

**REVISITING VIRTUE ETHICS AND SPIRITUALITY OF *BOTHO*: A STUDY OF AN INDIGENOUS  
ETHIC OF CHARACTER FORMATION IN THE MORAL THOUGHT AND PRACTICE OF BASOTHO**

by

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REVISITING VIRTUE ETHICS AND SPIRITUALITY OF *BOTHO*: A STUDY OF AN INDIGENOUS ETHIC OF CHARACTER FORMATION IN THE MORAL THOUGHT AND PRACTICE OF BASOTHO.

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## SUMMARY

The current Afro-communitarianism (AC) articulation and analysis of *botho* is characterised by two main approaches. First it treats *botho* as if it is a universal concept that can be expounded independently in a theoretical manner devoid of any specific cultural perspective that give it meaning and authority. Second it abstracts the Sesotho proverb “*motho ke motho ka batho*” (MKKB) from the rest of Sesotho narrative elevating it as foundational to the definition and meaning of the concept, where a particular reading of this proverb has come to be taken as the quintessential articulation of the meaning of this concept.

This thesis problematizes this account within the context of Sesotho culture from which the proverb derives. Firstly, it rejects the abstraction and exceptionalism of MKKB as poor scholarship and a deficiency in the knowledge of the ethical significance of narratives in Sesotho culture, arguing that this is an unjustified abstraction of MKKB from Sesotho narratives inconsistent with how proverbs are interpreted and used. It asserts that MKKB is best understood not in isolation, but within the context of the unity of African narratives and their meaning and unique role as the chief means of moral education into *botho*.

Secondly, the thesis questions the dominance of one specific reading of Ubuntu in the current *botho* discourse and the privileged status this reading has enjoyed over other, equally justified, interpretations. It argues for a definition of *botho* (*moral personhood*) based on the definition of this term as a moral statement describing good admirable moral qualities of character of *motho*. The study thus starts from the premise that talk about *botho* turns out to be talk about character of *motho* because *botho* cannot be fully realised independently of the characters of individuals who make it a reality.

The study recommends a character centric definition of *botho* as a fresh alternative, where an understanding of the possession of *botho* by *motho*, entails inculcation of *makhabane* or virtues of *botho*, many of which are found narratives especially proverbs. Its attractiveness is that it is consistent with the nature of African ethics as character-based ethic, but also underscores important assumptions behind *botho* including the primacy of character and the existence of a particular social order as a prerequisite for *botho* to flourish, all of which are worth serious consideration in the current *botho* discourse.

**KEY TERMS:**

*Botho*, *Setho*, Moral character, Makhabane (virtues), Sesotho culture, African Ethics, *Ubuntu*, communitarianism, Modern Western ethics, Community

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## CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

*“In the context of the activities of the moral life—in our decisions to obey moral rules, in the struggle to do the right thing and to avoid the wrong conduct, in one’s intention to carry out a moral duty, the quality of a person’s character is of ultimate consequence” (Gyekye 2011: par. 14)*

### 1.1 Introduction

The supremacy of character to moral conduct summed up in this quotation shows the intrinsic connection of our character as moral agents and who we are as persons. Character in this study will be used to mean the Sesotho word *makhabane*, virtues, specifically of the moral kind which entail inculcation of a combination of values and qualities that make a person a *motho* meaning a morally and ethically admirable person. It therefore denotes not just natural traits of a person’s personality but moral growth in terms of inculcation of good moral qualities as part of who one is, and this achieved through moral formation where moral beauty and goodness combine (Ikuenobe 2016: 129). It is in this sense that character is connected to *botho* because the latter stand for all moral beauty and goodness, which is never fully realised in any one person. In Sesotho culture it is the accumulation of these good moral qualities over all in a person that are considered first to reflect the person’s character, and second, a sign of the person making satisfactory progress in achieving *botho* i.e., becoming a *motho* (person) hence the connection with personhood. In this study *botho* is therefore understood in terms of inculcation of morally good and admirable qualities of character (van Niekerk 2007: 366). This is based on the definition of *botho* in Sesotho culture which is described as “*se bakang hore diketso tse ntle di bonahale ho motho*” Chitja n.d: 59). This can loosely be translated as “that which makes visible good actions of a person”, in other words that which reveals the good qualities of character of a person, that’s *botho*.

This understanding is intrinsically linked to *setho* another important moral term in Sesotho culture. It is defined in terms of “*boitshoaro bo botle ba motho; tloaelo e ntle ya boitshoaro ba motho* (good moral behaviour and habits of a person) or as “*tumelo le diketso tsa morabe o itseng ha o bapisoa le merabe e meng. Tsela eo sehlopha sa sechaba kapa morabe o itshoarang ka yona le ho etsa mekgoa le meetlo ya sona*” (beliefs and manners of a particular people, and the way they do their things in terms of their customs and culture) (Chitja. n.d. 698). Here *setho* links being human with (1) good behaviour (*boitshoaro*) of a person and in terms of ‘tloaelo’ (habits/manners) and (2) the person’s cultural origins (*meetlo*) and customary ways of conduct (*mekgoa*). This is the definition of the term that also inform this study and its understanding of *botho*. This understanding of ethical conduct is how traditional Basotho understood ethics. It is an understanding that is based on the centrality of character to *motho* (person) as a moral agent and his or her conduct. This understanding is currently not much

emphasised in the current discourse and one finds not much theorisation and analysis of *botho* in terms of moral character.

This study's bold appraisal of character therefore is a reminder of the dominance of Afro-communitarian understanding of *botho*, at the expense of other equally justifiable interpretations of this concept. This has resulted in the ambiguities surrounding *botho* and that ambiguities questions about which plausible elaboration of *botho* is the proper remaining unresolved and in turn impoverishing existing knowledge (van Niekerk 2013: 7). The neglect of character to ethical living, including in current *botho* discourse, is one of the criticisms today about modern Western ethics chief among which is the forgetfulness of *motho* i.e., the human person (Shutte 2008: 22) and their character as the centre of ethics. It is for this reason that focus of the study and critique of current *botho* discourse and ethics will place emphasis on this. This should however come as no surprised as the discourse like much of African ethics is not immune to the globalising uncompromising influence of Western ethics<sup>1</sup>.

The character-centric understanding of *botho* characteristic of Sesotho culture and the underlying spirituality of this concept is a perspective that has attracted little interest so far in the current *botho* discourse although Basotho are one of the people from whose culture this concept applied and is widely known and perpetuated. I reiterate the underlying spirituality here as an essential part of the Basotho understanding of *botho* to denote the religious dimension of *botho*. This is to emphasis the understanding of ethics in Sesotho culture where morality is not just secular but is underpinned by traditional religious belief and religion. According to this the consciousness of the sacred Sesotho culture respect the unity of life where the natural and social realms of life is inextricably bound with the supernatural (spirits) and spiritual realm of Balimo (ancestors) and Molimo (deity/divinity) as the guardian of culture (see Molefe 2015:64, Manda 2009: 2, Setiloane 1978: 32-34). This religious dimension of ethics or spirituality of *botho* is discussed in detail in chapter five, where I discussed the conditions in traditional Basotho society that supported the practice of *botho* and made *botho* as ethic possible.

The examination of experience of *botho* from the moral particularity and experience of it in Sesotho culture, which is covered in detail in Chapter four offers current discourse with a valuable case study wherein lessons can be learned for today's context and "the conditions that make *botho* possible". This ethical approach can lay a legitimate claim to rival current

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<sup>1</sup> The term Western ethics is used to refer to Western morality and moral traditions found in European culture. It will used interchangeably with modern Western ethics to describe secular global morality of Western Europe and North America (Prozesky 2009:4). It is used in this study to contrast with African ethics, which here refers to moral traditions embedded in the many and various cultures of the people whose roots of origin come from sub-Saharan Africa and predominantly in southern Africa. As such it is differentiated from Christian ethics and Western ethics both of which are still wield considerable influence in southern Africa (Nicolson 2008: 7, Prozesky 2009: 4). Ethics in this study will predominantly be used in its non-academic sense, to be describe a lived experience and, and to wrong and evil (Prozesky 2009: 4; Prozesky 2007: 19-20).

ethical approaches in articulating the values of *botho* afresh and contributing immensely to African ethics as an African response to the inadequacies of enlightenment ethics or modern Western ethics underpinning much of present-day moral predicaments (MacIntyre 1981:63; Shutte 2001:1, 164- 174, Richardson 2009: 138).

This thesis will explore this approach to ethical conduct as practiced among traditional Basotho and make a case for an account of *botho* grounded in the moral character of *motho* (person). I use the term *botho* in this thesis as opposed to the common combination in the literature of *botho-ubuntu* or *ubuntu* to emphasise the Basotho perspective in the approach of the subject (Broodryk 2006:23) and understanding of the term as found in their culture. This is to differentiate the starting point and perspective of this study from the prevalent view in current discourse where the Zulu term Ubuntu has assumed other meanings over time (cf. Mphetlang 2009: 12). This is in sharp contrast to Sesotho culture where *botho* is understood as moral concept preoccupied with the moral evaluation of the character of *motho* thus locating the terms squarely within the school of thought that described *botho* as a moral statement about personhood. I will show that the purpose of ethics among Basotho, while it was both personal and communal, in their society the moral character of its members was the fulcrum upon which ethics revolved and the glue that made *botho* a reality. It is in this sense that their approach shares many similarities with ethical approaches in the moral traditions of the virtues, or inculcation of *makhabane*. This ethical approach is traditionally associated with virtue ethics in the West hence reference to virtue and virtues ethics that will be made often in this study, without directly making that comparison itself, except as part of recommendation for further research. As such for Basotho the purpose of ethics was to form individuals into persons with good moral characters and good people and in turn good members of the community (Casalis 1861; 267, Bereng 1987: 40, Sekese 1994: 9). This is what in Sesotho it means to be a *motho* (person) i.e., habitual display of qualities and virtues of *botho* by *motho* as a matter of one's general behaviour and conduct, or character. This view I will argue is a preeminent account of *botho*, that can add valuable insight to the current discourse and the quest to make *botho* a reality in addressing today's ethical and moral challenges. Using the moral particularity of Sesotho Speaking culture, I will make a critique of current Afro-communitarian account of *botho* in the discourse (Metz 2007) through the analysis of *botho* as key moral concept in the moral thought and language of Basotho. I will further examine some of the traditional moral values of Basotho, their norms and ideas about moral formation and education in virtue, or inculcation of *makhabane*, (virtues). This will enrich existing knowledge by contributing to the present project in African ethics of helping contemporary moral agents to address the challenge of living morally commendable lives.

I therefore aim to bring to the fore an articulation of *botho* ethics, as a contender for an alternative ethical approach for addressing these concerns. The research will thus endorse a

well understood approach to *botho* in Sesotho culture which is that this concept cannot be separated from the definition of what is “*motho*” (person)” (Gaie 2002: 277) and his or her moral character (Mphetlang 2009:13). This is because to say one is a *motho* (person), embodies ethical presuppositions and denotes where moral goodness understood primarily in terms of good moral character. The aim of the study will be to show that as an ethical ideal, *botho* cannot be abstracted from the characters of individuals members of the community who are supposed to make it a reality. Neither can this concept be made intelligible independently of reference to character formation and development i.e., inculcation of inner qualities of regarded as morally admirable. The study will also look to show that this approach is an endorsement of a view, not emphasised much in the literature namely that *botho* is a variant of virtue ethics and is suited to addressing some of the concerns raised with current ethical approaches about the significance of character.

The study will, therefore, explore how the approach to *botho* and ethics in Sesotho culture can offer lessons on how to interpret afresh the meaning of *botho* in the light of character formation. It will examine and how this relates to the communal imperatives and values of traditional morality implied in the well-respected doctrine of Basotho, the doctrine of *motho ke motho ka batho* (MKKB) (a human being is a human being because of other human beings, (Mokitimi 1997: 21, Sekese 1994: 54) or ‘*re batho ka ba bang*’ (Sekese 1994:54) which is the plural form. The immediate background and context of this study is the current *botho* discourse including the ongoing debates around personhood in the literature (Metz 2014, Matolino and Kwindlingwi 2013, Menkiti 2004, Gyekye 2010). However, because African ethics does not occur in the vacuum, the study is also located in the context contemporary moral environment where there are concerns with western ethical traditions which has for a long time dominated sub-Saharan society.” Among these concerns brought by Western ethical approaches and its domination of ethics are the contemporary moral attitudes where the neglect of character as morally relevant to ethics is a feature of ethics (Richardson 1994: 91-92, Richardson 2009: 129-130). This study thus joins others in recent years that acknowledge that Western ethics is “merely a particular way of understanding ethics” and it is time for Africa<sup>2</sup> and its moral traditions to be considered as well (Murove 2009: xiv).

## 1.2 Aims and Objectives

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<sup>2</sup> The term Africa will be used here in its narrow nongeographic sense to differentiate Africa as continent. It will be used to describe the people and culture of black people of Sub Saharan Africa as distinct from inhabitants of the continents and surrounding islands including those of Arabic decent in the northern part of continent. It will not mean Africa is a monolith of static practices and traditions. Rather it is a recognition that Africa has a culture unique to it that is African, not Western or Asian. The use of the phrases ‘African culture’ and African moral traditions therefore will be used to contract with Western culture and Western ethics respectively where they denote some enduring and dominant common themes or ideas in many African traditions which this study advances as a critique of Western culture in Africa and a response of Western ethics (Ikuenobe 2016: 125-126).

The aim and goal of the study are therefore to prove that the tenets of *botho* ethics as found in traditional Basotho culture played a significant role among Basotho in fostering the development of good character and a basis for creating good community members.

Secondly it will be to promote the values and virtues associated with *botho* as essential basis for promoting development of good moral character among citizens today.

Finally, the aim will be to argue that *botho* principles presuppose a certain social order which makes the habitual practice of *botho* possible and workable way of life.

### **1.3 Framing the Research Problem**

The ethical ideal of *botho* continues to enjoy unparalleled prestige in recent years as a subject of research on traditional African morality, attracting much interest from a wide range of scholars and contexts. It is therefore a term that is now en vogue and as with all such terms it can be used or misused (Eliastam 2015). Alongside this enthusiasm, some have raised concern that concept means anything one chooses (Lutz 2009: 2; Munyaka and Motlhabi 2009) and that it risks becoming meaningless (Shutte 2001:14). Other have even suggested that “the project of ubuntu ought to reach its end” (Matolino and Kwindigwi 2013: 198). These views reveal not only the diversity of interpretations and the debatable nature of this concept (Khoza 2012: 2; Metz 2014) but also its currency (Kamwangamalu 2007: 35) in African ethics and ethics in general.

In spite much research on the concept, debates around what exactly this concept mean refuse to go away (Gade 2013: 487) and increasingly the concept seems to exist more in theory than reality. Although widely theorized the notion of *ubuntu/botho* does not appear to be translating into actual lived experience in society and communities (Eliastam 2015: 4; Letseka 2013<sub>A</sub>:337-338). It is within this context that the study of this concept continues to be of interest and relevance. The interest is also because of the potential *botho* must provide communities and individuals with ethical resources to address current ethical challenges agents are facing today (Ntibagiriwa 2001: 66). It is also because of the ethical approach it promotes, which is the endorsement of the value of moral traditions of Africa for so long ignored as a workable resource in ethics (Murove 2009: xiv). In view of the latter thus one finds in recent years a strong movement in African ethics, where scholars are revisiting traditional moralities of African cultures with the view to uncovering and recovering some of its essential elements as moral resources that can be of value today alongside other moral systems (Bujo 2001: 1 -2). This study shares in this view and explores the Basotho culture as one of the moral tradition worth consideration and attention of scholars. It deepens the understanding of this concept by analysing its meaning from the perspective of Sesotho speaking culture and challenging the dominance of one specific understanding of this concept over other equally justifiable. One of the interesting observations about the way *botho* is interpreted in the current *botho* discourse

is how much of it is based on the meaning of the word *botho* itself. As I will argue in this study this basic definition of the word is important, with respect to the perspective of the Sesotho speaking culture. This is because there *botho* as moral term is defined in terms of character using key words like '*boitsoaro*' (behaviour, compoment) '*diketso tse ntle*' (beautiful actions which means morally beautiful i.e., good admirable conduct or good manners (Chitja. n.d; 59, Otlogetswe 2015: par 2, Paroz 1974: 390). It is for this reason that in this study I contend that *botho* is intrinsically connected to good behaviour of a person understood fundamentally in terms good character and that this is should be the basis of its definition. This is quite different form how this concept is theorised in the current *botho* discourse.

Normally with words like this a basic dictionary meaning is first evoked, and then further interpretation and more nuanced application developed from them. With the *botho*, as found in Sesotho language this does not appear to be the case in the current discourse, and I will argue this in part explains the direction that the discourse on this subject took. If we look at the basic dictionary meaning of this word in Sesotho culture one finds that is described using key word like '*boitsoaro*' (behaviour, compoment) '*diketso tse ntle*' (beautiful actions which means morally beautiful i.e., good admirable conduct (Chitja. n.d; 59). So, in Sesotho speaking culture "*botho* refers to a composite of manners that are considered desirable and includes phatic communion acts such as saying Hello to people you meet, (*litumeliso*), or being polite and helpful (Otlogetswe 2015: par 2). As it can be seen this is a description of good behaviour understood in Sesotho culture in terms of '*boitsoaro*' which means character. The best way to explain the relation of this word to character is to say in Sesotho language it would be inconceivable for a person regarded as of bad character to have *botho*, similarly it would be unintelligible for a person regarded as having the roundness of character i.e., accumulation of *makhabane* (virtues) that makes one a morally outstanding person, to be at the same be lacking in *botho*. So only a *motho* with good character can have *botho* and no *motho* with good qualities of character can have no *botho*. The difference is *botho* is a totality and summation of all moral goodness as such it is always approximate, and character is a pathway to *botho* understood as personhood. It is this interpretation of *botho* that argue needs to be incorporated into the mainstream discourses on *botho*.

To appreciate the relevance and significance of this formulation of *botho*, it is necessary to outline the background and larger context of the reinstatement of character in ethics in general, within which this study is being undertaken and is a part of. The reasons behind this relate to the displacement of character in ethics as whole in modern Western ethics and lack of interest on character as a moral concept, at least in the English-speaking world (Richardson 1994: 91). The problems with this, has cogently been argued by MacIntyre (1981) in his seminal work *After virtue* in which the source of this problems can be traced to the enlightenment project on ethics (MacIntyre 1984: 4). One of the consequences of this displacement of

character, is a distortion of morality that has led to “forgetfulness of the human person” where there is less and less concerned with people themselves and their characters in favour of actions of individuals (Shutte 1994: 25). This distinction is important because it focuses on the latter which is seen as what is wrong with modern ethics and the cause for abandoning the development of good moral character, which is the whole point of ethics and moral life (Richardson 1994: 89). It will not therefore have escaped the notice of observant practitioners that one of the characteristic features of modern ethics as understood ordinarily today is the notion of the individual as the moral sovereign. The implications of this conception of the self and its impact to morality is best summed by MacIntyre (1982: 295) when he argues that:

“At the beginning of the modern” [era] “the moral agent as traditionally understood almost, if not quite, disappeared from view. The moral agent’s character, the structure of his desires and dispositions, became at best a peripheral rather than a central topic for moral philosophy [or ethics]. .... What replaced and still too often replaces the concept of moral character at the core of philosophical thinking about morality was and is a conception of choice of particular kind as central to moral agency”).

So not only has modern ethics displaced character as an important moral concept in our moral language, it has ensured that the way we think of ourselves as moral agents also disregards the significance of character to ethical conduct and much of the public’s moral life. This whole scale displacement of character thus means that for most people today, especially those living in societies that have fully embraced modern Western ethics, ethics essentially conceived in terms of “actions” of the individual, specifically the individual’s choices about those actions or particular moral decisions at particular moments, when “doing the right” thing is required. In other words, the modern approach seems to be that there are times during the moral agent’s life or occasions when ethics is called for and that there are other times when it is not. In this view, rules are “the primary concept of the moral life”, as opposed to “qualities of character” (MacIntyre 1981:119). In contemporary moral culture and in much of moral attitudes today considerations of the character of *motho* as a moral agent which deals with questions of “what sort of person am I to become” (MacIntyre 1981:118) or “what is worthy of me” (Richardson 1994: 92) are not only at the periphery of ethical discourses, but they are also not central part of the primary considerations of ethical decision making at a personal individual level.

But as it will be argued here, as moral agents we cannot envision ourselves in this way, without great cost to who we are a person. This is because it is our moral character that defines who we are morally or as moral agents and that by which we qualify our self-agency in the world in terms of having “certain intentions (and beliefs) rather than others” (Richardson 1994: 92). This means that without references to the moral character of the whole person i.e., taking into consideration his or her intentions, beliefs, motives and purposes (MacIntyre 1981: 208), characterising our moral behaviour as agents become unintelligible. It is for this reason that when a person behaves in a way which is inconsistent with what is understood as one’s aims,

intentions, or long terms goals or objectives, “we are both intellectually and practically baffled” (Ibid. 209). It is from such bafflement that colloquially we describe such behaviour as “out of character” and traces of this requirement for intelligibility of human in terms of consistency with our character i.e., who we are can be traced in common expressions often found in daily use like, “it’s unlike him or her to do such and such”, or “it makes no sense”.

The preoccupation with principles and rules of right actions that we find in modern ethics has led to a loss of sight of the primary focus and goal of ethics by ethical reflection, and that focuses as we have alluded to already is *motho* i.e., the human person (Shutte 1994:25). The implication of this is that the “rightness of actions” has now become the focal point of ethics not the character of *motho* as the person making these decisions. In terms of this moral priority in ethics is focused on considerations of doing the right things, as opposed to concerns with aiming to be a good person. This is a very different approach to moral conduct and from the traditional conception of the purpose and function of ethics as found in many pre-modern cultures such as that of the Basotho people, in which *botho* was not only the common moral frame of reference but a lynchpin of personal conduct.

This is dissatisfaction underlying the call for the reinstatement of character, which applies to the current *botho* discourse. This is because, for all their appeal and innate resonance with our nature as human beings, traditional values associated with *botho*, e.g., good moral character or moral uprightness, concern with one’s neighbor and their welfare, no longer seem to form part of moral ideals that shape and influence personal conduct in the way they used to in the past. This is both the predicament of contemporary moral culture and the tragedy of modern ethics. One only must look at most of our public life to how rarely if ever does one ever hear of policymakers and politicians announcing a policy because they think it will make people morally better. Never. What this shows is that contemporary moral culture has failed to inspire society with the moral ideals that prizes character as central to moral goodness and personal conduct, and as something to animate society. Modern ethics as well as liberalism and its individualistic ethic, which it promotes as its core value (Giddy 2014) is therefore complicit in the eclipse of “character”. It has done very little to stop the notion of being a “good person” not only being peripheral to our moral vocabulary and ethical goals, but also from this becoming the moral goal that shapes personal conduct.

Instead, modern ethics and its moral culture have made possible the rejection of the old ethical traditions. It is a key player in forcing their aspiration to the periphery of public life in general as non- mainstream counter-cultural position (Skidelsky and Skidelsky 2012: 87). In this moral universe, aspiration to be a “good person” with good moral character, which is the task of ethics (Richardson 1994: 89) or desire thereof is matter of choice. It “is no longer, as it was for the ancients” where ethical living was understood metaphorically speaking in terms of “an arrow capable of hitting or missing its mark” for which one strives for in life and accountable

to others for it. In modern societies being moral understood in terms of being good, is now a bare logical fact, guiltless and inerrant and is applied within a social context where there is no intrinsically desirable life, only a range of desired lifestyles (Skidelsky and Skidelsky 2012: 89). This is the quintessential expression of what MacIntyre (1981: 32) characterized as the modern self whose moral life is governed by criterionless choice.

But as it will be seen human life is not just a form of individual existence that is not open to moral praise or blame or moral evaluation. Personal conduct as part of life is governed and lived in the light of certain aims, intentions and goals in life, and it is these that constitute our *telos*, i.e., our sense of what we understand to be our purpose and reason for being as agents. And central to how we evaluate the progress one makes in this regard, i.e., how well one lives their life it is in part assessing the kind of person we become; what characters we have. This displacement of character from the centre stage of ethics in the manner that modern moral culture and modern ethics has looked to do is in effect also the displacement of another important aspect of morality inseparable from character, namely conscience. The two concepts are not only fundamental in ethics, nor are they are inextricably bound together, they are the core of personal morality and often moral judgement they are interchangeable. They constitute that “the inner voice of ethics, of right and wrong, of good and evil” and the “personal sense of right and wrong that we have as individuals .... which defines our characters (Prozesky 2007: 22). It is in this sense that character is central to personal conduct because

“it is from a person's character that all his or her actions—good or bad—radiate [and that] the performance of good or bad acts depends on the state of [a person's] character” (Gyekye 2011: par.14).

The implications of this to the current *botho* discourse, if it is to offer solutions to the myriad of ethical and moral challenges and moral decay that we see around us today (Prozesky 2007: 7-8) entails a change in thinking, not least in the direction of reinstatement of character. This means among other things revisiting current interpretations of *botho* represented in Afro-communitarian. It means replacing the current governing metaphor in current *botho* discourse where self-realisation through communal relationships is the overriding formulation of *botho*, with essentially more personal metaphors based on the significance of character (Richardson 1994: 92) where emphasis and priority are on “moral ways of being” and “specific dispositions of character” (van Niekerk 2013: 89). This is because as it will be argued here, the current dominant “harmonious relationships” formulation and understanding of *botho* (Metz 2007: van Niekerk 2013: 99, Mboti 2015) is unlikely to morally resonate or catch traction with contemporary moral agents, many of whom live lives in the context of modern urban existence where individualism is dominant. In this moral environment, individualism has infected society to the core and there is a widespread sense of the loss of community (Richardson 1994: 97). By contrast, the reimagined character-centric account of *botho* that will be outlined here places

significance on reinstatement or rehabilitation of character as a vital moral concept in ethics. In doing so this shifting focus of ethical reflection on *botho* from the external outward looking considerations of “good action implied in Afro communitarianism to an inward oriented internal focused agent centred focus on one’s moral character as the aspiration of the agent and intention to be a “good person”. In other words, the focus goes to the personal lives of people and the moral quality of those lives (Ibid. 89). This interest on the moral quality of people’s lives, not their actions as such, is the understanding and application of *botho* that we find in the moral practice and thought of Sesotho speaking culture, where this is a way of judging and evaluating the moral goodness of a *motho*. It is this interest in the moral quality of people’s lives as the essence of *botho* ethics that in this study will be examined with reference to Sesotho speaking culture where this is expressed in terms of the significance and primacy of character in the moral practice and culture of the Basotho and that which constitutes the centre of ethics.

It is against this background that we see in ethics, in general, a noticeable and growing countermovement for the reinstatement of character as a response to the current dominant approaches to ethics and the trajectory of modern ethics. That movement is tilting strongly in the direction of the reinstatement of character, the lack of which is one of the reasons behind much dissatisfaction with the state of the contemporary moral environment which is discussed in detail in chapter two.

### **1.3.1 *Botho* Ethics as a Responses to the Inadequacies of Modern Western Ethics**

From what has been said it is clear the study is not happening in the vacuum. It is conducted within an existing broader ethical context in which modern Western ethics has considerable influence on individuals and communities. This means that the current *botho* discourse, which is part of African ethics, is not only a part of this context, but that is influenced by it. The discourse is thus a part of African ethics’ response to this context to address the negative effect of modern ethics (McIntyre 1981: 1-5, Bujo 2001: xiv). It is part of new voices in the arena of global ethics, concerned with the euro-centric bias of current ways of doing ethics in African (Murove 2009:15) and in turn calling for an alternative approach. One of the characteristic ways in which modern Western ethics does this is the impression given that the way ethics is done today gives the impression that ethics is an activity to be brought into play only when problems of a particular kind emerge and when a decision of a kind needs to be made and that for the rest of the time we don’t have to worry about being ethical (Richardson 1994: 91). In other words, it is the focus on rules of right action. This is can be seen in the various ethical approaches in the literature on ethics that focuses on principles and rule including those that try to develop principles or theories of right action grounded on *botho* (Metz 2007). In this study, I will advance an interpretation of *botho* found in Sesotho speaking

culture that challenge this way of doing ethics with a different approach to ethical reflection, one where the focus is on *motho* (person) and the moral quality of his and her character. This approach shifts the focus of ethical reflection from focus on actions of people to people themselves. In terms of this approach *botho* is then understood primarily as a moral statement expressing an assessment of the moral character of *motho* i.e., the “moral quality of a person (Gade 2012: 484). This formulation and interpretation are necessarily not interested with “doing” i.e., a person’s actions *per se*. Rather its immediate interest is “being” where the primary questions informing conduct is “what kind of persons am I? Am I the sort of person the behaves that way? When this concept is analysed in this way, its inextricable link to character of *motho* (person) and possession of a good qualities of character, that make one to be a *motho* become clear, as I will show later when examining its practice in Sesotho culture, in Chapter four. It will also be clear how this understating i.e., of *botho* in terms of good moral character is at the heart of the assessment of moral personhood. In Sesotho culture this is seen in the negative descriptions of *botho* that Basotho use expressed in the statement ‘*ha se motho*’ (s/he is a person) or the moral term ‘*bophoofolo*’ which refers to total lack of *botho* in a person<sup>3</sup> (Khoza 1994: 8, Munyaka and Motlhabi 2009: 71, Otlogetswe 2015: par 4). This is where a description of lack of *botho* is explicitly defined in terms of personhood. In other words, the positive description of *botho* always implies awareness of its opposite and that is potential for an agent to fail to become a *motho* i.e., acquire the qualities of *botho*. It is important to realise that ‘*ha se motho*’ is actually a shortened form of the sentence ‘*ha se motho ea nang le botho*, (s/he is not a person that possess qualities of *botho*) which is the opposite of ‘*ke motho ea nang le botho*, (s/he is a person that possess qualities of *botho*). Both statement places emphasis on accumulation of certain qualities which in turn become part of the person person’s moral character, hence their private and public moral identity. For current *botho* discourse, this interpretation requires reframing the questions in the discourse about *botho* from “what does *botho* mean?” to what does *botho* say about *motho*. And the answer to latter will always point to questions about to “who am I am” as a moral agent, to what *botho* is about and not so much what the right thing is to do (Richardson 1994:100). This is because it is to the character of the person that we refer to when we say of a person ‘*ke motho ea nang le botho*’, when describing a person who shows excellence in *botho* i.e., in inculcating and accumulating qualities associated with *botho*, which makes a

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<sup>3</sup> Although ‘*ha se motho*’ and ‘*bophoofolo*’ both express moral failure of a person, the seriousness of the failing is not the same. The former relates to failure specifically in acquiring *botho* i.e., moral personhood, the latter relates to this failure not only of total lack and disregard of *botho* but one that display absence of any semblance of humanity or setho (humanness) in the conduct of a person. It is in this sense that to have no ‘*setho*’ is much more serious that to have no ‘*botho*’ since a lack of ‘*setho*’ signals the lack of characteristic human qualities, hence the term *bophoofolo* (beastly) strictly speaking refers to lack of *setho*. The reference to *phoofolo* is to express how antithetical to a behaviour expected of a *motho* (person) the conduct is that the only way to describe it is that it is only befitting of a beast. It is thus the strongest moral rebuke to an individual who fails to meet the expected standards of *botho* by live up to the standards of one who is a person, *motho* especially in the character that one has.

person a *motho*. It is for this reason that in this I will argue that *botho* must be analysed together with 'ha se *motho*', which is a short form of 'ha se *motho* ea nang le *botho*' (they are a not a person who possess *botho*) and bophoofolo as the quintessential expression of lack of *botho*. This begs the question what exactly does the word *botho* mean?

As a moral term, therefore, the question that *botho* is addressing in a person is "what sort of conduct befits me in view of the kind of person I am and ought to be" and this is answered in terms of one's moral upbringing and culture. And in African culture we know that personal identity is intricately linked with upbringing, or *kholiso* in Sesotho. As such the answer to the question "what sort of person am I" will always imply reference to where one comes from in terms of family and the community upbringing morally, both of which the individual is regarded as a representative of. It is in this sense that there is no escaping our social identity as moral agents, hence the communal elements in the understanding of *botho*. In other words, it is not just about the moral agent doing good things or doing the right thing but more importantly, the moral agent himself or herself being a good person in line with how one was brought up.

I will also argue that the challenges and moral problems Africa faces today (Shutte 2001:1; Dolamo 2013:1), to which *botho* is invoked as a response, are the backdrop of current *botho* debates. Here too I will argue that the relevance of *botho* is that these are because of the obliteration of the moral agent as understood in traditional societies in Africa. And central to this is the relegation of the moral agent's character and disposition to the periphery of ethical discourse and the moral life (Hauerwas 2007: 6). In other words, contemporary challenges many communities in southern Africa are facing today is because of the internalisation of ethical approaches that emphasise *what* moral agents do rather than *who* they are and ought to be. These problems are thus not about changes within Africa that undermined and disrupted traditional ethos (Kasenene 1994:138). Neither are about dilemmas about traditional and Western ethical traditions (Kinoti 1992:73) or indeed about urbanisation and modernisation that eroded values and norms of *botho* (Dolamo 2013: 2). They are instead problems that arise because of the whole-hearted and unquestioning embrace of modern western values systems and a First World culture ethical approach to ethics, especially individualism and the individualistic character of Western values frameworks, which is one the defining features ethics from the West.

I will prove in this study that this is not only a conflict with the traditional morality of the Basotho and indeed most African societies, but that it is also the opposite of the values and virtues encapsulated and implied in *botho* as a normative concept. The manifestation of many of these problems in society today therefore reflects the failure of current ethical approaches, but also of the pervasive and lingering effects of the enlightenment ethics and the conception of the individual it promotes, which gave birth to modern ethics as we know it (Richardson 2013: 153). It can therefore be argued that the fundamental ethical and moral problems in Africa

today, have to do with notions of individual autonomy, and an individualistic mantra of ethics of enlightenment that came with Western Christianity and westernisation. The joint effect of these is the elimination of the centrality of moral character in ethics and this as we shall see was the main feature of traditional African morality. This together with the relegation of the moral significance of character as irrelevant and to the periphery of moral discourse, are some of the reasons there is a growing dissatisfaction with current approaches to ethics, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

As well as this the role of Christianity and westernisation as the catalyst for the emergence of an individualistic conception of personal conduct in African culture cannot be underestimated. This in turn has entrenched a now commonly accepted notion that personal conduct is the private matter for the individual and the rejection of mutual accountability in the moral sphere. Western Christianity thus further entrenched the privatisation of conduct by placing emphasis on personal and private atonement for wrongdoing. I am thinking here of Western Christianity which places emphasis on a personal relationship with God as seen in the catholic practice of confession for example. This private notion of conduct introduced a different approach to ethics compared to that of traditional morality of many communities in Africa. Now, ethical conduct was understood as no longer social and accountability for the moral life communal and social. Instead it was now private and individual.

From the perspective of African ethics, I will contend that the autonomy of the self as articulated by the enlightenment ethics, (MacIntyre 1981: 60) together with its corresponding moral attitudes, both of which are now entrenched in modern ethics, is problematic to doing ethics. But more significantly that modern Western ethics fundamentally incompatible with *botho*, and what it means to be *motho* (Gaie 2002: 278; Murove 2009: 29). This notion of the self is now well entrenched in Western ethics where moral life is regarded as no one's business but except the moral agent alone. Its unaccountable character is foreign to African way of thinking about moral life where asking for and giving of accounts is essential part of who we are as moral agent. This self as presented in today's moral culture is irreconcilable with the African ideal that puts premium on welfare of all through mutual caring as codified in the doctrine of *motho ke motho ka batho* (Metz and Gaie 2010: 274). The prophetic imperatives of this proverb, I will argue entail not just social mutual care but also giving and asking for account where *motho* is "not only accountable" but "can always ask others for an account" and put them to question because as a moral "I am part of their story, as they are part of mine" (MacIntyre 1981: 216-218). This I will argue is the radical dimension of *botho* underpinning MKM and many similar proverbs and narratives, and that it manifests itself in the narrative conception of *motho* we find in Sesotho speaking cultures in the grand narratives i.e., "the narrative of our individual and social lives.

I will contend that in today's context of privatisation of moral life and extreme individualism, a rereading of the ethical significance of the expression "*motho ke motho ka batho*" (MKKB) (Metz 2007) for our times, should not be restricted to its critique of individualism in favour of the community. Rather it should be expanded where its central moral teaching is understood equally in terms of encouraging moral co-responsibility and accountability to others (Mokolatsie 1997: 63). That the interdependency it is renowned for should be reframed to focus on shared responsibility on how one conducts themselves in line with what is regarded as acceptable for a *motho* (Gaie 2002: 278). I will argue, therefore that it is the relegation of personal conduct to the private sphere in modern ethics, that is at the heart of moral challenges Africa is facing and reasons for the growing moral disquiet (Shutte 2001:1; Bereng 1987: 91). This proverb I will argue should therefore be interpreted afresh, to go beyond just friendly, harmonious social relationships (Metz 2007:334) or narrow application to only social and communal mutual aid and solidarity. It should be understood in terms of a formulation of *botho* that puts a premium on the specific type of relationship, where the essential *moral link* individuals have to one another is *the* relationship (Richardson 2009, 141). Such an interdependent relationship i.e., of mutual moral accountability is one where individual personal conduct, public or private, including what a person thinks deep inside, matter to the community (Bujo 2009: 116), and a cause for one to be morally called to account, as much as they can hold others to account.

### **1.3.2 Towards a Character-Centric Account of *Botho* In Current *Botho* Discourse**

One of the most interesting and curious observation about *botho* is how the current debates and discourse have chosen to approach this concept. The tendency is often to not to give a direct meaning of the term itself but rather to describe a constellation of traditional African values it represents but without actually defining the term itself (Prozesky 2016: 14; Metz 2007: 323; van Niekerk 2013" vii). Scholar appears to have too easily accepted the claim that *botho* is difficult to explain. I shall challenge this using the experience of Sesotho speaking culture. I will show that as moral concept *botho* can be explained although not fully and that available Sesotho dictionaries one finds a reliable working definition from which the discussion about what the term means can be based. This I will argue should be adequate as a starting basis of how *botho* as moral concept should be understood and theorised further.

So, in Sesotho culture we see that *botho* is defined simply as 'state of being a person, a human being' (Paroz 1971: 390). It is also described as "*boemo ba motho ha a phedisana le batho ba bang, se bakang hore diketso tse ntle di bonahale ho motho, and boitshoaro bo botle ba ntho e phelang* (The manner in which a person lives with others, that which makes public/ visible the good actions of a person, and good behaviour/conduct of a living being" (Chitja n.d:

59). According to this we see that to have qualities of *botho*, which are never acquired in their totality because human beings are not perfect, is connected to Basotho loosely may regard as good manners but it is more than that. It is about conduct and behaviour that one displays and is this is described using words like '*boitsoaro bo botle*' (good admirable behaviour, comportment) '*diketso tse ntle*' (beautiful actions) which means morally beautiful i.e., good admirable conduct. These are description of good behaviour which in Sesotho culture are always understood in terms of moral character. This is the same definition we find Otlogetswe (2015: par 2) describes *botho* as

“a composite of manners that are considered desirable by members of the community. This includes phatic communion acts such as saying Hello to the people you meet, being polite or being helpful in the community or at home.  
*Ke botho*”

There is another important insight we learn about *botho* in Sesotho speaking culture from these descriptions, and that is the connection of the *botho* to *setho*, which is itself is a difficult word to translated and this will be done later. Without reference to *setho* I will argue that *botho* is unintelligible and that this in part explains some of the ambiguities of *botho* that results in the stalled language-game where there is seeming no further elaboration (van Niekerk 2013: 7). What the introduction of *setho* to the list of key moral terms by which *botho* must be interpreted with is that '*motho* must have *setho* to have *botho*'.

So, here we have a basic understanding of *botho* as a basis for scholars to further theorisation about the deeper and more nuance meaning of *botho*. In other words, with a word like *botho*, which is rooted in ordinary people's lives one would have one would have expected that the first steps towards any analysis and theorisation upon such a word would be the basic and ordinary meaning of the term as found in the language it originates from. But as shown current this ordinary used meaning of the term is not reflected in the current discourse, nor is it the basis of discussion. Instead what one finds is fixation of *botho* discourse with *motho ke motho ka batho* as the primary understanding of *botho*. From here the approach of current *botho* discourse is to them emphasises the characteristic values associated with *botho*. For this reason, one of the of the characteristic features of the current *botho* discourses is its emphasis on the harmonious relationships with others that *botho* implies. I will challenge this, arguing that in addition to the above criticism, that just as much as there is recognition that the individual has a personal and social identity (Richardson 2009: 148), and that the individual and community complement each other (Bujo 2009:116), the imperatives of *botho* likewise have both a communal and personal or individual dimensions (Metz 2015). This is because at its most basic understanding possession of *botho* i.e., good manners and behaviour that a person displays are connected to person's integrity and dignity” (Dolamo 2013: 1; Casalis 1861: 303). This personal dimension of *botho* is not emphasised most in the literature, yet it is the most suited formulation for engaging the contemporary moral agent. This is because it

is a dimension that has to do with self-expression (Metz 2015) of *motho* as a moral agent and individual. Shutte (2009: 98) has described this as that which has to do with our relationship with ourselves. I will contend that this is best understood in terms of an account of *botho* that places a moral premium on the character of the individual. This understanding of *botho* which has strong similarities with virtue ethical approaches have so far and surprising attracted little attention in current discourses.

I will thus make a case for an appraisal of *botho* as a superior alternative for the right way of doing ethics in Africa. This is an approach that is consistent with African moral traditions and true to its ethical heritage. It is an approach better positioned to resonate with moral intuitions of most African and indeed contemporary moral agent. I will do this by outlining the tendencies and personal character and dispositions encouraged by the ethical approach implied in *botho* and juxtapose this with tendencies and personal attitudes espoused by its opposite, namely contemporary moral approaches as seen in modern-day moral attitudes. Like most agent centred ethical approaches, the character centric account of *botho* that is proposed here has corrective effect to the current *botho* discourse and its over emphasis of the communal dimension of *botho* at the expense of its personal dimension.

In this study I will therefore contend that *botho* as a form of virtuous ethics, is relevant to today's context, as a representative ideal of traditional African ethics. That it has a unique contribution to make to African ethics an ethics in general (Ntibagirirwa 2001: 66). Its understanding as an ethic of character as found in Sesotho speaking culture, can claim a legitimate and superior role to rival current *botho* approaches in influencing in practical ways the hearts of contemporary moral agents and influencing individuals as the primary ethical frame of reference for personal conduct. The reference to the heart is emphasise the difference with morality of the mind i.e., its over reliance of reason, principles, and rules in Western ethics in contrast to the morality of the heart underpinning the orientation of African ethics (Bujo 1990: 95-98). Therefore, I will hold that in spite of some concerns about the value of this concept (Matolino and Kwindigwi 2013, Mboti 2015, van Binsbergen 2001) there is within key tenets of *botho*, eternal truths from which we can learn lessons and are applicable and relevant to today's context and its ethical problems (Shutte 2001, Tschaepe 2013).

This study thus will explore how these values can be rediscovered and calibrated for today's context as useful moral resources for individuals and character development, who are essential for the experience of *botho* in communities. I will argue that what is needed to address the sense of moral decline as a concern, to use the analogy of a game, is a change of players i.e., focusing on the character of players. According to this analogy, there is a consensus about the status of the game i.e., decline in moral standard and failure of current ethical approaches (Ntibagirirwa 1999:8) as represented in modern ethics. I argue here that the best strategy and tactic for achieving this goal is by paying special attention to the

character of players i.e., the moral agents who play a vital role as they are the embodiment of the virtues of *botho* in society. Without a determined focus on changing the character of *motho*, the job of African ethics and current *botho* discourses is made that much harder. This may explain the perceived absence of the spirit of *botho* in modern-day African societies in general today.

The contention of this study therefore is that this is best done through the adoption a formulation of *botho* that focuses on character of people, similar that found in Sesotho culture and the Basotho understanding of what it means to be *motho*. This is based on the observation that, in spite of the all-pervading influences of Western values systems in many African communities; in most of these societies there is now growing recognition that there are inherent weaknesses within central tenets Western ethics with individualistic approach (Richardson 2009: 138) and some element of traditional morality are worth rediscovering. This includes a sense in many of these communities that there is still a powerful sense of a common approach to values and conduct and belief, that matters of morals and ethics are not just personal matters where one is accountable to only themselves.

It is within this context that calls for *botho* are being made and the current *botho* discourse must be found. I will therefore concur with those views in the discourse that say there is merit in revisiting the values of *botho* (Metz 2014: 1; Dolamo 2013: 1; Letseka 2011) but for different reasons. Instead of the communitarian ethical imperatives of *botho*, i.e., emphasising the communal relationships as the definitive way to described and articulate values of *botho*, this study adopts a different approach. It advocates an articulation and an understanding of *botho* first in terms of qualities of character of *motho*. It will underline the view that the habituation and internalisation of such qualities by *motho* as a way of life, does not only lead to valuing of communal relationships as important but also sustains them. This understanding emphasis moral development of the agents as the focus of ethical reflection and prerequisite for everything else that Afro-communitarianism advances about ethics in African culture. It is thus a more promising approach to effect the kind of influence on the moral behaviour of individuals to bring about the realisation and achievement of the Afro-communitarian aims goals of *botho*. In this study, I will thus submit that a character-based account of *botho* offers a better interpretation of *botho* for consideration. It provides society today with a framework and as the basis for the development a shared moral framework and ethical point of reference because it is character development and formation that there is a role for the individual and the community alike.

### **1.3.3 Redefining *Botho* in terms of the Moral Character of *Motho* (person)**

This study will further explore *botho* as a moral virtue inextricably linked to “*motho*” (individual person) and the formation and development of character-oriented towards the common good

(Metz and Gaie 2010: 276; Lutz 2009: 3). I will show that traditionally the primary context in which the term *botho* was invoked in Sesotho culture was as a moral assessment of a person hence its proper object of focus is “*motho*” (person) (Gaie 2012: 277) and what kind of character they ought to have. I will therefore that the approach of current discourses and its articulation of this concept in terms of self-realisation as the moral obligation for *motho*, is problematic. This is because we cannot define *botho* without first understanding and knowing what “*motho*” is first (Tschaepe 2013:51). I will show that being called *motho* which is a human being that possess *botho* i.e., personhood, is not a self-determined evaluation by the individual. But that it is always connected to an external assessment of one moral goodness, and as such it is something conferred upon *motho* by a community (Menkiti 1984; Gyekye 2011 par.18-19). The Basotho character centric formulation of *botho*, understood as personhood, therefore, offers a unique insight into this question of what is *motho*. It offers a persuasive argument to criticisms about the relevance and desirability of ethics of *botho* for today’s context (Matolino and Kwindiwi 2013, Mboti 2015), as it stresses character development as the essence of *botho* and moral development both of which are relevant to contemporary moral environment.

I will contend that the relational communitarian understanding of *botho* is therefore unintelligible without first recognising that *botho* is first a moral statement about “*motho*” (person), plural “*batho*” (persons). This means that at its heart *botho* cannot be abstracted from the character of *motho* i.e., individual agent. This is because it is the individual *motho*, through their upbringing and personal moral development, in the community, supported by their community, that *botho* becomes a tangible reality. It is for this reason that in Sesotho culture the upbringing in the moral sense is always described in connection with being “*ngoan’a Mosotho*” (a child of a Mosotho). This is the concept of *botho* that I will try to introduce to current discourses highlighting its value as found in the moral life and practice of Basotho, their language, norms, customs, and beliefs.

Since African ethics does not only speak of virtues of *botho* but its vices as well, I will also analyse the Basotho understanding of lack of *botho*. Here I take the controversial statement *ha se motho* (he/she is not a person) (Munyaka and Motlhabi 2009: 71) as the entry point into the discourse. This is because this statement features prominently in discussions about *botho* and its meaning has been subject of many debates. I will show that this expression describes the failure to live up to the expected standards of *botho*, also referred to *bophofo* (Casalis (1861: 303) meaning beastly or to behave like an animal. This must not be construed as saying anything materially significant about the person’s humanity. It is a moral assessment by Basotho denote complete loss and disregard of *botho* (Khoza 1994: 8) or morals (*boitsoaro*) in the way one behaves and conducts themselves. The expression is therefore the negative formulation of *botho* and therefore is always a statement about the moral character of the

person since “it is from a person’s character that all his or her actions, good or bad” (Gyekye 2011: par 14) come from.

I will show in this study that the correct meaning of this statement can only make sense within the above-described conception and understanding of *botho* and that without it, this statement becomes incomprehensible. I will therefore submit that there is a need to re-evaluate current *botho* orthodoxy in the light of auto-centric account of *botho*, to enable a rediscovery of a fuller conceptualisation of *botho* that pertains to *motho* and his or her relationship with himself or herself, and his and her moral self-identity (van Niekerk 2007:367; Lutz 2009:3). Such a reconceptualization will bring forth an account *botho* that signifies the moral ideal of being human that denotes certain wholeness of character or well-roundedness of character (Shutte 2009: 98, Mphetlang 2009: 12). It is a formulation that reflect *botho* as the highest attainment of virtue and totality of qualities of good character or *makhabane* (virtues) such as *mosa* (kindness), *mohua* (mercifulness), *ho fana* (generosity), *boitlhompho* (self-respect) and integrity (Dolamo 2013: 4) to mention a few.

I will put forward an argument for the centrality of character of the agent, as an essential part of being a good community member, and that is one of the weaknesses of the current discourse. It seems that in an effort to steer away from the individualistic ethics of the enlightenment as espoused by modern Western ethics, and Western notions of individual autonomy, the current *botho* discourse over have tended to emphasise the communal relational dimensions of *botho* most, perhaps because the community is so central to African ethics (Richardson 2009: 134), and individuality is often so closely associated with selfishness and individualism. As such the articulation and interpretation of *botho* in explicitly personal individual terms i.e., in terms of character of *motho*; the inner core of an individual (Dolamo 2013: 2); a formulation that emphasis cultivation of those inner admirable personal moral qualities, has not been sufficiently attended to, if not almost ignored in current discourse.

I will argue in this study that this personal dimension and formulation of *botho* is the heart of ethical imperatives of *botho*; that as a normative concept it is a description of moral quality and character of the individual in terms of values and ideals of the African community values which include communion with others. I will maintain that it is in the character of individuals so formed i.e., relationally constitute (Murove 2009: 29) that the ethical dispositions of *botho* are, internalised, lived and experienced in daily conduct in the community and this will necessarily manifest itself in the way a *motho* relates to others and the quality of those relationships (Mphetlang 2009: 19). As Richardson (1994: 93) puts it while “the community shapes my character”, ... “reciprocally, my character contributes to’ and shapes “the kind of community of which I am a member”. The challenge I want to put forward therefore is that current *botho* discourses have failed to articulate an essential and highly relevant meaning of *botho*, namely that it is an encapsulation of virtues that a real proper *motho* or ideal person has. As such this

concept as applied in the moral practice and language of those cultures from which it derives, it is an evaluation of conduct, in terms of progress towards this ideal i.e., how well or poor that progress of a *motho* is. In this sense *botho* is the criterion by which moral statement about *motho* is made; an ethical standard against which a person's moral worthiness is measured (Kamwangamalu 2007: 27) both by oneself and others.

I will therefore submit that this definition allows for a clear connection between *botho* and the character of *motho*, as so formed by his or her community and the virtues that *motho* should inculcate and inhabit (Richardson 2009:142). This is what is lacking in current discourse. I will show that this is consistent with ancient Basotho conception of *botho*, whereby the concept is first and foremost an evaluation of moral quality of the person (Gade 2011:313) assessing the moral agent's personhood or "human being hood" (Gaie 2002: 277) It is in this sense that I submit that the intelligibility of concept i.e., the appreciation of its full meaning, cannot be found independently of the analysis of the normative conception of personhood as articulated in the moral statement "*ha se motho ke phoofolo*" (they are not a person, they are an animal) which expresses a life lived with uttermost disregard and contempt of virtues of *botho*.

One of the interesting paradoxes of the social and moral environment of the modern-day African individual is that in spite of generally adopting influences of Western ethics and modernity and effects of urbanisation; some of the social bonds that provided *botho* with traction in traditional societies have not totally be eradicated in his or her life. By modernity here it is meant philosophical, social, and political ideas of rationality, objectivity, truth, equality, freedom, and the overcoming of the domination of tradition.... ideas that came to birth in the philosophical revolution of the Enlightenment (Petersen 1994:103). One such paradox which reveals the strength of this is what has now come to be known as "going home" for many urbanites including Africans in the diaspora, referring to the family home where parents and *leloko* (extended family) still live or place of origin. In other words, despite the prevalent modern often individualistic tendencies, that have put communal ties under duress, there remains for many today elements of a fragmented traditional morality and spirituality in their lives (Mokolatsie 1997: 5) that seems to still hold value to them, including normative value. These include an intense sense of respect for the ancestors, a wavering but nonetheless enduring sense of community and belonging in the form of identification with the family and extended family. These elements of belonging, although not as strong today and not the same sense of community experience as in traditional communities, are nevertheless valuable social resources still available for cultivating values of *botho*.

So even though today people may not live in small and undifferentiated communities, where everybody knew everyone, as the requisite condition for "*botho* living" (Matolino and Kwindigwi 2013: 202), the majority keep strong bonds of kinship and communion with a range of people. For instance, these would include being a son to my parents, a nephew to some

people, a brother to my siblings and an uncle. I am a husband to my wife, a son in law and brother in law to some people, and indeed I still identify with a place and country, namely Thaba-tseka and Lesotho, respectively. In addition to these ties, I am a friend, a colleague to others, a member of an ethnic group, a national of a country, and indeed a member of a race group, and so on and so forth. All these ties regulate conduct and shape what I can and cannot do and are therefore an essential part of my identity. These are the types of bonds that exist and means a lot to individuals even today and have normative influence in their lives, thus providing us with a minimum and basic, “ethically viable and supportive context” (Prozesky 2016: 14) for contemporary social settings necessary to tap into in order to reawaken the ethical imperatives and dictates of *botho* in individuals. They are the primary social institutions that are available even in today’s context, within which individuals can practice and all the values associated with the ethical ideal of *botho* and develop as a result character forming habits conforming to *botho* principles.

This study will therefore probe the significance of a *botho* informed approach to ethics in relation to the contemporary African moral agent and his and her moral environment, which according to Richardson (2009: 137-143) bears the hallmarks of enlightenment ethics. This environment calls into question the value of *botho* as it is at such odds with it. In view of this, it could be argued that the current discourses about *botho* has thus failed to take advantage of existing resources as moral capital for individuals and their current settings to capture people’s moral imaginations and intuitions. By continuing to frame the discourses predominantly in communitarian terms e.g. harmonious community relations, in a context where the traditional sense of community belonging for most people is non-existent, the discourse fails to speak to the modern individual directly where she or he is at, and to adopt more personal approaches that would nudge individuals towards a position whereby *botho* becomes a realistic primary moral framework and an intuitive primary point of reference. The interpretation of *botho* advanced here is one where it is understood in essence as a moral standard by which personal conduct is measured (Gade 2012: 487), and an ideal that becomes an ethical reference point for an individual and their moral aspiration to become “*motho ea nang le botho*” (a person with *botho*) or “*motho ea lokileng*” (a person with good moral character).

I will maintain that the interpretation of *botho* in terms of the character of the moral agent, is more suited for today’s context where the individual is the cornerstone of modern life and its political and policy instruments around which much of modern today societies and life are organised and arranged. Here I am referring to the modern socio-political and policy environment which is which is presupposes the primacy of the individual’s rights and use the language that speak first of the rights of the individual. This account of *botho* has utility value because today’s individuals psychologically define themselves in individualistic terms

(Mokolatsie 1997: 78) and as quasi-free self-choosing moral agents for whom the community and other moral agents do not have any substantive moral relevance to their ethical conduct and reasoning (Richardson 2009:140).

I will argue that there is a need to revisit *botho* in terms of ethics of character and spirituality of Sesotho culture that *botho* presupposes. Spirituality is used here to refer to the religious dimension of African ethics which implies a profound consciousness of the sacred and keeps the unity of the profane and sacred. It does not define human person and experience in purely secular or purely religious terms, because life is both at once (Bujo 2001: 95). The relevance of this approach is that it will enable the uncovering of and bringing to the heart of the discourses, a systematic account of the personal dimension of *botho*, i.e., defined in terms of moral character of *motho* in relation to herself or himself and others as well. First, because the contemporary moral agent occupies a strategic position in modern-day society due to weakening family and social bonds and the absence of a keen sense of community and belonging. In such contexts, the most practical social resources left as the seedbed for *botho* values is the institution of the individual i.e., *motho*. Many of these individuals despite their exterior urbanised Western way of life still hold dear some links with some of these traditional social institutions like the ancestors, family, extended families, “*bo-malome*” (uncles) “*bo-rakhali*” (aunts) etc. etc. Hence the growing new phenomenon among these urbanites of “going home” or *pha-balimo* (thanksgiving to ancestors) (Setiloane 1978:33) after important personal achievements or any significant life event. These individual moral agents today are the primary social unit with the potential to provide the best chance of the successful cultivation of the values of *botho* through personal moral development and formation (Dolamo 2013: 5) in their own lives leading to its realisation in the larger community.

Second, the significance of the personal or auto-centric account of *botho* (van Niekerk 2013) is that it highlights the truth that the tangible experience of *botho*, even when spoken of in terms of its communal relations, is concretely felt in the direct personal encounter of *motho* specifically their character. In other words, it is the individual persons, in concrete community settings that make *botho* exist, not in an abstract way, floating somewhere in the community. This is because the communal and relational prescriptions implied in *botho*, exist and radiates from the personal lives and character of individuals. I will argue in this study that it is the famine of “*batho ba nang le botho*”, i.e., individuals who have *botho* as the essential character of who they are, that explains why, despite much talk and discussion about *botho* in recent years (Gade 2012:486) there is still no real evidence of its existence in reality. The frequent reports in the public media of all sorts of morally reprehensible conduct in interpersonal relationships (Letseka 2013<sub>A</sub>: 338) bear witness to this.

I will show that the personal, self-regarding account of *botho* (Metz 2015: 339) i.e., in terms development of good character through the inculcation of virtues of *botho*, is relevant for

today's individuals and the moral challenges they face. It introduces a unique formulation of *botho* in the discourse, that can appeal to individuals to be good persons, because it is framed at a personal individual level, not communal. It has the potential to succeed in influencing individuals where the current discourses have failed because it speaks directly to the moral inclinations and consciousness of the contemporary moral agent as an individual. First, it makes the individual's moral character the focus of *botho* discourses and this is something practical that can be understood easily by the ordinary person because it is tangible and not abstract and as such it is a moral goal that is realisable. Second, individuals can easily identify with this way of conversing about ethics and in turn, this is more likely to lead to the eventual realisation of the spirit of *botho* in communities, something that appears elusive in modern-day communities, hence the doubts some have expressed about its relevance (Matolino and Kwindigwi 2013). Third, such an understanding provides a justifiable grounding for the role of the community in the personal moral life of the individual (Mokolatsie 1997: 2), something which current discourse has struggled to resolve satisfactorily as personal conduct becomes increasingly regarded as a private matter.

I will therefore contend that for talk of *botho* to remain relevant and of value to individuals today, there is a need for a change in thinking and a new *lingua franca* in mainstream *botho* discourses. The discourse needs to go beyond the tired repeated refrain of *motho ke motho ka batho*. Instead it must introduce other narratives and proverbs that illuminate *botho*, and in turn jump start the moral regeneration and creation of a society of "*batho ba e leng batho*" (individuals who are persons). It must emphasise inculcation of qualities of character understood as virtues of *botho*, to have people with good moral character. The significance of such a shift underscores in a unique and attractive way, an understanding of *botho* as self-expression of one's inner qualities of character (Metz 2015) through habitual acts of *botho* in community. This is because "*motho ea nang le botho*" obviously values his or her relations with others, which would have been part of one's upbringing through the process of socialisation (Bereng 1987: 40, Sekese 1994: 9). Such a shift is not just semantics, but more authentic to the traditional ideal of *botho* whose goal was fashioning and moulding community members into *batho ba nang le botho* i.e., individuals with characters imbued with dispositions and core values of *botho*.

I will further submit that only in this way not only does it become possible to make intelligible ethically, the much-admired feature of African ethics, the prioritisation of the welfare of all as a characteristic feature of African social life. This preoccupation with the mutual concern extends to the moral sphere and matters of personal moral conduct *vis-à-vis* mutual ethical accountability. This is because as Richardson (2009: 131) correctly points out unlike in the West, morality in African thought "is indistinguishable from the rest of social life", it follows that the mutual accountability implied and required by African communalism, covers not only the

social aspect of life but moral sphere as well. I will show this by an appeal to the experience of the Basotho, which is the focus of this study, and how it offers enlightening insight in this regard. As a form of African ethics, it provides an ethical resource from which lessons can be drawn in dealing with some of the lingering effects of ethics of enlightenment and Western ethics, which characterises much of what we see today (Ibid. 2009: 143) in the sphere of morality and ethics.

#### **1.3.4 Afro-Communitarianism and *Motho Ke Motho Ka Batho* Exceptionalism**

The Sesotho proverb "*motho ke motho ka batho*" (MKKB) which means "no man is an island" (Mokitimi 1997: 21) features prominently in the debates and discourses of *botho* (Gade 2012: 492; Metz 2007:323; Munyaka and Motlhabi 2009: 63). As such it calls for closer analysis as it is regarded as the quintessential embodiment of African communalism. I will try to debunk this and the tendency in the literature that exclusively views this expression as the summation of the meaning of *botho*. Using selected similar proverbs in the Sesotho and Basotho experience I will problematise the current casual often unexplained association of MKKB with *botho*. I will argue that this is an arbitrary and unjustified abstraction of one among many Sesotho proverbs that expound *botho* as feature of Sesotho culture. This is because this proverb, as part of Sesotho narratives is but one of the many such proverbs. As Khoza (1994:3) rightly points out, one useful gateway to appreciating the depth of meaning of the concept of *botho* is through age-old wisdom resident in African idiomatic expressions and proverbs. This is true of MKKB and I will argue that its significance for today's context is not only that it can be employed as basis for the formulation of an account of *botho* that emphasis mutual accountability. But that as an expression of mutual caring as the essence of African ethics, MKKB is not unique. There are several of these idiomatic expressions and proverbs among the Basotho that reveal the essence of the Basotho moral values and ideals. Each of these contributes a unique shade of meaning specific to itself, and in turn sheds further light on *botho*, as the moral ideal. But it more importantly their joint meaning and interpretation, through experience and familiarity with their use in the language and in specific social context, that proverbs supply a far deeper understanding and insight into the meaning of *botho*. And not least with regards elucidating practical ways that leads to one reaching the status of being of '*motho*.' I will thus challenge the tendency in the literature (Metz 2012) to reduce the depth of the meaning of the ethical ideal of *botho* to this one proverb out of a rich heritage of such narratives in the moral language of a people, such as that found among the Basotho.

I will also argue that the consequent tendency of treating this proverb as a principle analysed in abstract and independently of its socio-cultural context and reference to the lived experience that gave it meaning, risks misunderstanding this proverb and losing the essence of its meaning altogether (O'Neil 2001: 123;). This amounts to a manipulation of both this proverb

and *botho* as a concept by being treated as defying contextualisation (Richardson 2008: 65). While not denying that as a normative statement the ethical prescripts and values encapsulated in this expression e.g. communalism can resonate *mutatis mutandis* on moral terrains of other communities (Gyekye 2011: par 5) and societies, its abstraction from a range of rich adages expressing patterns of social and moral life unique to a specific people and its culture is problematic.

To a Sesotho speaking person, knowledgeable with its idioms and proverbs, the currency and exceptionalism of MKKB in the current *botho* discourses and literature is thus puzzling and unjustifiable. This is because as I will prove, this expression is one among many such proverbs that encapsulate traditional thought and wisdom on mutual care and according to traditional wisdom, their social and ethical significance is best understood when they are considered in unity, not in isolation from one another. In other words, there is fundamental unity within traditional African wisdom and oral literature resident in these idioms and proverbs which refuses a dismembering approach. This is because in terms of traditional wisdom and thought each proverb adds a shade of meaning unique to itself to the main idea being communicated. By way of an example the following three Sesotho proverbs are instructive here. A well-known proverb among the Basotho is “*ha ho ntloana ngoe*” (there is no home that is by itself, which expresses the same idea of the interdependency of people only that here the analogy used is that of a home. Another one is “*ha le fete khomo le je motho*” loosely translates; “It (death) does not pass cattle and eat the person.” This can be interpreted as a moral obligation of what “ought” to happen, which is that in times of need those with resources (cattle<sup>4</sup>), are supposed to make these available to others. The reference to “*motho*” in general denotes that those to be supported need not necessarily be close family. In other words, any member of the community can make this claim. This is the most radical and profound expression of interdependency we find among Basotho. The third proverb “*nonyana e haela ka tsiba tsa e ngoe*” (a bird builds its nest with the feathers of another) likewise expresses the same idea as the other two but now the analogy is of birds, and with this one we also find a much stronger basis for the common afro-communitarian reading of MKKB that often includes the notion of self-realisation understood in terms of success or excellence (Mokitimi 1997: 56, no 488) than in the other two.

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<sup>4</sup> The significance of cattle among Basotho must not be lost sight of. Livestock and cattle in particular were the most valuable asset a family or individual could have, and it occupied almost the similar status as money in people lives today in importance in social life. So, the prescript that the most prized asset or resource one has, must be made available, when necessary to other members of the community reveal the depth of Basotho understanding of not only interdependency and communal solidarity but more importantly of moral obligation (Tschaeppe 2013) and its implications which has relevance for today’s context. In this sense it is correct that according to traditional African ethic the moral obligation with regard to ownership of resources is that this while individual ownership is not discouraged, resources “ought” to be made available for common use when necessary, something that is foreign in today’s context. See also Mokitimi (1997: 3, proverb 18).

Two things can be learned from this. First, that these proverbs equally embody the ideal of mutual caring and communal solidarity, and that the impression portrayed in the literature that this a unique function of MKKB is incorrect. Second, that in terms of the unity of African traditional wisdom, these proverbs communicate a much deeper meaning in unity as opposed to in isolation from one another. It is therefore important to recognize that MKKB is part of a group of proverbs and according to Mokitimi (1997: 13-21) they relate to matters that society hold to be good or bad and are connected to virtues and vices. In Sesotho when these proverbs are invoked usually in conversation, there is a sub text implicitly known by all involved namely that you cannot speak on one without reference to the other. In other words both the speaker and the listener expect each other to know, based on their knowledge and experience of the culture, that in addition to the immediate message of the proverb in question, they are at the same time implicitly referring to other similar proverbs within the culture which are regarded as reinforcing the same message (Mokolatsie 1997: 48).

It is therefore important to be careful how we use MKKB in the discourse, lest we fall into the mistake of abstracting this expression from its proper context and usage, which exists in the unity of the corpus of old age wisdom of traditional African thought resident in African idiomatic expressions and proverbs (Khoza 1994). As van Binsbergen (2001: 59) warns it is unwise to analyse such proverbs as this and a concept like *botho* in isolation of the “sociology of knowledge by which” these “came into being”. The failure of *botho* discourse in this regard to respect the internal unity of proverbs as a body of knowledge, is in danger of what Okot p’Bitek, in O’Neil (2001: 123) describes as hubris of trimming or mimicking “African wisdom to fit Western scholarly” frameworks. Therefore, the impression made in the discourse where the significance and currency of this proverb is elevated as unique is problematic. This is because in the absence of any evidence supporting this, e.g. in the form of the contextual circumstances for its utterances in daily life, which is how the meaning of proverbs is determined, this status of MKM is academic invention founded on “doubtful” and ‘illogical interpretations of this proverb (Mboti 2015: 125). This is because proverbs as explication of required standards of conduct, embody certain values. And just as “the sense or meaning of ethical behaviour is never given *tout court* but derives from the complex patterns of belief encoded in cultural practices” O’Neil’s 2001: 123) so too is the meaning of proverbs and other narratives. The predominant reading of MKKB, which is lacking in this, is thus no different from another plausible reading of MKKB, one that simply expresses a human being as social. Thus, if read as *motho, ke motho ka batho*, one gets a slightly different nuance of meaning, which is less about self-realisation but merely denoting the nature of “man” i.e., people as human beings. Khoza (1994: 8) explaining this has thus correctly points out that that the axiom is “more than just a wise saying”, but “a hallowed axiom fraught with a great deal of explanatory and definitional significance vis-à-vis the existential question all cultures face: what is a man”?

To this question, according to this interpretation, a traditional Mosotho moral philosopher's answer is "*motho, ke motho, ka batho ba bang*" "(a person, is a person because of other people) which simply means as a human being, *motho* is social by nature, similar in meaning to Aristotle's "man is a political animal".

The point made here is to simply highlight that just like the above reading of MKKB is not improbable and a case can certainly be made for it, the same is true with Afro-communitarianism's reading of MKKB since the introduction of this proverb into the current *botho* discourse somewhere around the early 1990's (Gade 2011:313). Anecdotal evidence and familiarity with Sesotho narratives and proverbs, suggest that the unique rendering of MKM in current *botho* discourse is a later development and reading, that it is not supported by evidence from traditional contextual use of MKKB in its proper social setting.

The understanding of MKKB is no different to how similar proverbs in Sesotho language are understood and interpreted. The meaning of such adages is always decided by the contextual and intentions of the speaker, which in turn was informed by the customary and traditional usage of such expressions in the community, as handed down from generation to generation through tradition. This case for this reading and interpretation of MKKB advanced in this study is coherent with how similar proverbs<sup>5</sup> and expressions are regarded in the Sesotho language; namely that they are either descriptive statements, adages of contemplative insights of African traditional thought on the nature of reality, or prescriptive statement to inform conduct. To get the correct intended meaning one would often then have to understand the conversational context in which the expression was used. The same is true of this proverb, but often does not occur in the current discourses, as the used "in isolation –in vitro- without constant reference to the particular sociology of knowledge by which it came into being and was perpetuated" (van Binsbergen 2001: 59). This is problematic because the meaning of proverbs is best understood when they are studied in the context of their actual use, where

"The social factors surrounding the application of a particular proverb may also clarify its meaning which, often, is metaphorical or figurative. An outsider's initial understanding of a proverb might not be the meaning intended by the Mosotho" (Mokitimi 2004: 756)

The social factors here include the tone of the voice of a "speaker," the circumstances that evoked its use and the response therefore by the "audience" hearing such a proverb uttered. The current use and interpretation of this proverb as found in the discourse as a description of an articulation of *botho* appears lacking in this. This leads to the conclusion that this reading

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<sup>5</sup> The underlying priority of the 'welfare of all' found in Sesotho culture which is the context of this proverb and can be found in other similar proverbs such *sejo senyane ha se fete molomo* (no matter how little the food is, it can still be shared) or *bana ba monna ba arolena hloolana ea tsie*, (children in a family share the head of grasshopper). The central meaning of both proverbs is sharing where the moral obligation is that the quantity of scarcity or small quantity of something is no justification not to share, a fact confirmed by Casalis observation as well (1861: 207). In other words, sharing is the governing principle in order to safeguard the welfare of all, where even the little that there is ought to be shared if needed (Bereng 1987: 88) on sharing and generosity among the Basotho.

is driven more by the authorial ideologies of *botho* scholars specifically the considerations of nation building and reconciliation especially in the case of South Africa<sup>6</sup> (van Binsbergen 2001: 64). This is plausible in view of the desire of engendering the spirit of *botho* understood in terms nation building, hence the prominence of the common humanity and harmonious relationships theme found always going with current rendering of MKKB in *botho* discourse.

However, I will contend that that the abstraction and exceptionalism of MKKB that we see in the discourse, requires correction and that the meaning imputed on this proverb as having important normative connotation about personhood and the individualistic connotations of self-realisation idea, is unjustified (Metz and Gaie 2010: 274-275). First because at the heart of MKKB and many similar expressions is an exhortation for prioritisation of the welfare of the tribe or community i.e., communal welfare and brotherhood or mutual aid. Second, because within the cultural heritage that *botho* stems from, there is a rich repository of these idiomatic expressions and proverbs, including other metaphors in folk tales, that “cast light on *botho* and its orientation (Khoza 1994: 3) in equally vivid ways that should be brought into the discourse. Embedded in the variety these proverbs as part of the corpus of African narratives, are ready made ethical resources available for scholarship excavation by scholars of *botho* to develop a rich understanding of *botho* and corresponding practical ways of living that engender the spirit of *botho* relevant for today’s context. One such understanding that I think is a much more attractive reading of this proverb which the discourse could explore, is the notion of mutual moral accountability. This rendition of MKKB is not only relevant to for today’s context but also consistent with the overall theme of welfare of all and mutual care found at the heart of African culture. I will argue that today the significance of MKKB, where communal relations are weak, seems to me to be not so much what it says about individuals about self-realisation through and only through the community (Metz 2007: 337). On the contrary, I will contend that its attractiveness is on what it says as a statement about ethical mutual accountability of individuals to others. This is because it is in the nature of the African conception of personhood which this proverb presupposes i.e., narrative self, that as a person and moral agent I am not only accountable to others, but I can also always ask others for an account (McIntyre 1981: 218, 126). This accountability is the given of my live as a *motho* by virtue of being born into a network of pre-existing relationships and loyalties, each with its own unique moral obligations and expectations. These loyalties and relationships are what

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<sup>6</sup> The phrase authorial ideology is borrowed from Selepe (1999) in which it refers to the “specific material conditions” that influence “the author’s” thinking and find their way in the author’s literary work. In this entry the concept is applied with reference to early scholars of *botho* mainly in South Africa and the context of nation building (van Niekerk 2013: 3) and reconciliation (van Binsbergen 2001: 64) in post -Apartheid South Africa which the concept being applied with particular reference scholars like Shutte and Tutu *botho* of whom are regarded as prominent voice behind *botho* and nation building and reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa.

regulates and decide how we ought to relate to other. In the context of current *botho* discourse where moral life is regarded as a personal and private matter for the individual as the moral sovereign, I will argue that this is the most attractive and compelling way to interpret this proverb. The discourse should be championing this as a way of articulating the insight underpinning *botho*.

Another way in which MKKB is relevant that I want to highlight, because it is currently not being emphasised in the discourse is that it points to the significance of African proverbs as whole not just MKKB as a way of expounding the insights of *botho*. This in turn is a validation of the need for mainstreaming of the narrative dimension of African culture into current *botho* discourse, the role of proverbs and folktales and how narratives are ideal as vehicles for illuminating *botho*. This is especially the case in the case of folk tales and proverbs because of the unique role they can play in education into virtue by cautioning people about “their behaviour, their character, ... [and] the imperfect world in which we live” (Mokitimi 1997: xiii). In other words, the benefit of integrating more proverbs and other narratives in current theorisation of *botho* is their ability to convey advice, console and act as social commentary “on socially accepted norms” (Mokitimi 2004: 756) and behaviour vis-à-vis ethical imperatives required of *botho* required in daily living. Narratives capture the polysemic nature of *botho* as moral ideal and I will thus argue that the neglect of the narrative dimension of virtue as expressed in narratives, is one weakness of currently *botho* discourse. This is because narratives are a chief form of moral education in those cultures traditionally associated with *botho* of education about *botho*. This entry it is hoped to contribute towards addressing from the perspective of Sesotho speaking culture.

#### **1.4 Hypothesis**

The current state of the ethical value of *botho* for modern society is not only increasingly being acknowledged as welcome development for African ethics. However, the whole universalised and decontextualised approach characterising current *botho* discourses and its theorisation of *botho* needs to be revisited (Richardson 2008: 65–83). This study aims to introduce into the discourse such a contextual appraisal of *botho* by examining its significance and social-cultural meaning from the moral particularity of the Basotho, as one of the traditional settings and a cultural milieu in which *botho* was a way of life. Such an account of *botho* is a study area in African ethics in need of research because of the contribution it can make to current studies about the nature of *botho*. As one of the Sesotho speaking communities with a long and intimate cultural heritage and affinity with the term *botho*, and whose cultural and historical experiences this concept stems from (van Niekerk 2013: x), the Basotho are one of the natural study areas relevant to *botho* and its current interpretation and application.

Basotho have a strong cultural heritage and traditions with intimate experience of *botho* as one of the indigenous African people of Sub Saharan Africa from which the concept derives. For them, their understanding of personhood i.e., what it means to possess *botho* is indissolubly linked with having a good moral character which is regarded as essential to be a good member of the community. Just as MacIntyre (1981: 206) argues that settings have significant standing to individuals, likewise the significance of the perspective of moral traditions of communities from which *botho* derives, such as that of the Basotho is indispensable to debates about *botho* in the current discourse. This is because without such perspectives, the value of current *botho* discourse and the broad scope of local and universal application of *botho* as a unique African ethic will be significantly impoverished (Eliastam 2015: 2, Nicolson 2008: 3). Besides this, the word “*botho*” and the proverb “*motho ke motho ka batho*,” which feature prominently in the literature derive from the Sesotho group of languages i.e., Sepedi, Setswana and (Southern) Sesotho (Dolamo 2013: 1), the latter being spoken by the Basotho.

The experience of the Basotho, and the analysis of their moral traditions as reflected in their social-cultural milieu including language, customs, and practices, has not found much attention in literature (Prozesky 2016: 6). This is relevant to the current *botho* discourse because it is the setting from which the term *botho* and proverb MKKB stem from. This is relevant because language is not only a carrier of the culture of a people but is also a repository of their moral values. It is one of “a number of ways” by which a society express its “values” which in turn reflects what it “holds dear” and “as people come to value certain things and do them in a certain way, they use their language in ways that reflect what they value and what they do (Kamwangamalu 2007: 32). According to this the moral language of a people is a gate way into the moral thinking and moral views and ideas of that society. This is true of the Basotho and the language.

This study will therefore analyse *botho* and the MKKB *motho* in the moral language of the Basotho as entry point to the current discourse and a validation of ethics of *botho* in the evolving project of African ethics and its contribution to ethics. The study will appraise traditional moral traditions of Basotho as my moral starting point, to evaluate the dominant approaches to ethics which tends to ignore traditional African ethical systems and are biased to Western and Christian ethics (Murove 2009: xv). It will thus be a critique of the status of current discourses, advocating for the elevation of moral character to the discourse, drawing lessons from the Basotho culture.

This research will thus contribute to current discourses in South Africa and beyond by bringing the Basotho understanding of *botho* to the table of the *botho* dialogue, itself a part of the greater project of African ethics of recovering values of traditional African ethics for today's context.

The value of this research therefore is that it will give an insight into the Basotho conception of *botho* as the basis of a shared moral framework that held their communities together and stressed the primacy of moral character and moral accountability of members within that framework. This will open to the current *botho* discourse access to hitherto inaccessible insight of the moral language of Basotho and in turn a richer understanding of the meaning of *botho*, and of this proverb and similar adages. It is in this respect that this study is to my knowledge new and has not been done. The study will be of value to African ethics and the study of *botho* first, to uncover any shades of meaning and interpretation, or the shape and form of *botho* unique to their context and experience. Second to compare the extent to which their conception of *botho* differs or is like that depicted in the literature and third how it can be of value and practical relevance and applicability to an African moral landscape today and other places elsewhere with similar ethical contexts.

The study thus will endorse a contextual approach and analysis of *botho*, as a first-order category experience as opposed to a second order category (Inglis and Thorpe 2012: 90). It will contextualise this within the cultural and moral particularity of the Basotho which is the entry point of this study into the discourse. This is necessary to compliment prevalent approaches and perspectives in the study of this concept which has been from the outside looking in. A contextual approach for the study of the nature of *botho* allows a perspective and experiences of the primary communities, as representative ideals and from whose moral traditions and heritage this concept derives; to articulate their understanding and experience of *botho* as African themselves, as opposed to an understanding and interpretation of an African experience by non-Africans (Gade 2012: 486). The significance of this is that to date early and leading proponents of *botho* such as Shuttle, Metz others are of European descent (Gade 2011: 313-315). This disproportionately in the influence of leading voices articulating the experience of *botho* has set the tone of the discourse and the way *botho* is understood (Metz 2012: 102; Gade 2011: 304; Matolino and Kwindigwi 2013: 198). This is no clearer than in the arbitrary abstraction connecting the proverb "*motho ke motho ka batho*" to *botho* (Gade 2011: 313-315) to the exclusion of other similar proverbs.

This study therefore aims to challenge such established view in the discourse with a critical appraisal of those perspectives from within, and in turn make accessible a new insight in the discourse of the traditional conception of *botho* understood in terms of the moral status of a person (Gade: 2012: 487, Metz 2011) specifically the moral character of *motho*. It will thus contribute significantly to the appraisal of the relevance of *botho*, not so much as a rejection of critical engagement with dominant global culture (Shutte 2008: 16) of our connected global village (Nicolson 2008: 2). But as a critique of the dominant ethos of modern societies embodied among others in liberal individualism (MacIntyre 1981: xvi), and relativisation and privatisation of personal conduct (Shutte 2001:1) itself a by-product of the ethics of

enlightenment. It will shed light on the use and meaning of MKKB and other Sesotho proverbs with the same or similar meaning. It will shed light of the proper context and in turn deepen understanding and knowledge of their usage and appropriateness, as resources that can be used to communicate the depth of meaning of the ethical ideal of *botho* for today's context. The study will thus refine the understanding of "*motho ke motho ka batho*" and similar other African idioms, by applying it to the personal moral life of the individual as opposed to the social and communal life, which is the dominant interpretation (Metz 2011: 391). By reinterpreting these African adages afresh in this manner, a new avenue for living moral life as a public, not a private matter, one in which mutual accountability is valued and where others do not only contribute but have a stake and interest becomes possible. This is currently not possible and is something not immensely popular in the understanding of ethics. As Richardson's (2009: 140) observation of undergraduate students shows, the common view they hold about ethics, found in the statement "in the end it's up to the person to decide what is right for themselves" reflects a widely held view in society these days. The study will contribute to the discourse a new appreciation of narratives as vehicles for illuminating the ethical imperatives implied in *botho* embed in such idioms by understanding how they were used in their proper context. This makes it easier to uncover the social meaning of such imperatives and how to extrapolate their relevance into today's moral landscape. The study will recast MKKB and similar idioms as readily available ethical resources with great utility value, which can be used to counter negative impact of the privatisation of personal conduct and the moral life espoused by modern Western Ethics. This is one of the ethical challenges in today's context, and a basis upon which this study has argued for a shared moral framework.

### **1.5 Methodology of the Study and Limitations**

From what has been said, it should be clear as native Sesotho speaker my investigation will thus not be that of a neutral academic observer, but as brought up in Sesotho culture. The analysis I therefore embark upon here will reflect shared ideas and views about *botho* articulated from the standpoint of an expert by experience of one who grew up immersed in the social milieu of Sesotho culture, and knowledgeable with the moral traditions of Basotho. As an African my engagement with the notion of *botho* as one of the key moral term in Sesotho culture is therefore grounded in the understanding of traditional Basotho culture where my formative moral development was honed (Letseka 2013B: 355). In other words, I will rely on my native knowledge of Basotho and their moral practice as my starting point for approaching this topic. I have thus restricted the topic to the experience of Basotho because my knowledge and familiarity with

the culture, will be a valuable research tool and asset to capitalise on the advantages of my status as a researcher with authentic native experience and fully understanding the cultural milieu of Sesotho Culture in which this concept emerged, and which informs the interpretation of key principles associated with it (van Niekerk 2013: x).

