

The Administration of Customary Marriage in the Bakgatla Ba A Mocha Ba Marapyane

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ABSTRACT

Marriage is administered differently within ethnic groupings of Batswana with each tribe observing and practising rituals and customs that are peculiar to it. This paper sheds light on the marriage customs of the Bakgatla ba a Mocha through its different phases, from its initiation, betrothal, the seeking of the hand of the woman's hand in marriage through to the wedding ceremony. The research methodologies that will be applied are semiotics and moral philosophical didactics.

KEYWORDS

Marriage; custom; Bogadi.

INTRODUCTION

A wedding is a fundamental family reunion that brings the families of the bride and the groom together. The marriage institution comprises a husband and a wife who live independently of their siblings and parents. Marriage, therefore, offers a means to obtain a strong social bond between the couple. The Bakgatla tribe is found in many areas of Southern Africa. The Bakgatla ba ga Kgafela live in Mochudi, Botswana, and in South Africa, the Bakgatla ba Mocha live at Marapyane, the Bakgatla ba Kgosi Chaane are based in Ga-Seabe, the Bakgatla ba ga Kgosi Mokgoko are at Mmametlhake and the Bakgatla ba ga Kgosi Maloka are based in Masobye. These four groups of Bakgatla conduct their marriages in a similar manner, and common to the four, and many other groupings the world over, is the belief that marriage is a commitment that binds, not only the couple that weds, but also their families. The Bakgatla is a tribe of Bantu ethnic group that resides in southern Africa, primarily in Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. This paper traces and documents the marriage customs and rituals of the Bakgatla ba a Mocha, from the betrothal stage, right through to the celebration of the wedding. References are made to other tribes to enrich the discussion in this paper on customary marriage. The study was prompted by the fact that there are myriad elements that make up a marriage. These elements differ from one nation to another. The study will elucidate on the structure and purpose of wedding ceremonies of the Bakgatla people, to get a full understanding of a variety of elements of wedding celebrations. Furthermore, the paper will provide an explication of how the marital process of Bakgatla ba Mocha unfolds. Adding to this, various rituals are being followed to the letter for the successful sustenance of marriage.

Research objectives

The motivation for this research was the observation of inconsistencies in the manner that Setswana marriages are conducted, especially among the Bakgatla, despite the rituals and traditions being the same. The objectives of this research were twofold:

- To investigate and determine the marriage customs of the Batswana, more especially those of the Bakgatla; and
- To gain a better understanding of marriage traditions of the Bakgatla, and to contribute to the existing reservoir of knowledge in this regard.
- To explore whether wedding celebrations by Bakgatla are different from that of other communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Wedding ceremonies are handled differently by different cultures. Wedding ceremonies have long been an integral part of marriage and society (Joseph & Alexandra, 2018, p. 6). Many communities have a particular way of handling marriage and wedding celebrations. Batswana people are no exception. However, Westernisation has undeniably permeated wedding culture, and much has changed because of this Westernisation. Joseph and Alexandra (2018) explain the evolution of these traditions, so strongly instilled in cultures, and their important characteristics that define the wedding industry and its development. However, weddings involve far more

than traditions. According to Joseph and Alexandra (2018, p. 8), wedding ceremonies are a rite of passage that formalises the marriage between two persons. During these celebrations, members of the family lend a helping hand to ensure the success of the celebrations. In the case of the Batswana in South Africa, maternal uncles and paternal aunts play roles. This is not different from other cultures. Joseph and Alexandra add that familial contributions by various members to the wedding are considerable and unmatched (2018).

Exposition of marriage

Marriage is the union or joining together of a couple that has been brought together by love. Once a man and woman resolve to commit to each other, they whisper their intentions to their respective parents, who must then begin the process of negotiations until a mutually satisfying agreement is reached to enable the couple to marry and to begin the lifelong process of building a home together. Sefoka (2017, p. 14) defines marriage as a decision of two people to choose each other. He elaborates by explaining that the two, a young woman and a young man, undertake to journey through life together, and what joins them is love. They commit to build a home together. This act is what is referred to as marriage. However, what is important to note is that once this decision has been made, it cannot go forward without the involvement of others, for it needs to be sanctioned and approved by both sets of parents. This applies to Bakgatla and other Batswana clans. However, in other cultures people can marry without enlisting the full involvement of their parents. Boshego (2006:113) says, “marriage amongst the Basotho is viewed as a union between two individuals and also joining together of a number of families through a variety of rituals one such as *magadi*”. This caveat reinforces what has already been stated and makes it clear that marriage can be defined as an entwining of the families of the couple.

