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CHAPTER 4

4.0 CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE BAKWENA

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored the place of the researcher in the final product of any research work produced, how auto-ethnography influences data that the researcher gathers, pointing out how the researcher is not neutral in the processes of doing research and therefore is part of the data that they collect and the conclusions that they make.

This chapter explores the influence of Christianity on Batswana family life. This will be done with particular reference to marriage and *bogadi* and how the interaction between Christian and Setswana culture led to modifications in the family life of Batswana. Indeed, I posit that this interaction may have contributed to the rise in cohabiting unions.

In chapter 1, I discussed various factors that have led to changes in the family and marriage in Africa. This chapter will re-visit the Christian influence on the lives of Batswana in general and the Bakwena in particular. This is done in order to demonstrate how, historically, Christianity has had a direct impact on the lives of the people of Molepolole, where the study was carried out.

This chapter starts by giving a description of the place and people where the study was conducted. It then discusses the changes that have taken place, over time, in the social meaning of marriage, changes that have taken place specifically in the processes and procedures concerning *bogadi*, in order to demonstrate how these changes led to a fixed perception about what marriage is. That is, by re-labelling unions like polygamy, levirate marriages – unions that were customarily perceived as marriage – as 'unrecognised' and morally unacceptable (Schapera 1987, 1958) social unions, I will argue that Christianity contributed to the rise of non-marital cohabitation. By implication, Christianity contributed to

the number of people who were not married. The backdrop of this chapter is the observation by many scholars (Matthews 1940; Evans-Prichard 1989; Bledsoe 1990; Schapera 1939) on family life in Africa that, traditionally, it was one in which 'there was no such thing as an unmarried adult woman' (Bledsoe 1990: 117). This point is also articulated by Matthews when he explains the universality of marriage in Southern Africa. He explains that marriage was 'looked upon as a sacred duty to one's family to marry [...] those who do enter upon this state [...] enjoy a considerable prestige' (1940: 6). Mair further explains that those who did not participate in marriage were considered failures and the stigma associated with failure was attached not only to the individuals concerned, but also their families (Mair 1969). The question that this chapter grapples with is how has Christianity contributed to a situation in contemporary Botswana where marriage seems to be an exception rather than a rule, as reflected in the rise of cohabiting unions and the declining marriage rate. The last three censuses in Botswana reflect how few people are actually married compared to those who are single. This shows that, though society still perceives marriage as the norm, statistically it is actually an exception.

We do not have any significant statistical evidence of the reality of marriage that is nationally representative until the 1991 national census (Government of Botswana 1991). Though it was the norm, it was clear that not everybody could marry, even in the years before the arrival missionaries. The implication of polygamous marriages, where some men have more than one wife, is that other men will have none. The missionary resistance to polygamy must be understood not only from the theological perspective of the New Testament, but from a demographic perspective as well. The missionaries were worried about these young men and their social position who might have been disgruntled and disenfranchised since they were not in a position to start a family because of the polygamy of elderly or more powerful men.

This chapter explores the conditions that led to the creation of monogamous marriage as the ideal in Southern Africa, and other adult unions being considered deviant and non-marital. This resulted in scholarly research and publications in the thirties and forties seemingly taking monogamous marriages as the standard by which all other unions were compared, i.e. methodological nuptialism in the study of relationships. The chapter concludes by discussing how acculturation between the culture of Batswana and Christianity redefined the procedures and timing of the giving of *bogadi* and the moralisation of marriage that advocated for the Christian monogamous marriage. Marriages could take a long time to be concluded and finalised, in part because the *bogadi* payment could a long time to be fully settled – at times the better part of a person's lifetime – this meant that over a long period the marriage remained in a kind of 'halfway' status; i.e. as something that was perpetually 'in the making' (see Solway, 1990; Roberts & Comaroff, 1977; Gulbrandsen, 1986). The Christian missionaries opted for a clear-cut moment when a wedding would be held (Shropshire 1946) and this marriage could be registered in their files, thus ending or reducing a prolonged and indeterminate state for the marital partners. Consequently, the missionaries relegated other traditionally recognised unions to being non-marital and therefore illegitimate in their domains of influence.

This chapter argues that Christianity remained a force in marital relations and in the inspection of relationships throughout modern history. The post-colonial state reinforced missionary and colonial regulations without little interest in returning to its pre-colonial history, thus sticking to a model that remained fundamentally strange to the society.

The question is, how has Christianity also been able to (co-)produce cohabitation at the same time, especially in Molepolole, where missionary Christianity was first established in Botswana? In a sense, Molepolole became an important place, where Christianity engaged

in reshaping marital relationships (Van Dijk 2012; Griffiths 1997) because of the effect it had on marriage.