This means as an investigator I enter the arena of this discourses as one who inherited the moral tradition of the Basotho, and not as a free-floating researcher without any specified starting point (Richardson 2009: 142- 144, MacIntyre 1981: 220). I will use this native knowledge to analyse selected cultural practices from the Basotho culture and experience, including those marking key stages in the process of socialisation from childhood, to validate the centrality of good moral character to the Basotho concept of *botho* and what it means to be “a real and proper *motho*” (Mphetlang 2009: 18). In addition, as a native of the Sesotho speaking culture which is one of the cultures in which *botho* applies, I am in a privileged position to make a unique contribution to current discourse from knowledge of the “sociology of knowledge” of the Basotho culture (van Binsbergen 2001: 57) derived from a “personal experience” as an “authentic cultural milieu” theorist (van Niekerk 2013: X). This will enable me to articulate myself on the subject uninhibited and capitalise on the advantages of an authentic native experience and full understanding of the cultural milieu of Sesotho culture. For it is this, which informs the interpretation of *botho* and other key related moral terms in Sesotho culture that support the principles encapsulated in *botho*.

The research topic of this study intersects with other of areas of interest in African ethics and ethics in general. This includes the debate between radical communitarianism and moderate communitarianism (Menkiti 2004, Gyekye 2010) and character ethics as found in traditional virtue ethical approaches to ethics. Equally relevant is the inclusion of added reflections on Ubuntu from the perspective of other cultures beyond the borders of South African north of the Limpopo river from communities in places like Zimbabwe, Zambia and or Malawi. However, it will not be possible to cover and give a thorough treatment of all these within the limitations of this study. This means that it will not be possible to give these and other essential topics of debates that have a bearing on this topic and would nourish this study the detailed analysis they deserve. This study therefore does not intend to cover all the topics that the investigation of this topic raises that would be of interest and enrich the study.

So, although the context of the study is an investigation of *botho* in the context of current discourse and ethics in general, the primary focus of the study is the experience of *botho* its manifestation in the moral thought and practice of Basotho. This means that the approach and method that this study uses has comparative elements because it looks to cast light on the Basotho experience of *botho* in contrast to the how the concept is analysed and theorised in current *botho* discourse.

The qualitative nature of this study also means the methodology of the study is typically documentary analysis where the all the sources of information that the study uses are all written materials; namely books and electronic material published on the internet and relevant to subject under discussion. The study thus analysed a wide range of written and published material locally and internationally mainly covering the disciplines of ethics and philosophy and African ethics and African theology.

The study also makes use of seminal literature and written documents on Sesotho culture. Of importance here are works of early missionaries and historians in Lesotho as well as key Sesotho novels and other books in Sesotho by early Basotho scholars and authors. Although some of these sources may be considered old the scarcity the historical perspective and approach of the investigation of the topic in Sesotho culture makes relevant historical documents as source of traditional life of Basotho. To my knowledge, although there is a lot of material produce on this topic, to date there is little published material on this topic from the perspective of the moral particularity of Sesotho speaking culture. For this study these sources, especially early writings of missionaries in Lesotho are an important deposit of the Basotho understanding of what it means for one to possess *botho* as character trait, which is an important dimension of *botho* currently missing in the current discourse. The study also relies on other works in Sesotho language including a collection of Sesotho proverbs and other forms of Sesotho narratives. The choice of these sources is that, although often not prominent in current *botho* discourse as useful sources, within Sesotho cultures, these works by early Basotho authors offer valuable insight in the social life of Basotho and the context within which *botho* applied and found its meaning and interpretation. The insight of Basotho understanding of *botho* they convey is therefore relevant to the topic of this research.

As the topic of this study is a subject of ongoing research, with vast amounts of new material mainly in the form of articles continuously being produced, the study has analysed a huge amount of articles on *botho* that could be accessed at the time of writing on the topic and a wide variety of relevant literature available with the limited time of the study. Most of these materials analysed are in the form of electronic sources accessed through a variety of online resources including the University's online library sources and other academic online sources available to the researcher. This includes analysis of as much as possible newly published material searched from e-journals and other e-sources from the University online resources. The study analysed many published articles covering as many of the topic on *botho* related to theology, ethics, and philosophy as is possible within the set limits of the scope of the topic at the time of writing. Here too particular interest was on those articles on *botho* that in the main fall within the broad outlines of the disciplines of theology, ethics, and philosophy.

The method of this study also means that the study uses phenomenology as the primary study design, where the phenomena that the study looks to unpack is the concept *botho*, as found

in daily lives of Basotho. The choice of the qualitative approach to the study is that this enables a one to conduct a systematic inquiry and at the same time build a holistic, narrative, description of *botho* as the cultural phenomenon under study to inform and deepen existing knowledge and understanding of the concept. This approach also allows the necessary kind of flexibility and sensitivity to social context of *botho* necessary for is full understanding (Astalin 2013: 118). As such this design is suited to examining the topic as it applies the specific context which is Sesotho speaking culture.

The rationale for the choice of this approach is that it allows for a compressive overview of the topic and to observe trends in the debates around Ubuntu/*botho*, and common themes. This approach allows the identification of nuance of meanings and analysis of common trends in usage of the concept to highlight common threads from a variety of voices and debates around the subject as the ideal background to the subject of the research. This allows the researcher to pull together evidence from a wide range of material to gain as broad a view of the meaning and understanding of this topic in the current literature as possible. This is important as a foregrounding of this study and its context as the study proposes to introduce a perspective and approach to the topic not common in the current discourse. Key consideration here is the observation of the general approach of current analysis of the research topic where often this is approached from a universal point of view and not from a specific identified context, and the significance of narratives in African ethics. This is one of the weakness in current approaches to this topic.

### **1.5.1 Motivation for the Study**

This study is motivated by the observation that despite much research on the topic the nature of *botho* is very much a contested topic and this field of study is far from being exhausted (Metz 2014). The conviction behind this study is that a character-centric interpretation of *botho* i.e., moral quality of a person (Gade 2011: 306-309), as found among the Basotho, is a more authentic and applicable interpretation of the traditional ethical ideal of *botho* for today's society. In particular, the study is driven by the need for a *motho* centred talk of *botho*, as a more useful way of communicating the values of *botho* to modern-day moral agents. This aspect of theorising about *botho* is currently missing in the literature. Its significance is that the focus on moral character allows *botho* discourses to speak to individuals where they are and as they are, in terms of their social-psychological identity and sense of who they are, as opposed to who they are supposed to be i.e., members of communities of *botho*. Thus, the character-centric definition of *botho* I am proposing is a better way to converse about ethics of *botho*. Its emphasis which on character contributes in a concrete way to developing in alternative ethical approaches to the current Western and Christian ethical approach

(Richardson 2009:130); which underpin much of contemporary moral attitudes and public discourse.

The earnestness of this study also emanates from an observation that current discourses have not yet developed a link between traditional African values associated with *botho*, and proverbs denoting interdependence, as an ideal ethical resource for introducing into *botho* discourse the notion of mutual accountability to others (Richardson 2009, 141). There is little in the literature about what these key tenets mean for an understanding of the social nature of ethics as implied in *botho*, as an expression of the traditional morality. I therefore intended to explore how these values are to be understood as they pertain to the personal conduct of contemporary moral agent (*motho*), which is at the heart of *botho* ethics. In turn, I will make a case for accountable personal conduct grounded on a shared moral framework based on *botho*, where ethical accountability of the moral agent, is *the* relationship at the core of *botho* ethics as a lived reality rather than a theory.

I will use this analysis to build a case for a character-centric conception of *botho*. First, to show that this is the most attractive approach of making *botho* relevant to today's society. In doing so I will confirm the centrality and primacy of character for discussions on *botho*, but also in recognition of the moral culture of most individuals in society today (Richardson 2009:140). Second, to endorse the view that *botho* is when considered as following in footsteps of the ethical tradition of virtues ethics, with a unique African contribution, qualifying it as African.

From this, I will articulate the significance of *botho* as a character-centric ethic that places a premium on good moral character as the marker of being a good person. This is because even though morality is always the story of a particular people and a particular community, at a particular time in their history, there is sufficient evidence indicating that the values, beliefs, and principles encapsulated in the ideal of *botho* can resonate "*mutatis mutandis* on the moral terrains of other" communities (Gyekye 2011; par 5) and societies.

Having located *botho* within the framework of ethical approaches that emphasis inculcation of virtues, *makhabane* ethics, I will attempt to show that this rendering of *botho* offers an attractive alternative approach of doing ethics in Africa, and a model and basis for development of shared moral frame of reference and a communal enterprise, where the formation and development of the moral character of the individual into a good person is key. Given that the current *botho* discourse has without justification regularly evoked the proverb "*motho ke motho ka batho*" as encapsulating *botho* (van Niekerk 2013:4) and that no thorough analysis has been done specifically on the Sesotho concept of "*botho*" as it relates to "*motho*", my analysis of this will provide a greater understanding and insight into how they were understood in their original settings. As such a large part of this study will be a response to the shortcomings of current discourse. This will include the tendency to interpret *botho* in terms of African values concerned with community maintenance and communal solidarity.

I will use selected proverbs from the Sesotho language to show that the proverb “*motho ke motho ka batho*,” as an example of this tendency, is part of a large body of traditional wisdom of such expressions, orally transmitted from generation to generation. I will show that the currency that this proverb therefore enjoys is an abstraction is not only unjustified but undermines the unity of African narratives especially their function in unity as vehicles of moral education. But more important that the exceptionalism is detrimental to an understanding of *botho* in which different proverbs articulate its imperatives. As moral ideal *botho* is an expression of “utopian and prophetic” aspirations and its function are, as much to offer practical guidance as it is to “muse” and to exhort” (van Binsbergen 2001: 59) *motho* towards the ideal of being *motho*. These utopian character of *botho* expressed here reflects Karenga’s notion of the moral ideal (2004). I will argue this is the more suitable conceptualisation *botho*. The potential application of such an analysis will be an increased awareness and appreciation in current *botho* discourses, that “the sense or meaning” of *botho* as moral ideal “is never given *tout court* but derives from the complex patterns of belief encoded” (O’Neil 2001: 123) in the moral tradition particularity of the culture and “sociology of knowledge by which it” (van Binsbergen 2001: 59) is interpreted and given meaning.

The appraisal *botho* in Sesotho culture in this study is part of the growing interest in African ethics of investigating moral traditions of Africa. This renewed interest in African culture is itself as part of the growing latter dissatisfaction with Modern Western ethics and efforts to find alternatives. That means to fully recognise the significance and value of the ethical approach that *botho* presupposes, it is important to see this against the backdrop of contemporary experience and impact of Western ethics to many communities in whose moral traditions *botho* is key.

### **1.5.2 Plan of the Study**

The analysis of *botho* in Sesotho culture and in current *botho* discourse in this study can be divided into two focus areas. The first part is an overview of the state of morality and ethics today focusing on modern Western ethics both in its secular and religious forms. The second analyses traditional African morality focusing on traditional morality of the Basotho. The study covers this in five chapters of this study. Chapter one, which is introduction and background of the study, sets the general context or background of the study, and frame the research problem and central hypothesis. Chapter two is detailed macro level account of the problem, and overview of contemporary moral environment which set the larger context of this study in ethics in general. The chapter is a quick appraisal of the influence of Western and Christian ethical approaches as the predominant ethical approaches influencing conduct today. It highlights the growing concern with the basic approach found in Western Ethics with specific focus on the moral disquiet in Africa. The chapter looks at some elements of African culture

as the essential social context for the revival of *botho* ethics, now being revisited as possible ethical resources for addressing current moral problems.

Chapter three of the study can be regarded as the literature review of the study analysing available material locally and internationally. This is a broad overview of current *botho* discourse and analysis the main debates and common approaches and including a detailed analysis of connection of *motho ke motho ka batho* to *botho*. Chapter four and five focus on the experience of *botho* in Sesotho speaking culture and the significance of Basotho institution to the practice of *botho* ethics. In the context of the study these two chapters act as the findings of the study. As such chapter four is a detailed analysis Sesotho culture focusing on the primacy of character in the moral language and thought of Basotho as a central part of their understanding of ethics. Chapter five is a further examination of the Sesotho culture but here focus is the larger context of the social order found in Sesotho culture which is presupposed by *botho*. Specific focus here is on the key institutions of Basotho that provide their communities with an enabling environment which sustained and made possible the practice of *botho* possible. The chapter highlight the necessity of certain social conditions necessary for *botho* to thrive and be possible in a community. Chapter six is the conclusion of the study and recommendation for further research.

In terms of a simpler format the sequence of the chapter in this study can be divided into the introduction and background, which is chapter. This chapter is also the framing of the research problem and hypothesis. Chapter two, which is the detail elaboration of the research problem, gives an overview of current moral environment and influence of modern ethics and resultant moral disquiet including in African culture. The literature review of the study, which is in Chapter three, looks at a wide variety of available relevant literature locally and internationally relevant to the current discourse on *botho* ethics is given. This is followed by chapter four which in the context of this study functions as the findings of the study as it proposes a revisiting of *botho* in the light of character. Chapter five which looks at the social conditions necessary for *botho*. The chapter's discussion on social support structures necessary for ethics of *botho* to foreshadows a more detail discussion in chapter six. The final chapter of the study is the discussion and conclusion of some of the finding of the study and recommendations of the study.

## CHAPTER TWO: OVERVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MORAL ENVIRONMENT AND INFLUENCE OF MODERN ETHICS

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter will give a brief overview and critique of modern Western ethics as the predominant influence behind moral attitudes seen in contemporary modern societies in sub-Saharan Africa. The first part of the chapter will discuss the influence of Western ethics as found in secular morality of the West and modernity as its cultural expression. It will highlight key aspects these as antithetical to *botho* and values of traditional morality of Basotho and African culture in general. This will also include Christian ethics as the religious expression of modern ethics in Sesotho culture. The missionary enterprise among traditional Basotho communities played an instrumental role in the displacement of traditional morality of Basotho and the establishment of modern western ethical approaches in Sesotho culture. The last part of the chapter will contextualise this within contemporary African culture. It will highlight the growing moral disquiet about what is seen as the decay in the moral fibre of many African communities. It will also focus on calls for revisiting of elements of traditional morality to address some of the problems African is facing.

Modern Western ethics in its current form, whether in Europe or elsewhere can be described as the morality of the Western and European culture and carried it wherever this culture went<sup>7</sup>. It is now the most dominant moral culture of modern societies both in the developing and developed world (Shutte 2008:17). It is an ethical approach that emerged as a result of the Enlightenment when traditional Western morality was rejected and, in its place, secular morality emerged. This gained fullest expression from the end of fifteenth century to the beginning of nineteenth century onwards (Shutte 2008: 19-24; MacIntyre 1981: 37, 39). Since these early days modern Western ethics has remained true to its central tenets: devotion to individualism and choice, focus on questions of principles and rules to follow or apply and in what situations. These ideas have since become part the dominant global moral culture of contemporary society influencing ways of conduct and personal ethics in many places including in southern Africa and present-day Basotho culture. This is a moral culture in which ethical reflection on moral precepts have little to do with considerations and questions of characters of individuals. Questions of 'who I am', and what is worthy of me', or 'what kind of person ought I to be as so formed by my community'. This is an ethical approach that is increasingly less concerned with qualities of character of persons. Instead, modern ethical approaches give an impression whereby

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<sup>7</sup> By the West here it is meant European ethical approaches found in modern Western ethics which will include Christian ethics.

“ethics is an activity to be brought into play only when problems of a particular kind emerge and when the decision of a particular kind needs to be made. For the rest of life, apart from isolated moral episodes, ethics is something kept in a drawer, like a nutcracker” (Richardson 1994: 91).

Many in Africa are now beginning to raise concerns with Western ethical approaches especially with effects of enlightenment ethics MacIntyre (1984: 4) which has left ethics in an impoverished state with its reliance on reason as a foundation for morality. Western ethics’ over emphasis of the “thinking faculty of the individual and quest of rational principles and rules for right action, has led to the huge forgetfulness of the “person” in ethics, (Richardson 1994: 91, Shutte 2008: 4, 22). Ethics is accused of losing sight of its key function, of creating ‘*batho ba o leng batho*’ meaning good citizens, or helping individuals “answer the question: what sort of person am I to become?” (MacIntyre 1981: 118). It is this effect of enlightenment thinking on ethics entrenched in modern Western thinking that for many is its main weakness (Statman 1997: 6). This representation of ethics, which is concerned with ambiguous situations and hard decisions, and attentiveness to "quandaries" obscures the fact that ethics makes sense only within the context of a life preoccupied with answering “what the kind of person I am and ought to be” (Hauerwas 1983: 4). When ethics is left as the sole as the responsibility of the individual, as modern ethics does, it is no wonder that it will not focus on creating individuals who value and prioritises shared values. Such an approach will pay little regard to the common good and commitment to the goodness of life, i.e., the good life, where as individuals, we join one another making the best of our togetherness for the benefit of all “*hobane ke botho* i.e., because that is what it means to be a person (Prozesky 2007: 6)”

This orientation of Western value systems embodied in modern Western ethics and now transported as part of First World culture’s uncompromising overvaluation of the individual and subjective notion of the good continues to affect African communities both socially and morally (Waldstein 2017: 1). The introduction of the notion of the autonomous and a moral sovereign individual has left individuals morally adrift, with no clear moral anchor as they lose even more so that sense of belonging, while adhering to values without reference points other than themselves (Sandel 1984: 170). Taught to believe that one is morally autonomous the contemporary moral agents are confused beings. Unlike their counterparts in post traditional societies and pre-modern cultures like that of traditional Basotho, contemporary agents lack moral certainty. not only of the moral choice they make, but of what criteria to use in making those choices. This is because their moral life lived based on criterionless choice “is informed by different concepts, incompatible attitudes” and “rival premises” (MacIntyre 1981: 31,40,202).

It is this general state of confusion of values that many familiar with moral traditions of Africa are worried of the direction of modern ethics and its ability to provide individuals and communities with a sound common ethical frame of reference for today’s context. This, in part

explains the interest in recent years with calls to revisit elements of tradition morality with *botho*, which is discussed in detail in the next chapter, as one of the rallying points. To understand where these concerns emanate from and how *botho* ethics is seen as a part the solution, it is important to understand what the character and nature modern ethics and the nature of concerns being raised which I now turn to.

## **2.2 Concerns with Western Ethics and its Characteristic Features**

We have already intimated that one of the distinctive features of modern ethics, which distinguish it as different from other ethical approaches wherever it takes root, is how much of it bears the imprint of Western or European culture whose moral and social presuppositions it espouses. The account that follow here will be but a broad description and appraisal of this connection between the two. It will highlight characteristics features of modern ethics that typifies its character and orientation but also best capture its differences with ethics of *botho*. This will be used to illustrative the respective approaches of both, with modern ethics also serving as the background to the current *botho* discourse and this study as well. The intention therefore is present current *botho* discourse together with this overview of modern approaches to ethics as the contrast to the context in which *botho* ethics as practiced in Sesotho speaking cultures applied and thrived.

This intrinsic connection and indebtedness of modern Western ethics to European culture and its moral tradition thus must not be underestimated, as this explains how bound up modern ethics is with values and social ideals of Western culture and mode of thinking (Bujo 2001: 3). As a result, we see that wherever European culture has embedded itself and influence outside Europe, so has liberal Western values systems and ethics. This should not be a surprise because cultures are the social transporters of values which that culture promotes and encourages. In the case of modern ethics, that culture is not only Western and European, but also distinctively modern, secular, and liberal and of increasing globalising in approach to other moral traditions and cultures. It is an individualist culture, market-driven, and now dominates large parts of the world today. This is the culture of the First World with its first world value systems, embodied most profoundly in its liberal ethics and individualism. It an ethical approach whose manifestation is the diminishing of the sense of objective moral authority, democratisation of moral agency and dilution of a sense of shared values (MacIntyre 1981: 32). The consequence of this is a moral culture and moral attitude where society and ethics are viewed as just a matter of convention, purely subjective. As Nicolson (2008: 5) explains:

“far from consciously sharing a global ethic, our global village seems to be controlled by certain dominant cultures.....[but] none of these granted much

value to other worldviews or to other concepts of right and wrong; [instead]  
all assumed that they were the whole and only truth

Society i.e., our relationships with another is therefore merely a setting for application of practical set of rules to enable a society composed of people with very different values to function smoothly (Richardson 2009: 141). It is against this background and culture and in response to this that many concerns about modern ethics are being raised.

The reason for concerns is because modern Western ethics is now the predominant moral point of reference globally because of its close connection with First World culture, so its influence cannot be ignored. This is more so when despite its global reach, modern ethics has not changed its character and in turn, the values it espouses (Shutte 2008: 16) together with corresponding social and moral assumptions and attitudes. As Prozesky (2009 : 12) explains even as the world moves towards development of a “global ethic” that provides ethics with an inclusive moral frame of reference, “that can be accepted by people of any and every culture”, the stranglehold of Western ethics with its rights-based liberal individualism remain intact. The primacy of the individual as the moral sovereign is the corner stone of ethical focus. The inherent individualism of modern ethics, supported by liberalism and its idolisation of personal freedom has thus been described as a risk that easily degenerate into selfishness, irresponsibility, greed, and a society which no longer cares if left unchecked (Prozesky 2009: 12). It is against this background and growing moral individualism of Western ethics as a global culture and its ethos that modern ethics must be found and interpreted.

As a predominant ethics for last decade influencing many cultures, this ethic inspired by the intellectual agenda of the West driven by science and secularisation (Shutte 2008: 20-22; Shutte 2001: 43) has proved itself inadequate to address moral challenges. For many communities in sub-Saharan Africa the signs of moral meltdown and decay that we see all around us (Prozesky 2007: 7) are in part the result of the failure of modern ethics as moral frame of reference to provide communities with a practical shared value system and common frame of reference. regulate conduct and inform society. The complacent acceptance of modern Western values framework along with its liberal rights-based ethic (Sandal 1984: 171) has produced an ethical approach that has left societies with an impoverished conception of moral life, where this is increasingly treated as a private concern relating to the good of the individual. Thus, from the perspective of African ethics and culture, with its communal oriented ethos, the rejection of community-oriented character of moral behaviour (Bujo 2009: 116) that is inherent in modern ethics, is the single most worrying failing of modern ethics (Shutte 2008: 16). Reiterating this concern Mkhize (2008: 36) points out that “ethics is not a matter of individual” private moral life of the moral agent alone, as the post-enlightenment ethics teaches. It is by contrast a matter of life lived by and following a common set of moral values and shared frame of reference. In addition to what is perceived as the privatisation of ethics,

other deficiencies of modern ethics that are cited as raising concerns is the failure of modern ethics to pay attention to questions of character, the moral quality of individuals and their lives today and the corresponding relationship individuals have towards one another as moral agents (Richardson 1994: 89). It is within generalized dissatisfaction with modern ethics that scholars like Kinoti (1992: 73) have noted that there is “grumbling and lamentation” about the state of morality and the infection of secular liberal ethics in modern societies and in particular the worship of liberal individualism.

In society like that of Basotho and many African societies this means that while there is no way of escaping the modern world, there is at the same time the danger of adopting everything without selection” and losing “sight of the values of family and community and clan solidarity which cover all material and moral needs” Bujo (1990: 49, 52). It is agreed that the arrival of modernity in many traditional societies like that of the Basotho has fundamentally damaged and seriously eroded those pillars of traditional moral culture, which provided individuals in those communities with common and shared moral values. These gave the individual moral agent the confidence and certainty to speak authoritatively on matters moral. The experience of modernity and modern ethics in African culture, where shared values are constitutive of the self, has thus been one huge predicament and disconnect, due to lack proper dialogue between traditional African ethics and modern ethics. (Santal 1984: 167; Shutte 2001: 23).

One of the defining features of this predicament, now characterizing contemporary moral universe many today inhabit, is a constant inner conflict of values and contradictions in everyday life and the double life by so many modern urban Africans (Richardson 2008:79). To understand the nature of this predicament is necessary to give a brief account of some key features of Western ethics that are a catalyst of this, which is the focus of the following section.

### **2.2.1 The Moral Predicament of Contemporary Society Facing Individuals**

The critique of modernity and modern Western ethics in this chapter must not be construed as ignoring the vast moral and social achievements made possible by constellation of developments of the modern world (Berger 1984:156, Giddy 2014: 25; Prozesky 2007: 31; Shutte 2001: 34, 42, Richardson 2009: 138). It is to echo the sentiment which recognise this but also acknowledges there are worrying concerns with it. This is captured in the lament by Bereng (1987: 94) who argues that it is because modernity has “done so much that in societies like that of Basotho that many Basotho have accepted even to do away with their own traditions which stressed the unity of the nation. This is the predicament of moral culture of modernity not only unique to Basotho culture but many in sub-Saharan Africa. We are all part of modern society and we cannot avoid engaging with it (Shuttle (2008:16).

This is also an acknowledgement that the critique in this chapter is therefore not from a neutral outsider’s perspective. But is one done from within looking out from one belonging to a culture

experiencing this crisis of values, but with knowledge of a different culture that once existed, in the early days of one's formative years as '*ngoan'a mosotho* (a child of mosotho). It is a recognition of the complexity of the present and scale of the moral predicament facing many Basotho today, that took root ever since the dawn of modernity and introduction of western value systems and frameworks in their culture. This super imposition of modern values systems on African cultures, has caused moral confusion and uncertainty for individuals and their communities. It is therefore important that contemporary Basotho and indeed Africans in general engage with this reality critically and not finding security in the cave of traditionalism<sup>8</sup> or uncritical embrace of this reality and consumption of its cultural products. This experience i.e., of modern ethics as a moral predicament which itself must be understood as an inherent feature of feature of modernity, is summed succinctly by (MacIntyre 1981: xi) who confirms the same point that many in the world today are not only "inescapably inhabitants of advanced modernity", bearing its social and cultural marks. But even more troubling is MacIntyre's telling observation that we are also ardent living embodiments of modernity and its constitutive moral attitudes. I say inherent because some would argue that the values frameworks of Western culture framed around the individual encourage lack of shared values which in turn result in competing notion of what is good. Many of the liberal values of modern societies often mirrored by predominant ethical approaches, are in part the cause of this moral predicament and it can be argued in some ways encourage it. Values such as tolerance, pluralism, primacy of freedom of choice and many other, when applied to the moral sphere without many of the traditional communitarian values and ideal, can lead to the moral predicament and crisis of values many are now lamenting about. It is to this danger that some scholars have warned of leaving modernity unchecked, because it has serious implications to the society most notably the proliferation of extreme individualism, which is contrary to social order that *botho* presupposes (Giddy 2014:19 - 21, Prozesky 2009: 12).

It is to this reality current *botho* discourse is entering a new player and that ethics of *botho* is cast as a unique ethical approach immune to some of these challenges. This is an recognition that, although there is no way of escaping the modern world, what is not inevitable is the way we can respond to it. This is especially so in the way moral life is lived, and we conduct ourselves collectively and as individuals. It is up to us whether as member of our societies we chose to promote a way of life that is premised on old traditional ways of thinking about ethics which engenders common values, supremacy of the common good and intense commitment to the welfare of all (Lutz 2009:1). It is equally in the power of contemporary moral agents to choose a way of life premised on modern values of pluralism, autonomy and tolerance both of which emphasise more what makes us different and divides us hence the primacy of the

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<sup>8</sup> The is used to described beliefs of those opposed to modernism, liberalism, or radicalism based on irrational reasons to resist and or reject changes regarded as being detrimental to perceived notions of culture and tradition that must protected which must protected.

individual autonomy in today's society, is up to us. What is clear though is that a society in which the supremacy of the individual is the ideal for which all others are ordered to, is a society that is incompatible with traditional values and ideal presupposed by ethics of *botho* ethics where the common good or shared values are priority. Many critics now agree that the latter is not only what is needed in ethics today but without this, the transition into modernity is going to be constantly something that for many must be resisted.

What we get here is that modernity, in particular, its worship of the individual, has not only damaged traditional morality along with its value systems and culture, but that it also represents a culture that is in conflict with many of the values traditionally associated with such moralities including that from which *botho* derives. The primacy of the individual in modern moral culture of modernity and its devotion to the protection of the individual as the moral sovereign one of the central features underpinning modern ethics, that it requires close attention, to which I turn to next.

### **2.2.2 Individualism and the Primacy Choice in Modern Ethics**

The centrality of individual autonomy or Western individualist conception of a person is one of the features of western ethical approaches that it can be regarded as the governing principle behind all other aspects of the individual's life including the relationship with society in Western culture. The different way in which to analyse liberal individualism and how it manifests itself in ethics and society in general. One way is in terms of how modernity, which is reflected in western values systems, puts emphasis on what differentiates individuals as moral agents by prioritizing freedom of choice. The primacy of choice in ethics in Western culture and the supremacy of the individual are thus the underlying assumptions upon which modern Western ethics as well. The primacy of choice thus entrenches separateness and places this at the foreground of ethical reflection in turn reinforcing extreme individualism, where it becomes increasingly difficult to shared values and common moral frame of reference which ethics of *botho* presupposes. It is not difficult to see how this tendency i.e., to emphasise the separateness of various aspects of the life of the individual, would inform the individualistic concept of self. This in turn further consolidated the notion unique in modern ethics of the defining the individual as morally autonomous. This points to another peculiar feature of Western ethics, namely its individualistic character, the extreme form of this in twentieth century Christian ethics being situation ethics (Bujo 2001: 112-117; Richardson 2009: 142). For this reason, the character of modern ethics whether secular or religious, whether in Europe or in Africa is fundamentally individualistic in orientation. Its purpose and function are designed around individual autonomy and the interpretation of this bears a large imprint of Western culture (Bujo 2001:76). It is in this respect that modern ethics is different from African ethics. The emergence of this new social institution in the form of the morally sovereign autonomous

individual is the single most far-reaching development that defines modern ethics, from its start during the enlightenment till today (MacIntyre 1981: 228). The significance of this is not often fully appreciated in the rush and enthusiasm to articulate its positive aspects. What is not given adequate attention, and I will argue makes individualism possible is the primacy of choice in modern ethics as central to moral agency and in turn the privatization of moral life as a necessity. The freedom of choice together with individual rights, the twin concept that mutually support this conception of moral agency, are the central pillars of individualism essential for the autonomous self in both the secular and moral sphere, respectively.

This transformation of the self from its traditional understanding and social roles meant among other things, that the distinctively modern individual, is no longer bound by bonds and obligations of belonging and social roles the self inhabits. Nor is individual identified by loyalties and duties inherent in social roles the individual inhabits (MacIntyre 1981: 60-62; Sandel 1984:170). The consequence of this transformation and introduction of choice into the moral lexicon is that it became no longer clear what is the criterion that individuals rely upon to make moral claims and hence the loss of moral confidence of agents in public life. This is implied in the attitude characteristic of most moral discussions and debates today, where it is now common to hear people saying, "it's all a matter of opinion" or "who am I to judge what is wrong." What informs this view is an understanding implicit in modern ethics which is individual "choice" has now replaced more traditional objective considerations for making moral claims, these include an understanding of ethics where character is the defining feature of moral agency. The primacy of "choice unguided by criteria" or criterionless choice of which no rational justification can be given, is thus the centre piece of modern ethics supporting the welfare of the morally sovereign individual. It reinforces individualism as the governing principle and is presupposed by individualism itself.

The problem with this is that the reliance on choice as the basis for moral conduct reveals how modern ethics and its weddedness to individualism implies a certain element of arbitrariness now established as part of the moral culture of modernity (MacIntyre 1981: 20, 39). This privatisation of personal conduct in this way is implied and inherent in extreme individualism of Western ethics along with transformation of the self in the manner that modern ethics requires. This has many implications for ethics. First it means that it is no longer possible to make moral judgements by appealing to a moral criterion in a way that had been possible before (Ibid.: xvii, 8). This is because now such judgements are subordinate to the priority of criterionless choice of the individual where "each individual implicitly or explicitly" adopts 'his or her own first principles on the basis of such choice" (MacIntyre 1981: 20). Second, this also means it is no longer possible for moral terms to keep that reason-giving character and force they enjoyed because of the loss of the indispensable theoretical and social context in terms of which they were originally understood, elaborated, and rationally defended. In turn

this means that there is no longer certainty about the meaning of evaluative terms, which results in uncertainty and confusion hence the moral culture of modernity in the West and in Africa is increasingly experienced as of moral vacuum and predicament.

When the central principle guiding the moral life is that ethics is all a matter of individual choice it is no surprise that modern ethical approaches are not providing society with a sense of shared values. It is in this sense that modern ethics is accused of being emotivist because moral judgements are in the end regarded as expressions of an individual will and masks for expressions of personal preferences (MacIntyre 1981: 19). But as this study will show this promotion of choice in modern ethical approaches to conduct and thinking is incorrect is a distortion of our moral life as agents with a social identity which we cannot escape. This will become clearer as it is discussed in more detail in chapter five when we discuss the normative influence of social roles and social institutions. For now, it is important to stress that ethics of moral life cannot be premised on the priority of choice and autonomy of the individual. This is because ethics i.e., moral ideas and views of a society within which individual ethics function and is a part of

“is embedded in the ideas and beliefs about what is right or wrong, what is a good or bad character; [and] .... conceptions of satisfactory social relations and attitudes held by the members of the society; it is embedded, furthermore, in the forms or patterns of behavior that are considered by the members of the society to bring about social harmony and cooperative living, justice, and fairness” (Gyekye 2011: par 1)

It is in this sense that the primacy of choice in modern ethics is a distortion of ethics and is a recipe for conflict of ideas about what is good and bad because ethics is not just a matter of choices or mere matter of one's preferences, yet contemporary agents are taught to believe the opposite. The fundamental problem with the elevation of choice in ethics, is that it ignores the fact that ethics is social. At its most basic level ethics is a moral story of a particular people or community, of which the individual moral agent is only but a part of the narration of that story, not the author. Moral conduct is fundamentally an intelligible human action, intelligible not only to others but even more importantly to us, as historical individual beings with a specific moral particularity. This leads me to the next characteristic feature of modern Western ethics and its approach to ethics namely universalism

### **2.2.3 Universalism and Rejection of Particularity in Modern Ethics**

Another distinctive characteristic feature of modern Western ethics, besides individualism and its corresponding conception of individuality, is universalism. This is based on an approach to ethics based on an assumption that there is a discoverable ethic shared by all rational beings through common humanity (Richardson 2009: 138). This is a view of morality that rejects the validity of moral particularities in pursuit of universal principles often understood in terms of objectivity.

It is important to recall how this has come to be a central feature of modern ethics. It shall be remembered that that the leading figures of the enlightenment, from which modern ethics originates, shared certain central beliefs, which are important to their thinking on several issues imprints of which can be seen in modern ethics (MacIntyre 1981: 51). The presupposition held by the architects of the enlightenment is the fundamental belief

“that human nature is the same in all times and places; that universal human goals, true ends and effective means, are at least in principle discoverable; that methods similar to those of Newtonian science, . . . , should be discovered and applied in the field of morals, politics, economics, and in the sphere of human relationships in general” (Depu 2014: 168).

As a result of this shared belief, we see in modern ethics a dogmatic adherence to universality and objectivity alongside the devotion to the individual. And now both universality and objectivity have become the central pillars of modern ethical discourse. In other words, there is a basic assumption that there is a discoverable ethic shared by all through our common humanness, to which different cultures, religious, and historical experiences do not matter. From here we can see how according to the enlightenment thinking it was not that difficult to reject particularity and to relegate historical experiences to the realm of incidental and irrelevant contingencies (Richardson 2009: 138). According to this thinking, we approach ethical judgement and situations from the perspective of disinterested observers i.e., from anyone’s perspective. It is for this reason that modern ethics is so wedded to the idea of moral principles and rules because they give us an appearance of ensuring objectivity and rationality, and avoidance of moral relativism.

But universality has been shown to be fraught with problems. Few would argue that while often there is consensus on principles at the abstract theoretical level, as soon as these are applied to concrete situations differences abound because these are often understood in the light of different and sometimes conflicting moral particularities (Richardson 2009: 139, Bujo 2001: 8). As Bujo (2001: 82) echoing Thomas Aquinas points out, the validity of general principles presupposed by universality, does not always find the same expression in *praxis*. The reason is because the more concretely one must act, the more difficult does it become to translate general principles into action. Thus, we find that even with Kant’s universal law, that what was taken

“to be the principles and presuppositions of morality as such turned out to be the principles and presuppositions of one highly specific morality, a secularized version of Protestantism which furnished modern liberal individualism with one of its founding charters” (MacIntyre 1981: 266).

Kasenene (1994:139) is therefore correct to point out that the universal ethics suggested by Kantian ethics simply does not exist because ethical systems do not evolve in a moral and social vacuum. In other words, what universalism promises as “universal principles” instead turns out to “be principles specific to particular times, places and stages of human activity and

enquiry” (MacIntyre 1981: 266). In other words, even though there are principles that are regarded as universal, such as charity, honesty, and justice even these too are influenced by context for their application and meaning. It is in this sense the MacIntyre (Ibid.; 268) is correct to point out that what advocates of universality appear to ignore or miss is that in the end, all morality is always particular which means that ethical reflection or ethics in turn is always a reflection “of some particular social and cultural standpoint” It is for this reason that Bujo (2001: 8) argues that African ethics is premised on context sensitive universalism or reiterative universalism. It is clear from the above that modern Western ethics cannot therefore talk about universality in the manner that it does without reference and acknowledgement of particularity. This is because as MacIntyre (1981: 126, 268) explains, “aspirations of the morality of modernity to a universality freed from all particularity is an illusion” because “all morality is always to some degree tied to the socially local and particular”.

Another difficult with claims of universality is that often the argument for objectivity turns out to an argument for the predominance of the status quo. It also is a distorted image of subjectivism which schools us to be reluctant to speak the language of morality. As a result, we assume we can, and always should respond to any immoral action with “who am I to say this is wrong”.

This interplay between universality and particularity in modern ethics is an important area for ethics because as most critics point out it is one thing to agree on a set of universal principles and another to agree on their concrete application and meaning, because these are influenced by context in their application and the moral system in which a person operates (Kasenene 1993: 4). It is in this sense that universal principles “must be brought down to earth by particular practices” and “expose themselves” to “questioning” (Bujo 2001: 23) by the particularity of each context. Furthermore, assumptions of objectivity are problematic as they pretend that it is possible to have an ethical reflection that is not done from a particular social standpoint. This is because

“moral philosophies, however, they may aspire to achieve more than this, always do articulate the morality of some particular social and cultural standpoint: Aristotle is the spokesman for one class of fourth century Athenians, Kant, ....provides a rational voice for the emerging social forces of liberal individualism..... Moral philosophies are, before they are anything else, the explicit articulations of the claims of particular moralities to rational allegiance” (MacIntyre 1981: 268)

In other words, these principles are applied from one’s sense of moral identity as starting point. So, universalism is problematic because it engrains an abstract decontextualised way of doing ethics that is now so entrenched in Western ethics. This approach where ethical reflection and discourse is divorced from concrete contexts is a distortion of ethics. This is because ethics or morality is an account and narration of the moral story of a particular people, as such it is preceded by the lived experience, hence the relevance of the this as the relevant context for

ethics. Ethics is a second order activity and as such, it is preceded by events and life experiences. So “no matter how universal an ethic maybe it still has to be applied in a particular time and place” Shutte (2001: 14). As (Bujo 1990: 29) explains, no society can be expected to formulate its norms and values in a universal fashion especially when cultures still are different in time and place. The predominant notion now well entrenched in modern Western culture is that the primary task of ethics is to show how morality is grounded in unchangeable principles and convictions thus misconstrues what is ethics.

So, the ethical approaches such that underpinning current *botho* discourse is a recognition of moral particularity. Its introduction introduced to ethical reflection by approaches such as that implied by *botho* ethics, thus must be understood in terms of context sensitive universalism. It is an assertion that stresses that the starting point of ethical reflection should not lie in abstract principles but in concrete moral context whether inside or outside one’s own group (Bujo 2001: 8). Moral particularity here is not to be confused with moral relativism, becomes the moral starting or entry point is that by which I enter and join the discourse<sup>9</sup>. This is the case with this study where moral tradition of “*botho*” in Sesotho speaking culture is such a starting point and particularity. Without this moral particularity to begin from there is no-where to begin or move forward from. It is for this reason that

“the notion of escaping from it into a realm of entirely universal maxims which belong to man as such, whether in its eighteenth-century Kantian form or in the presentation of some modern analytical moral philosophies, is an illusion and an illusion with painful consequences” (MacIntyre 1981: 221)

The acknowledgement of particularity is therefore important as it recognises the validity of a moral starting point (MacIntyre 1981: 220) of the moral agent as a historical individual (Murdoch 1970: 26). Thus, I shall argue that an authentic ethical reflection is one grounded on concrete moral tradition within which the moral agent is situated. Thus, being aware of this and acknowledging it, is a prerequisite for doing ethics in an objective way. The significance of this is that it avoids the ethical deception of doing ethics from a neutral dispassionate perspective, when in fact one is simply articulating moral views and ideal of or from some particular social and cultural standpoint (MacIntyre 1981: 268). Ethical reflection done from anyone is and everyone’s perspective is therefore an illusion. Only when we can recognise that our own moral particularity as moral agents i.e., social embeddedness, are we able to speak locally while at the same time taking a universal point of view. This way we can authentically keep an eye to express something obligatory for others outside our own context as well without however expecting that ethical judgement must be universally applicable (Bujo 2001; 8, Mokolatsie 1997: 39).

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<sup>9</sup> Moral relativism refers to a view that holds regards moral difference as so deep and widespread across different societies that there can be no rational standards of justification for resolving these differences.

The characteristics of modern ethics that we have so far looked can be regarded as the secular manifestation of Western ethics. But as I have intimated modern Western ethics is both secular and religious, at least in terms of its heritage. As such an account of modern Western ethics and its characteristic features will be incomplete if it that does not include Christian ethics which is discussed next.

### **2.3 The Significance of Christian Ethics on Ethics in African Culture**

The term Western ethics is ordinarily understood as a description of ethical approaches influenced by European moral tradition and Western or European culture and often Christian ethics is implied but not explicitly mentioned. But as this study argues the influence of modern Western ethics in Africa today is through both its the secular and religious expression. This means I will assume, without arguing the case that both Christian ethics and Western Ethics share the same moral tradition and hence share a common basic approach now characteristic of modern Western Ethics. The two can thus be just a different formulation of the same moral outlook, which is European; one secular and the other religious. The foregoing section focused on the secular expression of this moral outlook in the form of Western ethics. In this section the focus is on Christian ethics as its religious expression with specific interest on the influence of missionaries in Sesotho culture. But before focusing on the impact on Christian ethics on Basotho culture, I want to make a few remarks about the impact of Christian ethics in general on moral traditions of other culture especially in Southern Africa.

Just as modern Western ethics can thus be differentiated from other ethical traditions for example moral traditions of traditional societies such as that of the Sesotho speaking culture, so too can Christian ethics. It is the moral teaching of Christianity from the West that bear the hallmarks of Western culture, even as the it is practice beyond the border of Europe. It is the moral teaching and views of the Christian faith articulated within the European moral framework, in contrast to traditional African ethics of African Christians who follow traditional African religions (Manyeli 1992: 28). It is the morality imported by Christian missions in partnership and often support of the European colonial powers (Richardson 2009: 130). While it is possible to speak of Western ethics and Christian ethics as distinct, it can be argued that because of their shared and common heritage, they are not that different in orientation and the values systems they presuppose. This is because the ethical approaches they have originate within the same European culture and both have been transported as one package to other parts of the world through colonisation and missionaries wherever the two went (Shutte 2008: 16-17). As a result, Western and Christian values have played a key role not only in changing the moral culture of other cultures but also in creating the conditions that made it possible for modern ethics or Western ethics as we know it to flourish globally. In other

words, European moral values cannot be disassociated from the moral imperialism of European cultural and Christian ethics that first came with colonialism and missionary project. Christian ethics is traditionally defined in terms of its two primary sources i.e., theology and the Christian church itself. Its analysis here will not be in terms of its theological foundations and interpretation of moral behaviour. Interest will be on its social-political and historical impact on moral traditions of other cultures it met with and how it was experienced by the host cultures in which it was imported to. Traditionally missionary ethics i.e., the role played by missionaries and their interpretation of the day to practical dictates of the Christian faith has not been subject of much ethical reflection in ethical discourses or given much scrutiny from current *botho* discourse. But as I will argue here, with the missionary project not only did the moral teaching drawn from the Christian faith take a different tone and character in the missions than it did in mainland Europe, but it also had strong colonial cultural and moral imperialism undertones. It will be recalled that the missionaries were products of their cultures which was Europeans and as such they carried with them moral and cultural assumptions of their societies. It is thus complicit in the concerted efforts and attempts to erase local cultures including their moral traditions. Here too must be added education was one of the key instruments used to prohibit converts from having anything to do with their culture and customs (Gill 1992<sub>B</sub>: 13). The significance of this is first that it was Christian ethics articulated in this way that has had a devastating effect on the moral cultures of African people and African culture. The results of its legacy thus have lasted long after the missionary project has ended, and its effects are still presently felt today. Second the significance of Christian ethics as presented by European missionary project is often too easily “excused” in contemporary ethical discourse as either ill-informed unfortunate, “Christ against culture campaign” (Ibid) that is not true to the gospel, or it is often overshadowed by the cultural considerations of the impact of colonial interventions that came with it instead. Whether the missionaries’ understanding of Christian faith was correct or not, the reality is it was its moral teachings presented and articulated by the missionaries that had a lasting impact about the role of Western approaches to ethics in Africa. I will argue therefore that missionary ethics provides us with a good insight of otherwise a less emphasised aspect of Christian ethics compared to the more traditional view of its idealised positive account encapsulated in Jesus’ ethic reflected in the New Testament law of love (Bujo 1990: 28).

As already intimated there existed a symbiotic relationship between colonial and missionary enterprise. In sub-Saharan Africa both had the same effect in the moral sphere in terms of their attitude about moral values of other cultures. It is in this sense that Christian ethics is relevant to the subject current *botho* discourse as modern Western ethics is. Both had the same effect and impact, and their agenda was the same *vis-à-vis* rejection of moral traditions of Africans and their value systems. Thus, the joint effect of both laid the foundations for the

current conditions now characterising much of the contemporary moral culture in places like Lesotho. As Gill (1992A: 26) puts it “the missionaries deplored a great deal of the traditional culture and its institutions, making certain European cultural norms was an integral part of Christian faith and practice”. Now that I have given these brief remarks about Christian ethics I can focus on missionaries in Lesotho.

The first missionaries in Lesotho were the French missionaries in 1833 and it can be assumed theirs was Christian ethics in practice, bringing a new way of life to locals. It follows then that much of their work of setting up the Christian faith among the Basotho naturally required an articulation of certain moral values and views, and ways of life befitting one who is to be a Christian. There are many ways in the account of this can be approached. The most common one is examining existing literature usually in the form of books written about missionary work, correspondence of the time, archive material about their arrival and life in Lesotho etc. etc. In short analysis of historical documents. There is however another way which so far has received little attention among scholars, not least those interested in Christian ethics in the mission areas of Southern Africa. This is Christian ethics as reflected in the written works of recent converts into Christianity in Lesotho specifically the novels by Basotho converts in early nineteenth century Basotho society. This avenue which I turn to next, offers a new uncharted un-sanitized account of “Christian ethics’ different from the standard missiology accounts of academic theological departments and texts.

### **2.3.1 Influence of Christian Ethics and Missionaries in Lesotho**

Shortly after the missionaries arrived in Lesotho in 1833 and their enterprise of evangelisation through education began to take root, there began to appear a range of Sesotho literature, or novels by local Basotho converts. These were the first graduates of missionary education systems who were trained as teachers to lead exemplary Christian lives and to teach their students to do likewise (Gill 1992B: 13). These novels which are written in Sesotho are not just novels, but narratives. And like all narratives they are vehicles for moral education and in them are embedded values and beliefs. It is in this sense that these novels must be regarded as authentic formulation of “Christian ethics” among Basotho approved by the missionaries and understood and passed on by locals for local audience. As such these were not just a reflection of views of perspective of new converts. In most cases these were in line with the missionary ideas but were also written in the way they did at the behest and encouragement of the missionaries themselves. In other words, the values promoted in these novels were consistent with Christian ethics and promoting it. It is this formulation of Christian ethics that I would like first to emphasise when speaking about how Christianity is the catalyst that made possible the conditions necessary for modern ethics in Lesotho. It is out of missionary influence that the present-day Christian church in Lesotho and its strong moral authority it enjoys to this day

owes its origin. In other words, whatever understanding of Christian ethics we have today it cannot be divorced from this early formulation in the teaching of missionaries in explaining the contribution of Christian ethics to some of the concerns about the state of moral standards and views about ethics today.

It will not be possible to analyse all the published literary works of the time from as text for ethical analysis here not a detail account of these possible that would do justice to these works. This is one area that will be an interesting topic for future studies, for even with this in mind, there are insights of traditional culture found in these works that cast light on *botho* and its meaning among Basotho worth serious consideration.

Among the early novels by local Basotho worth mentioning are Thomas Mofolo's *Moeti oa bochabela* (1907), *Pitseng* (1910), and *Chaka* (1925); and Everitt Lechesa Segoete's, *Monono ke moholi ke 'mooane* (1910/62) (Selepe 1999: 91-134). These novels while they were at once literary works they must also be seen within the context of the aims and intentions of the missionaries and fulfilment of the aim of Christianising the Basotho. An observation we can make at this early stage is that with its emphasis on the individual and their salvation, and dualistic conception of life where the body was separated from the soul, sacred from the profane, missionary ethics thus stressed individual salvation to the exclusion of the community and entrenched the dualistic dichotomy of life of the West among its new converts and their societies (Kasenene 1994: 142). Thus, we find that in their content these novels were designed to induce, via the portrayal of the main characters, the unquestioning faith in Christianity and its value systems among the Basotho (Selepe 1999: 95) and a strong belief in the progress of the West, i.e., through its commerce, technology and government (Gill 1992<sub>B</sub>: 13), an attitude that is still the case today.

One way of framing my argument is that in places like Lesotho just as much as literacy was necessary for the Christian institution to take root and to continue to exist (Selepe 1999: 89), Western Christian education made possible the conditions necessary for modern Western moral ideas to take root among the Basotho, the lasting effects of which can still be seen today. To understand the significance of these early Sesotho novels and their relevance to Christian ethics, it is important to understand the larger missionary context within which they emerged and out of whose influence they were to a larger extent written. As it will be clear their publication was related to missionary project and the entrenchment of Western Christianity and values in Sesotho culture. This is because the distinction between education and Christian teaching was negligible and

“the Christian schools inculcated what was seen to be a new and better way of life, founded upon a blend of Christian Protestant teachings, a strong belief in the progress of the West” (Gill 1992<sub>B</sub>: 13).

In other words, the main aim of the proliferation of Sesotho novels must be understood as part of the bigger mission of the Christianisation of Basotho, i.e., adoption of Western Christian

values. It is these values and the Western ethical approach they implied that these many of these early Sesotho novels promoted (Selepe 1999: 19). In many of them we can see already early signs of how the current attitudes that often regard Western culture as “better and progress” emerging and how Christianity played a role in changing not only the culture of the people but also their moral values. For our purposes here a brief analysis of a few prominent works will suffice.

If we take Mofolo's *Moeti oa bochabela* for example, it will be discovered that the underlying message of the novel conveyed via the portrayal of Fekisi the hero of the book is “designed to induce the unquestioning faith in Christianity among the Basotho” together with the value framework that came with it (Selepe 1999:95). This underlying message is found in other novels published around the same time for instance *Pitseng*, another of Mofolo's works. The second chapter of the book sums up the messaging characteristic of these novels that I will quote it at length here. The opening paragraph of the chapter reads:

*“Nako ea re ngolang ditaba tsa Pitseng ka yona, Lesotho e ne e le mehla ya tswelopele, Pitseng e sa ntsane e le mehla ya lefifi le letsho, la Sesotho sa kgale;.....Lesotho e le mehla ya dikolo, Pitseng e sa ntsane e le mehla ya mabollo le ho tsamaela majwala; ke hore mehleng ya lesedi, bona ba ntse ba le lefifing la bothoto “(p.9).*

(At the time of writing about what happened in Pitseng, Lesotho was in an era of civilisation and development (enlightenment), while Pitseng was still in the era of the darkness of traditional (old) ways;...Lesotho was an era of school, Pitseng still in the era of initiation schools and drinking sprees; that is to say the times of light when they were still in the darkness of ignorance)

The implicit appraisal here of the ways of the West is that being Christian is portrayed as equivalent to “enlightenment” and “being civilised” the latter understood as “progress.” This leave no doubt as to what the view of local culture and its values was. So, it is not surprising that the theme of these books is always juxtaposing traditional beliefs and values of Sesotho culture with Christian values and beliefs, by implication suggesting that where the latter is always portrayed as better. The difference between *Pitseng* and *Moeti oa bochabela* is that in the former is that the cultural and moral imperialism are explicit. The civilising agenda that was always lurking at the background of both colonialism and the missionary enterprise in many of these novels, in *Pitseng* it is no longer subtle and implicit. It is direct and explicit. Thus, we find in *Pitseng* a direct contrast being drawn between the village of Pitseng and its people and practice, and a civilized Lesotho marked by progress and development understood in terms of what the missionaries are introducing must not be underestimated. Here Mofolo uses the village of Pitseng is as metaphor of traditional value systems of Basotho, that must be left behind for a better higher framework of values of Christianity.

In many of these novels the role of education is key to the civilising project of missionary enterprise and in entrenching the moral superiority of Christian ethics and by implication of Western culture and its values. Thus, we find that “education and religion function together to

promote this idea". But as we have already noted often this was not only civilisation in terms of development i.e., schools, literacy, and other skills. It also included social and moral transformation of the culture of Basotho away from adherence to traditional Basotho moral traditions of Sesotho culture now cast a bad, to embracing the moral traditions embedded in Christianity and Western culture which were good and better.

The central theme running through many of these early writings is the establishment of the Christian faith in Sesotho culture along with its values. In other words, introduction of Western Christian ethics and its values among Basotho, and displacement of traditional morality system of Basotho. Through the portrayal of the main characters in these works, traditional culture is portrayed as backward hence portrayed as "darkness" while Christianity is equated with progress whether social, moral, or otherwise and thus it is often symbolised by "light." In other words, the Christian way of life or Christian ethics as the new life that converts were to aspire to, is the ideal way to lead a good life. By contrast the traditional Basotho way of life along with its values is something that is to be left behind and renounced as bad. In these novels what we have is not just literature but also the propagation of certain values and moral ideals, all of which were presented as Christian. These books reflect Christian ethics in practice, where the right way to conduct oneself is described in individualistic terms of an individual spiritual journey by the individual to reach ultimate peace is with God. The emphasis on this individual pursuit of a relationship with good coupled with missionary requirement that converts renounced their traditional culture, which was the vehicle for many values of Basotho, began the process of eroding many of the moral ideal of Basotho.

It is therefore important to realise that the articulation of Christian ethics is painted in these novels in manner that makes no distinction between Western values and Western culture as such and the Christian faith. So, in addition to the overt moral imperialism underlying these novels, as literary works they also played a part in undermining key social and moral ideals of the Basotho. One of these ideals is that which is codified in the Basotho doctrine of *motho ke motho ka batho*, which requires "moral support" in all its various manifestation in social life. This ideal which for Basotho defined the core of communal life is *summum bonum*, and a way of life where people live for one another and the welfare of all is a priority in one's life. This is reflected in many of their proverbs and other narratives (Selepe 1999: 156, Mokitimi 1997: 13-22).

So, what is beginning to emerge is that with introduction of Western culture in Sesotho culture as portrayed in these novels, traditional values such as this begin to be eroded and undermined. This can be seen in portrayal of the hero whose depiction often presupposes the liberal view of individual existence. So, whether it is *Fekisi* in the case of *Moeti oa bochabela*, and Mr. *Katse* and *Aria Sebaka* and *Alfred Phakoe* in *Pitseng*, the individualistic character of the hero of these novels and imprint of western individualism is unmistakable. This portrayal

of the individual is quite different from the traditional conception understanding of what is a proper *motho*, which among the Basotho is governed by a concern with the other and their wellbeing (Mphetolang 2009: 13-18). The role played by these Christianity through the medium of education and early Sesotho literature cannot be underestimated. It is therefore an important aspect when analysing the roots of contemporary moral attitudes including and the prevalence of individualistic moral attitudes and declining concern with communal welfare.

This contrast sharply with the relationship of individuals to ancestors in traditional religion and culture of Basotho, which was equally important for the individual but was understood in terms of seeking good relationships with the living as well as the ancestors. With Christianity the emphasis is not only other worldly but individualistic. It is personal relationship with God that transcends all else and concern with the “other” life that become to priority of the individual. In terms of this the individual’s “search for authentic values” and meaning in life and the best way to live, all get realised by dedicating oneself to having a personal relationship with God, and Christianity is only way of achieving this. The cardinal message of the novels is “that despite the price one has to pay” i.e., renouncing one’s culture, “the reward is the eternal peace an individual will find with God” (Selepe 1999: 102-6). This is in sharp contrast to the traditional religion of Basotho and its moral scheme where the purpose of *motho* in life is doing the best one can do to ensure the welfare of their community and make this one’s life priority that is always respected. The relevance therefore of these novels is an important one as they are dominated by religious considerations where Christianity is portrayed not only as acceptable ideology but also that which is “good” and a way of life one “ought” to aspire in opposition to traditional Basotho way of life and culture. The common aim of these novels was to convince the Basotho “to believe that their traditional practices; whether social, religious, and moral were evil and that their religion was pagan”, and in turn makes them easily turn to Christianity (Selepe 1999: 103).

According to many of these novels Christian ethics as articulated by the missionaries brought with it the “perception of reality” that the missionaries and these early Basotho converts preached among the Basotho through the medium of these novels. And that reality was that the “Christian way of life” was “good” “better” and as “progress–*tsoelopele*.” In Sesotho, *tsoelopele* denotes the English equivalents of development, progress, civilisation, enlightenment, or modern. The effect of Christianity thus was the same as Western ethics had on the moral culture of the Basotho as a nation. Both played a pivotal role in setting up the necessary social and ethical conditions for the onset of contemporary moral attitudes and emotivist tendencies which are not only different but also inconsistent with traditional value systems of Basotho. It is in this sense that the introduction of education in the model of the West by missionaries was not only to facilitate literacy but was seen first as a method of instilling Christian values and attitudes i.e., Christian ethics. Here there is no distinction

between Christian ethics and European culture, which are presented as Christian. And this is important, as today there is a tendency to want to separate the two. Western Christianity and education thus I will argue was among the most potent instruments through which Western moral values were promoted in Sesotho culture. So now we can see how the missionaries presented Christian ethics i.e., the Christian way to conduct one's life contributed to what we have referred to as European moral imperialism. The significance of this is that here we see how European values, norms and culture were intertwined with Christian values from early on and steadily chipped away the traditional moral foundation of Sesotho speaking cultures, with the end result that Basotho culture and moral systems were significantly and eternally transformed and would never be the same ever since. As a result of this, there appeared "a new generation of Basotho" not only "with different social outlook" but also with different social values. The consequence of this is that it is the descendants of this generation that are now the ardent consumer of and practitioners of modern Western ethics, with all its advantages and disadvantages.

The significance of this is not so much in the different social reactions to Christianity, i.e., those that were for it and those that were against. It is rather, that the introduction of western values among the Basotho brings about the emergence of a new consciousness and social classes. This in turn meant that the whole Basotho nation and society is ultimately transformed and with this a new society is formed. What relevant here to modern ethics is that it this new modern society does not take the character of either of the formerly opposing classes, but it is in many ways a completely different society is formed. That society is one that is neither African nor European and because it has nothing that is of "its own" it looks up to the dominant moral value framework of the day as its base and source of moral guidance" (Selepe 1999:111). Initially, this was the vision of life as presented by the missionary and colonial era. Post-independence, this role has been taken over by influences of First World culture, where the default attitude is epitomised in the common view of "whatever comes from the West is best" which is applied to the moral values and attitudes associated with the Western culture.

#### **2.3.4 Moral Neo-Colonialism of Western Ethics and Western Culture**

In the earlier sections, we have seen how the influence of enlightenment thinking has transformed the orientation of modern ethics and in turn shaped the moral culture of modernity. We also saw how modernity, is itself the consequences of enlightenment thought, or conversely how enlightenment thought reflects the fundamental features of modernity (Depu 2014: 162). We also pointed out the relationship between colonial and missionary projects and the significance of this relationship to European ethical approaches in general and their approaches to ethics and interaction with other moral traditions. It is the combination of all these that modern ethics has the character that it has today. In other words, while the earlier

section was an analysis of inadequacies of modern Western ethics in general, this section analyses the impact of modern ethics particularly as found within the context of other moral cultures in sub-Saharan African, and more specifically Basotho culture. It will be recalled that symbiotic relationship of Western ethics and Christian ethics meant that “many elements labelled as Christian were merely aspects of Western culture and for the was nothing positive that the African culture can contribute (Bujo 2009:113). This explains the nature of the relationship that characterized the encounter between them and African culture wherever the two met.

What has become clear about this interface is that it is typically accompanied by strong modernising undertones and zeal, overt notions of moral superiority and civilising of local cultures by representatives of Western culture. This should not come as a surprise because the so-called modern ideas that came to fore during the enlightenment were understood in terms of progress and seen by thinkers of the enlightenment as modern. But even more important is that these ideas did not only transform European society at the time, but historically these have also been associated with Western culture. It is out of this culture that Western ethics and Christian ethics evolved. As a result of this, we find that post-enlightenment European culture was often regarded as synonymous with “progress”, it was what it is to be part of the “modern world” as the influence of science and secularisation becomes the defining features of European culture from this period onwards (MacIntyre 1981: 81; Shutte 2001:43). This equating of progress with Western culture we see happening with Western ethics as well. This can be seen in Africa where among the early colonialists and missionaries there was a fervent belief that the African culture was not endowed with any moral character (Murove 2009: 24, 19). Thus, for lengthy periods many of these newcomers whether Christian or secular regarded African culture and its moral traditions as greatly inferior with nothing to offer the higher morality of the West they brought with them, nor even capable of enriching them ethically (Prozesky 2009:7). This attitude was justified under the twin banner of the “gospel” and “modernity” where both colonisation and Christianity were presented as modern, and equivalent to progress and development. Local cultures were thus expected to adapt and accommodated these if not adopt them altogether if they are to develop and avoid being left behind the times (Murove 2009: 24). This attitude has not changed that much since then about African culture and the moral traditions of its people, although now it is not as overt as it was in the past.

Today this is now taken over by the dominance of Western culture where we can see similarities in modern-day views underpinning much of the so-called “technological development” led by the West. As the dominant feature of the modern culture, the technological culture we are experiencing is skewed heavily by blind faith in the monoculture of First World culture under the guise of modern technology. With all its positive development

modern technology is not value neutral, and like most features of modern society it is dominated by the values of First World culture, which is Western and European character. It is in this sense that Bujo (2001: xi) correctly points out that despite its positive aspects modern culture should not blind us to the ambivalence of “modern technology”, particularly the “monoculture” that technology “creates” and the effects on “cultures of the non-Western world, which can scarcely assert themselves technologically and make their voices heard in the process of globalisation”.

It is in this sense that I will argue that a full understanding of impact of modern ethics in Africa, both in its secular and religious manifestation and their respective approaches is not complete without an acknowledgement of the association of ‘modernity’ and ‘civilisation’ with Western culture and its value systems. As Murove (Murove 2009: 24) points out this is necessary because there is a view that holds the assumption that transition into modernity for African societies means acceptance of Western morality, economics, and religion, and that unless Africans accept Western ways, they will not escape the net of primitiveness and under development. In other words, the role of “modernity” in enabling Western ethical presuppositions to remain unquestioned is crucial to an understanding of how in the moral sphere this perpetuates a form of moral neo-colonialism where Western value frameworks are covertly being imposed on other cultures such as that of the Basotho.

With modernity “unlike moral colonialism of the past, western values are not presented as superior, but as universal and developmental progress, requiring not conversion to an alternative (presumably better) value system” and way of life, “but recognition” and acceptance “of universal values” (Widdows 2007: 306) which are presented as not of any particular culture. This claim to universality in part explains how modernity has paved the way for modern Western ethics to become the dominant global ethical frame of reference including in many African communities. It helps in understanding the consequences of the condemnation by colonialism and Christianity of African values and modes of living as bastions of traditionalism with concomitant reluctance to embrace modernity (Murove 2009: 17). It also helps in understanding how the legacy of this has been continued to sustain the hegemony of Western culture as a symbol of social progress and development. It also explains the underlying character of ethics in modern societies especially post-traditional societies of Southern Africa which can be traced back to the emergence of Western ethics and modernity as its cultural express and their uncompromising disastrous interaction with ethical traditions of other cultures including in sub-Saharan Africa (Richardson 2009: 130, Prozesky 2009: 3). This leads to the next section which looks at the concerns now being raised as the result of this disastrous history of the encounter between the ways of the West and African culture and its underlying ethic of *botho*.

## 2.4 Concerns about Declining Moral Standards in Contemporary Africa Culture

The uncompromising displacement of traditional morality by modern Western ethics, in most African communities has left moral traditions of many in villages and towns in tatters. It has left individuals as rudderless ships with no moral anchors in a sea of moral uncertainty and confusion. This is what some have called the predicament of moral culture of modernity, and a moral vacuum of contemporary moral environment, where something has gone and nothing has replaced it (MacIntyre 1981: x, Shute 2001: 1). For many especially in Africa, but not exclusively, this form of moral neo-colonialism<sup>10</sup> found in the prevailing moral prism of modern ethics has led to an intolerable moral environment in many communities. Moral life is experienced as like living in a society where everything is allowed in the name of individual freedom. This freedom enshrined in secular liberal individualism of Western cultures and Western ethics, is often abused, and appears to seldom be balanced by acknowledgement and recognition of individual responsibility (Ntibagirirwa 1999: 4). We find therefore that today most people in many African communities live moral lives informed by a heterogeneous combination of modern influences and values on the one hand and elements and fragments of traditional culture and old morality rooted in moral traditions of people of Africa on the other. The result is deep moral confusion, uncertainty, and social problems. Individuals are no longer certain about what to value anymore or what values to keep and uphold, as they double in an out of both traditional and modern culture. This is the moral predicament of the moral culture of today's Africa and the moral universe many Africans inhabit. This confusion is typically represented by the figure of that moderately globalised Southern African "who submit publicly to the pressures of displaying a globalised modern culture, while in the more hidden niches of life, village forms are allowed to play some part" (van Binsbergen 2001: 63). Further describing this moral predicament of and the dilemma of many Mwikamba (1992: 86) explains that today

"Africans are becoming more and more ego-centred and as a result, they "are caught up in a moral contradiction. Should one be faithful and loyal to herself/himself, [or] to the community, the religious group, nation.... or to their wealth"?

The confusion about the way the individual sees themselves which is implied here is revealing because it is one where there is uncertainty about the relationship of the individual to the community. In traditional the question of split loyalty between the self and the community does not arise. This uncertainty where the good of the individual is perceived as somehow incompatible with the common or loyalty to the community contrast sharply with the traditional communal solidarity that is a feature of African culture. The crisis of values now a feature of much of contemporary African communities means that individualistic tendencies creeping in

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<sup>10</sup> This is borrowed from Widdows (2007)

these communities have left individuals feeling like loyalty to the community amounts to sacrificing what is good for the individual. This is further confirmation of the depth of this predicament and crisis of values now the subject of much talk and debates. It is to this transformation of the self, from the traditional African understanding to the modern one, that former President of South Africa Thabo Mbeki alludes to. Describing the situation in South Africa in Richardson (2003: 5) Mbeki says the problem is that

“There was a collapse of an acceptable level of morality in our society which resulted in the elevation of the self, and the serving of the interests of the self to the point that the self becomes a religion. The self, became the god we must all worship... In the vacuum individuals had to decide for themselves what was good and what was bad, and the good was defined as what would serve my interests”

This sums up the contemporary state of moral uncertainty individual now are confronted with where they had to decide for themselves what was good and was bad. And because many lacked those cultural and societal ethical resource that support the making of such decision, the default position is the individual and their interest. Thus, we see here again the reappearance of the same manifestation of individualism we discussed earlier expressed in modern ethics in the form the criterionless choice of the autonomous self we discussed earlier. It is this and all other perceived moral ills of contemporary African societies that is seen as signaling no stop to the moral decay eating away at the very core of the moral fibre of society, as those who know Africa well are concerned at the continuing decline of the values *ubuntu* embodies and it is no consolation that this occurring even as there is growing awareness of, and sympathy with, the principles of *ubuntu* beyond the borders of Africa (Hailey 2008: 19). What worries many is the growing indifference seen all around, the lack of generosity and compassion to fellow human beings, and leadership with no conscience and any regard for honour, the little or no regard for *botho*, and the loss of traditional understanding of moral responsibility as a corporate affair (Gaie 2002: 227) and a catalogue of other immoral behaviours are all a sign of the absence of a moral sense (Shutte 2001: 1) and moral meltdown surrounding us today (Prozesky 2007:7-8).

All this has brought into sharper focus the debilitating effects of the moral decay now affecting communities. It has also shown the difficult this environment poses for the practice of some of the traditional African values associated with *botho*. The pervasive prevalence of morally disturbing actions and omissions where it is becoming common for “giving and receiving of bribes, parents neglecting their children, adult “children” abandoning their ageing parents...[and] failure to show respect for one another” (Kinoti 1992: 76), all point to the moral malaise in society. In Sesotho culture this discontent is towards what can simply be summed up as the lack of respect of basic ethical fundamentals for one who is a *motho* which “no one who considered himself decently brought up” could ill afford (Ellenberger (1912: 292). It is

these fundamentals that underpin much of traditional social norms and rules of etiquette found in their culture.

According to Kinoti (1992: 73) the situation in Africa today has brought much grumbling and lamentation because “because they possess some knowledge of traditional morality”, now no longer there “which ensured the well-being of communities and individuals alike”. In other the concern here with contemporary moral culture of modern African is its implied failure to ensure the well-being of communities and individuals alike which as we saw earlier is the consequence of the over emphasis in modern ethics of autonomy.

The displacement of traditional culture and its value stems together with this unquestioning embracing of modern ethics as represented by the West, has led to the crisis of values in many communities in Southern African and most African societies today. This can be seen in prevailing moral attitudes of that autonomous urbanised “young man and a young woman who has been socialised in church and at school” (Bereng 1987: 94) who is embracing without questioning the dominant Western value systems and everything Western as progress and good.

Thus, one finds that there is now in many of these post-traditional societies a growing attitude where individuals assert the right to question just about everything and to decide the basic issues of their lives for themselves without any significant consideration for others<sup>11</sup> (Prozesky 2007: 7, Ntibatirwa 1999: 8). Consequently, it is fair to say that the contemporary moral agents live profoundly confused and inconsistent moral life. They are uncertain about how to respond to fundamental moral questions of who they are and who they should be, and how they were yesterday affects the decision they make today and, in the future, (Richardson 2009: 141). Due to lack of certainty about answers to these fundamental moral questions, deciding what to do on a day-to-day basis and making moral judgements for the moral agent becomes more difficult and more arbitrary and inconsistent (Mokolatsie 1997:13). It is in recognition of this change and the societal moral challenges it brings in Africa that Mugambi and Nasimiyu-Wasike (1992: 1) argue that many of these are not necessarily new,

“but they have taken on new forms and amplitudes of our time. Moral issues have become very difficult and complex, particularly in the African context where structures and forms are changing so fast that African society seems to be in a permanent transitional stage of history.”

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<sup>11</sup> The term post-traditional is borrowed from Giddy (2014) and is used here to differentiate contemporary societies as we have them now in mostly developing countries with specific reference to Africa and modern societies as found in the first world. I shall therefore reserve post-traditional societies to describe third world context and modern societies for the first world context. This distinction is necessary because even though both have been affected by modernity, its incarnation in both is different. In contrast to the first world distinctively post-traditional societies, like in Africa aspects of old traditions have not only somehow “survived into some sort of coexistence with modernity”(MacIntyre 1981:71) they have demonstrated a kind of resilience and strength that qualifies it as a true survivor (Prozesky 2009: 11;) and as such the traditional ethos of African culture has survived (Kasenene 1994: 138).

In other words, at the heart of the concerns currently being raised with modern ethics is the concept of the self as an autonomous individual that is the governing principle now embodied by modern ethics. What we are seeing therefore in these concerns is first, that traditional African morality as it used to be, has been lost and permanently damaged. Second, that whatever semblance or fragments of it are there and left, have been significantly changed and its understanding transformed, such that they no longer wield any moral authority<sup>12</sup>. It is this reality together with declining morals standards and general absence of a moral sense that for some constitutes the moral vacuum that is found in many communities. It is against this background that the disquiet and much talk about the state of ethics by public figures, religious and community leaders must be understood. (Shutte 2001: 1). In view of this some are thus calling out what they as the erosion of traditional values and the impoverishing effect to ethics of displacement of character (Bereng 1987: 96-98, Richardson 1994: 91) with growing for a different ethical paradigm one that would be based on renaissance of conscience (Prozesky 2007: x) or revival of Aristotelian ethics (Ntibagirirwa 1999).

Many of the issues that are now of concern with contemporary African moral universe; lack of moral certainty, moral confusion, self-doubt of the moral agent in terms of one's social and moral identity, can already be seen raised in similar disquiet about the displacement of traditional values by Western values in Sesotho speaking culture at the turn of the twentieth century. This is often depicted in many of the early novels of Sesotho literature referred to earlier. In these novels, one of the noticeable features of the hero is much talked about inner conflict or crisis of values in individual and communities alike about what is good and for whom and what value system to follow. This moral dilemma and predicament caused by the clash of value systems is narrated no better than in the famous Sesotho novel, *Mosali a Nkhola* (A woman lends into trouble) by B.M. Khaketla (Selepe 2009). The novel is "set in the heyday of British colonial rule in Lesotho" with a young *Mosito* about to assume his reign as chief after successful Western college education at Lovedale College. The dilemma facing the young chief is whether his Western education and the values it espouses i.e., of annihilation and alienation, will benefit him and his people or whether the traditional value system embedded in traditional social institutions and social roles he was brought up with should be his *lere* - walking stick both morally and politically as he governs and leads his people. The novel explores "whether it is Mosito's education and civilisation or the Basotho culture" and its traditional institutions and culture "that will provide answers to the problems facing him" in his role as a chief. This dilemma is amplified in the novel by the portrayal of the young Mosito marrying an "uneducated" Mosotho woman," *Sibonelo*, who in contrast to her husband who is

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<sup>12</sup> The term fragments and implied sense of loss of moral authority of traditional African values are used here in the same way that MacIntyre (1981: 1-2) describes similar fundamental change and transformation that occurred to premodern culture and its moral language now found in modern Western ethics and is in a state of grave disorder.

unsure of who he is, she “is steeped in her cultural beliefs and value systems.” The same clash of values is reflected in “Mosito’s *lekgotla* (council)” which “is divided into two camps: the former advisors of his late father who are “uneducated”, and his own peer advisors who are educated in the Western sense (Selepe 2009: 143-145). Mosito’s dilemma is a microcosm of the political and cultural dispute prevailing

“between what is considered to be right for the Basotho in general, not just for Mosito; *vis-à-vis* what is considered to be right for the Basotho, by the British colonial regime” (Selepe 2009: 141).

By extension, the conflict of values portrayed in the novel i.e., about what is good morally for Basotho *vis-à-vis* Western influences in the form of British colonial rule is a mirror image of the moral uncertainty and predicament now characterising contemporary Basotho. This moral dilemma, the confusing mixture of African and Western values, represent the moral uncertainty many are experience of being unsure of which way to turn. (Richardson 2009: 129). This I will argue is quintessential crisis of values many contemporary Southern Africans are experiencing today in particular the majority of urban and semi-rural folk and metropolitan urbanite elites including contemporary Basotho.

This concern with the impact of Western culture on African cultures, dramatised in the life of Mosito, is symbolic of the underlying concerns with contemporary moral environment in many communities in Africa today. It is a reality that can be seen in other parts of sub-Saharan African *vis-à-vis* modern ethics and influence of the West. This moral predicament stands for the ultimate choice between the two ways of life as far as Africa ethics and Western ethics is concerned. This is also the concern expressed by African scholars worried about the moral culture of their communities. This concern often in discussions about ethics expressed in typical African fashion in the medium of storytelling. Among African scholar familiar with the culture and its use of narratives as resources for ethical reflection and moral education, none captures the essence of the reality of the present African moral predicament in a story better than Hanna Kinoti in story in Richardson (2009: 129). Like in the story of *Mosito*, according to this story, the Hyena was following the smell of roasted meat until it came to where the path forked. Not knowing which path to take it decided to straddle both and as the paths drifted further and further apart the Hyena ends up splitting in the middle. Like the character of young Mosito to paraphrase Larson in Selepe (2009: 143) most Africans in sub-Saharan Africa indeed have become trapped individuals, who have “been assimilated, and then found it impossible to accept” the full abandonment of their own traditional African moral values and culture. It is in this sense that today Africa is at a crossroads,” because “in terms of everyday conduct for individuals and communities, there is uncertainty, disillusionment and even despair” (Kinoti 1992: 73). Both stories are thus a metaphor and social commentary that help to articulate the grave state in which moral life in Africa is and the moral crisis individual and

many communities in Africa are facing today. They are a microcosm of the contemporary crisis of values of modern societies in Africa today.

It is against this background that there is a growing disquiet, “grumbling and lamentation” about the displacement of “traditional African morality, and it being superimposed by other influences of the day and age in which we find ourselves” (Kinoti 1992: 73. In the case of *Mosito*, I will also argue that the story shows that the crisis is not new. That this crisis has been the subject of concern for a long time by different generations of Africans and therefore accusations often levelled at criticism of modern culture as nostalgia<sup>13</sup> for the past, -because it is assumed this is a recent fascination- is false. That means the moral contradictions, incoherencies and inconsistencies we are seeing today in Africa resulting from the dilemma just described, is a manifestation of moral decay in the foundation of the fabric of moral life whose origin can be traced back to the beginnings of the interface of African culture with the West.

The displacement of traditional African value systems especially the centrality of the growth of personal character to ethical conduct, by the ways of the West together with the corresponding individualistic concept of the self as its cornerstone, has thus left the African as a moral agent at a precipice of moral uncertainty and confusion. It has created a moral environment that at best is a crisis of values and moral uncertainty and at worst is a moral vacuum. In other words, there is a general discontent with the state of a contemporary moral culture among many in Africa. There is a worry with the change in moral attitudes along with the quality of the moral life of individuals today which has resulted in the decline in moral standards but has also created a moral crisis too (Ntibagirirwa 1999: 108).

These concerns being raised which are at the philosophical and theoretical levels, where ethics is understood and done in Africa still largely modelled on the West with little or no recognition of the contribution that Africa can make (Nicolson 2008: 1-12, Murove 2009: xv, Richardson 2009: 144). At a practical level i.e., day to day conduct, it is not only moral uncertainty but also inconsistency due to the absence of an overriding shared values and common moral frame of reference as well as disillusionment and even despair (Kinoti 1992: 73). This has led to growing concerns with declining moral standards (Dolamo 2013; Shutte 2001:1) which is seen as behind the increases in various acts of moral indiscretions (Richardson 2003: 5, Eliastam 2015: 3, Letseka 2013<sub>A</sub>). Confronted with such reports a morally discerning person is forced not only to ask about the moral character of one who

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<sup>13</sup> Such accusations mainly from some quarters within African philosophy circles, especially with reference to *botho* discourse (see Matolino and Kwindigwi 2013) are symptomatic of the failures of modern academic training where ethical reflection fails to go beyond the limits of traditional disciplines of mainly moral philosophy and moral theology, to embrace other disciplines in this case African narratives or stories whose moral value in education in to virtue transcends time and cultural boundaries and as such can enrich current ethical reflection and discourse, especially on ethical concepts such as *botho* which originate in cultures with strong oral tradition where stories were the primary medium of education by which social values and ideals were taught and learned.

conducts themselves in such a manner, but to conclude that the traditional African values and virtues of *botho*, such as respect for elders, charity, honesty, hospitality and communal solidarity, which gave ethics a tangible social content are not only in decline (Mwikamba 1992: 84-86) but in danger of extinction and no longer wield any moral authority on individuals. All this has intensified the experience many have of contemporary moral life today as being like a “moral vacuum” where “something” used to be there but is now “gone, and nothing has replaced it” (Shutte 2001). For many concerned with this poor state of moral standards, African society is in a state of near chaos in the realm of morality and the “the emergent new African-Western educated” and new Christianised moral agent is something of a caricature, least pleasing to himself (Kinoti 1992: 80).

For many the growing influence of Western culture and its dominance seeming with no stop to it can only mean more damage to even those remaining fragments of traditional morality. It means even more uncritical acceptance and embracing of many of the western values that are the very source of some of the problems. This will lead to even more confusion and uncertainty about values leaving many more unsure and uncertain. This is because although many will increasingly be influenced by western values, they are still a product of traditional culture and not fully able to renounce the dictates of traditional values espoused by African value systems, which have survived the onslaught of modernity. This can be seen in the current modernised African moral agent who are truly faced with an existential moral dilemma foreshadowed in the character of young *Mosito* in Khaketla's *Mosali a Nkhola* and Kinoti's story of the Hyena. Therefore, in many African communities, there is a general concern with what many see as badly deteriorating values of *botho* and moral standards, as society witnesses with dismay morally horrifying incidents and disturbing social behaviour in their communities.

It is against this background that there is a growing outcry about contemporary moral culture and influence of modern ethics in Africa. The suitability of modern ethics or Western Christian ethics to animate society toward creation good citizens and individuals with qualities of *botho*, is being asked with even louder voices. The legitimacy of claims this moral culture as a workable value system and the effectiveness of relying on it for moral guidance including its idolisation of the individual autonomy is no longer convincing for many. This and other distinctive characteristics of modern Western ethics are highlighted among some of the noticeable inadequacies, now regarded as no longer acceptable. As a result, we are seeing a ground swell of concerns, calling ethics to look elsewhere for solution in the direction of other moral traditions. The Sesotho speaking cultures which is presented here is one such a response presented here as better suited for articulating ideas for creating “*batho bao e leng batho*”, - individuals who are persons. i.e., who have “*botho*,” which is the purpose of ethics. Among these are those calling for a new emphasis in ethics specifically one that is committed

to the reinstatement of moral goal of growth in personal moral character as the new ethical approach instead of (Richardson 2009: 139).

This concern with modern Western ethics and crisis of values in Africa it has caused is being amplified by many scholars, now also questioning not only the inadequacies of modern ethics but hegemony of Western value frameworks as a whole as the basis for creation of global ethics but also the wisdom of continuing to do ethics solely through the lens of Western Christian traditions (Murove 2009: 15) while ignoring indigenous ethical traditions more relevant to people in this region and their moral outlook (Shutte 2008: 17). This movement is driven by perspectives inspired by moral traditions from the developing world like Africa and the east, and worth mentioning here is the ethics of "*botho*" from the moral tradition of Sesotho speaking cultures in Southern Africa, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

In recent years the social and moral challenges briefly discussed here have led to a growing interest in the moral traditions of African people in particular the rival of *botho* ethics (Letseka 2011, Metz 2014) and a growing consciousness about the importance of indigenous African ethical traditions to ethics in general but in particular to African ethics led by the likes of Shutte (2001) Murove (2009), Nicolson (2008) and Prozesky (2007, 2009). These scholars and others not mentioned here all share the common sentiment about *botho* ethics in relation to the contemporary moral environment and modern ethics. It is summed up by Shutte (2001: 9) who argues that there is a need to find a way of applying to ethics the insight at the heart of the ethical ideal of *botho* because it is something the dominant moral culture "in our own time and society has forgotten" but, which is desperately needed. The significance of *botho* and debates around it follow in next chapter which focuses on current debates.

## **2.5 Summary**

This chapter gave an overview of the nature and character of modern Western ethics and modernity as its cultural expression highlighting concerns from the perspective of African ethics as the background to current *botho* discourse. It analysed contemporary moral environment and presented a critical appraisal and evaluation of modern Western ethics. It showed that the latter is currently the predominant ethical frame of reference informing contemporary moral attitudes and view about ethics as such still has considerable influence in the ways of conduct in places like sub-Saharan Africa including among many Basotho.