Breger and Hill (1998, pp. 105–107) write, “marriage brings about a conjoining of two households, whose glue is the couple that is in love”. In addition, Semenya (2014) says, “Marriage is more than a physical relationship to Africans; it has eternal consequences. Families are further bound by the bonds of marriage. Marriage is not confined to only one way, with man marrying woman. In some instances, an arranged marriage can take place after suitable partners have been matched.”

Sefoka (2017) emphasises this claim, by saying, “Go nyalelana mo ga merafe go efoša dikgatelelo goba phedišanompe ya ditšhaba le gore motho a ka no ya a phela bophelo bya setšhaba se sengwe” [These intermarriages are not discriminatory as they discourage ill-treatment of people from other tribes as well as tribalism as people easily get acculturated into other tribe’s way of life and still enjoy those cultures]. What this means is that a married couple, a man, and woman, can live together and share knowledge of their different traditions and cultures.

Mogapi (1991, p. 149) disagrees with the statement that marriage is a contract between two people – the bride and groom. He believes that marriage is a conduit to the joining of the

families of the couple. This is an indisputable truth that can be extrapolated to confirm that what begins as a relationship between two, ripples outwards, and grows to touch their families.

Types of Marriage

There are two kinds of marriage: modern or contemporary, and traditional. Modern marriages are the kind that are commonly referred to as white weddings. The following is how Motsepe (2016, p. 14) explains it: “This is the sort of marriage in which the couple are the originators of the union and are together responsible for its creation and existence”.

This kind of marriage precludes the need for the involvement of parents, who play a peripheral role. The couple drives the marriage. The parents of the couple may become involved when the marriage arrangements are already at an advanced stage. In this type of marriage, the marriage bans were announced, according to the law, and a record of the marriage noted, providing details of who will be marrying whom. As time went by, the requirement for bans was abandoned; the Catholic church did so in 1983. It is up to the couple to determine the marriage regime – whether it is in or out of community of property. This marriage is governed entirely by the laws of the land. It is monogamous, allowing for the marriage of one person to one partner. This is explained by Mulder (2009, p. 131, in Motsepe, 2016, p. 15), who states that this kind of marriage assumes a monogamous relationship. This is the most adopted mode of marriage, and the most popular.

A joining of cohabitants involves people that opt to not formalise the marriage but, instead, enter a life partnership that enables them to share their lives without the strings of a formal marriage. These individuals, Motsepe (2016, p. 16) explains, are at liberty to bear children, or not. They may also choose joint administration of their assets, or not. They are under no legal requirement to bind themselves beyond this.

A marriage that is in community of property provides for the couple to share all their assets and debts from before the marriage in a joint estate of both spouses. Assets, debts, and liabilities acquired by either spouse after their marriage form part of the joint estate. When one person dies, the surviving spouse can claim part of the estate. If they divorce, the assets and liabilities are shared equally. Marriage out of community of property is different, in that whatever assets and liabilities that were accrued before the marriage are not included in the communal property – only those acquired after marriage are shared (Motsepe, 2016, p. 16). Same sex marriages are referred to by Motsepe (2016, p. 16) as “gayship and lesbianship”. The couple will themselves refer to themselves as husband and wife, although they are of the same sex. This kind of marriage is uncommon in the Black race and only come into effect after the achievement of democracy. It is protected by the South African Constitution, which was accepted following the democratic elections of 1994. Motsepe (2016, p. 16) quotes World Book *Celebration and Rituals Around Marriages Celebrations* (2003) to explain the rights of same sex marriage couples:

Until almost the end of 1900's, legal marriages were limited to those between a man and woman – although many lesbians and gay men lived-in long-term relationships, they could not claim some marital rights as heterosexual couples.

From time immemorial, marriages were commonly entered into by a man and a woman. This does not mean, however, that same sex relationships did not exist, but simply that such unions were not afforded the legal rights of marriage between individuals of the opposite sex.

Engagement

When a young man takes interest in a young woman, and he decides that he wishes to marry her, he first informs his parents. This disclosure enables them to begin the process of marriage by seeking the young woman's hand in marriage. Expressed more colourfully, the parents knock on the door of the young woman's home. Should the young woman be agreeable to the proposition, the formal engagement can take place. This engagement serves several purposes. Not only does it safeguard the young man's interests by making it official that the young woman is spoken for, but it also deters other suitors. By extension, the parents of the young woman are duty-bound to ensure that no bird, the weaver bird, is tempted to venture into the territory that has been thus sealed off.

