

## **A *makoti* in a Patriarchal Society: Culture, Christianity and Constitution in Collision?**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this article is to examine and analyse the African concept of makoti (daughter-in-law), her duties and expectations from the cultural dictates. Makoti is evaluated from cultural, religious, and constitutional perspectives, with emphasis from the biblical texts. No specific African or tribal culture will be followed, but the general treatment of and from makoti is a focus. The highlights of the argument revolve around cultural oppression, religious (Christian) compromise, and constitutional protection. Cultural dictates oppress the makoti so severely that she is made to feel in competition with her mother-in-law. The Christian teaching extends the oppression by promoting patriarchal headship, under which a makoti must submit. On the other hand, the South African Constitution, through its human rights sections regarding women and children, protects a makoti as human being. This is also done through marital prescriptions for a woman's freedom of choice to keep her surname after marriage. After the definitions of concepts, the reasons behind the sought-after additions of younger bo-makoti into the patriarchal cartel is explored. The three areas where a married woman exerts her rights (culture, Christian faith, and the constitution) are in collision regarding women's dignity. The power of cultural demands, elevation of man's headship in the Christian faith, and the dictates of South African Constitution are contradictory and collusive, leaving a makoti in a limbo, limping between opinions, not knowing who to be subject to. The conclusion is that to be a makoti in a patriarchal society where culture, Christianity and the constitution are viewed as comrades in arms protecting a makoti is a pipedream – a concept that is oxymoronic and far-fetched.*

**Contribution:** The article draws facts from interdisciplinary sources such as theology, sociology, anthropology, legal studies, and history. It contributes towards understanding of synergy between culture and religion, promoting harmonious communal life within the modern democratic multicultural societies.

**Keywords:** Makoti; Culture; Christianity; Constitution; Women; Men

### **Introduction**

It is commonly understood that African societies are patriarchally structured. This is “the social organisation and set of beliefs that grant and sustain male dominance over women and children.” (Heggen 1996:15–27) Men dominate, control, and lead their community's

selfhood in all aspects. It is said well by Biko: ‘One of the most fundamental aspects of our culture is the importance we attach to man. Ours has always been a man-centered society’ (Biko 2000:26–30). ‘Man’ in this context means ‘male’ in a gendered sense. Patriarchal society portrays males as the face of humanity and communities in general. Women are regarded as sub-human and were and are still in some communities regarded as second-class citizens. They were denied certain rights, such as voting, owning properties etc, which should have been theirs as the citizens of the state. The truth is that ‘patriarchy determined land ownership based on male hegemony’ (Resane (2021)). They were marginalised in business enterprises and academic adventures, though they were active economic contributors to the welfare of societies. Resane (2021:33–42) captures this vital role that ‘It is in many occasions, women who under strenuous circumstances, till the land, plant the crops, care for them until their full maturation ready for consumption.’

The term *makoti* is a Southern African Nguni language name, referring to a bride, a newly married woman, a daughter-in-law, which is a term used by the family of a woman’s husband to refer to her. There is a popular belief that this term is derived from Afrikaans language *Maak ons Tee* (Make us tea) or the English, *Maker of Tea*. *Makoti* is a new family member brought along by a son through marriage, with the intention of building future with her. The *ilobola* (Nguni) or *bogadi* (Setswana), a bride’s wealth or dowry, is a transaction used to initiate and introduce a *makoti* into her new family (her husband’s). It can be paid in either a negotiated number of cattle or a cash amount. The recipient of *bogadi* is the father of the bride, historically in a form of cattle. Culturally, ‘the cattle has symbolic religious significance in that cattle represent the continuing prosperity of the community’ (Thorpe 1961:63) Giving birth to daughters is a possibility of wealth that comes through *bogadi*, while giving birth to the sons is a possibility of extension of the family, which is a sign of prosperity. The *makoti* is perceived as the extender of the family (*moaga motse*) and a giver of prestige to the family of her husband. On the other hand, a son-in-law, who is not shouldered with burdensome responsibilities like the daughter-in-law, is expected to subconsciously serve his in-laws, hence in Setswana they have a proverb that says *mogwe ke mokgabo* (a son-in-law is a prestige). When *bogadi* transaction is completed, the *makoti*’s family gains a son while *mogwe*’s family gains a daughter. *Makoti* becomes part of her husband’s family, and this joining is carried out socio-religiously for the dead and the living to acknowledge, accept and bless her.