The chapter highlighted the significance of the symbiotic relationship between colonial and missionary projects in Africa with reference to Basotho culture. It showed that in the moral sphere both adopted the same uncompromising "civilizing" attitude towards the moral system and values of indigenous cultures in Africa with devastating consequences on the communities of those cultures including those of Basotho. This means that the religious expression of modern Western ethics and its influence when it comes to the displacement of

traditional morality in Sesotho speaking culture cannot be underestimated. Thus, from the perspective of moral traditions of Africa, specifically those of Basotho, modern ethics, whether in its secular or religious manifestation has the same detrimental effect of which concerns about it are now being raised.

The chapter thus discussed this presence of modern ethics today in both its secular and religious expression in the form of Western ethics and Christian ethics respectively. Here we saw that the character and orientation of the modern Western ethics as found today has remained true to its characteristic features it has always had from its origins in Enlightenment Ethics in Europe. In other words, even though modern ethics is now found in many parts of the world outside its European cultural origins it still bears the hallmarks of its European culture. In other words, it is still largely Western, Christian, and individualistic and is still part of the globalising thrust of Western culture. The chapter examined the implications of Western ethics and modernity as its cultural expression in many post traditional societies, that are now the feature of many communities in Southern Africa including those of Sesotho speaking culture and the Basotho people. Here the chapter showed how Western ethics along with the values of First World culture embodied most profoundly in its liberal ethics and individualism, is increasingly experienced by many of these communities as a catalyst to the sense of moral vacuum and decay, and that is a concern for many. The chapter showed the general dissatisfaction with ethics and state of morality in these cultures highlighting the contemporary moral environment experienced as crisis of values. It showed that this has resulted in a state of ongoing moral predicament, where individuals and communities alike feel morally uncertain and confused, and unsure of what values to hold. This together with dilution of a sense of shared values that modern Western ethics has engendered all have a joint effect of diminished sense of objective moral authority. The introduction of the morally autonomous moral sovereign idea in ethics has further added to the growing concern with modern ethics and modernity as its cultural expression, where moral attitudes and ethics are increasingly viewed as just a matter of convention, purely subjective, and merely a practical set of rules to enable a society composed of people with vastly different values to function smoothly.

The chapter showed the challenges faced by many traditional societies like that of Basotho. Many of these cultures and their communities are a part of modernity and there is no way of escaping, yet at the same time in some key areas of life this is experienced as a negative development for which solutions must be found. It is in view of the latter that there are now concerns of the real danger that many African societies face of adopting everything Western without selection and losing "sight of the traditional values of family and communal solidarity which cover all material and moral needs of people.

The analysis examined characteristic and representative features of Western ethics which capture its different approach to that of *botho* ethics. It illustrated the implication of such an approach to conduct in the light of that found in *botho* ethics in the light of how the latter is understood and applies in Sesotho speaking culture. The chapter analysed the phenomenon of the autonomous self-choosing moral individual as one of these features. It showed this notion of a moral sovereign now so well embedded in modern Western ethical approach to ethics how this diminishes the sense of shared values central to *botho* ethics and common moral frame of reference as the basis for morality in society. This expressed the inherent individualism of Western ethics and its orientation. The chapter highlighted specifically the over emphasis on what differentiates us as moral agents in society promote by the primacy of choice in western ethical approaches and implied by modern Western ethics. This the chapter argued showed that Western ethics' adherence to individual autonomy and freedom of choice of the individual as a moral sovereign, has the undesirable consequences of placing separateness of individuals in society at the foreground of ethical reflection. Such an approach to ethics is detrimental to a shared set of values which is presupposed by *botho* ethics. For current *botho* discourse this moral environment thus poses problems as it is encouraging and reinforces individualism this ethics which as just pointed out conflicts with *botho* ethics which the discourse is promoting as an alternative in society.

The chapter also explored another feature of the moral culture of modernity as presented in modern ethics. This is the rejection of moral particularity of Western ethics which is in favour of universalism. The latter is often understood in terms of objectivity of moral principles. The chapter discussed this as another area of concern with approach of modern ethics today and another reason for the growing disquiet and dissatisfaction many are having against modern ethics. This dogmatic adherence to universality and objectivity alongside the devotion to the individual, the chapter showed are what sets Western ethics apart from *botho* ethics, which is communal in orientation, and the main sources of worry about growing influence of modern ethics. The chapter showed that at the heart of modern ethics as presented through modernity is the assumption and impression given that it is possible to have an ethical reflection that is not done from a particular social standpoint, which *botho* ethics implies. The analysis showed that universalism promises universal principles as modern ethics does instead it turns out to be principles specific to particular times, places and stages of human activity and enquiry. The chapter showed that the assumptions about universality which underpin modern ethics are therefore incorrect. It important therefore for ethical reflection to recognise and acknowledge that however it may be defined, and articulated ethics will always be an expression of the morality of some particular social and cultural standpoint. This is more important now with the growing movement towards developing a global ethics, as such recognition makes for the kind of dialogue that this will require easier and possible.

The chapter also analysed western ethics in terms of its religious expression in the form of Christian ethics with reference to its presence in Sesotho speaking culture. It showed that although Christian ethics presents itself often as distinct from modern Western ethics, it nevertheless shares the same common origin and cultural heritage with Western ethics. Both also come from the same moral tradition and bear the same characteristic features. The relevance of approaching the analysis and impact of modern ethics from this religious perspective is that among the Basotho it was the missionary enterprise or missionary ethics more than the secular morality of the west, that entrenched western value systems and paved the way for modern ethics to take root as a feature of modern Basotho nation. For this reason, the chapter analysis Christian ethics with particular focus on missionary activity in Lesotho. Here the chapter focuses on early Basotho authors and the novels they produced as a reflection the idea and values propagated by Christian ethics. Using a literary analysis of a few selected novels in Sesotho language the chapter showed how Western values were promote to Basotho through the message of many of these novels. With the encouragement of missionaries many of these were designed to induce the unquestioning faith in Christianity among the Basotho and a strong belief in the progress of the West and renouncing of traditional culture and its moral values as “unchristian”. The common theme found in these works is one where being Christian which is not distinguishable from western culture and its values. Christian way of life is presented always as a good while many of the traditional Basotho cultural ways and values are portrayed as bad. The development of these novels thus contributed to the part of the missionary project which endorsed the entrenchment of western value through Christianity and its moral teachings in Sesotho culture. The chapter showed that these novels are just not literature but also serve to as vehicles of propagating certain values and moral ideals, all of which were presented as Christian which is not separable from western value. It was the success of this process in Lesotho that we saw the entrenchment Western values system in Sesotho culture and in turn the emergence of a new society and culture among Basotho. This society was neither African in the traditional sense of its predecessor culture nor European or western and because it has nothing that is of “its own” it looks up to the dominant moral value framework of the day as its base and source of moral guidance. This is indeed the moral predicament of modernity in post traditional societies in Southern Africa with contemporary Basotho culture today as the representative microcosm of this predicament. It is in response to this moral predicament that this study is revisiting the experience of *botho* as found in traditional Sesotho culture for lesson to be learned for today’s context.

The discussion of this chapter on the moral disquiet about modern ethics and concerns with the inadequacies of modern Western ethics and moral culture of modernity underscores this contemporary moral predicament, hence the interest on *botho* as a solution to this. The

chapter highlights this moral predicament as the basis behind the concerns now being expressed by many scholars in African ethics. For many it is the reason for the sense of being in moral crisis now being expressed in many African societies. According to these concerns, the problem of modern ethics is its progressive move away from considerations of the cultivation of good qualities of character, which leads to creation of good people and members of community, to obsession and fascination with universal moral principle. These concerns include those that see in modern ethics the reduction of ethics to an activity that comes into play when certain difficult moral decision must be made. Thus, making ethics into being a business of moral decisions about what is right and what is wrong at particular moments.

The chapter also showed that according to some the heart of the problem with modern ethics is its whole structure of ethics, which premised narrow understanding of human autonomy and freedom of the individual and the flawed conception of who we are as individuals and moral agents (Richardson 2009: 137). The elevation of the status of the individual in relation to the community which has become the primary conception of moral identity that many people now hold is the most worrying and problematic from about modern ethics from the perspective of the ethics among Basotho and indeed many southern African communities. Not only because it runs counter to the traditional African approach to ethics where communal life is a priority, but because it has led to views and moral attitude where moral behaviour is privatised and treated as “no one’s business” but the individual moral agent alone. From the perspective of African ethics, this poses problems because moral life is a joint responsibility, with the community responsible for the conduct of its individual members and members responsible for the moral life of the community. This concept of ethical accountability that is the sole preserve of the individual alone conflicts with the traditional ethical ideal of *botho*, argued here as a workable alternative but is also harmful to current efforts to engender a global ethic that focuses on human flourishing and the idea of a global community. For friends of *botho* this conception of ethics is thus not compatible with its central tenets of *botho*, where mutual responsibility in community for the moral life is one of the necessary conditions required for the realisation of *botho*. For this reason in this chapter the significance of the community as one of the key social institutions underpinning of African ethics is given particular emphasis, pointing out that the kind of moral individualism that is now pervasive in modern ethics is one of the challenges of an ethic that places such premium as the ethics of *botho* does ongoing inter-subjectivity of persons as envisioned by the African community.

It is against this background that the chapter discussed the growing movement in ethics in general but also from within African ethics for a change in thinking in the understanding of ethics. There is now a recognition gaining in momentum that ethic needs transcend considerations focusing primarily on rules and principles of right and wrong actions of individuals. Instead ethical reflection should focus on people and their character. In other

words, a change from the current impersonal goals of ethics to ensure objectivity and universality of moral principles. What the advocate of this new movement are calling for is focus of ethical reflection centred on personal goals of growth in personal moral character. For this school of thought, which resonates deeply with many of the current voices emanating from African ethics and sub-Saharan African, this means attention of ethics should be on the moral agency and by implication moral identity of agents. This is because that is what ethics is all about, i.e., it is rooted in who we are and our character. It is in terms of the persons we are as moral agent, now, yesterday and will be in the future that we approach moral decisions and answer questions of right and wrong. This is the heart of moral agency. Question about what is regarded as “making a moral decision at a particular moment” i.e., should I do this now or not, are not necessarily about a decision being made there and then. That decision in the strict sense of moral agency and decision making is already made because the person I am prevent certain types of conducts and includes certain types of behaviour *a priori*.

In other words what happens in those occasions i.e., when moral decisions must be made in a case, is that in large part the moral agent has already decided in advance by the type of person they are i.e., “what kind of person am I,” “what is worthy of me” and more importantly “what may I permit myself to do” (Richardson 1994: 92) what they are more likely to do in this situation. In other words, the question being answered is “Am I that sort of person” that would do such and such or act in such a way in a situation like this. And the answer to this question does not arise for the first time only when confronted with a situation, it simply gets applied to the situation considering the unique circumstance of that situation. This is because our character which supplies the basis for answers to many of our moral questions, determines our actions and informs our behaviour in advance. This is not how a modern ethical approach to conduct works and how most people arrive at these decisions. The chapter has thus highlighted this as the weakness of current ethical frameworks to which I have suggested we can learn lessons from the ethical approach of the ethics of *botho*, an its approach, which although at odds with dominant ethical theories that inform modern society, is nevertheless desperately needed.

The underlying contention therefore behind this chapter is that it is time that mainstream ethical reflection especially in Africa to transcends the confines of moral tradition of the West because there is every indication that the moral tradition of that culture like all moral cultures is not perfect and the signs are in some respect it is ethically impoverished. It is against this background that this study argues for reappraisal of *botho* and traditional African understanding of moral life as a joint enterprise, expressed in its classic form in the ethical ideal of *botho* as practised in the moral traditions of a Sesotho speaking culture. Such an understanding has the potential to address some of the challenges found with in Western ethics and the problems they generate now facing individual moral agents today. It also has

potential from which individuals today can learn lessons and find possible moral resources we need to. It is this conviction that ethics can learn from moral traditions of other cultures that we now see it playing itself out in African ethics and no more intensely than in the current *botho* discourse and corresponding debates about *botho*, which is the focus of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE: CURRENT *BOTHO* DISCOURSE AND PREDOMINANT DEFINITIONS OF *BOTHO*

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter will give a critical appraisal of the current *botho* discourse outlining the different approaches to *botho* and debates surrounding this concept as found in the literature, highlighting the varied formulations and definitions of *botho* found in the discourse. This will include the analysis of the older definition of *botho* understood as a description of moral quality or admirable character of a person as well as the more recent interpretations of it as a phenomenon. This former is currently the least emphasised in the current discourse. Within the latter groups the chapter will analyse Afro communitarianism (AC) as the predominant formulation of *botho* in the discourse around which all other formulations coalesce. Here the chapter will focus on AC's usage of the Sesotho proverb *motho ke motho ka batho* which is regarded as foundational to the theorisation of *botho*. The chapter will deconstruct this as a theorisation of *botho* and question the over reliance of current discourse on this proverb as a gate way to the insight of *botho* ethics. It will further analyse this proverb as part of Sesotho narratives and part of the indigenous knowledge of Basotho. It will highlight the internal rules of interpretation and usage of Sesotho narratives as a way of correcting the current usage of the proverb and in turn de-linking *botho* from *motho ke motho*. The chapter will conclude with a preview of a reimagined formulation of *botho* beyond *motho ke motho*, as part of the overall appraisal and overview of current *botho* discourse and its interpretation of *botho*.

The fundamental question the current *botho* discourse must address, to properly conceptualise ethics of *botho* within contemporary ethical thought and prevailing ethical theories, is 'what kind of ethics is ethics of *botho*'? Is it an ethic of right action, primarily interested in questions of "what is right and wrong" with focus on actions of individuals (Richardson 1994: 91)? Or is it an ethic of *virtue*, preoccupied with questions of character and inculcation of *makhabane* (virtues) and certain qualities of character? In this study I locate *botho* ethics in the latter, where it is an ethics intend on achieving the more person moral goal of growth in personal character of *motho* using the traditional Basotho culture and its understanding and meaning of the term *botho*, which is discussed in detail in the next chapter on the primacy of character. I will therefore argue that, from the perspective of Sesotho speaking culture, *botho* cannot be understood independently to the answer to the question

that must first be answered; what is *motho*? It cannot be properly conceptualised without reference to what sort of person one “ought” to become to be a proper *motho* (Mphetolang 2009: 14) and this I will argue is described in Sesotho culture primarily in terms of character. This is because it is believed that it is a person's character that reflect who the person really is i.e., it is the source from which all his or her actions—good or bad—radiate and the performance of good or bad acts depends on the state of one's character (Gyekye 2011: par.10-14). Using available literature including sources from the Sesotho speaking culture, this chapter will show that, traditionally this concept is connected to character because morality in Sesotho culture is understood fundamentally in terms of good morals specifically of character. In terms of this understanding the core standards of the moral life by which conduct is judged good or bad, and actions regarded as right or wrong, are always understood in terms of how *character* relates to conduct and the behaviour of *motho*.

It is from this understanding i.e., of a character centric account of *botho*, that I contend the starting point of analysis of the current *botho* discourse of this concept must be based. This is because it is not only the oldest definition of the concept in southern Africa; but also, the common usage in moral language of the people of Southern Africa from the eighteenth century until as recently as the twentieth century (Gade 2011: 316). Moreover, I will argue it is also the most appropriate for articulating the person dimension of *botho* which is desperately needed today. This interpretation is also congruent with the indigenous understanding of *botho* as found in traditional culture of Basotho from which the term *botho* originates. I will thus problematise the current conventional Afro-communitarian (AC) account of *botho*, (Metz and Gaie 2010: 274) which conceives *botho* in terms of quality of personal relationship in the community. I will argue that this account is inconsistent of *botho* as primarily a moral term used in describing morally admirable character in a person. I will furthermore challenge the current reliance in the discourse on *motho ke motho ka batho* to define this concept question this as unjustified abstraction of a proverb from its context as part of a body of knowledge found in Sesotho narratives. I will therefore show that Sesotho narratives, especially proverbs, are a body of collected wisdom that is best understood in unity and that as such they have their own internal rules of interpretation and application. Thus, I will argue that the interpretation of MKKB i.e., in terms of relational self-realisation of the self and impression given that this proverb alone express the essence of *botho*, is not an authentic articulation of the traditional understanding of *botho*, as this is not consistent with the traditional usage of this proverb and traditional understanding of *botho* as a description of the character of *motho*.

### **3.2 Debates Around Relevance and Significance of *Botho***

In the earlier chapters, it was pointed out that no aspect of traditional African morality has attracted as much interest and currency in recent years as the traditional concept of *botho*.

But the difficulty with *botho* is the extent of the literature and volume of new material that is still being published, makes it difficult to take stock in terms of giving an exhaustive account of current debates and views. The accounts of these debates that therefore follows here are limited by this. As such they will represent a cross section analysis of the debates aspects of which may have already moved by now. It will also be a broad description account of some area and topics of discuss in the discourse. So, the aim here will be more illustrative of the vibrancy of conversations currently taking place around this concept and to point at the general direction of some of the arguments within the current discourse. As such it will also not be the intention here to give a detail account of the merits and drawbacks of these. The exception here will only be for Afro-communitarianism account of *botho*. This is because as showed the problem with MKKB is the unjustified exceptionalism that the discourse has given this proverb which requires closer examination. But it is also because AC is the specific account of *botho* that this study is challenging and a response to.

One characteristic feature of the current *botho* discourse that one notices is the variety of views and ideas associated with *botho*, along with a wide range of formulations and descriptions. Aspects of some of these debates that follow here show the popularity and currency of this concept in recent years. This general excitement around *botho* in African ethics is based on the conviction that the insights at the heart of *botho*, are ideal informing ethics and conduct that are desperately needed in our times. Here we can mention the underlying ideals presupposed by *botho* as found in Sesotho culture such as shared values, common moral frame of reference, and intense sense of accountability and responsibility for wellbeing of others. This is something that the dominant moral culture of contemporary societies can learn from *botho* ethics (Nicolson 2008: 5, Shutte 2008: 9,15). According to this then, *botho* has a worthwhile contribution to make to ethics. It offers immense potential to remedy the effects of globalisation, which has seen large-scale destruction of *botho* based institutions and values in many communities. So, the view that *botho* is a relevant and prompt antidote to “the trauma caused by colonisation and the imperialism of Western culture and Western values system is widely shared by most critics (van Binsbergen 2001: 63). While this points to general enthusiasm around *botho*, it is the case that the concept is not without critics, nor is it immune from criticism (Hailey 2008: 18, Molefe 2014: 161) as it will be clear in the next section.

### **3.2.1 Polysemy of *Botho* and Concerns with Imprecision.**

The currency of *botho* in society especially in South Africa is one of the noticeable features of post-apartheid South Africa. One only has to look at the huge volume of new material on the subject for evidence of this but also the variety of applications; the term appears in pop songs, and endlessly in advertising campaigns; and also, in ‘a flood of booklets’ on [*botho*] in this or

that sphere of life. This can be seen clearly in how this concept now appear everywhere: in the names of a wide range of establishments, from security firms to schools within University departments, to open-source computer operating systems. It is against this background that others warn that the concept is at risk of meaning anything one chooses (Lutz 2009: 2; while other worry that it is almost meaningless.

But as well as this enthusiasm there are concerns about what exactly this term means and its lack of definition. So, one finds that there are recurring criticisms of this concept in the literature, one of which is that the concept lacks precision and vagueness. Reiterating this Mboti (2015:130) points out that in the discourse there is “the tendency towards generalisation in defining *botho* which renders the concept to be as imprecise as possible.” Other have raised concerns that the popularity of this concept leaves *botho* open to abuse or misuse (Munyaka and Motlhabi 2009: 64). Describing this Shutte (2001: 14) points out that every organisation has *botho* in its mission statement and the term begins to mean everything and nothing.

The perceived impreciseness and vagueness of *botho* is thus seen as meaning this concept can means anything anyone chooses (Lutz 2009: 2, Mboti 2015: 126). All these further substantiate the concern that this concept “has become anything to anyone who so wishes to deploy it” (Hailey 2008: 2, Matolino and Kwindingwi 2013: 200).

So, while the concerns of abuse of the term are legitimate and these should be taken seriously, I will argue that in this case i.e., the fixation with precision of the meaning of *botho* is yet another manifestation of the consequences of the blind spot of Western modes of thought due to the influence of Western training, where African scholars desperately try to apply Western intellectual standards and modes of thinking on African concepts and ideas<sup>14</sup>. To this it is argued there is plenty of evidence to show that the former has a different approach to the traditional African mode of thinking (Bujo 2001: 3) especially in ethics within which *botho* as a moral concept function. What is interesting here as well is that it is the academic scholars who appear to be worried about the lack of precision of *botho*, compared to the praxis of *botho* in communities where it is lived and practice. Here the practitioners of *botho*, and hence its experts by experience i.e., communities within which the concept thrived for centuries, appear not to encounter this same problem.

It is in view of this that some argue it is time current *botho* discourse needs to suspend its bias and engage concept like *botho* from the perspective of those to whom it applied free from Western modes of thinking. Instead, it argued here scholars should first approach this concept from the perspective of people within whose culture ethics of *botho* was the dominant ethic. The discourse will then discover that that perspective always includes a certain conception of traditional African worldview and its corresponding ontological assumptions upon which

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14 This is the kind of thinking akin to what MacIntyre (1981:204) describes as “the tendency to think atomistically about human” experiences “and to analyse complex” human “actions in terms of simple components”.

African ethics is grounded (Mkhize 2008: 2008) where the polysemy of this concept is better appreciated. It is within these assumptions and spirituality of African culture that this concept is best understood, and its meaning is found. This means it is important when thinking about this concept that reference is made to African traditional wisdom and traditional understanding of personhood and concept of life in general, which is key the African worldview. Second, the current *botho* discourse should regard the indefinable character of *botho* or lack of precision as a problem. Instead the nature of this concept should be an autocue to scholars of how it should be approached. And that is this concept is not like any other concept, because it is best understood as a polysemic moral ideal, with many meanings that are inexhaustible. This is because as it has been said already *botho* is a concept with that has many meanings that are inexhaustible because this ethic cannot be pinned down to have originated at a particular point in time in human history (Murove 2013: 36). Such an approach will then reveal the strong unexplored parallels that *botho* has with the “ancient African (Egyptian) concept of Maat” (Mkhize 2008: 36, Karenga 2004: 4,) specifically the polysemic nature of these concepts and they are to be analysed. It is in this sense that *botho* must be approached from the starting point that it is a concept with “a very wide and internally richly” meanings and that as such it articulates “a vast area of possibilities and implications” (van Binsbergen 2001: 54). Although the selection of “shades” of meaning in a concrete context is not an exclusive reserve of those native to the culture of *botho*, it is worth pointing out it is best done by indigenous people familiar with such a concept. As Karenga (2004: 5) points out polysemic concepts like *botho* often strikes one unfamiliar with their conceptual elasticity and richness, as lacking categorical preciseness and thus, analytical utility which is often the accusation one finds about *botho* in the literature and debates around *botho* (Lutz 2009: 2). This concept therefore is opposed to simplistic reductionist formulations that seek to confine it to any one definition. Thus, we find in the praxis of community or village living which is concrete application of *botho* to a specific context it takes on the nuances of meaning derived from “specific selection” of shades of meaning “made” (van Binsbergen 2001: 54).

When approached from this perspective, the lack of precision and efforts to give *botho* precision (Metz 2007, Ramose 2007) can be regarded as a failure of the inability of the current discourse to grasp the polysemic nature of *botho*. This may also explain why, despite the general agreement about the value of African moral traditions among critics, we see that when it comes to *botho* and its relevance for today’s context there is no consensus about its definition, hence the debates we see. This leads to another aspects of the debate about *botho* which is its place in the political sphere and response to globalisation.

### **3.2.2 *Botho* Industry as Political Exhortation and Response to Globalisation**

Among the reservation thus far discussed many of these relate to *botho* and its function within the sphere of ethics and morality. It is within this context that those criticism of *botho* project seen as not desirable nor workable are being raised (Matolino and Kwindingwi 2013, Mboti 2015). The reservations emanating here related to *botho* industry and the function of *botho* as a political philosophy and a response to globalisation representative of the global south vis-à-vis the global north. Here, critics like van Binsbergen, who can be taken as representative of this view, argue that *botho* can still be of value in other contexts beyond its traditional cultural origins, if rebranded differently. In other words, they are still critical of the current “*botho* industry” and its “academic and managerial codifiers” and in relation to globalisation. But the likes of van Binsbergen hold the view that *botho* should not so much be a push back against the effects of globalisation. The revival of *botho*, which is “not a straight-forward *emic* rendering” of pre-colonial African village practice, it is argued therefore should be reconceptualised in terms of its “utopian” and “prophetic” dimensions. Regarding the former *botho* is recast as a source of hope of an “an ideal society which is — as yet —nowhere to be found except in the philosopher’s blueprint.” In relation to the latter van Binsbergen informs us this function of articulates “the ills, contradictions and aporias of one’s time and age .... conditions which one share with many other members of one’s society” (van Binsbergen 2001: 58). This is a similar approach of this concept adopted by Praeg in Molefe (2014) who launches *botho* directly into the political sphere. Like van Binsbergen, Praeg argues against “grossly inadequate” current reductionist approaches that treat *botho* as “a mere conceptual problem.” According to Praeg, *botho* must be regarded as “primarily a political act” and the responsibility of scholarship i.e., current *botho* discourse in this context “lies precisely in recognizing this priority of the political.” According to Praeg a meaningful talk about *botho* “must examine the political background or space that makes it possible and allows us to” have conversations about *botho* . The reason is because to make sense of “What is *ubuntu*?” requires asking “questions” including asking why “now” and “for whom does this question matter” (Molefe 2014: 158). According to Molefe the most interesting contribution makes to the discourse is the first distinction Praeg makes. First it is the notion of *botho* as “a historical practice and activity for producing particular kinds” of persons i.e., those who have *botho*. Second, it is the notion of *botho* as a “contemporary “philosophical practice. In other words, “theories and ideologies that attempt to make sense of the pre-colonial lived experience of the African people in the secular, global and contemporary” (Molefe 2014: 158, van Binsbergen 2001: 72).

In this regard Praeg’s analysis especially the distinction drawn between “*Ubuntu*” and “*ubuntu*” finds similar expression in van Binsbergen’s (2001: 62) argument regarding “the identity between the academic evocation” [of *botho*] “in the form of philosophy, and the *actual* value orientation informing pre-colonial Southern African village” experiences. The significance of

both Praeg and van Binsbergen contribution to current discourse is that unlike most critics, they extend their appraisal and critique of *botho* beyond the traditional boundaries of the current discourse. More specifically both frame their argument within an explicitly and primarily political framework and re-conceptualisation of the concept, and not just one limited to the moral sphere. Both of these cast *botho* as something evoked to the make sense of the variety of dichotomy between the historical practice of the past relating to *botho* and contemporary philosophical practice, and between its utopian invocation of the ideal and its prophetic imperatives to the imperfect reality of the present. The reference of *botho* in connection with attempts to make sense of the pre-colonial lived experience of the African people in the secular, global and modern environment find resonance with another debate on *botho* found in the discourse, namely narratives of return, which I turn to next.

### **3.2.3 *Botho* as Another Form of the Failed African Narratives of Return**

The revival of element of traditional African culture epitomised by the interest in *botho* in current discourse is seen by some as akin to nostalgia that is no more. The enthusiasm around this concept is seen as a repeated of failed narratives of return that romanticise element of African culture and its social life. Among the reservation therefore coming from this angle include those that regard the current *botho* project as problematic as it only presents on its positive light and selectively leaving out some of the not so positive aspects. *Botho* it is account as articulated in current discourse This amount to a presentation of a romantic view of *botho* which “selectively “present only its “bright side” (Mboti 2015), van Binsbergen 2001: 70). Among these are voices within the discourse, casting doubt on relevance of *botho* and question the desirability of the revival of such traditional moral ideals as “*botho*” as a relevant ethical framework suitable for today’s complex mobile communities. Here we can mention the views expressed by the likes of Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) and Mboti (2015), just to mention a few, as representative of this school of thought. These scholars argue against *botho* revival saying this amount to another form of the failed African narratives of return. For them, the success of *botho* “depends on undifferentiated, small and tight-knit communities that are relatively undeveloped.” They argue that “without the existence of such communities” *botho* merely “becomes only but an appendage to the political desires, wills and manipulations of the elite” (2013: 202). They further argue that such communities are neither non-existent nor suited for today’s “complex, multicultural societies that do not prize communality and” self-identification that is primarily understood in communal terms. Moreover, these scholars also questionable if such communities are in the first-place desirable citing their propensity to dislike outsiders and intolerance. In view of this, they argue the *botho* revival must be abandoned and its continued appeal is masked by certain Africanist agendas to suit the elite. Thus, they conclude that *botho* is “not well rooted in the ethical experiences of modern people

*qua* moral beings” and as such the whole project they suggest ought to reach its end (2013: 198).

### 3.2.4 The Similarity of *Botho* and Similar Terms in Other Cultures

One of the observations with current *botho* discourse that is of interest for this study is the reference that one often finds in the literature about what are described as “other cognate terms and ideas as *botho* in other African cultures in sub-Saharan Africa with a similar meaning” (van Binsbergen 2001: 54). Although this is not presently an issue of debates in the current discourse, in this study it is included because I argue that the claim being made is accepted too easily without question in the discourse, and this I suggest is a mistake. Typically, this manifest itself in the discourse in statements that claim that *botho* or the concept is found in other culture even if in different names. Thus, we see Kamwangamalu (2007: 25) saying the concept of *botho* is also found in many African languages, though not necessarily under the same name. Among these are terms likes “‘umundu’ (in Kikuyu, Kenya), ‘umuntu’ (in Kimeru, Kenya), ‘bumuntu’ (in kiSukuma and kiHaya, Tanzania), ‘vumuntu’ (in shiTsonga and shiTswa, Mozambique), ‘bomoto’ (in Bobangi, Democratic Republic of Congo), and ‘gimuntu’ (in kiKongo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and in giKwese, Angola)”. Broodryk (2002: 14) similarly mentions “Nunhu” in Shona, Zimbabwe and “Utu” in Swahili, Kenya as having the same or similar meaning as *botho*.

But as (Gade 2013: 487) explains it is not always clear if these terms mean the same thing in these other languages because

“firstly, the precise meaning people *de facto* ascribe to [them] has not been sufficiently investigated. ... Secondly there is no agreement on what ‘*ubuntu*’ itself means. Therefore, the meaning that some people ascribe to a term such as ‘*umundu*’ may be like the meaning that some people ascribe to ‘*ubuntu*,’ and different from the meaning that others ascribe to this term.”

In other words, the presumed common understanding and meaning in these terms including *botho* as claimed by this tendency is not supported by evidence. As van Niekerk (2013: 2) explain

“in the case of *ubuntu*, however, uncertainty runs somewhat deeper: its ambiguous usage and politicised promulgation across cultures which do not share all of the same assumptions entail scepticism about its coherence or applicability, even in public discourse”.

It is in view of this persistent ambiguities that persist around *botho* that I argue that in Sesotho speaking cultures there is slight but nevertheless important difference between the Sesotho-Tswana term “*botho*” and what is regarded as its Zulu equivalent “*ubuntu*” (Gaie 2002: 277). In the former *botho* is rarely if ever, understood ordinarily in terms of philosophy or worldview but in the latter, this is more common. Moreover, in Sesotho speaking culture *botho* has not

incorporate much more readily many of the new descriptions now commonly found with Zulu term *ubuntu*. This explains the preference of the Sesotho term “*botho*” in this study, which is also shared by Mphetlang (2009: 12). This reflects the situation in Sesotho speaking culture as opposed to the common *ubuntu-botho* terminology.

What is important to realise here, which is the point being made, is that although these different terms like *botho* are found in diverse cultures, they nevertheless have strong local shades of meaning and often develop important local nuances of meaning that must not be ignored in pursuit of their supposed common meaning. This in most case reflect the values and virtues regarded as important in those cultures or communities (Gade 2013). The same is true of *botho* and its Zulu equivalent *ubuntu*. This means that a concept like *botho*, will not only have a very wide and internally rich meanings that may be common among diverse cultures but that such meanings will be selected and emphasised differently in concrete contexts (van Binsbergen 2011: 54). By way of an example in Lesotho, one of the virtues associated with a person who has *botho* is described in terms of the person being “*motho oa khotso*” (a person of peace). But if one surveys the current *botho* discourse, peace is not often among the top attributes or topics discussed in relation to *botho*. We are more used to harmonious relationships, sharing, solidarity and many other personal attributes. But among the Basotho, being a good person, (*ke motho ea hantle*) which is what *botho* entails is common described similar terms as in relation to peace (*ke motho oa khotso*). Thus, in addition to many of the common attributes linked to *botho* in in Sesotho culture which informs conduct and community living, peace is one of the foundations and governing principle that underpins the Basotho way of life. It is in this sense that local nuance and context would have shaded Basotho understanding of *botho* in terms what they regarded as important and a priority. Historically Basotho are renowned from their founding as nation to today for their prioritisation of peace, in way not comparable with their neighbours in Southern African. It follows then that peace and qualities of character associated with peace would necessarily find their way into being an integral part of the Basotho understanding of *botho*. This can be seen in the basic Basotho greeting “*khotso*” peace, which to this day is still the common greeting. This may also explain why until today Lesotho is often regarded as one of the most peaceful states in Southern Africa.

In other words, the relevance and significance of particular contexts to the meaning of these terms that are seen as having the same meaning cannot be underestimated. This is because of the specific selection of nuance of meaning that gets made from “a very wide and internally richly textured semantic field” and “a vast area of possibilities and implications” in response to the application of such terms in a particular context (van Binsbergen (2001: 54).

### **3.2.5 Connection of *Botho* and African Understanding of *motho***

What these debates reveal which is a dimension of these debates, though not explicitly reflected in current *botho* discourse is the idea that *botho* cannot be fully conceptualised apart from discussion about what is a *motho* (person). In other words, implied in *botho* is a conception of personhood, and this has been articulated best in what is referred in the literature as the African notion of personhood, which specifically refers to descriptions of moral quality of a “person in the robust sense” i.e., when one consistently acts or behaves in ways that are considered morally acceptable (Ikuenobe 2016: 128). Among African scholars none articulated this conception of personhood central to African culture and its moral traditions better than Menkiti (2004). Here I will only highlight salient elements of Menkiti central argument not a full discourse of his view and thoughts on the subject.

Menkiti’s personhood has been a subject of intense debates in the literature on Africa ethics and philosophy, where the key question is about where the priority lies between the community and individual. Nowhere, does this this debate plays itself out than in the debate between the so called radical and moderate communitarians represented by Menkiti and Gyekye respectively (Molefe 2017<sub>c</sub>: 49). It is not the intention to go into details of this debate here because others elsewhere far than any account here would while doing justice to the arguments (Molefe 2017<sub>A</sub>, Molefe 2017<sub>C</sub>). The first thing to point out is that personhood for Menkiti is connected to the community specifically the priority and primacy of the community. The second feature and perhaps the most controversial in some circles, is the idea that “personhood is the sort of thing which has to be achieved, the sort of thing at which an individual could fail. According to this personhood, is like a journey of becoming persons i.e., from individual towards personhood, is for Menkiti, laden with the possibility of triumph and failure and therefore it is believed, of necessity it stretches beyond the raw capabilities of the isolated individual (Menkiti 2004: 326). To illustrate personhood as process of Menkiti’s use the transition of a human child into personhood, where this entails moral maturity that come only with lived experience enabling an individual to become a possible moral exemplar (Ibid: 325). Of necessity therefore the community plays a vital role as catalyst and prescriber of norms, a process that results in the transformation of what initially is a biologically given entity into full personhood (Menkiti 2004: 326). This conception of the personhood, which implies the primacy of the community Menkiti argues is maximalist and goes beyond the minimalist notions of individuality centred around presence of consciousness, memory, will, soul, rationality, or mental functioning. This is because according to Menkiti the transition into personhood required in an individual, entails transforming the individual into a true person and married to the notion of a person is the notion of a moral being and a bearer of norms. This process of transformation of the individual into a person, since the individual cannot fully undergo this process unassisted is the basis for the conclusion that Menkiti makes which is

that 'personhood is the sort of thing which has to be achieved, the sort of thing at which individuals could fail (Ibid.; 326). Menkiti's thesis can thus be summed up in terms of a distinction drawn between the 'individual' and "individual person" which he argues are not interchangeable in the African understanding of the person (Menkiti 2004: 325). Now that we have given a brief narration of Menkiti's argument we can turn some of the notable response to this in the literature. As already indicated Gyekye is one of the scholars who has engaged this topic substantively. One of the aspects of this conception of personhood that Gyekye objects to strongly is what he regards as the unacceptable position that personhood is something defined or conferred by the community and to be acquired by the individual. This together with the "hyperbolic and extreme view of the functional and normative status of the community" constitute Gyekye central argument (2010: 301). Starting with the question of the soundness of the ontological primacy of community Gyekye asks "if a community crucially consists of persons sharing interests and values in some sense, wouldn't this fact establish the priority of the individual rather than that of the community, and that therefore the community existentially derives from individuals and the relationships that would exist between them?"( 2010: 300).

From this Gyekye goes on to point out the danger with the ontological primacy of the community and the corresponding extreme view of its functional and normative status. This includes the risks of arriving at wrong conclusion such as overlooking the logic or relevance of attributes that can be delineated as belonging to the human person qua person. For Gyekye the primacy of the community in the manner that Menkiti suggests exaggerates the normative status and power of the cultural community in relation to those of the person. This in turn obfuscates our understanding the real nature of the person (p 301). According to Gyekye personhood cannot therefore be understood as Menkiti describes because "a human person is a person whatever his/her age or social status" and while personhood may reach its full realisation in community, it is not acquired or yet to be achieved as one goes along in society". This is because for Gyekye, "one is a person because of what one is, not because of what one has acquired" (p 303).

On the face of it this argument consists of two diametrically opposed notions of personhood with no room reconciliation. But whether the positions advanced can converge, that depends on how one views this debate. As Molefe (2017<sub>b</sub>: 3) explains of which this author agrees it would appear that here, these scholars are talking past each as they are employing different notions of a 'person'. This is the point of Menkiti distinction between 'individual' and 'individual person' where the former refers to simply "raw appetite levels" and the latter denotes "the dignity of the person" (Menkiti 2004: 323). This distinction appears to often be ignored or lost whenever this debate arises, and this one with Gyekye appears to be no different. But for Menkiti this is of crucial importance and is therefore a vital differentiation in discussion about

the African understanding of a person. The former pertains to a person just as a human being, which is the aspect that is the focus of Gyekye's argument. The latter is about the idea of personhood understood in terms of moral achievements one gains in a moral arena i.e., a human being that has been able to lead a life characterized by moral excellence (Molefe 2017<sub>b</sub>: 7).

In Sesotho culture we find the same differentiation as it will become clear shortly when analysing the word *motho* in Sesotho language. Here it will suffice to point out that in Sesotho culture *motho* is the robust sense reflects the same notion of the normative notion of personhood as found in Menkiti as this expression and its related moral term *bophoofolo* shows. Both are explicitly a statement that says something about personhood. Closer attention to the ethical imperatives behind both further underscored the primacy of character as the essence of moral evaluation of a *motho*, thus emphasising the indissoluble link of moral judgements and the traditional African normative idea of a person (Menkiti 2004, Molefe 2017<sub>B</sub>). If we look at '*ha se motho*' in Sesotho culture, we find that it features predominantly whenever judgements of slightly serious moral nature are made in the moral thought and practice of the Basotho and in general in the daily parlance in the Sesotho culture. In the current *botho* discourse the interpretation of this statement can sometimes be controversial with concerns that it gives an impression of the denial of a person's humanity. A fuller analysis of this expression will be made later in Chapter four when discussion statements expressing of lack of *botho* in a person in Sesotho culture. Here our interest in it is merely to point its connection to *botho* and personhood, as the two are closely connected. The best way to explain this is to analyse traditional Basotho understanding and definition of the word *motho* (person) (Molefe 2017a: 219).

In Sesotho and Setswana group of languages the word *motho* -person, plural is *batho*, is composed of the prefix "*mo-*" and the stem "*-tho*" from which the two related moral terms *setho* and *botho* discussed later derive. This root as found in the Sesotho expression "*batho ba reng tho*" denotes the state of being truly, genuinely human, and therefore is closely linked to "*setho*" which denotes human nature and humanness in terms of human manners or customs (Paroz 1974:39, Chitja n.d: 698). Anyone familiar with Sesotho language will know how ambiguous and opaque the word *motho* and that its meaning requires careful understanding of what is the intended message behind its uses. The word *motho* can be used in two ways in Sesotho language. (Letseka 2013<sub>B</sub>; 358, Casalis 1861: 320, Gaie 2007: 277). It can mean just a human being in general or it can also mean a person as in the individual human being. As can be seen the two notions of '*motho*' as in '*man*' are closely related but not necessarily the same. In Sesotho culture, there is a moral distinction between *motho* as a metaphysical entity or simply as a being that is human and *motho* as a *moral* being (Gaie 2007: 277, Menkiti 2004: 325) i.e., an agent that has admirable qualities of character. Thus,

Basotho makes a distinction between '*motho*' as just a human being and '*motho*' as referring to moral personhood. As Molefe (2017<sub>b</sub>: 2) explains, the former simply describes a biological reality i.e., of "human parentage", while the latter expresses

"a normative notion that refers to human beings who are leading truly human lives insofar as their lives radiate with moral virtue or excellence. The idea of [*motho* in the latter sense] is a morally commending term; it says one is morally praiseworthy."

Molefe is right here and this is very much how *botho* should be understood, i.e., an assessment of the whole of a person's life in terms of possessing or deficiency in qualities of *botho*. This means that *motho* in this latter sense refers to moral personhood, as opposed to a person humanity or humanness. It is in terms of this its interpretation i.e., as denoting moral personhood that *motho* is an expression of the moral dimension of being human, codified in the moral judgement "*ha se motho*." This statement as a moral judgement denotes a strong moral sanction about lack of good moral character or *botho* by a person. Explaining a similar sanction in Akan language Gyekye (2011: par. 22) points out that "the reason for the judgment that an individual is not a person if he behaves or does not behave in a certain way is that the individual's actions and behaviour are considered as falling short of the ideals and standards of personhood". In other words, only an individual judged to have or making satisfactory progress in cultivating a character that displays qualities of *botho* i.e., as one's characteristic way of living, is given the status of being a *motho* (person). This means they are regarded as being a morally worthy human being. What we find in Sesotho, as is the case with other African languages is that moral sanction that an individual is not *motho* is based on a belief

"that there are certain fundamental norms and ideals to which the conduct of a human being, *if he is a person* ought to conform, that there are moral virtues that an individual has the capacity to display in his conduct and ought to display them if he is a person" (Ibid., par 22).

So, what we see here is that "*ha se motho*" is a moral judgment about a person's personhood or more correctly lack of it and this as we have seen in Sesotho culture is what is understood by *botho*. This focus of '*ha se motho*' therefore is to express failure of *motho* to possess *botho*, more specifically to inculcate and intergrade in their character as a moral agent good moral quality. This is because in their morality Basotho like most African cultures, the quality of the individual's character is most fundamental in our moral life (Gyekye 2011: par 12). It is in this sense that, when considered within the context of the moral language of the Basotho *botho* is always understood in terms of moral character and the cultivation of virtues that *botho* encapsulates

It is these virtues that a *motho* must aspire to have and its vices must be avoided becoming part of their character. So, we can see here how the questions of moral judgements are always about moral character and how in turn these are always intertwined with notions of personhood i.e., *botho*, as encapsulated in the meaning of *motho* as a moral person denoting expressing

a normative idea of a person i.e., moral personhood or human being hood (Gaie 2002: 277). *Ha se motho* therefore is not a statement whose interest is what elements make up a human being, but what constitutes personhood i.e., morally praiseworthy way of being a person in the way a person lives their lives i.e., in terms of the development of good characters (Molefe 2017<sub>B</sub>: 7). So, as a moral judgement “*ha se motho*” is a statement saying something about acts of *botho* but also more than that. It is a moral evaluation of a person’s life in terms of their character as a person overall, not just at a certain time, or a certain period of their life. It expresses and denotes that over time i.e., as shown by their character, one has failed to live up to those expected standards considered essential in a person to be considered a *motho*. It is therefore not a statement about a person’s humanity or rejection thereof. Rather it is a judgement of *motho* i.e., a human being and their lack of moral progress in the acquisition of the moral qualities expected of one who is a *motho*. This is a status one is given to one in line with the way a person has lived their life and continues to do (Gaie 2002). It is for this reason that “*ha se motho*” would be inappropriate to apply to a child because children here are only regarded as person’s potential as they are yet to achieve the required level of moral personhood (Gyekye 2011: par.25) because this expression is fundamentally about moral character and moral personhood, which does not yet apply to children. This understanding of personhood in Sesotho culture will be discussed in more detail in chapter when analysing ‘*ha se motho*’ and ‘*bophoofolo*’ in more detail as statement about *botho* and personhood.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to give a full account of the debate about personhood presupposed by current *botho* discourse in manner that would do this justice. What we can say though, is that despite current differences among leading scholars on this issue, represented by positions of Menkiti and Gyekye, there is agreement on the importance of the relationship that obtains between the community and the individual. This is because as Gyekye 2010: 29) correctly points out “an individual human being is born into an existing human society and, therefore, into a human culture, the latter being a product of the former”. Likewise, Menkiti states that the African conceptualisation of the person recognises that every individual is distinct from other individuals in their community, and that this is a given fact, a brute biological fact (2004: 324).

The relevance of this to this study and its character centric account of *botho* is its validation of what MacIntyre (1981: 217-218) calls the narrative conception of the selfhood. This an understanding of the individual that supports that as an individual

“I am what may be justifiably be taken by others to be in the course of living out a story that runs from my birth to my death. ... [and that] I am not only accountable, I am one who can always ask others for an account, who can put others to the question. I am part of their story, as they are part of mine” (Ibid.).

In other words, the concession they both make, which endorse the narrative conception of the self is significant for this study in two ways. First, I will argue that this shows that the two positions they articulate and represent are not as far apart as it may first appear. Second, that the primacy of character and its formation that this study advances underscores the relationship mutual presupposition the exists between the individual and it is here too that we find convergence. In other words, the focus on the reinstatement of character that this study is arguing for in the current discourse, must be seen as providing African ethics with curative tool towards reconciling these seeming two opposing views. This is because the development and formation of character the study advocates, enjoins both the individual and the community together as intrinsically interdependent partners with equal roles to play. It is both an acknowledgement of the individuality of the individual and the necessity of the community to that individuality to be.

I will therefore argue using the significance of character and its formation as argued in this study that here we have sufficient common ground towards a convergence that reconfigures this debate where the good of the community and that of the individual redefined in terms of both having equal stake in the moral goal of the growth of personal character of the individual, as the common goal. This is because the development of character is something done actively by both the individual and the community (Richardson 1994: 93). As the experience of Sesotho speaking culture that is discussed in this study shows, both two social institutions are essential for the moral life and most importantly for character formation and development and concrete experience of *botho*. The community provides and supports *motho* (individual person) with enabling environment to learn and perfect the virtues of *botho*. In turn the excellence of *motho* in inculcating the values of *botho*, which forms part of their character and moral identity, gives the community the character that it has i.e., a community characterised by acts of *botho*. When viewed from this perspective the tendency to elucidating individuality and the notion of personal identity independently of and in isolation from the notions of narrative, intelligibility and accountability embedded in the community are bound to fail (MacIntyre (1981: 218).

A closer look into these debates just discussed above here thus shows that current formulations of *botho* in the discourse can be divided into two categories. On the one hand, is the camp of those scholars critical of the current predominating account of this concept and questioning some of the basic assumptions underlying *botho* discourse. On the other camp are those scholars with a positive appraisal of *botho*. Some of the main proponents of *botho* for today's context fall in this category. Worth mentioning here is Shutte, Metz and Gaie, who are among those who have written extensively on the subject. These are among the leading voices behind the development of the conventional or Afro-communitarian account of *botho* in the discourse (Molefe 2017c). As shown, this is the predominant formulation of *botho* and therefore deserves closer attention which follows in the section below.

This appraisal of the communitarian account of *botho* that will follow here is against the background and in contrast to what I can be called the traditional account of *botho*. This is the account of *botho* found in much of pre-modern African culture in Southern African. It is thus an older understanding of this concept than current and it interpreted *botho* in terms of the moral quality and character of the person (Gade 2013: 488, Gade 2011: 308). This account, which is agent centred i.e., auto centric places emphasis on the connection between *botho* and *motho* and is found in its classical form in the moral thought and practice of Basotho and much of Sesotho speaking culture. This account is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

### 3.3 Afro-Communitarianism as the Predominant Interpretation of *Botho*

Within African ethics and the current *botho* discourse, the conventional or afro-communitarian account (AC) of *botho* is still the most predominant account of the concept in the literature on *botho* defining the concept in communal relationship terms. It is an interpretation or understanding of *botho* that is wedded to the proverb *motho ke motho ka batho ba bang* (MKKB) loosely translated “a human being is a human being through other human beings (Hailey 2008: 9). It often features together its Zulu variant *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* and the phrase “I am because we are” where its primary interpretation is linked to personhood and identity and is commonly taken to mean “a person is a person through other person”. According to AC the phrase also carries an important normative connotation linked to personhood, identity and humanness<sup>15</sup> (Metz and Gaie 2010: 274). It must be pointed out from the outset although both translations are correct although in the discourse the proverb is translated almost exclusively in terms of the latter. It must be stressed that this invention i.e., linking to this proverb and *botho*, has led to a preference for one translation of this proverb where the word ‘*motho*’ in this proverb is translated exclusively as ‘person’ without any evidence

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<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that in Sesotho speaking cultures there is no evidence of this usage where *botho* and the proverb *motho ke motho* have this relationship of mutual presupposition that the current discourse has invented. This can be seen among the Basotho where this is traceable, as far back as at the time of first missionaries in Lesotho (Casalis 1861: 322) when much of the life and customs of the Basotho began to be committed into writing. Likewise, Sekese 1994: 54) writing much later makes no such reference as well. This is important in view of Gade’s (2011) observation that the association of the two, at least in South Africa in its written debut is a recent development (van Niekerk 2013:4) and in a context where people were kept apart for decades this con-joining of the two appears to be driven more by the unique post 1994 “rainbow nation” desire for building of one nation, hence the emphasis on “common humanity” formulation.

In evoking this proverb here is also worth noting that the claim by AC that this proverb is “a good starting point for understanding sub-Saharan morality or the major strand of it” is arguable (Metz and Gaie 2010: 274). This is because it could be equally argued that in fact a good starting point to such an understanding is the primacy of love for all human being unconditionally. In Sesotho speaking culture this is expressed in the proverb “*motho ha se ntja ha a lahloe*” is Sesotho (A person is not a dog that can just be thrown away), In seTswana they say “*Motho gaa latlhwe*” (a human being should never be thrown away). In these proverbs I will argue is an expression of profoundly sub-Saharan morality and its intense consciousness of the sacredness of a human being or of humanity implied in *botho*, than ‘*motho ke motho ka batho*’. This further substantiates the argument of this study for the respect of the unity of proverbs in their use not in isolation enrich current understanding of the values and virtues enshrined in *botho*.

advanced for such preference. I say invention because from the perspective of Sesotho culture there is no evidence that support this connection of *botho* to this proverb.

But as anyone familiar with the Sesotho language will know this is not the only translation that can be made in view of the opaqueness of the word *motho* in Sesotho language. The proverb can be translated also where *motho* is translated as human being. As it is clear the English terms 'human being' and 'person' do not mean the same thing, and I will argue that the choice of the latter can be explained in part by the desire of leading proponents of *botho* to link this concept with *botho*, which denotes personhood. This will be discussed in detail later when examining this proverb in detail and its abstraction from other proverbs and Sesotho narratives in section 3.5. For now, it will suffice to point out that the less common translation adds a slightly different shade of meaning expressing mere social nature of *motho*.

As a definition of *botho* Afro-communitarian account (AC), is defined primarily in communal terms, i.e., harmonious relationships as opposed to individual personal terms about the moral agent. AC is an account in which often without any justification proffered, MKKB is advanced as integral to the definition and understanding of what is *botho* and as the encapsulation of the totality of what *botho* entails (van Niekerk 2013: 4). The implication here is that the meaning of this proverb is the same as what the concept *botho* means. This I argue is incorrect. Another feature of AC and its interpretation of MKKB is the centrality of the notion of self-realisation (Metz and Gaie 2010: 275) and the corresponding indirect claim that this is the essence of what *botho* as central idea of African ethics entails. This can be seen in the consensus among many thinkers that regard MKKB as call for self-realisation of the agent to develop her personhood" (Metz 2007: 331).

It must, however, be noted that in Sesotho speaking culture there is no equivalent moral term to the notion of self-realisation in their moral language. As such an interpretation of MKKB in terms of this idea is not only foreign to traditional thought and wisdom but be would alien to a Mosotho person familiar with the ethical imperatives of *botho*. Thus, it is arguable if, even what it denotes, is congruent with traditional African moral thought, which is often concerned with being a good person. It would therefore be interesting to understand find what evidence if any, is there within African culture to support this interpretation or something like it that is associated with *botho*.

It will be realised that although as a moral concept *botho* has been the subject of much research (Letseka 2013<sub>A</sub>: 337, Mboti 2015:127) theorising of this concept has remained firm tied to various formulations of AC and its interpretations of MKKB. So, despite the huge body of work on *botho* the settled definition of choice always boils down to this account and does not seem to go beyond the conventional parameters set around "*motho ke motho ka batho.*" Along with this one also sees in the discourse an appeal to other communally oriented

statements or variations of other similar phrases like “I am because we are” (Mboti 2015: 125), as further evidence of the validity of AC-MKKB definition of *botho*.

This exceptionalism and over-reliance on MKKB are puzzling considering the renewed and deeper understanding and awareness of the African culture and the vast collection of proverbs and adages with similar meaning to MKKB. This rich treasure embedded in African oral literature and African indigenous knowledge and wisdom offers *botho* scholars a rich deposit of sources and material with which to articulate and depict the depth of insights and truths contained in *botho*. Yet ethical reflection on this concept is still stubbornly wedded to this doubtful account.

A closer analysis of the usage of the term *botho* in Sesotho culture and other cultures of communities in Southern African however show that AC is recent development, which the context of South Africa, its appearance can be traced to the period between 1993 and 1995. According to Gade (2011: 313) it is around this time that various scholars begin to all link *botho* explicitly with MKKB and various versions its English translation. In other words, within a just a few years, MKKB became the dominant explanation offered to describe *botho*. As a result of this, we see a rapid development in the discourse where the way *botho* is deployed i.e., as a tool for advancing reconciliation (van Binsbergen 2001: 64) becomes inseparable with a particular interpretation of MKKB, with an important new emphasis on harmonious relationships between people and sharing of common humanity as key to its definition. We can thus see here how the relational communitarian leanings of MKKB become the central thrust of AC from here onwards. Thus, we find during this period an articulation of *botho*, which is increasingly relational in character and tone. Explaining this development in South Africa van Niekerk (2013: 3) says the rich set of connotations associated with *botho*,

“came to prominence in the post-apartheid moment..[where] *ubuntu* emerged as an increasingly common politicised term associated with the multi-racial “nation-building” project<sup>16</sup> in South Africa, gaining both attention and (to some extent) elaboration in a multi-cultural context beyond its cultural origins”.

The reference to ‘cultural origins’ of *botho* and its elaboration to support nation building agenda made here is revealing. This further supports the view that the *botho*-MKKB connection may be explained in terms of the authorial ideology of early proponents of *botho* in South Africa, many of whom would have been supporters of the nation building and reconciliation agenda of their time. Either way what is clear is that, not only is the prevailing understanding that

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<sup>16</sup> The idea of a nation building project appears to be the most plausible explanation behind two key developments around *botho* which are characteristic of the conventional account and discourse particularly as it unfolded in South Africa. First it would seem to offer an explanation of (a) how and why a connection between the proverb *motho ke motho ka batho* and *botho* became necessary (Gade 2011) and (b) why a particular rendering of *botho* denoting humanity as opposed to moral quality of a person for example became the preferred formulation and predominant one with a strong emphasis on “common humanity”. This background makes intelligible a view expressed by Praeg in Molefe (2014:158) that talk of *botho* is never just a conceptual issue but also a way of conducting politics.

MKKB *de facto* is the encapsulation of *botho* reinforced and popularised, it now becomes the standard description of *botho* in the discourse. This results in MKKB getting a new star status among African proverbs, a status which in Sesotho speaking culture it does not have. In the literature, AC is still the most dominant account and is regarded as the quintessential formulation of *botho* and among its most cited descriptions in the literature include Metz's (2007) definition and that of that of Tutu in (Mboti 2015: 127).

Among leading academics none is as significant for popularisation of AC as Shutte, who has written extensively on the subject. According to Shutte, "the key insight that is the foundation of ethics of" *botho* is the idea that "persons depend on persons to be persons" (Shutte 2001: 25). Shutte takes this to be an expression of traditional African thinking about humanity and argues that this is the heart of the African idea of community and claims this is the idea that is summed up by MKKB<sup>17</sup>. It is not hard to see why the roots of AC can be attributed to Shuttle to his first book *Philosophy for Africa Gade* (2011: 313-4). According to Gade the publication of this book is

"an important part of the reason for why ubuntu came to be identified as something, which relates to the proverb 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu. ... and [it] was the first book in English to explore the identity belief in the proverb" (Ibid.).

From this point onwards, a formulation that had been prevalent in the public discourse now becomes part of mainstream intellectual discourse and would dominate the literature on *botho* in African ethics ever since. Thus, critics and adherents of *botho* alike would forever now base their arguments and theories on the *botho*-MKKB connection. This became the standard and accepted point of departure from with we see scholars repeating this connection (Mabovula 2011: 40, Munyaka and Motlhabi 2009: 65).

It is therefore not an overstatement to say that Shutte's book did not only contribute in popularising MKKB as the definition of *botho*, it became instrumental in reinforcing this definition within the academia. It can therefore be argued that the formulation of *botho* in which MKKB becomes the formal definition of this concept and the two become almost inseparable was thus formally set up from this point onwards. *Philosophy for Africa* and the articulation of *botho* the book promotes has since been widely quoted in the literature as an authoritative definition of *botho* (Gade 2011: 313-315). This may explain in part why since then MKKB has remained the only proverb used with such consistency and prominence in discussions about *botho*. This formulation has had a huge influence on the current discourse and understanding of *botho*, and together with Shutte's synthesis have become the standard rendition of what *botho* means in the literature. Besides Shutte another important figure and a leading scholar

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<sup>17</sup> The use of the word "humanity" here to describe an African idea appears to be Shutte's reading into African moral ideas, a universalist view because humanity (Shutte 2001: 9) is an abstract universal concept in orientation as it refers to humankind universally (Dolamo 2013: 2). It is arguable that such a reading is congruent with traditional thought, and the "context-sensitive universalism" Bujo (2001: 8) characteristic of morality in African culture.

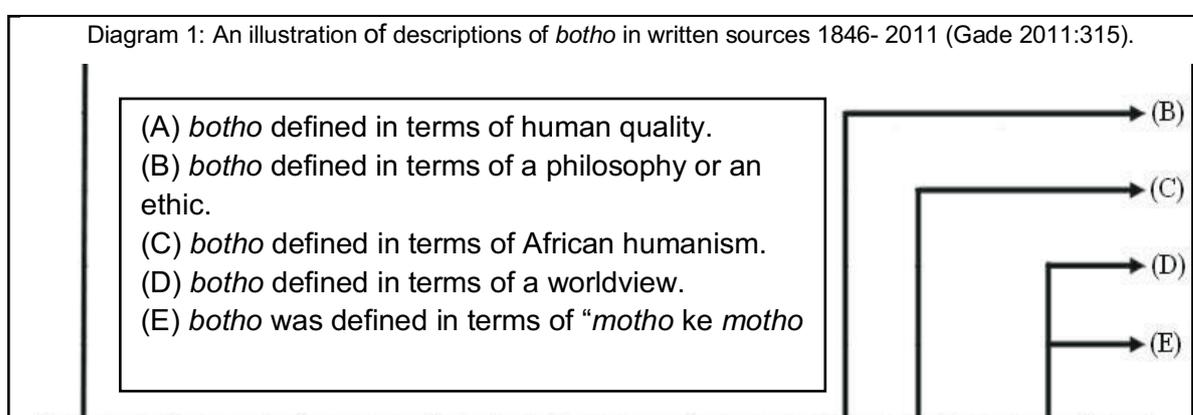
of *botho* whose work has played a huge role in the emergence and dominance of AC account and significantly shaped the direction and tone of current *botho* discourse is Thaddeus Metz. Metz's (2007) pioneering work exploring a wide range of areas of interest around *botho*; including *botho* as an African moral theory or moral status (2011), as a philosophy of social protection (2016), and other more recent works of his not mentioned here, can thus be regarded as the grounding that set the tone of the current vibrancy of debates around *botho*. Evidence of Metz's prolific and unparalleled work on the ethics of *botho*, includes the wide range of response to his works in the literature which includes Ramose (2007), Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013), Koenane and Olatunji (2017), van Niekerk 2013), just to mention a few. Metz's contribution is one that many friends of *botho* welcome and take as challenge. Of the current scholars of *botho*, Metz and Shutte are regarded as among the leading exponents of AC account of *botho*.

As we intimated although AC's communal formulation of *botho* is the most prevalent account of *botho* currently found in the literature, there is another formulation of *botho*, that express the personal agent centre articulation of its imperative, which are explained in terms of admirable character of the person. This begins of this account which equally justifiable, are discussed in the section below

### 3.4 Definitions of *Botho* Foreshadowing Current Descriptions of *Botho*

The ongoing *botho* discourse together with the volume of material being produced on *botho* means that often our attention is focused only on the current debates. This means often we do not take time to step back from the heat of the debates, to gain a broader and better perspective. It is partly this constant production of new material on the subject that there has not been an adequate systematic historical reflection on the meaning of *botho*, including as its articulation as ethic of virtue in the case of Sesotho speaking culture. Such a distant perspective enables analysis of the historical usage of the term and any changes and evolution in meaning, understanding and interpretation to be seen. In turn this makes for a better appraisal of current discourse and its interpretation of the concept where its contemporary meanings and understanding can be put side by side and analysed with other meanings of the concept and a better understanding of current uses is made.

One of the scholars, who has applied this type of approach to *botho* is Gade (2011, 2013) (see diagram 1).



Gade's analysis (2011: 316-318) categorises common ways in which *botho* is described in the literature tracing the historical usage of the term from 1846 to the present. According to this study prior to the 90s *botho* is understood as the moral quality of a person. But after this period we begin to see a noticeable shift where *botho* is progressively connected to other concepts foreshadowing the current dominant views including descriptions of *botho* as a philosophy, an ethic, African humanism and as worldview (Gade 2011: 303). The current predominant account of *botho* grounded on MKKB must therefore be seen as part of this evolutionary process in the meaning of *botho*. A closer look of the main formulations of *botho* from Gade's study, gives us two main categories. On the one hand, there is the older idea in which *botho* is characterized as 'moral quality of a person'. Reiterating this historical usage Gade (201: 316) states that the term "appears to, almost exclusively, refer to a human quality in texts published prior to 1980 [and] up to the present day, a number of authors have continued to identify ubuntu as a human quality". On the other hand, there is more recent formulations defining *botho* in terms of a phenomenon with emphasis on interconnectedness of persons" (Ibid: 488-498). Describing this, van Niekerk (2013: 2) points out that it is however peppered with "question begging terms such as African worldview, *botho* as a philosophy, or as humanism or even as a value system".

These two basic approaches, which will be referred to as quality and phenomenon accounts respectively form the background forming the core of the basic assumptions underlying and underpinning current debates. As such they are useful in making intelligible the multiplicity of formulations and descriptions of *botho* that we find in the literature. They are also useful as tools for analysis to gain a better insight into the variety of positions and divergence of views articulated by different scholars in current *botho* discourse. This study has enabled the identification common descriptions of *botho* and of key changes in the usage and interpretation of the concept including within current *botho* discourse, in the epoch before current debates. We can see what ideas are shared in the arguments and can find the emerging pattern of main ideas and views associated with *botho* in the discourse. This, in turn, supplies a more holistic insight into the nature of *botho* and what it means, unlike current conflicting arguments and counter arguments (Metz. 2014, Koenane and & Olatunji 2017, Ramose 2007).

The first observation about the importance of Gade's analysis to current discourse is that it has already shown how lack of consensus and common definition of *botho* in current discourse

means this is a recent development. This is because Gade's analysis shows that *botho* was not always understood in such a variety of ways as we are seeing today (Gade 2013: 488). This raises interesting questions for current discourse including what is the reason for difference in terms of consensus, between the use and meaning of this concept now post 1980s and its usage prior to this? The second observation is that general agreement seen prior to the 1980s about *botho*. This centred around descriptions of *botho* where it refers to certain human or the moral qualities of a person (Gade 2013: 488, Gade 2011: 308). Gade's study further highlights the problems with the ahistorical approach to the analysis of this concept in current *botho* scholarship. This in turn undermines particularity and unique settings in which *botho* as a moral ideal derives and thrived<sup>18</sup>. These local and contextual nuances of meaning and application of *botho*, are not sociologically and ethically incidentals, that can simply be discard to the periphery as irrelevant, in pursuit of a pure ethic of *botho* whose key features are shrouded in universal notions of common and shared "humanity." As a result of this approach, the Zulu people's story of "*ubuntu*" and understanding as told through their moral tradition is treated as no different from King Moshoeshoe of Lesotho and his people and their experience of what is *botho*, as narrated in their grant narrative as Basotho people as handed down in their moral traditional from generation to generation.

In the case of Sesotho speaking cultures, that story revolves around the idea of *botho* as essentially a statement about the moral character of a person. This understanding as we have seen, is in line with the older meaning found between 1846 and 1980 where *botho* exclusively described the moral quality of a person. This understanding is confirmed in Setiloane (1978:36), who points out that when we speak of *botho*, we also must understand that it, *ubuntu* (Zulu), *botho* (Sotho-Tswana) or *ubuntungushi* (Bemba) is a concept much deeper than the European word "person" or "personality" as it means "the very essence of being, the equivalent of "the soul" in Western Christian language". Here one can see from one of the earlier uses how this description of the concept already differs with recent accounts, which defines *botho* in terms of imputed interpretations of MKKB to this concept.

#### **3.4.1 Definitions and Descriptions of *Botho* as a Phenomenon**

A quick survey of the literature shows that the differing formulations and views about *botho* in the current discourse can be grouped under the phenomenon account and as such this feature prominently literature<sup>19</sup>. It features typically in the tendency where statements are made about

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<sup>18</sup> Van Nierkerk (2013: x) recognised this by pointing out the importance of how fluency in the ingenious languages associated with *botho*, authentic membership in a culture whose traditions espouse *botho* and personal experience of the authentic cultural milieu theorists in articulating *botho*, are all undeniably asset in current *botho* discourses.

<sup>19</sup> For an overview of various descriptions of *botho* that fall within this domain see Hailey 2008.

*botho* e.g. as a philosophy<sup>20</sup>, worldview or humanism (Kamwangamalu 2007: 26, Khoza 1994, Broodryk 2006:17) without any explanation of what is meant (Gade 2011: 317). If we take philosophy for instance, it is often not clear in what way *botho* can be regarded in that context as such a philosophy and what type of philosophy is being envisioned (Gade 2013: 488 and 492). The kind of explanation one would expect we see for example with Metz's (2016:3) "Philosophies of social protection". Here Metz explains that the analysis is of *botho* as a philosophy of social protection and goes to explain this. An assertion is not simply made without justification or explanation. Another term used in a similar manner is humanism (Khoza 1994) or humanity. Like other similar terms, it too is just said as a description of *botho* without further elaboration (Kamwangamalu 2007: 26, Broodryk 2006: 21). The same tendency can be seen with worldview. Here *botho* is described as a comprehensive ancient African worldview based on intense values of humanness (Broodryk 2006: 22-33). Shutte (2001: 21) also refers to worldview in explaining *botho* saying that "to get inside the idea of [*botho*], one must understand the world-view and the view of the person in which [*botho*] has its roots". However, Shutte's most notable description of choice for *botho* is in terms of it as an ethics (2001; 51). Together with the other scholars including Mkhize (2008) and Metz (2007) fall into that growing school of thought that defines *botho* as an ethic.

What we are seeing here is that the hegemony of the conventional account has defined *botho* in a way that a choice of certain key terms e.g. philosophy, worldview and humanism or humanity appear as preferred descriptions of choice for *botho*. Like the application of MKKB in the discourse, these terms enjoy a star status position, where they the established conventional definitions of *botho*. These different formulations are not to be regarded as separate and independent accounts of *botho* as often they are interlinked and imply one another.

For the purposes of this section what binds these together is that they do not defined *botho* as a description of the moral quality of a person (*motho*) and the moral character of persons (*batho*), which is the focus of the next section that I now turn to.

### **3.4.2 Descriptions of *Botho* in Terms of Admirable Character**

In the earlier section, we have intimated that the current dominant descriptions of *botho* are a recent development. We implied that this is not how historically *botho* is understood and in turn articulated. This peculiarity i.e., between the older understanding and usage of the term

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<sup>20</sup> van Binsbergen (2001: 69) is one of the scholars highly critical of this formulation questioning its legitimacy by arguing that what is presented "as the Southern African indigenous philosophy of [*botho*] amounts to a rendering ..... of ideas that are certainly implied in Southern African village practices and ideas but that exist there under different, much more diffuse and situationally varying, linguistic formats". He thus concludes that *botho* in the "sense of the conceptual complex which modern exponents of philosophy claim to exist around that term, is at best a transformative rendering, in a globally mediated, analytical language, of vernacular practices and concepts which are very far from having a one-to-one linguistic correspondence with the phraseology of philosophy".

and its newer more recent interpretations is reflected in how differently *botho* is understood in Sesotho speaking culture compared to the current dominant understanding of the concept in the discourse. The Sesotho-Tswana concept “*botho*,” has tended to keep the older more traditional understanding of this concept i.e., as a moral quality of the person (Mphetolang 2009:12). By contrast, its equivalent terms e.g. *ubuntu* in other Nguni languages in South Africa and parts of Zimbabwe have progressively incorporated much more and readily many of the recent and newer definitions.

Explaining this difference Mphetolang (2009: 12) argues that unlike *botho*, the term *ubuntu* has “been turned more into a philosophy” and as a result of this it has, hence losing its very core as a way of life and not a worldview”. Gaie (2002: 277) imply that the terms are not *the same* saying that *botho* “is somehow similar” or that it seems “to reflect” *Ubuntu*. It therefore seems that even though the two terms are now widely regarded as having the same meaning in the literature, some scholars still draw a distinction. In Sesotho speaking cultures, *botho* is still predominantly understood as a description of moral character of *motho*. As we have seen this formulation has been lost in the more modern interpretations of *botho* now prevalent in the current discourse. This entry underscores this older understanding of *botho* as moral quality of person arguing that this is a more authentic understanding and application of this concept and it’s implied in the opposite idea of *bophoofolo* (Gade 2013: 488, Mphetolang 2009: 13).

Although this tradition is forgotten, it is certainly not dead as fragments of this tradition can still be found in many ways in contemporary moral discourse and ethical reflection. For example, Shutte in his explanation of *botho* in terms of humanity in Gade (2011: 314), states that *botho* must be “understood as a moral notion referring to overall quality of *character*, or attitude or behaviour or way of life”. Likewise, Broodryk (2006: 23) highlights the significance of character to who we are as moral agents, saying that while our character and everything that we are as agents is determined and influenced by our worldview, in turn our characters as moral agents is indicative of the worldview we subscribe to. So here we have instances where the relevance and significance of character as moral quality of person is underscored as not only significant but essential to an understanding of what it means to have *botho*, and yet this idea is not developed any further. These examples I will argue are representative of the tendency of current *botho* discourse *vis-à-vis* *botho* as a description of the moral quality of a person. That tendency often manifests itself where scholars show no interest in the glaring necessity for an understanding of *botho* that is grounded on the primacy of character. This is possible due to the influence of prevailing dominant account of *botho*, itself heavily influence by modern Western ethics, which as pointed in chapter two has relegated character to the periphery of ethical discourse. Another manifestation of this tendency is found in current discussions about *botho* and personhood, where reference to the inculcation of “*makhabane*” i.e., moral virtues

(Letseka 2013<sub>A</sub>: 340) is often at the centre. As Letseka correctly points out in Sesotho '*makhabane*' denotes, morally admirable inner moral qualities of a person and these are qualities of character. And yet here too this dimension is only mentioned in passing and skipped over as though it is not the heart of the discourse on the nature and meaning of *botho*. Nowhere in the current discourse does this older tradition that describe *botho* in terms of moral character confront current discourse with such uncompromising force as in the classic Sesotho moral statement about personhood i.e., what it means to be a *motho* (person) in namely the statement "*ha se motho*" (ea nang le *botho*) - is not a person (who has *botho*) (Munyaka and Motlhabi 2009:71) and the corresponding moral term '*bophoofolo*' (beastly) as found in the moral language of Basotho. The discombobulating confusion of the unintelligibility of this statement to modern discourse, and the inability to grasp its function has given rise to all sorts of arguments in the literature, about what this phrase means, including whether both are a denial of one's humanity and humanness or not? As it will become evident this moral term and this statement have less to do with articulating an account about humanity and humanness of individuals, and more to do with a moral statement and assessment of a person's lack of qualities of *botho* which enable one to attain moral personhood, i.e., *botho* (Molefe 2017<sub>A</sub>, cf. Menkiti 2004). I will argue that here we find in the most concise way an explicit articulation of traditional formulation of *botho* as the moral quality of a person, expressed in terms of a shortcoming or failings. It is a judgement of *motho* focusing on character i.e., as not having the required *makhabane* (virtues) or admirable qualities of character befitting one who is a *motho* - person. And yet this important dimension and understanding of *botho*, is yet to find much support in the current *botho* discourse and is still largely ignored.

But more importantly for the current *botho* discourse this rendering of *botho* is the more authentic formulation to how the concept was understood and applied for decades in Southern Africa. As Gade's points out this interpretation was the most prevalent understanding of *botho* traceable to the early 1800s where *botho* is something describing moral quality of the person and their character (2011: 308, 2013: 488) and this is always linked of personhood. What this shows is that as a moral statement about the moral character of a person, *botho* always implies the potential for failure to live up to dictates of *botho*. That means along with virtues, *botho* must be understood in terms of the vices which are primarily defined in terms of total failure to live up to the expected standards of *botho*. In addition, *botho* is always conceived in terms of becoming *motho* (person) or failure to progress or make enough progress towards this goal. In Sesotho speaking culture this failure is summed in the expression "*ha se motho*" (he or she is not a person) (Mphetlang 2009: 18, Munyaka and Motlhabi 2009: 71) and the significance of this to the account of *botho* I am endorsing here we have already outlined.

Now that we have looked at the debates and prevailing approaches to *botho* in terms of common descriptions and interpretation, we are in position to critically analyse these, with reference to the Afro-communitarian (AC) formulation of *botho*, which is still the most dominant articulation of *botho* in the literature.

### **3.5 Critique and Appraisal of Current Interpretations and Ideas About *Botho***

There are many ways in which the current *botho* discourse can be appraised, one of which is by recognising and acknowledging the focus of current discourse on the subject matter at hand. The other is the context, specifically, the role of key participants in the discourse and their authorial ideologies. In other words, as well as the message, the personality of the messenger and their intentions are relevant to the discourse. It is therefore important that as well as analysing what the revival of values of *botho* for contemporary contexts including in Southern African entails, we pay attention to, and be mindful of the significance of the context in which this exercise is taking place. In the context of current *botho* discourse, this is particularly pertinent due to the impact of this on the tone and character of the conversation. One of the noticeable aspects of this context is the role and influence the authoritative voices and opinion shapers leading the direction of *botho* industry.

Describing these key players van Binsbergen (2001: 70) says they are largely “self-proclaimed experts on” *botho*, and a “globally informed” elite group of “Southern African” intellectuals, with little or no connection in terms of “place and social practice” with “the emic expressions” of *botho* “at the village level which they seek to capture”. To this can be added Gade’s (2012: 486) telling observation about the under representation of African voices at the table of this discourse and over representation of scholars “who are not of African descent.” In view of this and to fully appreciate and understand the nature of the current discourse it is therefore important to recognise the underlying authorial ideologies of many of these key participants. This is because the discourse is not immune to the ideologically held views and assumptions of its key players, in this case leading exponents of *botho*. First, as we have noted in Southern Africa there is this peculiar and discomfoting reality that the academic discussion on *botho* is still largely dominated by views and voices of non-Africans. This is not to say these views have no place nor contribution to make. But it is an acknowledgement that such views will always lack that insight and knowledge, that comes with native knowledge of one who belongs to a culture whose moral traditions are the proper setting and context in which *botho* finds its definition and moral force (Letseka 2013<sub>A</sub>: 338; van Niekerk 2013: x). This is because *botho* is part of indigenous African knowledge system and the embeddedness nature of this knowledge means the “local specialist knowledge in the day to day physical and social environment of the” African “community” (van Binsbergen 2001: 69) is crucial to unpacking its insights as reflected in the ethical ideal of *botho*. Second, it is important to recognize the

context within which *botho* “became an object of particular interest” in different part of Southern Africa. In Zimbabwe and South Africa for example this was “the political periods of transition from white minority rule to black African majority rule (Gade 2011: 303, van Niekerk 2013: 3; van Binsbergen 2001: 53). Thus, as van Binsbergen rightly points out, *botho* “has been explored as a workable philosophical concept in the context of majority rule in South Africa and Zimbabwe. This may help to explain and understand the observation made by Kamwangamalu (2007: 35) that

“South Africa is perhaps the only country in Africa where [*botho*] is so much talked about.....In other African countries, however, [*botho*] is the norm, it is felt, it is practiced and reflected in the daily behaviour of the members of a community”.

In the light of this, it is important to understand the social environment and the role this had on key players, because it is not inconceivable that the imperatives of nation-building prevailing in society would not have influenced their thinking as well and as such this became one of key drivers of influence on the discourse and *botho* discourse led the way. It must also be asked how much is the neglect of the understanding of *botho* in terms of the moral quality of a person and character, a consequence of the influence of the ideological considerations of nation-building and reconciliation espoused by leading *botho* scholars? This is even more so when one considers arguments made in the discourse in which some have insisted that talk of *botho* is always political and that *botho* discourse is always deeply embroiled in political considerations. As Praeg in Molefe (2014: 158) explains *botho* is never simply an intellectual investigation limited to the conceptual level but is also “a political act and” the responsibility of scholars of *botho* is “in recognizing this priority of the political”. In other words, to what extent can the predominant over emphasis of communitarian relational formulation of *botho*, be attributable to the authorial ideology of *botho* scholars. In the explanation of the significance of the strong interdependency formulation of *botho* in South Africa, Oduor (2014: 86) argues the same point that the currency of *Ubuntu* in public discourse is connected to the loss of ideological momentum by other ideological alternatives to capitalism. According to Oduor there is nothing unique about *ubuntu* because it is simply an expression of an altruistic position in response to the tension, found in any modern society, between altruism and individualism.” The current Afro-communitarian reading of *botho* is therefore of particular interest in this regard. This is because when we look at Sesotho speaking cultures, AC has not found traction in the public discourse, unlike in South Africa and Zimbabwe. It suggests there is no *prima facie* evidence of a connection between the socio-political influence at play in the societies and the emergence and prominence of AC (Gade (2011, 2012). In these societies, this concept is still understood as a description of moral character of a person. This can be seen in the moral language of Basotho where moral behavior is described in terms of whether or

not one has a good character, using words like '*mekhoa*', '*lokileng*' or '*boitsóaro*', all of which denote good character or good behavior" (Gyekye 2011: par.10).

It would therefore appear that the hegemony the AC, as found in the present, primarily South African *botho* industry, reflects the authorial ideology of scholars of *botho* and the socio-political considerations of nation-building and reconciliation (Matolino and Kwindiwi 2013: 199). This, in turn, has led to the emphasis in current *botho* discourse on the theme of 'common humanity' and 'harmonious relationship. It may also explain lack of interest on the more personal dimensions of *botho* in terms of a character-centric account of *botho*. In so doing AC has thus unwittingly undervalued the personal dimensions of *botho*, whose tangible primary location is the individual *motho*, specifically the moral character of the individual person i.e., *motho*. In other, words we cannot understand the communal and relational imperatives of *botho* without first articulating its personal imperatives, in terms of the question "what is a *motho*" and its relationship to *botho*. The latter is the essential quality qualifying the former as satisfying the expected requirement for personhood. But at the same time, the possession and experience of *botho* in a person who has it has a communal effect. It radiates outwards in a complex network of social relationship from the most intimate at the level of family and relatives (*lelapa/leloko*), to the village (*motse*) or community one belongs to and others not belonging to one's own community such as "*baeti*" travelers or visitors and even "strangers" are incorporated.

### 3.5.1 Afro-Communitarianism and its Definition of *Botho*

We have already touched on aspects of the communitarian or relational account of *botho* earlier. Here I will only highlight some of its major features as articulated by its proponents in the literature using an ordinary understanding of ethics and how it is defined using this as an entry point. According to Gyekye (2011: par. 1) the ethics of a society or the norms and *standards of conduct* of society are

"embedded in the ideas and beliefs about what is right or wrong, what is a good or bad character; it is also embedded in the conceptions of satisfactory social relations and attitudes held by the members of the society; it is embedded, furthermore, in the forms or patterns of behaviour that are considered by the members of the society to bring about social harmony and cooperative living" .

The current *botho* discourse has tended to focus exclusively on the communal relations and social harmony part. This view is supported by the over reliance to interpret *botho* in terms of the proverb MKKB. In turn, this proverb has a privileged status where it is regarded as the quintessential expression of African communalism (Metz 2012). Here MKKB is used as a catch-all distillation of *botho*, leading to established uniformity now common in the literature (Mboti 2015: 126). As explained earlier, Shutte is the first scholar to have used and

popularised MKKB in connection with *botho*. As Gade (2011: 314) explains it is in the new foreword to the American edition of the book *Philosophy for Africa*, that Shutte introducing the book as about *botho*, says central to the book

“is the conception of humanity embodied in the traditional African proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through persons). This understanding of human nature has its counterpart in the moral sphere in the idea of *ubuntu*. In English, this is equivalent to humanity, understood as a moral notion referring to the general quality of character, or attitude or behaviour or way of life.”

Shutte’s explanation here is both interesting and intriguing. In one paragraph he manages to make but two significant conceptual leaps of thought. The first involves connecting “humanity” a highly abstract and universal concept to the meaning of MKKB transforming this proverb into an African philosophical statement about humanity. This is not the traditional interpretation of this proverb. The message of MKKB and similar proverbs is mutual care and sharing and communal solidarity (Ramose 2009: 312). The problem with interpreting this proverb as a statement about humanity is that the term is extremely wide and universal in orientation. By contrast, I will argue that while the truths claim and experience of MKKB can find resonance in other moral terrains of other cultures, its primary context as found in its cultural origins and social setting in Sesotho culture, is the local and concrete, not the universal and abstract. The second leap follows from the first. Having created this invention Shutte now link this to *botho*. The results an interpretation of *botho* that is firmly grounded in MKKB along with its implied references to “humanity” and in turn other related terms e.g., humanness or humaneness. But as can be seen, the meaning of these ideas i.e., humanity, MKKB, and *botho* have no linear relationship. These technical terms and definitions i.e., humanity as an expression of universality of our humanness, that have now been added here, stands in sharp contrast to ordinary usage of MKKB and *botho* “as a matter of course, and accepted parlance, in traditional Sesotho culture. What is important here is that Shutte’s explanation follows a familiar pattern observable in the literature. In most cases, without justification, a set of connotations is simply associated with *botho*, and then scholars “proceed to forward MKKB stating that this as *an* encapsulation of *botho*” (van Niekerk 2013: 4). This is the case here with Shutte and the use of MKKB.