The Purpose of Marriage

Marriage is necessary in human society. Sefoka quotes Makubyana as follows: "*lenyalo le hlohleletša maikarabelo a gore batho ba lebane le lapa la bona ba le hlokomela*". Makubyana explains that, as children grow up and reach marriageable age, they begin to take on responsibilities that enable them to establish homes of their own. One of the steps to setting up a home for oneself is to marry. This is followed by having children. In the same vein, Sefoka (2017, p. 28) says "the purpose of marriage is for the perpetuation of the man's lineage and family name".

Premarital Pregnancy

Should a young woman fall pregnant out of wedlock, euphemistically termed the shattering of a window, or the breaking of her leg, or "damage", the parents of the young woman, upon realising that their daughter is expectant, must seek to establish the identity of the father of the baby. Once he is known, his parents are informed of this development. If he accepts responsibility, a fine is levied, and an amount is agreed upon by the families. If the father-to-be intends to marry the mother of the baby, this "fine" is sometimes combined with *magadi*. Once the fine has been paid, the matter is deemed to have been laid to rest and the man's guilt expunged. Following this, *bogadi* can be presented, which allows the marriage to take place. However, should no marriage take place, the family of the woman will have no further justifiable cause for complaint, as a remedy has been sought. Most families will not ask for financial reparations from the man if he accepts responsibility for fathering the child.

The Meaning of and Administration of *Bogadi*

Bogadi signifies gratitude. It is an acknowledgement that the man is being granted permission and support by the prospective bride's parents for his wish to marry their daughter, to take her

from her familial home, to go with him to build a new home with him. It is not a financial transaction, but rather a gesture of appreciation. Semenya (2014) quotes Smith (2002) and explains that the *bogadi* is an “age-old African custom that is as alive as it was a hundred years ago”. Dowries, or *magadi*, as some describe it, is not a recent development. *Bogadi* has been in existence for ages. Mmotong and Phokwane (in Sefoka, 2017, p. 30) explain, “the lobola provided in the form of cows or presents from the home of the man, that are presented to the family of the woman in the lead up to marriage”. The practice of the giving of the *bogadi* is not new. In the past, its value was based on the person’s ability to give. However, this has changed. Mogapi (1991, p. 150) states that the *bogadi* is not payment. *Bogadi* takes the form of cows delivered in pairs, always in multiples of two. Care is taken that even numbers are given, never odd – never three, five or seven. If they do not come in even numbers, they are said to “limp”, as they are not yoked together. If, in the place of cattle, money is given, it should also be in even denominations, and never odd. Never three, seven, nine or eleven. The denominations must always be two, four, six and so on.

The cattle arrive on the hoof, driven by men. Women carry blankets. They could number two men and two women. There are two blankets— for the bride-to-be and her mother. Tobacco is brought for the ancestors, to signify that the woman is to be married. In addition, two *doeks* or headscarves are given, for mother and daughter. When the bride is officially handed over to her in-laws, this blanket will be draped across her shoulders; she will wear the *doek* on her head. *Moretlwa*, a woody branch of the flava tree, is provided for the herders to control the cows. Other items are a knife and any other article to signify that the family of the suitor has decided to marry. Once this article is presented, part of the marriage ritual is complete, the way is open for the young woman to visit the home of the man – even before the actual wedding ceremony is held. She is, for all intents and purposes, their bride. This article could take various forms. It may be money – 10 or 20 rands, or more. The form it takes is not standard, however, whatever form it takes, it comes tethered.

Those delegated to deliver the *bogadi* must arrive at the bride’s home before the break of day and must not enter the homestead until they are invited in by an emissary of the woman’s family. Should they arrive after sunrise, they will be fined. The designated person meets the visitors. It is this person who will receive the request for greetings and convey them to the family of the young woman. If there is an offering, *pulamolomo*, to be made, the visitors are informed what is required. They prepare whatever is requested and it is received. This usually takes the form of money, a sum of R20 or more. Like *mokgoko*, its form and value are not standard. The offering of money is a symbolic gesture, given to lubricate the mouths of those who will speak. The emissary delivers the words and whatever else to those who represent the woman. The man’s representative has their own emissary, who explains what their mission is. The representatives on the man’s side are called *bakgonyana*. After these exchanges, they are allowed to enter the yard. Negotiations begin. It is the role of the emissaries to lead. If, when the *bogadi* is presented, mistakes occur, fines are levied. One such mistake could be that the

young man might have visited the home of the young woman dressed inappropriately, without a jacket. If the amount of *bogadi* is insufficient, for some reason, disagreements can and do sometimes arise.