### **Culturally Oppressed**

In many Southern African indigenous cultures, the daughter-in-law becomes part of her husband’s family through cultural processes (Moeti, Koloi-Keaikitse and Mokgolodi 2017:247–256; Nganase 2016). It is generally accepted in African world views that when you marry a man you marry his entire family. It is cognitively and emotively embedded in the subconscious of every married woman to sense belongingness to the husband’s family through these celebratory processes to be joined and welcomed into her husband’s family (Pitso 2002). Whether she enters inter or intra-cultural marriage, she goes through acculturation whereby she is unsettled from her culture to be assimilated into her husband’s culture, whether by adopting new thought patterns, language, or idealism from

her husband's culture (Prinzig and Prinzig 1991:151). This process is also highlighted by Mwamwenda, in reference to the isiXhosa culture that 'When the bride is taken to her husband she is accompanied by her peers of both sexes as well as by older men and women' (Mwamwenda 1996:405). These cultural protocols are generally led by members of the family for the community to generate the spirit of connectedness and oneness (Moloko-Piri, Mulaudzi, and Heyns 2016:245–259; Moeti and Mokgolodi 2017:66–72). Again, these protocols and processes offer some opportunity for *makoti* 'to learn about their in-laws' culture, especially if the cultures of two families were different' (Moeti 2018:188). In the Zulu culture, prior to her accompaniment to her in-laws, a *makoti* is 'instructed to behave properly where she is going, as she is [her family's] representative and any wrongdoing on her part reflects on her people' (Mwamwenda 1996:405). Her femaleness represents her family, and the way she was brought up. Alease Brown (2020:17) had this in mind when she said: 'Female honour was connected to the family structure, which was the core of social, economic, religious, and political life. Female honour and family honour were mutually determinative.'

The common feature in many African cultures is that of tension between the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law. Both parties have different expectations, especially if they are from different ethnic cultures. 'Mothers-in-law are always trying to show their superiority and dominance over their daughters-in-law as expected and practiced in Basotho culture' (Mohatle 2015:102). In many ways, the *makoti* is expected to treat her mother-in-law, or even the whole family, as royalties. She is expected to serve them like a slave serving the master. 'She has to prove her worth and that the price paid for her was not in vain' (Masenya 1998:86). This same sentiment is expressed and elaborated by Mothoagae (2015:4). Mohatle (2015:69–70) takes it further to point out that rules and regulations governing *makoti*'s selfhood, expectations and deliverables are in abundance:

These rules and regulations include, waking up early in the morning, to clean and sweep the house grounds and cook for the entire family so that when everyone wakes up, they should get breakfast, as it was the practice of Basotho.

For any African culture that is still steeped in originalities of culturalities, a *makoti* is expected to bring joy to her husband's household by treating the members with respectful services such as feeding, cleaning, working in the fields etc. If patrilocal habitation exists (staying with her mother-in-law), 'she has to do the cooking, sweeping, gathering of firewood, and gardening, and to fetch water from the well' (Mwamwenda 1996:411). In reference to Naomi-Ruth narrative, Masenya (2013:2) highlights that "the recipient family celebrates as the bride marks the exit of hunger from the family". To show the intensity of this practice, Khoabane (2015) points out:

Not only must you learn how to put up with his demanding mother, you must also learn his culture and his family rules and regulations. This is when you really become a bride, a new wife and a daughter to your husband's parents. In African cultures you are now *makoti*, a daughter-in-law.

That means you are expected to work hard from dawn to dusk with little rest. Failure to do so results in being labelled the lazy *makoti*. Mohatle (2015:102) continues to capture this that:

The daughter-in-law is expected to wake up very early in morning to do chores that will be acceptable in that family; otherwise she will be subjected to different forms of abuse by the women living in the house and the neighbours where she is married.