The significance of Shutte’s synthesis to current *botho* discourse must not be underestimated because it is behind the influence and popularisation of MKKB as a way of defining *botho* that we see in South Africa from around 1995. Thus, we see that from around this time “a preferential consensus of sorts grew and accreted around the” appeal to MKKB to describe *botho* (Mboti 2015: 126). This has since become characteristic way to defined *botho* in the discourse and this definition is now the standard Afro-communitarian account *botho* “irrespective of whether” one defines *botho* as “a human quality, African humanism, a philosophy, an ethic, or a worldview” (Gade 2011: 303). So, we find Metz (2007: 323) relying

on this same understanding saying that the central idea implied in *botho* i.e., “that one’s identity as a human being” depends on a community often figures into this proverb. This is no better expressed anywhere than in the statement attributed to Tutu in van Niekerk (2013: 1) in which he says *botho* again is described as “the very essence of being human.... It also means my humanity ....is inextricably bound up, in theirs”. According to this, *botho* is associated with being generous, hospitable, friendly, and compassionate. The significance of this is that it reinforces the notion of shared and common humanity (Mboti 2015: 127) to *botho*-MKKB account. Among the proponents of AC, Metz and Gaie (2010: 275) further argue that MKKB is “a good starting point for understanding sub-Saharan morality” because the maxim carries important normative connotations, namely it requires of the moral agent i.e., “one’s ultimate goal” to be become a full person, a real self or a genuine human being. This view is underscored by Shutte (2001: 30) who argues that “the goal of morality” according to *botho* ethics “is fullness of humanity” or personal fulfilment without selfishness. Describing this Bujo (2001; 87) points out that the modern tendency is to define a person in terms of self-realisation as an ontological act.

So, from this perspective, the precepts of *botho* enjoin one to moral growth in terms of developing one’s real or true self by relating to “others in a positive way.” One becomes a person solely ‘through other persons,’ which means that one cannot realise one’s *true self* in opposition to others or even in isolation from them (Metz and Gaie 2010: 275). The significance of the vocabulary of AC account here is revealing. This includes terms such as ‘fuller’ and ‘fullness’ of ‘humanity’<sup>21</sup>, ‘real self’, ‘full person’, ‘inextricably caught up’, ‘proper self-assurance’, ‘human nature’ and ‘humanity’ in connection with MKKB. Anecdotal observation suggests this is an introduction of an understanding that is not supported by evidence from the cultures from which the proverb derives, more specifically Sesotho culture. This is because I will argue these concepts are not only viewed differently in diverse cultures and are not a reflection of how traditional moral thought of Basotho describes human experience. Analysis of MKKB’s traditional setting and its usage among Basotho shows that it reflects a doctrine whose primary interest and purpose is promotion of communal solidarity, mutual care and sharing, and the prioritisation of the welfare of all. The social function of this proverb thus is an as exhortation in concrete settings for practical mutual solidarity with other members of the community. It should thus not be read as a statement about personhood or personal moral growth as such, in the same way as “*ha se motho*” for instance. Just as much as other many other proverbs encouraging these values of solidarity, mutual aid and care cannot be interpreted as primarily statement about personhood instead of expressing mutual care and communal solidarity (Ramose 2009: 312). Moreover, this constellation of technical

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<sup>21</sup> This is confirmed by Broodryk (2006: 20) who notes that these sort of concepts like humanness are viewed differently by different cultures.

terms connected to this proverb is philosophised with theorisations denoting characteristically abstract ideas with strong universal connotations. This too is inconsistent with traditional Basotho moral thought, which is context sensitive, local, and in orientation i.e., allows principles to take validity instances unlike “covering-law universalism” (Bujo 2001: 8,31). This also appears worryingly to be yet another symptom of an application of Western ideas and ideal on African concepts and thought.

From the brief outline of Afro-communitarian account given here two observations can be made. First, that much of what constitutes AC’s account of *botho*, cannot be separated from the proverb *motho ke motho ka batho* (MKKB) and the corresponding self-realisation interpretations of the aphorism. Second, that this is a selective, unjustifiable privileged position and star status given to this proverb. This is problematic because it gives MKKB a false independence from the rest of Basotho indigenous knowledge of which MKKB is part of together with other Sesotho narratives. This amounts to an abstraction of the proverb out of its natural context. To the first of these observations i.e., self-realisation I turn to next while the second observation about the privileged reading and exceptionalism<sup>22</sup> of this proverb will be dealt in the later sections.

### 3.5.2 Overemphasis of Self-realisation and relational Dimension of *Botho*

In chapter one we pointed out the tendency of AC to overemphasise the relational communal dimensions of *botho* together with an articulation and understanding of *motho ke motho ka batho*. This is best summed up by (Metz 2012:104) who says that MKKB as the articulation of *botho* entails

“that one should develop into a real person, or live a genuinely human way of life, [and that this is] something that one does just insofar as one prize friendly relationships, ones in which one shares a way of life with others and cares for their quality of life”.

According to this sub-Saharan morality is thus describe as a ‘self-realisation’ or ‘perfectionist’ ethic, where the moral agent’s ultimate goal is to become a full person, a *real self*, or a genuine human being (Metz and Gaie 2010: 274). We find the same idea linking self-realisation with communal participation and valuing of relationship by the moral agent in Bell and Metz (2012: 83) who argue that “traditionally speaking, adherents to Ubuntu have thought of self-realization being a function of communal relationships with human beings and also “spiritual” ones such”. What we see here is how the notion of self-realisation evolves into becoming part of the now

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<sup>22</sup> I used the term to refer to the tendency in the literature where *motho ke motho ka batho* is singled out and treated as unique, or exceptional to other similar African proverbs, where an impression is made that this proverb falls outside the ambit of the normal rules of interpretation and use that applies to other proverbs and narratives.

accepted and established description of *botho* in the current discourse and in African ethics in general (Metz 2007: 331, van Niekerk 2007: 365).

The problem with this is the description of community participation and the motivation for it in terms of self-realisation described in terms of becoming one's 'real self.' From the perspective of Sesotho culture such terminology as that found here introduces an individualistic element to the notion of moral development by *motho*, inconsistent with the understanding traditional moral understanding of Basotho. This is because in terms of traditional moral thought of Basotho, personhood or 'becoming a person which is what *botho* and the communal participation imply, is not described in terms of "self-realisation." Rather in the Sesotho culture, as in other African cultures, personhood is understood "as a process of coming into existence in the reciprocal relatedness of individual and community" through "common action" i.e., fulfilment of social roles which is the anchor that keeps one "from becoming an unfettered ego"<sup>23</sup> (Bujo 2001: 87). A formulation of *botho* therefore that defines *motho* in terms of self-realisation through undefined relationships as the heart of African ethics as AC does, conjures notions of an individualistic unencumbered emotivist self (MacIntyre 1981: 31) foreign to African culture. The danger therefore of articulating the moral ideal implied in *botho* and MKKB as one of the many ways to elucidate what is *botho* in terms of a 'self-realisation' even if qualified as "through communal relationships,' is problematic. This is because it could be argued that one could still enter in communal relationships with others and still be proven that one is not adhering to imperatives of *botho*. This could arise where for instance individual choice is the sole criterion and basis for the establishment of such relationships (MacIntyre 1981: 32, 39). This is vastly different from the moral value of relationships that *botho* presuppose which are relationship not just based on choice but primarily based our social identity as moral agents.

But more significantly this runs the risk of presenting a version of the self that conflicts with African communal sensibilities. From the perspective of Sesotho culture this is also foreign to traditional moral thought. This is because a more accurate way of understanding the self, presupposed by *botho* is "a self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning from the middle to end" (MacIntyre 1981; 205). This is because an understanding of a concept like *botho*, which is wedded to a concept with strong individualistic connotations like self-realisation, suggests the achievement of personhood through personal striving by the individual. This is neither how *botho* should be interpreted nor the African understanding of personhood and it amounts to a perversion of African moral ideas. As Bujo (2001: 87) explains in African culture a "person is not defined as an ontological act by means of self-realisation, but by "relations" or "a network of relationships that constitute

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<sup>23</sup> In traditional African culture, this is encapsulated in the social roles the moral agent inherits and assumes throughout their life, or their social identity.

his inalienable dignity". Self-realisation as a way of explaining *botho* appears to confirm an observation by Metz (2007: 331-333) of current theoretical interpretations of *botho* in the literature, that they are closer to individualistic Western moral views than they are to communitarian ones, one expects of African culture.

So, from the perspective of Sesotho speaking culture and indeed African ethics, self-realisation is not the best way to formulate our understanding of *botho* because, like its contemporary communitarianism revivalism in the West, it cannot detach itself from its Western origin and its strong individualistic connotations even if it is advanced within the context of a communitarian framework such as African communalism (Bujo 2001: 29, 43). The problem of descriptions of *botho* in terms of such abstract individualistic concept like self-realisation understood as discovering one's true self, is also not ideal as a description of *botho*. Such terms give the impression that the ethical ideal of *botho* is something that the moral agents can achieve individually or by personal achievement (Bujo 2009: 116). This would be against traditional African thought resident in proverbs and other idiomatic expressions. It is in this sense that AC's account of *botho* in terms of self-realisation is rightly being challenged not only as founded on dubious grounds and illogical interpretations of *motho ke motho ka batho* but also as doubtful (Mboti 2015: 125; van Niekerk 2013:3). This begs the question how a discourse on *botho* ended up have as part of its central feature a term with such strong individualistic connotations like self-realisation.

It is not easy to trace the origin of this interpretation it is not implausible. I will argue that anecdotal evidence points to the influence of Western trained *botho* scholars, "read into" traditional African idioms and moral language, abstract Western concepts, and ideas in line with their training and frame of reference. In other words, it is necessary to recognise that understanding of self-realisation" within current *botho* discourse and its plausible superimposition on the interpretation of MKKB, could not have happened without the influence of the personalities or the key actors in the *botho* industry and the educative pressures and their authorial ideologies influencing the intellectual realm and products of scholars of *botho* (Mboti 2015: 126; Selepe 1999: 52). This means recognising that *botho* scholars are not immune from the influence of modern European mode of thinking and liberal ideas from the West. It also means acknowledging that most of these scholars if not all, have been trained in the Western tradition. And we know that in this tradition individual autonomy, freedom, and individual choice especially, in the realm of morality, are emphasised more hence the high value placed on the individual as a moral sovereign. In other words, unlike the African tradition, for the Western tradition

"life is seen in terms of separation, independence, and conflict [of interests]. Separateness is treasured and regarded as intrinsic to the integrity of human life. Only when it is privatised, does human life have identity, autonomy and freedom" (Mafunisa 2008: 113).

In view of this, it would appear that the attraction of a self-realisation reading within *botho* discourse is a lighter version of the Western idea of the autonomy of the individual, something perhaps that some scholars feared, in the case of *botho* ethics, that it would be lost in an ethical framework that is deeply communitarian in character and practise, which is characteristic of moral cultures like that of Basotho. For evidence of this one needs not to go any further than an examination of the state intention and purpose of Shutte, who is one of the few scholars of *botho*, whose authorial ideology<sup>24</sup> is most explicitly stated. In his book, *Ubuntu an ethic for a new South Africa* (2001) he argues that “freedom and community” which are two guiding principles of underpinning “the ethic developed” in his book, both express the ideas of “self-determination” and “dependence on others” respectively, but that neither the “European nor the African” cultures do justice to any in their treatment as mutually exclusive. “I believe, however, that” [these] are not mutually exclusive as they may appear” he writes (Shutte 2001: 11). Here we see the intellectual basis to blend African concepts with European ones which is to infuse the European idea of individual freedom into the African idea of community (Ibid, 10, 51). It can therefore be argued that this twin-interlinked aim is one of the most plausible grounds for the introduction of a self-realisation within *botho* discourse. Elsewhere Shutte makes this mission even clearer saying with reference to a ‘reformulated Aquinas’ understanding of human nature,

“I want to bring out the connection between this conception of human nature and two ideas that are central to traditional African understanding of people. These are the ideas ... of *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* and *seriti*” (2008: 27).

While it is not possible to credit Shutte with sole evolution of self-realisation in current discourse, the significance of the contribution he made in this regard cannot be underestimated. This is because Shutte is recognised as one of the first scholars to seriously engage with *botho* (Metz and Gaie 2010: 275, Gade 2011: 313, 2015: 125).

Irrespective of origins or how it came about, self-realisation interpretation connected to *botho* is problematic. It introduces an individualistic shade of meaning and colouring to African communal concepts that is foreign to *botho* as a moral ideal and the traditional African understanding of *motho ke motho*. It conjures up the notion of individual striving for moral excellence, too close in tone to ideals espoused by liberal individualism, which is the opposite of the African way of life. The conceptual appropriation of self-realisation in *botho* discourse thus introduces a radically different meaning to the MKKB, one which leaves this proverb vulnerable to an individualistic interpretation where the purpose of life, and in turn that which

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<sup>24</sup> It is not a coincidence I will argue that the period that this association between *botho* and this proverb was an important one in the history of South African politics i.e., transition from apartheid when the political pressure and idea for nation building was in vogue. So, it is not surprising that Shutte and others found in this proverb an idea that can be construed with the agenda of nation building and of building relationships across historical divides, hence the emphasis on commonness of “our humanity” in his thesis.

informs ways of conduct for the moral agent, is simplified to an individualistic pursuit of “development and fulfilment” of one’s capabilities to become a real self (Shutte 2001: 13, Metz and Gaie 2010: 275, Metz 2007: 333).

Traditional Sesotho moral thought and understanding of morality, and this includes the interpretation of this proverb as found in Sesotho culture, does not conceptualise moral life in these terms nor does it frame the understanding of what is “*motho*” and how to become *motho* in such terms. For this reason, I will argue that self-realisation as a formulation of *botho*, can be explained as an imported formulation whose necessity is questionable. From the perspective of Sesotho culture and its understanding of *botho* the continued reference to self-realisation in relation to *botho* within *botho* discourse will always remain suspect. No matter how it is dressed up, whether in communitarian dressing and explanations like “self-discovery or finding one’s true self *through* valuing of friendly relationships, as a concept self-realisation will remain foreign to traditional Basotho culture and moral thought from which both *botho* and the proverb MKKB derive. This is because it denotes and conjure uncomfortable individualistic pursuit for moral excellence incompatible with traditional Basotho moral thought and ideal implied in many Sesotho narratives and proverbs.

### 3.6 Redefining Use of Narratives in Current *Botho* Discourse

My argument thus far is that central to the prevailing account of *botho* in the discourse or Afro-communitarian account, is the proverb *motho ke motho ka batho ba bang* (MKKB) where this proverb is regarded as the encapsulation of *botho*. This means that among the African proverbs none has gained more prominence in debates and discourses of *botho* as this proverb and its Zulu variant, “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” (Gade 2013: 492; Metz 2007:323; Munyaka and Motlhabi 2009:63, Shutte 2001). This selective privilege of MKKB along with another popular expression ‘*I am because we are*’ (Ikuenobe 2016: 150) can thus be taken as the hallmarks of AC. What is important to note here is how this proverb is treated as uniquely different from other African proverbs not only in articulating what it means to have *botho* but by implication what it means to be a person. In this view, MKKB is not only the summation of the meaning of *botho* (personhood), but also the quintessential embodiment of African communalism.

One of the peculiarities of this exceptionalism in the usage of MKKB in the current discourse is also how much this proverb is invoked without reference to the normal social context in which proverbs often are encountered. This awareness of the contextual setting of proverbs seems to have been either ignored or discarded as irrelevant in the discourse. But as Derive (2004: 754) explains proverbs like MKKB and similar idiomatic sayings are typically used as part of ordinary everyday parlance, and they are often

“uttered by the elders to the younger group members, who may themselves *reply* with a proverb [and] ...As witnesses and caretakers of the body of accumulated wisdom of the group, proverbs express the norm, the point of view, and the philosophy of the group, taking into account its *tensions* as well, since different proverbs can express contradictory theses” (ibid; 754).

Describing the characteristics of proverbs Casalis (1861: 307) also shares this view pointing out that proverbs are “a spontaneous production of public reason and conscience” found “in daily use”. It follows that their meaning is to be understood as practical, hence they had to be “easy of comprehension” or to understand but at the same time have “undisputed [moral] authority.” One of the characteristics of the Sesotho language from which MKKB originates is its metaphorical composition and style, which applies to proverbs too. In addition to the prevalent use of metaphors, one of the language styles common in Sesotho is the use of different terms to express the same idea or general idea. It is often remarked of Sesotho that it seems to an outsider as superfluous in character because often a Mosotho will repeat what is said by using several different expressions that denote the same meaning, to show that they have understood what has been said (Casalis 1861: 2017). This is not only part of the language requirement to prove eloquence of speech and competency but for those familiar with the language they “are careful to observe the shade of meaning peculiar to each” expression (Ibid. 304).

Reiterating the importance of the context in the usage of proverbs and the “best” way of determining their meaning, Mokitimi (2004: 756) explains that “the meaning of Sesotho proverbs, .... is determined by” their “contextual usage when the speaker is communicating with the audience in a particular situation” as well as “the social factors surrounding” their application”. One of the social factors that applies when proverbs are invoked is that there is always a subtext, implicitly known by all involved. That subtext is that utterance of one proverb implies reference to all the others, either in support of or counter to. Both the speaker and their audience are thus expected to know, based on their native knowledge of the culture and language that in addition to the immediate proverb uttered, an implicit reference is also being made of other similar proverbs within the culture which are regarded as reinforcing the same message (Mokolatsie 1997: 48). As Mokitimi (2004: 756) explains that as vehicles of communication in dialogue proverbs

“entails the different levels at which they are applied in practical situations. The first level occurs when circumstances trigger the use of a proverb. The second level occurs when the participants or the audience respond to the use of a proverb in a way that shows the proverb to be appropriate or inappropriate. The audience may sometimes respond with another proverb that connotes either approval or disapproval of the speaker’s proverb”.

For instance, in the case where MKKB is invoked in gratitude to the mutual aid rendered, one could reiterate the idea by saying in reply “*nonyana e haela ka tšiba tsa engoe*” (a bird builds

its nest with feathers of another) or “*ngoana sa lleng o shoela tharing*” (a baby that does not cry will die on its mothers loincloth). Both proverbs support the idea of mutual aid or communal solidarity but evoke it differently. It must be noted that the proverbs that are implied do not necessarily and always have to support the idea expressed in the initial proverb uttered. Sometimes it could be those proverbs that pose a counter message, and this would be perfectly in keeping with Sesotho culture (Mokitimi 2004: 756). So following on from our example above with MKM as a statement endorsing rendering of mutual aid, the audience could invoke another proverb to challenge it, such as ‘*moketa ho tsosoa o itekang*’ (help will be given only to one who is trying) or ‘*mphe mphe e ea lapisa motho o khonoa ke sa ntlo ea hae*’ (it’s better to have your own food than constantly begging) (Seema 2012” 120). This in order to guard against perceived abuse of communal solidarity.

The recognition of the contextual usage of proverbs just outlined is unfortunately lacking in current usage of MKKB. Were this context to be taken into consideration it would soon be clear that there is a whole rich deposit of similar proverbs which would not only enrich current understanding of *botho* but open new avenues of articulating the ethical imperatives of *botho* in different spheres of life that MKKB can’t. I am thinking here of a similar proverb “*morena ke morena ka sechaba*” (a chief is chief by the grace of the people) for articulating principles of ethical leadership grounded on *botho* principles and governance by consent.

It is in this sense that Mboti (2015: 133) is correct to challenge the current fixation with MKKB in the discourse as a distraction. It is a distraction because of the selective arbitrary privileged status of MKKB and the suffocating effects this has on ethical reflection. This tendency of the analysis to focus only on MKKB does not recognise this proverb as a part of African narratives, which is a body of accumulated knowledge and a rich deposit of wisdom about *botho*. This knowledge is readily available for excavation and unpacking the insights of *botho* through such sayings.

The main criticism AC is first, the over-reliance on this proverb which gives rise to the bias and tendency to conceptualise *botho* only in terms of its relational communal dimensions (Molefe 2017: 53). In doing so the discourse neglects to articulate other dimensions of *botho* characterising “our relationship with ourselves” (Shutte 2001:31). This is the dimension of *botho* that has to do with possession of virtues of *botho* i.e., inculcation of makhabane. This is a dimension that places emphasis on the desirable inner moral qualities of a *motho*, where the moral statement “*ke motho*” ‘he/she is a person’ denotes a certain level of achievement personal moral qualities of ‘good character’ (Ikuenobe 2016: 156). These are best expressed by a formulation of *botho* framed in personal terms i.e., formation and development of good moral character as the core ingredient of *botho*. Here the focus is the character of the individual or *motho*, who is the crucial linkage point at which the ethical dimension of *botho* i.e., both in its personal and communal dimensions is illuminated (Ramosé 2007: 355).

Second, the problem with the current dominant account of *botho* is that it imputes a meaning not internal to MKKB and in doing so turn this proverb into something it is not, i.e., a moral statement purporting to say something about personhood. As it has been pointed out earlier, MKKB is a norm about mutual concern and communal solidarity. So together with many other similar idioms, it cannot be regarded as a moral statement about *motho* (person). MKKB is therefore not an expression of a moral evaluation of personal conduct and assessment of personhood in the same way that *ha se motho* (he or she is not a person) and *bophoofolo* are (Munyaka and Motlhabi 2009: 71, Ikuenobe 2016: 156). This exclusive privileged connection made of MKKB to *botho* is thus problematic because it gives the impression that MKKB is the only gateway to accessing the depth of meaning and insights of *botho*. I have argued thus far that in African oral literature e.g. other proverbs, we will find embedded there, rich deposits of the age-old wisdom resident in African idiomatic expressions and proverbs like MKKB (Khoza 1994:3). The proverbs and sayings can offer scholarship valuable insights into the multiplicity of their meaning as a social commentary of community life and in turn what they tell us about what it means to be *motho*.

As I have already argued the core of the message embedded in MKKB is mutual care and promotion of the spirit of communal solidarity. This is the understanding to be found in its application in concrete situations in its social setting. It is an understanding derived from a view of life as fundamentally an unfolding drama of mutual concern lived in a variety of communal contexts. These include classical activities such as *letsema* or communal work party (Casalis 1861: 163, Ramose 2007: 350), "*mafisa* and *lesielo* long-term loans of cattle (Duncan 2006: 81; Richardson 2009: 136) or of pigs and poultry, respectively. It is important to reiterate that in Sesotho culture this practice was not only understood in terms of a loan but in its most radical form *mafisa* was a gift, usually of livestock. As Matšela (1979: 87, 128) explains in Sesotho culture, the aim of *mafisa*, as part of traditional curriculum taught in circumcision schools, was to instil and encourage many of the values associated with *botho* such as "sharing of wealth with others on a gift or loan basis". In this sense, MKKB is essentially and an exhortation for solidarity, mutual help, and a norm of how an individual who is a *motho* "ought" to relate to others.

So, in terms of the relationship to *botho*, MKKB must be understood as one example articulating some of the expected *mekhoa* or manners related to sharing and generosity, that are expected of one who is a proper *motho*. That means it is an expression of what qualities of character one ought to have and display a matter of one's identity and who they are in their relationship with others. It is as such an aspect of practical guide with respect to communal living as an essential aspect of *botho*, not the summation of the eternal truth found in *botho*. This is because apart from the fact that the truths and insight into the practical and concrete meaning of *botho* are also found in other proverbs, as a moral ideal, *botho* cannot be reduced

to a method of doing something (Dandala 2009: 260). MKKB is thus one of the many norms or an expression of the expected way of life one “ought” to have in the community. In other words, this proverb stands to *botho*, in the same way that five blind men, who were invited to see the elephant, stand to what is an elephant. Each of them each touching the elephant at various parts, the head, the tail the trunk etc. etc and the corresponding tactile sensory experience they got was adamant that his description of the elephant was definitive. (Broodryk 2006: 20). On the face of it this exclusive association of MKKB with *botho*, e.g. in a statement like ‘*botho* is the short form of MKKB’ (Gade 2011: 313) appears to present no problem. This is because it could be argued that all what such statements are saying is that *botho* implies inhabiting and displaying a disposition that values community life. This is compatible with the spirit underlying the social and ethical imperatives of MKKB. The problem with this is that the converse will not be true i.e., that such statements are what it means to be *motho*, which is what *botho* entails. In other words, I dispute the implicit claim that such an association has come to mean in the discourse, and that is the idea that this one single proverb, in and of itself captures the totality of the meaning and wholeness of the virtues encapsulated in the ethical ideal of *botho*. More than that, *botho*, which is description of what it means to be a proper *motho* or person is therefore fundamentally a moral ideal denoting moral progress between *botho* and non – *botho* (Mphetlang 2009: 18). This means it can never be fully achieved, but at best will be approximated. It follows then, that such an ideal and the insight into it can never be articulated exhaustively and fully in one way. But rather because of the nature of moral ideals, *botho* will lend itself to expression and articulation in many ways. This may help to explain why there are so many proverbs in African culture, some appearing to have the same meaning but expressed slightly differently. They help to make understandable what it means to be *motho* in different contexts and situations i.e., how to live up to the standards of *botho* where *botho* is the organising principle around which life is structured. As a moral ideal, *botho* will by nature resist reductionist formulations and interpretations that look to reduce it to precise single definitions or single definitive formulations as the current application of MKKB in current discourse attempts to do.

To put it differently, the transgressions that one may have regarding *botho*, are treated as serious, as they are not just about particular omissions but are fundamentally reflections of a deformed character lacking in those qualities essential to making one a *motho*. By contrast transgressions of the norm like MKKB are treated as important but would not always necessarily be regarded as deserving of stronger sanctions than a stronger reminder that one ought to try harder to become a good person. *Botho*, therefore cannot be equated with MKKB because it denotes and refers to personhood. The latter is more profound as it is a statement about *motho* and moral character. It is a statement defining what makes a “human being” a “person.” This distinction is often regarded as controversial in the literature especially by

scholars inclined to define personhood in narrow often Western individualistic value frameworks or those not familiar with the African normative conception of personhood (Molefe 2017<sub>A</sub>: 218). But as most thinkers have seen this is the predominant way African ethics defines personhood and how *botho* should be conceptualised. As Ifeanyi Menkiti in Gyekye (2011: par 18) explains

“personhood is the sort of thing which has to be attained and is attained in direct proportion as one participates in communal life through the discharge of the various obligations defined by one's [social role]. It is the carrying out of these obligations that transforms one from the it-status of early childhood, marked by an absence of moral function, into the person-status of later years, marked by a widened maturity of ethical sense—an ethical maturity without which personhood is conceived as eluding one”.

In other words, since personhood is *reached in direct proportion as one takes part in communal life*, MKKB can thus be seen as expressing one way by which as moral agent we take part in community participation. And so, like other similar proverbs it would be in this sense that MKKB has connections with *botho* i.e., as one avenue, or norm giving guidance to the moral agent about how to take part in communal life which leads to habituation of dispositions of *botho*. But it will be a mistake to construe this as saying MKKB is equivalent to *botho*. It is in this sense that it can be argued that the current discourse struggles with how to properly conceptualise and explain the link between this proverb and *botho*<sup>25</sup>. This problem has thus led on the one hand to continued reliance and use of this proverb in contemporary *botho* discourses, and on the other hand to failure as far as I am aware to sufficiently explain the exceptionalism it enjoys which leads to the need to delink MKKB from *botho*, which I turn. The preference of MKKB as the most preferred explication of *botho* (van Niekerk 2013: 2) in the discourse, I will argue has given rise to a coupling of the two ideas that are not necessarily dependent on each other. In other words, the relationship between *botho* and MKKB is not one of mutual presupposition, where you cannot understand one without reference to the other. This is because to do so would suggest that *botho* cannot be defined analysed independently from this proverb which most *botho* scholars would not support. Moreover, *prima facie* evidence from the work of Gade (2011) and the Sesotho speaking culture shows no evidence supporting this seeming arbitrary connection. This contention is borne by the fact even within early sources in Sesotho speaking culture accounts of *botho* makes no such link. Instead, what we find *botho* is often paired with the concept of *bophoofolo* (Casalis 1861: 322, 303). Similarly, in collection of Sesotho proverbs, Sekese (1994) makes no such link in the explanation of the plural form of MKKB “*re batho ka batho ba bang*”. The reason there is no such link in such sources is that in Sesotho culture there is an account of *botho* independent

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<sup>25</sup> Molefe (2017<sub>A</sub>) thus correctly identifies this problem i.e., “the confusion in a quest to articulating a plausible conception of” AC as attributable to “the ambiguity attending the African notion of personhood” i.e., *botho* “in the literature” (Metz 2013, 7; Molefe 2016).

of MKKB. It is also the case that this is not how *botho* is spoken of in ordinary parlance of Sesotho speaking.

This points to the challenge facing the discourse namely defining *botho* independently of MKKB. This is because the connection between the two that AC upholds has by and large not only “failed to adequately question” the dubious and “illogical interpretations of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* and its variations”, (Mboti 2015: 125) but in most case it has built upon this as the basic foundation and only adding to it. The greatest challenge for the *botho* discourse is therefore not only to go beyond the slogan-based definition of *botho* but to start the discourse afresh about *botho* as a moral ideal. As van Niekerk (2013: vii and 4) has shown the current approach has proved inadequate to resolving the difficulty of further explication of *botho* beyond the popular slogans and various question begging labels. Instead what it seems to have done is only to entrench the under-determined status of this concept in the discourse. It is time that this uncritical acceptance of the “selective privileged reading of MKKB re-examined as its current application in *botho* discourse is not only unjustifiable but also suggests a certain arbitrariness.”

### 3.7 Reimagining *Botho* Beyond *Motho ke Motho ka Batho*

One of the problems intimated in foregoing discussion with current *botho* discourse and its usage of MKKB, is the failure to define *botho* independently of this proverb. The challenge for *botho* discourse is therefore to develop an alternative comprehensive account *botho*. Such a comprehensive independent explication of *botho* will have to be grounded first on the recognition that *botho* is moral ideal and that in cultures such as that of Basotho it encapsulates a totality of values and virtues. It is in this sense that the challenge of contemporary moral environment discussed in chapter two now facing current *botho* discourse, is for an innovative approach of reimagining *botho* independently and beyond sloganeering of *motho ke motho ka batho*. It will not be possible to articulate this reimagined account of *botho* here, as this is the focus of next chapter where I am discussing the character centric account of *botho* in the light of the primacy of character in Sesotho speaking culture. Here the argument I want make is simply that an account and formulation of *botho* that is not reliant on an appeal to MKKB is what is needed if ethical ideal of *botho* and its richness is not to be reduced to an interpretation of a single proverb.

As a first step towards this, the discourse can begin to analyse *botho* in terms of Karenga’s notion of moral ideal (2004: 4). Explaining this Karenga (Ibid. 4) states that a moral ideal does not establish a pattern of behaviour, but

“rather it is a “telos of a style of life” which “functions as a standard of inspiration, not by providing an articulate norm to be complied with, but by providing a point of orientation.” It contrasts with an ideal norm which “functions as a standard of aspiration which issues in a sense of moral

progress in one's efforts toward ideal achievement." For "with an ideal theme... moral progress is measured not in terms of compliance with a norm but rather in terms of the degree of comportment with the ideal focus." Some examples of ideal themes are the.....the Christian concept of agape, the Zulu concept of *ubuntu*, and the Kemetic concept of Maat."

To understand *botho* as a moral ideal is well construed because *botho* is fundamentally a constellation of core values and virtues of African ontologies and normative requirements (Kamwangamalu 2007: 26, van Niekerk 2013: vii). According to Cua in Karenga (2004: 4), a moral ideal has a power to stimulate different thoughts and interpretations. So, when interpreted in this way i.e., as a moral ideal, *botho* becomes an edifice around which traditional morality and values revolve. It is that highest good, the last end, desirable for its own sake, and for which other ends or goods are pursued for its sake (Waldstein 2017: 3-7).

In other words, its relationship conceptually with other goods is that these are ordered towards it. This is because it is the highest good and not *vice versa*. When understood in this way *botho* is then the centre around which all other ethical values and traditional virtues expressed through the narrative dimension of education in virtue i.e., the narration of "morally freighted proverbs and folktales to" the young (Gyekye 2011: par. 5) and other character forming social practices and activities find their meaning and significance.

It is within this framework that the use of narratives including proverbs finds their proper place as vehicles of moral education into virtues of *botho*. The discourse could thus make a comprehensive utilisation of narratives in their totality as a way of explaining the depth of *botho* as a moral ideal. It could evoke the individual meanings of each narrative or proverb to articulate one aspect without the risk of this being construed as the full explanation of *botho*. This way of deploying narratives is consistent with their traditional usage where they functioned in unity not isolation as vehicles for moral education and formation into *botho*. This is the case in Sesotho culture, and it is important here to clarify how they can be used towards this end. The best way to do is to further unpack the problem with the current use of MKKB and thus illustrate how this proverb and others can be used in the future as vehicles to support articulation of virtues enshrined in *botho*.

One of the reservations about how MKKB is used, which I intimated earlier is that because of the uncontextual approach of doing ethics today, this proverb has now been severed from its proper context as part of oral literature. This in turn has given MKKB a false independence from other narratives and the function that these have as avenues for moral education. This is in part due to non-contextual usage and abstraction, and disregard of this proverb as part of the body of knowledge found in indigenous knowledge<sup>26</sup> systems, such as that of Basotho. In that knowledge system the unity of narratives i.e., proverbs, folktales, riddles, is respected

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<sup>26</sup> For more of Basotho indigenous knowledge and proverbs see Seema (2012), Possa and Makgopa (2010), Mapesela (2004), and Maharasoa and Maharaswa (2004).

as these are important social resources for moral education. This unity is thus paramount in how each proverb or narratives is employed, and it is an essential requirement upon which all proverbs including MKKB derive and find their meaning and significance as part of moral education and teaching (Bujo 2001: 24).

This unity internal to narratives as a body of collected knowledge is also important because it is a recognition that *botho* is a moral ideal and as such the understanding of this ideal is expressed through different narratives, e.g. in proverbs this is best achieved when these are used in their unity than in isolation. And in Sesotho culture it is in the depth of meaning and multiplicity of explanations of the values of *botho* that narratives including proverbs find their proper place in *botho* discourse as important vehicles of moral education including education particularly education about what is *botho*. In other words, the significance of recognising such unity is that together the meaning of such proverbs gives us a deeper insight of *botho* and what it means in a variety of social context and settings than they do individually. It is from this elasticity of meaning of moral ideals, that we find that among the Basotho one of the interpretations which is fundamental to the way the Basotho understand *botho*, which is based on the way they identify themselves as a people, is the notion of *botho* as an essential condition for peace (Chaka 2016: 65). It is for this reason that I have argued for untying *botho* from a reductionist definition based on this proverb, and revisiting it afresh, to enable the use of other proverbs and narratives, that equally elucidate *botho* and thus further increasing our understanding of this ideal and its ethical imperatives. This means that proverbs, including MKKB, ought not only to be treated fundamentally as part of indigenous knowledge systems, but must always be interpreted in the light of this body of knowledge and the rationale behind it. When analysed from this perspective and context, it becomes clear why the current usage of MKKB will be fraught with questions of legitimacy. If we look at the Sesotho speaking culture for a moment and their usage of proverbs there is *prima facie* evidence challenging this selective reading and arbitrary preference of MKKB as the sole avenue for articulating the values and principles of *botho*.

This exceptionalism is against everything we know about the unity proverbs as part of the corpus of Sesotho narratives and indigenous knowledge and it impoverishes the understanding of *botho* as a polysemic moral ideal. This contention is supported by the brief analysis of another proverb similar to MKKB namely “*morena ke morena ka sechaba*” (MKS) (a chief is a chief because of the people<sup>27</sup>). This proverb can easily be read as “*morena ke morena ka batho*.” If we take this proverb and MKKB one is struck by their similarity. They

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<sup>27</sup> This proverb I will argue shows the impoverishing effect of the conventional account i.e., relying too heavily on one proverb as the encapsulation of the ethical imperatives of *botho*. In this proverb, we have probably the most attractive articulation of *botho* with regard to ethical leadership. This dimension of *botho* exemplified in its most classic and profound way in the ethical leadership of King Moshoeshe (Prozesky 2016) I will argue is another dimension of *botho*, which contemporary African society, particularly at its leadership level today is in desperate need of and one which is best captured only in this proverb, in contrast to *motho ke motho ka batho*.

both have the same sentence structure. Both have a similar style and the play of words. But what is important about the two is the message they convey when analysed together i.e., . they complimentary meaning and corresponding values and virtues they presuppose and require of the individual. While both can be interpreted in terms of the messages they convey, it is what they also discourage that the essence of their practical meaning is also revealed. This adds to existing knowledge added information about *botho*. In adopting this approach to analysis, we will discover that the common understanding and interpretation underlying the two proverbs is rejection of the vices of *boitšepo* (Sekese 1994: 54) i.e., egotism or selfishness (Metz and Gaie 2010: 275), whether one is just an ordinary person i.e., *motho* or a person in a position of leadership and authority i.e., *morena*.

It is therefore important to observe that from the analysis of MKKB and other similar proverbs in African culture (Sekese 1994: 54, Ramose 2009: 312; Bujo 2001: 87) the main message about *botho* they communicate in their own different ways, is rejection of selfishness, egoism or any form of self-importance. These are discouraged as vices that one who is a *motho* ought to avoid, for these are morally undesirable qualities for *motho*. The richness of the values of *botho* that gets uncovered in this brief analysis of the two proverbs underscores the impoverishing effect of current over-reliance on MKKB to explain *botho* and which will continue to be the case in the discourse unless this exceptionalism is changed.

The point of the argument here is that there is a vast richness of meaning in proverbs, as a body of knowledge of traditional culture, that is a readily available resources for use in articulating the precepts and practical application of what it means to possess *botho* and practice its values and virtues in various spheres of life. This richness is currently not accessible to the *botho* discourse because of the neglect of narratives to the discourse and fixation with MKKB only. A case in point of this is the articulation of virtues of values *botho* that relates to ethical leadership (Prozesky 2016), a topic that is currently of foremost importance in many contemporary African societies including among the Basotho. The ethical imperative of *botho* linked to leadership are as equally relevant and necessary for today's context as are those that focus on communal solidarity and safeguarding communal relationship. The ethical ideals of *botho* and corresponding qualities of character expected in the former, are far better communicated expressed in "*morena ke morena ka sechaba*" than in any other proverb. Nor can these be accessed and conveyed adequately, for instance by an appeal to MKKB.

So, the most important lesson we can learn in terms of practice and behaviour, in using narratives in a way that respects their unity as demonstrated in the two proverbs i.e., MKKB and MKS, is that both share in common the same meaning, i.e., promotion of certain qualities of character or displaying of certain virtues in a person and lack of corresponding vices. They explain the virtues expected whether one is an ordinary person or one in position of leadership and authority. In terms of the virtues that one who is a proper *motho* must thus display and

inhabit, as a matter of one's character or identity, we can mention here virtues of humility "boikokobetso", generosity, "mosa", kindness, "mohau" mercy, *kutloelo-bohloko*, humaneness or feeling for fellow human beings, fellow feeling for the other. And equally important for one who is "Morena" i.e., a chief, which must be interpreted here as metaphor for leadership is possession of certain virtues, chief among which is hospitality and "toka" which means fairness but also with strong connotations of justice. All these virtues are regarded as evidence that one has developed a good character (Seema 2012: 129).

It is interesting that among their proverbs about the chief, the Basotho seem to have emphasised virtues related to hospitality more than other values such as justice or strength, or power. This can be seen in the variety of proverbs about the chief that expresses this expectation including, "morena ke khetsi ea masepa" which literally translates, 'the chief is a shoulder bag of shit', This means the quality of a good leader -Morena- is forbearance and possession of the virtue of accepting all unconditionally, the useful and the useless, the resident and the traveller or foreigner alike, the reliable and the perfidious alike (Coplan 1993: 102). This unconditional availability of the chief is expressed in another proverb, "Morena ha ete," - the chief does not travel. This means that if one needs the help of the chief the office must always be there to attend to the needs of the people. These are important ethical imperatives of leadership demanded by *botho*, of those in positions of leadership, that need to be incorporated into the new formulation of *botho* referred to here, which is not tethered to interpretations of MKKB.

The central argument therefore here is that adherence to the unity of narratives in the context of *botho* discourse, will allow the uncovering of the fuller and deeper meaning of *botho*, making it easier to apply this in different contexts and spheres of life. Apart from this exclusive connection between MKKB proverb and *botho*, it is also the case, that with any form of discourse,

"there are always "gaps in communication, and no way that meaning can be present in its totality at any one point," [because] "meaning and essence can never be fully present in any one sign' or text" (Mapesela 2004: 320).

This means whatever means of explicating *botho* that exist now, will always approximate its ideals but never articulate these exhaustively. This is equally true of the current *botho* discourse and its use of MKKB *vis-à-vis* its relationship to *botho*, which means, that MKKB cannot be regarded as the wholeness and totality of what *botho* entails. Hence the value of interpreting proverbs in terms of their unity of meaning to understand the breadth and depth of *botho*. This can be seen again when we analyse some of the Sesotho proverbs as a whole such as MKKB and similar proverb. Here it will be observed for instance with MKKB, that it belongs to a group of proverbs promoting certain behaviours and values in particular the

primacy of welfare of all or communal solidarity and other related values and virtues<sup>28</sup>. These proverbs include “*nonyana e haela ka tšiba tsa e ngoe*” (a bird builds its nest with the feathers of another), or “*khalapa li ea buseletsana*, (to return a favoured done) (Mokitimi 1997: 14, 37). These proverbs are an endorsement of a behaviour that prizes communal solidarity, mutual aid, and cooperation (Mokitimi 1997: 13) and related values and ideals. These ideals are embodied in several social practices in Sesotho cultures in many agricultural sharing mechanisms such as *letsema*, or *seahlolo*. The former refers to a practice in African culture of cooperative community fields’ cultivation while the latter refers to share cropping (Letseka 2013A: 342, Metz 2014: 68, Mofuoa 2014: 229). It is this idea of community cooperation and solidarity, which is an essential part of *botho*, which many of these proverbs including MKKB apply and articulate for different aspect of social life, that the use of narratives in unity enables. Another important value found in the use of proverbs in unity to articulation a deeper understanding of *botho* is the notion of vices to be avoided that they reject. Chief among these vices is *boitšepo* (Sekese 1994: 54), which is articulated in many ways by different proverbs. This can loosely be translated as selfishness and it is regarded as the antithesis of the virtue of *botho*. It is a social attitude that denotes pride in oneself, the kind of individualistic approach to life where an individual believes they do not need others and as such have no obligation to others as well (Sandal 1984: 5). In other words when used together narratives amplify the message they individually communicate, giving it a better outcome than they do individually. In this case the message that many Sesotho proverbs amplify is ‘that neither the single individual nor the community can define and pursue their respective purposes’ and ends apart from the mutual foundedness and complementary nature of being a person (Ramose 2009: 309). This reiterates a well understood African idea of the dynamism of reciprocity and mutual concern expressed through sharing and harnessing of collective forces (Bujo 2001: 88; Ramose 2009: 308: 312). This is a feature of a life characteristic of the African community and also expected of one who is a *motho*. As these proverbs cited show, that they are an articulation of not only certain social norms and ideal, but even more importantly they point to the underlying constellation of virtues and moral qualities important for one who is regarded as a *motho* to have.

It is not possible here to give an exhaustive analysis of the significance of proverbs as part of the Basotho indigenous knowledge, to the development of a richer account of *botho*, than the current one found in the discourse. But it will suffice to point out that like in many African cultures, Sesotho proverbs are a rich deposit of “ethics and morals” and “reach not only to the head but also the conscience” of *motho* to “help in the exercise of deciding between good and evil, justice and injustice, right or wrong” (Mokitimi 1997: xiv). The argument being made here for an alternative account of *botho* beyond slogans, is that in relation to *botho*, proverbs

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<sup>28</sup> See No 7, 8, 147 in Sekese 1994: 53-54, 101

individually can never exhaustively capture the vast breadth of practical everyday ethical imperatives that *botho* has. To tap into this, we therefore need all the tools and resources available to communicate this and narratives do this best. As such they must be understood as always, a *partial* revelation of the virtues and eternal truths embedded in *botho*. It is for this reason that their message is best understood in their unity as a corpus of indigenous knowledge for it is there that the entirety of virtues of *botho* are revealed and can be accessed. The benefit of this comprehensive approach to narratives to unpack *botho*, is that it will first enrich current understanding of MKKB. Second, it advances the articulation of an account of *botho* as a moral ideal and thus addresses what some have described as a persistent stalled language game both in public and scholarly discourse characteristic of contemporary debates on *botho* (van Niekerk (2013: 9).

In view of all this, the question must then be asked if it is not time that the discourse begins that all-important task of analysing *botho* as an ethical ideal, free from its dubious connection with '*motho ke motho ka batho*' (Mboti 2015: 125). Is it not time for the *botho* discourse and African ethics to begin to take seriously the relevance of African indigenous knowledge and unity of its oral literature to the current quest for a better understanding of *botho* for today's context? These questions point to the urgent need for a *botho* discourse and African ethics in general, to revisit afresh the value of proverbs as deposits of traditional wisdom and norms. There is therefore a need for a change of approach to excavate the rich "flora" and "fauna of African indigenous knowledge systems" (Mapesela 2004: 317), in order to uncover the hidden insights of *botho* and inform current discourse towards a more comprehensive systematic account of *botho* in tune with the whole body of knowledge that constitute African indigenous knowledge. This, in turn, will free the current discourse to look beyond the persistent confines of the current discourse to embrace among other things an equally important formulation of *botho* as a moral quality of person that pertains to an assessment of the moral character of *motho*.

Currently the predominant formulation of *botho* in the discourse is not articulating and communicating many of these essential ideals embedded in narratives, many of whom are centred around qualities of *botho* defined in terms of moral character of persons. As such his dimension and function of proverbs and narratives is not emphasised much by the approach of the current *botho* discourse yet it is essential for a developing a new broader and richer account of *botho*. This is particularly important when communicating something as personal as the virtues of *botho*, which germinates in the community first in their concrete application and nurturing it in individuals as part of character and moral formation, which is the subject of the next section that follows here.

### 3.8 Reinstatement of Character to Definitions of *Botho* in Current Discourse

The appraisal of the reinstatement of character advocated here must be understood as an acknowledgement of the positive contribution current *botho* discourse has made in drawing attention to the value of *botho*. It has raised the profile of this concept locally and internationally highlighting its ethical importance and contribution of *botho* ethics to ethics as an attractive alternative way of doing ethics. This development must be supported but also improved upon so that this ethic is in tune with today's contexts, whose characteristic features includes a stronger sense and consciousness of individuality, not to be confused with individualism, although the two are not too far apart. This is more so when one considers the negative impact of the dominance of Western approaches to ethics in different communities and their moral traditions. However, it is also the case that Afro-communitarian based accounts of *botho* can be misunderstood as overemphasising the communal dimension of virtue, neglecting to emphasise equally the much-needed personal dimension and agent centred imperatives of *botho* on *motho*, particularly those imperatives pertaining to character (Molefe 2017c: 51). What is interesting about the current *botho* discourse and its handling of character is that here and there reference to this is made but no real systematic account *botho* premised on character as such is ever developed. Take for example Shutte (2001: 32) remark that the range of moral virtues that make up *botho* consists of those virtues concerned with our relationship with others and *those that characterise our relationship to ourselves*. Here we have an acknowledgement of the importance of character to *botho*. But more significantly Shutte argues that this "takes the form of integrity, a solidity or wholeness of character" as well as other "positive qualities of character". What we see here, which is characteristic of the current *botho* discourse is a recognition in passing of the connection between *botho* and character, but this is never fully developed as a formulation of *botho*. The exception here is among contemporary scholars of *botho* such is van Niekerk (2007:367, 2013: 84). But if the discourse were to follow this through as implied here, it would soon be discovered that it is precisely in the emphasis on character, i.e., in its formation and development, that the transformative power and attractiveness of *botho* as an alternative ethical framework appropriate for a change of contemporary moral attitudes is found. This is the agent centred, character centric account, where *botho* is linked to character as a vital moral concept, which in Sesotho culture is understood in terms of inculcation of *makhabane* i.e., virtues of *botho* as essential to one's *telos* of being a good person. In other words, current discourse would place at the centre of ethical reflection questions of the moral character of the persons, to underscore the significance of individuals as the agents that make *botho* a reality in the community along with the corresponding practice of virtues upon which *botho* depends. Making questions of character the centre of ethical reflection on *botho* militates a rethink of the fundamental ethical problem behind the moral challenges facing modern individuals in Africa today highlighted in

chapter two. It allows for a better understanding of current ethical challenges and decay in the moral fibre of communities in Southern Africa discussed in earlier chapter, that these are symptomatic of problem of the displacement of character in ethics i.e., failure to create *batho ba nang le botho* (individuals who possess *botho*). This is an understanding we find underlying what it means to be a *motho* as found in traditional societies such as that of ancient Basotho. Here attention is focused less on “doing” and actions of moral agents, but rather on “being”. Earlier we referred to what MacIntyre (1982: 1) described as the disappearance of the moral agent's character in ethics and that the consequences of this has been relegation of our intentions, desires, dispositions and goal in life as agents, to the periphery of moral discourse and ethical reflection. This displacement of character as the central focus of morality and ethical reflection and evaluation of personal conduct (Richardson 1994: 91; MacIntyre 1981: 195) is not only a problem with modern approach to ethics, but also to current *botho* discourse. This is because I will argue, that in Sesotho culture and by extension in African ethics, the notion of ethics without reference to moral character of a person is unintelligible, and this is the problem with current *botho* discourse has. One of the negative consequences of this is that this has led to an unfortunate disconnect between “doing” and “being.” And yet when it comes to ethics, what we do is not morally immaterial to who we are i.e., to our identity because our actions reflect our character.

What the displacement of character in the manner just described does, is that it enables an understanding of ethics where our actions can be considered as separate from who we are. We now can regard what we do as not a real reflection of who we are as agents i.e., our characters. Actions can now be treated as separate incidentals that can be assessed independently of our moral identity as agents. According to this then, our actions have no bearing on our character as individuals. But we cannot envision ourselves as agents in this way, because to acquire and possess *botho* and make this part of one's character, one ought to be in the habit i.e., consistently performing actions coherent with ethical imperatives of *botho*. According to Gyekye (2011: par 16) the performance of good actions must be habitual if they in turn are to produce the “corresponding character” because a “good habit ...persistently performed strengthen that habit;” and “in this way, virtue (or, good character) is acquired”.

The displacement of moral character from the centre of ethics means that one's character is no longer the primary point of reference for moral behaviour in ethics and in turn assessment of moral behaviour. Hence in most modern societies this has been replaced by choice<sup>29</sup> (MacIntyre 1981: 20, 33). This is true of most traditional societies in Africa whose moral traditions have been heavily affected by the influence of modern Western ethics. Many cultures in Southern Africa today, including many of those from which *botho* derives are a

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<sup>29</sup> See chapter 4, after virtue, (1981) for more on radical choice.

case in point. It is important to realise though that the displacement of character could not have occurred without the corresponding transformation of the traditional role and understanding of what is *motho* in the community i.e., as a beacon of *botho* and a microcosm of the community's ideals (Mphetlang 2009: 19). The implication of this is that moral agents are now no longer accountable to others and neither can individuals be held to account for their conduct by others. So, when it comes to conduct, contemporary individuals are indeed their own moral sovereign whose accountability for a particular way of life is judged only by choice of the moral agent.

The danger with this abandonment of character as the defining quality of morality in current *botho* discourse is two-fold. First the loss of sight of character as the core of the century-old understanding and interpretation of *botho* in Southern African. This is confirmed in the common usage of this concept in the cultures of traditional societies in Southern Africa from which this concept derives (Gade 2011: 308; Gade 2013: 487). Second, this means that current *botho* discourse will continue to neglect this as important feature of African ethics, and that morality and the fact that ethics for most African people is character-based. This is because for African ethics and this includes ethics of *botho* "good character is the essence of" what it means to be ethical and the "linchpin of the moral wheel" of traditional morality of African culture (Gyekye 2011: par 13). For this reason, questions of moral character are proper entry points into discussions about *botho* and are necessary for unpacking its insights as polysemic moral ideal. This is relevant because moral character reveals who we are as individuals and it is also that by which we define what is *motho*. This in turn is central to the interpretation and understanding of *botho*. That means analysing the concept of *motho* and how this is understood both in its descriptive terms i.e., referring to the individual, and its normative and most fundamental sense where it denotes moral personhood (Mabovula 2011: 42, Ikuenobe 2016: 128). This is because *motho* is the embodiment of *botho* in the community and the individual becomes that through which the tangible experience of which *botho* in the community happens. What this tells us about moral character is that *botho* cannot be abstracted from the characters of the individuals who make it possible. In other words, the existence of *botho* cannot become a reality unless there is in communities' *batho*, (persons), with characters so formed and still forming, that as individual agents they become *de facto* the living personification of *botho* and its ideals in the community. Through character formation, understood in its active sense i.e., the moral agent's choice to be a certain sort of person (Richardson 1994: 92), *botho* can, in that sense be moulded on to one's character (Otlogetswe 2015:2). This, in turn shapes and defines the character of *motho*, becoming the essence of who the agent is in terms of their moral character and social identity. Through the practice of acts of *botho* in daily life *motho* thus strengthens the reality and existence of *botho* in the community.

Unless *botho* is reformulated afresh in terms of the character of person and acquisition of a good disposition of character, talk of *botho* thus will remain just that. For this to happen it will require shifting focus back to individuals as moral agents and their character as the primary focus of ethical reflection. The relevance of this is it that allows the articulation of personal dimension of virtues of *botho*. This dimension puts emphasis on integrity and personal character and turns the conversation about *botho* away from over emphasis and preoccupation with safeguarding communal relationships as the primary ethical consideration, to the individual personal level of becoming better at inculcating *makhabane* a *botho* (virtues of *botho*). This formulation is better in reaching contemporary moral agents many of whom self-identify more in individual personal terms than communal relations. But the net effect I argue will be the same regarding the communal consideration of harmonious relationships. This is because as shown many of the values and virtues being inculcate and internalised as part of the agent's moral character, are communal in nature and orientation and not selfish or individualistic.

It is in this sense that Afro-communitarian is described here as overemphasising the communal and relational imperatives of *botho*, at the expense of its more personal and individual dimension that focus on inculcation and cultivation of good qualities of character. The consequences of this are the all too familiar accusation that African ethics is too focused on the community while overlooking the individual, further entrenching this false dichotomy that I argue is unhelpful and takes away the rich reciprocity characteristics of African culture. This articulation of *botho* I will argued is compatible with the communal orientation of African ethics, and consistent with how *botho* has been understood and interpreted for generations including in Sesotho speaking cultures. In Sesotho culture thus we find *botho*, is at once concerned with questions of inner qualities of character of *motho*, and inculcation of virtues of *botho*, like integrity, honesty and dignity, self-respect just to mention a few (Dolamo 2013: 2; Casalis 1861: 303). In other words, it is an articulation of *botho* that locates moral value in the individual moral agent, where the emphasis is on inculcation and cultivation of good moral qualities of character, and many of these qualities have a strong communal orientation and focus, such as sharing, being kind and helpful to others etc. etc. This I will argue should be the heart of contemporary theorisation on *botho* as an articulation of African communalism. From the perspective of Sesotho culture, emphasis on dispositions of character is the correct formulation of *botho* because it coheres with how *botho* is understood (Casalis 1861: 322, Gade 2011: 108) while not denying the communal nature of ethics of Basotho. This is because in Sesotho culture *botho* cannot be fully explained without reference to *boitsoaro* i.e., good behaviour which has to do with considerations of the character of *motho* and how one carries themselves *socially* and morally. Questions about the possession of *botho* by a person (*motho*), can only be fully answered with reference to questions about what kind of person is

in the first place i.e., who they are as a moral agent, in whose life and way of living *botho* is supposed to come alive in the community. It is for this reason that the call for the reinstatement of character in the *botho* discourse and analysis is long overdue, and the character-centric account of *botho* proposed here is presented an alternative starting point.

It is against this background that the case for the reinstatement of character in the current discourse is made. This means paying greater attention to individuals particularly to the notion of *makhabane a botho*<sup>30</sup>, i.e., inculcation of qualities of good character and virtues of *botho* and reinstating this to the centre of the discourse. This requires recognition that discussions about *botho* i.e., moral personhood, are ultimately discussions about qualities of character. It also means acknowledging the primacy of character as a starting point of analysis about *botho* understood as personhood. That means the question “*what is motho*” is thus taken to be in an important sense more fundamental and prior to the other questions of ethical reflection on *botho*, such the actions of the agent, or his or her valuing of harmonious communal relationships or some communal imperatives that *botho* entails. The implication of this to current *botho* discourse means that talk about personhood cannot be fully entered into independent of a discourse about the character of persons. One can therefore argue that it is going to be exceedingly difficult to expect *motho* without good character, i.e., as part of who they are or their essential makeup, to value and display the requisite dispositions of *botho* in communal relationships with others. This is because harmonious communal relations are the outward expression of the inner dispositions of one’s character or inclinations and qualities of character where the former presupposes the latter. There is therefore an internal hierarchy implied here, which entails that the communal relational dimensions of *botho* cannot become a reality independently of its personal individual dimensions implied in the development and formation of character. This means that the latter is prior in the sense that *motho* i.e., the individual agent, becomes the concrete wellspring of *botho* in the community and this is experienced primarily in their character. Hence in Sesotho speaking cultures, someone regarded as having *botho* is described as having a well-rounded character (Mphetolang 2009:13). The foundational moral claims encapsulated in *botho* therefore are claims about moral character and specifically as expressions of the assessment and evaluation of the character of *motho*. In other words, if we have agents with good moral characters first or persons imbued with proper dispositions of *botho*, then the communal imperatives of *botho* will occur and come naturally in the life of the agent. This is because central to good character is inculcation of values and virtues of *botho*, and many of these are communal in orientation and focus. Or to put it another way, the communal imperatives implied in *botho*, presuppose

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<sup>30</sup>It must be observed thought that in African culture the community is intrinsically involved in the moral agents acquisitioning of these virtues, it is not an individual solo effort, because in African culture the community is not satisfied to leaving the individual on their own on the journey towards personhood, without guidance and involvement of community.

the development of moral character in the members of the community that is compatible with the values and virtues of *botho*. Without these characteristic ways of living that is typical of who we are as a matter of our character or our identity as moral agents, living out the communal virtues of *botho* in the community becomes difficult if not impossible. This is what in Sesotho culture is referred to as *mekhoa* in the moral sphere, which denotes certain habits of moral nature of a person that reflects one's true nature and identity as a moral agent. From this we can see why discussions about *botho*, are intrinsically connected to discussions about character which is an answer to the question "what is *motho*" and "the person they ought to be." This is because it is the individual *motho* who is the tangible living embodiment of *botho* in the community including its communal imperatives. Because of this understanding in Sesotho culture it is precisely this interface between *motho* and *botho*, that is regarded as essential for ethics and the concrete experience of *botho* in the community especially the personal transformation in a person that *botho* formation engenders in a person as a moral being. The reinstatement of character as indicated is best understood in terms of the notion of inculcation of virtues. We have already touched upon this in passing with references to the idea *makhabane* (virtues) and here I want to underscore this.

In Sesotho culture cultivation of virtues and avoidance of vices is very central to how Basotho speak about the character of *motho*, and in turn personhood. *Botho* or personhood in Sesotho culture is regarded not only as the foundation of ethical living but also in essence as the seedbed for what a Mosotho would call *makhabane a botho* i.e., virtues and qualities of character (Seema 2012: 134; Maharasoia and Maharaswa 2004: 109, Letseka 2013<sub>A</sub>: 340). As it can be seen this implies a shift from the externalities of current approaches preoccupied with actions and what individuals do, to the internal looking ethical concerns about *motho*. In other words, the interest here is with the continual internalisation of qualities of *botho* in *motho*. This makes the character an essential prerequisite for concrete and tangible presence of a communal practice of *botho* and its imperatives. The neglect of character thus has serious implications for current theorisation of *botho* which currently does not give adequate emphasis on this as an expression of the personal dimension, agent centred formulation of *botho*. First it means a continued lack of progress in broadening the discourse and advancing the discussion any further than where they currently are, which is described by some as an impasse or the *cul de sac* of the stalled language surrounding *botho* (van Niekerk 2013:7). Second, it means such analysis will continue to ignore the necessity and significance of character i.e., inculcation of good qualities of character as the core message for ethical reflection on *botho*. This is particularly pertinent in Sesotho speaking culture, where character is essential for moral life understood in terms of acquisition of *makhabane*. This notion expresses an internal inner quality of goodness in moral behaviour, and as such it is correctly described as the linchpin of morality and wellspring of moral agency (Gyekye 2011: par. 13)

and essence of African moral system. This further reiterates the argument that “in order to understand the moral obligation of *motho* to others, which is the communal imperatives of *botho* mantra of AC, it is necessary to first engage with the question “what a person is” in the first place (Mphetolang 2009: 14, Tschaepe 2013: 51) and this is done by way of assessing one’s character as a moral agent”.

The high moral premium Basotho ethics place on character of *motho* offers a good starting point for the introduction in current *botho* discourse, of ways and approaches that articulates the personal agent centred account of *botho*, which is a prerequisite for the realisation of the communal imperatives of *botho* advocated by Afro-communitarianism. This is because the emphasis on character highlights the crucial role that *motho* plays in the moral life of the overall health status of the moral life in the community. Because character is a moral property that exists in the individual this requires respecting the intrinsic link between *botho* and *motho* as an individual (Mphetolang 2009:13). Specifically, his and her moral character and its formation. In this sense *botho* must be understood as a description of that inner moral quality or beauty of *motho* that reflects a person’s character and implies his or her moral heritage. Because of this *botho*, cannot be separated from the African conception and definition of what is “*motho*” (person), according to which, *motho* in the robust sense embodies ethical presuppositions, much of which is centred around moral character of the individual (Ikuenobe 2016: 129, Gaie 2002: 277). In Sesotho culture the word *motho*, has a specific interpretation that captures both the descriptive (physical and metaphysical) and normative meaning (Ikuenobe 2016: 144), which the English translation “person” does not really convey. A more correct translation of *motho* thus should read “individual person.”

It is worth noting that the reinstatement of character is not incompatible with the central claims of AC *vis-à-vis botho* and its communal orientation<sup>31</sup>. It is in fact an endorsement of the significance of the community because the formation and development of character, through which the individual is nurtured and socialised into *botho* from childhood to adulthood, (Dolamo 2013: 5, Casalis 1861; 267, Bereng 1987: 40, Sekese 1994: 9) is a matter in which the community has a big stake and interest. Character as a reflection of one’s personhood or *botho* therefore does not only presupposes the community as its authentic context, it requires it. It is in this sense that it is correct to say one cannot speak of *botho* outside the community (Dolamo 2013: 8), because that by which *botho* is manifested in a person is something that comes about because of active involvement and nurturing by others. Our “communities and families are thus pivotal to the development of” our characters as moral agents, given that as

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<sup>31</sup> Here I am thinking of Metz’s account of *botho* which has come to be the prevailing account of AC in the literature (Metz 2007, see also Molefe 2017c: 53 and 57).

agents we are products of our own community<sup>32</sup> (Letseka 2013<sub>B</sub>: 357). This means that the individual as a moral agent, even as a hero of their own life story (Shutte 2001: 53), is always a reflection of their community.

A detailed analysis of the role of the community in the formation and development of moral character of its members and the relationship with the individual agency is beyond the scope of this chapter<sup>33</sup>. This will however be discussed in chapter five under the social conditions necessary for *botho* to thrive and that make it possible. Here it will suffice to only emphasise that in Sesotho culture, the community is like a school of character. It plays a key role in the formation of character in the early years of one's life and in its development in later years in adulthood through several social institutions and their normative influence on *motho*. In terms of this, it is the community in the end that creates out of individuals "*batho bao e leng batho*," i.e., persons that have qualities of *botho*, and who become citizens that are truly human and morally upright. So, as it can be seen this status of the community in African ethics is a further endorsement of the case for reinstatement of character and articulation of a more personal agent centred account of *botho*. Because of this relationship of the community to moral development and formation, we cannot therefore strictly speaking theorise about the communitarian imperatives and values of *botho* in the community, without reference to moral character of the members found in those of the community.

The argument therefore behind the reimagined formulation of *botho* advocated here, is that a more explicitly agent centred interpretation of *botho* is what society needs today more than a communally based account. The former is more suited to the context of the contemporary moral environment in which the individual is the primary unit of social consideration. This is because in today's context society is organised around the notions of the individual as the basic social unit, of individual rights where people increasingly thinking of themselves in terms of individual autonomy. And the best way of formulating such a personal inward agent centred articulation of *botho*, I argue starts with an interpretation and understanding of *botho* primarily in terms moral character or the moral quality of a person (Gade 2012: 488), an account that is very personal and speaks directly to the individual. This is confirmed by Metz (2011: 391) who points out that to African thought "talk of "personhood", which is what *botho* is essentially about "is inherently moralised such that to be a person is to be virtuous or to exhibit good character". It is therefore not difficult to see how in the moral tradition of the Basotho, "*botho*" as the pinnacle of moral excellence i.e., personhood, is understood primarily in terms of the

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<sup>32</sup>This must not be understood as implying that the individuals have no role in the formation of their own character. The relationship with the community is a symbiotic one, because the community shapes the individual's character, but at the same time individual reciprocally shapes the character of his or her community (Richardson 1994: 93).

<sup>33</sup> The term is used here in a specific sense to denote the lifestyle and community spirit often found in many traditional villages in places like Lesotho, or what could be called village life. This qualification is to emphasise the particularity of such a way of life which can get lost in 'community' which is easily universalizable especially in discourses where it is differentiated with 'society'.

good moral character of *motho*, developed through the habitual practice of “*mekhoa e lokileng*”, morally good habits of *motho* in the community.

In view of this it is now no longer a choice, but a necessity to articulate an alternative formulation of *botho* from the current Afro-communitarian one. The current approaches where the emphasis is on communal relations is problematic and not helpful within a modern context where the traditional sense of community belonging for most people is weak or non-existent. In other words, because modern urban existence of the West and liberal individualism has diseased contemporary moral environment of so many African societies so much, the widespread sense of loss of community and belonging has rendered the current communitarian argument in the discourse to become almost irrelevant (Richardson 1994: 97). In that context, it seems that an articulation of the principle of *botho* primarily in communal terms is a failure to read the signs of the times, and a recipe for failure to communicate effectively by tailoring the message in view of who the audience is. The result is an account of *botho* that is experienced as irrelevant to most people, as it does not speak to the concrete reality that the modern individual identifies with. This leaves *botho* without that key social institution it needs to come alive in the community as its embodiment, namely *motho* or the individual and most important a *motho* with a certain character. This is also a missed opportunity to exploit the heightened sense of individuality of our times, as a readily available ethical resource, to bring about in communities the reality of *botho* by educating the individual towards virtues of *botho* in terms of habitual cultivation of qualities of *botho* as part of forming one's moral character in daily living that makes one to be a good person, of which most people have an innate sense of what this means.

In other words, there is a need to look at a different approach to *botho* ethics, in the direction of a character centric account analogous to that found in Sesotho culture, which shares many features traditionally associated with the moral tradition of the virtues. Such an approach involves the core of ethical reflection centred on questions about who we are i.e., “what sort of person we are as agents.” It will also of necessity be focused on the notion of good moral character as an essential part of answers to these questions because our character reflects who we are. The benefit of this approach, compared to prevailing ones, is that it requires of the moral agent choosing to be a certain type of *motho*, with certain kinds of beliefs and values where these are essential to one's way of life, and in turn their personal conduct. Even more significant is that it further underscores that it is thus not going to be enough for *motho*, to occasionally display commendable acts of *botho* in communities. What is needed instead is a commitment to virtuous living by the moral agent as they aspire to become a *motho*, by leading a certain way of life infused with qualities of *botho*. According to this then underlying this approach is a view of *botho* ethics where *motho* has a clear sense of one's goal in life, a *telos*, which becomes the moral anchor and compass that guides one towards virtue. In this regard,

this approach shares many tenets of the ethical approach traditionally found in virtue ethics. In it can be found many similarities with the central arguments often associated with the moral tradition of the virtues, not least in the emphasis on the supremacy of character. It is to these approaches that elevate character that I turn to.

### **3.8.1 *Botho* as an African variant of Virtue Ethical Approach to Ethics**

The character-centric formulation of *botho* or agent centred of *botho* advocated here with its emphasis on the primacy of character is a big departure from the prevailing accounts of *botho* in the discourse. It asserts that when it comes to *botho* ethics it is inculcation of *makhabane a botho* (virtues of *botho*) that matters most and that it is this that is the foundation of grounding of relationships with others. It is based on the premise that character denotes integrity and self-respects and that one is more likely to respect others if they respect themselves. This makes this approach more at home within virtue ethical approaches commonly associated with virtue ethics (VE). This assertion is made against the background where there is a growing recognition in the literature on ethics that the moral tradition of virtues, or virtue ethics which for long time was exclusively defined in Aristotelian terms, can be found in many non-Western traditions. Despite this, there is little in the literature, especially in the current *botho* discourse by way of interest in inquiring about the historical presence of this tradition in the moral traditions and cultures from which *botho* derives. It is not the intention of this study to make a comparison of *botho* ethics and virtue ethics here as this will be beyond the scope of this chapter, nor will it be possible here to give a fuller account of this. The aim is to highlight the similarity in approach in broad terms and especially on the emphasis on the primacy of character. It is to state in broad speaking without arguing the case the basic common approach between this tradition and ethics of *botho*, and more specifically the supremacy of character that *botho* place emphasis on. In other words, this is further endorsement of an observation not that uncommon in the literature where parallels on this subject have been drawn before. The recognition of this affinity between ethics of *botho* and virtue ethics is what is seen in Ntibatirwa's (1999:3) remarks about the lack of reflection on virtue ethics in African ethics pointing out that this is "despite its imperative necessity" and suggesting that renewed interest in the concept is in this sense a positive sign for the rediscovery and validation of the ethical approach. The most explicit parallel so far made is one by Metz (2012), who points out that although there are differences between the two, there are many commonalities, and adding that a plain reading of Aristotle on many topics suggests that he would readily agree with much that is found in sub-Saharan ethics. Likewise van Niekerk (2013: 89, 2009: 84) draws similar parallels arguing that the current definitions of *botho*, "reproduce the characteristic concerns of virtue ethics" [and the concept itself]; "seems amenable to a very particular set of claims intended to pick out the characteristic shape of virtue ethical theories."

This study shares this view and emphasises the parallel with focus on the formulation of *botho* in terms of the primacy of character. In this regard the basic premise for both is the same since VE takes the judgement of character as basic and foundational (Solomon 1997: 166) while *botho* ethics similarly highlights the primacy of character. Besides this we also see commonalities where VE maintains that the ethical task of each person

“is to be become a person of a certain sort where becoming a person of that sort is to become a person who has a certain disposition to respond to situations in a [particular] characteristic way.....These features of human being on which virtues theory concentrate in depicting the ideal human being are states of character.....which [*motho*]human must possess if they are to be successful as [a *motho*]...i.e., to reach the appropriate telos of [his or her life]”. (Ibid.)

This similarity here is not least because the main preoccupation of all versions of VE, like *botho ethics* is living distinctively good lives and being good persons (Watson 1997: 67). It is also that with both, the notion of a morally good person is the irreducible starting point (Louden 1997: 289), as opposed to considerations of what constitutes good actions and bad actions. In other words, for VE and ethics of *botho* the primary object of moral evaluation is *motho* i.e., the moral agent and specifically the character of the person. In others it can be argued that both approaches start from the premise that “assessment of human character is..., more fundamental than either the assessment of the rightness of action or the assessment of the value of the consequences of actions” (Solomon 1997: 166). It can further be argued that the elevation of character as the heart of evaluative statements seen in VE , the primacy of character is what makes *botho ethics understood in terms of cultivation of makhabane* a version of VE. This idea of virtues as articulated in VE and its centrality and intrinsic connection to an evaluation of conduct is very much what *botho* ethics entails and how it functions in the moral culture of Basotho i.e., as an expression of a moral judgement following a moral assessment of conduct. Thus, we see that in both VE and ethics of *botho* the central focus of ethical reflection is the person (*motho*) i.e., the individual specifically his or her character, i.e., its formation and development. It can therefore be argued that without reference to character the reimagined formulation of *botho* this study proposes is unintelligible just as it is with VE. These initials observation about *botho* underscoring the significance of character for moral conduct show how much *botho* ethics as a character-based ethic, reflects many key elements traditionally associated with the moral tradition of the virtues. This understanding of I will argue is well construed because like many virtue ethical approaches, *botho* ethics places the significance of character at the centre of ethics. It is in this sense that ethics of *botho* can be treated as an African variant of the moral tradition of the virtues. I will therefore argue that its key themes; primacy of character, emphasis on cultivating virtues of *botho (makhabane)*, and the moral significance of the community all resemble features of ethical approaches characteristics of many pre-modern and traditional cultures similar to the ethical approach

traditionally found in Aristotelianism. It must, however, be stressed that this does not mean that the reimagined formulation of *botho* envisioned here i.e., in terms of character and the requirement of the practice of virtues, must take on a “neo-Aristotelian” form. Variants of VE do exist that are not, for instance, in the East, this tradition can be traced to Mencius and Confucius, (Hursthouse and Pettigrove 2016). This is the case with *botho* in sub-Saharan Africa and how it is applied and functioned as a moral ideal in Sesotho speaking culture. As an ethical ideal and basic moral frame of reference, it encourages inculcation of *makhabane a botho* (virtues of *botho*), many of which can be found in the lives of paradigmatic figures in the culture of the Basotho. I am thinking here of figure like Chief Mohlomi, philosopher and teacher and his protégé, Moshoeshoe, King of the Basotho. The two are the most notable adherents of *botho* ethics, from which valuable lessons about virtues of *botho* can be learned especially about leadership today. Moshoeshoe<sup>34</sup> later went on to become one of the most renowned ethical leaders of his time; practitioner of ethics of *botho* par excellence in eighteenth century Southern Africa, championing peace as an important principle and a virtue highly regarded as central tenet of *botho* (du-Preez 2012: 9; Prozesky 2016) among his people.

The character-based approach to *botho* ethics advanced here is yet another voice in the growing debate about the relevance of character in ethics in general. Traditionally this approach is associated with virtue ethics, hence the argument about the parallels between the two. This approach is best understood in terms of an approach to ethics that “articulate moral value through a focus on the morality of dispositions of character, rather than on the morality of acts” (van Niekerk 2013: 84). In Sesotho culture, the equivalence of this is the insistence on the cultivation of *makhabane a botho*, as central to *botho*. It implies that the assessment of moral conduct is not only a matter of how one acts but more importantly it is a matter of one’s character and the way one lives their life. This, in turn, ought to be the central focus of the discourse. The insights within *botho*, that are being rediscovered by its interpretation in terms of character, for example the priority of the ‘goodness of *motho*’ over the ‘the rightness of actions of *motho*’ provides contemporary moral environment with a workable alternative ethical framework which is much needed today (Shutte 2001: 9). This is because unlike the existing major ethical theories, *botho* is a rejection of the idea of ethics as something concerned primarily with rules about “the right thing to do” i.e., priority of what is right over what is good (Richardson 2009: 142). In other words, it is preoccupied with a different set of

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<sup>34</sup> In Sesotho culture he is also accredited with the invention of ‘*mafisa*’ system, a practice sharing of wealth in the form of cattle with those who have no cattle on a gift or loan basis (Matšela 1979:87). The moral significance of this practice, which in the current discourse is sometimes erroneously referred to only as loan term loan of cattle (Richardson 2009: 136, Mofuoa 2014: 229) often misunderstood as merely an expression of African communalism. A closer analysis of this practice reveal the moral character of the person in that it is an eternal expression that demonstrates the possession of the virtue of sharing, kindness and *kutloelo bohloko*, (fellow feeling for another person) values and virtues (*makhabane*) that are highly regarded and encourage in Sesotho culture as part of moral education of Basotho.

interest namely the character of *motho* as revealed in their life and the way one conduct themselves (Mkhize 2008: 42). This formulation of *botho* it can be argued that it does not only encapsulate eternal truths relevant for contemporary sub-Saharan society, but that it is also relevant to ethics in general as it underscores necessity of the reinstatement of character and virtue ethical approaches to ethics, which is traditionally associated with VE (van Niekerk 2009: 84, Richardson 1994: 89). This is because it places premium on moral character of the agent as the basis of moral value. It focuses how well moral agents perform in acquiring good moral qualities of character that make a person a truly “morally beautiful person” (Ikuenobe 2016: 129). When viewed this way *botho* ethics presents an attractive alternative to modern approaches to ethics and is a validation of an approach that resonates *mutatis mutandis* with the moral tradition represented by virtue ethics. This is the tradition that in the West is synonymous with Aristotle’s ethics, which some are now questioning the wisdom of its abandonment due to the influence of the enlightenment on modern ethics (MacIntyre 1981: 117).

The most persuasive argument of the similarity between *botho* ethics and VE is the conception of *botho* in Sesotho speaking culture. As already mentioned in Sesotho culture ethics is described in terms of virtues and vices. Similarly *botho* is defined in that way as well i.e., the virtues it encourages in a person and the vices it discourages. It is for this reason that *botho* as virtue is evoked in Sesotho culture always in opposition to *bophoofolo* as its corresponding vice to be avoided i.e., failure to acquire *botho*. Linked to this is that the Sesotho understanding of this concept puts great emphasis on attainment of *botho* through inculcation of *makhabane* (virtue) as a habitual moral training in character. What this points to is the importance that Basotho ethics placed on moral formation specifically in training for character. All else thus flows from this including inculcation of *makhabane*. The same is true of virtue ethics. As Hursthouse (2016: par 2, 59). explains for proponent of virtue ethics, (a) virtues and vices are foundational for virtue ethical theories and other normative notions will be grounded in them, and (b) great emphasis is put on moral education, where the goal is not inculcation of rules but the training of character of individuals”. As it can be seen in both cases great emphasis is put on moral life being understood in terms of virtues and vices, both equally place great significance on moral formation and training for character. In terms of elaborating this in relation to *botho*, this will require a further analysis of how *botho* as moral concept is understood and its intrinsic connection with character. Some of this has already been discussed in earlier sections so here I will just summarise the main points.

If one looks at ordinary parlance in Sesotho culture it will be seen that references to *botho* and how it is spoken of, is as a description of moral quality or an attribute of a character that either a *motho* has or does not have. And the context within which this assessment is made is not a single act, but the whole process of moral education into the virtues, a process of education

that is lifelong. This is what *botho* fundamentally means i.e., *motho* progressively acquiring certain admirable good qualities of character or *makhabane*. In other words, the central questions at the centre of ethical reflection according to this account are questions about *motho* and the moral quality of their life (Richardson 1994: 89, 93), questions which as we know are the running theme of VE.

The relevancy of the character centric formulation of advanced here echoes VE's central idea of training in character, with the emphasis on the idea of inculcating virtues. This does not only reaffirm the primacy of character, which is a key theme of VE but highlights the significance of moral training that both VE and *botho* ethics emphasis as essential to the quality of a person's character. This is also consistent with one of the foundational claims underlying virtue ethical approaches, which is 'what sorts of persons we are and ought to be and how we should live' (Hursthouse 2016: Par 3; Richardson 1994: 92).

The implication of this for current *botho* discourses among other things includes a shift towards interpreting and redefining *botho* in terms virtue ethical approaches, whereby the inculcation of admirable moral qualities of *botho* is the purpose and aim of being moral or as VE puts it to be virtuous. This means interpreting *botho* in terms of encapsulation of virtues, whereby even the valuing of harmonious relationships is understood as dispositional state partially constituted by and intelligible in terms of the moral agent's character and how it is formed (van Niekerk 2009: 84). In other words, these relationships must be understood as not sufficient on their own, they still require active effort by the agent to acquire the right set of character dispositions which are agreeable to forming and sustaining harmonious communal relations and integrating these into one's character as part of who they are and how one lives. It is in this sense that *botho* is understood as that by with other normative ideals and values are defined or lived in conformity to. It is because *botho* is itself a moral ideal consisting of a conglomeration of virtues (van Niekerk 2009: 87, Shutte 2001: 32). In this way *botho*, becomes the principal normative ideal upon which other moral ideals are grounded, because as found in Sesotho culture, *botho* fundamentally denotes the totality of *makhabane*. That means full attainment i.e., perfection in possession or complete attainment of *botho* is never fully achieved because this would mean a perfect *motho*, which is not possible because as agents we are never perfect.

The possession of *botho* and the virtues it encapsulates therefore is always a matter of degrees, measured in terms of evaluating whether one is making sufficient steady progress towards this or not. It is in this sense that *botho* can thus be considered as the goal or *telos* in the moral agent's life another. Here again one can see elements of teleology of VE here although not that fully developed. In other words, personhood or *botho* and *makhabane* denote moral growth and maturity where the emphasis is on the link between being ethical and moral maturity. Personal moral growth which *botho* presupposes is then to be understood an

acknowledgement that *motho* as a moral agent is a work in progress i.e., “a still evolving and growing being whose full attainment of *botho* or personhood is a matter of degree. In other words, making progress in how well one lives their life in terms of learning about education in virtue that one gets from lived experience and from others with the requisite moral standing in the community or moral example (van Niekerk 2013: 88).

It is interesting to observe here that this description picks on the teleological orientation and this is another area of commonality of *botho* ethics and virtue ethical approaches. It manifests itself most clearly in what is commonly referred to as normative conception of personhood. This is an understanding of *motho* is reasons for being, which in Sesotho culture can be interpreted as doing what one ought to do as a moral agent or *motho*. It is a view of life of the moral agent seen as consisting of moving steadily through life towards one’s ultimate purpose in life or *telos* and this is achieved by the way our whole life is constructed (McIntyre 1981: 34, 147, 175). In terms of this understanding, *botho* denotes possession of good traits of character inculcated over time and consistently displayed over one’s whole life. Its possession i.e., good traits of character or more correctly inculcation of *makhabane* by the agent, makes *motho* to be good in terms of performing their purpose or *telos* well, and in African ethics, this is implicitly understood in terms of simply being a *motho* i.e., good person and fulfilment one’s obligations and role in life. This teleological connotations in *botho* is best captured in the joint notions of personhood and acquisition of *makhabane*. These denotes possession of *botho* as “the sort of thing that does not develop in *motho* automatically, but rather has to be acquired through habitual practices in the course and during one’s life. This is done by the way a person lives their life and it implied a possibility of failure in achieving this or success (van Nierkerk 2009: 84, Molefe 2017c: 58). Success here must be understood in terms of, making adequate acceptable progress towards a complete and fulfilled life, which is one’s life goal<sup>35</sup>. *Makhabane*, on the other hand, denotes the practising of the virtues in the course of one’s life and the steady progress one makes through regular practice and participation in social practices<sup>36</sup> i.e., those types of human activity that provides the arena in which the virtues are exhibited, and moral habits are developed and sustained.

The centrality of character or virtuous character is not only the overarching theme of character ethics that VE denotes, but it is also its bedrock. This can be argued is the same about ethics *botho* because development of good character is the governing principle. And since character entails a certain stableness and permanency, i.e., a behaviour pattern formed because of past

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<sup>35</sup> The meaning intended here is akin to that which is applied when describing individuals in terms of the success in a career, the emphasis is on the whole of a person’s life in that particular career as a whole, whose final assessment is at the end. The same applies to *botho* as the evaluation of the moral life of *motho*. When understood in this sense then *botho* in its most radical form refers to a complete and fulfilled life achievement, which fully assessment can only be made at the end, as the ancient Greek proverb say ‘Call no man happy until he is dead’ (McIntyre 1981: 34).