Bogadi is received by the woman's paternal aunt and her maternal uncle. These two hold immense responsibilities, as they are tasked with conducting the marriage of their niece or nephew. The uncle is called *mojadithogo*, the one upon whom the head of the cow is bestowed. The aunt is the one who "eats" the back of the marriage cow. The uncle is given the head, as well as its neck and a pair of ribs. Once this has been accomplished, the blankets and *doeks* are unwrapped and worn by those who receive them. At this point, there is much celebration and ululation, for it is the point at which the arrangement is confirmed, and the mission has been accomplished. The visitors are then served tea. Then, they ask to be shown their bride. If she has children, they are introduced too. Once negotiations are complete, a small beast – a small goat – is given to the visitors for slaughtering. Its innards are cooked. Then, the visitors ask permission to return home, as their mission has been accomplished, however, this request is initially denied, with reasons being given for why they cannot possibly return to their homes so quickly. The pots are still on the fire, and they will only be granted leave to depart once they have broken bread with those to whom they have been sent. When they eventually depart, it is up to them to decide which part of the animal they leave behind to remain with the family of their bride. It may be a foreleg, or thigh or its skin. They are at liberty to take the entire beast if they so wish. They also take with them a piece of paper that has been signed by the recipients of *magadi*, as proof that the task they were assigned has indeed been accomplished. The document will be shown to the family of the young man as proof, to show that they were successful in the task they were assigned. This is a certificate of proof; it is signed by both parties.

There are those who would wish to see the practice of *bogadi* abolished, citing various reasons. As Semenya (2014) explains, "most of the couples argue that parents consider *bogadi* reimbursement for the expenses they incurred in raising their daughter". Those who speak in this manner are not thinking clearly. Each child, whether boy or girl, must be raised and supported and nurtured from the time of birth until they reach a marriageable age. Therefore, there is no reason for the parents of women to hide behind this excuse to misinterpret and abuse the practice of *magadi*. Semenya (2014) quotes Nonkonyanama of Contralesa, who hits the nail on the head by saying, "young men who feared responsibility always [cited] *lobola* as a problem". Those who would want the practice of *bogadi* dismantled are those who seek to shirk their responsibility as men and avoid thanking the parents of the young women who have raised a partner for them. Semenya (2014) summarises this attitude by adding that "*lobola* should not be a deterrent in African tradition as it was not about material goods".

To conclude this argument, my view is that the practice of *bogadi* needs to continue, for it was never about the payment being made to the parents of the woman, nor was it ever meant to be about anyone enriching themselves. Rather, the practice of the giving of *bogadi* is, in its

unadulterated version, the process of bringing together the gods, so that the marriage might be blessed, and blessed further with children.

The Roles of the Maternal Uncle and Paternal Aunt in the Marriage

On the morning of the wedding, the paternal aunt stations herself near where the cow will be slaughtered. When the beast is slaughtered, the aunt is given a chair, placed strategically close to where those who take the various cuts of meat must pass from the kraal where the beast is slaughtered. She sits there, knife and a receptacle at hand. She slices a sliver from each part of the cow, which she collects and takes home with her. She returns the following day – the day that the wedding ceremony will be celebrated. She comes with her belongings and those who accompany her.

Malome, the maternal uncle, is the one who receives the head(s) of the cow(s); the paternal aunt receives the cut of the cow called *setlhana* – from the back of the cow. Makubyana, as quoted by Sefoka (2017, p. 28), explains that the parents of the man who is marrying inform the aunt or uncle and ask that they unlock their hearts, as their son has taken the big step to marry. Once informed, the paternal uncle of the niece or nephew is assigned the task of organising the marriage procedures (Sefoka, 2017, p. 28). *Malome* and *rakgadi* are the ones who give or receive *magadi*. The uncle comes with those he has chosen to accompany him, who bring specific gifts on the day of the wedding ceremony: cakes, traditional beer, tea leaves, sugar, a basin of soured millet porridge (*ting*), and money in paper denominations – as much as he can afford. These gifts are the equivalent of what the paternal aunt brings at the time of the wedding.

When these two arrive, they announce their arrival with song. They bring with them all the goods they carry. They circle the home and are shown where to sit so that they can be fed. When the uncle and his entourage depart, they are given a gourd of traditional beer, not brim-full, a basin of cakes and the head of the beast that has been slaughtered for the wedding. This head comprises not just the head, but also the neck, as well as two ribs from either side of the cow. If the one who is marrying is a *leitibolo*, the head of the cow is cooked right there at the wedding and eaten right there, but if it is the wedding of a second or third-born child and more, *malome* and *rakgadi* may take the *tlhogo* and *setlhana* to their homes and cook and eat them there. If the newlywed is not a first-born, the uncle is allowed to take *setlhana* away with him, to share it with the rest of his entourage. The same applies to the aunt. When she leaves, she is also given a bowl of cakes and traditional beer and *setlhana*. Similarly, if the one marrying is the first-born of the family, the *setlhana* (the back, top part of cow's carcass) is eaten right there where the wedding will take place, if not, the aunt takes it home with her.