The daughter-in-law residing with her parents-in-law is expected to dine in silence, with her life stilled and stilted. If the parents-in-law are cruel or show her some disdain, she suffers in silence as a zipped-up soul choked with unshared tears and stifled screams. Although this system is slowly vanishing, patriarchalism still dictates male dominance over the new member of the family or clan who joins them through marriage to their son. This patriarchal attitude is enhanced by patrilineal and patrilocal culture, through which a woman surrenders her agnatic kinship and takes residence in her husband's home or community. Although in the real sense, a newly wed woman does not lose her clan or tribal originality and identity, her children will identify with their father's patrilineality. This is one of the anthropological realities that colonialism and apartheid, through missionisation, could not stamp out as Africans continue their cultural and religious practices. Maimela (1994:4) correctly points out that 'South African blacks, for better or worse, are still steeped into their African cultural and religious milieu.'

Patriarchy robs women of their identity and freedom. Patriarchal society dictates that the *makoti* changes her surname and adopts her husband's surname. *Bogadi* or *lobola* was a legitimate unifying token between the two families, effecting no ancestral exchange as no person can be dislodged from her ancestral roots or connection. Changing the bride's surname is a foreign feature in African cultures, as these cultures never had surnames. Since their adoption by the Western European families from the eleventh century, surnames had been used to indicate one's family, tribe or community (Blake 2011). It was the British Monarch, Henry VIII, who ruled England in 1509 –1547 to order that all new births should be registered under the surname of the father (Doll 1992:227). The patriarchal practice enhanced by the colonial legacy of a woman adopting her husband's surname after marriage makes her one of the man's possessions, solidified by *bogadi* exchange.

According to Matolino (2014:51), 'kinship is construed in two ways only; through blood and betrothal.' Since a *makoti* joins her husband's kinship and clan, she is adopted as a daughter, joining the clan through *ilobola* or dowry. Like it is said in the Setswana language that *mosadi o tsema mo gae ka kgomo*, (Woman enters the groom's home through or by a cow), referring to *bogadi* (dowry) that was normally an exchange of cattle between the two families during the nuptial vows. She cuts ties with her biological family and becomes part of her husband's family, though this does not mean social or emotional severance with her origins. Various interpretations conclude that a woman becomes a commodity, possession bought from the market to become man's gratification tool and baby manufacturing machine for the marital clan. Hence, failure to conceive makes her the primary suspect, as if man never possesses possibility of infertility. Infertility is a patriarchal tool to condemn a *makoti* and it robs her self-worth and identity.

The bottom line is that the *makoti* and the in-laws' relationships show that there are some complicated family systems among African cultures (Nganase and Basson 2018:229–240). A *makoti* is a responsibility bearer immediately on arrival to her husband's clan. All things are expected to revolve around her, and she becomes responsible for all eventualities in the household. She is 'treated as the "property" of her husband's family. She is literally expected to divorce her family'(Mofokeng wa Makhetha 2021:164). She joins a rival club with her mother-in-law, especially if she takes up patrilocal or unilocal residency with her parents-in-law. Mofokeng wa Makhetha (2021:165) highlights this that the married man continues to be "treated like a big boy that must continue to stay under mommy's wings". If the mother feels displaced from her role as the primary person in her son's life, mother-in-law – daughter-in-law tension becomes inevitable. The only time the matriarch becomes visible or noticed in patriarchal society is when and how she treats her daughter-in-law. Priyanka Joshi (2020) in one of her blogs mentions:

A married woman has a responsibility towards her husband and so does he toward her. Taking care of his parents is a part of marriage but in many households that's the only thing that becomes a major task and in such cases if a mother-in-law wants to be treated that way, she needs to hire a servant. The responsibilities of daughters-in-law do not come with a manual and there is no rule to fulfil each of them while whittling self.<sup>1</sup>

In modern societies, cultural shifts have occurred in that the newly married couples can afford independent residencies in the urban areas, far away from their parents. They can also afford life on their own. This cultural shift offers the new couple some independence where the "males are elevated and celebrated as heads of households and in charge of the economic and spiritual success of the home" (Gabaitse, Setume, Dube, Lefa, Kgalemang, Madigele, Modie 2018:79–95). However, cultural hang-ups still linger over the new couples as parents or relatives-in-law visit, and the same loyal duties from a *makoti* are expected. These expectations are not excessive but possess high potential to create conflicts. Both the father-in-law and the mother-in-law may enter their son's household and dictate the *makoti*'s dress code, expect to be offered a certain type of food, and in extreme expectations, dictate parenting lifestyles for their grandchildren. In the primitive culture of the Basotho people, these expectations are extended beyond the father-in-law and the mother-in-law, including even the elder brother-in-law and other senior male members of the family. For instance:

A daughter-in-law should always be decorous and modest in the presence of her father-in-law. She should keep her body covered and should not suckle her baby or

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<sup>1</sup> Priyanka Joshi is an Indian national, and the founder of Sanity Daily. Her aim is to empower people with mental health issues. She has received an Achievement Award from Amazon as a social influencer, poetess who prods people, especially women, to share their stories. In this blog, finding your purpose as a married woman and living your life to the fullest, she encourages married women to take their stance to unlock their potential. <https://sanitydaily.com/finding-your-purpose-as-a-married-woman/> (Accessed 16 March 2022)

dance the *mokhibo* in his presence. Nor should she remain in a room alone with him, sit near him, eat out of the same pot, shake hands with him or in any way touch him. She may cook for him and even spread his sleeping mats but should not wash his clothes to touch his intimate property, such as saddle or gun. These rules are strictly observed early in marriage but are gradually relaxed as time goes on (Ashton 1967:77).

These are the hurtful messages “that may induce a complex amalgam of emotions such as fear, anger, humiliation, guilt and shame” (Rittenour and Kellas 2015:63) In this situation, a *makoti* feels disempowered, undermined, or disrespected in her own personal space – her own house. The negative comments about such things as children, house, or food may come across as unsolicited advice to undermine a *makoti*. Generally, “the woman's in-laws feel disgraced if she does not show her respect for them in the socially approved manner” (Guma 2001:273). What adds salt to the wound is when the mother-in-law feels that her son is not satisfactorily taken care of by his wife. “This feeling may eventually give birth to unhealthy competition between a novice and one who has had several years of experience” (Mofokeng wa Makhetha 2021:165). The bottom line is that when a violence-prone culture disrespects and despises the *makoti*, abuse becomes rife and intolerable. By all means possible, the son is the one who can bring sanity and calmness should his mother go to such an encroach, by respectfully requesting that his family respect his spouse.

### **Religiously compromised**

Many Christian authors on marriage agree on one common factor: Newly married couples should become a separate family unit, not enter into a patrilineal, matrilineal or unilineal relationship with either of the parents. This theology of marriage is based on Genesis 2:24

*Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

The same decree is repeated by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew 19:5 and by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:31 to prove that the Bible does not encourage a *makoti* to reside with her in-laws but rather to live with her husband, where the two become a new family unit. From these texts, it becomes clear that Christianity opts for neither patrilocal, matrilocal, or unilocal residence postmaritally. However, the Bible seems to lean towards patrilocalism as observed in the patriarchal periods, with references to Rebekah joining Isaac’s household, and Ruth opting to follow Naomi to her husband’s patriarchal roots. Mofokeng wa Makhetha (2021:165) says ‘The Bible teaches the “leave and cleave” doctrine, but often only the woman leaves.’<sup>2</sup> The texts above favour geographical departure to form a new family unit in which the husband assumes his headship of his new family. One evangelical theologian, Sproul (1986:64), points out that “Living with

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<sup>2</sup> Makhetha, 165.

in-laws provokes a multitude of unnecessary tensions – and set up potential conflicts of interest.” The unity of the two individuals in marriage necessitates this new family unit where a couple “makes a commitment to each other in an exclusive relationship” (Powell, Barker, and Harvey 1996:34). This is emphasised by Prinzing (1991:26) that “Time and distance will either solidify the relationship or provide a context for new relationships.” This is an early step in cementing the new relationship. A new family unit creates an atmosphere where “each spouse brings a great amount of influence into the marriage” (Helton and Helton 1999:70). It is the place where the newlywed couple become enablers and choose to change for the better.