<sup>36</sup> See McIntyre 1981: 187.

persistent actions (Gyekye 2011: par. 16) it is the sort of thing that does not change significantly over time but evolves gradually so to speak due to growth and maturity i.e., character development. For this reason, character tends to be understood in terms of those dispositions and good moral qualities that last much longer and change less easily. It is in this sense that moral virtues (excellences of character) or vices likewise are understood as the consequences of habituation (Ibid.). This is true of the understanding underlying possession of virtues of *botho* too, which is an expression of the acquisition of qualities that describe the moral beauty of a person. And like virtues these admirable inner qualities of character that reflects a person's good character are cultivated over time and are not easy to acquire. But like habits once they are cultivated they become part of one's make up and as such they are not easy to change hence synonymous with our characters (Ikuenobe 2016: 132) and are therefore a reflection of who we truly are. For this reason, a person's moral standing i.e., assessment and evaluation of this is always in terms of good character. This is because according to traditional understanding

“the most important .... and lasting judgment that can be made about a person is about his inner beauty or moral character. It is one's character or inner beauty that determines what one does; and what one does, is also a reflection of one's inner beauty” (ibid., 132).

One of the reasons moral character is central to the understanding of *botho* in Sesotho culture and indeed in African ethics in general is that, in the moral language of many of Africa cultures, particularly those from which *botho* derives, there are no equivalent terms for English words “morality” and “ethics” (Gyekye 2011: par. 10). Instead, these cultures describe this sphere of life, i.e., moral behaviour and personal conduct in a language terms that denotes character, whether it is in their moral terms or proverbs. Regarding proverbs it shall be recalled from earlier chapters that many of them function as a catalyst of morals and ethics and are decisive in communicating ethical goods and correct behaviour (Bujo 2001: 24). Hence it will be seen that those proverbs dealing with ethical and moral issues reach not only head but also to the conscience, stir it and helping in the exercise of deciding between good and evil, justice and injustice, right or wrong” (Mokitimi 1997: xii, xiv). The ethical significance of proverbs as the deposit of moral values of the culture has already been discussed. Here I only want further to underscore their significance by pointing out that many of them have normative imperatives of *botho* that pick on admirable qualities of character. Thus, we find proverbs that encourage and promote “hard work, kindness, love, bravery, strength, unity, trust, justice, fairness, friendship and generosity”. We find others depicting vices to be avoided such as “slander greed, laziness, thieving, backbiting, injustice, untrustworthiness, lying and murder, arrogance, selfishness and incest” and many other qualities regarded as bad for one's character (Ibid. xiv). What we can see from this is how central proverbs are, as an articulation of virtues of *botho* and that as such their primary function is as a resource for practical wisdom

in ethical decision making for a person. Here again we can see similarities with another theme found in VE namely the significance of practical reasoning (*phronesis*) that is found in VE.

What is clear though is the observation that many of the qualities or virtues outlined above are descriptions that are ordinarily used when we speak of character. This further supports the centrality of character found in common between ethics of *botho* and virtue ethical approaches and underscores the significance of the character-centric account of *botho* advocated here. Similarly with the moral terms used to describe the moral life, we have already seen that these include terms like '*boits'aro*' and '*mekhoa*' both of which denote and describe morally admirable behaviour and habits, which are descriptions of character.

In other words, in cultures like that of the Basotho from which ethics of *botho* applies, the ideas and beliefs that pertain to ethical conduct are described always and solely in terms of moral character. Thus we find that in the moral language of the Basotho, for instance when a person is regarded as having bad or no morals, a Mosotho will say "*o boits'aro bo bobe*" (he or she has bad behaviour) or "*ha na mekhoha*" (they have no manners) and "*o mekhoha e mebe*" (they have bad habits/manner), or simply "*ha se motho ho hang nthoeno*" (-is not a person at all that thing). All these statements while on the surface express value judgements about behaviour and habit, they are fundamentally statements about character as the sole standard by which possession of qualities of *botho* is evaluated and assessed. This means that *botho* as representative ideal of the African morally ideal person, must therefore be understood and interpreted equally in terms of character.

In view of this it is arguable if a person with bad character can simultaneously be regarded as having qualities normally associated with *botho*. This is because "it would be illogical for anyone with *botho* to demonstrate concern for others and at the same time have the" tendencies of someone with a bad character" (Letseka 2013<sub>A</sub>: 340). According to this then, to say of one he or she is a person is thus to make a claim about someone being morally upright or virtuous; it is to make an assessment about their moral praiseworthiness (Molefe 2017<sub>A</sub>: 220) which is ultimately an appraisal of the person's good character i.e., they are morally outstanding. In other words, when *motho* is praised for having *botho*, what in effect is being pointed to, is the achievement one has made in inculcating certain qualities of character and virtues. It is these virtues of *botho* that makes a person morally good, admirable, and commendable and a morally outstanding person. This leads to the next point that *botho* shares with VE approach to highlight.

The exercise and practice of virtues as it will have been detected in this chapter is a social one, although they are attained individually. It is therefore important to recognise that central to virtues is that they are the sort of thing that by nature thrive within a certain social setting, that they are fostered by certain types of societal arrangement and conversely are endangered and stifled by others. The same is true of *botho* and the virtues it encapsulates. It is for this

reason that it is important to emphasise that the agent centred account of *botho* advance here is inherently communal and personal but not individualistic. This is because African ethics, more than the classical text of VE does, makes an especially important intervention here in terms of its conceptualisation of moral formation, in that it finds the proper setting for this as the community setting of the village or *motse*. Hence the expression it takes a village to raise a child. The character-centric account of *botho* proposed here validates this in acknowledging that these admirable qualities of character, as personal and central to the individuals' ultimate goal or *telos*, are best understood and acquired in one's participation in social practices (MacIntyre 1981: 187) and communion with others (Shutte 2008: 25; Mkhize 2008: 39). In other words, they are not developed and perfected in isolation or as a solitary endeavour by the individual alone. This means that fundamental to the practice of virtues, in this case, virtues of *botho*, is an understanding that this requires the existence of an enabling suitable social order to thrive. Such a society does not only make the practice of virtue possible; it encourages this and treats it as an admirable and morally worthy thing to do.

What this imply is that for the practice of virtues to have the desired effect i.e., take root socially it is not enough to have moral agents with the right disposition of character. This is because to paraphrase Prozesky (2016: 7) for virtues of *botho* to be a reality in society, personal moral character of individuals alone will not be enough. This is because what genuinely inclusive ethical living i.e., practice of virtues mean and require in practice as well is "sound ethical support structures and resources available to them analogous to those available to King Moshoeshoe" one of the most ethical figures in 18<sup>th</sup> century Southern African (Ibid.,). And this necessity of an enabling social order is confirmed by the emphasis African ethics places on the community spirit characteristic of traditional African village life and moral formation and how the latter was regarded and functioned in those cultures from which *botho* derives.

It will be seen that in African culture, moral education i.e., character and its formation or development does not only go hand in hand with the community (Letseka 2013<sub>A</sub>: 342) but entails the inculcation and acquisition of the values that lead to the emergence of a particular social order. As suggested, this is the same consideration that is found underpinning the central claims of VE. This is because according to (Statman 1997: 2) behind the recent interest in the revival of virtue and character in ethics is a "dissatisfaction with some basic aspects of modern (Western) society" and an implied preference for the establishment of "a different kind of society and for a different relationship among its members". In other words, if in the moral sphere VE implies dissatisfaction with the problems of modern ethics or the "futility and sterility" of contemporary moral debates, in the social sphere it expresses opposition to some fundamental aspects of modern (Western) liberal society. Similarly, the approach to ethics that is being advocated. It implies a desire for a deep revision of existing social order and a rejection of the current sociology underpinning contemporary social order (Ibid. 2). In other

words, underlying the revival of character ethics underscored here is an implicit critique of existing social order and a call for its replacement with a different kind of society and a different kind of relationship among its members (Statman 1997: 2, 15). This should come as no surprise because, with character-based ethical approaches, the focus of morality is on virtues or *makhabane* and as we have explained these are best achieved in the context of community, or more correctly within certain types of communities. Moreover, certain social arrangements are essential for the practice of virtues, while others are detrimental and, in some instances, even discourage their practice, hence the difficulty today of living out some of the traditional *makhabane a botho* or virtues as before.

This helps explain the concerns in the literature with the contemporary moral environment, where the existing social order is regarded as not conducive to the practice and inculcation of the virtues in the way it was possible in traditional societies. Describing this environment MacIntyre (1984:6) succinctly summed it as living after virtue, “where neither the virtues nor virtue are regarded as central to the general moral culture and discussions about behaviour and conduct.” Ours is a society where all social life is arranged and defined in terms of the individual as the primary unit of social and political organisation, as well as civil liberties. But more important is that it is a social organisation where moral sovereignty and autonomy are now all vested in the individual, as the sole accountable person. In such a society the “community is [treated as] simply an arena in which individuals each pursue their own self-chosen conception of the good life” and people only come together for pragmatic purposes because society is morally incidental and there is no essential moral link between people (Richardson 2009: 140). This is reflected in the widely held view in the contemporary moral environment, where most people think that they should be allowed “to do anything they want, provided they do not violate the rights of others (Statman 1997: 7). Such a society will therefore most likely be conflict with the ethical imperatives *botho* because *botho* presupposes priority of the common good, not the individual’s rights<sup>37</sup> along with the social order such imperatives require to sustain them and is conducive for the inculcation of the virtues (MacIntyre 1981: 115-117). In African society, according to Molema in Gyekye (2011: par.37) this is the end and aim i.e., telos of each moral agent and in harmony with, and conformity to, that the conduct of *motho* is moulded. This means that the virtues or *makhabane* are similarly best achieved and practised not individually and in isolation but in common and with others, and more specifically in the pursuit of the common good. Hence in African culture, the good of the individual is primarily understood as bound up with the common good. The acknowledgement

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<sup>37</sup> This simply means “that the social character of morality requires that the individual member of the society, ever mindful of his interests, adjust those interests to the interests and needs of others) (Gyekye 2011: par 66). In African ethics it is crucial that this is conceptualised correctly so as not to give an impression that the individual’s interest don’t matter.

For more on the debate on African ethics and individual rights see Gyekye 2011: par 67-77, Molefe 2016: 116, Molefe 2017<sub>B</sub> and Molefe 2017<sub>C</sub>: 53.

and recognition here is that as moral agents and members of a specific community, we are not just bound up together for pragmatic purposes but that there are essential moral links that we share together that are morally important to who we are<sup>38</sup> (Richardson 2009: 141). The same notion is found in Aristotle's ethics and the ethical significance of and the function of the *polis*, in relation to the practice of virtues whereby the primary concern is the whole of life, not only this or that good but "man's good as such" (McIntyre 1981: 156). Similarly, with African ethics, this is revealed in the African representation of values (Metz (2012:100) "where it is not possible to achieve the ethical ideal individually or as a strictly personal achievement" because this is made possible in the community. In other words, it is in and by being part of the community from its smallest manifestation in the form of the family to its largest form in the *polis* that as moral agents we can find a deep meaning and substance to our moral beliefs. This means that it is in the community i.e., through its social institutions, particularly of *lelapa* or family (both nuclear and extended) (Letseka 2013b: 356) and the village, or neighbourhood that one learns and perfects the art of becoming a *motho* by practising the virtues of *botho* such as how to be generous, kind, hospitable and ultimately what is good (Ntibagirirwa 1999: 79, 82). Describing this Kasenene in Ntibagirirwa (1999: 105) states that "a person who becomes famous and respected in the community... as a virtuous person" is one who has proved in the manner in which they live their life to be superior to the norm in some way, and has excelled in their life plan or *telos*, achieving a moral standard admired by the community". In other words both African and Aristotle's system of ethics, which are standardly defined in terms of excellence of moral character of *motho*, and his or her permanent exhibition of the virtues through one's character, start from the premise that moral goodness and the practice of the virtues, cannot be described independently of the individuals' character as a moral agent (Metz 2012: 100) as so formed by one's *community* and culture. So, it can be seen from this that the central tenets of Basotho approaches to ethics displayed in their understanding of the ethical ideal of *botho* are similar with virtue ethical approaches represented by Aristotle's system. This is because both start from the premise that ethics, in particular moral formation or education, which first occurs in the family and later in adulthood in the community and one's participation<sup>39</sup> and active involvement in habitual practice and various social practices, is undertaken *with an eye on the community* of which as moral agent we are inescapably a part of.

In comparison to current approaches to ethics which are largely abstract and individualistic, the approach to ethics in Sesotho culture advanced here is an attractive offer for the creation of moral agents who have a place among friends and in the society and who is a better citizen in his or her community and in the universal human family in general (Ntibagirirwa 1999: 117).

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<sup>38</sup> This helps to explain the prevalence and emphasis by some scholars of the relational dimension of *botho* that one finds in the literature (Metz, 2007: 333, Molefe 2017c: 53).

<sup>39</sup> See Giddy's notion of personal participation (2014: 23 and McIntyre's idea of social practice (1981: 187).

The reimagined agent centred account of *botho* inherent in this approach and advocated here for consideration, places significance and moral attention on the primacy of character of *motho* as the focus of ethics which for Basotho was a central feature of their understanding of ethics. This leads to the next section examining the primacy of character in Sesotho culture in the next chapter.

### 3.9 Summary

The chapter gave a critical appraisal and overview of the current *botho* discourse and interest in the revival of *botho* ethics. It locates this within the larger context of the debates on *botho* and the background of the dominant ethical theories underpinning contemporary moral environment. The analysis of *botho* and prevailing approaches, highlights some of the main debates around the concept, primarily in South Africa. Here the chapter outlined concerns about *botho* related to perceived overuse and misuse of the concept, where it risks becoming almost meaningless. Other concerns are that the concept is no longer a suitable ethical approach for contemporary modern society, which is different from traditional communities which *botho* implies. Some point to the lack of precision of the concept at one of its problems. The chapter highlighted the nature of these debates around *botho* and showed that these can be grouped into two main schools of thought. One school is of those critical of *botho* industry and questioning the wisdom of reviving a concept like *botho* which is at home in traditional community settings characteristic of the past and no longer possible in modern complex mobile communities. Among those questioning *botho*, the concern is with what is regarded as the one-sided portrayal of the good side of *botho* as practiced in traditional communities leaving out the negative elements found in those communities as part of the communal approach and practice of *botho*. For these critics, the revival of such traditional moral ideal as “*botho*” as a relevant ethical framework suitable for today’s complex mobile societies is not realistic or desirable in some instances. The other school of thought argues that the ethical approach and imperatives implied in *botho* is just what modern day societies need and the relevance of *botho* for today’s context is clearer now than ever. Scholars in this group have a positive appraisal of *botho* and constitute the most dominant view in the discourse currently. This view accounts for much of the development of the conventional or Afro-communitarian account of *botho* now the main interpretation found in the discourse. The chapter analysed this understanding of *botho* focusing on its definition primarily in terms of harmonious relationships. It analysed this account which is derived from and is dependent on the interpretation of the proverb *motho ke motho ka batho ba bang*. Here I have however argued against this formulation of *botho* pointing out that based on the experience of Sesotho speaking cultures, there is no evidence of this usage where *botho* is defined in terms of this proverb. The relationship of mutual presupposition that the current discourse presents of these

two I argued is at best an academic invention that has more to do with academic scholars' interest and scholar of *botho* than a reflection of actual usage of the two in social setting reflective of the experience of lived reality.

The chapter also critically analysed a central claim in Afro-communitarianism that feature in these debates, which maintains that there are other similar terms and ideas as *botho* in other African cultures in sub-Saharan Africa and that these terms all have similar meaning. Here the chapter showed that although these terms may be similar, they are nevertheless not the same. I therefore argued using the example of *botho* in Sesotho culture and Ubuntu in Zulu culture that these terms in their social context of their respective cultures will reflect local nuance in meaning as determined by their context, hence caution should be exercised in treating these as meaning the same thing. For this reason, in this study the preference is of the Sesotho term *botho*, as opposed the more common combination of ubuntu-*botho*. This is to underscore the Sesotho perspective and the underlying understanding accompanying the use of the term *botho* in their culture. Another aspect of the discourse that the chapter discusses is the inherent connection the concept has explicitly and implicitly with personhood. Here the chapter showed that the current discourse is taking place within an ongoing debate within African ethics about personhood. The chapter argued the connection with personhood is based on the premise that *botho* cannot be fully explained without first unpacking the African understanding of what is a *motho*. The chapter showed that this debate plays itself out in the discourse in the common argument about the priority of the community versus that of the individual. The chapter here suggested that the mutually exclusive dichotomy characterising this debate is unhelpful, within the context of the proposed character centric formulation of *botho* of this study. The chapter posits the narrative conception of the self of Basotho culture, implied in the formulation of *botho* proposed in this study as a viable alternative avenue for forging a convergence between the two that the discourse can explore to explain the relationship between the individual and community as not mutually exclusive. This is because the moral responsibility required by character formation, become a responsibility the enjoins the two in a common project, where they are both equally important role players. Thus, in doing so the difference portrayed in this argument become less and the opposed positions they are supposed to stand for are not as far apart as initially it may have seemed. Another area of analyses this chapter focuses on is the challenge a topic like *botho* presents because of the volume of new material constantly being produced. This makes it difficult to survey the material in a comprehensive manner that one can draw out themes and common observations. However, the chapter found the use of a historical approach tracing historical analysis of the usage of *botho* in written sources a useful tool in this regard. This provided the analysis with a way to review the evolution of the usage of *botho* in southern Africa and to compare current understanding with how this concept was understood traditionally. The

chapter analysed different definitions of *botho* found in current *botho* discourse from the late 1800s showing that the current formulations of can grouped onto two main categories. One category *botho* is described in various ways but all expressing it as a phenomenon. Here the chapter found descriptions that includes *botho* as a worldview, philosophy or as humanness. The other category is of definitions where *botho* is understood in terms of moral quality of a person and moral character of the person. This latter reflects a much older usage and the chapter argued is consistent with the understanding of the term in in Sesotho speaking culture. The chapter analysed both approaches i.e., the phenomenon account of *botho* and the moral quality of person account suggesting that the latter is a better and more practical articulation of the concept for today's context.

The chapter also gave an critique of current *botho* discourse, challenging first the overly communitarian formulation of *botho* that is now the predominant formulation in the discourse. Along with this is the corresponding self-realisation understanding of this concept. Here I showed that this formation and supporting definitions are not the most appropriate formulation of the essence of *botho* as a normative concept about personhood. I pointed out that the notion of self-realisation as a conception of African ethics, is counter-intuitive to traditional African thought about personhood. I also argued that this runs the risk of introducing an individualistic shade of meaning to *motho ke motho* that is not found in this proverb. I thus suggested that this is a later reading in African ethics driven by considerations of articulating the need for individual autonomy within an ethical framework that is regarded as essentially communitarian. I have challenged this, pointing out that the place of the individual within African ethics is never in doubt citing several examples to substantiate this, including the ceremony of naming which in African culture underscore the uniqueness of the individual as a member of their family. I have thus suggested that the implicit reference of individual autonomy implied in self-realisation is not a African problem for ethics in Africa nor for traditional African moral thought and that its introduction in the discourse is unnecessary, at least from the African ethics perspective.

The chapter also mounted a robust critique of Afro communitarianism as the dominant account focusing on its over reliance on the proverb *motho ke motho* as means of articulating the richness and totality of values and virtues encapsulated in *botho*. The chapter showed the weakness of this. Firstly by demonstrating how this is a poor use of the richness of African proverbs. Using experience of this proverb and other narratives in Sesotho culture, I argued against the exceptionalism of this proverb as amounting to a misuse. The chapter pointed out that this give the proverb a false independence and abstract character from the unity of proverbs and other narratives, which it does not have and is not how it functions. I therefore challenged singling out one proverb out of many with similar meanings that cast light on *botho* and its meaning, contending that this deprives the discourse of the multiplicity of meanings

and applications of such aphorism necessary for the explicating *botho* for the complexity of contexts that is today's moral environment. This in turn the chapter suggested gives rise to the impoverished account of *botho* compared one that which could be gained from the added richness of meaning from other narratives. Here the chapter cited the proverb *morena ke morena ka sechaba* as an example of the benefit of the use of proverbs in the discourse in their unity not isolation. I argued that the ethical leadership imperatives of *botho*, desperately needed today are better articulated in this proverb than they could ever be in *motho ke motho*. The chapter thus calls for a more comprehensive and complementary use of proverbs and other narratives in the *botho* discourse to further unpack what is *botho* beyond how it is currently the case.

Second, I argued that *botho* as a moral concept, is best conceptualised if it is treated as a polysemic moral ideal, with many meanings that are inexhaustible, and as such it should not be reduced to simplistic formulations or definitions. I thus argued that the reduction of this moral ideal to a single proverb as the chief way in which it is understood and interpreted is problematic. I pointed out that to do this is not only problematic because this equates *botho* with this single proverb, but also that also misunderstands the nature of *botho* as polysemic moral ideal that is best described in multiplicity of ways and approaches that rejects reductionist definitions. I argued this is problematic because such use of single source explanation as that found in this proverb reflects just one way of elucidating the values virtues of *botho*. I pointed out that because *botho* is a polysemic moral ideal it cannot be fully expressed in only one way like in a single proverb. Rather that it requires the recourse to the whole depth and breadth of Africa narratives to reveal its full meaning. Here the chapter stressed the significance of proverbs and narratives and the internal unity as vehicles of moral education and the complimentary meaning of *botho* they supply each other when used in unity than in isolation.

I further argued that this calls for a revisiting of *botho* where the understanding of this concept is not premised on *motho ke motho ka batho*, in favour of an account of *botho* premised on its understanding first as a moral ideal with multiplicity of ways of explicating it including through narratives and proverbs. The chapter suggest that the articulation of such a reimagined account of *botho* i.e., one whose values are inexhaustible, requires for its communication and interpretation, a more comprehensive use narratives like proverbs in their unity not isolation as is currently the case and one that goes beyond the fixation with single proverb *motho ke motho*. Narratives, which includes folktales and proverbs I argued its values are still the best tools to unpack the richness of *botho* as the ethical ideal, many of whose values remain untapped and embedded in most of the African narratives as the deposits of traditional understanding of what is *botho*. This I have argued in turn will contribute towards the development of an account of *botho* that is not married to *motho ke motho*. The starting point

towards this I thus have argued begins with the reinstatement of the description of *botho* in terms of the moral quality of a person, specifically the primacy of character as central focus of current *botho*, which is the focus of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR: REVISITING *BOTHO* AND THE PRIMACY OF CHARACTER IN SESOTHO SPEAKING CULTURE AND THE MORAL THOUGHT OF BASOTHO

### 4.1 Introduction

*The essence of botho cannot be fully understood without reference to moral character of motho because its existence presupposes inculcation of certain dispositions of character.*

The chapter examines the understanding of *botho* in Sesotho speaking culture and centrality of character to their understanding of this concept, where it is used primarily in the context of moral assessment of *motho*. The chapter will underscore the central claims underpinning this study that defines *botho* as a description of moral character of a person as suggested in the quotation above and implied at the end of forgoing chapter. Here this interpretation is thus discussed detail in this chapter as the essence of the formulation of *botho* underpinning this study. The chapter will examine the experience and moral life of traditional Basotho communities as a case for introducing a character centric articulation of *botho* in the current discourse. The chapter will show this is a more authentic formulation of the concept because it is consistent with the older usage and understanding of *botho* in many traditional communities in southern Africa before the 1980s. The chapter will therefore give an account of the significance of character to ethics of *botho* in Sesotho culture by surveying the social and cultural aspects of Basotho culture and moral life that reflect their understanding of the importance they give of character, especially in their moral language and the linkage of this to their understanding of *botho*. The chapter thus is implicit case for the reinstatement of character as the central focus of ethics. It will examine the importance of moral formation in Sesotho culture and the role of Sesotho narratives as the chief means of education into virtues of *botho*. Of particular interest here is *litšomo* (folk tales) and their power as stories to communicate the values and virtues of *botho* for today's context beyond the cultural origins of *botho* itself.

The reality of many modern societies, including communities in Africa today, is the displacement of character and its significance from public life and ethics where character formation as a moral concept commands little moral significance and authority. The abandonment of character as a key moral consideration in discussions about personal conduct is one of the most noticeable features of contemporary moral environment discussed in chapter two, including in current *botho* discourse. This contrasts sharply with moral attitudes and approaches of traditional moralities of many pre-modern cultures such as that found in Sesotho speaking culture, one of the cultures from which *botho* derives. It is for this reason that it comes as a surprise when on occasion; the quality of a person's moral character is brought to the centre of public discourse in evaluating the moral conduct of a person. An

example of a rare public evoking of moral character as an important ethical consideration for assessing conduct a person we see in an open letter by a senior party official in South Africa recently to then president of the country who said:

“I cannot continue to look the other way whilst shameless leaders *without character or integrity* wreak havoc with the principles of those who liberated our country so that there should be a better life for all<sup>40</sup>” (IOL 2017)

The significance of this is not in the power or profoundness of the statement made here, or the moral authority it commands thereof. Nor the fact that this is a public statement by a contemporary politician in a leadership position of in society. It is rather, that moral character of a person is here being presented as relevant and appropriate consideration in the assessing morally the conduct of a person. In this case the person whose moral character was being assessment was a public figure in a position of leadership. This underscore the argument of this study which is, being a good person, which is what *botho* entails is bound up with the quality of character, as the reflection of our inner selves and who we are as moral agents. The relevance of this is that it shows the significance of moral character as an important consideration in the moral assessing of the individual. This I will argue in Sesotho culture is always understood in terms of having *botho i.e.*, the kind of person one considers themselves to be as a moral agent. While this anecdotal evidence may not be that conclusive to support the argument of the moral significance of character, it underscores the rarity in which moral character features as an important ethical consideration in discourses and public discussion about conduct of moral agents on which one can be called to account on. This supports the central argument underlying this study calling for the restoration of character in current *botho* discourse and ethics in general, and by showing how much the Basotho experience echoes an ethical approach I will argue is commonly found in African culture where moral goodness is inseparable from consideration of good character and *botho i.e.*, what it means to be person or personhood. Metz (2011: 391) makes this clear that ‘in typical African reflection, talk of being a *motho* is moralised in terms of being virtuous or the exhibition of good character’. This shows how moral evaluation of a person or unacceptable level of immorality is intrinsically connected to the character.

It is not surprising therefore that the displacement of character in contemporary African moral culture is one of the main criticisms levelled at modern ethics and its impact on African cultures. It follows then that this concern will be one of the reasons behind the current moral disquiet in African levelled at the failures of modern ethics. According to this the failure is specifically with formation of good character in individuals where individuals care about the good of others, as wells as one’s own legitimate interests (Prozesky 2007:105). It is because of these concerns that there is a noticeable movement in ethics advocating for the

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<sup>40</sup> <https://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/mathews-phosa-this-was-my-damascus-moment-7831409>

reinstatement of a character-based ethical approach to the centre stage of both our moral and social life and what some may call ethics of conscience. It is here that I think *botho* and African ethics can make a unique contribution not only to the current *botho* discourse but also to the larger enterprise of ethics in general. This is context that the character-centric account of *botho* as found in the moral tradition of the Basotho examined here is being revisited. Its relevance, is partly as a response to the failures of modern ethics and partly as a critique of current *botho* discourse and Afro-communitarian account of *botho*. It is not going to be possible here to give a detailed account of the relevance of character to ethics. I will thus seek to show how an understanding of *botho* in Sesotho speaking culture is intrinsically connected to character and inculcation of *makhabane* i.e., good moral qualities and virtues associated with possession of *botho*. This is taken in turn as an entry point to the larger conversation about rediscovering and reinstating character to the centre of ethical discourse including current *botho* discourse.

In Sesotho speaking culture the development of moral character often understood in terms of inculcation and cultivation of qualities of good character is the essence of what possession of *botho* means. But before looking at the primacy of character as the hallmark of understanding of *botho* in Sesotho culture, it will be important to give a brief overview of the traditional moral scheme of the Basotho. This will include its hierarchy of key moral terms of *setho*, and *motho*. Together the three represent the traditional morality of Basotho within which *botho* is found and from which it derives its moral authority. The three are thus regarded as the most important set of moral terms in the moral language of Basotho. Their relationship is equally special in that it is one of mutual presupposition and that by which *botho* is understood and interpreted. I will argue here that this way of interpreting this concept, which I now turn to, offer the current *botho* discourse another avenue by which it can work towards the development of the reimagined account of *botho* beyond *motho ke motho* discussed in the foregoing chapter.

#### **4.2 *Botho* and the Hierarchy of Moral Terms in Sesotho Culture**

It has become common in the literature to find various linguistic or morphological analyses presented as a way of analysing the meaning of *botho*<sup>41</sup>. Along with this one also finds equivalent terms in other languages sub-Saharan Africa (Munyaka and Motlhabi 2009: 64, van Binsbergen 2001: 54; Kamwangamalu 2007:25, Murove 2009: 322) presented as evidence supporting the meaning of *botho* being suggested. As an entry into the analysis of the Sesotho word *botho* we shall take the same approach and compliment this with the dictionary meanings of the word. It shall be recalled that the Sesotho dictionary describes

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<sup>41</sup> Others like van Binsbergen (2001: 71) have however questioned this approach.

*botho* as “*se bakang hore diketso tse ntle di bonahale ho motho and boitshoaro bo botle ba ntho e phelang*”.<sup>42</sup>(Chitja n.d: 59). The literal translated of this is “that which makes visible good actions of a person” and “good moral behaviour/conduct of a living being”. In other words, *botho* is that sort of thing that reveals the good qualities or character of a person. This is the basic way to understand the meaning of this term, but it is worth noting that in Sesotho culture it is recommended that this description be compared to the meaning of another related moral term, ‘*setho*’. A full analysis of this term will be made later. Its relevance here is to underscore another common way in which the meaning of *botho* is determined in the literature. As it will be seen the word *botho* in Sesotho and Setswana group of languages is composed of the addition of the prefixes ‘**bo**’ to the stem ‘-**tho**’<sup>43</sup>. From this stem comes related words; *setho* from the prefix ‘se-’ and *motho* from the prefix ‘mo-,’ plural *batho* from the prefix ‘ba’. Casalis (1861: 322), a French missionary in present-day Lesotho in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, thus commented on the structure of the language of the Basotho, that

“[One] property of these prefixes, and that which is most remarkable is to modify and extend the meaning of the roots. Thus, by adding by turn to the root *tu(sic)* which represent the general idea of man...the prefixes *mo, bo, se,* we get *motu(sic)*, the man (the individual); *botu (sic)* humanity, the quality, the title of man; *setu (sic)* human language [respectively]<sup>44</sup>”.

Most of these analyses tend to come to the same conclusion which is to support the current and predominant Afro-communitarian formulation of *botho* which defines the concept in the relational communal account (Metz and Gaie 2010: 275). By contrast, Casalis’ goes further than most and identifies another prefix ‘**se-**’ from which the word ***setho*** derives, which is not often found in similar morphological analysis. This leads to one of the problems with current *botho* discourse which I want to highlight here and that is the uncontextual theorisation of *botho*. By uncontextual here I am referring to the tendency of analysing *botho* as an abstract concept and from a universal perspective where it can be studied without reference to specific moral system or cultural perspective of any of its cultural origins and from which it derives. This is analysis of *botho* done independently of or in isolation from other related key normative concepts or related moral terms with those cultures, which supplies added insight and deeper

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<sup>42</sup> This understanding is intrinsically linked to *setho* another important moral term in Sesotho culture. It is defined in terms of “*boitshoaro bo botle ba motho; tloaelo e ntle ya boitshoaro ba motho* (good moral behaviour and habits of a person) or as “*tumelo le diketso tsa morabe o itseng ha o bapisoa le merabe e meng. Tsela eo sehlopha sa sechaba kapa morabe o itshoarang ka yona le ho etsa mekgoa le meetlo ya sona*” (beliefs and manners of a particular people, and the way they do their things in terms of their customs and culture) (Chitja. n.d. 698). Here *setho* links being human with (1) good behaviour (*boitshoaro*) of a person and in terms of ‘*tloelo*’ (habits/manners) and (2) the person’s cultural origins (*meetlo*) and customary ways of conduct (*mekgoa*). This is the definition of the term that also inform this study and its understanding of *botho*.

<sup>43</sup> This root as found in the Sesotho expression “*batho ba reng tho*” denotes to be truly, proper genuinely human, and is closely related to “*setho*” understood here as humaneness, which means the property being humane, which always presuppose the having the quality of being human. It is important that the converse does hold as there are human beings who are inhumane.

<sup>44</sup> A better rendering here would be the dignity of a person or *seriti* which denotes aura that surrounds a person (Shutte 2008: 29, Casalis 1861: 245). See “*botho*” also in Chitja n.d.:59.

understanding to the meaning what it means to possess *botho*. In Sesotho speaking culture this is of particular concern with regard to those key moral terms that shares the same linguistic origin with *botho* within the culture. I am thinking here of the terms *setho*<sup>45</sup> and *motho*. These moral terms are not only related to *botho* but also are crucial for the fuller understanding of *botho* in the moral language of the Basotho. Its theorisation thus must be made with reference to these, without which the meaning of *botho* will not be fully grasped.

The necessity of approaching the analysis of *botho* in this way is not only a better way of understanding of how this concept should be analysed but also recognises that *botho* as a moral term and key concept in African ethics, does not function in a vacuum. But rather that it finds significance in part from its intrinsic relationship with the whole body of moral language and key moral terms found within the languages of the cultures from which it derives. This is what is its proper context that informs its meaning and application. It is this context that gives the concept its meaning and authority within the cultures in which it applies. This contextual approach in how *botho* is theorised enables the discourse to find a justifiable basis to integrate some of the interpretations and formulation of *botho* now common in the discourse. I am thinking here of the interpretation of *botho* in terms of humanness or as humanity (Tschaepe 2013: 49; Shutte 2001: 2). While both notions are related to *botho* in so far as they describe characteristic human qualities in a person, it will be noticed that is not necessarily the same as saying this is what *botho* means. In other words, the question is what is the basis for making this assertion besides simply stating it and does it stand up to scrutiny? Anecdotal evidence from the analysis of *botho* in connection with '*setho*' I will argue suggests it does not. This is because a closer analysis of this shows that, it is on account of its the connection of *setho* that *botho* can be described in terms of humanness or humanity. Both qualities are strictly speaking properties relate to *setho* which denotes human nature more than they do to *botho*, because in Sesotho culture *botho* relates to personhood which presuppose *setho*.

It shall be recalled that at the heart of the meaning of *botho*, i.e., moral personhood, is the moral distinction that says even though one may be human, they may still lack *botho*, i.e., those qualities of character that makes one a person, and therefore need to still develop and inculcate these. In other words, by analysing *botho* in the light of related moral concepts, the analysis can understand individually the relative importance of the meaning of each concept, within the moral language of the culture (Paroz 1974: x). This is because in the case of *botho*, the relationship of mutual presupposition that it has with *setho* and *motho* means that *botho*

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<sup>45</sup> *Setho* is a difficult to translate but it denotes both human nature as wells as one cultural and moral udbring and formation. It is defined as in Sesotho and Setswana dictionaries as "*tsela eo morabe o itseng o itshoarang ka yona le ho etsa mekgoa le meetlo ya ona*" which is loosely translated as "beliefs, customs and manners of a particular people or nation in which as a particular people that nation or people typically do things (Otlogetswe 2015). According to Nqosa (2010: 318) the term *setho* is also used to denote values that are consistent with tenets of *botho* and here it will also mean a moral culture of the Basotho people within which and by which individuals are brought up into as persons.

will imply the meaning of the other two, even though it may itself not directly have that meaning. This is the case with humanness which is the properly a quality that is expressed by *setho*. This way of analysing *botho* therefor supplies the discourse with new and a deeper insight into the meaning of *botho*. The necessity of this is because each of the concepts i.e., *setho* and *motho* adds a complimentary shade of meaning unique to itself to our understanding of *botho* resulting in a richer and deeper meaning and understanding of *botho*. This underscores another important feature about *botho* and how to theorise about it, and that is its polysemic character (Karenga 2004). As already shown, this is one of the reasons that makes it difficult to explain this concept, much to the frustration of some scholars interested in preciseness as we have seen in Chapter two. Describing this Shutte (2001: 85) thus points out that *botho* is deep and wide in scope that traditionally stories have been the best vehicles for accessing and illuminating its insights. The reference to stories as a means by which to explicate *botho* must not be underestimated as forms of narratives. I discuss this later towards the end of the chapter where I highlight their relevance in Sesotho culture of narratives to moral education into values of *botho*. The reason stories are best suited to articulate the values of *botho* is because of its polysemic character. For this reason, I argue that stories are still the best way to explain and describe *botho* and that this must be at the centre of how we analyse *botho* in the current discourse. This is the case in Sesotho culture where the chief form of moral education into *botho* was through the traditional medium of storytelling commonly done in the narration of those well-known stories in Sesotho called *litšomo* (folk tales). The significance of these in moral education is discussed later in the chapter when we look at the narrative dimension of virtue or the narrative account of *makhabane* (virtues).

When one looks at Sesotho culture it will become clear that one of the key terms that it is imperative to have in mind when analysing *botho* is *setho*. So central to the full understanding of *botho* in Sesotho culture is *setho* that it is arguable if it is possible to full grasp the meaning of *botho* without reference to *setho*. The difficulty with *setho*, in comparison to *botho*, is there is little material in the literature in terms of a systematic account on this concept and its analysis as a moral concept and what one finds is very limited, with the exception of a few instance in Mofuoa (2016), Otlogetswe (2015) and Futhwa (2012). Considering its closeness to *botho*, one would have expected there to be significant material compared to the huge volume of material there is now on *botho*. What is clear though is that *setho* has strong connotations with the nature of being human as understood and defined through tradition within the African culture. Like many principal African moral terms, *setho* is a complex notion to describe, highly value-laden and inextricably linked with the particularity of cultures and the ontological assumption of African culture. From available material we find that it is described as having to do with the indigenous “belief system of the people of Africa”, where “*botho* is the value system, encompassing the lifestyle and norms of *batho*, (plural for *motho*)” or a practical

manifestation of how people live (Futhwa 2012: 7). We also find that the understanding of *setho* is intricately connected with that sphere within the African culture that often is referred to conventionally as part of African indigenous religions (Dube 2009: 200). Another interpretation one finds is where *setho* is defined in terms of human quality or humanness. In other words, *setho* is something that relates to human nature or being human. According to African moral thought, *setho* can thus be described in terms of “human traits found in” a person (*motho*). Its deficiency in *motho* “is what in Sesotho speaking culture is called *bophoofolo* or *sephologolo* which means “beastly and barbaric” (Otlogetswe 2015: par 3, Mphetolang 2009: 18, Casalis 1861: 303). This refers to lack of *botho* in a *motho* (person).

From this, we learn two things. First that we can see where the link between *botho* and humanness derives, which is that it is implied indirectly in terms of *bophoofolo*, the opposite of which is being human i.e., humanness in which the emphasis is on being human hence humanness. In other words, it is the interpretation of *bophoofolo* that makes *botho*, as humanness intelligible. Without this the association of *botho* stays tenuous and leads to the ambiguous tendency in the literature that has surrounded this strand of theorisation of *botho* in terms of humanness or humanity (Shutte 2001:2). This leads to the second, point and that is, it is by virtue of the mutual relationship of *setho* to *botho* in *motho* that we can explain the origin of the formulation of *botho* in terms of humaneness, that human quality characterized by tenderness, compassion, and sympathy for other. What is beginning to emerge here is the significance of *setho* to current *botho* discourse, which points to this as one area for future research that needs to be investigate alongside the other description of *botho* namely “*ha se motho*.” But more important for the case for character centric account of *botho*, is that we are also seeing here that *setho* is a human quality and that this is an individual property of a person rather than a communal one, and this manifest itself as part of the character of the person. This calls for closer examination on what *setho* is and how exactly does it relate to *botho* and *motho*.

#### **4.2.1 *Botho* and Centrality of *Setho* in the Moral System of Basotho**

The term *setho* is not easy to translate into English but in Sesotho culture it denotes both one’s human nature and how one was brought up in terms of socialisation by one’s cultures<sup>46</sup>. Therefore, *setho* can be described first as denoting human nature where it used in general terms without specific reference *motho* i.e., an individual. At this level *setho* refers to human

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<sup>46</sup> In Sesotho language when the prefix ‘se’ is added to a root word, it denotes the same meaning of the English word species. In other words when used on its own ‘se’ simply means of such and such a species. So, when it is added to the root word ‘-tho’ which means human (van Binsbergan 2001:54, Kamwangamalu 2007: 25) it we get the Sesotho word *setho*, meaning of human species hence its interpretation in terms of human nature. The same principle with other species, thus we see with humans we have *setho*, in the case of animals you would have *sephoofolo*, and in relation to birds, one gets *senonyana*.

nature or those intrinsic qualities which define one as human (Otlogetswe 2015: par 3). But since human beings do not exist in isolation, *setho*, also denotes one's origins in terms of culture. This means when used with reference to a specific person, not just in general, emphasis is on the way these human qualities every human being has, have been shaped and moulded in a person by their culture and society one is part of. What this tells us is that no human being can escape the life-changing effects of culture, and this leads to another definition of *setho* that we find in the literature. And that has to do with the fact that *setho* is understood as that which expresses certain human qualities as expressed in a person in terms of human manners or customs (Paroz's 1974: 390) of a particular people. This definition is shared by Tlhalosi in Otlogetswe (2015: par 1) who also defines *setho* in terms of manners in which a particular people do things. In terms of this cultural definition, the emphasis here is how these human qualities in a person, manifests themselves in that person which in large part is determined and shaped by who one is as a moral agent i.e., with regards to social identity as so formed and socialised into society by one culture and by one's people and one's society. When understood this way *setho* denotes cultural upbringing in terms of one's cultural origins and socialisation. It is for this reason that in Sesotho culture *setho* is intrinsic to *botho* because the latter is the Basotho way of moulding these human qualities in a *motho* into what Basotho regard as a *motho* (Person). In other words, the role of culture in how these qualities become integrated into *motho* or who we are as agents and how we live and relate to others. In other words, this process is heavily changed by one's "*setso*"<sup>47</sup> defined in terms of one's roots understood in terms of a person's cultural origins and customs of that culture. This leads to the definition of *setho* that pertains to the role of culture.

Describing this in Sesotho speaking cultures Otlogetswe (2015: par 1) defines *setho* therefore as "*mokgwa o batho ba dirang dilo ka one*" [a manner in which people do things] or "*mokgwa o rategang wa motho*" [admirable/morally commendable traits/manners]. Chitja (n.d.: 698) likewise echoes this definition, where *setho* is described as "*tumelo le diketso tsa morabe o itseng ha o bapisoa le merabe e meng'* or *tsela eo sehlopha sa sechaba kapa morabe o itshoarang ka yona le ho etsa mekgoa le meetlo ya sona*" (Belief and manners of a particular culture in comparison to others. The way a certain people or ethnic group conducts itself, its customs and manner of doing things). It is in this sense that *setho* is more than these natural human traits we have as humans. When understood in this way, *setho* recognises a certain nature that humans share with others, but it will be observed that it's meaning transcends to local and particular as the term denotes primacy and centrality of culture in modifying and determining the orientation of these human traits or qualities in a *motho*. This explains why the latter interpretation of *setho* is the most used. This is the understanding therefore of these

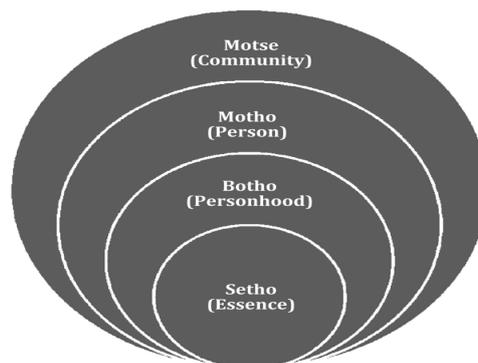
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<sup>47</sup> The word derives from '*motso*' which in Sesotho means root, which when applied to a person becomes '*setso*' (Chitja n.d.: 428, 703). Its usage denotes in connection with *botho* thus the origin or background of a person in terms of their moral upbringing and socialisation into *botho* by family, the community, their clan, or tribe etc. etc.

terms as used here i.e., as that which denotes Sesotho cultural origins and moral particularity and social upbringing of individuals into being what is socially acceptable for the individual to be a *motho*. This does not reject the common humanity of *setho* and is presupposed by *botho*, but it gives significance to culture and particularity as decisive in determining and shaping the orientation of *setho*. In other words, even though a systematic account of *setho* and its relationship to *botho* in African ethics is yet to be written, what can be deduced from the general consensus in available literature is that *setho* is connected with or has something to do with the interplay between “being human” or and “culture or how moral particularity shapes and moulds human nature differently in different and particular contexts”.

In the case of Sesotho culture, the product of this interplay in a *motho* is what we call *botho*, where the function of ethics is the creation of *batho ba nang le botho* - individuals who have *botho* and this is the purpose and meaning of life. It is in this sense that in Sesotho speaking culture *botho* is regarded therefore as the agency of *setho* in *motho*. Although *setho* denotes something about moral agents as human beings, this must be understood and interpreted with reference to the characteristic ways of being human in diverse cultures and societies. So *Setho* in the context of ethics in Sesotho culture will denote ‘mekhoa le meetlo ea Basotho meaning” customs and manners of Basotho i.e., characteristics ways of doing things as Basotho, hence the expression “e ka re has ngoan’a Mosotho” (it is like they are not a child of Mosotho, when evaluation conduct of a Mosotho person who behaves like one not raised like a Mosotho. This way of doing things or *mekhoa* is what Basotho call *botho* especially when it is applied to the moral sphere and ethics among Basotho. This rediscovery of *setho* therefore brings to the fore another important insight into the discourse, and that is in order to fully understand and appreciate the normative foundations and significance of *botho*, it requires reference to *setho* and the traditional understanding of *motho* particularly the normative presuppositions underpinning this understanding as found in the “*motse*” (village) or the community<sup>48</sup>. In the moral tradition of Basotho, the best way to conceptualise *setho* is in terms of its position withing the traditional moral scheme of Basotho (figure 1).

Figure 1: *Setho* Ethical Worldview (Mofuoa 2016: 104)



<sup>48</sup> This must be read in the light of the normative significance of “*motse*” the village as social institution outlined in previous chapter.

This schematic representation of traditional morality of Basotho is best explained in terms *setho* as the foundation of moral agency in a person whereby *botho* is the manifestation or “the fruits of *setho*” in a person (Dube 2009: 200). This formulation is confirmed in Casalis’ analysis where *setho*, *botho* and *motho* stand to one another in a morally material and significant way, and the latter two presuppose *setho*. In other words, what we learn here is first that moral personhood i.e., *motho* presupposes having *botho* which in turn presupposes *setho*. In terms of the current *botho* discourse what is even more relevant is that here we learn that *botho* as a moral term presupposes *setho*. More importantly, that the interpretation and analysis of *botho* according to this does not only require reference to *setho* but that without this, such ethical reflection and understanding of this concept will remain wanting and impoverished.

What we see from this moral scheme is the crucial importance in Basotho morality and culture of the interface between our “nature” as human beings on the one hand and one’s moral particularity or “*setso*” i.e., one’s roots or characteristic ways of doing things as found in the culture. In the moral sphere this “way of doing things” manifests itself in *motho* as their moral character understood both in its passive and active sense (Richardson 1994: 92). But as it will be seen, moral character is always formed in a large part within the context of and according to the values and manners of communities that we belong to. In other words, our characters are formed differently because of the cultures we are brought up in (Hofstede *et.al.* 2010: 6-10). In other words, different cultures articulate, emphasis and mould these natural “common intrinsic human qualities” differently in their members, in accordance with and in the shape and orientation of their values, beliefs, ideas and understanding of the world they have as handed down through the tradition of that culture.

In Sesotho culture, the consequences of this in a *motho* is what is now called *botho*. In other words, that orientation and modification on human nature that occurs is recognised as being in terms of all the traditional social and moral values and principles associated with the moral ideal of *botho*. That means among other things, the emphasis is on fusing together these natural human traits with the values and moral ideals of African culture to form in *motho* certain dispositions of character recognisable as having *botho*. In this way, one’s character, which is the public manifestation of who we are, is ultimately a reflection of the values of one’s culture in as much as the agent’s own values both of which are an expression of our unique traits and qualities as individual human beings. What this reveal is the significance of the community to *setho* in relation to *motho* and their character and its formation.

Since each society consists of diverse groups, and within each society diverse groups each have its own *mekhoa* and mannerisms or typical ways of doing things, it means that each society or community will mould differently these human qualities shared with other cultures

in their members. This explains why we find that in some societies, these human traits are tapered for instance in children in such a manner that the child soon learns to think of themselves as “I” the individual, while in other societies they think of themselves as “we” (Hofstede et.al 2010: 91). This means that culture gives these natural human traits a particular, texture and orientation, in line with the values, ideals and beliefs that the community or culture, in which the individual is a part and brought up in. It is in this sense that *setho* is connected to human manners, or *mekhoa* i.e., a way of doing things by a particular people.

In the Sesotho speaking culture, *setho* must therefore be understood therefore as denoting the way these natural human qualities, have over many generations been shaped, moulded, and continued to be coloured with Sesotho culture and values of Basotho. This then manifests itself within *motho* or the individual as *botho*, hence the expression *botho* is the fruits or agency of *setho* in *motho*. In other words, as Otlogetswe (2015: par 4) explains

“*botho* presupposes *setho* in a *motho* .... [and] “it would be farfetched to expect one who lacks *setho* to show *botho*. There is a hierarchy here. *Motho* must have *setho* to have *botho*.”

According to this rendering, *setho* is thus best understood as the agency whose manifestation in a *motho* is *botho* (Mofuoa 2016: 103). It is from this understanding that there is an emphasis on the need to respect the traditional hierarchy within which these moral terms have functioned and found their moral significance.

This brief account of *Setho* in the moral system of Basotho highlights the importance of conceptualising *botho* with reference to *setho* and where the two fuses together in the individual to form what Basotho call a *motho* i.e., person not just a human being. This is because in them we get a deeper insight into the tenets of the moral scheme of Basotho, and that is only a *motho* who has with *setho* in them can display *botho*. This is consistent with the understanding within the culture because where this is not the case a person like that is duly regarded as being like an animal i.e., *phoofolo*, from whence the moral sanction *bophoofolo* in Sesotho culture comes from. The important insight we get from this, which is relevant to the current *botho* discourse and the topic of moral personhood is that a *motho must first have setho to display botho* (Otlogetswe 2015: par 4). It is for this reason that the linguistic similarity seen between *setho*, *botho* and *motho* is significant for ethical reflection in current *botho* discourse. It shows that because these moral concepts share the same overall meaning, whatever we take their specific individual meaning to be, must always be interpreted in the light of the other two. In the case of *botho*, this means that its analysis cannot fully uncover its insight without reference to *setho* and what ins Sesotho *motho* means, because the relationship between these is one of mutual presupposition.

In other words, the relationship between these terms, implies that if it is correct that *botho* is a moral description of a *motho*, as the central claim of this thesis implies, then the question

becomes what about *motho* is it describing? It is in answer to this question that the Basotho make references to character, that embodiment of the habitual practice of moral virtue that defines and turns a human being into a *motho*. That is to say, the primary function of *botho*, the lack of which is summed up in “*ha se motho*,” is the assessment of the moral character of “man” i.e., *motho*. Within the context of the current *botho* discourse, this is significant because it shifts focus from the relative tunnel vision like effect thus far created around *botho*, fixated on *MKKB*, to paying attention to the wider moral terrain implied by *setho* and *motho* which is the proper context for locating the normative idea of personhood. We have already alluded to the traditional African notion of personhood previously, noting that according to traditional thought there is a specific definition and understanding of what is a *motho*.

The reinstatement of *setho* to the current *botho* discourse enables the changing of the trajectory of the discourse i.e., from with attention on existing accounts of *botho*, to broadening analysis of *botho* in the light of *setho*. This is because as Otlogetswe (Ibid. par 4) points out only a *motho* with *setho* can display *botho*. This points to the significance of character and its formation because if these natural human qualities are to become part of who we are as moral agents, we know that this does not happen automatically nor are we immune from the vices that makes us inhuman. In other words, it is through a society actively encouraging and promoting good conduct i.e., through moral formation and training of character in its members, that our natural human qualities as human beings are developed into good admirable qualities of character. It is through character formation that societies become more humane, more kind, more honest, and individuals become more ethical. In other words, the introduction of the notion of *setho* allows a more explicitly rehabilitation of character as primary moral consideration to the centre of *botho* discourse and the understanding of this concept, in a manner like the way it is understood in Sesotho speaking culture. To this I now turn to in the section that follows here.

#### **4.3 Botho and the Primacy of Moral Character in the Moral Culture of Basotho**

The central argument of this study is that in Sesotho speaking cultures the understanding of *botho* is always described in terms connected to *boitsoaro* ba *motho* (moral behaviour or conduct of a person), or ‘*mekhoa and sebopeho tsa motho*’ (manners or habits and nature or character of the person). The best way of explaining this is to say in Sesotho culture one cannot be regarded to possess *botho* without displaying a acceptable *boitsoaro* and *mekhoa* according to Sesotho culture and this is understood primarily in terms of what in English is referred to as good moral character. In this section I am going to argue that the best way to understand what a particular word means in a particular language is to examine its common usage in ordinary daily living by the practitioners of the language and how this usage is

informed by the tradition and indigenous knowledge system of the culture. This I will contend is the case with *botho* in Sesotho culture. So, we find that when confronted with the term *botho* in the context of daily living, such as saying someone '*ha se motho ea nang le botho*' (they are a person who has no *botho*) or '*ke motho ea se nang botho*' (they are a person who does not have *botho*), the first thing that comes to mind to an ordinary Mosotho is the behaviour of a person. Questions that come to mind thus include: What kind of person are they? Are they a good person or not? Do they have good or bad character, are they helpful to others, kind and peaceful? Or are we talking about someone who is cruel, selfish, does share with others? In short are they a nice person? All these questions in Sesotho culture are understood to be asking about the qualities of character of the person. This we find implied in Paroz's (1974) definition of *botho* as "state of being a person", which presuppose an understanding of what a person is<sup>49</sup>. The same definition is found in the Setswana dictionary (Otlogetswe, 2012: 62), which defines "*botho* as *mokgwa kana maitsholo a motho a itshwarang ka ona*" meaning habits or behaviour or conduct that one displays. It is also defined as "*maitseo a mantle a motho a nang le ona*," the good manners that one has." Similarly, Kgasa and Tsonope in Otlogetswe (2015) describe *botho* as "*mokgwa o siameng wa motho*" [the good manners of a person], again emphasising the good character of *motho* as the basic meaning.

It must be noted here that the equivalent of *mokgwa* in Sesotho refers to what in English can be described as a characteristic behavioural habit, denoting and revealing the sort of person you are and who you really are as a person. In other, words a person character. The most precise articulation of this conception and understanding of *botho* i.e., as a moral quality of a *motho*, in Sesotho speaking culture is found in Gaie (2002: 277) who says that *botho*

"captures the essence of human being hood or personhood. To say that somebody has no *botho* is to mean that they have no personhood. It means that even though the thing might be a human being, it lacks qualities of a person."

Casalis (1861), one of the earliest European missionaries among the Basotho in Southern Africa writing about the same time as some of the texts cited in Gade (2011: 308), articulates the same understanding among the Basotho people. One of Casalis' great contributions were to rigorously commit into writing much of Sesotho culture and language at the time, long before any real contact with European culture and or influence as such. His account of life among the Basotho in many ways is one of the few and earliest available written sources of traditional Basotho way of life, although tainted with European bias. He nevertheless provides valuable

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<sup>49</sup> This dictionary is one of the few Sesotho Dictionaries produced in and it give as close a definition of this concept as we can get to the usage of the as found in traditional Sesotho culture, which has not changed that much from the contemporary understanding of the concept. This definition is also the same one found in In terms of this understanding it is in contrast with the definition of "*ubuntu*" in the South African version of the Oxford dictionary 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2006, where the Zulu concept is described "as a spirit of fellowship, humanity, and compassion especially associated with African Society".

insight into 19<sup>th</sup> century Sesotho speaking culture in Southern Africa even if through the prism of European moral and cultural superiority complex. Describing ethics in Sesotho culture Casalis writes

“The external appearances of moderation and decency constitute in the eyes of the [Basotho] what they call botu (sic) the title or dignity of man in opposition to bopofolo (sic) the brute life a name they apply to every immoral act of an excessively scandalous nature” (Casalis 1861: 303).

The first thing that one notices in this account is the use of the term ‘moderation’ and ‘decency’ in connection with *botho* and the explanation that this refers to the “title, quality” and “dignity of man”. The use of these terms and the variety of meaning and connotations suggests an attempt to capture the essence of *botho* in Sesotho culture and the difficulty Casalis experiences in finding the right definition. I will suggest that this is because of the polysemic nature of *botho* that in this study I argued is one of the features of this concept not fully appreciated. The discourse gives the impression that the process of explaining *botho* is almost settled. Here we can see the refusal of this concept to be confined to simple reductionist definitions. The meaning of “title’ here must therefore be understood in moral terms, to signify high moral standing of a person among peers, which is articulated in dignity. It seeks to express a level of moral dignity, respect, or admiration. In the language of ethics, we could say moral gravitas that is associated only with one who has achieved and has in an exemplary way displayed excellence in *botho*. In African culture and ethics, this is closer in meaning to *seriti* (Shutte 2008: 29, Mphetolang 2009: 24) which refers to a person’s shadow. This word is not easy to translate into English, but it denotes moral dignity or aura that exudes from one who has a certain moral and social gravitas. Casalis’ account reflects an understanding of *botho* that implies a recognised social status morally and dignity accorded to a person because of excellence in acquiring and displaying qualities of *botho*.

As already intimated in this study these qualities typically are attributes characteristic of personal character, which is regarded as the truest reflection of who we are as moral agents. What this implies is that if *botho* is connected to how we conduct ourselves as moral agents; it would make no sense that this does not involve personal character as the expression of who we are moral agents. It is in this sense that Casalis’ description of *botho* in terms of a title of man is a description of a person’s character, signifying the moral gravitas and dignity of the individual. It points to the roundness of character and the resulted moral assessment where one is adjudged to being morally admirable and beautiful. In other words, they qualify to be a moral exemplar. It is thus something that becomes a source of inspiration to others. In other words, the use of the term “title” as a moral description of a person entails that such a person is displaying dignity of behaviour, and morally admirable qualities of character, hence some that is regarded with high regard and admirable. This description should therefore be understood as denoting the moral dignity that comes with being conferred with the status of

being morally admirable and beautiful person. That means being regarded as being a *motho* who has *botho* “i.e., integrity, dignity and decency.” These are the qualities that constitute the “moral standing” or “the title of man” i.e., the honouring of *motho* in the community for having qualities of *botho*, i.e., an accumulation of certain “manners” through habitual conduct that the community considers morally admirable, commendable and encourage in its members (Otlogetswe 2015). What is also clear here is that in Sesotho speaking cultures ethics is conceptualised in terms of virtues and corresponding vices. This is the case with *botho* as often it is evoked in conjunction “*bophoofolo*” which is its opposite (Casalis 1861: 303) or *sephologolo* (Mphetolang 2009: 18). This is an essential element of how *botho* must also be understood and Casalis was observant enough to pick on this. So, to fail in this regard i.e., not to have *botho* means the individual gets the moral status or title *bophoofolo*, (beastly). One of the peculiar things about Sesotho language is that there is no direct equivalent of the English word “morality” or “ethics” in their moral language and lexicon of key moral terms even though character plays such an important role in their social and moral life (Gyekye 2011: par 10). This may lead a casual observer of Sesotho culture to conclude that claims of morality or ethics among Basotho being character-centric are dubious and without basis. But those familiar with the moral traditions of the Basotho and their culture will point to several important social rituals and practice in Sesotho culture full of inference and reference to character as evidence of high regard Basotho placed on inculcation of good moral character. This means, if one looks beyond the surface and delves deeper into Sesotho culture and their moral language, one soon finds prima facie evidence of the centrality and primacy of character in their morality. This is because in Sesotho culture the moral language that Basotho use to describe the moral sphere of life, i.e., ethics or morality, often has strong connotations of good character, as will be seen shortly. As such, like other African cultures, discourses, or statements about morality in Sesotho culture often turns to be discourses or statements about the character (Ibid.: par 11). In view of this i.e., character-centric orientation of thinking about the ethics of their culture, the morality of the Basotho can thus be described as a character-centric ethic and the evidence of this can be found in various spheres of life in Sesotho culture especially in their moral language.

#### **4.3.1 Prominence of Moral Character in the Moral Language of Basotho**

The underlying argument upon which this study is premised is that in Sesotho speaking culture character is essential as the primary formulation and interpretation of *botho* and what *motho* is i.e., to be a *motho* and the understanding of ethics. One of the strongest foundations for holding this view i.e., the primacy of character in Sesotho culture is the moral language of

Basotho<sup>50</sup>. By paying a close attention to the nuances of the moral language of the Basotho and some of their key moral terms, one discovers a moral tradition and culture seized with safeguarding the moral character of its members from childhood to adulthood. In other words, from the analysis of the moral language of the Basotho, the understanding that we get of *botho* is that first and foremost this is a normative concept primarily concerned with moral judgements and or assessment of a person that are connected with the moral character of a person. One will therefore discover that when referring to the moral sphere of life or ethics, Basotho tends to use words that denotes or normally refer to behaviour and character. Thus, when a Mosotho wants to make the moral statement “he has no morals” or “her action is unethical” he or she will say “*o boits'oaro bo bobo*” (they have bad conduct/behaviour) or “*ha a na boits'oaro*” meaning they have no good behaviour (Gyekye 2011: par.10). Both fundamentally point to the bad character of the person and that the person is unethical or immoral. The same can be seen in what a Mosotho would say “when a person behaves (or acts) in ways that are morally right”. They would say of such a person “*o boits'oaro bo botle, or bo lokileng*” which means a person has a good character or their behaviour is good (Ibid.). In addition to “*boits'oaro*, (behaviour, personal conduct),” we find other morally freighted words Basotho use to describe moral character. Worth mentioning here is the moral term “*mekhoa*,” which denotes habits, tendencies, and inclinations of a moral nature that a person has. Another term is “*sebopeho*.” It is closer in meaning to the character but also denotes the nature of the person in terms of their make up as a person. These and other cognate moral terms and key moral concepts such as “*bobo*” (ugliness) “*botle*” (goodness and beautiful), “*lokileng*” (good in terms of being just, all share one thing in common and that is they are expressions of certain moral values or personal qualities all connected to moral character of *motho*. And as I have argued this is implied in *botho* and strongly associated with a person’s behaviour denoting good or bad character. According to this then the interest in a good character as the most fundamental to the moral life of a person, is a characteristic feature of Basotho morality that it is found permeating much of their moral language, and this would necessarily be the primary understanding of *botho* for Basotho.

This means that from the perspective of Sesotho speaking culture to properly conceptualise *botho*, current theorisation around *botho* needs to take into consideration the significance of character, as implied in the moral language of the Basotho. This is because Sesotho culture is one of the traditional cultures in Southern Africa with a history of *botho*. It is also because this concept and its moral significance cannot be separated from it being part of the moral language of the culture, in which it functioned. In this context it thus operated under certain

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<sup>50</sup> Today Sesotho language is spoken in present-day Lesotho and parts of the Free State province and Matatiele both in South Africa. Both places are two places outside Lesotho where there is a large population of Sesotho speakers and where fragments of traditional Sesotho culture and some of their traditions can still be found.

cultural and language rules, rules and contexts that gave it meaning and relevance. In other words, *botho* even as it is regarded as a concept has a context both cultural and linguistic that the current *botho* discourse cannot just strip away, as irrelevant to its interpretation. That means even as *botho* is elevated to the superior status of the governing moral principle or central pillar of African ethics, it is important to recognise that in the moral thought of the Basotho and practice morality or ethics, of which *botho* is an expression of is not understood in single terms. This explains why the Basotho understanding of *botho* in terms of character is expressed in many ways. In Sesotho culture the moral sphere of life is thus conceived in a number of associated terms, all related to character and any one of these terms is sufficient to express the general idea - about character or what it means to be a *motho*, but at the same time contributing a shade of meaning which is peculiar to each term (Casalis 1861: 304). This is certainly the case with *mekhoa*, *boitsoaro*, and *sebopeho*, as it is so with *setho*, *botho* and *motho* and other key moral terms in Sesotho language. All these as it shall become clear are consistent with Basotho ethics as character-based ethic where character overarching moral consideration information moral education and formation.

A further examination of the moral language of the Basotho reveals other moral terms that further underscores the significance of character as key concept for ethics in Sesotho culture. I am thinking here in addition to "*botho*" (*personhood*), of concepts like "*letsoalo*" (*conscience*), "*sebopeho*"<sup>51</sup> (*character*), *mosa* (*kindness*) just to mention a few. The same emphasis on the supremacy of moral character as the object of ethics can be seen with traditional education system and training of Basotho. A large part of what constitute what could be called traditional curriculum both in formal and non-formal education, is centered on training in character through inculcation of *makhabane a botho* (*virtues of botho*). Worth mentioning here are virtues such *mosa* (*kindness*) *boikhutso* (*peacefulness*) *bohloeki* (*purity/chastity*), *boikokobetso*, (*humility*), *mamello* (*perseverance*) and hard work, (Matšela 1979: 183, Maharasoia and Maharaswa 2004: 109, Letseka 2013<sub>A</sub>: 342, Casalis 1861: 306). What we learn therefore from the moral language of the Basotho is that good character and its development is thus the sole goal of socialisation of individuals and it became the central focus of moral formation from childhood. If we look at some of the key moral concepts of the Basotho it will be seen that many have strong connotations denoting moral character as its key.

Of these moral terms, none captures the idea of the primacy of character and its significance to moral life more vividly than the Sesotho word *mekhoa* (*habits*). The word can loosely be translated as habits or more correctly habitual behaviour, as it has strong connotations of behavioural conduct on a consistent basis, hence its connection to character. The significance

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<sup>51</sup> In Sesotho language there is no exact equivalent word for character, but in addition to *sebopeho* several other words are used including *mekhoa*, (*manners/habits*) *boitsoaro* (*conduct/behaviour*) just to mention a few all which adding a shade of meaning to the central idea explaining moral character which could be good or bad (see Paroz 1974: 28, 156,432).

of habits to training in character is a well-recognised feature of ethics of character because as moral agents we acquire the virtues of character from habitual exercise. In other words, we become honest, caring, kind, humane, or loving by habitually performing honest, caring, kind, humane and loving acts (MacIntyre 1981: 154). We have already come across the definition of this term “*mekhoa*” earlier (Casalis’ 1861: 228), where we highlighted its ethical significance and the place it occupies in the moral language of the Basotho. It shall also be recalled that this term featured prominently in the various descriptions of *setho*. In Sesotho culture “*mekhoa*” could mean; behaviour, habits, customs, or manners and as it will be observed these are compatible with descriptions of the character. In its ethical meaning, the term *mekhoa* means all of these but as intimated the term is commonly associated with *boits'oaro*, which means good moral conduct and behaviour, or moral conduct displayed by a person on a consistent basis. Thus, *mekhoa* as normative term implies in a certain sense, habitual or typical *boits'oaro* where it denotes the highest form of normative authority governing the conduct, akin to that of a self-regulating internal norm. It is in this sense that Casalis’ (1861: 228) is correct in observing that in relation to the social organisation of the Basotho the “*mekhoas*” (sic) constitutes the real laws of the country much higher or more authoritative than “*melaos*” (sic) i.e., the legal laws of the culture. From this, it can be seen how in the moral language of the Basotho “*mekhoa*” as a description of an individual *motho*, is connected to and is the description of the character. Thus, when a Mosotho asks “*mokhoa hau o joang?*” (what kind of person are you) what they are really saying, is making a moral statement that is asking about the character of the person, particularly of the person’s questionable moral conduct.

When “*mekhoa*” is referred to in relation to the moral sphere of life and *botho* in this way its close connection with moral character becomes clear. That is to say, the primacy of character as the characteristic feature of morality among the Basotho gives the term a more precise meaning, that denotes actions and behaviour related to habit forming conduct. This is because *mekhoa* understood as character results from the habitual daily ways of behaving or conduct of *motho* (person). As Gyekye’s (2011: par 15) explains because character is defined in terms of habits, and the latter in turn results from a person’s deeds or actions, character, therefore comes from our actions. It is important to observe that consistently behaving in certain ways will produce certain habits and in turn produce corresponding character. It is in this sense that *mekhoa*, understood as habits or habitual ways of conduct, is the necessary character forming social practice (MacIntyre (1981: 187) essential for the practice of *botho* possible.

Another feature in the moral language of Basotho that reflects centrality of character is how the words Basotho use to describe character and make moral judgements about *botho*, many of them describe qualities of the heart (*pele*). The heart is thus an important metaphor for character in the moral language of the Basotho and in the articulation of qualities of *botho*. It

signifies the centre and core of a person's being and seat of all thought and moral deliberation. It is in this sense that *botho* as a description of the moral quality of a person is not intelligible without reference to the goodness and gentleness, or lack therefore, as the characteristic attributes of a person's heart. In Sesotho culture the heart is regarded as the seat of all life, feeling, thought and will (Casalis 1861: 243) and as such it the chief means by which most moral judgements in Sesotho culture are made. Reiterating this Bujo (2001: 100, 120-122) points out that "African ethics locates the seat of ethical conduct in the" inner "organs of the human person" [and here] "the heart occupies the primary position". In other words, Basotho, like most Africans, attribute everything in particular, moral reflection and the seat of moral life to "that organ that signifies the core of a person's being" namely the heart (Bujo 1992: 100, Bujo 1990: 98). Thus, we find that in Sesotho culture moral deliberation is understood and thought of as fundamentally the function of the heart. As such, moral goodness i.e., *botho* or good character is described and understood primarily in terms of the qualities of the heart (*pelo*). The Basotho believe that a person's heart is therefore the most authentic and true reflection of a person's moral character and who they truly are. When described in this way the morality of the Basotho can thus be seen as kind of "morality of the heart"<sup>52</sup>. This is because *pelo* is not only the locus of ethical conduct but also the sources of humaneness, hence it is the true embodiment of a successful integration of *makhabane* (virtues of *botho*), which are essential for moral assessment and evaluation of *motho* and his or her moral conduct.

According to this then what we find is that moral judgements and assessments are expressed in terms of positive or negative attributes and qualities associated with the heart. This included statement such as describing a good person as "o *pelo e ntle* (they have a beautiful heart). This is often a moral statement describing a person adjudged to be morally a good person and of good moral character. Such a person is thus associated with qualities like *mosa* (kindness), *ho fana* (generosity), *ho rata batho* (love of people) *mohau* (mercifulness) *bonolo* (gentleness) and many similar attributes characteristic of the heart. It shall be recalled that in Sesotho culture virtues are promoted side by side with corresponding vices to be avoided. Thus, we see that as well as positive qualities of the heart as a way of describing the character of a person, so too are the negative one. This features in expressions like "o *pelo e mpe*" (they have bad heart) meaning evil person, or '*pelo e tsoeu*' (white heart) describing a greedy<sup>53</sup> person, and "o *pelo e thata*" (they have a bad heart) i.e., to be hard-hearted, referring to a

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<sup>52</sup> The significance of this and its contrast to the devotion and centrality of reason in Western ethics must not be lost sight here as this further highlights the contrast and difference in approaches to ethics in Sesotho culture and Western approaches, where reason is the heart of ethical methodology.

<sup>53</sup> In Sesotho to be greedy is not only lust for food, but denotes selfishness and to be unwilling and to not be prepared to share what one has, whether it's food, one's labour to help others, one's resources to lend to others. It is contrasted with being generous, kind, and hospitable or loving. It is in this sense it always implies and is closely connected to being selfish.

person regraded as uncaring, unmoved by anything, stingy, and without mercy. This relates to the vice of *bokhopo*, which can mean cruelty, evilness and being inhumane, and not loving. *Bokhopo* as the greatest vice contrast with kindness as a virtue which is regarded as one of the greatest among Basotho (Casalis 1963: 306).

The final observation about moral statements in Sesotho language is that most judgements describe moral character in terms of aesthetic language characteristic of African conceptions of beauty in which something beautiful is also regarded as good (Ikuenobe 2016: 128, 131). In other words, these descriptions can be found in terms that ordinarily convey African concepts and notions of beauty or appreciation of something 'beautiful.' Thus, we find that in Sesotho culture, for instance, judgements of conduct that is morally good and regarded as right is often described using the phrase "*e ntle*," it is beautiful, which means it is morally good, admirable, commendable, and praiseworthy. Similarly, conduct judged to be bad and wrong is described using the words "*-e mpe*," it is ugly, meaning it is morally reprehensible. This usage of aesthetic language with moral underpinnings is also found in the word '*bobe*', or '*mashoe*' (ugliness) to articulate the idea of moral evil (Casalis 1861: 304). Typically, this is found in statements like "*o boitsoaro bo bobe*" (they have bad behaviour) which is a moral statement about one who is regarded as lacking certain expected qualities of *botho*. Other similar moral statements with aesthetic connotations to express a moral judgement and evaluation of conduct include "*motho ea hantle*" (a good or nice person) or "*o pelo e lokileng*" (They have a good heart) to described someone regarded who has a morally good heart. The normative weight of the word "*hantle*" from the stem "*ntle*" from which the word '*botle*' (beautiful) derives together with its opposite "*-mpe*" from which we have the word *bobe*, (ugliness), must not be underestimated<sup>54</sup>. In both cases these terms convey a moral judgement of being a good person or a bad person, respectively. And this they do in the emphasis they make which is the description of the character of the individual *motho*. These are therefore important part of the moral lexicon of Basotho and go hand in hand with the moral judgement about lack of *botho*. These add to the existing moral vocabulary of terms the idea of conduct as being morally admirable. At the heart of this is the notion of moral admiration and praiseworthiness of character of a *motho*.

These aesthetic terms used in the context of moral performance of a person adds to the evaluation of moral goodness another unique way of expressing moral judgements in African ethics in which moral concepts are combined with conceptions of beauty. In other words, in this type of moral judgement we have an aesthetic judgement that is at the same time moral, where the conception of moral goodness and admiration of something good are combined (Ikuenobe 2016: 128, 131) to reflect being moral and ethical as something that is also

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<sup>54</sup> The word for beauty (*botle*) in Sesotho consists of the prefixes '*bo*' and suffixes '*ntle*' from which the word '*motle*' derives. In both cases these terms while they convey moral significance on being a good person in relation to others, their primary description which is the character of the individual *motho*, locates moral value in the individual.

admirable hence why others should and ought to want it and aspire it. Aspiring to be morally beautiful and admirable is a notion not common these days, and yet it is the essence of being ethical. So, in the moral statement “*motho ea ketso li mpe*” (a person with ugly/bad actions) is an expression of undesirable character of the person as the emphasis here is on habitual conduct (Gyekye 2011: par 15, 16) i.e., the character of the person who in the statement is judged to have displayed chronic failings to meet expected standards.

So, what we see is about ethics in Sesotho culture is that moral judgements with aesthetics connotations, express an assessment of person’s inner dispositions and qualities of character, symbolised by their heart, in addition to their external behaviour. It is all these together that makes such a person to be regarded as morally admirable, and in that sense morally beautiful (Ikuenobe 2016: 128) hence such a person can be elevated to the status of moral exemplar. In Sesotho culture the understanding is that “the inner moral beauty of a person is the reflection of their outer public moral character”. The understanding is also that it is this inner beauty of character that manifests itself externally as *botho* hence that which is commended and said to be praiseworthy. As with the other moral judgements in Sesotho culture, here too reference and emphasis are once again on the character of the *motho* and the sort of person they are, which is understood in terms of the reflection of the moral agent’s heart and its disposition.

What we see here then is that the individual i.e., *motho* through his and her conduct, symbolised by their heart as a manifestation of their character is given moral praise in part for inculcating the acceptable qualities of character, and integrating these into their character. The significance the heart in the moral language of Basotho is as an articulation of the Basotho idea of internalisation of ethical norms and success of moral formation and development of character oriented towards *botho*. The heart therefore occupies a primary position in the moral culture of the Basotho as the quintessential reflection of a person’s character or moral goodness. It is in this sense that actions, which are inseparable<sup>55</sup> from whom we are as moral agents are relevant ethically because they are the visible and outward manifestation of the invisible inner qualities of character of a *motho*, which is what matters most in ethics. We see this in the Basotho’s account of *makhabane*, or virtues. According to this, a person’s possession of *botho* or lack of it, is believed to reflect the nature of their heart and ultimately a person true identity and character, both of which are regarded as a true reflection of who the person is and what kind of *motho* they.

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<sup>55</sup> This is important as sometimes in matters about ethics and conduct there are attempts to draw an artificial distinction between what “we do” and “who we are” hence the expression “that is really not me” as if to suggest that yes I did that but that’s not really who I am. In character based moral judgments this distinction does not arise because “there is no separation between doing and being” (Bujo 2001: 124) and with character ethics the focus is primarily on the person not their actions as such.

### 4.3.2 Social Practice and Ceremonies Symbolising Character in Sesotho Culture

In addition to the moral language of Basotho, further evidence of the supremacy of character is found in many traditional ceremonies and social practices of Basotho. In these one finds that having a good moral character was celebrated and promoted as an important part of what Basotho want in a person and hence it features prominent in moral formation and education activities in their social life.

If one takes a quick glance at the social life of ancient Basotho one finds that the Basotho celebrated or marked key moments and stages of life with certain rituals, ceremonies, or rites of passages. These played an important part in the social life of the community, including in the in the moral formation and education of individuals. Thus, we find that from the moment of birth to adulthood, ethics of Basotho is preoccupied what kind of moral character their members would have. For Basotho good moral character, a person and the ability of a person to inculcated good qualities of character is the embodiment of *botho* i.e., being a *motho*. In this regard, none among the many social events in Sesotho culture is considered more important and treated with high regard than the birth of a baby. Here thus we find corresponding rituals and practices performed in the first few years of the baby's development all pointing to the significance of character. One will see therefore that a major consideration underlying many of these social practices, rituals, or rites of initiation in the development of the baby is to ensure that the baby grows up to have a good moral character. In many of these ceremonies or initiation rites and practices related to the growth of the baby (Bereng 1987: 37-41), the symbolism found in all of them is all about moral character. i.e., ensuring that the baby grows up to be morally a good person by which is meant an outstanding *motho* and member of the community<sup>56</sup>.

A key requirement in all such rituals that we see is that the central figure during the ritual i.e., the person selected to play the leading role, is always a person regarded as having outstanding moral character. In other words, it had to be a person adjudged in the eyes of community as being of good reputation, morally outstanding and possessing admirable and commendable character. In short, a morally upright person (Matšela 1979: 141, Bereng 1987: 40). Highlighting this requirement in the customary practice of kindling the fire of the house afresh after the baby was borne Casalis (1861:267) states that "for this purpose it was necessary that a young man of chaste habits should rub two pieces of wood quickly one against another, until a flame sprung up, pure as himself". Here chastity is regarded as a virtue and a sign of good behaviour and good character. The same requirement is seen with

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<sup>56</sup> The significance of the communal understanding and nature of character and moral development in the culture must not be lost sight of here. In these rites and rituals, the community through its social institutions i.e., *lelapa* (family) and tradition and custom, which the family adheres to, is actively involved to ensure that its new members become the kind of person's that reflects what a *motho* is to be.

*kananelo* a thanksgiving ceremony after the baby is born. The term derives from the word “*ananela*” meaning to appreciate or accept a new member into the family (Matšela 1979: 113, 121, 153). This is one of the few such practices that has lasted even today although now often found in a slightly modified form. Traditionally *kananelo* was also the occasion of giving a name to the baby. In Sesotho culture like most African cultures, the ceremony of naming a child is a particularly important one. As such this decision is not one to be taken lightly nor is the name chosen arbitrarily, and just a matter of the parents. According to tradition, a name had to have some social significance and as such names were given “not merely as a mark of identity” (Matšela 1979: 79). Names were carefully chosen and the person they were named after had to be regarded as an outstanding exemplary individual. In other words, besides being a recognition of individuality and uniqueness of the person (Bujo 2001: 6) naming was important in a moral sense specifically with regards to moral formation of character. This is because as Matšela (1979: 146) informs us for Basotho,

“a good name meant a lot to a person as it was thought to influence him/her [in life] in some way, as the proverb goes: “ *bitso- lebe ke seromo* ” (“A bad name is a permanent bad smear” or “Give the dog a bad name and hang him”).

According to traditional thought, one of the reasons behind the names babies were given was so that the children “could *resemble* as much as possible the [character of the] great or beloved ones whose names they bore.” In other words, “A child given the family name of a grandparent or a relative was so that he/she should *be like* that person” (Ibid., 113.)

Another important ceremony of Basotho where the primacy of character is the primary consideration is *kuruoetso*<sup>57</sup>. Traditionally this is a series of small family or homestead events done in the first year of life to introduce the baby to various aspects life in the community. The first of these is a ceremony is called ‘*ho fuoa nama*’ (to be given meat). This is the time when the baby is given “its first morsel of meat” to introduce it to eating meat (Matšela 1979: 135, Sekese 1994: 9). Here a person was chosen, and they would then spit on a piece of meat and give this to the baby (Sekese 1994:19). The belief is that “the saliva of an adult swallowed by a baby remains forever in the child as part of its life and in turn, the baby swallows that person’s good character. It is for this reason that in Sesotho we have the expression ‘swallowing of character’” (Bereng 1997: 37, 41).

What is significant here is that the person selected is selected because of their character. They therefore had to be a person with a good reputation, of good standing in the community and someone considered a good person. In other words, someone who has displayed “*mekhoa e metle*” i.e., proven to be a person of good manners or habits overall and more important good behaviour or character. This means among other things being a person

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<sup>57</sup> The second month after the baby is born marks what in Sesotho is called *kuruetso*. This an important stage of development from when the baby is slowly introduced to various things like food, the elements through a series of ceremonies. (For more on this ritual see Sekese 1994: 9-10, Paroz 1974: 192).

“who is generous, not selfish, and who is generous and shares what they have with the community.” They were not to be greedy, i.e., not only lust for food but also inability and unpreparedness to share with others. According to traditional belief it is believed that a child given food by such a person will “have resistance and withstand immoral temptations”, and if “by any mistake the child was to get its first food from a person of *bad character* the child would likewise become a person of detestable character”. This preoccupation with securing good moral character among the Basotho can be found in the second practices linked to *kuruoetso* ceremony is “*kuruoetso ea moham*<sup>58</sup>” (Sekese 1994: 10). If the former ceremony was about introducing the baby to solid foods, this one is about introducing the baby to liquids and the main participant here is *mohami*, (the milker) i.e., the person that milks the cows for the household. Again, here we see that *mohami*, usually the herd boy of family, is selected because they have proved themselves through their exemplary character, and inculcation of admirable values that they have good character. Describing the moral and social qualities that are expected of *mohami*, Sekese (Ibid.) tells us that this person had to be someone “*ea e-song ho itšilafalitse*” meaning one who renowned for being of good repute, especially with regard *bohloeki* i.e., being chaste<sup>59</sup>, or pure and chaste. Even more important is the requirement that they must not only be chaste but be good in an all-rounded way. In other words, they must not just be good in one aspect of their lives or character. But they must be seen to be good in their whole behaviour and be honourable in other areas of life as well. The significance of purity of life and complete roundedness of character implied here as the height of moral uprightness and *botho*, must not be lost sight of as these virtues are implied in *botho* (Mphetlang 2009: 13). The same emphasis on good character we see at play in the third of ceremony of “*ho beelloa*” also known as “*kuruetso ka pula*” (Sekese 1994: 10) of the baby. Like the other rituals, the aim of *ho beelloa* was to introduce the baby to the elements symbolised by rain. According to custom the baby would be stripped and laid in the courtyard by a “clean” i.e., chaste older youth child (a virgin) of its sex and removed when it started crying (Matšela 1979: 147, 232; Sekese 1994: 10, Paroz 1974: 192).

What these rituals and ceremonies have in common is they all reflect symbolic acts akin to “imprinting” the baby’s character, with the good character from a community representative who is a moral exemplar, so that in adulthood the baby can become a *motho* (person) with good character. These rituals therefore are not only symbolic events denoting the centrality of character to moral development and formation. They are an expression of the primacy of

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<sup>58</sup> *Mohami* (the milk boy) is the role of a herd boy, usually responsible for looking after the family or homestead’s cattle and one of the social roles is to milk the cows. The availability of milk is a very important responsibility in traditional Sesotho household, so *Mohami* occupied a very small but important position within the household. He had total authority and responsibility and exercised a lot of discretion within the remit of his role and could determine if and when there will be milk in the home.