When the bride arrives, she finds her uncle awaiting her arrival, to greet her by reciting her family clan names. This also happens with the *rakgadi*. She, too, is supposed to sing the praises of her brother's child. Only then do they enter the home. Once the uncle has sung his niece a praise song, her aunt follows suit. She too praises her niece. Those who are not gifted in the art of poetry have the option of singing a hymn instead, after which the words, may our

children enter, are uttered. This praise singing is the way the gods and ancestors are informed that a bride is arriving in the home, or that the child is leaving the home for another to get married. The poetry explains who the child is.

What all this signifies is the belief that a child does not belong only to the parents, instead, it recognises that there is family, there is blood. The child also belongs to her aunts and uncles. A marriage that is conducted in this manner is founded on a solid foundation. It is strong. The possibility of divorce is, therefore, avoided.

The Pronouncement of *Bogadi* and Marriage

Evidence of Magadi

Proof of the delivery of *bogadi* is evidence that those delegated to deliver the *bogadi* were successful and were well received. According to Semenya (2014), “the tradition where the fiancé’s family slaughters a sheep or a goat as an expression of thanks to those family members who completed their task as *bakgonyana* and complied with all the demands of the bride”.

The Bakgatla do not slaughter a sheep when receiving the family of their suitors, for they believe that a sheep is a *seromo*; in other words, since it does not cry when it is slaughtered, it is not used for the purposes of traditions that seek to involve the ancestors. The belief behind this assertion is that the ancestors can only hear the goat and not the sheep. It is always a goat that is slaughtered, for when it is slaughtered, it will scream and cry and, according to the Bakgatla, this cry is what informs the ancestors that there is child for whom *bogadi* are being given. This sacrificial slaughter, according to Molapata (2005, p. 1, in Semenya, 2014), is done “to spill the blood of the slaughtered animal and this is believed to be a method of communicating with ancestors, informing them about the impending marriage”. Semenya emphasises the point by saying that “the ritual also strengthens the bond between the two families and their ancestors”.

Once *bogadi* have been given, the members of the family of the groom are given a goat for them to slaughter. It is the beast that they return home with after it is slaughtered. It is up to *bakgonyana* to determine which part of the goat they will leave behind; it could be the forelegs, or a different piece. They are allowed to take the entire beast. This goat is killed after the receipt of *bogadi*. It comes from the daughter’s family in appreciation for *bogadi*. In this case also, *sebego* comes into the picture.

Notification of the Chief

This notification is made known to the chief on the day of the wedding. On the day of the wedding, a gourd of traditional beer, as well as two ribs of a cow slaughtered during the wedding, are taken to him. The gourd is carried by the woman of the door who is selected; the meat is carried by a man of the door who has been selected. When they arrive, they are asked to take a sip of the drink, and to taste the meat that has been cooked, to ensure that safe to eat. If it is poisoned, it will kill them first.

Notification of the Families of the Bride and Groom

On the day of the wedding, those who have been identified from the family of the young man to go and fetch the bride, accompany the uncle and aunt, and return from the women's home with a basin of cakes, the foreleg of a cow, a basin of *ting* as well as a calabash of traditional beer. Those who are part of the bridal entourage, or the chaperones, also return bearing gifts. By giving a foreleg of a cow, the ancestors, and all relatives of the two families of the groom and the bride are entwined. This act gives weight to the saying that the marriage of these two cannot be entered by those who are not married, because this would surely be an affront to the ancestors.

Wife Inheritance

In bygone times, the elders, in their wisdom, devised ways and means by which to solidify marriages, to prevent them from crumbling, even in the event of the death of a partner. The practice of *seyantlo* provided for a widow to find a new partner from among the relatives of her deceased husband, who would then take on the role of providing for and assisting to raise the children. If the marriage had not produced children, then the new partner can assist to bear the children on behalf of the wife. Mogapi (1991, p. 164) explains it as follows: "If one partner passes away at an early age, the families of the couple would join hands to make plans for *seyantlo*".

Seyantlo was not deemed to be an unacceptable proposal, as "children listened to, obeyed and were respecting of their parents". When a couple married, it was with the knowledge that, if God chose to take one of them, then the resulting tragedy would be mitigated by *seyantlo*. The widower would take a new wife from his deceased partner's family, or a husband would be found for the widow from the deceased husband's family. The beauty of this arrangement was that this resolution did not come as a surprise. It was known to the couple from the time of their marriage. They accepted that this was how things would be.