4.2 Geographical and socio-economic positioning of Molepolole

Before turning to the history of the significance of Christianity in the marital process and its changes, I will situate the place of research – Molepolole – in the context of some (historical and geographical) dimensions that will help us to understand the impact of Christianity more clearly. Molepolole is found in the Kweneng district in Botswana. It is the recent historical village of the Bakwena (Merriweather 1968). The term Bakwena literally means the 'people of the crocodile.' The crocodile has become an important symbol in Molepolole. The crocodile is the totemic animal of the Bakwena. According to the 2011 Population and Housing census report, 'Molepolole still retains its position as the biggest village in Botswana with an estimated population of 63 128' (CSO 2011: 4), coming in third after the two cities of Gaborone and Francistown. Molepolole lies 50 kilometers west of the capital city, Gaborone. The population is largely urban; however, despite its large and modern infrastructure, Molepolole is considered a village since the livelihood of most people still depends on agriculture. Though subsistence farming has been complemented by the cash economy, most of the Bakwena still practice the two farming systems of crop production and animal husbandry. The *masimo (ploughing fields)* and cattle posts are normally located kilometers away from the village. Therefore, though I spent most of my time in the village, I also had to travel to the lands and cattle posts to locate some of my informants, especially the parents, aunts, and uncles of my informants. Some of the crops produced include the local varieties of sorghum, maize, beans, and some delicacies like sweet reeds and water melons. Animal rearing includes mainly cattle and small livestock like goats and sheep. The proximity of Molepolole to the capital city and the level of development in infrastructure,

such as the road network, have contributed to the rapid growth of the village, hence it is more likely to find people who are cohabiting in this village.

The Bakwena settled, in the seventeenth century, in what today is Molepolole after periods of migration. Sillery (1954) acknowledges that the group was not homogenous as there were *bafaladi*,[12] then comprising non-Bakwena among the group. The Bakwena were forced to migrate from one place to another as a result of the war with the Boers and they resettled in the village in the nineteenth century by which time they had been in contact with other groups inhabiting the area. This pattern of migration, contact and inclusion is still reflected today. Although the village is largely comprised of Bakwena, it is not homogeneous and many non-Bakwena are residents. Today, some come voluntarily to apply and settle among the Bakwena, while others come as civil servants and for other different purposes. The proximity of Molepolole to the capital and the city push-factors like high costs of living makes this village an ideal place for people from other parts of the country to settle, away from the city but close enough to enjoy the benefits of city life, like better employment opportunities but low rents. Molepolole displays an interesting mix of architecture, which reflects the changing nature of Botswana society as tradition gradually gives way to a more modern lifestyle. The village boasts a College of Education, an Institute of Health Sciences, a hospital, secondary schools, a police station, land board offices, a Council and a number of clinics and primary schools. It also provides a number of other services: shopping complexes, a good network of tarred and gravel roads, electricity and piped water. This infrastructure demands manpower, which is drawn from all over the country and even abroad. All these developments situate Molepolole as a hub for immigration, rendering the village non-homogenous in terms of population.

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[12] Bafaladi-refers to all foreigners that have been incorporated into the chiefdom (in this case, all non-Bakwena living among the Bakwena)

4.3 The legal system

Molepolole has its own paramount chieftaincy, which played a crucial role in the early phase of the missionisation of the Bakwena. It is necessary, here, to make a few remarks about the legal-pluralistic system that also applies in Molepolole. In fact, a general note on the legal system in Botswana is important for this study as it enables a discussion of why individuals would opt to cohabit, rather than take advantage of the possibility to get married at the age of 21 without parental consent. Botswana operates under a dual legal system of customary and Dutch-Roman Law /civil law (Molokomme 1991; Dow & Kidd 1994).

Under the pluralist system, the paramount chieftaincy is legally entitled to officiate marriages under customary rule and to provide for legal settlement of cases pertaining to, in this case, the Bakwena kinship system and its rulings concerning inheritance and the acknowledgement of offspring. The customary court of the main *kgotla* in Molepolole can pronounce in such cases as divorce, property settlements or the provision of recognition of children (Griffiths 1997). Griffiths observes that there 'is a whole range of relationships that involve procreation […] and that marriages are only in the minority among all such relationships' (1997: 13). This is evidenced by the last census, as discussed above (Mokomane 2005b; Kubanji 2013). Thus, there are different relationships in which children are born: marriage, single parenthood, teenage parenting, cohabitation, etc. However, she further notes that marriage still holds powerful sway at an ideological level. That is, though marriage seems to be declining, it still provides a frame of reference in terms of how individual relationships are characterised, particularly where the law is concerned. The social and legal status of a relationship still largely depends on whether that relationship is a marriage or not. This legal aspect is very important, especially when it comes to the rights of women and children. This is because their socio-legal status and access to inheritance still

largely depends on the marital status of the relationship. It is through marriage that one can inherit from their father or husband, i.e. a mother needs to be married to the father of her children in order to be able to inherit intestate (Molokomme 1991; Dow & Kidd 1994; Mokomane 2005b Molepolole, like any other village in the country, is marked by a patriarchal kinship system where the father's line of descent is very important: inheritance and social positioning are largely determined through the father's line, and women marry into the families of their husbands (Kuper 1970; Matthews 1940).