<sup>59</sup>See Matšela 1979: 165 for the moral relevance of being chaste in Sesotho culture or *bohloeki*, (purity) (Maharasoia and Maharaswa 2004: 109). In Sesotho culture the general attitude is that youth, i.e., boys and girls or the unmarried, should be chaste (Matšela 1979: 165).

character to Basotho understanding of *motho*, and how this is integral part of the curriculum of the ongoing moral instruction and formation of the individual from childhood to adulthood. In other words, the central message at the heart of these practices is always connected to shaping the individual's character, and as such ensuring that the baby develops a good character is a recurring theme in many of these. These rituals and social practices must, therefore, be understood in terms of two primary aims they serve from the perspective of Sesotho culture and its ethics. First, these rituals and practices must be seen within the context of moral formation and education, as an important part of the moral life of the community. In this sense, they are to be understood as building in the baby a foundation for good character in adulthood. This is to be further developed in adulthood by the individual through moral and character development, and inculcation of good qualities of character and in turn becoming a *motho*. Second, in these rituals, one finds that the Basotho understood them as a kind of vaccination preventative protection against moral vices whereby the baby is as it was symbolically vaccinated against getting later in life a bad character.

The prizing of moral character as the focal point of ethics and moral formation and in turn the essence of good conduct and of *botho* we see in many of these rituals or practices can be seen in other aspects of the social life of the Basotho in adulthood. This is most notable in the education of the young as carried out in their traditional educational institutions. Nowhere in the culture of the Basotho is the importance of moral character more clearly told and pronounced than *lebollo*, circumcision schools. Describing this (Matšela 1979: 135 –150) points out that because it was seen that the youth learned more from examples than mere words, those entrusted with leadership and teaching of the young initiates, were selected from people of good repute. The teachers or facilitators (*basuoe*) in these schools were not only openly known paragons of virtue, but also people of character “adroit in the ways of men, very experienced and respected for good behaviour, kindness, wisdom and healthy social relationships” (Ibid. 204). In turn the initiates were encouraged to learn, by observation from the characters of *basuoe*, what good qualities of character look like, which they should develop as an essential part of who they are and make this part of their character as well. They were thus expected through their character to be wells of courage, insatiable seekers of wisdom, truth, and social justice, of health and beauty, wealth, and kindness” (Matšela 1979: 203). For this reason, the curriculum of most of these circumcision schools reinforced the cultivation of good qualities of character. As Matšela in Maharasoa and Maharaswa (2004: 109) explains some of these qualities of character taught in these schools includes qualities of *bohloeki* (purity), in its literal and metaphorical sense and *makhabane* (virtues), both which speak directly to questions of character. In other words, just as we saw in the rituals about the development of the baby where the person playing the leading role, was selected on the basis on their good reputation and outstanding moral character, the same was the case with *basuoe*.

The selected aspects of the social life of Basotho from childhood to adulthood and their symbolism underscores the primacy and centrality of character in the moral consciousness and culture of Sesotho speaking culture. They show how the primacy of character would become the predominant way in which *botho* is interpreted and understood.

What we therefore learn here about character, as symbolised in such rituals as just outlined above is that as primary description of *botho* in Sesotho and Tswana speaking cultures, *botho* is something that as it were can be moulded on to a *motho* through character development and moral formation (Otlogetswe 2015: par 2). Or to put in another way, because “character is acquired through our actions, habits, and expected responses to moral instructions, it can be changed or reformed” (Gyekye 2011: par 15). This means that the formation of character is an ongoing process from childhood that a *motho* carries forward into adulthood by adopting habitual actions of *botho*, through ‘*boitsoaro*’ and ‘*mekhoa e metle*’ (good, admirable behaviour and habits) infused with values of *botho* practised in the community. The individual continues the process of shaping their character with these values and dispositions, while the community also continues to shape one’s character as well (Richardson 1994: 92). In this sense, our character defines and distinguishes who we are as moral agents. It is that by which we freely choose to be a certain kind of person, i.e., qualities of character emanating from a deliberate acquisition and active striving to inhabit certain values as opposed to others. It is in this sense, that as a moral agent my moral character reveals, “who I am” and “what kind of person I choose to be” (Shutte 2001:53). In other words, it is that by which I choose what I may and may not “permit myself to do in light of the conception I have of my own so far formed, and still forming, moral character” (Richardson 1994: 92).

What this points to, which is discussed in the next section is that moral praise or sanction of *motho* in the community is always connected to an understanding that an individual is living up to or not living up to what is expected. This implies that in traditional societies like that of ancient Basotho, *motho* as a moral agent is regarded as a microcosm or reflection of the community or society in which he or she was brought up. As a moral agent one thus becomes the embodiment of the values encapsulated in *botho* and a beacon through which virtues of *botho* radiate outwards and a concrete tangible experience of acts of *botho* in their community or society which is the focus of the next section below. This leads us to the question of the relationship of *motho* and the community because one cannot speak of moral character without reference to the community, regarded by many as one of the traditional institutions that played an important role that is not lost and desperately needed in today’s context.

#### **4.4 *Motho* as the Beacon and Site for the Experience of *Botho* in the Community**

The reinstatement of the traditional notion of moral character, central to an understanding of what is *botho* in Sesotho speaking culture advocated here must be seen against the larger context underlying this study, which is the dissatisfaction with the character of modern society. Of relevance here is the disconnect between traditional ways of thinking about morality presupposed by *botho ethics*, and contemporary approaches to ethics promoted by modernity and modern Western ethics. The former promotes social identity as central to societal norms where *motho* is understood as the microcosm of the moral life of the community. The latter promotes the notion of the self that is morally accountable to itself and autonomous, where the individual is not only a moral sovereign but can choose their own values (MacIntyre 1981: 34, 62). The focus of this section pays closer attention to the former and more specifically the traditional Sesotho way of thinking about *motho* i.e., the individual as beacon of *botho* and public embodiment or representative of the community values and norms and custodian at the same time. This must not be construed as looking back “to the past for a previously developed set of traditional values and virtues” to bring them back to the present (Walmsley 2013: 31). Rather it is about revisiting traditional “ways of thinking about morality and approaches to ethics” embedded in traditional culture, which may be relevant and applicable for the contemporary situation” and from which lessons can be learned. I shall argue here that it is in part “these ways of thinking about morality and approaches to ethics” that make the practice of *botho* easier. It is in recognition of this that some of the current voices in ethics are calling for ethical reflection to look beyond the moral tradition of the Western culture to other moral traditions like that of the Basotho. It is these traditional ways of thinking about ethics, whose vindication against modernity and Western ethics through revival of ethics of *botho*, that I will argue is to be found in something similar to the understanding of *botho* ethics in pre-modern culture of Basotho people.

One of the big differences between pre-modern cultures and the way they thought about morality and ethics and contemporary ones is how the moral agent is conceived<sup>60</sup>. This is relevant for the current *botho* discourse and today’s context in view of the moral predicament and crisis of values discussed in chapter two facing contemporary moral agents. Today the prevailing conception of the moral agent is that of an encumbered autonomous self, accountable only to what it chooses (MacIntyre 1981: 31). In traditional cultures, such as those where *botho* derives and thrived as a popular and dominant ethic, this was different. In these culture *motho* i.e., the self was understood in terms of its social embodiments and its social identity. In Sesotho speaking cultures one of the defining social embodiments of the self or *motho* was one’s social role as the beacon of *botho* and the embodiment of the communal values or norms. In other words, the individual was always conscious of reflecting the community and its values in the way one conducted themselves and as such mindful of this

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<sup>60</sup> See Sandel 1984: 173, MacIntyre 1981: 31-34f, and 127,205 -217 for more of the modern self.

all the time (Mphetolang 2009: 17). And this is where the interface between possession of *botho* and honour are found. This because it is in the possession of *botho* that a *motho* has honour and moral standing both in terms of self-respect but also respect by others in the community. This relationship is best described in the words of Berger's (1984: 151) explanation of the concept of honour<sup>61</sup>. He says that the qualities that honour enjoins us as moral agents, do not only express the connection we have with the community, but also the connection of self with

“the idealized norms of the community: ‘Honour considered as the possession by men and women of these [idealised norms and standards] is the attempt to relate existence to certain archetypal patterns of behaviour.’”

This means the moral agent living their moral life both as a concrete living representative and a custodian of the moral virtues of the community in one's moral behaviour and personal sphere of influence and conduct. It means calling “the individual to responsible behaviour with knowledge that such behaviour will have consequences for one's neighbours and indeed the whole community” (Mphetolang 2009: 17). In other words, as far as ethical living is concerned *motho* or “the individual does not consider himself to be the only one involved in his action” (Bujo 2001: 29). The community is always a central part of the considerations such that without this dynamic relationship between *motho* and the community, correct ethical decisions and acts of virtue by *motho* alone are impossible (Bujo 2001: 29, Mphetolang 2009: 17). In Sesotho culture, this is best captured in the normative meaning of the idea of '*boitsoaro bo bottle*', which is one of the moral qualities highly regarded in the community that a *motho* ought to inhabit. This can loosely be translated as good behaviour in the moral sense or comportment i.e., the way a person carries themselves and overall conducts oneself morally. This is like what in “Tswana culture” is called “*tlhong botho*” which “is used to refer to the habitués of *botho*, [or] the ways that one learns from childhood to comport oneself” (Mphetolang 2009: 20). It is important here to stress that *boitsoaro* in Sesotho has strong connotations of self-policing norm, which is regarded by the individual as of value to self and to others equally. It has the same connotation as the emphasis on the morally good behaviour of an agent in an all-rounded way does, not just in a certain aspect of one's life, or in an inconsistent way. The term captures both inward morals regarding of oneself, i.e., how one self-regards themselves, but also the outward looking other-regarding focus that considers how one's moral standing is as viewed by the public. This way of thinking about ethics reflects the nature of how personal conduct according to traditional thought, is inextricably bound with its impact to the good of the community including its moral life (Shutte 1994: 34).

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<sup>61</sup> It is interesting to note that in spite of the obsolescence of the concept of honour in general in ethics today, it is nevertheless still common to hear people lament that an individual has no shame i.e., loss of face in the community, which is only intelligible in relation to honour (Berger 1984: 151, Hofstede et al 2010: 110).

In other words, *boitsoaro* as an inward-looking, self-regarding ethical consideration, is connected to questions of qualities of character that *motho* is asking regarding themselves. Here considerations of conduct of the self are decided not only by “what am I to do but who am I really, i.e., in terms of my upbringing?”. “What kind of person morally am I, who do I want to be and ought to be?” As an agent centred moral term, ‘*boitsoaro*’ implies moral intentions of a person relating to their public moral image. It expressed how the moral agent is morally invested in safeguarding and protecting this image in the way they conduct themselves, in a manner that is consistent with this sense of who they are as a moral agent. This underscores the normative authority of this concept where it denotes the moral agent self-regulative behaviour in the light of the person’s standing in the community and social identity. This self-regarding consideration of conduct must be confused with narcissistic obsession with the self or confused with selfishness or the unhealthy preoccupation with the individual self, associated with the kind of self-absorption akin to egotism (Richardson 1994: 91).

This way of thinking about the social role of *motho* consists both of the “self-regarding” dimension of the virtue of *botho* i.e., agent centred and “other-regarding” dimension (Shutte 2001: 32). What this means is that in their personal conduct *motho* aims to keep a healthy balance of the two dimensions of *botho*. This is because in African ethics the understanding is that,

“one’s personal conduct affects the entire community .... [and] through his conduct and his actions, the individual has an effect on the [community and therefore] ...the individual cannot avoid reflecting on how his ethical actions affect the community. Ethical norms are not [lived] by the individual *ex nihilo*; rather, the individual ... [identifies] with something that already exists” (Bujo 2001: 125).

In Sesotho culture, this is put into practice by self-policing normative imperatives codified and implied in *boitsoaro*. It implies our attitude as moral agents towards how we are perceived morally by others public i.e., the external and public imperatives of personal conduct. This is because *motho* is also perceived by others as a custodian of moral values and virtues of *botho*. But it also expresses how *motho* perceives themselves in terms of this social function, and the practical implication of such social embodiment on one’s personal conduct in general. The implication of this is that, while living their life the moral agent is mindful of their *boitsoaro* and how this reflects on their social identity. Because of this, the individual cannot act solely for their own interest, without due regard of what their moral life says about them as member of a specific family and community, with certain values and certain ways of doing things.

The relevance of this pre-modern way of thinking about morality to ethics today is that as agents we cannot escape our social identity. We are both accountable to others and can hold others to account. This is because as moral agents we enter the moral arena of life, to an existing drama with a specific role assigned to us in that drama. The requirement for us at

minimum, as new entrants to this ongoing drama of being moral, and in the role, one plays during one's life, is to play our part of this dram well. This is what excellence in virtue means. This is what *botho* means and requires. This means that the role of an agent is to live their moral life as best as one could, conscious of the significance of one's moral heritage and tradition, which forms one's moral frame of reference. This stays as the purpose and aim of life until one leaves the scene as it were, to leave the drama to continue to be performed long after each moral agent has left the scene. In other words, as moral agents, we are always representative of the moral values and ideals of our communities, whether we consent to this or not. And part of this entails external public representation and internalisation through upbringing and moral formation, the moral values and ideals of one's society or communities that one identifies with which become the external moral identity of the agent.

So, in terms of ethics this means that our primary purpose and responsibility as agents is to exercise good stewardship in the sphere of life where we have influence, of the moral life we inherit and utilise as a valuable common good. Like an actor in a play, each of us thus seeks as best as one can, excellence in one's specific role in life i.e., moral life of the community, especially in the way one lives and conduct themselves in their own personal life. In relation to the practice of *botho* this means that *motho* i.e., the individual once again being the concrete tangible social spaces in the community where *botho* is experienced and felt. When this is not the case i.e., an individual no longer represent the values of the larger community they are member of, it follows that the experience of *botho* as the characteristic feature of the community and what makes the community the way it is gets lost.

This leads to the need to examine the significance of the community as a supporting and enabling environment for agents as the beacon *botho*. This is the reason why "one cannot speak of *botho* [and *motho*] outside of community" (Dolamo 2013: 4) which is coherent with the Sesotho understanding of *motho* as "a process of coming into existence in the reciprocal relatedness of individual and community" (Bujo 2001:87). This relationship between the community and individual and the role of the community as social institution that makes the practice of *botho* possible will be discussed the next chapter as one of the key social intuitions of Basotho.

#### **4.4.1 Bophoofolo and Lack of *Botho* in *Motho* in the Eyes of the Community**

One of the observations about the moral culture of Basotho that is beginning to emerge is that possession of *botho* is understood not only in terms of the positive definition of *botho* but also in terms of its negative definition or lack of thereof. In other words, description of *botho* in terms of what it is not is very much part of education into *botho*. In Sesotho culture, this is summed up in the expression "*ha se motho*" the full expression being '*ha se motho ea nang le botho*' (- is not a person who has *botho*). This expression is used together with another

related moral concept “*bophoofolo*” (Mphetolang 2009: 16). As can be seen from both that they are considerations that describe *botho* in connection with personhood. This means that *botho* is not only a description of the moral quality of a person, but also a definition of a certain type of person (*motho*) (Mphetolang 2009: 16). This implies that to fully understand what *botho* is, one must be able to answer what constitutes *motho* first (Tschaeppe 2013: 51). In other words, understanding the traditional Sesotho conception of personhood i.e., what it means to be a *motho*. Here it will be seen that, like most African cultures for Basotho, *botho* is a status that is achieved, and its acquisition manifests itself in good character. It is for this reason that in Sesotho culture there can be no full moral evaluation of a *motho* i.e., whether one possesses *botho* or not without reference to character, because as Gyekye (2011: par 14) explains in “African moral systems” bad and conduct “is put down to the lack of a good character” and possession of good character respectively. This is because the understanding is that “it is from a person's character that all his or her actions—good or bad—radiate: the performance of good or bad acts depends on the state of one's character”. What this means is that it is the *character* of the person *that matters most morally*, as this is often taken to be that which defines who one really is. In African culture who we are as moral agents is defined in terms of a particular, understanding of being a person i.e., *motho*, not just a human being. This is why, a person's character is the standard by which moral judgements about *motho* are made, and in turn a person's *botho* i.e., personhood is evaluated and judged.

Much has been written about African conceptions of personhood and how it differs with Western conceptions (Bujo 2001: 3, Menkiti 1984, Letseka 2013, 340). But none captures better the Sesotho understanding of personhood or *botho* than this pithy well-known expression “*ha se motho*” (Munyaka and Motlhabi 2009: 71). So central to the evaluation of *botho* in a person is this expression that it can be argued that among many African moral judgements we have, this articulates in the most profound way the essence of the African conception of personhood. It is this same idea of personhood we find in another common expression describing failure to have qualities of *botho*. It shall be recalled that in African ethics morality is conceived in terms of moral virtues and moral vices. The Basotho understanding and definition of *motho* i.e., an agent that has *botho* is similarly expressed in this fashion where *botho*, is a moral virtue to aspire to inculcate. Failure to achieve this does not only leave *motho* with the unenviable status of ‘*ha se motho*’ but also that of *bophoofolo* (beastly), a description of a moral vice that one who considered themselves a *motho* ought to avoid (Mphetolang 2009: 13). The latter concept has not received as much attention in the current *botho* discourse and African ethics in general like *ha se motho* has. But in Sesotho culture, you cannot talk of one without implying the other. As Casalis (1861: 303) explains among Basotho to possess *botho* i.e., decency of personhood is conceptualised “in opposition to *bopofolo* (sic) the brute life a name they apply to every immoral act of an excessively

scandalous nature.” The point that Casalis is trying to put across here is that *bophofo* expresses the fundamental censure for conduct adjudged to be antithesis or complete opposite of *botho*, and that is complete debasement of character, not befitting one who ‘ought’ to live and conduct themselves like *motho*.

In Sesotho culture the significance of moral personhood as expressed in ‘*ha se motho*’ goes beyond the current debates on this issue and the perennial question in African ethics about the priority of the individuals versus that of the community. When understood in terms of moral progress made, this expression thus is an articulation of an even more fundamental notion about personhood found in Sesotho culture, that denotes a similar as idea of a *telos* (MacIntyre 1981: 34) understood in terms of one’s purpose and function as a person in life. And according to traditional thought, this relates to being a *motho* i.e., attainment of and displaying of certain expected moral virtues in one’s character befitting a human person. It is for this reason that *botho* is to be understood in terms of character because both character and *botho* denotes a certain consistency of habit, or characteristic way of being, i.e., *mekhoa* in Sesotho. It is an expression of an account of agent’s being, over the course of their life and how they chose to be a certain sort of person who lives life in a particular way rather than a certain type of person who lives in another way i.e., one modelled on values and virtues of *botho*. This conception of a person presupposes personhood as a process, starting with the initial natural state of just being a human being i.e., “*motho-as-he/she-happens-to be*” and *motho-as-they-could-be* progressively if they respond well to moral formation and developing a good moral character or living one’s life with the view to wanting to be always a *motho* and having this as the objective of one’s life or as MacIntyre (1981: 52) would say “man-as-she/he-could-be”. This means that although it is acknowledged individuals are born as a “human being,” the attainment of *botho*, or personhood, does not happen automatically or naturally. For this to be i.e., “a development specifically of one’s character into becoming a person (*motho*) “comes through the process of socialisation” (Dolamo 2013). It is in this sense that Shutte (2001:24) is correct to say of this process of moral growth, “in the beginning, at the start of my life, I am really not a person at all” although I am still human. The concept of human nature articulated here is one in which there the understanding is that “an individual can be a human being without being regarded as a person (Gyekye 2011: par 23), and the aim of moral formation is for *motho* to attain the latter status.

What this understanding of personhood reveal about Basotho moral traditions is a culture which has a twofold conception of *motho* or human nature<sup>62</sup>. First it is the conception of *motho* ‘*as-he-or-she-is*’ by virtue of being born human, i.e., as yet unsocialised and formed by culture. Second it is a conception of *motho* as ‘*what-she-or-he-ought-to-be*’ i.e., if they are brought up

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<sup>62</sup> This is akin to the teleological moral scheme described by MacIntyre (1981:52) which conceived human nature in similar ways i.e., a human being as he or she is, and a human being as she or he could realise his or her true nature or telos, and the role of ethics is that which bridges enables transition from one to the other.

well, by which Basotho means moral formation and development. '*Ha se motho*' refers to the latter not the former (Molefe 2017<sub>A</sub>: 220). When viewed in this way this expression is more than a moral judgement but is a further explication and reiteration of the basic ethical outlook underlying the morality of the Basotho which is the attainment of *botho* or moral personhood. This, in Sesotho culture is connected to the notion of leading a morally praiseworthy, and outstanding life for which moral formation and education play a crucial part. It for this reason that for Basotho moral formation was one of the important parts of the function of the community. It ensured that *motho* as an individual is thus supported with the necessary ethical resources, to make it possible to attain personhood, and because of the complexity of this task Basotho relied heavily on the dynamism of narratives, in addition to community moral exemplars as chief means of moral education, which is discussed below.

It will have been noticed that in general moral judgements and statements in Sesotho culture are made in the light of attainment of certain virtues and absences of corresponding vices. In others by an implied juxtaposing virtues side by side with vices. This means that in the case of "*ha se motho*" and "*bophoofolo*" both of which represent the vices, the virtue here is to be *motho* i.e., possession of *botho*. In Sesotho, such a person would thus be described simply as "*motho ea hantle*," (a morally good person) to a question "what kind of person are they"? This statement is an acknowledgement and recognition of one's overall goodness of character and moral standing or uprightness of character. These implies progress in the acquisition of the various virtues and in getting rid of corresponding vices. It is in this sense that as a moral judgement "*ha se motho*" cannot be analysed completely without reference to the normative idea of a person i.e., African concept of a person or personhood (Gyekye 2011: Par 19, 20, Menkiti 2004). We can now see why in order to interpret *botho* correctly, it is therefore necessary to revisit *botho* in the light of its older descriptions as denoting moral quality of a person and notions of character and the practice of virtues (Gade 2013: 488, Gade 2011: 308) and avoidance of the vices all of which are essential for personhood. That means if possession of *botho* and its associated qualities amounts to acquiring the virtues enshrined in *botho*, then *bophoofolo* is the articulation of corresponding moral vices and the associated behaviour one ought to avoid. The significance that is implied in the term *bophoofolo* expressed here, must not be lost sight of as here we see again the character-centric orientation of *botho*. This is because *bophoofolo* denotes a state of being, with the emphasis on the way one lives their life in general. The significance of this to current *botho* discourse is that it further reiterates the nature of *botho* which is less interested in individual acts of a person, but more with the quality of a person's life in its wholeness and how they live it. This distinction is important as it points to the primacy of character implied in "being," which entails a consistent or particular way of behaving over a long time. This manifests itself publicly as the moral character of a person, or his or her *botho*. In Sesotho culture as it will have been seen the development of good

character is the special focus and aim of moral formation and education. The importance of this to inculcation of qualities of *botho* is discussed in the section following below.

#### 4.5 Narratives as Chief Form of Moral Education in Sesotho culture

The relevance and significance of the narrative dimension of education in the virtues<sup>63</sup> implied in *botho* and African ethics so far appear to have attracted little or no interest from *botho* scholars. This is despite the recognition of this as an obvious necessity and acknowledgment that narratives especially stories in expounding the values and ideals *botho*. We see this with Shutte (2001:16) who explain points out that traditionally the illustration of *botho* was in songs and stories” and that because of the scope of the concept which wide and deep stories are still the best way to illuminate the meaning of *botho* even if our stories now refer to present-day realities”. This is not only a recognition but an endorsement of the significance of narratives to explicating *botho* in the current *botho* discourse. And yet in spite of this i.e., natural relevance of the narrative dimension of virtue as a resource for explaining the virtues of *botho* as a normative ideal, there is still no real interest among scholars of *botho* that one can speak of in the current *botho* discourse in the theorisation of this concept and unpacking its fuller meaning as a composite of virtues (van Niekerk 2013: 87). There is therefore yet to be in the current discourse a systematic and focused analysis of narratives, as a vital avenue for uncovering the insights of *botho* embedded in narratives especially those narratives found within most cultures from which *botho* derives. The significance of this is even more pressing when considering the over reliance of the discourse on *motho ke motho*, as example of the value that narratives can bring to the discourse.

It must be recalled here that that in many of the cultures where *botho* was popular traditionally, the spoken word i.e., oral tradition was the chief form of moral education, preserving and transmitting knowledge and handing down the culture’s heritage, including its moral heritage. One therefore finds that stories and indeed all narratives in many pre-modern cultures or traditional societies play a vital role in imparting knowledge about norms and standards that regulate behaviour and personal conduct. Therefore, narratives are important in a society and in general relevant to ethics because of their inalienable significance for correct interpretation of life. This means that as moral agents, whether we acknowledge this or not, we are what the past has made us, and we cannot remove ourselves from and since stories are about the past we are in this sense also story formed beings (Richardson 2009: 145; Dandala 2009: 263, Bujo 2001: 27). This is true of most traditional societies or pre-modern African cultures including Sesotho culture and Basotho society. But as it has been recognised narratives are not accounts that occur in a vacuum, but they always express “the historical memory” of

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<sup>63</sup> This is borrowed from Bujo (2001: 27, and McIntyre 1981: 229).

particular society in which they are narrated, (MacIntyre 1981: 121, 127). This underscores the relevance of moral particularity and context within which narratives occur (Ibid. 221), which is itself an important aspect of ethical reflection that must always be taken into consideration in ethics, because it underlines the vital social role that narratives play in the moral life of a culture. It follows then that of necessity, narratives will have moral ideals and values held deeply by a society making them one of the richest deposits of moral values of a culture. Thus, it will be seen that many narratives do not only reflect the history of the cultures from which they emerged but that they are also an expression of and a reflection on that culture's moral heritage. Therefore, most narratives will presuppose certain social order and moral beliefs, vital for one to know or be familiar with to fully grasp the messages that they communicate and the moral lesson they intend to convey. Explaining the significance of this Bujo (2001: 27) points out that "stories do not only constitute the past, which is handed on in narration; they also "have contexts"<sup>64</sup> that supply the outlines and "body" of that which is narrated, moulds without which the narration loses some of its significance and in turn rendering narratives unintelligible, and therefore ineffective as a means of education into virtue".

Narratives therefore are important in a culture, especially stories, as a social philosophy of the culture; they "makeup theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being", (Letseka 2013<sub>B</sub>: 354), and this is the case in Sesotho culture as we shall see shortly with *litšomo* (Letseka 2013<sub>A</sub>: 342). One of the primary use of narratives and stories in such cultures, including that of the Basotho is they are the chief form of moral education in virtue. While moral education and teaching are often seen as the preserve of stories in these cultures, it is equally the case with other narratives like proverbs, riddles, guessing games, dance, and songs (Bujo 2001: 24, Casalis 1861: 337). In all these the virtues communicated are learned, internalised, and practised, not in a static manner but in a manner that they are correctly and appropriately applied to all existential situations, particularly the ethical sphere (Bujo 2001: 25). As it will become clear here, the main objective behind narratives, in cultures like that of the Basotho is training in character (Mapesela 2004: 321) and inculcation of *makhabane i.e., virtues* (Letseka 2013<sub>A</sub>: 341, 342, Maharasoia and Maharaswa 2004: 109). In other words, "the belief is that the moral narratives would help the young people to acquire and internalize the moral values of the society, including specific moral virtues, embedded in [these] ethical narratives" (Gyekye 2011: par. 15).

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<sup>64</sup> This reiterates the importance of moral particularity of those culture traditionally associated with *botho* which is implied in these stories and ought to be the primary context of analysis of *botho*. The narrative account advanced thus is an affirmation of the problem with the approach of current *botho* theorisation, which lacks the sufficient context especially in relation to the narrative dimension in education in the virtues of *botho*. Instead the approach almost treats *botho* as an abstract concept that can be analysed independently and defined in precise terms, without little or no reference to the articulation of these virtues of *botho* in different ways in the stories within the culture that explains and interprets what it means. This tendency can be seen in some of the concern raised in the discourse about its lack of preciseness and corresponding efforts to give precision to its definition (Mboti 2015: 130, Lutz 2009: 2). This in turn leads to a misunderstand of the nature of *botho*, which is that it is not just a normative concept but more importantly that as moral ideal it is by nature a very polysemic concept.

The ethical significance of narratives that will be explored here therefore, using selected narratives from the culture of the Basotho, will be of narratives as the paradigm of education in virtue. It is therefore important to point out from the outset that narratives do not only mean stories, and thereby restricting the narrative dimension of education into virtue to stories. The narrative element in education in virtue does not need always to be in the form of telling or narrating stories, or tales, or fables. It is equally present in dance, poetry, songs, praise singing and other nonverbal forms of moral education and instruction, including in the life of moral exemplars, whose whole life story is a kind of story narrated for others to learn from.

It is important to realise that narratives are part of the wider context of African indigenous knowledge and education system. This is therefore the framework within which they functioned and carried out their task of moral education and teaching. Equally important is to understand the nature of the narrative element of education in virtue. In African culture it aims to illustrate the virtues to be inculcated and it delineate vices, which are to be avoided (Bujo 2001: 27). This is particularly pronounced in some of the traditional tales in Sesotho culture illustrating *makhabane of botho* as the goal of moral education. When analysing the narrative dimension of virtue with reference to *botho* and the cultures from which it derives, especially the Sesotho culture, it will therefore be important to recognise that narratives are first the articulation and explanation of *botho* as the encapsulation of virtues. Second that their narration has a context i.e., wherever they are narrated narratives are told with a particular and specific social context in mind and against the background of that social context.

Sesotho culture like most African cultures has a variety of narratives. This includes stories that narrates their history and self-understanding as a people including stories of their heroic past and conquest as well as their moment of loss and defeat. This is the case with *lithoko*, (praise poems) which are common form of narratives in Sesotho culture<sup>65</sup>. Basotho also have within their culture other forms of narratives used explicitly for moral education. I am thinking here of that stock of stories handed down from generation to generation and narrated in every household conveying life lessons about the good way to live as a person and bad way to lead your life as well. A keen observer of Basotho culture will thus be aware that central to their culture is an understanding and conception of moral life, where good character is promoted as the essence of goodness and what it means to be *motho* i.e., a good person. This was in turn encouraged as that which ought to become the characteristic way one displays the possession of *botho* in the way one lives their life. This way of thinking about moral life was passed on from generation to generation through narratives where fellowship with moral exemplars of the culture, where the company of the old wise and experienced members of the

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<sup>65</sup> The difference between *lithoko* and *litšomo* is that the latter was predominantly deployed as means of moral education, while the former is often a narration of the past heroic age of the culture. Typically, *lithoko* tells of great historical events and corresponding display of excellence in virtue such as extra ordinary acts of valour, courage, or kindness or wisdom (see Casalis 1861: 328).

community is itself part of education in virtue and a key part of moral education. In other words, moral instruction, and education into a virtue in these cultures were primarily through stories (Bujo 2001: 24). In Sesotho culture, this is found in that stock of Sesotho folk tales known in Sesotho culture as *litšomo*<sup>66</sup> (folk tales) (Letseka 2013<sub>A</sub>: 342, Letseka 2013<sub>B</sub>: 354).

Before looking at the significance of stories in Sesotho culture and their role in moral education in general and *litšomo* in particular, it is important to look first at other Sesotho narratives and how they were utilised in education into virtue. Of interest are those common sayings and expression akin to proverbs. This is because this underscore the importance of the unity of Sesotho narratives, whereby *litšomo* (stories), *lithoko* (poetry or praise songs) *maele* (proverbs or common saying and expressions), *lilotho* (riddles) are not to be treated as separate entities. These narratives are instead to be treated as one body of knowledge, whose deployment and utilisation presupposed knowledge of the others. Their relationship to one another is therefore a complementary one, which is how traditionally these functioned and would have been understood and applied as part of the indigenous Sesotho system of education into virtue. It is in terms of this unity therefore that narratives must be understood especially as part of the non-formal part of traditional Sesotho education system which took the largest part of every person's education time covering all his/her days of childhood, youth up to adulthood (Matšela 1979: 188). This form of education includes all forms of education and training which took place anywhere and anytime. It differs from a formal one like that which took place in *lebollong* (circumcision school) which took place under supervision and close monitoring of recognised experts and exemplars. Non-formal education is always spontaneous and took advantage of situations as they presented themselves to impart knowledge and encourage the concrete practice of virtues. Among the virtues Basotho regarded highly and encouraged in their society and made them the focus of their education system includes "correct forms of behaviour and morality... chastity, honesty, reliability, courage, humility and respect for elders " (Ibid: 191).

Just as there is little interest as yet in the current discourse to investigate the experience of *botho* from the perspective of Sesotho speaking culture and its understanding of *botho*, so too it would appear with the use of Sesotho narratives as vehicles for explicating *botho*. The closest one finds to this is reference to "*motho ke motho ka batho*" and related moral statement "*ha se motho*." This study thus explores and analyses other related narratives or expressions in Sesotho culture for their ethical insights about virtues of *botho* and introduces these to the discourse as a way of broadening the discussion on *botho*. Worth mentioning among these is the doctrine of "*o se re ho moroa moroa tooe*" (Nqosa 2010) as an expression of the virtues of generosity, hospitality and non-discrimination all of which are ethical imperatives implied in

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<sup>66</sup> According to Coplan in Letseka (2013<sub>A</sub>: 342) *litšomo* like "auriterary metaphors, are intended to startle untamed meanings from their burrows. They are full of surprises and attacks ranging from the uncanny to the fantastical, with mythical creatures, wild animals, and even wilder humans pursuing improbable stratagems".

*botho* as it applies to Sesotho culture. It is important for the discourse to realise that these expressions or proverbs are part of a large body of narratives that traditionally supported the practice of the virtues of *botho* by providing further guidance on what it means to be ethical and to live a life consistent with the principles of *botho*. In this section, similar expressions are going to be examined to highlight their normative significance as a means of moral education in to *botho* within Sesotho culture.

A keen observer of Sesotho narratives, especially proverbs, and other similar adages or moral sayings will be aware that because of their primary social function as chief vehicles of moral educational, narratives are designed to be easily remembered and applied appropriately depending on the context. Most of them are intentionally brief and sometimes poetic hence they must always be understood as condensed synthesis of moral education into virtues of *botho* as found in culture's past experiences (Bujo 2001: 25). In other words, they are not only "concise, pithy, reflective statements that are both simple and complex," and easy to remember, but "that they also compactly express large, abstract ideas or concepts" (Mokitimi 2004: 756). In terms of communication in the context of moral formation they therefore function like summarised accounts of the narration of the ethical imperatives of the grant narrative about Basotho and *botho*. As it shall be recalled this is what we referred to as the overarching narrative, summing up all the Basotho's combined knowledge and wisdom i.e., views and ideas about what it means to be a *motho* as handed down through tradition.

One of the expression Basotho commonly use normatively as part moral education of their members is the expression "*ngoana mosotho*<sup>67</sup>" (a child of Mosotho). This expression can be used to pass moral judgement of good or bad behaviour. I start with it use in connection with the former. In this context typically it's used to describe conduct of a person who behaves themselves morally well where Basotho would say "*ke ngoana oa mosotho.*" This can loosely be translated to mean 'they are child of *mosotho*', meaning the person conducts themselves as expected of one who is brought up as proper *mosotho* or in Sesotho way. A careful reading of this statement suggests an underlying greater story that this expression presupposes which has to do with what it means to be a *mosotho* or being raised as a *mosotho* child. Traditionally the "upbringing of children" as a preparation for adulthood or future life including moral formation, was understood in a particular and specific way among Basotho. It was not so much on preparing individuals for the future, because nobody knows what the future will be but the focus of education into the virtues was on preparing individuals to live their lives well and fully, whatever their future will be (Matšela 1979: 84). The distinction made here further underscores Basotho ethics as essentially teleological in nature, because here the statement denotes

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<sup>67</sup> For elements of Basotho social and moral culture that constitute the normativity of this phrase see Ellenberger (1912: p268, 290), and many of the moral imperatives attached to *ngoan'a mosotho* (Mapesela 2004: 322) are the same as those implied by to Basotho, and in both cases the normative imperative they refer to implies certain conduct of a particular regarded as befitting one who is a Mosotho.

commendable progress i.e., a degree of excellence in virtue that an individual is displaying towards their ultimate goal. The second usage of this expression is as a censure for unacceptable conduct. Here a Mosotho would say “*e ka re ha se ngoan’a mosotho*” (it’s like they are not a Mosotho child) or “*Ke ngwana waga mang*”<sup>68</sup> in Setswana meaning whose child is this one. Both poor conduct and failure to make good progress to one’s education in virtue through upbringing (Mphetolang 2009: 19). The emphasis in these two statements, is about a person who lives their life in a manner inconsistent with one who is brought up as a Mosotho child. As with the first expression, here too the moral denominator is Bosotho i.e., the culture and way of Basotho and the assessment being made is that the individual in question he or she is behaving or conducting themselves i.e., in life in general, as if they are not a child of a Mosotho (Mapesela 2004: 322).

The normative dimensions of virtue implied in the utterance of both statements reflect what Bujo (2001: 27) sees as characteristic feature of morality in African culture where virtues are depicted side by side with the vices to be avoided. This is the case here in these two statements. In the first statement is an expression of a positive affirmation of conduct that the result of a life lived in alignment with the attainment of virtue. The second is an articulation of the failure to live according to expected standards as narrated through tradition handed down in Sesotho culture. This amounts to the capitulation of the individual to vices. So, we find that the first phrase implies that all that is acceptable and cherished in a well-natured Mosotho child is present in the way of life of the individual in question. With the latter, it means that such behaviour displayed by the individual is not only regarded as bad but also as not expected of one brought up as Mosotho i.e., a child of a Mosotho. The second point relates to the word “child” in the phrase “*ngoana mosotho*” (a Mosotho child) which denotes child in a moral sense much like in the same sense as moral personhood is understood. Here “*ngoana mosotho*” thus must be interpreted as referring to a person’s moral progress in relation to their ongoing upbringing but more important the individual’s response to that. In other words, has the person responded in a way that they can be judged as having made satisfactory progress i.e., in terms of their education into virtue through their upbringing? Or has the person in their conduct showed signs of regressing or not responding well to upbringing (Mphetolang 2009: 19).

One of the ways to understand many of the proverbs or sayings in Sesotho culture is to show the conditions under which a Mosotho would resort to many of these sayings. As Mokitimi (2004: 756) explains “the meaning of Sesotho proverbs is best understood when they are studied in the context of their actual use” i.e., “when the speaker is communicating with the

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<sup>68</sup> This expression similarly to its Sesotho counterpart, can also be a moral statement questions the social institution responsible for upbringing and how well they can do their job. In this case this would be directed at the person’s parents, family and indeed the community about seeming failure to bring up one of its own properly (Mphetolang 2009: 19).

audience in a particular situation". This does not only give us the relevant context, which we have already pointed to its significance in moral discourse, it also gives us insight into the intention behind the invocation. This is what Bujo (2001: 31) refers to as the direction of the communication intended because these were not just statements and expressions that were uttered with no particular intention and conversational context. In the case of a '*ngoana oa mosotho*', one finds that the circumstance in which a Mosotho resorted to these is to reiterate a moral idea already commonly shared and implicitly understood in the culture (Mapesela 2004: 322). And that is an underlying understanding of Bosotho being a kind of normative standard, a way of life for one to live their life by and that by which conduct is regulated. What this implies is an understanding within the Sesotho culture where Bosotho denotes a conglomeration of certain standards of conduct regarded as typical of one who is a proper Mosotho. Thus, according to this being brought up well as '*ngoana oa mosotho*' means an individual whose conduct is in conformity with this as a standard. When a person does not live their life according to this, then a Mosotho would say of such an individual, *o itsoere joalo ka ha eka ha se ngoana oa Mosotho.*" This is as much a moral statement as it is also a moral assessment of the person's conduct in general, meaning that such a person, he/she is not behaving in a manner befitting one raised as a Mosotho child, i.e., brought up accordingly to certain standards of upbringing regarded as characteristic of Sesotho culture. The implicit, meaning of "*ngoana Mosotho*" that is being communicated here, reflects how the Basotho regarded their culture or Bosotho as a kind of an expression of a particular way of life that presuppose certain ways of living or moral standards that marks it as Bosotho. This we see in the extent to which Bosotho as expressed in, mosotho child is spoken of as a normative standard synonymous with values and virtues that constitute *botho*. In other words, as Mapesela (ibid.) explains "not only do these phrases encourage the development of identity with Sesotho culture, they also promote and encourage the development of good ethics and *botho*."

Another important expression in Sesotho culture that features prominently in moral education into the virtues is the common Sesotho expression "*ngoana ke ua sechaba*", which means 'a child belongs to the nation' (Mapesela 2004:322, Matšela 1979: 87). It is important to observe that in this expression the message that children are being told *vis-à-vis* their conduct is that they should conduct themselves in an exemplary way in the presence and or absence of their immediate parents. But this expression equally expresses ethical responsibilities for any adult person *vis-à-vis* their duty in the social upbringing of young members of the community in the right way. In other words, "Basotho were concerned about proper behaviour among younger members, whether they knew them (the children) or not" (Matšela 1979: 87). As Mapesela further explains "this phrase implies that raising a child is not only the responsibility of a child's biological parents but rather of every elderly person in the community" (2004: 322). This was

a way of ensuring moral education and teaching of the young by deterring bad behaviour among youth. This was because children would know that at any time an adult person could be around and reprimand them.

What we therefore learn about these expressions and sayings such as these explored here, is that they are excerpts of a grand narrative of the Basotho. Their pithiness made it easy to recall the main lessons of what it means to be a Mosotho and how one who is brought up in a Sesotho way is ought to conduct themselves. In short, these sayings and expressions presuppose knowledge of this grand narrative about Basotho, specifically the moral story of the Basotho as a people. This is because through upbringing one got exposed to the narration of the full story including the understanding of personhood and *botho* as implied in their social practices or customs of Basotho as well as those reflected in their forms of politeness and rules of etiquette (Casalis 1861: 207). Central to this story is the high moral value Basotho place on a person being of good upbringing by which it is meant not only the actual parental education in virtue of a child but more importantly how the child responds to such education and moral formation. This explains the strong feeling every Mosotho has towards acquiring the unenviable status of being regarded as “*motho ea se nang mekhoa* i.e., a manner less person of bad character and behaviour” which every Mosotho who considered himself or herself decently brought up could not afford (Ellengberger 1912: 293). As can be seen without this background and knowledge, it is arguable if the analysis of such expressions and statements along with their constituent key moral terms such as “*mekhoa*” or *boitsoaro* is not going to misrepresent the true meaning and ethical significance that such expressions enjoyed in their original settings and social milieu within which they applied and gave them significance.

#### **4.5.2 Significance of *Litšomo* in Moral Education in Sesotho Culture**

The significance of stories as a specific type of narratives with a special role in moral formation and education into virtue has so far been indirectly discussed or by inference as part of an account of narratives in general. But as it will become clear here, in Sesotho culture, stories played a crucial role not only in the psyche of a society but in moral education and education into virtue as well. This means that that we can best learn about the ethical imperatives of *botho* and the virtues it encapsulates through stories. Moral stories, therefore, capture in the most vivid way how the essence of our lives as moral agents and quest for meaning found in narratives. Most stories can be understood by everyone without any need for the explanation of what the moral lesson is. Describing the importance of stories in moral education, McIntyre (1981: 121, 216) explains that in addition to being the doorway into understanding society

“It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, .... that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are..... Hence there is no way to give us an

understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources”.

This is the power inherent in stories as vehicles for moral education hence why they fascinate us. This is true even today where traces of this can be found in the fascination with “modern stories”, although the content and nature of these and their narration may have changed. In Sesotho speaking culture the narrative dimension education into virtue is found in that stock of moral stories called *litšomo*, which I will discuss shortly. Traditionally the narration of *litšomo* was in fellowship with the elders and was primarily for moral education. They helped young people to acquire and internalize the moral values of the society and affirmed the values of social morality” which is focused on “on human relations” (Gyekye 2011: par 6, 15). The same cannot be said of many modern “stories” told through the medium of technology and television. This has distorted the social value and significance of stories not only in relation to our moral life as agents but more specifically in relation to moral education into virtue particularly of the young which is that we live our lives predominantly through stories. This is because as a moral agents *motho* is social animals and

“in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a storytelling animal. He... becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. [And]...the key question... is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'” (MacIntyre 1981: 216).

This means that it is in part through stories that we seek answers to fundamental existential and moral questions”, questions such as ‘What does it mean to lead a good life’?, “how does one become *motho* i.e., a good person and live life well or indeed “what does conduct or life worthy of one who is morally good look like?” Different cultures throughout the ages have answered these questions in their different ways, hence we find different stock of stories in different cultures. They range from stories that explain our identity within the narrow boundaries of family and community to those that explain our identities as nations. They reflect some describable story i.e., of a particular community and its moral tradition (Richardson 2009: 145). So, if we want to learn about the moral beliefs of a culture, paying attention to the stories of that culture seem to be a good starting point.

This is true of those traditional pre-modern cultures like Basotho culture, from which *botho* derives. Looking at these cultures one will find that the “chief means of moral education is the telling of stories” usually from a stock of stories “handed down from generation to generation” and often peculiar to that culture (McIntyre 1981: 121). In other words, it is through stories that most cultures transmit knowledge and educate their members and future generations into virtue. This means that stories do not only reflect a society’s moral beliefs and values but ultimately, they reflect the virtues and moral ideals that a particular society holds dear. In turn they outline preferred ways of living individuals are expected to emulate. One of the reasons

that stories are so important for moral education is that they have a unique way of preserving eternal moral truths, irrespective of cultural origins and place. They can convey a message in a way that transcends time and space or age. In this sense, most stories are timeless, because the moral lesson they teach is always relevant to any context. This is true of the stories of most of the cultures associated with *botho* which is why stories are the ideal way to explain the meaning of *botho* (Shutte 2001: 16).

Because of this unique standing of stories among African narratives, it is time current *botho* discourse renounce the bias against traditional tales as a means of theorising and explaining the values enshrined in *botho*. This is given credence when one considers that it was through stories that in African culture stories are the chief means of moral education into virtue. This means the same should be the same for current *botho* discourse in learning about *botho* and what the concept means, most notably in relation to cultivation of good qualities of character. As such one finds that in most traditional cultures, such as Sesotho speaking culture much time was devoted to the narration of stories as the first stage in character-building (Dandala 2009: 265). Thus, we find that in Sesotho speaking culture storytelling was the most common means of day to day moral instruction and education especially for younger members of societies (Casalis 1861: 337; Ellenberger 1912: 297) with narration of *litšomo* as the most prominent, which the focus on the next section.

Before looking at *litšomo* and their significance to moral education and formation in Sesotho culture, I would like to make a few preliminary remarks. First, to point out that it is not the intention here to give an exhaustive analytical analysis of all *litšomo* found in Sesotho culture. Second, that it is important to realise that *litšomo* as part of narratives, like other moral education resources in Sesotho culture, function within a much larger context of indigenous education and knowledge system of ancient Basotho (Mapesela 2004, Maharasoia and Maharaswa 2004). This knowledge system like all knowledge systems makes certain claims to the truth about life in its beliefs and moral system. Of interest for us here is what this knowledge system says about *motho* and what it means to be a person. As such this knowledge system provides an overarching framework to narratives including *litšomo* and it is that which narratives their moral authority and significance. Narratives like *litšomo* will therefore reflect this and the particular moral theory and ethos it subscribes to. I will therefore argue that many of Sesotho narratives are unintelligible, and their moral significance will not be easily accessible if analysed and theorised without reference to this knowledge system. This is because they presuppose the central tenets of this knowledge system, and often directly or indirectly imply it. This is true of *botho* as well. But the scope of work this requires means this is an area of interest worth a study in its own right. Any attempt to do this here will be an injustice. It will therefore suffice here to only highlight the importance of *litšomo* as the

chief means of moral education, highlighting their role in moral education about virtues, training in character and moral personhood according to Sesotho culture.

In ancient Basotho society, *litšomo* were usually narrated around the fire, in the evenings usually by elders to younger members usually when all household chores were completed. They were told and retold in every hut in the village, such that they were almost known everywhere by heart. They were the chief means by which the community taught its members about admirable qualities of good character, virtues (*makhabane*) that one ought to inculcate and vices to avoid. Describing this even the early missionaries with their European bias and prejudice of African culture acknowledged the moral significance of *litšomo*, with Casalis (1861: 339) saying of their role in moral teaching “here and there we find valuable moral lessons proving that evil never remains unpunished”. Narration of *litšomo* in Sesotho Culture is an important part of the non-formal education of the Basotho (Matšela 1979: 191). Today *litšomo* are no longer commonly narrated in households, as was the case in the past. The decline of the practice is another consequence of the displacement of traditional Sesotho culture, more specifically oral tradition by modernisation and Westernisation of the Basotho culture<sup>69</sup>. The power of storytelling is now replaced by the proliferation of reading and writing. I will argue here however, that *litšomo* remains one of the most valuable and relevant and underutilised resources for moral education about *botho* and virtues of *botho*, currently available to current discourse. In other words, for current ethical reflection to benefit from the rich ethical resource that *litšomo* represents, it is imperative virtues of *botho* are analysed in terms of how they are articulated in narratives in general and in many *litšomo* in particular.

As the chief means of moral education *litšomo* should thus be read less as stories for entertaining children or mere African literature. Many *litšomo*, if not all of them convey and communicate deep moral lessons and express eternal moral truths about what the culture regards as good character and bad character (Letseka 2013<sub>B</sub>: 354). In them we find captured there the traditional African moral thought about what it means to be moral, to be a person of good character, which in Sesotho speaking culture is defined in terms of being a proper *motho* (Mphetlang 2009: 17). They are a vivid articulation of Basotho’s values and qualities of moral character regarded as befitting one who has *botho*, and hence a proper *motho*. They also depict metaphorically the existential question crucial for moral life of *motho* which is the ultimate life-shaping choice confronting *motho* as moral agent. That choice is succinctly depicted in Kierkegaard’s *Enten-Eller* and the choice between the ethical way of life and the aesthetic way of life (McIntyre’s 1981: 40), which is a metaphor resembling the ultimate choice

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<sup>69</sup> I use the terms modernisation and westernization here with specific emphasis to denote discontinuation of some social practice within a culture for what appears to be no apparent rational reason or benefit other than as a result of general tendency in Africa of uncritical embrace of much of Western culture which often is regarded as modern, and implying progress and develop. With *litšomo* some would argue if their abandonment is progress, considering the general embrace of television stories even of bedtime stories reading practices.

for *motho* depicted in *litšomo*, i.e. a choice between the good way to live life and the bad way to live.

But unlike MacIntyre's "ultimate choice" between two ways of life, in the narration of *litšomo* to live their life as an individual *motho* and in turn the audience is always confronted with a fundamentally different choice. Here the choice to be made is first informed by the communitarian character of African ethics or social character of African morality where the moral agent must always "give due consideration to the interests and welfare of others" (Gyekye 2011: par 66). In Sesotho culture this choice is understood in terms of that which defines one as a *motho* i.e., a choice that defines the kind of person we are. In other words, the kind of life we will build for ourselves, and those we affect. ... where the choice we face as moral agent is the choice between generosity and greed" (Prozesky 2007: 76). Or to put this differently in *litšomo* the choice is portrayed as between "the selfish way of living or the unselfish one, i.e., living mainly of oneself or living with a real and active genuine concern for others" (Ibid: 77). Second, in *litšomo* the moral agent in this case the audience listening themselves does not confront the moral of the story i.e., the choices depicted in the story from a neutral standpoint" but from their moral starting point as "*ngoana oa Mosotho* (a Mosotho child). This is because as earlier discussed as a normative statement "*ngoana oa Mosotho*" precludes one who is brought up as such from certain moral choices that would be inconsistent with this status. Making such a choice, if one makes it, amounts not only to the rejection of oneself and who one really is, but leads one to gain the unenviable moral status of *bophoofofo* (Casalis 1861: 303, Mphetolang 2009: 18; Otlogetswe 2015: par 3). In other words, to be regarded as "*motho ea se nang mekhoa* i.e., mannerless person", a status every Mosotho who considered himself or herself decently brought, would not want (Ellengberger 1912: 293, Mapesela 2004: 322).

So, the narration of *litšomo* must be understood as aimed at reinforcing the values and ideals already encouraged in the moral practice of the agents by their upbringing in one's moral journey as a *motho*. The ultimate purpose in *litšomo* therefore is the reaffirmation of a way of life already lived by virtue of one being brought up as "*ngoana oa mosotho*", and to reinforce the practice of virtue in the agent's life as a good way to live one's life. *Litšomo* thus must be read as enabling the moral agent to introspect by reflecting on the two ways of life depicted in these stories. Their narration is an opportunity for one to recommit themselves to a life lived in virtue and validation of that way of life. It is a time for the moral agents to meditate on choosing the ethical way of life and how to become better in living out the virtues which that way of life presupposes. With the narration of *litšomo* the kind of choice where the moral agent is presented as confronting both choices having as yet embraced neither is not possible (MacIntyre 1981: 40). According to traditional morality every moral agent confronts these moral choices in life from a morally pre-defined standpoint and moral particularity that is one's

starting point. As such a *choice* of a way of life depicted in the *litšomo*, that would entail emulating a way of life inconsistent with the status of being “*ngoana oa Mosotho*” is simply not an option. It is for this reason that the narration of *litšomo* is often presented by elders with the necessary moral insight and maturity to correct impressionable young minds who may sometimes misunderstand the enchanting lifestyle of some of the main characters in the stories for virtues to be aspired to and emulated.

Another important observation a keen observer of Sesotho narratives will be aware of is that the narrative dimension of education into virtue as found in *litšomo*, is the juxtaposition of the virtues and their corresponding vices to be avoided (Bujo 2001: 27). In *litšomo*, the aim is therefore to learn the difference between good and evil, good and bad. It is also for *motho*, in the form of the audience listening to the narration to show growth in discernment to distinguish the best way to live life well and fully, from the bad and therefore the wrong way for one to live<sup>70</sup>. The possibility of failure to make the right judgement in discerning, especially of younger members of the society, about the true virtuous way of life as depicted in the story is the reason elders narrated the stories most of the time. Having made that distinction and recognising the right one, the expectation is then for one to internalise the virtue and values of this way of life by habitually doing those acts that produce these values. This becomes part of the growth in moral wisdom for daily conduct and for application in different situations calling for ethical action. For this reason, *litšomo* are narrated repeatedly to the point that they were known by heart, and often the children would themselves be asked to narrate these to others. This, in turn, fostered and encouraged the development of good habits of character. So, if we do not usually read *litšomo* in this way, to paraphrase McIntyre, it is because over-familiarity with their narration has lulled us into believing that these are mere tales for leisure whose only moral significance is the moral education of children. It is such views of *litšomo* and the bias of the new i.e., where everything that is “new and modern” is treated as always implying progress, that has dulled our sense to the value of *litšomo* and the power of their messaging about how to live life well. It is the conviction of this entry here that *litšomo* are not only relevant to ethical reflection on *botho*, but have a unique, and as yet realised potential to contribute immensely to current analysis and theorisation of this concept.

The brief overview of the relevance of *litšomo* just outlined provides necessary background to *litšomo* and their role in education in virtue in Sesotho culture. Now we can explore a few selected classic *litšomo*, that best capture the narrative dimension of education into virtue and their social function in moral education especially in training about character.

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<sup>70</sup> According to the traditional morality a “good way to live” is always understood in terms of prizing the welfare of all and this is the underlying message of most *litšomo* i.e., underlining the values of social morality or the common good (Gyekye 2011: 77)

### 4.5.3 Analysis of Selected *Litšomo* in Sesotho Culture

None among the stock of *litšomo* of Basotho capture the essence of the narrative dimension of virtue and training in character than those depicting the character of '*mutlanyana*', the hare. In these stories often the character of the hare or lifestyle is typically portrayed as the clever, cunning good for nothing character<sup>71</sup>. It is often depicted as a creature of envy who is "doing well" despite not applying any effort in life. It lives an extravagant life from unjust rewards coning other animals out of their possessions as illustrated in the story with the jackal.

#### (a) *The Hare and the Jackal*

In the English version of this story "The guardian of the dew pond", all the animals decide to build a dam to "catch the dew by night" to address a severe drought. But

"one animal, the good for nothing hare, refused to lend a hand, but sat on the big rock and laughed and jeered as the others sweated and toiled in the heat of the summer sun, and the angry creatures vowed that not one drop of water would they allow him to drink" (Savory 1962: 31).

Following this, a rota of guards was created, and all the animals took it in turns to guard the pond to make sure the lazy hare goes nowhere near the pond. Where this story is leading to is self-evident as the hare as usual got up to his tricks to get what he does not deserve. The basic character and way of life of the hare's character depicted here are recounted in another similar *tšomo* "The end of the wicked one" (Ibid, 57-59). Here we see the hare's sneaky character and cunning lifestyle of getting his way through life without putting in the required effort. We are told that after the jackal, known for his building skills, was asked by the animals "to build them a house where they could gather together and enjoy themselves", when the hare got up to his same old tricks. The jackal, having judiciously begun his work and now roofing the house, "the hare came sauntering past". With his "intentions" as usual, very far from good" it offered to help. The jackal thinking nothing of this agreed gratefully. With the jackal working on the roof from the outside, the hare working on the roof from the inside the hare proceeded carefully to sew the jackal's tail firmly to the rafters along with the grass. Then

"Having made quite sure that the jackal was now unable to jump down from the roof after him, the wicked hare climbed down from his perch inside the roof, .... then climbed onto the roof and killed the poor jackal, after which he carefully skinned him [and] ... putting the jackal's skin over his own, [proceeds to live as the jackal] (Ibid. 57).".

Disguised as a jackal he goes from house to house selling them dagga (marijuana) until one day one of his customers discovered that "his jackal's skin was not all that it appeared to be".

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<sup>71</sup> The term lifestyle here is used deliberately to emphasis the way of life that the main character led as opposed to their actions as the moral lesson contained in *litšomo* i.e., focus is on "being" or character and not of "doing" or actions as such.

The moral of the story is clear to see here and what qualities of characters and corresponding behaviour is being encouraged and discouraged. Suffice to say the character of hare in the story i.e., clever, wise and on the surface enviable at least from the perspective of the other animals, is not reflected in good light. The subtext of the story points to its character as a whole as somehow deformed and not the kind to be encouraged or admired. These are not qualities of character or more correctly this is not a good way to lead one's life and therefore by implication something that the listener ought not to aspire to emulate in their own life, because it is based on falsehood, and not expected from one who is morally a good person. In other words, a careful reading of many of the stories of the hare, one finds that although at superficial level the character and lifestyle displayed by the hare seems attractive, it is on the whole discouraged. As a characteristic way that one conduct themselves, the lifestyle chosen by the hare as depicted in many of these stories is it is nevertheless disapproved of and discouraged as befitting one with good character and as a way of life. The listener is therefore left in no doubt as to which way of life is regarded as good and therefore the right way to live and conduct oneself morally, and which way is bad and unacceptable for moral behaviour.

**(b) *Moshanyana Sankatana or Kholumolumo*<sup>72</sup>**

The theme of ultimate ethical choice between the two ways of life i.e., the good and bad way to live life central to the moral teaching many *litšomo*, is depicted in its most dramatic presentation in the classic story of *Kholumolumo* (The Monster Beast). It is depicted vividly in the qualities of character of the main characters and the kind moral agents represented. *Kholumolumo* is a tale of the giant, ferocious, mythical beast which devours all the people except one pregnant woman. She gives birth to a child, Sankatana, who grew up in an extraordinarily fast manner after his birth. He was born able to walk and speak. And he asked his mother where the people are seeing none around. Upon being told that they have been devoured by *Kholumolumo*, Sankatana sets off and attacks and kills the beast. He liberates his people from the belly of the beast and in gratefulness the people of the village crowned him their king. But soon resentment and jealousy creeps in and the people plot to kill him. After many failed attempts Sankatana was finally killed out of jealousy and misunderstanding (Manyeli 1992: 33. Savory 1962: 40, Casalis 1861: 347, Ellenberger 1912: 300).

Here too the moral of the story is clear in terms of how not to conduct oneself if one is a proper *motho*, and a good person. This is depicted in the personality of Sankatana which is contrasted with the figures of those among his people wanted him killed.

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<sup>72</sup> The origin of this myth or legend of Sankatana or Litaolane as the boy is called in other versions because of the amulets and divining bones around his neck, is a source of many debates from the time of missionaries in Lesotho because of the similarity of the mysterious birth and growth of Sankatana with that preached by Christianity about the birth of Jesus Christ (Manyeli 192: 34).

### **(c) Masilo and Masilonyane**

It is perhaps in the tale of two brothers, Masilo and Masilonyane (Casalis 1861: 339 -343, Savory 1962: 35-39), that the normative significance of the two ways of life, i.e., the selfish and unselfish way to live that both MacIntyre (1981: 40), and Prozesky (2007: 76) refers to finds its most vivid articulation and strongest depiction in *litšomo*. Following custom of narrating *litšomo* in Sesotho culture where the audience receives a cue for the beginning of the narration, I shall observe this traditional protocol here. “*Ba re e ne re*”, once upon a time, there were two brothers, Masilo and Masilonyane, Masilo was the oldest. One day they decided “to go and get rich”. “After a few sleeps they came to a place where two roads lay before them, one leading to the east and the other to the west”. Masilo “chose the latter while his brother took the opposite direction”. After a few days, Masilonyane came across a place with many pots turned upside down and decides to see if any treasure was hidden beneath them<sup>73</sup>. Pushing them one by one he came to one of immense size, which remained immovable. Suddenly it gave way and out toppled a monstrous angry man whose one leg was very large. “For your punishment, you are condemned to carry me,” said Big leg. Following a failed escape from Big-leg, Masilonyane, in despair decided to kill him setting his dogs on Big-leg instructing them to only “leave his great leg”. Cutting the leg up with an axe he strikes a fortune, and out came an immense herd of beautiful cows, including one more beautiful than the rest, white as snow. On the way back home the two brothers meet again at the place where they separated and had agreed to meet.

Masilonyane considering himself fortunate said to his brother “Take as many as you like except the white one”, for it “can belong to no other person but me”. But Masilo was not satisfied as he envied the white cow and kept repeatedly asking for it but to no avail. Eventually, Masilo’s greedy and jealous character led him to decide to kill his brother. Passing the fortune of Masilonyane as his own and claiming no knowledge of the whereabouts of Masilonyane. All was well for him were it not for the long-tailed widow bird, which kept perching itself on the horn of the white cow and singing about what happened. Masilo attempts several times to kill the bird, but to no avail and the truth is eventually known (Casalis 1861: 339, Savory 1962: 35).

The portrayal of the two ways in this story is one of the most vivid among the *litšomo*. First, we see a selfish way of life or a life lived without virtue, as depicted in the character of Masilo. This is depicted in terms of a range of vices in Masilo: evil thoughts, jealousy (*mona*), envy (*ho khala*), greed (*meharo* or *ho ba pelo e telele*), deceit (*bomenemene*), lying (*leshano*). All these are presented as qualities of bad character and what their corresponding consequences

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<sup>73</sup> In other versions of this story it is a large *sesiu* (grass sewn granary or a large earthen pitcher), of which Masilonyane enlists Masilo’s help to turn it up. The latter refuses annoyed at this waste of valuable hunting time (Savory 1962: 35) and goes on to hunt.

are. The subtext and the underlying message to the listener of the story is that these are vices and a type of moral character one who is a *motho*, ought to avoid as qualities of one's character. This is because leading a life like this is not *botho*. But as it will be seen these are representative of perennial vices faced by human beings and thus the message is that one will encounter these, but one must work hard not to succumb to them, as Masilo does. Second, we have life lived in virtue which is depicted in the character and personhood of Masilonyane. This story depicts among other virtues Masilonyane inhabits; generosity or sharing (*ho fana*), not being self-fish (*ho se ikhabe*), kindness (*mosa*), being truthful ('*nete*), justice (*toka*) and forgiveness (*tsoarelo*). These are the ideal qualities of character, one ought to cultivate and hence by implication practice in daily living as part of shaping and developing one's character in the right way.

Furthermore, in most *litšomo* the juxtaposition of the two ways of life and its connection to primacy of character, is sometimes mirrored in depiction of the characters of the older sibling versus that of the younger sibling. In most *litšomo*, the character of the younger sibling is always admirable and commendable while that of the older sibling is portrayed flawed and prone to bad judgements or decisions and entertaining ill thoughts and ideas<sup>74</sup>. The same is true of this story, and it is the finds echoes in the of Morongoe and Morongoenyane which follows below.

#### **(d) Morongoe le Morongoenyane**

This motif of the older sibling and young one depicted in terms of bad and good character respectively is often found running through many *litšomo* as part of the overall moral education in virtue in Sesotho culture. This is the case in another sibling story of the two sisters: Morongoe the older, spiteful and unloved and the younger sister Morongoenyane, kind and much loved. In the story, Morongoe conspires against her younger sister (Savory 1962: 27-29). One day the elder sister called all the girls in the village to gather wood with her in the forest and they all set off in high spirits for day of fun. When the wood was gathered, they

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<sup>74</sup> The normative imperatives of the metaphor of the "older sibling" contrasted with the "younger sibling" and the respective ways of conduct and characters as depicted in *litšomo* i.e., as flawed character and imperfect with regard to moral development must not be underestimated here. In most *litšomo* this is often reflected in the names of the sibling which always follow the same structure, with the younger sibling's name being the diminutive of the older sibling's name, such Masilo and Masilonyane, Morongoe and Morongoenyane.

This is particularly important in cultures such as that of Basotho where the social role of the elder sibling is usually as the natural successor to the father or the heir. In other words, this role was a leadership role, in whom was vested huge moral responsibilities including responsibility for the moral education over other siblings by setting good example (Casalis 1861: 180). Yet in *litšomo*, the figure of the older sibling more often than not is portrayed as morally imperfect, often displaying undesirable qualities of character, while by contrast the younger sibling is often portrayed in displaying the right character dispositions or admirable character to be condoned and emulated. This is best exemplified in the tale of Masilo and his young brother Masilonyane (Casalis 1861: 341), where the former's greed leads him to kill his younger sibling for the latter's fortune. This is one of the benefits of the narrative dimension of education in virtue that the current *botho* discourse can benefit from in trying to apply the principle of *botho* in different sphere of life including in this case to ethical leadership.

romped and played until the younger one said it was time to go back home. The elder sister laughed and said: The afternoon is young: let us sleep for a while after our play. When Morongoenyane had gone to sleep her sister persuaded the others to steal quietly away and leave her there alone. Soon the moon arose, and lions came upon the sleeping Morongoenyane. "Ah here is meat" said the lion, "today we will sleep well with our hunger fully satisfied". But one of the lion's children said, "no don't kill her yet. Let me play with her for she is strange to me". A bond of friendship developed between the two and the baby lion swallows Morongoenyane to save her from the older lions. When the older lions returned the Morongoenyane was nowhere to be found. The little lion joined the search and after a while they gave up and went their way. The little lion then carried Morongoenyane carefully to her father's hut ensuring her safety. Morongoe was upset and angry to see her sister safe and sound, so tried again to get rid of her. The story ends with a juxtaposition of the two sisters' fortunes in life. The younger sister Morongoenyane leads an admirable commendable life, loved by all. By contrast the old sister Morongoe died as she has lived – unloving and unloved and a cross old maid. Here too we see how innocence, kindness, in the character of Morongoenyane is depicted as admirable qualities of character or virtues and what has lasting moral value. While jealousy, envy and evil thoughts represented in the character of Morongoe symbolise undesirable qualities of character not befitting one who is a *motho* and in the end, these do not pay off.

In these stories and many similar ones it is the character of the main characters that is the focus of the story where the good and bad characters are juxtaposed. In Sesotho culture this was part of training in character that Basotho were very concerned to safeguard in their members. These traditional stories are therefore important sources for an understanding of *botho* the requisite cultivation of good qualities of character. The important insight about *litsomo* is that they formed one of the chief means of moral education. From them we find the essence of what can be referred to as a narrative account of the virtues in the moral thought of Basotho. They are the closest to a systematic and authoritative account of the virtues, specifically virtues of *botho*, we can get in Sesotho culture. They are also the most reliable account available of what Basotho regarded as good qualities of character and in turn descriptions of qualities of *botho*. Therefore, it will be seen that in many of these stories the characters of the "hero" and the "villain" both representative of the virtues and vices respectively, are often juxtaposed side by side to drive home the message about the importance of developing good character or inculcating the corresponding *makhabane*. In these stories is embedded unique ethical and moral insights relevant and essential to understanding what it means for a *motho* to possess qualities of *botho*, not only for contemporary Basotho in Lesotho today but for interpreting the principles of *botho* to others in

other contexts. They provide current discourse with a rich source of insights for understanding the ethical imperatives of *botho* in a wide variety of social settings.

For current *botho* discourse *litšomo* are relevant for the analysis and interpretation of *botho* from the perspective of the moral culture of Basotho, as one of the cultures traditionally associated with *botho*. They are therefore indispensable for unpacking the ethical imperatives of *botho* as this concept is understood and applied traditionally within Sesotho culture. This is because in the process of narration, the meaning of what it is to have *botho* which is coded in the words, actions, and conduct of key characters in *litšomo*, is simultaneously decoded. They ensure that the ethical imperatives of *botho* embodied in *litšomo* are not only mistaken in what is outwardly obvious and perceived in the story but more importantly are continually reinforced as an aspiration and goal of a *motho* for his or her moral life (Mapesela 2004: 321). Here Bujo (2001: 25) makes an important observation which is instructive for current *botho* discourse on the relevance of stories for teaching about *botho* ethics. He points out that “the virtues communicated and acquired by means of fairy tales and proverbs are not intended to be applied in a static manner to the various situations in life”. Rather, they must be continually expounded and actualised anew. The repetitive nature of the narration of *litšomo* in Sesotho culture thus serves this purpose of ongoing illumination of the virtues necessary for shaping daily habits. These in turn play an important role as part of the process of moral growth and internalisation of qualities of *botho* by reinforcing certain dispositions of character as morally desirable and by implication implicitly promoting and encouraging the inculcation and cultivation of these as part of one’s moral growth in the journey of life.

For our purpose in this chapter, *litšomo* are relevant for ethical reflection on *botho* in their social function as chief means of moral education, especially their role in outlining in a non-prescriptive way the inculcation of qualities of good character as essential to being a person. In other words, it is in their representation of the narrative dimension of virtues or education in virtue that the relevance of stories applies to current *botho* discourse. They offer a richer elucidation of what qualities of *botho* are essential for good character and which ones are to be avoided as vices. In them we find *botho* or more specifically good character and its qualities defined, explained and described in a manner that sheds more light on its meaning than the current analysis can do so far. This means that *botho* as the assessment and ultimate culmination of the process of moral education, is best explained in part in terms of qualities of good character often depicted in these stories. What this means is that this concept is intelligible as a key part of the process of moral development and growth, and part of understanding what it entails, or its definition is explained much better through and in stories such as *litšomo*.

The implication of the narrative dimension of virtues to ethical reflection on *botho* is a need for shift in the analysis towards focus on the assessment of conduct and behaviour of *motho* in

terms of the process of acquiring good qualities of character. The significance of reinstating the narrative dimension of virtue in *botho* is that this enables a much more comprehensive way of unpacking the values and virtues encapsulated in *botho*. Its benefit is the timelessness power of stories to articulate and explain *botho* as a polysemic moral ideal and moral values and ideas it embodies. This means that traditional stories like *litšomo* are far more suited and in turn more attractive as the primary means of articulating the ethical imperatives of *botho* and interpreting its meaning. This is because stories like those found in *litšomo*, have an inherent power to speak across cultures in terms of time and space. They can convey their message within the immediate borders of their origins as well as beyond those borders in an equally powerfully persuasive manner, with equal clarity to their audience.

#### 4.6 Summary

This chapter discussed the experience of *botho* in Sesotho speaking culture showing that the centrality of character in traditional Basotho society and the understanding of *botho*, foreshadows the current prevailing interpretation of this concept in the discourse. The character centric account of *botho* discussed in this chapter is presented both as critique of Afro-communitarianism formulation of *botho* in the current discourse and a defense for an alternative agent centered account and articulation of this *botho* as found in Sesotho culture. We saw that the interpretation *botho* in terms of character in the experience and moral life of traditional Basotho communities as discussed in this chapter is not a new way of understanding *botho*. Instead, this is a return to a much older usage of the term consistent with its traditional understanding in Southern Africa. The chapter as whole is therefore making a general case for reinstatement of moral character in current *botho* discourse and analysis of the concept, which is understood is an important consideration in assessing the moral standing of an individual. The central argument thus underlying this chapter is that if the understanding of *botho* is to become a reality with practical application to personal conduct and moral life of individuals at a personal level today, this will be found in the interpretation of this concept in similar way it is understood in Sesotho culture where it is primarily linked to character and inculcation of *makhabane* by individuals as moral agents.

The chapter gives an overview of the significance and primacy of character to Basotho understanding of *botho* understood as personhood by surveying aspects of Basotho culture and moral life especially their moral language that express the significance of good moral character. This includes examination of anecdotal evidence and collating the insights drawn. It showed how in their culture, their language and in their social practices Basotho have always prioritised formation and development of good character as the core focus of their approach to ethics including of course the understanding of *botho*. It showed that the foundation of the

primacy of character as the basic understanding of *botho* is rooted in the moral culture and social life of Basotho. The chapter thus analyzed many of the ceremonies and social practices of Basotho and showed how in these we find the most explicit account of the priority of the primacy of character in Sesotho culture. The chapter gave an account of these social practices showing this interest in character among Basotho as journey to personhood which start from childhood progressively up until adulthood. Here the chapter showed that in Sesotho culture the common thread in many of these ceremonies and rituals performed for *motho* along this journey is always focused on securing good character and Basotho's preoccupation with individuals becoming citizens with good character. The chapter outlines this journey start with the first of these ceremonies performed for a baby called the *kuruetso* ritual, which is a series of small ceremonies during childhood and analysis the practices of Basotho along the pathway to adulthood up until *lebollo* (circumcision schools) which marks adulthood phase of one's moral formation and development. Throughout this pathway the chapter showed the preoccupation of Basotho with good character of their members is unmistakable. The chapter showed that in many of their ceremonies and social practices performed for new-born babies, one finds that having a good moral character was celebrated and promoted as an important part of the ceremony or rituals. Here the chapter showed that in the selection of lead person during these the character the person was the primary consideration. In other words, the choice of such an individual is always based on their good character. The belief and the symbolism here are that the child would take after the character of that person as well and in turn become a morally good and admirable person. Now the connection with *botho* here is clear since it was the primary consideration for Basotho that one must show in the way they live that they possess *botho* i.e., have acquired the expected good qualities of character.

Among the various *kuruetso* rituals and ceremonies, which is the introduction of the baby to the natural environment and various aspect of the community life, the chapter examined the ritual of *ho fuoa* ritual (to be given) referring to introducing the baby to solid and liquid foods and *kananelo* (thanksgiving). What we see here is that these rituals are treated already as essential part of moral formation where good character is symbolically moulded onto to the character of the baby, and by implication *botho* indirectly as well. This is because in Sesotho culture the understanding is that *botho* is the sort of thing that can be moulded in a child through moral formation.

The chapter showed that the prominence of character in ethics in Sesotho speaking cultures can also be observed most prominently in their language. This is particularly noticeable in some of the key moral terms Basotho use as central to their moral language and understanding of ethics as reflected in their traditional moral scheme of Basotho. Here the chapter highlighted the neglect in current *botho* discourse of the significance of key moral terms of *setho*, *botho* and *motho*. The chapter showed the significance of these as the core of

moral scheme of traditional Basotho, where the relationship between these is one of mutual presupposition. In terms of this scheme, morality or ethics for Basotho revolves around the essential hierarchy of these as they are among the key moral terms in their language. The chapter therefore argues for the respect of the unity of these moral terms as this governs how they are to be understood and applied. The chapter highlighted this as one of the weakness with the current theorisation and analysis of *botho*, because according to this it means *botho* cannot be fully grasped without reference to the other two. The chapter thus argued that in Sesotho culture *botho* as a key moral term is understood not as a moral concept that is evoked in isolation. For Basotho this moral term functions better in unity with *setho* and what their understanding of *motho* is. In other words, the understanding of each of these moral terms presuppose an understanding of the others. It is in this sense that the chapter implicitly cautions against the tendency of removing and abstracting the concept *botho* from this hierarchy of the key moral terms by analysing it in isolation from *setho* and *motho*. This is not only an essential part of understanding its full meaning but that by which that meaning becomes intelligible. The necessity of this is because each of the concepts i.e., *setho* and *motho* adds a complimentary shade of meaning unique to itself to overall understanding of each term. This result in a richer and deeper meaning and understanding of *botho* as a polysemic moral concept.

The chapter thus gave an in-depth investigation of the meaning of *setho* in Sesotho culture as one the key moral terms influential in the Sesotho culture that informs the understanding and application of *botho* as a key moral term in Sesotho language. It showed that this term, like some of the key African moral concept is not easy to define, but also that *setho* is currently not theorised much in the discourse. In comparison to the popularity of *motho ke motho ka botho* in current *botho* discourse the absence of this key moral concept in the analysis and theorisation of *botho* is surprisingly inconspicuous and it is unknown as part of the explanation and definition of *botho*, yet it is central to what *botho* means. We saw that in Sesotho culture the term expresses two ideas about *motho* (person) denoting qualities connected to our nature as human beings or human nature and also expressing strong connotation of cultural upbringing or a person's cultural and moral origins understood in terms of upbringing. Thus, as found in the moral system and language of Basotho, *setho* therefore refers to both. In other words, it expresses the complex process that combines a person's human nature with the societal norms and values, or the manners and ways of doing thing by a particular people as reflected in an individual. What we learned here about *setho* is that as property of *motho* it is heavily determined by culture hence this is the leaning of its predominant meaning. In other words, *setho* relates to or has something to do with the interplay between being human and cultural socialisation. It denotes how moral particularity of one culture and upbringing shapes and moulds human qualities in persons differently in different contexts. The chapter thus

showed that in Sesotho culture the outcome of this interplay in a *motho* i.e., the individual is what we call *botho*. The chapter showed that in the moral scheme of Basotho the conceptualisation of *setho* in relation to *botho* is that the latter is the fruits of the former. In other words, *setho* is the agency whose manifestation in *motho* is *botho*. In Sesotho culture this is typically understood in terms of personhood and is connected to and achieved through inculcation of *makhabane a botho* (values and virtues of *botho*).

The chapter also analysed other aspects of the moral language of the Basotho that validates the primacy of character and cast light on *botho* in addition to the significance of *setho*. Here the chapter highlighted the significance of moral terms like “*letsoalo*” (*conscience*), “*sebopeliso*” (*character*), *makhabane* (*virtues*) and *mekhoa* (*manners or habits*) to day-to-day moral vocabulary of Basotho and ethics. The analysis of these showed that they are all connected to descriptions of qualities of the character of the person. In other words, they too underscore the primacy of character and its significance to moral life in Sesotho culture. We also saw something else about these and that is these are used in statement to make moral judgements, and that many of these judgements are expressed in terms of positive or negative attributes and qualities associated with the heart. The chapter gave a brief account of these descriptions which describes the state of character in terms of either having a bad evil heart or good and morally admirable heart. Here the chapter showed the significance of the heart in the moral language of Basotho and that in Sesotho culture the heart is regarded as the inner most organ of a person and that as such it is taken as the seat of all life, feeling and thought. It is therefore thought of as the one organ in which all ethical conduct emanates from. The understanding here is that the heart is the most authentic reflection of the character of a person and this is further endorsement of the Basotho ethics as essentially character centric.

Another aspect of Sesotho culture and their understanding of *botho* that this chapter analyses is the understanding of *motho* (person). Specifically, the conception of the individual *motho* in terms of social identity where, as a moral agent, a person is regarded as a site for the experience of *botho* and a beacon *botho* in the community. The chapter showed how in Sesotho culture this understanding of *motho* i.e., definition of individuality in terms of its social embodiments meant that one of the expectations of the individual is to be the beacon of *botho* in the community. It is to be the embodiment of the communal values and norms and this was understood in terms of excellence in *botho* by the individual in their personal conduct (*boits'oaro*). The analysis showed that it refers to both an inward-looking self-regarding imperative of *botho*, and outward looking other-regarding focus that considers how one's moral standing is viewed and seen by others. To both of this consideration the thus analysed the term itself in terms of this function of the individual and showed that as description of possession of *botho*, it first expresses an inward-looking, self-regarding qualities of character of a *motho* where considerations of conduct are determined not only with respect to the

individual but with due regard of others in the community as well. The chapter thus showed that in Sesotho culture the understanding is that as a moral agent, *motho* is always a representative of the moral values and ideals of the community whether one consents to this or not. In this context the Basotho understanding therefore of ethics is the creation of *batho ba nang le botho* - individuals who have *botho*. Or to put it different to produce *batho bao e leng batho* – individuals who are persons, and this in turn become both the purpose and meaning of life of *motho* as a moral agent, the pursuit of, is what determines personal conduct and shapes personal ethics.

One of the features of *botho* highlighted in this chapter is the description of *botho* in connection character and how this articulation of the virtues of *botho* always implies cognisance of the corresponding vices. The chapter showed that in Sesotho culture references to *botho* are always made in the light of its opposition “*bophoofolo*, as the corresponding vices whose possibility is always here. This term we saw that it denotes a quality of character and describes a person who in their conduct shows total disregard of all tenets of *botho*. This quality is also found in the phrase ‘*ha se motho*’, (- is not a person) which feature prominently in current *botho* discourse as a description of failure in inculcating qualities of *botho*. The analysis of *bophoofolo* and this statement showed that both express failures to achieve personhood. Here I argued that personhood thus is understood as a two phased process; “*motho-as-they-happen-to-be*” and “*motho-as-they-could-be*”. The former express, the initial natural state of just being a human being, i.e., a being that is human, and the latter, denotes the moral for development and growth as a result of moral formation and development of a good moral character. This conceptualisation and way of theorising about *botho* I argue would enrich current discourse.

The chapter concludes with focus on moral formation in Sesotho culture where the chief means of traditional moral education into values of *botho* is stories or narratives. The chapter showed that the goal of Basotho society, in their culture and corresponding education system was creating people with good moral character. Here I argued that the relevance and significance of the narrative dimension of education in the virtues implied in *botho* and African ethics so far appear to have attracted little or no interest of *botho* scholars in spite of this being recognised as an obvious necessity and their suitability as ideal vehicles to explicate the ideals of *botho* because of its polysemic nature as a moral ideal. Furthermore the chapter suggested that similarly, just as there little interest as yet in the current discourse to investigate the experience of *botho* from the perspective of Sesotho speaking culture and its understanding of *botho*, it appears that there is as yet no noticeable interest too on the use of Sesotho narratives as vehicles for explicating *botho*. The only exception here as already pointed out is the use of “*motho ke motho ka batho*” and passing reference made to “*ha se motho*.” In view of this the chapter investigates the how in Sesotho speaking culture, like many pre-modern

cultures the use of narratives especially *litšomo* is the chief form of their non-formal moral education. The chapter showed the significance of *litšomo* as part of stories and how through such stories traditional Basotho society taught its members the ethical imperatives of *botho* and the virtues it encapsulates. It highlighted how *litšomo* as stories played an important part in the articulation of the moral life of Basotho culture, both in terms of preserving its values and norms and transmitting these to future generations. The chapter narrated selected *litšomo* as representative of the stock of moral stories that Basotho used as part of their moral education. Worth mentioning here are the story of siblings Masilo and Masilonyane, Morongoe and Morongoenyane, with the common theme of *litšomo* of the good way and bad way to live depicted and symbolised by the contrasting moral characters the siblings. The younger siblings typically depicted as display good qualities of character and the older as agents with flawed and still lacking in growth. The brief analysis of the usage of *litšomo* in this chapter showed that main message and the goal behind for Basotho was connected to training in character and encouragement of inculcation of *makhabane* i.e., virtues. The chapter showed that the repeated nature of narration of *litšomo*, is part of informal education of Basotho aimed at supporting the internalisation of values and virtues, many of which are implied in *botho*. The chapter also showed that the narration of *litšomo* was aimed at reinforcing the values and ideals already encouraged through upbringing as part of in one's moral journey as a *motho*. We saw that this is common captured in the expression *ngoana oa Mosotho (a child of Mosotho)*. The chapter highlighted the significance of the use of stories like *litšomo* as ethical resources for current discourse in explaining the values and ethical imperatives *botho*, which is that they enable a clear elucidation and teaching about the acquisition of virtues of *botho*, where the intention is for these not to be applied in a static manner to the various situations in life but to be continually expounded and actualised anew.