Batswana do not want to bear witness to the disentanglement of marriages, or divorce that could result after the passing of a spouse (Motsepe, 2016). This is emphasised by Forster (1962, p. 13, quoted by Motsepe, 2016, p. 30):

Our families are our insurance. When a man falls, he knows that his family will care for him and his children until he is able to earn again. And they will be cared for without a word of reproach. If a man dies, his widow and children are sure of a home.'

Seyantlo also helps to preserve the dignity of those who survive the deceased. They can plan for and ensure that the home they had built together does not disintegrate, and that neither the children nor the widow go hungry. *Seyantlo* does not require *bogadi* to be given. The new arrangement is concluded simply through negotiations between the two families.

There are other ways by which preservation of a marriage used to be attempted. In the unfortunate event that a couple was not able to bear children of their own, a surrogate could be found. Semenya (2014) calls this "cleansing the thighs ... when the sister is not procreating, it was compulsory that a man must marry her younger sister who would bear children on her

behalf". The role of the surrogate is to live together with the first wife, for the sole purpose of bearing children for the home.

Lefetwa is the word for an unmarried woman who is believed to be too old to marry, a spinster. She may or may not have borne children. This woman commonly makes a request to be allocated a piece of land to put up a shelter for her children. If she does not have the means to build a home of her own, she will rely on her children to do this for her. This will be the first time that she is able to enjoy having a home of her own. Like a *lefetwa*, *kgope* refers to a man who is beyond normal marrying age. He lives without the burning desire to find a partner, and even if he does find one, it is often simply dalliances that do not lead to the altar. In the end, this individual no longer looks after himself, doesn't wash, and wears dirty clothes. Letšosa and De Klerk (2008, p. 11 in Mankga, 2013, p. 11) explain, "Remaining unmarried, the bachelor is thereby setting his life in linear time and following [a] straight path that eliminates any possibility of returning as an ancestor". How an ageing bachelor is spoken of is sad because this individual is not given any respect, especially because he will die without leaving anything of himself behind. Letšosa and De Klerk (2008:11 in Mankga, 2013, p.11) and Semenya (2014) share similar views, because Semenya reiterates these thoughts by saying "remaining unmarried is to cease living, both now and in the hereafter". *Kgope* means without stature. He may as well be dead, even while he walks. Even when he goes to a social gathering, he is not afforded the respect of the ancestors. A spinster is somewhat better off, because even though she is not married, she may at least have children. Mankga (2013, p. 11) emphasizes this lack of respect for an unmarried man by saying, "he would not be able to reproduce himself though children". Mankga (2013) says all that needs to be said with these words. *Kgope* leaves nothing behind. Once the man dies, he leaves not even a child on earth.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Various research methodologies were applied in this investigation: moral philosophical didactics and semiotics. The former moral philosophical approach or method focuses on the ways of instruction employed to pass on knowledge about customs and traditions. They are intended to guide, coach, teach and mould people's behaviour regarding their adherence to a particular custom. Semiotics elucidates meaning through interpretation of signs and gestures that are followed during the marriage ritual. Motsepe (2016) cites Stables (2007) to show the significance of signs as taking the place of something else. The hierarchy shows how the signs at its peak are recognised by those who live together. Motsilanyane (1992, p. 14) adds by explaining that, "this manner of understanding of signs is recognisable in people who are living together". What this means, furthermore, is that these people tend to teach and learn from one another and behave in a similar way to each other.

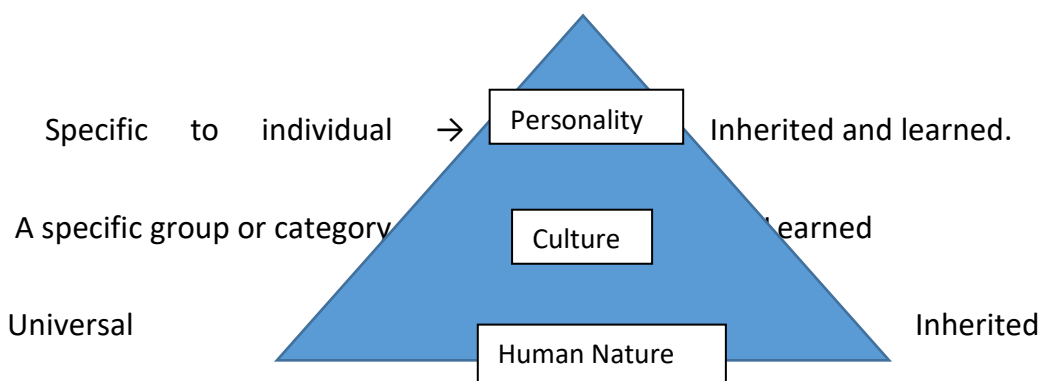
Hofstede's cultural dimension is a theoretical framework that has been developed by Geert Hofstede. This framework makes us understand cultural differences between countries. With the understanding of this framework, it would be easy to identify and analyse the cultural