However, one needs to understand that “leaving” does not mean abandoning. Famous marriage counsellors, Bruce and Carol Britten insist that men should leave their parents, be united to their wives, and still love and help the parents. Good relationships with the in-laws should be cultivated (Britten and Britten 1991:197). The Bible through the church always admonishes daughters-in-law to pattern themselves after the examples of Sarah, *who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord* (1 Peter 3:6), though the text is about a wife and a husband; Rebekah who responded positively to go with Abraham’s servant to become Isaac’s wife (Genesis 24:57); Ruth the Moabite who opted to cling to her mother-in-law and her homeland. The Naomi-Ruth narrative expresses a clear example of extended family relationship dynamics. Boaz was a relative of Naomi because he belonged to her late husband, Elimelech’s, family. This concurs with the traditional African marriage worldview that a man not only marries his wife but also her family or vice versa. Bitrus (2000:45) captures this narrative that:

Ruth did not feel that she should love her mother-in-law only when all was well with them. She stuck to her even when the going was rough. Ruth was prepared to take the risk of going into the unknown for the sake of being with her mother-in-law during her difficult times, with no guarantee that she would have a bright future.

The traditionalists listening to Ruth’s self-expression to her mother-in-law will give a standing ovation. However, the unfolding of this narrative reveals the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law’s mutual blessing on each other. “Ruth blesses Naomi by staying with her. Then Naomi blesses Ruth by helping her find a husband” (Spangler 2015:85). The climax of the blessing emerges when the women of Bethlehem acknowledge Naomi’s blessing for having a daughter-in-law who is worth more than seven sons (Ruth 4:15).

### **Constitutionally protected**

There are some historical reasons for women protection by the law. They were not accorded formal recognition as equal citizens of the state and were disenfranchised for a long time. They received second-class treatment socially and legally as they were subjected to their male counterparts – fathers or husbands. The customary law designated women the status of minors and excluded them from rights regarding children and property. South African common law of the past deprived white women of guardianship and various economic rights.

Women continue to contend with extremely high rates of rape and domestic violence. Black women, the *abomakoti*, were disadvantaged as a result of their race, gender and

kinship. The traditional, colonial and apartheid law played a significant role in enhancing prejudices against women, especially those entering family circles through marriage. At the climax of all dialogues regarding *makoti's* social, religious, and economic standing, one of the fundamental features of the South African Constitution is equality. This equality is described by Mailula (2005:27) as “a right that accrues to every human being irrespective of age, gender, birth and social origin among other things.” This is congruent with Section 9(1), which stipulates that everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law. This sentiment carries on into Section 9(3), which prohibits any form of unfair discrimination based on one’s birth and/or social origin. It is therefore conclusive that the *makoti's* rights as a woman, freedom and legitimacy are protected by the constitution. This constitution, referred to as one of the most liberal in Africa, protects women in general. The Bill of Rights, enshrined in the Constitution, protects women by guaranteeing them the rights to life, dignity, privacy etc. Le Bruyns (2014:61) summarises the contents of the Bill of Rights as inclusive of “social justice; unity in diversity; a human rights culture; improved quality of life for all; and human dignity, equality and freedom.” This is specifically stipulated in Section 9, entitled “Equality.” It stipulates:

(3) The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth<sup>3</sup>

The close examination of this clause promotes prohibition of discrimination against women based on biological features or social status. The democratic project as enshrined in the constitution protects the marginalised and the powerless citizens, such as the *abomakoti*, who suffer emotional and sometimes physical abuse. Such protection is the litmus test for the potency of democracy. Nürnberger (2014:53) is correct that “Democracy is a hollow concept where it does not actually empower the powerless.”

Oxfam South Africa, in its policy on women’s rights and gender justice, claims that “Although gender non-conforming people can marry in South Africa, they still face relentless prejudice and exclusion from mainstream society, some of which manifests in extreme violence.”<sup>4</sup> A *makoti*, who is generally a woman, faces a complex context made up of a confusing dual legal system in which customary practices reign supreme. The context is still pervaded by pervasive sexism, patriarchal norms, attitudes and beliefs and a culture of impunity. This is exacerbated by the current democracy, which constantly contends with religious resurgence and cultural fundamentalism – whether traditional, Christian, Islamic or otherwise. The constitution is at loggerheads with these forces that are subliminally embedded in people’s *intrinsic*.