4.4 Traditional/local administration

The traditional socio-political system in Botswana is centred on a ward system: 'Each ethnic group managed its own affairs under the leadership and authority of a chief' (Schapera 1952: 28). The chief's ward becomes the main ward and he is the senior officer in that ward. From an interview with the then Deputy Chief of Molepolole, I gathered that the village has about 42 wards under the leadership of different headman, who owe their allegiance to the chief. The government of Botswana acknowledges chieftaincy and has incorporated it in the governance of the country through the structure of the House of chiefs thus recognising traditional leadership. The ward system is a way of decentralising power and the management of village affairs. Each ward is headed by a *kgosana* (headman) who is usually related to the chief and directly reports to the chief. According to information obtained from *dikgosana* (the plural of *kgosana*) in the two wards where I carried out my research, every Wednesday all the *dikgosana* converge at the main *kgotla* for reporting purposes and general consultation. The kgotla and dikgosana are important for the arrangement of marriages especially where this concerns the establishment of customary marriages as well as for the transfer of the bride wealth in the form of live cattle. These structures maintain an important role in controlling cattle-transfers

4.5 The development of Christianity in Molepolole and its impact on *bogadi*

Molepolole has a significant historical relationship with Christianity (Sillery 1954; Sales 1971). This makes the village the ideal place to carry out research on religious matters in relation to marriage and cohabitation, as all Christian groups are represented: mainline, Pentecostal and African independent churches. According to the 2001 census, about 70% of Batswana describe themselves as Christian. Christianity is not the only religion practiced in Molepolole, there is also Islam and other traditional religions.

I have decided to focus on Christianity because it is already diverse and it is the religion that has, comparatively, had a great impact on the lives of Batswana. Islam was established in Molepolole in the eighteenth century (Amanze 2002) and today Molepolole has one mosque and one Islamic primary school. However, though there are some Batswana who have converted to Islam, Christianity has had more impact on the community than Islam and other religions due to its historical relationship with the Bakwena chieftaincy.

Christianity, like any other religion, plays a very important role in the lives of its followers, especially in relation to family life. For this reason, I will now discuss the impact that Christianity has had on the culture of Bakwena in particular, with specific reference to the processes and procedures relating to *bogadi*. These changes have taken place due to, among other developments, the introduction of Christianity and its reaction to Setswana culture (Sillery 1954) and specifically on to family life, marriage and *bogadi*.

The first tribal chief in Botswana to convert to Christianity was Sechele I, the Paramount Chief of the Bakwena (Parsons 1997; Sillery 1954; Sales 1971). Merriweather notes that David Livingstone was crucial in the conversion of the chief, 'Livingstone worked among the Bakwena and was instrumental in converting the great chief Sechele 1 into Christianity' (1968: 16). He further notes that the 'Bakwena chiefs had a deep regard of the

church [...] they all had taken an interest in the church's welfare' (*Ibid.*). This reflects the general acceptance of Christianity among the people of Molepolole. In accordance with Christian moral values, *Kgosi Sechele* had to give up his polygamous marriage and so he sent four of his wives to their parents so that he could be baptised into the Christian faith (Sillery 1954; Parsons 1997). Parsons explains that, in 1848:

> Sechele had reached a point where he wished desperately to be baptized into the church, the first among the chiefs of the interior to become a Christian […] the obstacle of polygamy stood firmly in Sechele's path (Parsons 1997: 77).

The action by the chief is an indication of the extent that Christianity permeated the lives of Bakwena and provided a new set of values, especially concerning relationships.

In Lesotho, Murray observed that as missionaries converted Basutho to Christianity, 'polygamy and *bohali* [a Basutho word for *bogadi*] became focal points of ideological contention between the defenders of 'proper Sesotho' and the PEMS'[13] as agents of moral reform (1977: 81; Poulter 1976). This radical change from a variety of socially accepted relationships (polygamy, levirate) to only one type of marriage, the monogamous Christian marriage, led to other previously socially accepted marriages being relegated to the periphery and redefined as non-marital, consequently increasing cohabitation. Relationships that were traditionally regarded as marriages were reduced to mere cohabitation as a result of the ways in which the Christian missionaries understood and perceived *bogadi*, the bride wealth payments, a practice that they believed went against a 'proper' marriage based on love and individual decision-making. For the missionaries, *bogadi* initially meant a loveless wedding practice, almost akin to slavery. This was as serious as the problem they had with polygamy.

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[13] PEMS is a missionary group that worked among the Basotho.