aspects that influence behaviour and attitudes of people from various societies. Hofstede also makes us understand the dimension about masculinity and femininity. Where societies value traditional masculine traits (that include ambition, authority, assertiveness) versus the feminine ones (that include cooperation, submissiveness). The framework also puts forth the assertion that there will be unequal distribution of power between people. Some societies are for this dimension whilst others are not. Hofstede's cultural dimension model (1991) identifies three levels of human mental programming. This model emphasises the lessons children learn from their parents. Hofstede's model can be used to explain the practice of *seyantlo* – wife replacement or inheritance in Batswana marriage, more especially within the Bakgatla of Marapyane. The model proposed by Hofstede (1991) to illustrate this theory is given in Figure 1.

According to Figure 1, a person is born with inherent human traits. The environment in which an individual grows up imparts other features, such as the way one conducts oneself; it teaches one the culture and traditions of the place. The model illustrates that it is through exposure in one's environment that one learns practices, such as those of *bogadi*, wife inheritance and surrogacy. The lack of understanding and miscommunication that sometimes result in society are rooted in an inability to conform to established traditions, because when individuals abandon the ways of their society and depart from them, differences arise.

Figure 1.

Hofstede's cultural dimension model (Motsepe, 2016, p. 47)



FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Many wedding celebrations conducted by Bakgatla of Marapyane in South Africa reveal the preference for traditional weddings. In many instances, the issue of dowry is still practiced, despite the influence of Westernisation on wedding celebrations of other peoples. Whilst the traditional way is still practiced during the festivities, symbols, such as wearing of rings, is now practiced. Married Bakgatla women used to wear special earrings called *nkitsing* [know and recognise me as a married woman], to show that the wearer of these earrings was married. As time passed, married women started wearing Western-style rings. The use of earrings has since

been discontinued. The role of *malome* (maternal uncle) and *rakgadi* (paternal aunt) in the running of the affairs of the wedding of their niece or nephew is also being eroded. These two used to play a pivotal role before and during the wedding. They were involved in the discussions about lobola, and they managed the the wedding celebrations from start to finish.

Some other communities still observe cultural practices. In Indian cultures, newlyweds are made to require necklaces and rings on their fingers to show that they are married. With African people, rings are used, but not the necklace. Many Africans tend to wear rings on the second left fingers, even if they are not married. This was not allowed in the past, as it was believed that you would chase the luck of getting married away. As in the past, priests are involved in wedding celebrations today. At weddings of Indians, the *pujari/pandit* (a Hindu priest) prays over the newlyweds with the rings and necklace (*minn*) and the saree (*mantharakodi*) (Joseph & Alaxandra (2018)). Hindu weddings have similar practices at their weddings. One difference in how Hindus celebrate weddings is requiring the custom of the marrying couple going around the fire. Furthermore, in Western cultures, the father of a marrying daughter walks her down the aisle and presents her formally and officially to the groom.

The protocols of customary marriage of the Bakgatla differs from the way other nations or communities run theirs. The parents of the bride and groom are minimally involved. The main people that take part are the uncles and aunts. There are terms that are key in marriage, among which *bakgonyana*, (the entourage sent to negotiate bogadi with the daughter's family), and *mmaditsela* (someone acting as a communication link between the bride and groom negotiators). Clans other than Bakgatla also use *mmaditsela* and *bakgonyana* when they are negotiating marriage.

DISCUSSION

The marriage customs and traditions of the Bakgatla ba Mocha, an ethnic group of the Batswana people in South Africa, are a significant aspect of their cultural heritage. The Tswana marriage customs vary on how they conduct their marriage customs and rituals. The Tswana culture states that marriage is a communal affair, and it involves not only the union of two people (bride and groom) but also joining their two families of man and woman. Marriage, according to Mulaudzi (2013:43), is "the key institution around which the entire social structure revolves". This explains that many people – the couple, their parents, their friends, and relatives – are involved in marriage. Gyekye (1996:76) echoes same sentiments when adding that marriage is not merely an affair between two individuals who have fallen in love and plan to spend the rest of their lives together. It is a matter in which the lineage groups of both the man and the woman are deeply interested.

Before the marriage ceremony takes place, it is not unusual for members from one lineage group to try and obtain information about prospective husband or wife, whoever is from the lineage group. Gyekye (1996) states further that the purpose of these private or secret

inquiries is to enable both the lineage groups to determine whether the man or woman is worthy of their child or relative. Marriage could not go on without such important checks. This was one way of decreasing the high rate of divorce amongst the newlyweds.