The chapter thus showed that narratives like *litšomo* make a persuasive case for the reinstating of the narrative dimension of education into virtue in the current discourse and its theorisation and analysis of *botho*. This is because the narrative account of the virtues enables the unpacking of the values and virtues encapsulated in *botho* in much better and diverse way than the current *botho* discourse does. The chapter also showed that approach does. But more importantly, the benefit of using stories from the culture within which *botho* derives to explain what *botho*, is the timelessness power of stories as interlocutors of *botho* as a polysemic moral ideal and the moral values and ideas it embodies. The chapter thus has suggested that narratives like traditional stories such as *litšomo* are an attractive means of articulating the ethical imperatives of *botho* and illustrating the qualities of character that *botho* presupposes, which agents ought to inculcate. This is because stories like *litšomo*, have an inherent power to communicate across time and space. When used within current discourse

they can convey their message equally within the immediate borders of their cultural origins as well as beyond those borders.

What this chapter has implicitly revealed about the account of *botho* just outline in this chapter is the social conditions within Sesotho culture that made the practice of *botho* possible. The significance of social conditions necessary for *botho* to prevail is an aspect of the analysis of *botho* that is more relevant in today's context if *botho* is to be not only animate communities in those cultures it derives but more importantly if it is to be exported to other contexts as a viable alternative ethical framework. This is because this outlines the social conditions necessary, the social order required to be in place in a society for *botho* to thrive. In other words what kind of social order must be put in place or created to make the practice of *botho* not only possible but easier. To this topic I now turn to in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE: ETHICAL RESOURCES AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES THAT SUPPORT THE PRACTICE OF *BOTHO*

### 5.1 Introduction

*“Ethics, with its relevance to society, as much as to individuals cannot be understood without recognising the role of social institutions” -Vishwanath Pandit<sup>75</sup>*

This chapter will look at the normative significance of traditional social institutions and social roles in Sesotho culture and how this influenced personal conduct and the behaviour of individuals and their relationships with others. It will examine the nature of Basotho social life and how this functioned as the required social context and environment supporting the practice of *botho* and sustained its existence. The chapter will highlight the essential link between ethics and social institutions<sup>76</sup> expressed in the quotation above, and how social institutions of Basotho provided a traditional Mosotho with the necessary supportive environment required for moral formation and development of good moral character. The chapter will analyse aspects of Basotho culture characteristic of their way of life, as the necessary conditions in broader environment that the practice of *botho* in Sesotho culture presupposes for *botho* to remain a popular ethic. Among these the chapter will analysis the religious underpinning of ethics in African culture and related institutions because morality in African culture is neither secular nor religious, but simply part of the wholeness of life. It will also analyse the significance of the community and the social institutions and social roles characteristic of the social organisation of Basotho and how these influence conduct. This will include focus on the institutions of *lelapa*, *leloko* and *motse* (village) and their corresponding social roles. This chapter will argue in that the normative nature of institutions and social roles in Sesotho culture sustained and engendered *botho*. It will further show that this can offer lessons for today’s context, about the types of institutions and attitudes to social roles required to sustain *botho* ethics, analogous to those found in 18<sup>th</sup> century Sesotho culture and made ethics of *botho* to thrive a predominant feature in their society.

If one looks closely to *botho* ethics and the conception of the virtues enshrined in *botho*, it is hard not to concluded that such an ethic could only have become possible within a particular social setting and society. What this means is that the nature and character of ethics of *botho*

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<sup>75</sup> Pandit V. 2016. *Ethical Norms and Social Institutions*. In: Ethics, Economics and Social Institutions.pp99-112, Singapore: Springer.

<sup>76</sup> The terms institution here is used in its broad sense meaning to mean a regularity in social behaviour that is agreed to by all members of society, specifies behaviour in recurrent situations, and is either self-policed or policed by some external authority” hence the use of the term normative as well. It is similarly used to denote the norms of rules associated with social institutions and which people are expected to comply with. These norms or rules thus influence the way individuals interact with them, determining what is permissible and right and what is impermissible and wrong. It is in this sense institutions have a regulative effect on how individuals conduct themselves. (Argandoña 1991: 1-3).

like ethics in general is nurtured by certain types of social institutions and endangered by others (MacIntyre 1981: 195). In the case of *botho* it is therefore hard to imagine it becoming a predominant ethos in the societies it did, independently of the social institutions and roles found in those societies supporting and sustaining its existence<sup>77</sup>. In other words, *botho* cannot be understood and made intelligible without reference to certain type of social order with its corresponding social institutions and social roles, that enforces adherence to its principles, promote its values and supports training in character and inculcation of the virtues that *botho* presuppose and encapsulates. Similarly, ethics as a reflection on the moral life of a society both at a communal and individual personal level, cannot be fully reflected upon independently of a reflection on the underlying influence of social roles and social institutions to the moral life of a community or society (Pandit 2016: 92). In other words, it is arguable if a full account and reflection on *botho* is possible without an analysis of the how institutions of the cultures within which it functioned and prospered, influenced and shaped personal conduct. For if this ethic is to be revisited afresh as an alternative for today's context and become a reality, it will be partly by creating such institutions or something like them in today's context. This is because

“howsoever good the individual members of the society may be, according to whichever criterion one may choose for such assessment, they are almost bound to be ineffective as members of the society in the absence of well-designed institutions governing it. ... For this reason, any discussion of ethics in its relation to society is incomplete unless it specifically pays adequate attention to the prevailing institutions, with respect to their structure, and mode of functioning” (Pandit 2016: 99)

In other words, for ethics of *botho* I will argue having individuals with good morals and characters is necessary but not sufficient. It is in this sense that Prozesky (2016: 14) correct observes that “morally weak or even corrupt contexts can undermine and weaken the moral character of good people’ while “morally strong contexts can do the opposite”. The implication of this for current *botho* discourse is that *botho* cannot be thoroughly theorised independently of social settings or context. Social institutions and social roles are thus an integral part of this context or social setting that the analysis of *botho* needs to take into consideration and ask in what way did this context influence the practice of *botho*. These institutions and roles are the necessary ethical support structures i.e., an essential part for being ethical. Describing the significance of context in relation to successful ethical leadership, Prozesky argues that institutions provide a “continuing back-up of “an ethically strong, supportive context” for being moral. Using the examples from the Sesotho speaking culture he points to the role of the community with its principles of mutual support, generosity and hospitality, elders, family, as

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<sup>77</sup> The term institution is used here in its generic sense to denote not only organisations but also institutions in their subtle forms which get modified through time and function specifying the behaviour of individuals through several norms, customs and conventions “so that a regular and stable pattern of behaviour is created” (Argandoña 1991: 1-3, Pandit 2016: 91.).

integral to that context. Prozesky is right because in Sesotho culture central to this “supportive context” or ethical support structures is a network of social institutions and social roles, and other social support systems in which principles of *botho* were embedded and made alive. This means that for *botho* to thrive, it presupposes a particular social order i.e., existence a certain kind of society, along with its social support systems including institutions. It is these traditional social support systems and institutions that this chapter underscores as essential for the existence of *botho* in Sesotho speaking culture. It will be realised that this includes social roles as defined and understood through customs and tradition. All these structures supplied the necessary social support structures to make possible a of living consistent with ethical imperatives of *botho*. They ensured adherence to *botho* values from generation to generation and the next section unpacks their significance to ethics of *botho* with focus on the social roles and social institutions. Before looking at the function and place of social institutions and social roles, and how they influence individuals’ behaviour in Sesotho culture, it is important to contextualise this by first examining the social function of institutions and their significance to the moral life of a society in general.

## **5.2 Ethical Relevance of Social Institutions and Social Roles**

If one looks at each society one finds that not only does each have its own unique ways in which it governs and organises its affairs and they all do through their social institutions and social roles. It is therefore difficult to imagine how a community or society can exist without these. As (Downie 1964: 29) explains society is a “complex network of institutions” formal and informal, “which gives structure to the life of the community”. That means society is always more than “the aggregate of individuals who happen to occupy a geographical area. Echoing the same sentiment Argandoña (1991: 2) states that

“the aggregate behaviour of a society is not the simple sum of the behaviour of the men and women that make it up. There are intermediate structures that limit and guide the actions of people towards some social ends. We will label these intermediate structures institutions in a generic sense”.

So, we can see that institutions are not only the bedrock upon which society organises itself and arranges its affairs but that they are essential to the very being of a society. It will also be observed that “just as communities differ with respect to the kinds of social support structures and dwellings that mark them, they also differ with respect to their characteristic social institutions, roles and role duties” (Sciaraffa 2011: 123). This means that the differences found in these institutions in different communities will reflect the rationale behind their creation. They will also reflect the values underlying their creation, values which that society regard as important. These values often are linked to the common good or fundamental goods a society regard as important for its existence. In turn these translates into the norms and standards of

that society for its members. What this shows is that institutions as well as corresponding social roles are purposeful “acts” of human creation and as such they are not ethically indifferent. This means that “by virtue of their origin, social institutions and social roles have an ethical content” and are of necessity value laden (Argandoña 1991:6). It is in this sense that institutions are “images of ourselves as moral creatures” irrespective how they came about (Downie 1964: 31). And as part of our “growing up within these institutions and constant interaction with them later in life” as moral agent in turn “we tend to internalize the values and ways of life embodied by social institutions and their constituent roles” surrounding us from childhood (Sciaraffa 2011: 123). That means the social institutions a society has and maintains reflect what that society values as important, socially and morally. It is for this reason that it is important for ethics to pay attention to the relationship that exists between institutions and individuals, as the embodiment of society, and the influence they have in regulating conduct and influencing behaviour.

Social Institutions, whether we consent to or not, limit, restrict and specify expected behaviour from us as moral agents, and that of others and how they should relate to us (Argandoña 1991: 2). This is because we do not get involved and engage with social institutions *qua* individuals, floating butterflies each doing their own aim in life. We do so fundamentally as bearers and occupiers of specific social roles with certain well understood concepts of what it means to be good in that role. For this reason, our identity as moral agents is always a social one because it is not possible to divorce who we are from our social roles, (Berger 1984: 154). With regard to social roles we inherit these by virtue of our social memberships “as members of families, communities, tribes and nation, together with a “variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations”; and all this “constitute the given of our life, and moral starting point”. Within this context as moral agents, what is good for me therefore has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles” (MacIntyre 1981: 220). This means that in our involvement and interaction with social institutions we do so always as bearers of certain “social roles. These spells out for us a pattern of rights and duties the natures of which are decided by the natures of the institutions which give rise to the social roles” (Downie 1964: 29). Thus, for example my involvement in my family as a social institution is as a bearer of many roles: as a husband, son in law, son of my parents, a brother to my siblings, and in more important in African culture as first-born son, and a neighbour to my neighbours as well and so forth and so forth. It is in this sense that Berger (1984: 154) correctly points out that “it is through performance of institutional roles”, that as moral agents we discover our true identity and “participates in history, not only of” social “institutions but that of society as a whole”. It is for this reason that modern ethics in its conception of the self is accused of a tendency towards a curious ahistoricity (Richardson 2009: 139).

This brings us to the contentious issue of our relationship as moral agents with social roles. I say contentious because we have seen the progressive transformation of this relationship since the enlightenment project on ethics, where the self is regarded as distinct from its social roles (MacIntyre 1981: 31-35). But as Cordell (2011: 255) rightly points out as moral agents at “various points” in our lives we are bearers of certain social roles and these carry with them certain role-specific duties, standards, and expectations of their occupiers. But even more radical about the normativity of social roles is that they place on their bearers certain normative “obligations that are not necessarily coextensive with those incurred by virtue of one’s status as “human” or as an agent”. This is because from the moment one is born not only is our life a life-long occupation and habituation of a multiplicity of social roles “into which we have been” born into, but also a lifelong programme of moral development and growth into these roles. It is for this reason that as an occupier of social roles, *motho* has to learn what these roles are in order to be able to understand how others respond to [him or her] and how his or her]responses to them are apt to be construed (MacIntyre 1981: 216) by others and their understanding of these roles I occupy as a *motho*.

Peter Berger (1984: 154) aptly captures this by pointing out that as a moral agent, *motho* “discovers his true identity in his roles and to turn away from the roles is to turn away from oneself”. And because social roles are part of who we are, fulfilment of the duties of role inherent in social roles cannot be separated from our behaviour and conduct and in that way social roles have an influence on us morally. In other words, social roles have a distinct normative function that shapes and influences our lives as moral agents in a significant way (Cordell 2011: 255) and thus forms part of moral compass. This means that however much we may protest and pretend that we are what we chose to be, as autonomous moral sovereigns that modern society has made us believe we are, we cannot depict ourselves as entirely independent of the social roles we inhabit. We are inescapably bound up and surrounded by the duties of social roles we occupy, and this is the nature of our social identity. Explaining the significance of this Berger (1984: 154), points that for *motho* to attempt “to turn away from” [social roles] “is to turn away from himself” and that it is in “the performance of institutional roles that the individual participates in history, not only the history of particular institution but that of his society as a whole”. It is therefore not an overstatement, nor should it be surprising therefore, to find that as moral agents we “typically do little more than spend the bulk of our” lives “fulfilling the various” duties and obligations about our social roles (Sciaraffa 2011: 107). What this means is that as individual moral agents, we are living our life both social and moral always

“as bearers of a particular social identity [be it as] “someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle” or as a member of this clan, that tribe, this nation” (MacIntyre 1981: 31, 220).

Given this, the moral task then for us as bearers of these social roles is first the validation of our roles through role identification and understanding what they mean. That means learning from our own experience, our tradition, and also from others before us who excelled in those roles, i.e., in what it means to be an occupier of such and such a role. This process therefore cannot be the sole prerogative of the individual. This is because in any culture the definition of social roles is never an event in the life of an individual. It is rather, a collective process of learning, considering the larger narrative context in which that role is defined through customs, tradition, and current experience in the culture. The first step then in learning what being an occupier of a role means, is aligning one's explicit valuation of the goal of the role with their emotional valuation, thus conceiving of "oneself as a person for whom the pursuit and realisation of the goal is" not only necessary but important for one's life and their envisioned purpose in life (Sciaraffa 2011: 110). It is in this sense that one can argue "whether we can even coherently conceive of a moral agent" independently of "their social roles". This is because social roles are an integral part of our social identity (MacIntyre 1981: 34) and so much of our moral actions are in direct response to the requirements of these roles (Cordell 2011: 256).

It will thus be observed that social roles confront us daily with a cluster of duties and obligations that bind us. It is because of this nature of social roles that a moral judgement is possible to make i.e., how well, or uncaring, or indifferent one is in fulfilling the duties of their role (Cordell 2011: 256). Thus, as agents we experience and accept social roles as binding (Sciaraffa 2011: 107,109) because "what an individual is expected to do *qua* spouse", son, daughter, and so on, and the "reasons they are expected to do it, stem distinctly from their roles as such" (Cordell 2011: 255). It is in these expected and inherent "standards unique to each role, that agents as role bearers ought to meet" (Sciaraffa 2011: 109) that the normativity of social roles is most visible. Individuals are in turn judged in terms of how the individual lives up to these along with the corresponding obligations and responsibilities handed down from generation to generation and by tradition. What this means is that social roles are the indicators by which a determination is made on how well as agents, we have integrated the role we occupy and the person we are or become, or what Downie (1964: 32) refers to as the "morality of the role and morality of role enactment"<sup>78</sup>. This is because in social roles one discovers oneself and gets a deeper understanding and knowledge of who one is. In other words, social roles form that space within an interlocking set social relationship that we inherit as moral agents and without which or lacking that space, we are nobody, or at best a stranger or an outcast (MacIntyre 1981: 34). This is because in social roles one finds themselves "placed at a certain point in a journey with a set of goals i.e., obligations and duties where to move through life is

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<sup>78</sup> As role bearers we do, in the way we fulfil the duties of the role make a personal stamp on how the role is experienced by others, and it is this which qualifies the agent as a role bearer exceeding the requirements of the role.

to make progress or fail to make progress” (Ibid). In this journey, our lives as moral agents are a continuation of the story, a display and public statement of our success and progress or failure and inability to make progress, towards a certain given purpose and end i.e., our *telos* (MacIntyre 1981: 34). In other words, it is in part in the fulfilment one’s role duties or lack thereof that personhood i.e., moral assessment and evaluation of a *motho* is made. From this, we can see how social roles constitute a large part of *what* we are as moral agents but also *who* we are (Downie 1964: 30) and the ethical imperative of living virtuous lives with respect to each of the roles we occupy. As Wright (2010: 96) explains “one starts out to live a virtuous life” in one or other social role, e.g. as parent where “the virtuous life” requirement of this role is for “one to be a virtuous parent”. This is true for all other social roles.

What this shows is the centrality of social roles as part of our moral life, and why they are relevant to ethics and ethical reflection, including current discourse on *botho*. The reason is because as moral agents we “are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives” but always “embedded in a life with its own demands and obligations” (MacIntyre 1981: 213, Wright 2010: 96). Those duties and obligations are what is at the heart of social roles. They are a well-established set of social expectations, duties, and dues, not of our making, but have instead been created over time by tradition and a long-standing set of social practices. In fulfilling the duties of our roles, through role enactment we choose to be certain sort of persons, according to our understanding of our roles in terms of our upbringing, our personal and moral formation and development as persons.

The above outline of the influence that social institutions and social roles has on personal conduct provides us with background necessary to examine aspects of Basotho culture and the role of institutions and social roles in their life. This is relevant with regard to how social institutions have implications for ethics and the moral agent. This is more with regard to the practice of the virtues that *botho* entails, which is the focus on the next section below with focus on the traditional institutions of *motse* (village) *lelapa* and *leloko* (family and clan) and *lenyalo* (marriage).

### **5.3 Influence of Selected Social Institutions of Basotho on Ethics**

Traditional Basotho communities in Sesotho speaking culture organised and structured their society and managed their social affairs and moral life through their social institutions and corresponding social roles of their members. Although many of these would have emerged organically, the reason Basotho society maintained them is because they fulfilled an important role in society. They are therefore an embodiment of its beliefs, they safeguard its culture, and promotes its moral values. It is in this sense that traditional social institutions of the Basotho functioned as ready-made ethical resources. They provided moral agents with crucial social support systems to be ethical. As such we find that they played an important function as part

of the supporting and enabling context for individuals to be ethical, which is a prerequisite of maximum lasting well-being which is the principle underpinning ethics of *botho* (Prozesky 2007: 46).

In Sesotho culture there is no better place to look for the influence of social institutions on conduct and behaviour than in those paradigmatic institutions of the family (*lelapa*), marriage and (*lenyalo*) (Matšela 1979: 99). Both were held in the highest esteem by Basotho but also an important role in their communities. But as anyone familiar with Sesotho speaking culture will know this would be premature. This is because an account of these two will be incomplete without reference to the village (*motse*) as overarching social institution. In Sesotho culture a village is a complex network of formal and informal social institutions with corresponding bearers of social roles and with their sets of duties and social and moral obligations. This also means that we cannot properly speak of the village independently of the normativity of these complex, interlocking network of institutions within it and the corresponding roles. This is because the village in traditional Basotho society is itself a complex institution or social system. It is composed of many other institutions including *moreneng* (the chief's place), *khotla* (court), *lipitso* (village meetings), *lelapa* and *leloko* (family and the clan), *lenyalo* (marriage) (Ellenberger 1912: 265, Casalis 1861: 124, 233) and many other institutions and informal roles. And all these play a unique normative function in the village. They constitute the social conditions necessary to engender *botho* in the village. So, the village as the edifice around which traditional life in Sesotho culture was lived, is naturally the ideal entry point for analysing the ethical significance of the social institutions and social roles in Sesotho speaking culture. But before doing that, it is necessary to address one of the reservations often cited in relation to talk of a revival of elements of traditional African Culture and in this case, its institutions and morality.

As with all matters related to revisiting elements of traditional African culture and its traditions, in this case, its moral traditions and the social institutions that sustained it, the immediate problem one encounters is the accusation of romanticism and idealisation of African culture. What is interesting about such accusations though is it appears not to be an issue when certain moral traditions are being revisited from other cultures. I am thinking here for example of the revival of say Aristotelian ethics for example. This bias can be seen often in the literature, especially in relation to the current *botho* discourse, where talk of *botho* is described as another version of those failed African stories of narratives of return regarded by many as a failure nor desirable (Matolino and Kwindigwi 2013: 199). But as Bujo (2001: 131) correctly points out one must avoid the mistake of not distinguishing

“between the ideal and its realization [because] it is precisely [the] ideal that reminds the ethical subject that he often fails to live up to what is required and that he is not entitled to be content with mediocrity.”

This is true of current *botho* discourse of which this study is a part of, and the appraisal of *botho* as a representative ideal of African moral traditions and as that towards which personal moral conduct is ordered i.e., a moral compass in the moral maze of social life today. That means the perceived failures of contemporary Africans to live up to virtues of *botho* including the corruption of African value systems that we see today, does not and should not invalidate its relevance and validity. This is true of some of the social institutions and social roles that will be discussed here in Sesotho culture. Their relevance to the current discourse, to use van Binsbergen (2001: 58-59) phraseology should be seen in their utopian and prophetic functions, i.e., as an expression of the ideal and the imperfect. Their analysis is to highlight the neglect of the significance of social institutions that supported *botho* and corresponding social roles as found in their classic form in the African way of life in the village. This is important for a fuller understanding of *botho* because it is for instance in how the village as an institution functioned and operated in regulating life more than its physical makeup, that made the practice *botho* possible. Much of the institutional dimensions and function of the African village, is not only relevant to today's context but with appropriated modifications, can offer a useful blueprint for today's context. While we do not need to replicate the traditional pre-modern and pre-colonial era villages, there is a case to be made of the value of the social institutions found in the village and their role in sustaining its way of life and lifestyle. In other words, some elements of traditional African village lifestyle, for example, generosity and hospitality, mutual care and accountability are elements found in the village that I will argue are much needed in modern urban villages and semi-rural communities in today's' context. The traditional villages supplied more than just homes for people, but a moral framework and social support structure within which individuals could be ethical and become moral, i.e., continuous striving to be *motho* and what this means in daily living was possible. This I will argue is what modern ethics and the current *botho* discourse can learn lessons for today's modern "villages from traditional institutions.

### **5.3.1 Normative Influence of *Motse* as Social Institution in Sesotho Culture**

If one looks at Sesotho culture and in general how traditional Basotho lived, one finds that the primary form in which their society was arranged was villages. A traditional Basotho village (*motse*) can be described as mainly single homesteads, usually owned by primary families. According to Matšela 1979: 98) these would be a cluster of huts and that "several of these clusters, usually formed by households or homesteads of agnatically-related families, comprised a small village or hamlet". In the olden days a traditional Basotho village consisted of numerous huts (*matlo*), a place of resort for the men *khotla* which also functioned as a public court (Casalis 1861: 123) with an animal enclosure or kraals (*masaka*) at the centre. Villages consisted of a well-established governance structure and norms under the

stewardship and leadership of *Morena*, (the chief or headman) whose function as social institution is custodianship of the village's norms and standards. Although today most villages in Lesotho are no longer like this, we can, however, see to varying degrees the general characteristics of a Basotho village lifestyle or way of life as recorded in available and different sources. Today villages consist of small urban towns, although some are still rural, most villages are becoming bigger and urbanised now and losing many of the traditional features. Although traditionally villages or patterns of settlements, varied and differed in size, in general village living had a recognisable character and ethos consistent with principles and values of *botho* handed down through tradition and custom. Ellenberger (1912: 293) describes captures this life in the village simply as where “everything was done deliberately and in good fellowship”. It is important to note that good fellowship, which is the quintessential features of the lifestyle in the traditional village of Basotho, is not an automatic thing, or something that comes naturally by virtue of people living in the same area. It is something that must be deliberately chosen, habitually practiced which brings it in the sphere of ethics.

The analysis of the Basotho village that follows here underscores how members in the village regulated their conduct and relations with others in the light of the norms and standard that the village has. This is because within traditional villages of Basotho there is a certain established regularity in social behaviour to which all consent to which specifies behaviour either self-policed or policed by others (Argandoña 1991: 1). It is in this sense that the village is an institution because through its customs and tradition peculiar to each village, it regulates the social behaviour of its residents. As the basic unit of social life, the village provided individuals with a stable practical social support system of norms and social rules. This ensured social and moral equilibrium in the village, and enhanced, promoted, and protected the values and ideals of the village. This is in part what made *botho* ethics in the village a lived reality.

In Sesotho speaking cultures a village was an embodiment and depository of collective experience and moral knowledge accumulated over time and in it was enshrined the moral tradition of the culture. It is from this that the village was able to “limit and guide the actions” and behaviour of its residents towards some common ends and aims (Argandoña (1991: 2). This common end and aims is understood in Sesotho culture in terms of certain conceptions of shared future, a future in which certain types of conduct and behaviour is encouraged as morally good, and certain kinds of actions and behaviour are precluded because they are morally bad and wrong (MacIntyre 1981: 215) and not befitting of one who is a *motho* or *ngoan'a mosotho* (a properly brought up person). Here it can be seen why and how in the moral culture of Basotho ethics as a private matter for the individual becomes unintelligible. One of the clearest ways in which this manifests itself in the village and in its way of life, is in the strict adherence and respect the Basotho had for norms and values about generosity and

hospitality. This is expressed in its most profound form in the scrupulous reverence to rules and norms of hospitality and generosity especially visitors, i.e., outsiders or strangers. This often features in the much-cherished code of conduct in Sesotho culture codified in the doctrine of “*O se re ho moroa, moroa toe*” (don’t say to a bushman, you are just a mere bushman) (Nqosa 2010). It is important to emphasise here that in Sesotho language there is no equivalent term for the English word of “stranger,” the closest is recently invented word ‘*matsoantle*’<sup>79</sup>. This is because in the Sesotho language the most common way “strangers” are characterised is “*baeti*,” which means visitors or travellers. The difference in the tone and attitudes implied in the terms “stranger” and “visitors” (*moeti*) reveals a lot about the underlying ethos informing personal conduct and attitude of traditional Basotho towards “outsiders”. In many accounts of village life of Basotho culture, one finds recounted with striking consistency how welcoming and open their attitude is towards *baeti*. So important was the value of hospitality to *baeti*, that it is found expressed in several ways in traditional Basotho village. Among these, the most notable is their designated place at *khotla*, which is loosely translated as the court, where visitors reported when they arrive in any village<sup>80</sup>. Describing this Casalis’ (1861: 125) notes that, not far from the chief’s residence was “*a place of halt for strangers*” and it is reported that “the old chiefs continually exhort their sons to be constant in their attendance there, *to receive travellers*”. Ellenberger (1912: 269, 291) likewise makes the same observation that “strangers were always welcome, and their persons and property inviolate” and points out that Basotho “thoroughly understood and practiced the laws of hospitality in the most generous manner [where] the stranger was always welcome and given every assistance possible”.

An intimate knowledge of Sesotho culture thus show that this predisposition to be generous and hospitable is actively encouraged in that the doctrine of “*o se re ho moroa, moroa toe*” captures the essence of the Basotho understanding and thought about the treatment of outsiders, and the normative authority of this doctrine. As Casalis (1861: 208) explains Basotho “instead of considering the desert as beyond the limits of laws of men”, they believed “travellers are entitled to as great a degree of security as if they are under the immediate protection of their respective sovereigns”, because as we say in Sesotho “*tsela ke morena*”

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<sup>79</sup> This a derogatory term that translate “those from outside” coined recently to describe fraught relationships between locals and new arrivals in the country referring mainly to other Africans of north and east Africa origins and to some extent Chinese people in Lesotho.

<sup>80</sup> *Khotla* was another important institution in the village, almost like a seat of governance and administration. So, the significance of making provision for and designating a place for visitors in the heart of village administration shows how highly regarded the ideal of hospitality to “strangers and foreigners” was for the Basotho. This plus the Basotho’s adherence to relatedness through *liboko* (totems) bears striking resemblance to heroic societies where there was “a well-defined status to which any stranger who arrives from outside can be assigned” (MacIntyre 1981: 124). In Sesotho a stranger arriving in a village with no immediate relatives, would be found “relatives” in the village by asking their *seboko* (totem). Upon this being established then the visitor would be introduced any family in the village with the same totem for them to care and provide hospitality for the traveller. This way no one would ever not have relatives. Those who did became the responsibility of the chief.

which loosely means “the road is king” meaning traveling takes one to unknown places. So, it was common practice in traditional villages that

“A stranger, on entering a place where he has no acquaintance, seats himself in a place of public resort. He does not remain long unnoticed; the chief, or one of the principal men of the place, soon comes up and asks him from what country he come from .... Meanwhile refreshments are brought .... The most profound respect will be paid to his person and his baggage” (Casalis 1861: 208)

What is important to note here about the Basotho and their village life is the adherence to the principle of hospitality as exemplified in their attitude to outsiders. It ensured and encouraged kindness to strangers and entrenched this attitude as the default position in relation to “outsiders” in their midst. The significance of this doctrine as articulation of *botho* principles is evident and highly applicable for today’s context including in places like South Africa where incidents of attacks on foreigners are happening with frequent regularity and in Europe where there is a growing rise of nationalist and anti-migrant sentiments. The lesson it teaches us today about how much *botho* is an inclusive ethic is unmistakable. This is more pertinent in view of debates in current *botho* discourses about how *botho* can remain authentic to its cultural origins but at the same time apply to other contexts. This doctrine offers an authentic African grounding for an answer to this concern, from the culture within which *botho* was practised. As Nqosa (2010: 334) explains this doctrine expresses a strongly held Basotho principle,

“which affirms of the equality of humans regardless of race, ethnicity, or social standing, and unreservedly condemns discrimination based on such criteria. The doctrine also carries a powerful moral force by banishing discrimination by stereotyping.”

This hospitable attitude towards “strangers” as formulated in this doctrine is a manifestation of the normative significance of this proverb and the values of *botho* it propagates, which translate to practical ways of behaving of individuals in the village.

Basotho placed such high regard on the generosity and sharing and correlating attributes that some of the most highly regarded *makhabane* -virtues and values of *botho*, in the village were defined in terms of hospitality and sharing e.g., ‘*ho fana*’ which is to be generous and giving. It is from this deep sense of solidarity and sharing that reveals another important feature that characterised traditional villages of Basotho, the strong sense of belonging, mutual care, and responsibility for others. Thus, we find that every Mosotho felt obligated and responsible for their neighbour” and their wellbeing in good things and in bad things” and one was liable to be punished for any crime of his neighbour (Bujo 2001: 86). As Ellenberger (1912: 268) explains

“If any man saw two other fighting and did not intervene to stop them, he was held to be *conjointly culpable* if either was hurt. ...A village was collectively responsible for each one of its inhabitants. If the skin of a stolen animal was found in a village, or the spoor traced to it, and the thief not

caught, that village, collectively, had to compensate the owner, and to pay a fine “to clean the ground.”

It was this communal accountability and responsibility for one another found in Basotho villages that ensured a high degree of generosity and hospitality as the hallmarks of the village. This, in turn, played a vital role in sustaining the practices and habitual acts *botho*. It spurred individuals to aspire towards the acquisition of virtues and apply themselves in inculcating the dispositions of *botho*.

Besides generosity and hospitality which implied mutual responsibility for one another, Basotho villages were renowned for their adherence to the old age practice the Basotho are renowned for and that is “*ho lumelisa*,” to greet others (Matšela 1979: 159, 63, 71, 132) whenever you meet them it does not matter how often. This practice which entrenched the values of *botho* is typical of traditional Basotho villages and one of the few that still hold strong sway even today. It was in part because of this that children mostly were monitored with regard to whether “*ke ngoana ea tsebang ho lumelisa*” (a child that greets people). For Basotho, greeting someone was a social practice by which a person expressed and showed *botho*, denoting deep respect of the other (Prozesky 2016: 9), hence the great formalism involved in *litumeliso* (greetings protocol). Thus, when greeting people, one had to use respectful titles; “*Khotsong bo -ntate* ” (“peace be with you, sirs), or *Lumelang ntate le 'me*” (“Greetings, father and mother”) (Matšela 1979: 159). As a social practice<sup>81</sup> *litumeliso* was therefore not just inquisitiveness about the other person’s affairs or just saying “hello” to someone, it was a sign of respect for the other person according to Sesotho culture.

Respect for others whether young or old through *litumeliso* was one of the most admirable qualities of character in a person and a manifestation of being brought up well that a person could have. As such it was a highly regarded personal attribute and quality of character for a *motho* to have and a sign of satisfactory progress towards excellence in having *botho*. As one of the cardinal ethical concepts in the moral tradition of Basotho *litumeliso* was one of the first and most noticeable habits or manners (*mekhoa or behaviour*) that showed that an individual is succeeding to integrate the values and dispositions required for *botho* into their character and identity. Therefore, deeper ethical significance of this practice is that it was one of the indicators of satisfactory progress in inculcating *makhabane* or virtues of *botho*, especially the virtue of *tlhompho*, i.e., deep respect of the other person). So, what we see is that *ho lumelisa* was the most fundamental and primary way of showing *tlhompho*, (politeness and respect), both of which are normatively significant for engendering ethical relations with others implied in *botho*. In other words, failure to succeed to master the imperatives of *botho* at this most

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<sup>81</sup> The use of this term here is in the Aristotelian sense to denote an activity “providing the arena” in daily living “in which the virtues”, in this case its virtues of *botho*, “are exhibited and in terms of which they are to receive their primary, if incomplete, definition” (MacIntyre 1981: 187).

primary and basic level made it unlikely that one would be successful with more morally demanding requirements of *botho* in other spheres and aspects of life. *Litumeliso* was a way of showing that one has the virtue of respect and politeness which means good manners both of which goes hand in hand with *thompho*. These were for the Basotho among the highly regarded virtues for one who regards themselves to be a good person and possess *botho*. The way you greeted someone also revealed your goodness as a *motho*. The requirement for respectful politeness in daily living was so important for Basotho that there were all sorts of norms and rules about being polite covering all classes of people, children, adults, neighbours, friends, and chiefs. Describing this Ellenberger (1912: 292) notes that there is “so much politeness and so many rules of etiquette which were faithfully observed” and that “if anyone spoke to someone older than himself, politeness required the use of a term of respect and affection”.

It is not difficult to see how an emphasis on such a norm i.e., politeness accompanied with respect towards others, can have an enormous impact on society in terms of the tone and quality of relationships and a general amicable feeling that prevails in social relations. The normative implications of such a practice on the general tone and warmth of personal relations between individuals *vis-à-vis* the adoption of behaviour and a way of conduct that fits in with values of *botho* are clear. It meant that everyone aspired to be as a matter of who they are and their moral character, respectful, polite, and friendly hence the association of *botho* in the current discourse with primacy of harmonious friendly relationships (Metz and Gaie 2001: 276). In the practice of *litumeliso*, we therefore have a Sesotho version of what it means to treat the other as a person, and this is at the heart of what *botho* means. It is for this reason that *ho lumelisa* and politeness were among the primary behaviours often used to judge how welcoming a village was. According to this then a model village was one where these were prevalent and prospering. This is particularly significant in relation to the moral formation of young members of the society who grow up with this as the understanding of how to be a good person or *motho*. The significance of the practice of *ho lumelisa* is not only a genuine expression of solidarity and showing interest in the welfare of the other person, but it was also one of the means by which moral assessment of the character of the individual was carried out. It was indeed the central features that defined a village as “good” and moral. If you were a person who greets other people you were a good person and *vice versa*. In turn, the character that a moral agent has reflects their upbringing, hence its relevance to the village. As it can be seen adherence to *litumeliso* norm was thus not only a socially acceptable thing, it influenced and shaped personal conduct, in that “no one who considered themselves decently brought up i.e., a proper Mosotho could afford not to adhere to this because this would earn one the unenviable description of a mannerless person – *motho ea se'nang mekhoa*” (“a person without proper manners”) (Ellenberger 1912: 293). Contemporary friends

of *botho* would say of such a person “*ha se motho*” which denotes not only that the person is judged not to have been brought up well, but even more important that they show lack of qualities of *botho*. The point about this is to show that it was precisely in terms of certain social practices, such as the strict devotion to certain norms, or standards of politeness and rules of etiquette in the village that a person was adjudged to have acquired *mekhoa e metle* (good manners and behaviours) that make them a person (Ellenberger 1912: 292, 268; Casalis 1861: 207). As it can be seen this was in part one of the way Basotho defined *botho* understood it in terms of personhood

Unfortunately features like this sense of accountability for one’s neighbours or one another, are some of those aspects of African culture and lifestyle that have suffered the corrosive effects of modern “sins” of contemporary Africa (Bujo 2001: 137) and are in a noticeable decline in society. These old ways of life and many others features that characterised African culture in village living have suffered under “progressive re-colonisation of the world by First World culture” or European culture (Shutte 2001: 4, Casalis 1861: 209) and this continues till today. So, in many places in Lesotho traditional culture and its traditions are no longer that dominant and as such is no longer the source of a shared moral frame of reference for most people as it was in the past.

However, despite this, it is also the case that, some elements of traditional village living and practices, characteristic of African culture and morality have not totally disappeared and are very much part of the modern way of life. I am thinking here of social practice like visits of condolences when there is a death and the overall attitude of African culture towards bereavement. This practice along with its remnants, which can be found in various forms even in urban areas, has remained part of the contemporary way of life even today. It is, in fact, striking to see even today, many Africans travelling long distance to attend a funeral not only of close family members but a friend, a close neighbour or sometimes just another member of the village where one comes from. Often many do this because according to tradition, it is not so much what consolation one brings, but the most important and “greatest thing is to have come, often travelling long journeys in order to show sympathy with those mourning” (Ellenberger 1912: 263). In Sesotho culture, no one who considered themselves decently brought up, would want to be seen to be failing in this aspect of being a *motho*, hence the respect of this old age practice even in the context of modern living. As such even today the village practices around bereavement are vital in many communities. People still gather at the family of the bereaved and help as much as possible, with food and other practical organization related to the funeral. It is practices like these first that enable moral agents as individuals to practice values of *botho*, but second, it is these practices considered in their unity as expressions of virtues such as sympathy, empathy that provided that much needed supporting social infrastructure that supports and makes *botho* possible in the village.

So, the “village” as an institution is more than just its sociology but is also an embodiment of a specific moral tradition. It embraces certain norms and values peculiar and important to that village. It is in this sense the custodian of a moral tradition, i.e., set of moral and ethical regularities, and behavioural norms that have emerged organically over time, which in turn inform and influence the behaviour of its members (Argandoña 1991: 2). When viewed this way, the village thus has a specific characteristic activity, namely the development of agents with *botho*. Through its normative authority derived from its moral tradition, the village and its ethos make it possible for the moral agent to live up to the imperatives and ideals of *botho*. It is in this sense that African ethics has been described as always “we”-ethics as opposed to “I ethics”, because it “does not rest content with supplying ethical norms, to the individual without accompanying them on the path of praxis” (Bujo 2001: 71) like the way many people view ethics today. One means by which this support to the individual is given in Sesotho culture is through the social roles conferred on the individual which will be discussed next. But before that there is another important institution in Sesotho culture without which the village as institution would struggle to meet its obligations and functions, and that is what in English is called the family. In Sesotho culture, the family consists of two distinct but intrinsically linked institutions, namely *lelapa* and *leloko*. Both are very influential when it comes to conduct and regulating behaviour of their members<sup>82</sup>. In these I will argue is embedded essential elements that we can learn lesson from about *botho* and its practice for today’s context to make *botho* possible.

### 5.3.2 The Family as a Normative Social Institution in Sesotho Culture

The effect and arrival of outside influences on traditional Basotho social institutions, none has suffered lasting damage than the family and what it stood for traditionally. Among Basotho institutions, none was as important in terms of moral formation and transmission of values than the institution of the family as it is known in Sesotho. The family or *lelapa* and *leloko* as the family is called in Sesotho culture with their corresponding roles played pivotal roles in moral education and adherence to social norms sustaining the practice of *botho* and inculcation of *makhabane*. *Lelapa* can loosely be translated as the family while the *leloko* is often translated in the literature as kin or members of the same clan. The form that the institution of the family takes in different societies often is determined by the culture of the society (Shutte 2001: 83), however, what is common to all, is that the family remains the most

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<sup>82</sup> *Leloko* is part of the family (*lelapa*) but bigger and has higher governance powers. Often it consists of families (*malapa*) of the same surname or who share common descent or lineage. Although part of the family, *leloko* is distinct understanding of family relationships. It denotes broader relationships and many more families of the same lineage than those involved in *lelapa*. The two are best understood in terms of the former representing the inner smaller circle of the family lineage consisting of close family, and the latter representing the larger broader circle of family lineage consisting of many more families or a clan.

important and primary social institution in many societies and this is true for the Sesotho culture. Many of the features of the institution of *lelapa* and *leloko* that will be discussed here, will also resemble a way of life found in other African cultures *mutatis mutandis*, largely because within the African culture there are as many commonalities as there are differences. It is in these similarities that we find enough evidence of certain salient common and unquestionable features characteristic of the normative character of the family as an institution. This is often the case about ways of conduct, “language, social organization, economic system, political structure and other modes of socio-cultural expression” (Matšela 1979:30). The understanding of *lelapa* and *leloko* in Sesotho culture denotes broader and deeper forms of relations that entail relatedness and belonging. They also imply accountability and responsibility for obligations and dues one has to other members in far stronger ways than the English word family does. This is because both have strong connections to family traditions, kindred, kinsfolk, or the family stock and custom (Paroz 1974: 197) along with a strong connotation of a family decent by *seboko* (totem). As the primary institution of Basotho society *lelapa* and *leloko*, are particularly important social units central to the village as a normative institution, governing every aspect of the life of a Mosotho of old. In Sesotho culture, like most sub-Saharan African societies before the influence of modernity, the family, also sometimes referred to as *ntlo* (household) was a system of governance or social organisation among Basotho, that consisted of “both the primary and extended families, with the primary governed by and through it (Matšela 1979: 31, 102, 129, and 162)”. But as we have said each family was subservient to *leloko* of that family or the clan. *Leloko* is not easy to translate into English as it has strong connotations of the family, clan, and tribe all at the same time. It shall therefore here, be loosely translated either as a clan where it shall denote the sense of belonging and relatedness that is not only understood in terms of marital relations but also of decent or *seboko* (totem) in Sesotho.

Those not familiar with African social institutions may find it difficult to understand the significance of *lelapa* and *leloko*, particularly their normative significance. Traditionally these institutions had a huge binding effect on individuals as moral agents commonly expressed in the family palaver with its mini judiciary like authority (Bujo 2001: 48). In Sesotho, the function and meaning of these two concepts are therefore always heavily loaded with customary and traditional expectations of their social function. The moral authority they have over their members, even as this is constantly under refinement by each generation of members of the family, was not only well-established and understood by everybody, it was something that everyone had a personal stake in its protection and safeguarding. But above all its decisions were respected and acted upon as normative. However, the way the relationship of belonging is understood, in the institution of *lelapa* and *leloko* the most important thing is that while the

“primary family generally consisted of the spouses and their dependent children.... more often than not, their close relatives' children or their aged

or ageing parents [also] lived with them or nearby under their care” (Matšela 1979: 99).

It will be noticed here that central to the notion of family in Sesotho culture was this intense sense of mutual responsibility for other members of the family. It was thus common for many families to look after close relative’s children and ageing parents, including living with them as part of one’s family. Here we can already see the key feature of the family according to Basotho understanding in relation to responsibility and accountability for other family members. This is something modern families today can learn lesson about. This reveals the obligation and requirement of members of the family to be the sort of people that act and behave this way towards other relatives in need. This is because that is what a family is and ought to be. *Ke botho* (That is part of *botho*). So, here we can already see how the Basotho understanding of kinship or family informed conduct and shaped behaviour. It entailed mutual care and wellbeing of other family members as something each member of the family felt deeply. While this is in part due to being taught from early on in life, it was at the same time something one had to choose as an adult and therefore value deeply and which one has strong vested interest in. It is for this reason that it was common for families to live with other relatives.

The deep sense of family solidarity in traditional societies like that of Basotho is one of the features of family belonging and solidarity that modern society can learn a lot from. For Basotho, it was the intimate and deep solidarity found in the family i.e., nuclear and extended family that was extended beyond parents and siblings to include the larger circle of relatives and relations. This we see in *lelapa* and *leloko* where it encompasses the broad sense of kinsfolk, even including those relatives from the moral agent’s great people, fondly known in Sesotho as “*ba heso moholo*” which refers to maternal relatives. This extended belonging of *lelapa* was so important in Sesotho that it is recounted poetically in oral literature by the character of the poet-singer, “*Mohlang ke shoang le joetse beso, le joetse beso le beso-moholo*” (The day I die inform my people, inform my people and my great people as well), and has now become everyone’s song (Bereng 1987: 23). As a result of this attitude, the family taught its member the value of the bond of belonging, or ‘*ho amana*’ (relatedness) no matter how distant. Individuals were taught to regard this as an important part of one’s life, and as such no less deserving of the moral agent’s time and nurturing as those relations with immediate family members. For this reason, one of the important social expectations and norms among the Basotho was for the individual to nurture a myriad of familial relationships, starting with knowing all of one’s relatives by name, both seniors and juniors and wherever possible visit them (Matšela 1979: 161). The requirement to visit relatives is still noticeable even today especially among the diaspora Africans or city dwellers. Many of these when they go back “home” a practice of going for a visit to one’s village periodically, it is expected to visit

as many of the relatives as is practically possible. In some families failure to visit some relatives during these annual “going home” visits is a source of serious family disquiet that must be addressed in serious family palavers about the offence caused to some members of the *lelapa* or *leloko* who felt aggrieved at not being visited.

Describing this intense sense of “*ho amana*”<sup>83</sup> or relatedness and belonging (Matšela (1979: 5) states that this is one of the major reasons for the high degree of unity among the Basotho. This would make sense because the true meaning of “*ho amana*” implied in the phrase is not simply about being related to someone, but also describes the quality of the closeness of the relationship. The literal meaning of “*ho amana*” derived from “*ho ama*” (to touch) denotes a quality of closeness and sensitivity in the relationship akin to skin touch. And this is the type of belonging that is expected of member of the same *lelapa* or as we say in Sesotho “*ba – amani*,” i.e., those who are related to one another. *Ho amana* or kinship by decent is therefore another form of belonging often found and implied in *leloko*, which includes relations by *liboko* (tribal emblems/totems) or the main descent groupings of the Basotho (Matšela 1979; 100). It too implies similar closeness of the relationship and plays an important role in what individuals should do in relation to those they are closely related to and those they are not so closely related to.

The notion of “*ho amana*” (to be related to someone) i.e., the bond of familial relationships and kinsfolk (Paroz 1974: 5) also implies obligations, claims and dues owed to one by other members of the family in the network of relationships found in *lelapa* and *leloko*. In Sesotho the relationships within *lelapa* and *leloko* relations, place greater emphasis on the underlying duties, obligations, and expected behaviour of members of the family have towards those they are related to i.e., as we say in Sesotho “*ba amanang le bona*”. This is because in Sesotho culture to say of another person “*re ea amana*” (we are related), is means by virtue of this relationship there are certain dues that we justifiably can expect of each other i.e., dues owed. So “*ho amana*” in moral sense denotes a prescriptive claim, to the effect that, as relatives we are mutually accountable to another. By virtue of the relationship we have and the role of being a “relative” that we each occupy we owe one another certain dues, obligations and responsibilities (MacIntyre 1981: 218). “*Ho amana*” therefore stipulates ways of behaviour for the moral agent and expresses social expectations of how anyone who bears the role of being a relative “*ought*” to conduct themselves in relation to other relatives. Not to adhere to this etiquette or custom in the way one lives their life is therefore to act wrongly, and in turn, makes one “bad” relative.

It is important also to remember that this sense of belonging and relatedness found in the family was for the Basotho possible and desirable to be extend further by expressing it in other forms. The most notable case here is in “*mo haeso*” (homeboy/girl) which literally means “one

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<sup>83</sup> This is derived from the verb “*ho ama*” which means to light skin touch (of a hand).

from my home place”, in recognition of being from the same village. In other, words, solidarity or the sense of belonging practiced in the *lelapa* and *leloko* here is being extended outside the restrictions of family relationships only i.e., marital and blood ties only, to incorporate other people from the same village, or of the same *seboko* (clan/totem) (Murove 2009: 316). When interpreted in this sense “*mo haeso*” become all-inclusive because it means virtually no one in the village can be left without “relatives” as anyone in one way or another could be accommodated into the bond of belonging. It is this treasuring of “*mo haeso*” and extending the reach of “*ho amana*” i.e., relatedness in Sesotho culture, first as found in the sense of belonging in the family, second as scaled up through the clan and mainstreamed into the culture and life of the entire village, that village life became an intricate web of intense sense of belonging and solidarity. It is this generalised sense of solidarity that makes the village an important social institution that provide a conducive environment for the practice of *botho* in the family and in the village.

So, the relevance of the institution of the family here is that all this had a normative effect primarily by being enforced through adherence to the norms and values of each *lelapa* and *leloko*. So, the role of the family in engendering this profound sense of mutual accountability for the welfare of other family members or family belonging (Matšela 1979: 162, Futhwa 2012: 91) made it an important institution in the village particularly for the educational of the young more especially moral formation. When viewed this way the family was indeed a school of character, because it was in the family that moral formation took place, whereby mothers and grandmothers “carried out most of the education of the society’s children (Matšela 1979: 95, Ellenberger 1912: 297)”.

Earlier we pointed out the challenge of applying the English word family to the institution of *lelapa* and *leloko* in Sesotho culture. It was intimated that like most traditional African concepts when translated into English, the full meaning and bond of belonging and relatedness implied in Sesotho concepts gets lost in translation. This is because as Bujo (2001:48) explains the African notion of “family” is much more comprehensive than its understanding in the West because it embraces more than the nuclear family. In addition, the English translation does not capture the sense of belonging, that is often associated with the dues that accrue as dictated by custom and tradition. This is what is at the heart of the Basotho understanding of family. It is a narrative concept of belonging and this applies equally to the sense of belonging and relatedness found in *lelapa* or *leloko*. This we see for instance in the special significance Africans place on having the same surname, where the understanding is that a shared story of belonging. For most Africans, this is often regarded as *bona fide* grounds of claiming relatedness traceable to the story of the same *lelapa* or *seboko* (clan) or family stock. Thus, we see the curiosity of Africans when they recognise a familiar surname. Often there is a tendency to inquire further to try and find if the person is related to or if they “know” so and so,

of such and such a village. This behaviour is still practiced today although not by everyone. The same desire to establish a sense and bond of belonging can be seen also among people who have the same *seboko* (totem) or tribal emblems (Ellenberger 1912: 241), who feel somehow that they owe one another certain dues or responsibility as a relative. This form of belonging still exists and is acknowledged by most Africans and the same is true of Basotho as well.

### 5.3.3 Marriage as a Normative Social Institution in Sesotho Culture

So far, the account of the family outlined here has not said much about, the institution of *lenyalo* (marriage)<sup>84</sup>. This means that there can be no fuller account of the ethical significance of *lelapa* and *leloko* (family) without reference to marriage. *Lenyalo* is not only another important social institution in Sesotho culture but one that is the centre of creating and expanding family relationships and bonds of friendships between families in the village and between villages. It is therefore one of the important social institutions among the Basotho and here only the outline of its moral significance will be discussed, as part of a network of institutions found in the village that influenced behaviour and personal conduct.

As just indicated the institution of marriage is very important in Sesotho culture because among other things it was the absolute precondition of social maturity for the young couple” (Phoofolo 2007: 367). So important was the social standing of *lenyalo* for Basotho, it required the exchange of the most valuable asset in Basotho society — *likhomo*, (cattle) in the practice of *bohali* (bride price). It is not surprising therefore that such an important institution in the society was designed fundamentally as a public affair, in which there could not be too many witnesses (Ellenberger 1912: 272). It was therefore regarded as an invaluable institution whose survival was guaranteed by the united interests of several parties, more specifically parents or members of the family (Ibid. 273, Casalis 1861: 183.). It was also the responsibility of all members of *malapa* i.e., immediate members of the two families as well as extended family members from both sides to make sure nothing threatens its viability. It is in this sense that marriage was regarded as the matter of extended family and lineage that went beyond the dictates and fates of the two contracting parties (Phoofolo 2007: 368). to some degree this is the still the case today. It was therefore truly everyone’s business in the family lineages of the new couple. This can be seen with the payment of *bohali*, where often “the *bohali* cattle” was understood as coming from the bridegroom’s lineage, not just his immediate family. In Sesotho culture it was customary that several members of the boys’ family lineage contributed

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<sup>84</sup> In Sesotho the marriage process is often a matter between families. The boy will usually signal to his parents the desire to marry. Then the father would then discuss this with family members and the mother including which girl they like as a daughter in law (Matšela 1979: 104). For more on Sesotho marriage see Duncan 1960, chapter 2, and Ellenberger 1912: 271).

to the *bohali* cattle. Similarly, it was common practice for the bride's parents to share the *bohali* "cattle among members of her kin" such as with *malome*, maternal uncle" ((Phoofolo 2007: 368, Ellenberger 1912: 262, 271).

In Sesotho, the institution of *lenyalo* is always associated with certain virtues and values that are highly regarded, such as "respect" "commitment and permanence of marriage" or fidelity in marriage. Among this *boitsoaro bo botle* (exemplary good moral behaviour) was one of the highly stressed virtues those in a marriage were expected to display. This included respect (*thlomphe*) of oneself, themselves one's partner, the in laws and the community at large in the way one conducts. The understanding here is that this is behaviour that reflect an overall an admirable good character. Adherence and inculcation of these values and virtues thus influenced and regulated personal conduct of those involve. This we see most clearly expressed in relation to monogamy, where this virtue was regarded with high esteem in the village (Casalis 1861: 186, Ellenberger 1912: 273). This does not mean that fidelity in polygamous marriages was not needed, but it would appear this reflects more the bias of missionary views towards monogamy.

What is important for our purposes here is the instrumental role of *lenyalo* as an institution, and its social standing in Sesotho culture and its normative influence moral formation. It will be observed that in Sesotho culture among young men and women, not yet married, good behaviour became one of the goals i.e., something to aspire to and to inculcate in part because it was that which one will be assessed by in the village when it comes to important phases in one's life. This includes marriage where traditionally the parents chose a marriage partner for their son or daughter, and the moral character of the potential wife or husband of their child become one on of the key considerations in the minds of all family members. For instance, when parents were looking for a daughter in law, among the key questions they considered would include, what kind of family is the girl's family, are they good people or not. What about the girl herself, is she well brought up etc. etc. The same deliberations applied to the girls' parents in relation to their potential son in law and his people. Are his people good people i.e., *batho ba nang le botho*, are they the kind of people to be proud to have as *bakhotsi*, (in-laws) and associated with? In this way marriage as an institution played an important role in terms of encouraging inculcation of good qualities of character or dispositions of *botho* among the young adults.

When we take a closer look at the status of marriage in Sesotho culture, one therefore will find that another primary functions or ultimate purposes and goal of the institution is that it "linked lineages together in an endless and enduring reciprocal" ever expanding network of relationships and obligations between and among lineages (Phoofolo 2007: 368). It is in this sense that in African culture "marriage strengthens and re-establishes fellowship and solidarity beyond blood relations" (Bujo 2001:35). Hence the endearing description we find in Sesotho

referring to the in-laws as “*bakhotsi*,” which denotes close intimate friendship. This signifies the high esteem in which marital relationship was held. It follows then that, for the Basotho, as is the case for most African cultures, *lenyalo* is thus understood primarily as the expansion of the bonds of “*ho amana*” relatedness and belonging. It was the creation of new bonds of belonging hence marriage arrangements traditionally were concluded by parents and relatives between respective families.

In African culture, it is common knowledge that marriage was seen primarily as a creation of a bond of not just relating but belonging between families. It is for this reason that one will notice that in ordinary parlance in Sesotho, a Mosotho often, in referring to the marriage of one of their children, would say “*o nyetsoe ke “ba ha-*” (is married by the family of -), which means he or she is married to so and so’s people i.e., mentioning the name of their *bakhotsi* or in laws (Ellenberger 1912: 274). Remnants of this traditional understanding of the institution of marriage can be seen in the customary practice among many Africans even today of “*ho qela mohope oa metsi*” (to ask for a calabash of water). This is a traditional formal way by which the boy’s parents ask permission from the girl’s parents to marry their daughter. Along with this is also the practice of *bohali* or *lobola* (*dowry*) even though this aspect has seen the most dramatic changes, and to some extent corrupted, it is still practised till today (Ellenberger 1912: 272; Matšela 1979: 103). It goes without saying that in Sesotho culture, like many traditional societies, the role of marriage was not only socially highly regarded, it was one of those social institutions with clearly specified functions in the village and not only to the individuals directly involved partners but most importantly their families.

In addition to purposes internal to a marriage i.e., starting a new family and, in the process, ensuring the continuation of *leloko*, marriage was also a way of extending belonging and friendship between families. What we see in this understanding of marriage is that it was a social institution with a clearly defined social function which is an institution by which families extend bonds of family belonging and friendship hence the care and thought about their future son or daughter in laws but the whole family regarding the family that they are about to be married to when one of their members gets married. It was thus common for families to actively pursue friendship with other families they liked and after befriending each other to seek solidifying these bonds by encouraging marriage between their children. In other words, *lenyalo*, extended and expanded the Sesotho notion of “*ho amana*,” relatedness between families together with the accruing obligations and dues associated with familial relationships or *baamani* (relatives). What this enlarged bond of kinship and belonging means is increase in size of social obligations that those in this network of relatedness accrue, which will influence individual's behaviour. This is because these relationships in Sesotho culture implied certain obligations and responsibilities that results in certain ways of conduct on behalf of those involved.

This is because in Sesotho culture marriage relationship between families did not only have obligations on the two immediate families and the parties involved. It also implied the same for other members of *lelapa* and *leloko* who also have a stake in it and its welfare. As such those in a bond of relationship on account marriage owed each other accountability about the status of that marriage. As such anyone involved could be held accountable to hold others to account if it is felt they are not living up their obligations by virtue of being related. This applied from those in inner most circle of the young couple themselves, including their respective families, extending outwards to the larger circle of members of *lelapa* and *leloko*.

So here we see that for Basotho marriage was a vehicle that ensured the never-ending expansion of bond of friendship and belonging between families through successive interlocking networks of marriages relationships. When this is taken together with the practice of adhering to strong bonds of relationships through totems, it meant that in a traditional village one ends up being related in one form or another with everybody, to whom dues of friendly relationships are owed as per custom and practice. The implication to personal relationship in the village and between families is that one ought to value these relationships highly as if they were those of close relatives.

The point being made here is that in Sesotho culture one of the implicit functions of traditional understanding of the institution of marriage is the extension of “blood relationships to embrace and expand the circle of relatives i.e., bonds of belonging, communal solidarity and friendship found in *lelapa* and *leloko* with other families outside these two (Matšela 1979: 100, 138). In turn this expanded network of relatedness enjoined individuals in a materially significant way where now they owe one another dues of family belonging and friendliness. It is in this sense that Metz is correct to describe *botho* as an ethic that must be understood as placing basic moral status in loving relationship between people (Metz 2007: 337). This means that it is important to resist the temptation to only view the institution of *lenyalo*, through the narrow modern lens of contemporary social order, premised on individual autonomy, rights, and individual choice. To do this is to miss the point namely that marriage was an institution, that like many traditional institutions had a clearly recognisable function and purpose, one of which was the establishment of new relationships and expansion of family bonds of belonging, and not just an agreement between two individuals for their own good.

This leads us to the all-important matter of the normative imperatives of social roles<sup>85</sup> characteristic of traditional social institutions of Basotho which sustained *botho*, and in turn supported the family and marriage in their institutional function as part of village in creating “*batho ba nang le botho*” - people with *botho*. I now turn to this in the following section.

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<sup>85</sup> For more on Basotho social roles and their function see Ellenberger (1912: 268, Bereng 1987: 23-28, and Futhwa 2012: 50).

#### 5.4 Influence of Traditional Social Roles of Basotho on Personal Ethics

The brief analysis of selected social institutions of Basotho above has shown the influence that they have on conduct and behaviour of individuals, and in turn their relevance to ethics of *botho* and current *botho* discourse. What this analysis has not examined sufficiently though is the extent to which the moral authority that social institutions enjoy is in part carried through social roles, specifically the fulfilment of the duties of the role that moral agents occupy. It is important therefore that we unpack the nature of social roles in Sesotho culture to understand their influence on behaviour and personal ethics. This is because as it will be shown social roles have a big ethical influence on our lives as moral agents, setting parameters of what we can and can't do, what is permissible and regarded as good and right and what is not allowed and regarded as bad and wrong. It is not the intention here to analyse the various roles found in traditional villages and families of Basotho. The aim is to show that in Sesotho culture many of their social roles came with inherent obligations that were binding to the role occupiers. Thus, they impose certain responsibilities and duties and that it is in the fulfilment of the duties of the role that behaviour of moral agent is moderated and regulated. In this way social roles are interlinked with ethics because they influence conduct in certain ways which were meant to be consistent with values of *botho*. I will therefore argue that the influence of *botho* ethics in Sesotho culture cannot be fully explained without reference to the social obligations and responsibilities that came with social roles.

Earlier we saw that as moral agents, our relationship with social institutions is never just *qua* individuals. But that we interact with social institutions as bearers of specific roles as a given of our life. What this means is that many of us "typically inhabit a number of roles" and as such life can be regarded as consisting in a large part of fulfilling the duties of our roles and their various demands and responsibilities (Sciaraffa 2011: 107). Moreover, as human beings, we regard our role as somehow provide us with the justification for much of what we do and how we live our lives. This means also that often the "reasons that our role-duties provide, make up the lion's share of our everyday practical reasoning [or *phronesis*] for acting in a particular as opposed to another (Ibid. 107). When understood in this way social roles are central to who we are and to our social identity (Berger 1984: 54).

If one looks at Sesotho culture and its social organisation, we find that their social stratification or differentiation reflects many of their common social roles. These are usually disaggregated in terms of social groupings including gender, age or rank or some other grouping unique to Sesotho culture. Among these we can mention roles such as the role of 'ngoana' (a child), *motho e moholo* (adult person) *bashanyana* (boys), *banana* (girls) *Bo 'M'e or basali* (mothers and adult women) and *Bo-Ntate or banna* (fathers and adult men) (Matšela 1979: 116). We cannot forget of one the most important roles in every village, namely the role of *mohaisane* (neighbour) which was expected of every family to be, and of course *morena*, the chief. Some

of the common social roles worth mentioning here, within institutions of *lelapa* and *leloko*, are the roles of: *batsoali* (parents), *bo-ntate moholo* le *bo-nkhono* (grand parents), *bana* (children), *bo-motsoala* (cousins), *ntate moholo* (paternal uncle), *rakhali* (paternal aunt), *bo-malome* (maternal uncles) and *'mangoane* (aunt i.e., younger sister to one's mother) *nkhono*, in the case of the older sister of one's mother. These can be further broken down into *'M'e* (mother) *ntate*, (father), *khaitseli* (sister), *moena/baholoane*, (brothers) (Bereng 1987: 23-28, Matšela 1979; 100, Futhwa 2012: 50) and the eldest son, on whom the responsibility of good behaviour for all other siblings was upon his shoulders. It is not the intention not will it be possible here to analyse all various roles found in the village, but here it will suffice to underscore their normative influence.

Among traditional social roles in Sesotho culture nowhere is their normative influence more pronounced than in those social roles implied in relationships found in the institutions of *lelapa* (family) and *lenyalo* marriage, and the broader network of social relationships that is formed between in-laws or *bakhotsi* as we say in Sesotho. This usually manifests itself in the exceptional moral weight freighted on the labyrinth of relationships typically around these institutions among Basotho. Much of this moral weight is because of the newly created relationship of *ho amana* (relatedness) as well as new roles that individual now will have to occupy all which gets established when a marriage agreement is entered. In other words, the complex set of relationships of *ho amana* that is found between members of *lelapa* and *leloko* can thus be understood as the explication of the associated social roles that members occupy. And as such it spells out a certain way those who are related "ought" to relate to one another and to towards each other. So, in relation to siblings, these relationships at same time express inherent social expectations, which determine and influence conduct and behaviour in terms of what a good sibling occupying that role denoting a degree of relatedness to another sibling "ought" to behave like.

In Sesotho culture marriage thus is one of those relationships of belonging that sets in motion a whole new set of new roles for individuals along with their corresponding duties towards the in-laws in addition to one's existing roles duties. These new roles are expressed through an elaborate new network of relationships that get set up. Each of these relationships implies and entails certain obligations and dues owed. If we look briefly on the relationships that obtain within the family and extended family members especially children, we find that Basotho went to great lengths to distinguish each of the web of relationships that exist between siblings. These are far more elaborate than the simple ones expressed in the relationships of just brothers and sisters. In other words, what is significant here is that these relationships are prescriptive, in that they coffer specific roles unique to those who occupy along with corresponding responsibilities. Thus, one finds elaborate mixture of names for each of these relations usually denoting how siblings are related to one another. These include *'ngoan'eso,*

(sibling), 'ausi' and 'abuti,' (older sister and brother) respectively. Among male children, we have 'more' (a younger brother) 'moholoane' (elder brother). There are other relations denoting certain implicit special roles. I am thinking here of the 'khaitsemi' exclusively for male and female sibling that succeed each other<sup>86</sup>. Although *khaitsemi* refers to one sibling, just like *ngoaneso*, or *ausi* and *abuti*, it is different from these. It denotes a special relationship characterised by deep affection and protective caring (Prozesky 2012: 8). So, siblings with a *khaitsemi* relationship have an implicit special relationship or obligation to that sibling that is not necessarily the same to those of other siblings. There are other similar with special obligations. Among these none has special established role than the role of 'ngoane moholo, firstborn<sup>87</sup> and "ngoana'ofela" - last born. These are as much about birth order as they are about the social standing in the family and in the village, expressing a social role and in turn prescribing a way of conduct implied by the role occupiers of that role.

So we see that some roles in Sesotho culture come with greater responsibilities. The first born, for instance, besides being the heir and having to care for the well fare of other siblings, is also responsible and accountable for *boitsoaro* (manners, behaviour, conduct) of all other siblings (Casalis 1861: 180). Similarly, with the role of an adult person in the village, 'motho e moholo'. Here too the role occupier is expected to play their part in the moral education of the younger members of the village. So, if *motho e moholo* comes across *bana* (children) misbehaving, it was his or her duty to reprimand them irrespective who those children are. This is because moral education is the responsibility of every adult person in the village in Sesotho culture. The children for their part as part of their role as 'bana' (children) understood this as well hence, one of the qualities they inculcated from an early age was respect of any adult person (Ellenberger 1912: 268). This idea is found in the well-known saying 'it takes a village to raise a child'. So here the duties of the role of *motho e moholo*, precluded certain conduct from one who occupies that role i.e., not reprimanding children when they misbehave. The role also enjoins one to a certain course of action i.e., reprimand the children thus altering one's behaviour which otherwise would not be the case if they did not occupy that role, e.g. if they occupied the role of another child.

All these family relationships or network of social relations, are *de facto* social roles and have very clearly understood normative requirements with direct impact on the behaviour of

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<sup>86</sup> The word *khaitsemi*, has a slightly different emphasis on the relationship between siblings than English words brother and sister convey mainly because of its normative weight in governing this relationship. It is used to describe a relationship between a male and female sibling, usually who are born after each other and it is meant to denote a special bond of love (agape) and friendship between such siblings. Customarily this was probably to defuse the bitter sibling rivalry in adulthood associated with *bahlahlamani* (sibling that succeed each other) which often threatened the unity and peace of the entire family. The normative significance of *khaitsemi* here is best captured in the now famous saying in Sesotho culture by Chief Mohlomi a mosotho moral philosopher who is reported to have said of the value of peace, *khotso ke khaitsemi ea ka*, 'peace is my sister'.

<sup>87</sup> Today there is a common expression of "black tax" which refers to a practice mostly among black people where siblings, due to circumstance, assume responsibility for the economic well-being of their family and sometimes of relatives as well. This is very much the case traditionally with the eldest child as well, who was often regarded as the heir especially if it's a son.

individuals, including certain prohibitions attached to them. And this is the same with all other roles. They all have well understood inherent expectations and responsibilities, claims they can make upon each other as well, and all this has a normative influence on the individual siblings on how they conduct themselves. These roles govern and make possible many of the features that characterised Basotho culture. It is in part due to the adherence to duties of these social roles that traditional Basotho society kept many of the features it became known for, such as deep sense of solidarity, concern with other's wellbeing, generosity, kindness, and responsibility for others. These attributes provided Basotho society with a social environment conducive for the practice of *botho*.

As it will have been seen social roles and social institutions exist in complex web of primary and secondary roles and duties. This is the case where both are invested in the same individual. The person inhabiting a certain role, can at the same function as a social institution with a clearly defined role in the village recognised as such by others. So, for instance *bo-Nkhono* (grandmothers) this is both a social role and a social institution whose social function is often that of being grand-parents in a household and also an educator in the community. The same is true *motho e moholo*, (adult person) in addition to their primary role in the family, either as husband, wife, or parent, as an institution, an adult person is one whom children in turn can approach for recourse on anything due to a child as a member of that community. It is in this sense that social roles and social institutions are two sides of the same coin, and it is also in terms of fulfilment of the duties of both social roles and institutional roles that that individual's moral goodness is also evaluated. In other words, a good *ntate* (father) is one who is both a good *parent*, a good *husband*, but also a good '*motho e moholo* i.e., performs well the duties of an adult member of the community. It is the social institution for instance of "*mohaisane*" (neighbour) that demands and provides the individual with the norms and rules of conduct towards a *mohaisane*, and also that allows one to be regarded as a good *mohaisane* and in turn the dues and privileges that go with one who performs such a role. In the absence of the defined social role the norms that govern *bohaisane* (neighbourliness) would be a matter up to the individual's choice, to decide, define on their own. By contrast in traditional Sesotho villages, the function of the social institution of *mohaisane* is defined by the tradition and custom with individual role occupies each adding a unique contribution to the continuing dynamic role definition and function of this as an institution.

Today the notion of social roles as bearing any material significance to who we are as moral agents sounds alien to many. But a closer look at many of our interactions show that these in fact implicitly presuppose this. We still regard ourselves as members of our family household, related to our relatives in some way, a parent to someone or some people, an uncle, an aunt and a grandfather and grandmother to some. Even in modern complex societies one is still a neighbour to some people and resident of such and such a town or township and member of

such and such society. These associations impose tacit social roles that we occupy which have inherent duties that we fulfil. The only difference is that today many of these social roles are no longer subject to communal accountability as it used to be and as such are devoid of the associated communal duties and deserts and privileges that are due to one who inhabits those roles. The sense of identity of the individual roles is thus less defined and very shallow and, in some instance, it is only by name. Traditionally this was not so, and the idea that one could bear a role and not assume the associated personal and communal duties and responsibilities expected of one who inhabits that role was unheard of. Such a conception of the self is a concept that is foreign in Sesotho culture. It is in this sense that imagine an individual without such social embodiments or distinct from his or her roles in such a manner is not only to “imagine a person without moral depth” but someone “wholly without character conjuring something with a ghostly character (Sandel 1984: 172; MacIntyre 1981: 33). This is something akin to the restless mythological figure of *sethotsela*, (ghost) in Sesotho culture, a restless soul that belongs nowhere, i.e., neither to the community of ancestors or the living. It is in this sense that in Sesotho culture each person is born into his place in the world and knows it which gives one certain rights and dues as well as responsibilities and obligations (Ellenberger 1912: 281, MacIntyre 1981: 33).

Another important nature of social roles in Sesotho culture that is relevant to ethics of *botho* and its communal orientation is the social nature of the Basotho understanding of roles. In other words, even though it is individuals who occupy roles, it is the village and the community that defines and decides these, both regarding what they entail in term of conduct and in terms of success in fulfilling the duties that apply to the specific role. This is because the modern idea of moral agent who is an autonomous moral sovereign as suggested today does not exist. This means that social roles are the sort of thing that are socially conferred upon a person, and so is the fulfilment of specific expectations and duties of the role (Richardson 2009: 133). In Sesotho culture fulfilment of duties of social roles are regarded as having an impact on the larger community and its moral standing. For this reason, if children were regarded as brought up badly that was a reflection not only of lack of good upbringing by the parents but of overall poor '*khalemelo*', reprimanding of children in the village by those occupying relevant roles for this duty i.e., '*batho ba baholo*', adult members of the village (Mphetlang 2009: 19). The same would apply to a bad parent, their failings are regarded as a blemish that brings shame not only to the immediate family but the whole village.

What this tell us about social roles in Sesotho culture is that inherent in them are norms and standards as well as obligations. It also tells us that in addition to the considerations of the role bearer to fulfil the duties of the specific role, it is also how others view this as well that is morally important. It is for this reason that where one fell short in the fulfilment of duties of their roles, they are subject of justified criticism, not just by the family members but also the larger

community. In Sesotho culture this took different forms including shunning or shaming of the person (Sciaraffa 2011: 117,123). This understanding is that while each of these roles had their own unique functions peculiar to each within the individual family (Futhwa 2012:50), the same obligations were expected of anyone occupying the same role. In other words, many traditional social roles found in Sesotho culture were given definition and interpretation through custom and tradition. As such there was a common understanding of what they entail, and role occupiers performed the duties of their roles in the light of this understanding. They also knew that at any time they could be called to account in terms of how well or not so well they are performing in their specific role. There was a consensus therefore of what roles meant and what to expect of those who occupy them.

So, the normative standard for conduct for the role bearer thus consists of an accepted base of a set of duties, obligations, behaviours, attitudes, and dues. These were not understood as only owed to oneself but to others as well. This meant that there is a legitimate interest and stake others have in how as moral agents we perform and fulfil the duties of our roles. This was the case with many social roles in Basotho culture. This conception of social roles is in part one of the features of traditional ethical resources, that I argue played an important part in sustaining and encouraging the practice of *botho* as an ethic in Sesotho culture.

What we learn from this as well is that social roles thus make us as moral agents accountable to others as well as to ourselves for the fulfilment of the duties of the roles we occupy. In this sense social roles are the public expression of mutual accountability implied in *botho*. This is in sharp contrast to contemporary moral attitudes today where it is common to hear “it’s none of my business” or “it’s their choice’ when matters of conduct are discussed. When understood in this sense, social roles become a basis of justifiable grounds for holding individuals to account and for moral agents to be accountable to one another (Sciaraffa 2011: 109). It is here that the foundation of normative authority of social roles is located, because as a moral agent

“I am answerable for doing or failing to do what anyone who occupies my role owes to others and in addition I am not only accountable, [but I am also] one who can always ask others for an account, [and] who can put others to the question” (MacIntyre 1981: 126, 218).

In other words, in Sesotho culture because I am the firstborn son, I can justifiably be held accountable in my village, community or society for how I live up or not live up to the expected and required standards of this role. This is because as “*ngoan’ e moholo*” (the eldest child) I occupy a role with established duties and widely accepted and long standing “standards that persons occupying” this “role ought to meet.” And any falling short or “deviations” from these, “are taken to be” a justifiable ground “for criticism” or holding one to account (Sciaraffa 2011: 109). But it must be stressed that this does not mean that as moral agents we are or become nothing but the social roles which we inherit and occupy (MacIntyre 1981: 31). This is because

as agents in the fulfilment of the duties of the roles we also add to it by virtue of our own agency a unique stamp. This idea of accountability and social roles is going to come across as alien to contemporary moral agents brought on the assumption and acceptance of liberal individualism as given. But what the experience of Traditional Basotho shows is that as moral agents neither are, we free and uncommitted agents. We are always bearers of specific and sometimes multiple social roles. These in turn influence and shape our conduct by binding us through “patterns of rights and duties, the natures of which are determined by the nature of the institutions which give rise to the social roles” (Downie 1964: 29)”. This means that in our efforts as agents to be good persons or make noticeable progress towards personhood i.e., becoming a *motho* as we say in Sesotho, we are “never able to seek for the good or exercise the virtues only *qua* individual”. Instead we always approach this and “our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity” i.e., as occupiers of multiple social roles (MacIntyre 1981: 220).

Another observation about social roles in Sesotho culture is that they are often typically defined in and through the rich heritage of narratives including proverbs and other similar pithy sayings (Coplan 1993: 92). Here the significance of social roles is that they are defined also in terms of the virtues the role occupiers ought to inculcate to perform that role well. I am thinking here of proverbs like, *fura*<sup>88</sup> *la ngoana ke ho rongoa*”, (the role or function of a child is to be sent to run errands), which captures the general understanding of what is considered to be a definition of a good child i.e., one who is brought up well, is one who plays their part in the life of the community through efficient carrying out of messages and running of errands (Matsela 1979: 132, 162). But this also articulates the virtues a good child ought to inculcate, and these include efficiency in the delivery of the messages, discipline of not getting distracted while on errands and doing this as speedily as possible. This also involves displaying the intellectual virtues by displaying cognitive abilities to understand the main message, i.e., take in information and be able to impart it in such a way that the meaning is not lost. Another example helps to illustrate the same point with adults. This we find in the proverbs “*mosali o tsoara thipa ka bohalleng*” (a woman holds the knife at its sharpest end) and “*marabe o jeoa ke bana*” (The puff adder is eaten by its babies<sup>89</sup>) both which describe the ideal character of parents or qualities essential for one who occupies the role of a mother and a parent. The former describes a mother as someone who would do everything to protect her family including putting herself in danger if necessary. Similarly, with the latter which describes one who

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<sup>88</sup> *Lefura*, refers to the fat part on the meat and in Sesotho this is regarded as the tastiest. So, the meaning here is that a good child stands to being sent to run errands, as a person's appetite is to a tasty piece of meat. In other words, a good child is one who is good at running errands (Mokitimi 1997: 14, No119).

<sup>89</sup> This proverb is based on a believe Basotho have about the puff adder (*marabe*). According to Sekese (1994: 66) with this proverb a parallel is being made with *marabe*, where it is said that when it gives birth it dies, and its young ones eats it. This proverb is thus an expression of solidarity with one who has little because they sacrificed all for the children, to the effect that it emphasises that this is what a good parent ‘ought to do’.

occupies the role of being a parent, prescribes that it is someone who will be prepared to go without for the sake of their children (Mokitimi 1997: 44).

From this, we can now see why proverbs are such an integral part of the moral language of the Basotho. When proverbs are used to define social roles, they must be understood as an articulation of the function and purpose of a particular role and how that relates in part to the moral agent self-understanding i.e., in terms of one's goals and ultimate purpose in life which is to be a good person in the respective roles that one occupies. And we can see this cannot be fully achieved without a person doing well in fulfilling the duties of the roles one occupies as part of living out their life. This understanding of being a *motho* i.e., in terms of having an ultimate function or purpose in life, is close to the Aristotelian idea of a *telos*, in that it is an expression of the functional understanding of man or *motho* in Sesotho. I use the term function here in the way MacIntyre (1981: 58) defines it where the "concept of *man is understood as having an essential nature and an essential purpose or function*", which is the heart of ethics or morality. This is like the understanding of social roles, and in turn those who occupy them as found in traditional Sesotho speaking culture. According to this then, social roles are the main vehicles, not the only ones for *motho* to fulfil that essential purpose and function, and as we have seen this relates to being a good person. For Basotho this was defined in part by how well one fulfilled the obligations and duties of their social roles. This, in turn, was part of what was taken into consideration in making moral assessment whether one has succeeded or is making satisfactory progress in inculcating qualities of *botho*.

It will also be noticed that social roles and this is particularly pronounced among blood relatives are often indistinguishable from the identity of the bearers. This is because social roles in part define who we are, because as we pointed out we are other people's sons, fathers to some people, or mothers and sisters to others and relatives to some. These roles do not only exert normative authority upon us as individual members of our families but in the end, they are part of who we are and constitute our identity. Because of this intrinsic connection with social roles or role identification, it is not easy to separate our identities with them, and as such, they form part of our conception of who we are as moral agents and as members of families (Sciaraffa 2011). In other words, as individuals, we carry with us our social roles as part of the definition of ourselves, even if we reject these (MacIntyre 1981: 27,172).

What this analysis shows about the normative influence of institutions and roles on personal conduct, is that *botho* as an expression of specific way of being moral, cannot be fully understood without reference to social institutions as part of menu of ethical recourses and support structures that enable the practice of *botho* as an ethic in the community. The analysis also showed that social institutions like *lenyalo* (marriage), *motse* (village) or *lelapa* (family) and others not discussed here, themselves serve a function within a larger whole i.e., larger complexes of institutions and social roles that together fulfil some larger end or set of ends of

the society (Sciaraffa 2011: 109). In Sesotho culture this larger end and set of ends of a society manifests itself in the characteristic way of life found in their culture. It is these larger complexes in Sesotho culture constituting characteristics features of Basotho way of life, that provide the supportive and enabling environment conducive to *botho* ethics. In other words, there needs to be in place social conditions in the community to provide individuals with ethical resources, analogous to those available to traditional Basotho that made the practice of *botho* easy and possible as a way of life in their villages. It is this social context that I argue provided individuals with the necessary ethical conditions or social environment that made *botho* intelligible and possible in practice and sustained it in communal living. In the next section below, I examine these features and social conditions that characterise the Basotho way of life and under pinned ethics of *botho* in their culture.

### **5.5 Characteristic Features of Basotho Way of Life that Underpins *Botho* Ethics**

Although Basotho culture is part of African culture and such share many common features with other cultures, Basotho culture does have many features that distinguish it as different, not least their language. As we know language is carrier of customs, beliefs, norms, and values of a particular culture. This means that in their culture there are certain social practices and ways of doing things peculiar to Basotho. These informed their understanding of ethics including ethics of *botho* as found in their practice and moral thought and also encouraged and made the practice of *botho*, as the central pillar of their morality easy to practice. Among these and worth mentioning are the common practices *seahlolo* (sharing), *letsema* (work party), and *mafisa* (livestock loaning) (Mofuoa 2014: 229) just to mention a few. Although many of these are unique to Basotho culture it is also the case some form of these may be found in other African cultures as well. This is because Africa as a continent, although inhabited by a diversity of people and as such is not a homogenous entity, like any society, whether its European, Chinese, American or Asian, there is unity in diversity that enable that which is being qualified to be recognisably as African and not European, Asian, Indian, Chinese or any other culture. This means that within the diversity of African moral traditions there is a recognisable unity, and commonality which distinguish moral traditions from this continent as African. As Hanna Kinoti explains: "although Africa is a vast continent" when it comes among other things to their moral traditions and basic moral assumptions "there is adequate evidence" of commonality "to generalise to a considerable extent" (1992: 76).

The same is true of the of those central features of Basotho culture that will be analysed here as instrumental in supporting the practice of *botho* ethics in their culture. In many of these can be found commonalities that can be found transcending local differences. The features that will be discussed here while they may equally be found applicable and relevant to other African culture, the immediate context of their analysis is focused on Basotho people and their culture.