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Section\\_Nine\\_of\\_the\\_Constitution\\_of\\_South\\_Africa#:~:text=Under%20the%20heading%20%22Equality%22%2C.of%20all%20rights%20and%20freedoms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Section_Nine_of_the_Constitution_of_South_Africa#:~:text=Under%20the%20heading%20%22Equality%22%2C.of%20all%20rights%20and%20freedoms) (Accessed 29 January 2022).

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<https://www.oxfam.org.za/what-we-do/programmes/womens-rights-and-gender-justice/> (Accessed 3 February 2022).

One area that protects a *makoti* constitutionally is that it is not the rule of law or mandatory that a woman should assume her husband's surname after her marriage or remarriage to use her husband's name. It is not compulsory but an option for a woman to assume her husband's surname. According to the Section 25 of Births and Deaths Registration Act (1992):

A woman may assume her husband's surname or revert to her maiden surname or a prior surname she legally bore, and since 1997 a woman may also join her surname with that of her husband's as a double-barrelled surname.<sup>5</sup>

A *makoti* is constitutionally protected from abuse by a spouse, in-laws, or any legal administration, as she is a woman whose rights are enshrined in the constitution. She is also a human being with full rights accorded any citizen of the state at any given time. She has all the rights to purchase or own property in her name.

It is to be noted here that a *makoti* is vulnerable due to patrilineality, which situates her within her husband's patrilineal legacy. She cannot own or inherit her husband's family possessions, as all the estate is culturally bequeathed to her sons. Rights or access to property ownership enhances their selfhood to deal with their vulnerabilities. Property ownership for a *makoti* serves as social protection against abuses, such as gender-based violence. Land ownership for females, especially the *abomakoti*, is a very complex issue, and the most demeaning and discriminatory practice.

The lack of land rights by women and girls indicates that they are victims of discrimination, since land is considered the most fundamental resource to women's living conditions, economic empowerment, and to some extent, their struggle for equity and equality within a patriarchal society. Without rights to land, women's economic and physical security is compromised. This demonstrates that in the constitutional era of democracy graced with human rights aspiration, a *makoti* still remains vulnerable to abuse by both traditional and religious fundamentalism (Mutangadura 2004:8–9).

### **Culture and Christianity *ke di ya thoteng di bapile* (comrades in arms) against *makoti***

In many grey areas of ethical conceptualisation, culture and Christianity join hands as comrades in arms regarding the attitude or treatment of a *makoti* within her parents-in-law's unilocal relationships, where religion is practised. Counsellors attest that many perpetrators of gender violence are religiously inclined, if not by religious fanatics. Some use scriptural texts to justify their behaviour by citing biblical texts or religious dogmatics. It is a universal principle that the most bigoted, gender-oppressive, abusive, and racially hateful people are religious. This is captured by Kobo (2018:3): "Powerlessness, entanglement in vicious cycles of violence between home and the church, absolutised normativity of a male in the headship theology and the use of

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<http://www.dha.gov.za/index.php/amendments#:~:text=A%20woman%20may%20assume%20her.as%20a%20double%2Dbarreled%20surname> (Accessed 2 February 2022).

scriptures to justify this miserable state” of women such as a *makoti*. One can also refer to Calvinists justified apartheid in South Africa. The abusers of *makoti*, especially the mother-in-law, are of persuasion that their treatment of any woman, especially *makoti*, is God’s divine plan for social relationships. They justify this by referring to historical, cultural dictates and applying male-dominated theology commonly thought to be consonant with Judaeo-Christian faith. Amazingly, the abusive mother-in-law was once a daughter-in-law. She suffered the same kind of ill-treatment, and instead of ending it, she opts to perpetuate it. She quickly forgets that she and her daughter-in-law had become members of the clan through *dikgomo* (cattle for *bogadi/ilobola*). In fact, they are both *abomakoti*. The mother-in-law who embraces cultural inclinations that are reinforced by religious teachings becomes more influential and dangerous, not only for her but for the community of women at large.