The important aspects of Tswana marriage customs include a lobola (*bogadi*), which has been defined as the bride price that serves as a symbol of respect, gratitude, and acknowledgement of the bride's worth. The lobola vary. It mainly depends on who is getting married. A woman who is educated cannot enjoy a dowry similar and equal to the one offered to an uneducated woman. Variation of the price also depends on the intense negotiation between the *bakgotsho* (family of the daughter and son). The customs and traditions can evolve over time and individuals' choices and preferences may influence the specific details of a Bakgatla ba Mocha wedding. This is the case because culture and its practices are diverse and different communities may have variations in their wedding customs, even within the same ethnic group.

Bakgatla marriage is a very fascinating, joyous, and culturally enriching endeavour. The investigation of issues of marriage requires some sensitivity, respect and focus on cultural immersion. The consent to investigate the marriage was sought so that the research process should not harm the community in any way. The privacy of the tribe should be respected all the time. In collecting data, the researcher collaborated with the community members, couples, and local leaders to gain insight into the rituals and customs about Bakgatla marriages. This suggests that accurate information was collected for this study. The research was participatory in a bid to gain valuable insight into cultural significance and how marriage practise kept evolving in the Batswana tribe particularly Bakgatla tribe.

Bakgatla still hold the belief that bride price (*bogadi*) forms a strong bond between the two families, that of a groom and other of a bride. Divorce comes as a last resort if the bride price has been paid. Before a person decides on a divorce, they remember the lobola that has been paid to the bride. The marriage of the Bakgatla couple starts with the involvement of the parents, thereafter the negotiations ensue, and agreements are reached on dates for *magadi* (lobola) and *lenyalo* (wedding day). During the wedding the couple and their entourage wear traditional and western clothes. It shows that mixture accounts for gradual movement from the traditional practices to the westernised ones. Also, many Bakgatla couple wear traditional dresses from other traditions and leave their own.

Malome (maternal uncle) and rakgadi (paternal aunt) still perform their rituals during marriage celebrations. Malome would bring the package including *ting ya mabele* (ground sorghum) cooked or raw, cakes, traditional beer, sugar, tea, and some money, say R200.00 during the wedding day and when he and his people leave, they are given the similar exchanged stuff except money. The same applies to *rakgadi* who also brings *ting ya mabele*, cakes, traditional beer 2.5kg of sugar, tea, and some money on the wedding day. When rakgadi and her people leave, they are also given the package but not the same ones they brought. On the day of the wedding, almost the whole community would come in large numbers to celebrate

the wedding with friends and family. The traditional weddings for the Bakgatla are not for the family alone.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the paper provided insight into the procedures of marriage by Bakgatla starting from early stages of negotiations until the bride is ushered to her husband's family. The paper successfully explored various steps taken during *bogadi* and other important rituals cemented in the culture for the success of marital union. This paper documents the way the Bakgatla ba Mocha conduct marriages. There exists a very precise language that is associated with the marriage process. Further, this paper traces the path followed for a marriage to take place, from the time when a young man identifies a young woman he wishes to marry, through the involvement of both sets of parents, to betrothal, through stages of negotiation, culminating in the wedding. In this type of marriage, it is the maternal uncles and paternal aunts who take the lead in driving the marriage process. In the conclusion of wedding day, the *bakgonyana* are given specific parts of the cow that is slaughtered as part of the marriage process. This is done to show that the woman's family were welcoming, received the *bogadi* and gave them a good reception. This serves as the testimony that people that were sent to ferry the daughter arrived. This is the ritual that concludes the marriage negotiation. The paper has provided the explication of *bogadi* and marriage rituals up to its end. It has been shown that Bakgatla do not handle customary marriage different from other Batswana clans. Furthermore, the traditional weddings of Bakgatla are awash of rituals, customs that reflect community's belief system, values, and social stratification. Currently and age, the role of modernization and globalization have gradually crept into how the traditional weddings of the Bakgatla are handled. Couples find themselves having to serve the two masters. In conclusion, the running of a wedding has become very capital intensive as two cultures, western and traditional are being merged to satisfy the two sides of the coin.

Recommendations

- Preservation of oral history is important; it is required that this history of the Bakgatla ba Mocha of Marapyane be documented for future generations.
- The information collected on traditional marriages to be shared with the community to make them love their tradition and respect their cultural heritage.
- The marriage customs of the Bakgatla can contribute to the understanding of cross cultures and expose diversity of various customs and traditions.

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