As such even though this section will not make strong distinction made between Basotho culture and African culture, it will place emphasis of the experience and perspective of Basotho. Of relevance, though will the commonness of ontological assumptions, such as the significance of religious belief and spirituality, the centrality of community life and unity of life or holism, all which underpin Basotho culture and African culture as well. What this means for the argument about *botho* that this study makes is that to fully appreciate its relevance and value for today's context, it is imperative to understand the underlying ontological assumptions upon which this concept is grounded but also informs its practice in specific context. This also includes knowing the salient features of the traditional setting of Basotho culture or context within which this ethic is at home. This is because it is pointless to study a polysemic moral ideal like *botho* in isolation or *invitro* without taking into consideration the particular sociology of knowledge by which it came into being and by which it is perpetuated (van Binsbergen 2001: 59). In Sesotho speaking cultures, it is this awareness of the particularity of sociology of knowledge of Basotho implied in their indigenous knowledge system, which informs the practical interpretation and application of *botho* and is of relevance to ethics in general. Such an approach in analysing this concept will provide us today with an insight into the larger totality of moral thought and practice of Sesotho culture in which *botho*, as a normative concept enjoyed a role and function supplied by this context (MacIntyre 1981: 10). In turn, we will be able to identify those elements that make the practice of *botho* possible as found in the cultural milieu from which *botho* was practiced as predominant ethic (van Niekerk 2013: x). From this we can also transplant *botho* from its cultural origin and its ethical imperatives authentically and apply its dictates appropriately as well in today's context and other cultural context. The following characteristic features of the African culture which feature prominently in Sesotho culture show common features that underlie ethics in African culture. They also underscore the importance of understanding ontological assumptions that underpin ethics and the practice of *botho* in Sesotho speaking cultures.

### **5.5.1 The Significance of Religious Belief to Ethics in Sesotho Culture**

Much of the analysis of *botho* thus far in this study may have unwittingly given an impression of ethics in Sesotho culture as a secular morality. This is because the religious dimension of ethics which is always integral to the African understanding of morality, has not been highlighted and given much prominence. The reason is in part because the religious dimension of ethics in African culture is a given, and as such there is no need to explicitly state this. But in the context of discussion of modern ethics which presents itself as secular, it becomes necessary to highlight the difference here. It is therefore important to realise that in Sesotho speaking cultures the practice of *botho* ethics implied cognisance of its religious dimensions or what I referred to as the spirituality of *botho* (Mphetolang 2009: 22). It is the

consciousness of the sacred found in Sesotho culture that cannot be separate from life and under lies the outlook of how Basotho approached life especially the moral life. In other words, as anyone familiar with African culture knows, religion is never too far from life, nor is it separate from the rest of social life.

In Sesotho culture, like most African cultures there is an intrinsic connection between the secular and religious, the profane and sacred. This is because according to traditional thought and believe, “there is only one world, which is not first profane and then religious” (Bujo 2001: 96). The religious character of African life is well-documented subject in African theology and its imperatives on social life. This must be understood as central to moral life as well. Therefore, in Sesotho culture the practice of ethics of *botho* functioned as part of a larger ancient system of belief, a belief that was deeply religious. This means that *botho* as moral concept operated in the context of a worldview and moral outlook, where there was an inextricable connection between the natural and social realms of humans with the supernatural (spirits) and spiritual realm of *balimo* (ancestors) and *Molimo* (deity/divinity) as the guardian of culture (Manyeli 1992: 30-48, Molefe 2015:64, Manda 2009: 2, Setiloane 1978: 32-34). The moral scheme within which *botho* was invoked to assess conduct, must thus be understood as part of an ancient religious belief of the Basotho and a moral culture that is deeply religious. This, in turn, implies a spirituality i.e., a noticeable consciousness of the supreme being or the divine that the moral code of the culture presupposes. This is because in this culture one of the predominating ideas influencing behaviour and personal ethics is a belief in ancestors. This is always an important consideration at the back of the mind of the moral agent's life and existence. As Mkhize (2008: 37) explains ancestors are understood as “examples of good conduct” on whom good conduct is modelled and is valued in part because it ensures good relations with them. In turn, the continued cherishing of their superior moral qualities become a normative standard that an ethically fit moral subject<sup>90</sup> or a proper *motho* seeks to emulate i.e., by making present the ethical experience of the ancestors and attempts to shape his or her actions accordingly (Bujo 2001: 34). This means that if the conception of *botho* as a normative concept is to be properly theorised, this cannot be done without reference to the spirituality that underpins it. In other words, it is not possible to give a complete account of the experience of *botho* in Sesotho culture without a good understanding of the role that religious belief plays and occupies in Sesotho culture. This is because within this culture the notion of secular morality, i.e., morality independent or separate from religious belief, which is a common notion today, does not exist. As such a conception of ethics purely in secular terms would be unintelligible. In this sense, traditional morality of Basotho bears close resemblance to many other pre-modern cultures, where this separation of ethics and religion was non-existent. The prevalence of this dichotomy in many societies is thus a recent

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<sup>90</sup> The term ethically fit or active is borrowed from Prozesky (2007: 20)

development. In places like modern European society, which is one example, this moral tradition has progressively been repudiated in large part due to the influence of enlightenment project on ethics. This project as already pointed out did not only abandoned traditional morality of Europe but changed key tenets of its tradition, including “the moral unity of Aristotelianism, whether in its ancient or medieval forms” (MacIntyre 1981: 156). By contrast at about the same time on the opposite side of the globe in 18th century Sesotho speaking culture of Southern Africa, we find a similar moral tradition not only being embraced by some of the great figures of the time like the great Chief Mohlomi, but also being propelled as the cornerstone of social and moral life. In this part of the world, this moral tradition is part of a vibrant pre-modern moral culture of Basotho in which the ethic of *botho* was later to be its greatest asset. Central to this moral scheme is a certain sense of spirituality reflected in the key religious terms of the Sesotho language of *Molimo* (God or the supreme being) and ancestors, *balimo*. Like other African culture, it is these religious tenets that characterise Basotho culture and traditional African moral and ethical systems as deeply religious as well (Mkhize 2008: 36).

In Sesotho culture this notion of the divine, can be found in all manner of places including for instance in the ancient prayers of Basotho. Here one finds reference to the notion of divinity in *Molimo*, (God) singular, *balimo* and *melimo* (gods) plural form, and *molingoana*, a diminutive form suggestive of degrees of godliness (Manyeli 1992: 31- 43). It shall be noted that the nature of divinity as recounted here is varied, which suggests the presence of religious belief in the whole of life, not just the sacred, or religious or spiritual realms covering all. This underlines African spirituality, which begins with the recognition of God as the omnipotent source of life (Mkhize 2008: 36), hence the reference to the spirituality of *botho* made in this entry, which is important dimension not to forget in the analysis of this concept. The unity of life stressed here points to another important religious feature in Sesotho culture the ethic of Basotho presupposes, and that is the concept of holism or cosmic unity. I will therefore argue that the religious foundation of Africa ethics is nowhere better articulated than in the notion of holism or cosmic unity which expresses itself in social harmony and social and environmental equilibrium (Kasenene 1994: 142).

Cosmic unity or holism as a spirituality, prioritises interconnectedness of existence and the unity of life as of supreme importance. This belief and spirituality of the unity of life rejects all forms of dualistic tendencies and conceptions. As such in the way they live Africans, makes no distinctions between the natural and social realms of humans, which is inextricably bound with the supernatural (spirits) and spiritual realm of *balimo* (ancestors) and *Molimo* (deity/divinity) as the guardian of culture (Molefe 2015: 64, Manda 2009: 2, Setiloane 1978: 32-34). This view is supported by many studies that show that African culture is deeply religious in orientation and that religion permeates all aspects of life (Chitando 2008: 47). The

notion of an “all-pervading Supreme Being who controls the universe and social relationships,...[who] is interested in the way people relate to one another” (Kasenene 1994: 140) is the underlying assumption that gives meaning to taboos, regulations and prohibitions many of which are imbued with deep religious undertones. These guide behaviour and moral conduct, and hence this is the soul of African ethics. This centrality of the spiritual realm to daily social life may in part explain the continuing interest in religion in African even today despite the highly modernised and globalised environment, that now characterised much of sub-Saharan Africa as can be seen in the growing number of new churches<sup>91</sup>. This is in sharp contrast to other places where the religious appeal is diminishing, which support the view that religious belief and spirituality that underpins morality among Africans is still an important reality in the life of many Africans, including those urban elites that are supposed to have embraced secular Western culture and morality.

The African experience of religious belief and ethics is quite different to the claims of secularisation of secular morality of the West and modern ethics, where there is a break in the realm of morals with traditional authority specifically religious authority (Shutte 2001:43). By contrast the unity of life and wholeness of human experience espoused by African religious belief permeates all aspects of life including the moral life. Within African culture, the dichotomy that Western ethics insists on between religion and ethics is not only foreign but is also in conflict with the African worldview where “morality” is not separate “from the rest of African social life” (Richardson 2009: 131) and emphasis is on the wholeness of life. Mkhize (2008: 36) reiterating this unity of life as reflected in the African conception of a hierarchy of beings, states that “traditional African moral and ethical systems can be said to be religious” because “they begin with the recognition of God as the source of life”. What this means for a moral concept like *botho* and how its values and the virtues it encapsulated should be understood is that “there exists a cosmic order which dictates the place of each virtue in a total harmonious scheme of human life” and that truth in the moral sphere consists in the conformity of moral judgment to the order of this scheme (MacIntyre 1981: 143). The same applies to the current *botho* discourse and its analysis of the values and virtues expressed in *botho*, i.e., these must be interpreted and applied in conformity to holism or cosmic unity that

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<sup>91</sup> Many of these new churches can be described as prosperity gospel churches with some taking on local African features but what they all share in common is theologically conservative Christianity that emphasizes believers’ abilities to transcend poverty and/or illness and to gain blessings through devotion and positive confession (<https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/faq/prosperity-gospel>). These churches are among the fastest growing religious phenomena in Southern African today with a huge following.

permeates African culture. In other words, the religious sentiments of African culture, such as those found in Sesotho speaking culture must be part of the social support structures, or ethical resources that supported individuals to be ethical. Another such important resource is the community.

### **5.5.2 Significance of Community and the Common Good in African Culture**

The importance and status of the community in African culture, is recognised as one of the most admirable features of African culture which contemporary societies can learn lessons from about the practice of the ethic of *botho*, even in a globalised and complex context that is now much of sub-Saharan Africa. So unique is this that Westerners often remark about how strong the sense of community is and how fascinated with this idea many Africans seem to be. At the heart of community spirit, is the strong concern with one another's welfare and wellbeing so noticeable and important in many African cultures as a way of life. This is the traditional value of the common good characteristic of many pre-modern cultures such as that of Basotho. If one looks at the Basotho culture, the idea of common good is the edifice underlying much of the social and moral life of Basotho. It is a social and moral wheel around which all of life revolved. In this sense it can be described as the primary underlying consideration that informed their way of life and the rationale behind the high regard of many of the practices they practiced such as sharing, solidarity and a sense of responsibility and accountability for others. It is because of the concern with the common good or welfare of others that we find that in Sesotho culture every Mosotho felt obligated and responsible for their neighbour and why one would be punished for any crime of their neighbour, and the whole village was collectively responsible for each one of its inhabitants (Bujo 2001: 86, Ellenberger (1912: 268). This is true of many African cultures, the community is key, because this is the expression of what it means to be a person, and this extends to the moral sphere. The understanding here is the individual *motho* is the embodiment of his or her community of its moral ideals. This is because in African culture the understanding is that "ethical living" is a task "incumbent upon the entire community" and that the "community gives expression of itself" morally "through" its members (Bujo 2001: 28). Because of this status of the community in African culture, much has been written in the literature about its significance and relevance to *botho* ethics is well recognized (Metz 2007, Mabovula 2011, Letseka 2013<sub>b</sub>). Thus, we find that in Mabovula (2011: 38) the community is described as "a kinship-oriented social order, which is informed by an ethic of reciprocity", or as an ongoing dynamic association where people "have a special commitment to one another and have developed a distinct sense of their common life. It is the embodiment of the common good in which "one comes to see one's interests as being bound up with the interests of the group over a great number of issues of life and well-being". The common idea expressed here is the traditional value of the common good. I will argue that it

is the notion of the common good implied in *botho* that manifests itself as African communalism. This is another feature of society that is conducive to *botho* as an ethic. This consciousness of the common good is thus underscored by the emphasis the African culture makes of harmony in relationships between persons as the apex of created beings (Mkhize 2008: 37). This is because according to African culture, society is morally significant and the relations that obtain between individuals in a society are not incidental to ethical living. Instead they are essential to being moral and development of good character (Richardson 2009: 140). It is in this sense that Metz (2007: 334) is correct to point out that in African culture “certain relationships” as opposed to others “are constitutive of the common good that a moral agent ought to promote”. According to this then the common good is fundamentally bound up with how one relates to others, hence these relationships are morally important. What we have here therefore is a spirituality that requires a particular outlook of life, in which being moral is seen essentially as a network of interdependent social relationships all aimed at safeguarding and maintaining natural equilibrium between the individual and the community, and between the community and the environment as the ultimate good i.e., the common good to which all have a duty towards.

What we see therefore is that central to the African way of life, is a deep concern with common welfare as such it follows that this is going to be one of the ideals and underlying foundation of African ethics and a governing principle which underpins much of African culture. It is the foundation upon which ethical imperatives for the way life in general is lived are anchored and for the understanding of moral goodness. This is because this consciousness permeates the entire African social life culminating in the requirement where relatedness of persons, not separateness, is a decisive issue and the aim of social life (Bujo 2001: 3). It is the basis for the norm informing the fostering of particular type of human relationships including the rejection of dualistic conceptions of life as well as the separation between the individual and the community. What this means is that the “good “is defined and understood in terms of its unity i.e., the relationships within the group, not the individual. For this reason, African culture places primacy on the common good where welfare of the individual is inextricably intertwined with that of the community (Shutte 2008: 33).

It is often difficult for most people to conceptualise and find personal moral justification or grounding for the aspirations of the common good i.e., link between common good and ethics. But as Prozesky (2007: 105) points out, moral goodness, which is the sole function of ethics i.e., to help moral agents attain moral goodness, means caring about the good of others as well of taking care of our own legitimate interest”. What is clear from all this is that the idea of the common good is consistent with two central ideals underpinning the African way of life. These are based on the belief that the individual's existence is intertwined with that of the community in the context of *botho*, and that a wrong done to the individual is a wrong inflicted

on his/her whole community (Gaie 2002: 277). When understood this way the common good thus permeates the spirit and attitudes, both social and moral that characterises the traditional African idea of community and its practical application in daily living. Here the adherence to its dictates entails treating others as 'another self, with no distinction between their good and one's own' (Shutte 2009: 97). In this sense the common good underscores the African understanding and conception of a community as more than just "a mere collection of individuals but as "people conspiring together, *con-spiring* in the basic Latin sense, united among themselves in a common and shared goals even to the very centre of their being" (Shutte 2008: 27). Because of this, communal life in African culture is always a priority and the community, in turn, is a unity with a religious and moral obligation (Kasenene 1994: 141). That obligation is encapsulated in harmonious relationships and the preservation of life as the highest principle of ethical conduct through communal solidarity.

We can see here how the principle of harmony and balance conflicts with modern ethics and contemporarily moral attitudes. This is because here the focus of modern ethics as seen in chapter two leans towards extreme individualism, concern with the autonomy of the individual and attainment of what is good for them (Bujo 2001: 77). It follows then that this holistic conception of life in relation to community relationships as reflected in African culture, will equally apply to what is regarded as "good". In other words, such conception of what is good for the individual in African culture cannot be opposed to the good of all i.e., the common good which is understood in terms of their well fare and wellbeing. We see this in Sesotho culture for instance in the approach and attitude to material possessions. According to custom, "*leruo*" -wealth or material possessions are not solely for private use by those who have it. Tradition, or the rule of conduct as codified in the rules of etiquette dictated that such possessions be made available when others are in need (Richardson 2009:136). These loosely designed codes of ethics of *botho* among the Basotho, although only regarded as etiquette than a norm or law were faithfully observed and adhered to (Ellenberger 1912: 292).

It is in terms of this practice that possession of *botho* is associated with generosity and sharing, which for Basotho is one of the most explicit manifestations of *botho* and a sign of the virtue of kindness. As such this desire to be generous became one of the deepest sensibilities of Basotho and found expression in all sorts of ways within their communities. These range from sharing items such as ploughing implements, to having *seahlolo* -sharing ploughing fields, to *mafisa*, extended lending of cattle. In other words, in African culture one finds that there is generally accepted and known prescription, for a way of conduct in which material possession or personal assets, where their possession and ownership precludes their use in common and for use for the common good (Murove 2008:86).

All this was part of the radical social ethic of the common good ethics which governed relations and personal ethics in the community. It is within this context and setting of communal living

understood in terms this intense inner feeling, to care about the welfare of others, that the understanding and analysis of *botho* must be found. The understanding here is that even though individuals may indeed possess assets, in practice this functioned more like the right of administration, and as such this is not devoid of the sense of common good ethics, since this right always take into account the members of the family fellowship as a whole (Bujo 2008: 7, Richardson 2009:136) or the common good of the community. It is for this reason that one who deprived the community of access to such possession i.e., through selfishness was regarded as not a good person and had a poor moral standing in the community, something that sounds foreign in today's context. Basotho would say of such a person '*o pelo e thata*,' meaning they have a hard heart. This because is such conduct it shows one who is without kindness and compassion. This is because such conduct fundamentally undermines the basic tenets of *botho* and corresponding sensibilities of way of life which is informed by high regard and priority of the common good.

### 5.5.3 Community Membership and the Significance of Social Identity

Among the features that underpin the Basotho understanding of ethics and in turn relevant to the current *botho* discourse to consider, is their conception of the self or the social identity of the moral agent enshrined in African culture. In terms of this understanding our self-understanding of who we are is understood primarily in terms of social identity. This social and communal approach to identity is thus opposed to an individualistic notion of self. In other words, like in many pre-modern, traditional societies, in Sesotho culture, it is through membership i.e., in *lelapa*, *leloko*, the village and many other social groups that as moral agents we identify ourselves. This is because as moral agent

"I am brother, cousin and grandson, member of this household, that village, this tribe" and "these are not characteristics that belong to human beings accidentally, to be stripped away in order to discover 'the real me'. They are pan of my substance, defining partially at least and sometimes wholly my obligations and my duties" (MacIntyre 1981: 33).

The relevance of this is that this conception of the self underscores the significance of one's social identity which cannot be fully grasped without cognisance of the roles one occupies, many of which are permanent part of one's identity and who we are. But even more significant is that this understating of the identity of the *motho* (person) has implications that determines and shapes behaviour of a person as a moral agent. This is because in African ethics, ethical conduct i.e., moral goodness or what is good for the individual,

"means that the individual does not consider himself to be the only one involved in his actions...[because] there is a "circumincessory" relationship between the individual and the community in its three dimensions (the unborn, the living, and the dead) so that without the community, correct ethical decisions and acts of virtue are impossible" (Bujo 2001: 29).

In other words, membership of the community is not only an important requirement or a matter of choice, but also an essential part of the understanding of one's identity. This is part of the understanding that would inform and influence moral agency including the application of and practice of *botho* by the individual. It is in this sense that social identity is related to personal conduct and can be regarded as regulating and influencing personal ethics and conduct. Of course, this does not mean that some individuals do not try to reject their social identity, and when they do, they cannot remain as part of the community literally and metaphorically. Traditionally those who do, i.e., by their conduct and way of life, they would be shunned and be banished and the honour along with the corresponding set of duties and privileges due to them is withdrawn. Earlier we saw how in Sesotho culture this unenviable status rendered one to be called a manner less person and someone of bad character and behaviour" that every Mosotho who considered themselves a proper Mosotho person wanted to avoid (Ellengberger 1912: 293). In the community, therefore this sense of belonging and is indissolubly linked with the social roles, through which belonging is reaffirmed in the honour i.e., the embodiment regard by others that the individual gets from the community. This is because here honour is that which is due to everyone by virtue of their role and belonging in a community (MacIntyre 1981: 116).

The concept of honour and community belonging requires explanation because it is not a common concept in modern society least of all as core concept defining relationships in traditional societies like Basotho culture. In its simplest definition honour is the recognition the individual gets understood as what is due to them, "by reason of their having their due place in the social order" (Ibid, p116) or the role that the individual inhabits and fulfilling the duties of that role in an exemplary way. In other words, honour is something one gets on account of their role, because it is in our social roles that we each have our place in the community and the honour that come with that (Berger 1984: 154). We see this clearly in the Sesotho speaking culture, where "every individual is the superior or inferior of his neighbour" and it was believed that "each person is born into his place in the world and knows it" (Ellenberger 1912: 281). In other words, as individual members of the community we inherit a particular space in the ongoing narrative i.e., moral story of our moral particularity enacted within an "interlocking set of social relationships" in the community. It is in this story that our responsibilities and obligations are to be found, but also our dues and what we are owed, and this include honour where it is earned.

What we find here then is that personal identity in African culture is understood in terms of the broader community membership which is defined in large part by the various roles one inhabits. This means that community membership i.e., through our roles is not "inseparable

from understanding ourselves as particular persons and who we are” because this means that “to some I owe” certain dues

“more than justice requires or even permits, not by reason of agreements I have made but instead in virtue of those more or less enduring attachments and commitments which taken together partly define the person I am” (Sandel 1984:172)

The centrality of social roles to the African conception of the self thus cannot be overemphasised here, because according to this understanding no individual exists just as an individual. Every person is defined by others and self-defines themselves in relation to the community specifically in terms of their role within that community whether as “a neighbour, a friend, a relative, a clansman, a member of a tribe or of nation and so on” (Munyaka and Motlhabi 2009: 68). Moreover, this self-identification of the individual extends outwards in ever expanding network of relationships. It is important to note here that community belonging in this way is not a matter of choice, it is the given of our lives because

“The story of our lives is always embedded in the story of the community. We are born with a past, which becomes part of who we are, and to try to cut ourselves off from it through an individualistic account of our identity is to deform our present relationships” (MacIntyre 1981: 205).

Any attempt to reject community membership and social identity, as some modern people try to, is an illusion that is at one’s own peril. This also cannot happen without a serious existential crisis and confusion to the meaning of our lives and a crisis of identity and belonging. It is this conception of the self that underpins *botho* and must inform the current *botho* discourse as moral qualification of *motho*, best captured in African moral thought in the idea of the moral ideal of personhood (Molefe 2017<sub>A</sub>: 217). It is in this sense that in African word view, personal identity is inextricably bound with our relations with others and it is in this interconnectedness of person that the manifestation of *botho* occur (Munyaka and Motlhabi 2009: 68).

#### **5.5.4 Community as the Custodian of Moral Traditions and Moral Formation**

The significance of community as a prominent feature of the African way of life, based on common mind and common heart, is well acknowledged in the literature and current *botho* discourse (Shutte 2001:26). This is true in Sesotho culture, where the community or more correctly *motse* (the village) was an important social institution with a unique function to play in the moral life of its members. This does not only distinguish African idea of community from collectivism where there is necessarily no common interest but reveals the social function of the community as an institution. As a social institution the community has a social role, and it performs this through other social institutions within it especially the individual members who are the bearers of the community’s social roles. We have already seen that one of these was the preservation of the common good. The community also has an ethical role as the social

embodiment of a set of norms, and specific configuration of values and virtues, and as a guardian of morality and custodian of the moral life (Mkhize 2008: 37). That means it keeps the existing moral tradition but also continuously adds and reviews this tradition through various forms of internal processes delineating new moral parameters of what in this community is permissible and acceptable (Mokolatsie 1997: 58). I use the term tradition in relation to the community as an institution in the sense MacIntyre (1981: 222) defines it, as it relates to institutions, as bearers of tradition this entails continuous argument as to what such an institution ought to be. Similarly, I borrow the term palaver from Bujo (2001: 45 -55). This normative significance of social roles embodied in the community's social intuitions, is a feature of the community life very much at the heart of ethics as a joint enterprise. It is in the social institutions and social roles within the community that much of the day-to-day rules of conduct for behaviour reside.

One of the important functions of the community in African culture as a social institution was to be the primary context within which moral goodness i.e., the practice of virtue was first learned, defined and then lived and assessed. As such community in an African traditional setting resembled the form of traditional morality expressed in Aristotelian ethics where there could be "no way of judging the goodness or otherwise of the person without reference to the community in which the person belongs". What this means is that in this context then, "that which is good must be understood, and the moral decision that follows must be calculated according to the describable nature of each community" (Richardson 1994: 93). What we get here is two important points about the community and its significance and relevance to African ethics and ethics in general. First that the ethical approach that appears and is informed by the communal life as a priority cannot be abstract and individualistic. Within this framework the modern idea where ethics is essentially a matter of individual choice and legislation by abstract, solitary moral agent (Mkhize 2008: 36) is incompatible with African ethics. Second that the community takes on a morally normative dimension and function, whereby it is invested with the responsibility for moral guidance. This it does by specifying, interpreting and defining what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. It is an arena where norms come into being through a reciprocal relationship between community members (Bujo 2001:2).

The normative function of the community is also found in its role in character formation and development of its members, especially in the early formative years and later in life through participation in the community informed continually by a living tradition. The key role in this regard is the community's role as a school for character. This means the community is where training in character occurs and a place where, as a moral agent one learns and practices the virtues of *botho*. We must recall that

"African communities believe that their future depends on the ethical conduct of their members [as such] education in the ethical conduct that promotes the good of the community plays a decisive role" (Bujo 2001: 24).

So moral development and formation was a key part of the ethical function of the community. By way of analogy, an example of a football team captures this function of better, and its role in the individual's pursuit of moral excellence in the practice of virtues. Like in a football team where each player has unique talents and skills, but each player knows that they are part of the team, where team success is the goal and there is no contradiction between that and the individual player's good. So, it is with ethics and relationship of the moral agent and the community. It is in this sense that the community is not only important for shaping and forming character but also as a school for character, i.e., the practical setting where like a player in a football team, the individual receives guidance and advice. At the same time, it perfects the art of moral goodness through practices of habits of moral goodness, in which success or progress they make regard determines how well one is doing towards moral goodness i.e., possession of *botho*. In terms of moral conduct, in Sesotho culture the community can therefore be regarded as the necessary enabling environment for moral excellence, a communal social space to practice good manners and learn good character forming habits of *botho*. Members of the community in the reciprocal process of ethical reflection on their moral tradition engage in moral discernment and enrichment of one another in the light of their tradition and challenges of current experience. In other words, in terms of the normative function of the community, ethical conduct is not based only on the individual but is realised primarily by the relational network in the community (Bujo 2001:6, MacIntyre 1981:31).

As we have just noted one of the key functions of the community as a social institution therefore is teaching virtues and support individuals to cultivate qualities of character. And one of the key instruments in this regard is the family, itself also a social institution, whose role and function within the community is as the primary school for character (Dandala 2009: 262). The family here must be understood by its most profound and inclusive sense extending beyond extended family and those related by blood (Shutte 2008: 28). As it will have been seen the family is therefore, one of the most significant social institutions that played a huge role in the community, towards inculcating moral virtues for today's context. The role and status of the family therefore whether in its narrow sense as it is understood today or the more inclusive understanding it was understood as in traditional African village community, it played an important part within the community in furthering the institutional function of the community as a school for character. Today the institution of the family as a building block for community is one of the few remaining traditional support structures available to the community and individuals to help contemporary moral agents to be ethical.

## **5.6 Summary**

The chapter analysed the ethical significance of social institutions and social roles and how these influences the personal conduct contextualising the analysis within the Basotho culture. It argued that the traditional institutions found in Sesotho culture and associated social roles form an important social context and environment that supported the practice of *botho* and sustained it as a popular ethos characteristic of the traditional moral culture of Basotho. These provided a traditional Mosotho with the necessary ethical resources and infrastructure essential for moral agents to be ethical and to respond well to training in character through traditional forms of education, formal and non-formal. The chapter thus argues that that social institutions and social roles are important in ethical reflection including that of current *botho* discourse on *botho*. This is because understanding the social influence of these on personal ethics allows ethical reflection to understand how social institutions and roles in society are essential instruments by which social norms and moral traditions in a culture are preserved and made intelligible. This is true of ethics of *botho*. We saw that as such we gain a better insight into the moral traditions of a culture by understanding the normative influence of these institutions and roles in a culture.

The chapter first analyses social institutions and social role to underscore their significance in regulating behaviour and personal conduct. The analysis in the chapter showed that institutions are created for a reason, and that these reasons are linked to the ultimate goods and ends of a society. These envisioned and shared ends is what underpins the social norms that in turn places certain expectations and obligations of what is permissible and what is not on individual members of a society. This regulation of behaviour of moral agents in this way is part of the pursuit of fundamental goods of the wellbeing of the society or the common good. This is in part what ethics in that society will reflect, and hence why analysis of institutions and roles is relevant for current *botho* discourse and its theorisation about *botho*. The chapter showed that social institutions are relevant to ethics because they form part of the moral agents' self-understanding and identity and the latter plays an important role in determining conduct. The chapter therefore argued that, if a better understanding *botho* is to be achieved, the current *botho* discourse must take into consideration the larger social conditions that made ethics of *botho* possible, specifically the role and function played by traditional social institutions. This is because it is in part by unpacking how these influenced personal ethics and supported ethical imperatives of *botho*, that we can learn further the social conditions required to make *botho* a living ethic. This means that it is important to recognise that ethics of *botho*, as the habitual practice of certain values and virtues, is promoted by certain types of social institutions and endangered by others. As an ethic, the chapter argued that *botho* thus requires a specific type of social order to grow. Thus, the chapter argued that it is therefore hard to imagine an ethic like *botho*, becoming a predominant feature of way of life within the

cultures it was popular, without certain types of social institutions supporting and sustaining its existence.

The chapter showed that because social institutions fulfil certain intended functions and purposes, they achieve these through individuals as role bearers. In other words, it is individuals in their role as occupiers of social roles that to carry out the intended aims and goals that institutions are created. The analysis of traditional social roles thus showed that these have inbuilt widely agreed performance standards and obligations that apply to each role occupier. It also showed that as moral agents the social roles we inhabit and adhere to are not morally neutral. Many come with well-defined role-specific obligations, requirements and constraints which influence and determine the role occupier's actions and behaviour normatively. What this chapter also showed is that the relationship between social institutions and social roles is one of mutual presupposition, and that as such talking about one implies the other. The chapter thus argued that it is this interdependency of social institutions and social role in traditional societies or pre-modern culture of Basotho that in part played a key role in their moral life. This is because together these have a double binding effect on us agents in terms of adherence to basic social norms. This in turn enhanced the self-policing role moral agents have about living lives consistent with ethical imperatives of *botho*. But also, together these provide individuals with a vital continuing back-up of an ethically strong, supportive context to become moral. What this tells us is that the context i.e., moral universe that moral agents inhabit matter, social institutions and social roles feature prominently in this universe. The chapter therefore argued that morally weak contexts undermine and weaken the moral character of agents even of good ones. Similarly, morally strong contexts i.e., social context can do the opposite.

This complex web of relationship between institutions and roles the chapter has shown that it is relevant to ethical reflection including the current *botho* discourse. In the case of the latter, it showed that the implications or the failure to attend to this influence of social institutions that underpins and sustains the practice of virtues of *botho* as well as the character and actions of individuals who make it happen or role bearers, means such a reflection will be an impoverished one, always missing something essential to the understanding of the social requirements of *botho*. The reason for this, is that social institutions do not work on their own but by our consent or acceptance as moral agents. So ethical reflection cannot, therefore, be done without reference to social roles because these bestow the society and individuals with some rights and responsibilities, and dues owed, all which must be understood from an ethical point of view.

The chapter examined selected social institutions and social roles of the culture of Basotho starting with the institution of *motse* (village), its structure and organisation. It highlighted how traditional villages of Basotho were places where everything was done deliberately and in

good fellowship and revealed that this way of life is not an automatic thing, or come naturally, but that it is actively promoted, hence the importance of the village in this regard. The implications of this for the moral agent the chapter thus argued that this way of life is to be deliberately chosen, which brings it in the sphere of ethics. This is seen in how in a typical Basotho village, members regulated their conduct and relations with others in the light of the norms and standard that exist in the village. This is because within traditional villages of Basotho existed certain regularity in social behaviour to which all consent through custom and tradition and this specified acceptable conduct and behaviour. The chapter showed that adherence to these conducting influencing norms was often joint effort that is self-policed and also policed by other. The Basotho village thus displayed a certain consensus of mainly self-policing norms i.e., do's and don'ts and more specifically the "ought to's" about moral conduct. This gave the village, as a stable practical social system, a certain moral identity as an organisation with recognisable norms and social rules that guide conduct of its members. Further, we saw that this ensured social and moral equilibrium or balance which is important in African culture, but it also enhanced and protected the values and ideals of the village that made *botho* living a reality. Because of this status they enjoyed, traditional Basotho villages enjoyed moral authority that entrenched certain behaviour and moral values, now integrated into the moral culture of the Basotho. This includes scrupulous reverence to rules and norms reflecting virtues of *botho* such politeness and respect for others found in *litumeliso*, (greeting of others) and hospitality and generosity towards including to visitors, i.e., outsiders or strangers, as codified in the doctrine of "*O se re ho moroa, moroa toe*".

The chapter highlighted how this deep sense of respect and solidarity codified in norms and customs about generosity and sharing, is linked to an intense sense of belonging, mutual care and responsibility towards others embedded in Sesotho culture. Here the chapter showed that traditionally every Mosotho felt obligated and responsible for their neighbour" and their wellbeing. This high regard for responsibility and accountability for one another in their villages meant that one was liable to be punished for any crime of his neighbour, and the village was collectively responsible for each one of its inhabitants. The chapter highlighted that it was this communal accountability and mutual responsibility found in Basotho villages and shared accountability for the welfare and conduct of others that ensured a high degree of generosity and hospitality as the hallmarks of their village living. This, in turn, played a key role in sustaining the practices and habitual acts *botho* by encouraging individuals to aspire towards inculcation and acquisition of virtues and dispositions of *botho* related to these values. Among these habitual acts the village used to assess one's satisfactory progress in inculcating the values *botho* i.e., makhabane including virtues such as tlhompho, (deep respect and politeness) includes simple gestures such as *litumeliso*, greeting of others when you meet them. So, the chapter showed that the practice of *litumeliso* as found in Basotho villages

expressed the deep respect Basotho valued of treating the other as a person, and this is at the heart of what *botho* means. For this reason, in Sesotho culture *litumeliso* as an expression of virtues of politeness and respect, is among the key indicators of measuring performance relating to *botho*. It was thus one of the common standards used in evaluating how welcoming a village is, how good its people are and how well brought its children are.

The chapter also showed that as an institution the village is more than just its sociology but also an embodiment of a moral tradition which embraces certain norms and values peculiar and important to that village. As such a village is a custodian of a moral tradition, i.e., set of moral and ethical regularities, and behavioural norms that have emerged organically over time, which in turn inform and influence the behaviour of its members. When viewed this way, the village in Sesotho culture thus has a specific characteristic activity, which is the creation of *batho bao e le batho*, (creation of individual who are persons) and in doing so make it possible for the moral agent to live up to the imperatives and ideals of *botho*.

Besides the village, the chapter analysed *lelapa* and *leloko* (the family) as another important social institution of Basotho. Here attention was drawn to the difficulties of translation the Sesotho concept of family as expressed in a network of relationships found in *lelapa* and *leloko*. Those relationships the chapter showed can be summed in the Sesotho expression "*ho amana*" which means relatedness, and that this encompassed a wide range of relations transcending normal family and blood relations to include those relationships one gains by *liboko* (tribal emblems/totems) or the main descent groupings of the Basotho or even place of origin. We saw that this intense sense towards being related and belonging found expression through a broad interpretation of "*ho amana*" ranging from close inner circle as found in the family, extending ever outwards to the extended family, the clan, to one's village. The chapter showed that the bond of belonging and social ties involved in *lelapa* and *leloko* stretched beyond the normal confines of family belonging as understood in the narrow sense of the term in the West. It instead encompasses many more sets of networks of belonging and relationships than ordinarily implied in families in the West. It also became clear that each of these relationships come with their own obligations and responsibility owed to others. These in turn heavily shaped and determined conduct and how individuals behaved towards one another but also how they live their lives. In other words, these relationships changed the way individuals as moral agents conducted themselves not just occasionally but as matter of how to conduct oneself as a way of life. This is because this deep sense of family solidarity and belonging required of family members to value and prioritise the bond of belonging, i.e., relatedness no matter how distant, as no less deserving of the moral agent's time and nurturing as those relations with immediate family members. One of the implications to the individual is that it was therefore expected that the individual is to nurture these familial relationships, starting with knowing all of one's relatives by name, both seniors and juniors

and wherever possible visit them. This practice can still be seen today in the common practice of going home annually for many Basotho outside Lesotho. Central to these visits is the expectation to visit all relatives. Failure to do this is often a source of many family frictions, some even leading to serious fall outs require serious interventions like a family meeting.

The chapter showed that in Sesotho culture the family i.e., both the primary and extended families is always heavily loaded with customs and tradition, both of which have a binding effect that place normative obligations on individuals as moral agents. This is particularly the case with many social roles found in the family, that place certain obligations on those who occupy those roles, not in the short term but for the rest of one's life as the occupant of a particular social role within the family. This leads to one of the most ethically significant social institutions of Basotho, namely *lenyalo* (marriage).

That chapter also analysed marriage (*lenyalo*) showing that among the institutions of Basotho none has so much impact on behaviour and personal ethics than this and through the complex network of obligatory relationships and social roles it introduces and confers on individuals as moral agents. We saw how with marriage a whole new set of familial obligations and duties is set in motion for a variety newly assumed social roles by a wide range of people, whom until then did not occupy many of these roles. We saw that with the bond of relationship of marriage in place, one becomes an in law to new families with a whole range of obligations, duties and social behaviour develop on account of this role. Similarly, with roles of daughters in laws or son in laws, and many other social roles that come with marriage, we see permanent and lasting expected behaviour that come into being formalised as expected i.e. normative way of conduct for those involved. This becomes from then onwards part of a way of live for those concerned and what they ought to do. Here we saw that no social institutions in Sesotho culture express better the value Basotho place on belonging and relatedness and bonds of friendship than in the social institution of *lenyalo* (marriage). This is because in it is the realisation of the extension of families ties and bond of belonging and friendship beyond blood relatives. In this sense *lenyalo* is no different from the family, because it is the inner most unit of the family. But it is nevertheless a distinct institution from the family because it comes with its own new parameters of obligations due to the addition of new members to the family i.e., the in-laws. This causes the review of existing family norms and obligations, duties, and rights that individuals have. So, as well as having its own norms and obligations internal to marriage as an agreement between two families, as an institution marriage therefore sets in motion a whole new set of relationships among family members and in laws. What the chapter showed is that all these relationships stipulated and conferred new social roles on individuals, and these come with their own obligations and responsibilities. They informed and shaped conduct as part individual's personal ethics, hence their relevance to ethics and current discourse on *botho* ethics.

The chapter showed that marriage thus is a unique expansion of *ho amana i.e.*, relatedness and belonging in Sesotho culture that founded fellowship and solidarity transcending blood relations, and that this come with certain duties and obligations that have influence on conduct and personal ethics, in terms what was now expected of one due to these new relationships. We saw that with marriage those in a bond of relationship on account marriage thus owed each other accountability about the status of that marriage. As such anyone involved could be held accountable to hold others to account if it is felt they are not living up their obligations by virtue of being related. This expanded network of relatedness thus enjoined individuals in a materially significant way where now they owe one another dues of family belonging and friendliness by marriage. The chapter showed that among Basotho this usually manifests itself in the exceptional moral weight freighted on the labyrinth of relationships typically around these institutions. Much of this moral weight is because of the newly created relationship of *ho amana* (relatedness) as well as new roles that individuals will now have to occupy all which come into existence when a marriage agreement is entered into.

That chapter also showed that the complex set of relationships of *ho amana* in Sesotho culture can thus be understood as the explication of the associated and sometimes implicit social roles found in institutions such as marriage or the family and village. This is because these relationships denote a certain way those who bear these roles “ought” to conduct themselves vis-à-vis those they are related to. Here the chapter highlighted the variety of social roles found in Sesotho culture showing how often these are based of different social groupings and correlates with different institutions where they are often called upon. Among some of the common roles discussed includes *motho e moholo* (adult person), *mohaisani* (neighbour), *Bo 'M'e or basali* (mothers and adult women) and *Bo-Ntate or banna* (fathers and adult men), *bana* (children), in-laws or *bakhotsi* and ngoan'e moholo, firstborn and “*ngoana'ofela*” ,last born.

The chapter showed that as individuals our relationship with social institutions is never just *qua* individuals, but that such engagement is always as bearers of specific roles as given of life. It also showed that common to these roles is the expectations and obligations that they imply which in turn influence personal conduct and is taken into consideration in the assessment of one's moral goodness and here we can include the possession of *botho* too. Here the chapter showed that in Sesotho culture many of their social roles imposed certain responsibilities and duties and that it is in the fulfilment of the duties of these roles that behaviour of moral agent is moderated and regulated. In this way social roles are interlinked with ethics because they influence conduct in certain ways which were meant to be consistent with values of *botho*. It is for this reason that the argument of this chapter is that the influence of social roles on agents must be a consideration in the reflection on *botho* ethics and how the concept is analysed and understood.

The chapter argued that the fulfilment of the duties of social roles in Basotho society in part created the necessary social conditions that regulated individual's behaviour. This is also in part, responsible for the emergence and proliferation of many of the social practices and features that characterised Basotho culture such that it was fundamentally conducive and ideal for the practice of *botho* ethics as a way of life. This includes promotion of corresponding behaviours such as a deep sense of solidarity, concern with other's wellbeing associated with community life, generosity, kindness, politeness accountability for one another and all the core elements that enable community living.

The analysis made in the chapter also showed that these institutions and roles such as these found in Sesotho culture, are themselves part of a larger complexes of resources in a society that fulfil some larger end or set of ends of the society. In African culture the pursuit of this larger end and set of ends of a society manifests itself in what has come to be regarded as the characteristic way of life found in their culture. The chapter contended that it is these characteristics ways of living including of thinking about ethics that in Sesotho culture constitutes the social and cultural milieu and characteristics features of Basotho way of life, that provided traditional Mosotho a with supportive and enabling environment conducive to *botho* ethics. The chapter gave an account of this analysing their manifestation within the context of Sesotho culture, even though these are also found in other African cultures as well. It highlighted key features of a selected number of these in the Basotho way of life showing how they were regarded as important because among other things they under pinned ethics and understanding of personal conduct in Sesotho culture. Among these key features the chapter discussed the religious dimension of ethics in Sesotho culture as one such important feature. It showed how the consciousness of the sacred, i.e., the strong religious belief, which is common in African culture, played a key role in Sesotho culture as part of their moral culture. The chapter showed that in Sesotho culture like many pre-modern cultures, the notion of a secular morality or a conception of ethics purely in secular terms does not exist and that such a concept would be unintelligible. In this sense, traditional moral culture of Basotho bears close resemblance to many pre-modern cultures where this separation of ethics and religion was non-existent.

Another feature that the chapter looked at is the priority of the common good and the community. Here the analysis showed that in the culture of Basotho the idea of the common good is the edifice around which social and moral wheel of Basotho culture revolved. Thus, we saw that this is the underlying consideration that informed the way Basotho lived and in turn the rationale behind the high regard of many of the practices they practiced. Of particular significance here are practices in their culture that encouraged sharing, solidarity and a sense of responsibility and accountability for others. The chapter thus argued that it is because of the concern with the common good that we find that every Mosotho felt obligated and

responsible morally and socially for their neighbour” and why one would be punished for any crime of their neighbour, and the whole village was collectively responsible for each one of its inhabitants. It is this intense sense of oneness that also inform the understanding of a person in Sesotho culture, which is defined in terms of social identity.

The chapter examine the understanding of person identity as another important characteristic way of life in Sesotho culture. It showed that like many pre-modern cultures, in Sesotho culture, moral agents identified themselves through membership including that of *lelapa*, *leloko* and the village. In other words, personal identity of the moral agent in Sesotho culture the chapter showed that this was understood primarily in terms of a person’s social identity and membership of the family and the village i.e., community belonging. The chapter discussed how social identity understood in this way is part of the understanding that informed and influenced personal conduct and ethics and that this includes the application and practice of *botho* by the individual. The chapter thus argued that any attempt to reject social identity i.e., social belonging or community membership, as some modern people try, is not only an illusion that is at one’s own peril, but to do this is a serious existential crisis and confusion to the meaning of our lives and a crisis of identity and belonging. Here the chapter argue that this conception of the self-underpins *botho* and must inform the current *botho* discourse as moral qualification of *motho*, best captured in African moral thought in the idea of the morally ideal person. Thus the central argument of this chapter is that the conception of *botho* as a normative concept in Sesotho culture cannot be properly theorised, without reference to the social support structures in the community that supports and making it easier for individuals with the ontological assumptions and underlying basic assumptions with Sesotho culture that inform social and moral life. This the chapter argues is a challenge that needs serious consideration in current *botho* discourse. This leads to the general considerations and recommendation that this study is making in its conclusions which is the focus of the next and final chapter of this study.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Conclusion

In this thesis I have foregrounded *botho* as an undervalued quality of character in the current *botho* discourse and challenged the dominance of Afro-communitarianism as one specific reading of *botho* over other equally justified, interpretations of this concept. I argued that *botho* is a polysemic moral concept that cannot be explicated in just one way. I also challenged the over reliance of this dominant interpretation on the use of proverb “*motho ke motho ka batho*” to explain the ideals enshrined in *botho*. I have questioned Afro-communitarianism interpretation of *botho* where this concept and this proverb are often (sloppily) treated as synonyms and disposed the association of this proverb with *botho*, as flawed unsubstantiated exceptionalism not supported by evidence. I have in turn pursued a redefinition of *botho* based on its usage and meaning as found in Sesotho culture where it is used as moral term describing good and morally admirable person, more specifically their moral character. I showed the authenticity of this formulation as grounded in its consistency with the earlier pre-1990s usage of this word in Southern Africa where it is used exclusively to describe admirable character of a person. This is also an account that validates the reinstatement of character in ethics, which has seen a growing resurgence in recent years which this study is advocating for in current *botho* discourse. The study has shown that the neglect of questions of moral character of persons in the analysis of *botho* in current *botho* discourse, echoes similar trend in modern ethics, where until recently character as a vital moral concept was relegated to the periphery of ethical reflection and discourse.

In this study I have shown that when *botho* is understood in terms of descriptions of moral character, it means it is in part the sort of thing that *motho* (person) works towards and acquires as part of training in character through moral formation and growth. It will also be clear that as such this concept must be understood as a description of the moral quality of a person reflecting who the person is morally. When understood this way the concept thus expresses a moral statement, assessing the satisfactory progress a person is therefore making or not making in inculcating values and virtues regarded as morally admirable and in turn essential for a personhood i.e., for a person to be considered *motho* (person). It is in this sense that in Sesotho culture this moral term is always used to describe a process of maturation by *motho* towards personhood (*botho*) and inculcation of *makhabane* or virtues of *botho*.

Since *botho* as moral term is fundamentally evoked in the context of moral assessment describing an acceptable progress made by a person in accumulating good moral qualities, it is important to recognise that these qualities are an essential part of what is regarded as a

person's character, specifically the roundedness of character i.e., overall excellence in inculcating '*makhabane a botho*' (virtues of *botho*). This is why in Sesotho culture *botho* is always connected to admirable moral character. It is also important to realise that the proper foundation of the communitarian orientation of *botho*, is grounded in character. This is because morally admirable character entails inculcation, as part of one's character, good moral qualities which in turn shape and influence behaviour. A closer look at many of the qualities shows that they are communal in nature and not individualistic. In this sense I argue that the character centric account of *botho* advocated here is the most attractive account of *botho* as an ethic of virtue because it articulates both the personal dimension of *botho* i.e., in terms of inculcation of admirable moral qualities of character at a personal level, which speak to the personal dimension of *botho*, and communal dimensions of *botho* i.e., in terms of the communal orientation of these qualities to be inculcated and displayed in relation to conduct towards others. The study argues that this reimagined interpretation of *botho* advocated is best understood through a more systematic analysis of the moral term '*bophoofolo*' and the moral statement '*ha se motho*' along with other key moral terms in Sesotho culture. These two express a negative description of *botho*, which is another important way of elucidating the meaning of the concept. Among the other key moral terms relevant in the analysis and better understanding of *botho*, the study specifically highlights the key moral term *setho* which in Sesotho culture is essential for grasping the meaning of *botho*. The study has thus shown that this approach to the analysis of *botho* gives a new insight namely that a proper way to approach the analysis of *botho* is in terms of an understanding of the virtues it encourages and vices it discourages.

While the immediate focus of the study is the critique and appraisal of current *botho* discourse, it is mindful of the broader context expressing concerns with inadequacies of modern Western ethics, concerns which this study also shares. This is the focus of chapter one and two of the study. But as it will have become clear the study is also a critical appraisal of the approach of current *botho* discourse in the light of the need for reinstalment of character as represented in the reimagined character centric account of *botho* the study is advocating for. This account is presented in this study thus as an approach worthy of serious consideration by current *botho* discourse. The study contends that this approach is a promising alternative offering great potential to broadening existing discourse, because it opens up new insights on ethical reflection of *botho* from a specific cultural perspective of one of the cultures from which this concept applied and derives. Chapter one of the study is therefore the elaboration of this argument and hypothesis of the study. It serves as the foregrounding of the substantive argument for the redefinition of *botho* that this study proposes. It also gives the broad outlines of the central argument behind this study which includes the critique of current *botho* discourse, debunking the unsubstantiated claims emanating from the exceptionalism

conferred on *motho ke motho ka batho* (MKKB) and its association with *botho*. It highlights the problem in the tendency of the current discourse to treat *botho* and this proverb as if one presupposes the other or the two are synonymous. It also challenges the tendency to describe this proverb as the summation of African communalism and therefore quintessential expression of traditional values encapsulated by *botho*.

The chapter presents the study as counter argument to prevailing views in current *botho* discourse using the experience of Basotho culture and the authors knowledge of Sesotho culture including of the use of Sesotho narratives which are important vehicles for moral education into virtue. It calls for a proper and more authentic use and analysis of this proverb as part of the unity African narratives arguing for adherence to rules of interpretation internal and applicable to narratives. It further contends that a closer analysis of this proverb will thus show that the ethical imperatives it implies are fundamentally concerned with mutual aid, mutual care, communal solidarity and concern with the wellbeing of the other. This theme is consistent with many similar proverbs and narratives in Sesotho culture, and often enacted in many of their social practices. The chapter thus challenges the predominant reading of this proverb primarily as a statement about personhood and or humanity. This we have suggested is an academic invention, inspired possible by close association of this proverb with the slogan 'I am because we are'. When this slogan is read against the Cartesian dictum "I think, therefore I am", which is intentionally a response to, the difference is evident with *motho ke motho ka batho*, whose primary focus is mutual aid in communal living.

The chapter thus reframes afresh the key question in the current discourse from focus on characterisations of what is meant by *botho*, to a consideration of questions of character. It shifts attention to the question: if *botho* is a moral description of *motho*, as the central claim of this thesis implies, what exactly in a *motho* is *botho* referring to? The chapter gives a preview of the answer which is discussed in detailed in chapter five by suggesting that the answer to this question is to be found in the direction of qualities of moral character, specifically descriptions of *motho* and about admirable character of person. The chapter lays the foundation for the substantive argument about the primacy of character found in chapter four as reflected in the statement 'ke *motho* ea nang le *botho*', meaning a person who possess qualities required by *botho*.

In the context of current *botho* discourse, this emphasis and formulation of *botho* is an important contribution that broadens the discourse. This is because it introduces an important dimension and articulation of *botho* that focus on persons and specifically on personal goal of wholeness of character. Compared to current discourse, which emphasis an impersonal goal of relationships, this study is therefore not only an interesting approach to the subject, but also a different formulation of *botho*. It is an approach that cast *botho* in new light as a polysemic moral ideal and pinnacle of virtues, whose expression as found in the moral thought and

practice of Sesotho speaking culture should be understood primarily in terms of training in character. The reimagined interpretation of *botho* it advances, which focuses on the character of *motho*, expresses an important moral ideal in Sesotho culture and that is the notion of *makhabane*, i.e., cultivation of good qualities of character. This, in Sesotho culture is central to an understanding of ethics including *botho* and is presented here as a better alternative account of *botho*, because it makes this description of *botho* a more personal attribute compared to the current descriptions that place emphasis on communal relations. The attractiveness and uniqueness of this formulation is thus in its ability to better capture and express the personal dimension of *botho* which is found in its emphasis on training in character it implies. This personal dimension of *botho* is not emphasised much in the current discourse and yet the nature of *botho* is such that it is as much a personal ethic as it is a communal ethic. These two basic dimensions presupposes each other and the over emphasis of one over the other is an injustice to the uniqueness of *botho* and diminishes its value.

In chapter two the study analyses contemporary moral environment, as the dominant moral culture today influencing ethical approaches including contemporary moral attitude in Africa. The chapter gives a critical overview and critique of the moral culture of modern societies and the predominant influences informing contemporary moral attitudes. It is an overview of concerns with modern ethical approaches and the inadequacies associated with modern Western ethics including Christian ethics. It analyses the nature and character of modern Western ethics showing that both in its secular and religious forms i.e., Western Christian ethics and Western ethics, modern ethics still bears the hallmarks of European culture and first world culture from where it originates. The chapter thus showed that modern ethics has not changed its individualistic and globalising orientation, even as it becomes the predominant ethos in other cultures including in many African cultures today. In many post traditional societies, such as that of Sesotho speaking culture now the feature of many communities in Southern Africa, this has created moral challenges and a crisis of values many are now worried about. This is mainly because of its values of First World culture it embodies most profoundly in its liberal ethics and individualism, where choice is given moral priority. We saw that this is increasingly experienced by many of these post-traditional communities as a catalyst to the sense of moral vacuum and perceived decay in the moral fibre of their cultures. Among most African cultures, contemporary moral culture is so unsatisfactory that it is characterized by some a worrying moral predicament, that has left individuals and communities alike morally uncertain, confused, and unsure of what values to hold. Among those cultures of Southern African traditionally associated with *botho* ethics, the emergence of the autonomous moral sovereign individual who is accountable to no one except by choice, that has come with modern ethics, has created a dilution of common moral frame of reference and chaos of moral values as each person can now pursue their own idea of what it is good.

In societies like that of the Basotho the influence and introduction of western values and beliefs through Christianity and modernity, has torn apart traditional morality which engendered a sense of shared values and objective moral authority. This has made living out many of the traditional values associated with *botho* ethics much more difficult if not impossible. The growing embracing of inherent individualism of Western ethics, which over-emphasizes what differentiates people more than what they have in common has thus left some who know African culture well deeply concern at the direction contemporary ethics is taking and the effect of this on communities and African society. Of particular concern is the emphasis on separateness of people through the promotion of individual autonomy and choice that modern ethics endorses. This has placed at the foreground of ethical reflection what differentiates us as moral agents in way that is detrimental to having a shared set of values presupposed by *botho* ethics. This is one of the reasons behind the growing concerns among some African scholars about the moral crisis African societies are facing as result of such influences on personal ethics and conduct in Africa today. Among some of these concerns is the continued lack of emphasis on questions of the cultivation of good qualities of character, as essential for the creation of good people and members of community, in favour of individual autonomy and choice.

Against this, the chapter has shown that there is now a strong argument for a change in thinking in the understanding of ethics. That change requires ethical reflection that transcends the current focus on rules and principles of right and wrong, and actions of individuals of modern ethical approaches. Instead ethics and here scholars of *botho* can play a leading role, should focus on individuals as moral agents and specifically on the quality of their character and how society and communities can support individual in being ethical. For those advocating this approach and change, it means attention of ethics should be on the formation of personal character and moral identity of individuals as moral agents. This is not only because that is what ethics is all about, i.e., who we are and what we ought to be, but also because as moral agents we approach moral decisions i.e., answer questions of right and wrong in terms of the persons we are and our social identity as moral agents and hence the argument that this should be the preoccupation of ethics.

The central contention of this study implied in this chapter is therefore that it is time that ethical reflection especially in Africa, transcends the confines of moral tradition of the Western ethical approaches. The reason is because there is every indication that the moral tradition of that culture like all moral cultures is not perfect and the signs are in some important respect it is ethically impoverished. This has led to growing moral disquiet about the inadequacies of modern ethics and concerns with the weaknesses of its approach to moral. This is seen not only in Africa but elsewhere as well. In Africa thus we see the consequences of this in the new movement revisiting element of traditional morality. It is within this context the current *botho*

discourse must be interpreted. From the perspective of African ethics, the renewed interest in traditional ethics of *botho* in recent years is the vanguard of this movement and focus of this shift in southern Africa where in recent years there is renewed interest in revisiting the traditional moral ideal of *botho*.

In chapter three this study underscores the relevance and currency of *botho* highlighting the vast material being produced on this topic as evidence. The chapter thus suggested this show that it can now be said with a confidence that it is not yet the end for *botho* project or industry but indeed “it’s just the beginning”. The chapter analyses the current understanding and articulation of *botho* in the current discourse and the ethos it stands. It gives a critical but not exhaustive appraisal of current *botho* discourse, giving an account of the current debates found around this *botho*. It showed that while these debates underline the enthusiasm around *botho* they are also a reflection that there is still lack of consensus around the concept. There are those who are enthusiastic about *botho* and there are those that either are sceptical or not in agreement with the predominant view of *botho* as represented by its main protagonists leading the current *botho* discourse. The analysis of these debates shows that there are those scholars who interpreted *botho* primarily in terms of a phenomenon and those that see it as moral quality of person. We saw that the former, especially its Afro-communitarian formulation is currently the dominant view and as such it is the focus of the critique of this chapter but also of this study.

As an interpretation of *botho* Afro-communitarianism we saw that it can be described as an account of *botho* grounded on an understanding of *botho* in terms of its communal dimension with emphasis on harmonious relationships. This formulation we saw that it is premised on the unsubstantiated and mistaken connection of *botho* to the proverb *motho ke motho ka batho ba bang*, and the interpretation of this proverb thereof. Thus according to this account this proverb now exclusively translated as “a person is person through other person” is similarly interpreted as enjoining the individual to be a better person or find their true self through participation in these relationships with others. The chapter argued that current *botho* discourse including Afro-communitarianism has thus not offered any clearer definition of the meaning of “*botho*” itself as a concept and moral term. Instead the discourse is satisfied to continue to invoke this concept from the safety of its three-pronged safety net: first that by claiming that *botho* and *ubuntu* mean the same thing, second that this concept is difficult to translate into English, and finally that it features in the proverb *motho ke motho ka botho*.

The chapter showed the danger of reducing the meaning of *botho* as a moral ideal to an interpretation and analysis of one single proverb. The problem with this approach the chapter pointed out, is that even if the connection was justifiable, which it is not, this would still be just one way of elucidating values of *botho*, not the only one. This is because the explanation and meaning of such a complex polysemic ideal as *botho* cannot be reduced to one explanation

in the way this proverb is being used to. The chapter demonstrated that this amounts to equating *botho* to this proverb, which is incorrect. But it is also to misunderstand the nature of *botho* as polysemic moral ideal. The chapter showed that such ideals are best described in multiplicity of ways and approaches, hence their refusal to be confined to reductionist definitions. The chapter further pointed that the unsubstantiated exceptionalism of this proverb in the current discourse is also a problem because it suggests poor knowledge of African narratives and their use thereof in unity, which offers a rich resource for moral education that is ideal for explicating *botho*. In addition, such exceptionalism gives this proverb a false independence from how narratives are used and interpreted. This leaves this proverb open to uncontextual usage where it can easily be analysed in abstract by being theorised apart from its natural context found in its unity with other proverbs and narratives. The problem with this, the argued is that this further entrenches the tendency to use this proverb together with *botho* resulting among other things in a situation where this proverb now somehow ends up being understood as having something to do with personhood. We have seen that in Sesotho culture from which this proverb originates, the articulation of personhood, expressed in this proverb is in fact articulated in the moral statement '*ha se motho ea nang le botho*' meaning a person who has no *botho*. It is also the preserve of the moral term '*bophoofolo*' which we explained describe a behaviour befitting a beast not a person. We argued that it is in these that the explanation of *botho* in terms of personhood is properly found in its clearest way than in *motho ke motho ka batho*.

The chapter is also a challenge on current *botho* discourse and that is the claim commonly made that there are other similar terms and ideas like *botho* in other African cultures in sub-Saharan Africa that express the same meaning as *botho*. While there is the case that there are many commonalities in African culture, it is important nevertheless to be cautious not to draw parallels that are too close on these different terms in the different cultures. This is because as we showed in the case of *botho* in Sesotho culture that although the concept probably expresses the same general idea with *ubuntu* in Zulu culture, the story of both cultures i.e., historical and local context and experience out of which they emerged and thrived are different, and that as such it is not unlikely that the nuance of meaning and local application and emphasis in meaning is going to differ as well. The chapter argued that in their original cultural milieu or social settings of their respective cultures, these terms reflect a nuance in meaning in response to the unique context that provoke their usage and invocation. All this is context dependent as such it's unlikely the two words will have the same meaning in terms of practical application in a specific context. Thus this study has argued that such claims of equivalency should be made with care and caution should be exercised in treating these terms as having the same meaning. It is for this reason, that in this study the preference is made for

Sesotho moral term *botho* which denotes good behaviour specifically morally admirable character.

Chapter four of the study advocates for a redefinition of *botho*, to address both inadequacy of contemporary moral culture and modern Western ethics and the resultant moral disquiet behind calls for a revisiting of elements of traditional African morality as a solution. The chapter present this interpretation of *botho* primarily described in terms of the traditional understanding of the term as moral quality of a person as can be found in the moral thought and practice of Basotho where the primacy of character features prominently in their moral culture. The chapter uses the moral experience of Basotho culture as a case study and shows that this reimagined account of *botho* is consistent with how this concept was used traditionally in Southern Africa, prior to its current and more recent usage. Thus, we see in the analysis of this chapter how the preoccupation with good character permeates all aspect of the social and moral life of traditional Basotho. The chapter thus showed that one of the most explicit ways in which Basotho emphasised the importance of character to moral life is found in many of their ceremonies and social practices marking key life events and stages of a person. To understand the significance of the character in the moral culture of Basotho chapter gave an account of the social practices of Basotho the reflect priority of character in moral education. These social practices are better summarised here if recounted in a linear fashion of a journey to personhood from childhood to adulthood.

One of the insights into Basotho culture that we get in this study, which cast light on *botho* and its connection to character, is how primacy of character is the focal point of moral formation from very early on in the life of a person. As a result, this features prominently in many of these rituals starting with *kuruetso* rituals during childhood to *lebollo* when a person enters adulthood. The central theme of these ceremonies and practices is to secure good with good character of their members. So, we see that in those in those rituals performed for new-born babies, that having a good moral character was celebrated and promoted as a central part of the ceremony or ritual. Here the chapter showed that the choice of lead person in many of these was based on their good character. The individual chosen to lead the baby in these activities the chapter showed that it had to be someone of great moral standing and adjudged to have all rounded moral character. The symbolism behind this was that the child would take after that person's character as well and in turn become a good person in adulthood. According to customary belief here good character and in turn *botho* therefore understood as something that can be moulded onto to the character of the baby. So, what see here through these rituals is how essential they are regarded as part of moral formation and as shown for Basotho is focused primarily on development of good character.

This showed the Basotho's understanding of moral formation where we find that the goal is training in character i.e., creation of '*batho bao e leng batho*', -individuals who are going to be

good members of the community in the future. The analysis showed that moral education and formation in Sesotho culture was done both through formal and non-formal education means. For the latter we find that the preferred vehicle of choice for carrying out teaching and training in character was through narratives in addition to community moral exemplars. Of importance here the chapter highlighted are a stock of stories in Sesotho narratives called *litšomo* (folktales). The chapter analysed a selected *litšomo* to illustrate the use of these in moral education with focus on training in character formation. What the chapter also showed is that in addition, stories are still the best means of moral education into virtues of *botho*. This is because story more than any other medium of education far outweighs any methods in illuminating the inexhaustibility of values and virtues of *botho*. Their utility as vehicles for clearly explaining *botho* as an ethical ideal, in different contexts that vary in terms of culture and background is highlighted in the chapter as one of the strengths of *litšomo* and storytelling. The chapter thus argued that they are thus ideal for explaining *botho* including beyond the borders of its cultural origins and context from which the concept derives. Here I argued that the relevance and significance of the narrative dimension to education in the virtues implied in *botho* and African ethics so far appear to have attracted little or no interest of *botho* scholars in spite of this being recognised as an obvious necessity and their suitability as ideal vehicles to explicate the ideals of *botho* because of its polysemic nature as a moral ideal.

The chapter showed that the prominence of character in ethics in Sesotho speaking culture is further corroborated by the analysis of key moral terms in their moral language and the traditional moral scheme of Basotho. What this analysis showed is that in Sesotho culture virtues are understood in the light of the vices that a person must avoid as part of their character formation and development. Similarly, we find that when Basotho speak of *botho* there is always implied reference to what it is not i.e., failure to make good progress in acquiring *botho*. The chapter explains that in Sesotho culture this is often expressed in two ways; in the moral term “*bophoofolo*” and the statement ‘*ha se motho ea nang le botho*’; often found in its shorter version the discourse as “*ha se motho*” (is not a person). In these descriptions the reference is to the failure to inculcate qualities of *botho* or *makhabane* (virtues). Here I have argued that the understanding is that the possession of these qualities, typically reveals themselves in who we are as moral agents and that this is more specifically in found in our character.

Another important insight we gained from this chapter about the understanding of *botho* in Sesotho culture is that *botho* is unintelligible without related key moral term of *setho*. This is because according to the traditional moral scheme of Basotho, *botho* is the fruits of *setho* in a *motho*. The analysis of the meaning of this concept showed that *setho* denotes the state of being human and that the is understood essentially in terms of human nature, but also that it has strong connections to cultural formation and socialisation in its meaning. The chapter

showed that in Sesotho culture *setho* thus denotes the person's origins, understood in terms of their cultural background and moral upbringing, where the latter is about character formation and development of the person. According to this *setho* is then the agency whose manifestation in *motho* is *botho*. In Sesotho culture this is typically understood in terms of personhood and is connected to and achieved through the inculcation of '*makhabane a botho*' (values and virtues of botho) where the aim is for these to be an integral part of the character of the person.

This chapter contextualises the importance of analysing *botho* from the cultural perspective of one of the cultures from which the term derives. Here Sesotho culture as such culture, is thus cast as one of the cultures that authentically can be invoked for finding an explanation of what *botho* means. The discussion on the experience of *botho* in Sesotho culture thus showed that the understanding of this concept i.e., in terms of good behaviour or manners, foreshadows the current prevailing interpretation of this concept in the discourse. It also shows that when they describe and defined *botho*, Basotho used moral language that denotes habitual conduct or behaviour. These includes statements like '*boits'oaro bo bottle*' which connotes good moral behaviour, or '*liketso tse ntle*' meaning good and morally admirable or commendable conduct. As this chapter has argued when behaviour and conduct is described and assessed with the view of the long term such as that implied in development of habits, that is when it refers to character i.e., how a person behaves in the light of their moral formation and development. It is in this sense that the chapter argues that the morality of Basotho is character centric and since *botho* is the whole point of moral formation i.e., accumulating qualities of *botho*, how it is understood will be connected to good character as well. This does not mean *botho* means good character, but that good character is a pathway to acquiring *botho* i.e., personhood. Implied in the above redefinition of *botho*, is reference to moral formation as key to Basotho culture in terms of ensuring their members acquire good moral character.

The significance of moral formation in Sesotho culture the chapter argues points to another important insight namely that for individuals to thrive in inculcating good admirable qualities of character, which *botho* presupposes, they require a particular social order or enabling social environment. This is the focus of chapter five where the analysis focuses on normative significance of social institutions and social roles to moral life in traditional Basotho culture. The central argument of this chapter is that social institutions have a moral influence on us as moral agents and that they dictate what we can and can't do. This they do by virtue of the social roles we occupy. The chapter thus argues that these institutions and roles that individuals occupy are relevant to ethics as part of the social order that support ethics i.e., regulating behaviour of individuals. The chapter contextualises this analysis by focusing on Sesotho culture showing that in Sesotho culture these institutions and roles supported the practice of *botho* and sustained its existence in the village and society at large. In other words,

they provided a traditional Mosotho with the necessary ethical resources and support infrastructure i.e., environment essential for moral agents to be ethical and to respond well to the process of training in character and moral development. What this means for *botho* discourse is recognition that morally weak contexts undermine and weaken the moral character of agents even of good ones. Similarly, morally strong contexts i.e., social context can do the opposite. For this reason, the ethical significance of social institutions and social roles is a necessity in any future discourse on *botho*.

The chapter thus analysed selected key institutions of Basotho along with their corresponding social roles. It showed how this network of relationships implied by institutions and roles has inherent obligations on individuals and that these obligations influence and shape personal conduct in similar ways as ethics. The key social institutions analysed included the traditional Basotho village (*motse*), *lelapa* and *leloko*, both which are translated as family and extended family, and *lenyalo* (marriage). All these institutions have explicit and implicit obligations and responsibility for individuals who are members based on the nature of the relationships they have with others. Common to all these we can mention the deep sense of solidarity and belonging required of anyone involved in these relationships. Individuals were expected to value, hence the high priority Basotho place of the bond of belonging, i.e., relatedness no matter how distant, and no less deserving of the moral agent's time and nurturing as those relations with immediate family members. We saw that this solidarity with others in Sesotho culture extended from the inner most circle of members in the institutions of marriage to the outer most circles the community of the village and beyond to include visitors and travellers or strangers. Here we saw how Basotho adhered scrupulously to rules and norms of politeness, hospitality and generosity towards others, especially outsiders or strangers, as codified in the doctrine of "*o se re ho moroa, moroa toe*".

The chapter emphasised how as individual moral agents our relationship with social institutions is therefore never just *qua* individuals. Rather that we all engage with these and with one another as bearers of specific roles and how these roles constitute the given of our life. It showed that all social roles have in common is the expectations and obligations they impose on role occupiers and this in turn influence personal conduct. It also showed that in Sesotho culture many social roles enforce certain responsibilities and duties and that it is in the fulfilment of the duties of these roles that the behaviour of moral agent is moderated and regulated. In this way social roles are interlinked with ethics because they influence conduct in certain ways. We thus saw that it is in this sense that fulfilment of the duties of social roles e.g. social role of *mohaisane* (neighbour), that it is in part taken into consideration in the assessment of one's moral goodness i.e., in deciding if the person is a good neighbour or not. This in turn become part of the consideration in the assessment of a person regarding whether they possess *botho*.

Another important insight gained from the analysis of the ethical significance of social roles and institutions in Sesotho culture, is that they are themselves part of a larger complexes of social support structures and resources in a society that fulfil some larger end or set of ends of the society. We saw that in many African cultures the pursuit of this shaped the character of African societies creating what is now often regard as the characteristic way of life found in African culture. This is the case with Basotho culture. Their way of life including day to day conduct was lived in the light of this larger end i.e., certain conception of a possible shared future, a future in which certain ways of living are already excluded while some seem inevitable. The chapter argued that in Sesotho culture this is what made their culture to be the way it is, to have the social context or socio-cultural milieu that it did and develop the characteristic features of Basotho way of life that they have. In turn this social setting provided traditional Mosotho with a supportive and enabling environment conducive to the practice of *botho* ethics. The chapter thus argued that it is in part on account of this that we find in Sesotho culture that many of the social practices and features of their life, are fundamentally in harmony with and are ideal for the practice of *botho* ethics as a way of life. Here we saw how features such the deep sense of solidarity, concern with other's wellbeing associated with the African community, generosity, kindness, politeness and mutual accountability for one another and all the core elements that enable community living, together provided the individual mosotho with the necessary social setting to find it easy to practice values and virtues associated with *botho*. It is this that in Sesotho culture constitutes the social and cultural milieu and characteristics features of Basotho way of life, that provided traditional Mosotho a with supportive and enabling environment conducive to *botho* ethics.

The chapter gave a brief account of selected features in Sesotho culture considered conducive and necessary support to the practice of *botho*. These included social identity and community membership, the religious underpinning of life in African culture, the community as the custodian of moral formation and traditions of the culture, and the high regard of the common good. These ideals and features, which were central to the traditional life of Basotho provided the necessary communal and social support to the individual as amoral agent to be ethical i.e., find it easy to practice values of *botho*. They all had the joint effect of supporting the social and moral life of the individual especially in training in character and development of good admirable character, which in turn is essential for practice of *botho* ethics as the predominant ethical approach in Sesotho culture.

The investigation of *botho* in the experience and moral life of traditional Basotho that this study has done, has shown in their culture the *botho* is understood as the encapsulation of virtues. The study has in turn argued that the proper arena of the virtues and vices is character. In this sense the study is a validation of description of *botho* in terms of character. This account of *botho*, as we saw is not only consistent with traditional usage of the word in Southern Africa

but also underscores the case for the reinstatement a character to the centre of discourse about *botho*. The study thus makes a general case for moral character as an important consideration in assessing the moral standing of an individual. This is because this is what is meant when we say a person has *botho* i.e., they have shown excellence in cultivating good admirable qualities, qualities which as explained are always understood as the reflection of moral character. It is for this reason that this study concludes that questions of character must be brought back to the centre of *botho* discourse if our understanding of *botho* is to become a reality with practical application to personal conduct and moral life of individuals today.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

One of the contributions that this study makes to current discourse is in expanding current conception of *botho* as not only a moral concept but also that as a moral concept *botho* is highly polysemic moral ideal. Although material on this topic is constantly being produced, this must not be construed as suggesting that the project of scholarly inquiry into the depth of *botho* as moral idea is now complete. As moral ideal *botho* is inexhaustibly rich as an articulation of values and virtues and so are the cultures from which it is traditionally associated with.

### **6.2.1 On the Ethical Significance of Moral Particularities**

To deepen and broaden existing knowledge on this concept this study recommends further studies on this topic and the adoption a similar approach taken here i.e., conducting of research focusing on the articulation and elucidation of the ethical imperatives of *botho*, from the moral particularity and perspective of a specific culture, in the case of this study the Sesotho culture. Of particular interest here are the moral traditions of the various Sesotho language speaking cultures and their Nguni counterparts in Southern African. It is the contention of this study that the approach of the current discourse, which starts the theorisation of this concept from the general and advance from there apply this universally on *botho* as a concept, needs the complementary approach provided by the particularity of its articulation and interpretation in concrete contexts unique to the various cultures that *botho* is traditionally associated with. This is because within the unique diversity of these cultures from which *botho* is practiced, is a wealth of insights about *botho* buried deep in the uniqueness of each culture. And like a newly found rich archaeological site, each of these cultures are a deposit of archaeological significance requiring the discourse to careful and patiently excavate the deposit of *botho* embedded in them, attentive to each detail of nuance and fragment of meaning that is found within the culture. There is therefore a need for further research to excavate nuances of meaning of “*botho*”, of “ubuntu” and many other similar terms or

concepts in other cultures to “map out the entire landscape of ideas” and views about what these terms mean in their respective context and moral particularities of each individual culture which this concept is traditionally associated with.

Of relevance here is research on *botho* from the perspective of many of the communities from some of the cultures north of the Limpopo river, such as the Shona or Ndebele people in Zimbabwe, or the Lozi people of Zambia whose language share common heritage with that of Basotho. This will enable research to be more contextual and to articulate in-depth the moral views and ideas which “*botho*” or its equivalents terms represent in other cultures thus broadening current knowledge base and providing the discourse with even better understanding of the concept.

### **6.2.2 On the Social Order Presupposed by *Botho***

As suggested in this study much has been written about *botho* in the literature but as it has already been acknowledged by others, scholarly inquiry into this topic is just getting started. And nowhere is this more so than on the question of the ethical significance of the social order that is presupposed by *botho*. The significance of this is that it tells us that, in the pursuit of eternal moral aim of having in a society “*batho bao e leng batho* (individuals who are good people) or ‘*batho ba nang le botho*” (individuals who possess qualities of *botho*), the strength and quality of character of the *motho* (individual) alone, although necessary is not sufficient. For this goal to be achieved i.e., for *motho* to attaining the status of “being a good person” morally, requires sound ethical support structures, societal resources to support and reinforce the dispositions of character of the moral agent in his or her life and intentions towards the achievement of moral goodness and to make this possible. In societies like that of the Basotho, that social support system is realised in their social institutions and social roles within a culture, where these played a vital role in providing moral agents with much-needed enabling and supportive structures and resources to be ethical.

The implication of this for future studies is more research on the significance of social institutions and social roles to the practice of *botho* as a new area of interest for *botho* discourse. This is because as we have seen in this study ethics of *botho* presuppose a particular type of society or social order as well as corresponding institutions to make *botho* a reality and thrive. Therefore, more research is still needed focusing on this aspect of African culture, to find what type of social institutions and roles are conducive to and support *botho* and how these can be created for today’s context. Without a rigorous analysis of the of the social conditions that made *botho* ethics possible the seeming impracticality and illusiveness of *botho* as a living ethos, and questions of its suitability for today’s context will remain.

### **6.2.3 On the Significance of Narratives to *Botho* Discourse**

There is no aspect of the analysis of the articulation of *botho* examined in this study that is desperately in need of more research than significance of narratives as vehicles of moral education into values of *botho* and the crucial role they can play in explaining and articulating the values and virtues of *botho*. This study has shown the rich moral heritage of African culture embedded in narratives especially folk tales and proverbs and the power they possess to expound *botho* as polysemic moral ideal. The importance of the narrative dimension of virtue as expressed this study in relation to elucidation of *botho* is that it underscores the argument made in this study a full explanation of this concept in current *botho* discourse will remain an impoverished one until the discourse is able to giving a more systematic account of how this concept is described and explained in African narratives in their diversity and extensiveness as part of the analysis of this concept. Many of the cultures traditionally associated with *botho* have a wealth of narratives including their own stories such as like *litšomo* among the Basotho. These stories are laden with invaluable moral ideas and views of these cultures reflection about what is considered acceptable admirable and unacceptable ways of conduct within a culture. In turn this constitutes that which is encouraged and taught to members as essential to possession of *botho*. In other words, if we want to deepen current knowledge about *botho*, there is no better way of excavation the rich deposits of nuance of meaning and understanding of *botho* in the different cultures in southern African than investigating many narratives found in these cultures. In most of these narratives we find valuable and innumerable ways of defining and articulating the values and virtues encapsulated in *botho*. These insights are currently inaccessible to scholarship because so far, the discourse has not taken narratives as essential sources for illuminating knowledge on *botho* and the values represented. This study has shown that narratives are highly rich deposits of what values and virtues *botho* enshrines. It has also shown that they are valuable ethical resources for moral teaching especially for articulating the ethical imperatives of *botho* not only to contemporary Africans today but to the wider of audience beyond.

### **6.2.4 On *Mafisa* as a Reflection and Manifestation of Personal Character**

Anyone interested in current *botho* discourse and African ethics will be aware of the significance of *mafisa*, the traditional practice commonly referred to as long term loaning of livestock, often referred to in the discourse as the quintessential expression of *botho*, and the embodiment of African communalism as one of its distinctive virtues. What is often missed about *mafisa* is the extent to which it is a testament of the moral character of individuals involved in, especially the expression of kindness, intense sense of caring and compassion, of altruism and unconditional generosity and sharing of wealth to help those in need that this

practice implies. So far there is no systematic analysis of this practice in terms character and the attitude to material possession and sharing of wealth in order in help others who are in need. In other words, it is important for this practice to be studied as an expression and manifestation of the moral character of *motho* as a moral agent, especially the moral character of those with material possessions. A closer analysis of this practice particularly in specific contexts and social milieu such as that of Basotho people cannot be separated from its intrinsic connection to questions of the moral character and basic attitude to wealth. This I believe is where the moral radicalness of *mafisa* as critique of contemporary attitudes to sharing of wealth is found as a prophetic message about moral character of those who are wealthy like the founder of Basotho nation, King Moshoeshe I, who is renowned for practicing *mafisa*, not only as a political tool but also as an expression of sharing, giving, kind and humane character and fellow feeling towards others. This is because at its heart *mafisa* is a moral choice, a choice to do good with one's material possession especially wealth, with no expectation of anything in return. It is therefore fundamentally an ethical act that reflects a noble character of *motho*, in which a deep desire to help others is a moral choice reflective of the agent's character.

#### **6.2.5 On *botho* and Character Based Ethical Approaches**

It is often remarked explicitly and implicitly in the discourse how similar the ethical approach underpinning *botho* has with the moral tradition of the virtues or virtue ethics, especially with regards to primacy of character. These similarities and parallels can be detected in the proposed formulation of *botho* that this study advances as well. And as has already been said so far in the discourse interest on the ethical reflection on *botho* in the light of character ethics or virtue ethics and their basic approach is still lacking behind. What this study has shown in this regard, underscores this as unexplored area of research with great potential to really make a big contribution to existing knowledge on *botho*. Moreover, such a dialogue between and with virtues ethics, even more importantly is that in the current climate in ethics, i.e., of developing a truly global ethic, the theorisation of *botho* where emphasis is on the primacy of character, offers African ethics with a good springboard from which to make a unique contribution. This can help in turn with the development of the required minimum set of common values, to overcome the crisis of values orientation now generally a problem not just in Africa but one that is a problem globally.

### 6.3. Concluding Remarks and Significance of the study

The significance of this study and the character-based articulation of *botho* it proposes, is that this is the first inquiry of its kind to revisit *botho* in the moral thought and practice of a specific moral tradition and culture, namely the Sesotho speaking culture and moral tradition of Basotho. Although Sesotho culture is one of the indigenous cultures that is home to *botho*, and as such it is a natural candidate for exploring within it how the practice of *botho* informed their morality, there is surprising very little by way of in-depth scholarly inquiry and research by scholars of *botho* that is specific to Sesotho culture in current discourse and literature. This study thus is an important contribution to the discourse, because while it builds on existing body of knowledge, it is also a fresh approach to the subject compared to common approaches of current *botho* discourse. This is because this is the first study of its kind to investigate in a systematic way the experience of *botho* in Sesotho culture and unpack how this term is used and applied in that context, from which lessons for today's context can be learnt.

This approach is, therefore, not only important as a different approach to the understanding *botho*, it is also important in terms of the contribution it makes to the discourse of opening a new area for further research and interest on *botho*, on which not much is known about now in the discourse. The study and hence its importance and the contribution it makes, is the introduction and articulation of *botho* and its connection to centrality of character that it makes in the current *botho* discourse. The significance of this study is thus best understood if it is viewed as a new voice in the current discourse and African ethics in general, representing a lesser-known moral tradition in ethics with a wealth of ethical resources to share and from which lessons can be learned. This is because this study is a voice representing, one of the cultures historically associated with *botho*. It reflects views and ideas of a moral tradition and culture authentic to Southern Africa and a long history of a unique approach to ethics underpinned by certain principles of personal and social existence grounded on *botho* ethics. It is a perspective that is now accredited with making the Basotho people and culture one of the peaceful cultures of their time.

The main contribution of the study can thus be regarded as one of deepening and broadening existing body of knowledge on *botho*, with insights from the moral particularity and tradition of Basotho people, by developing and introducing a particular and different account of *botho*. At the centre of this account and formulation of *botho*, which in Sesotho culture is also the basis of one's relationships with others, is to be found certain fundamental claims which are not only at the heart of traditional moral scheme of Basotho people, but also forms the parameters within which *botho* is defined in this study. Chief among them and worth mentioning here is that *botho* presupposes *setho* in a *motho*, and that for *motho* to be able to practice *botho* similarly presuppose the existence of a particular social order or social setting compatible with practicing virtues and values of *botho*, without which possession of *botho* becomes not only

difficult but almost impossible. The attractiveness of this account is that it is not married nor dependent on the proverb '*motho ke motho ka batho*'. But it is an independent alternative account of *botho* grounded on the significance of character as the true arena of morality in African ethics and the exact locus where virtues and vices play out in a person. In terms of this characterisation of *botho*, the possession of virtue makes one a *motho*, because - *ke botho* and in turn one has moral worth, and without it one is morally worthless, '*ha se motho, ke phoofolo*'.

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