Culture and Christianity tend to associate femininity with defectiveness and defilement, and associate masculinity with spirituality and divinity (Heggen 1996:19–20). The concept of male headship in the canonical narratives synergises with cultural dogmas of male dominance and leadership. While a new husband is expected to be the head of his home, African culture also expects him to be the undisputed head of his wife. His word is final, he is the owner of the family, and the wife is not an equal partner to share in the decision making (TAG 1996:117). Many *abomakoti* regard these sufferings as their cross to bear by grinding their teeth and developing thick skins to stand firm in their sufferings. Christians associate this with Christ’s humility, and therefore believe that *makoti* is obligated to share in Christ’s sufferings and redemption. Culture will in the same vein affirm this stickability in sufferings as a real proof of authentic womanhood. The answer to that attitude is clear: nobody should “dare not romanticise nor idealize suffering” (Heggen 1996:23).

It has been pointed out above how different cultures in Southern Africa go through specific protocols to initiate and introduce a *makoti* to her husband’s family. There is some synergy or similarity between these cultures and Christianity. For instance, the Theological Advisory Group (TAG) (1996:108) recorded:

There was usually a procession of some kind when the bridegroom and/or his friends went to the house of the bride, usually at night, to fetch the bride and take her to the house of the bridegroom. Sometimes this procession was marked by singing, music and dancing (Jeremiah 7:34) and using the lamps, if held at night (Matthews 25:7). Some suggest that the wedding procession was a kind of relic of marriage by capture (Judges 5:30; Psalm 45:15)

Another example to be cited where religion and culture are *di ya thoteng di bapile* is when Jesus Christ in Luke 12:53 and Matthew 10:35 make an inference to Micah 7:6; speaking of the ensuing family tensions. He specifically mentions mother-in-law and daughter-in-law tensions. Examining these biblical texts, one sees similarities with African cultures when it comes to bringing a *makoti* into her new family. The religiously inclined patriarchy appeals to these texts to justify these feuds and to legitimise them as inevitabilities of life in the family fabric where *makoti* is a member of a clan.

This does not imply that the emancipation of a *makoti* from the cultural and religious thralldom means relinquishing norms. Men and women's roles are encouraged to be a *symbiosis*, complementary rather than conflictual. A needed appeal is that the religio-cultural practices that are not in line with the constitutional rights should be abandoned, but where there is a synergy with the Bible, they must be enhanced. There should be a balance between traditional family headship and biblical family leadership. I think Diane Stinton (2004:240) is right here that "Jesus represents both the fulfilment of leadership expectations in traditional African thought and of current yearnings for liberation in all dimensions." Aspirations for a *makoti*'s liberation aim to undo cultural injustices and religious prejudices. Some sociologists and feminist theologians from the University of Botswana capture it correctly when they say that the new couple within the cultural dynamics should be culturally informed and "retain traditional values while at the same time appreciating rapid changes in family dynamics, politics, economy, religion and politics" (Madigele et al. 2020:109–121). This means that a new couple is two individuals who are both cultural and religious and together they should embark on a synergy towards marital harmony.

### **The way forward**

Culture, colonialism, and Christianity intertwined to enhance Christian patriarchal tendencies that marginalised women from the mainstream of socio-economic activities. Dube (2000:15) alludes to the fact that imperial attitudes and practices by missionaries and colonial forces relate to the imperial tendencies of the biblical texts. In other words, the biblical texts were used by both imperialists and missionaries to perpetuate injustices in the social stratagem. Culture is changing due to population dynamics such as urbanisation, industrialisation, and economic revolutions. Colonialism has ceased as a system but continues to exist as an ideology. Christianity (religion in general) is a dynamic inevitability intrinsic in human subconscious. Since culture keeps shifting, human relations are impacted – positively or negatively. It is therefore recommended that cultural shifts (from traditional to modern) be embraced in the ways that favour a *makoti* who has suffered immensely under the traditional practices. The new couple is to take up a new residence where they can exercise their unitedness without the interference of the in-laws.

Secondly, theology should evolve towards gender equality, inclusiveness, and transformation that positions a *makoti* into the space of interdependence that allows her to exercise her feminine freedom. This is the call made by Oduyoye (1986:121) for the incorporation of the woman into the community of the interpretation of what it means to be a woman. The appeal here is that theology should take women's experiences and contexts seriously. Theology should denounce and condemn any form of abuse: in the context of this paper, for a *makoti* who always feels trapped and helpless within the religio-cultural entanglement. Women, especially those in the fields of theology, are to rise up "to identify what enhances, transforms or promotes in such a way as to build community and make for life-giving and life-enhancing relationships" (Oduyoye 2001:16). Voices of women theologies against *makoti* abusers contribute to the emancipation of a *makoti* suffering emotionally under misinterpretations of religious

texts. This brings the church to the platform as a problem solver rather than a problem promoter.

The bottom line is that Christianity promotes the equality of all people, including a *makoti*, and that she also has “the right to be treated with utmost dignity and given equal opportunities in life” (Tofa 2014:181). *Makoti* is a human being – *imago Dei* carrier like any other person. Therefore, she has the rights as such, and these rights should not be violated. Violating her rights as a person is an attack on God himself. Christian churches should mediate, reconcile and resolve daughters-in-law’s conflicts with their parents-in-law. The church is to condemn the secular or even cultural practices that violate human dignity in any form. Spiritual realm should not become the church’s cocoon to hide from human abuse in any socio-political domain. The church is not detached from the world. The church should understand the society in which it operates. It is God’s divine institution destined to be the custodian of God’s word that speaks the true knowledge on “how people need to be liberated so that God’s love, justice and righteousness can reign over the whole creation” (Mageto 2010:137). Its members reside within a cosmos and are affected by corrupt socio-political systems and therefore have the right to be prophetic to these systems by calling them to respect those who are the victims of culture and religion. ‘Domination of other human beings based on race, class and gender... should also end’ including domination on *makoti* by her in-laws (Madigele, Mogomotsi and Mogomotsi 2021:94). Fairness and non-discrimination are fundamental to the Christian dogma and confession, ‘most clearly and succinctly expressed in the “Golden Rule” of Luke 6:31’ (Foster 2014:78). This harmonises well with *ubuntu/botho* which ‘detests violence, dictatorship, individualism and any other immoral behaviour’ (Musoke 2018:23).

Finally, regardless of cultural oppression and religious bias, women are to be conscientised of their constitutional rights. The socio-religious initiatives on liberating women should be extensively *kerygmatic* for the emancipation of *abomakoti*. Campaigns, workshops, seminars and pulpit ministries should relay the message of the constitutional freedom of all people, especially of those who are socio-religiously marginalised. Wasike (1990:68) is correct that “women and men in the Church must be educated to equality, and women’s expectations of themselves have to be raised to a model for human justice.”

## Conclusion

This paper points out that a *makoti* is under the scrutiny of Culture, Christianity, and the Constitution. The reader will realise that in these three realities of life, a *makoti* is either oppressed (culturally), compromised (religiously) or liberated (constitutionally). Within a cultural context, the abuse of a *makoti* is in many places regarded as a norm. The cultural evolutionary processes introduced a significant revolution where the “egalitarian husband-wife relationship is replaced by hierarchical one in which the husband is dominant and takes a prominent role” (DeJong and Wilson 1979:133). This opened a gap for his new bride to abuse by his own people, especially his mother. It is known that cultural shifts are changing the *status quo* significantly. Fundamentally, culture’s supremacy climaxes its essence when a new member (*makoti*) enters its confines. She is welcomed by a mother-in-law who is also a *makoti* as she is part of the clan through

marriage. She was once a young *makoti*, and it is still a mystery why she perpetuates what she went through by piling the same kind of treatment to her son's wife. Other members of the family or clan put high hopes and expectations on a *makoti* – most of them unreasonable and unkind.

Christianity enters the fray and exacerbates the situation by teaching submission and unconstrained principles of headship. *Mkhwenyane* (*mogwe* or son-in-law) is burdened with the expectation of subordinating his wife to his people. Subliminally, his dignity and integrity are enhanced by the obedience or submission of his wife. He becomes a demi-god who leads his wife to a slave's treatment.

The South African Constitution, through Human Rights clauses, protects women regardless of their social standing in communities. *Makoti* is a woman who is to enjoy constitutional protection like any other woman. In Setswana worldview, a *makoti* or a wife is categorised as a child, hence in exchanging pleasantries, a married man is asked: *Ba tsoga jang bana?* (How are the children?) This question includes the life and welfare of his wife. Even if a *makoti* may be categorised as a child, the South African Constitution in Section 28 of Bill of Rights<sup>6</sup> has special place for the protection of children.

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<sup>6</sup> This Section states that "every child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, health care and social services, as well as the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation."

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