The missionaries saw polygamy as loveless, a form of relationship in which 'natural' affections between husband and wife were absent.

But how was *bogadi* understood in Kwena society at the time Livingstone and later missionaries of the London Missionary Society arrived?

4.6 Changes in the purpose and presentation of *bogadi* among Batswana

Archival information and literature about *bogadi* prior to the introduction of the church and civil registered marriages reflect a close association between *bogadi* and the rights or legitimacy of children and the paternity of the father, and that it only relates indirectly to the validity and establishment of a marriage per se. This is consistent with observations made elsewhere; for instance, Murray notes that the traditional purpose of *bohali* in Lesotho was to socially position the child. This is reflected in a Sesotho idiom '*ngoana ke oa likhomo*', 'cattle begot children' (1977: 64). The following extracts from Botswana National archives, an article entitled 'The Conflict between the Native Customary Law and Civil law in Bechuanaland' reads:

> *[B]bogadi* in the traditional marriage played a less definitive but vital part: its main role was to establish the legal rights of the children […] but it was not only the legal rights of the children that it established, it also transferred rights from the parents of the mother to that of the father. Because of the association with children, it was not an essential part before the marriage could be consummated. The consummation followed parental agreement and consent but *bogadi* was paid at any time from the time when they lived together to the arrival of progeny or even later. It was not even uncommon for a man's daughter's *bogadi* to be passed on to the mother's parents in payment of her *bogadi* (Larson 1970:7)

The above extract illustrates the purpose traditionally served by *bogadi*, prior to the arrival of Christianity. When missionaries introduced Christianity, the approach that they used was that of presenting a conversion to modernity (Van der Veer 1996) and moralising 'heathens'. Missionaries were openly hostile to traditional African forms of culture such as polygamy and bride wealth (Lesthaeghe 1989: 33; Parsons 1997; Cairncross 1974). Murray observes that, among the Basotho, the early missionaries viewed the payment of *bohali* (A Basotho word for *bogadi*) through 'cattle as the epitome of heathenism' (1977: 81). They thought this was buying women through cattle, which was a misinterpretation of how Batswana organised and gave meaning to processes and procedures concerning the establishment of marriage. Christianity required that newly converted Batswana give up certain cultural practices. The missionaries would try to protect the new converts from back-sliding into heathen ways by, among other things, sending the converts to mission stations. This is illustrated by Hutchinson (1957), who states that the missionaries:

> […] established stations in which they could accommodate their pupils, in complete isolation from their tribal environment. The mission stations were instrumental in removing the Christian convert from the influence of his traditional belief and social control (Hutchinson 1957: 162).

Due to a lack of understanding and appreciation of the purpose of the giving of *bogadi*, and based on wrong assumptions, missionaries called for the abolition of some important aspects of Setswana culture, thereby changing some procedures and processes in the giving of *bogadi*. While traditionally what defined a relationship as marriage was the consultations, negotiations and consent between the parents of the man and woman in question, in

contemporary society, *bogadi* has shifted to become a significant marker in the process of establishing a marriage. Primarily, the purpose of *bogadi* was to socially position the children as belonging to their father and his family. Secondly, *bogadi* served to give the father his status as the 'social father' of those children (whether biologically his or not) Murray 1977). In short, many researches and writings (Matthews 1940; Lesthaeghe 1989) on traditional Southern African procedures pertaining to *bogadi* concur that: what determined a union as a marriage was the consultation and consent of both sets of parents; that it was purely a prerogative of the groom and his parents to decide how much and when to give *bogadi*; and that the payment of *bogadi* was not an immediate condition for establishing a union such as marriage. Solway (1990) also observes in relation to the Bakgalakgadi that bride wealth was:

[…] rarely paid early in marriage the process and I have seen it paid after divorce, after the death of the wife and by sons for their mothers. Few would question the marital status of a middle-aged couple if bride wealth was not yet paid, but the rights of their young adult children to their father's agnatic group's support and property might well be issues for debate (Solway 1990: 45).

Matthews (1940) observed among the Barolong that:

[…] the question of *bogadi* is never raised at all during the negotiations preliminary to a marriage. There is no bargaining about the amount of *bogadi*. The negotiations are concerned mainly with obtaining consent of the parents of the girl' (Matthews 1940:13).

When discussing Kgalagari marriages, Kuper (1940) notes that once parents consulted with

each other and agreed that the couple can marry, even before *bogadi* was paid the couple was regarded as married:

> […] a woman for whom *kgobo*[14] has been accepted is not referred to as a mistress or concubine (*nyatsi*) but as a wife […] *bogadi* is paid several years after children have been born to the marriage, *pholo* paid and the family established at the husband's home […] Delays of eight to ten years are common […] in some instances men will pay *bogadi* for their own mothers after the death of their fathers. As one informant put it; *bogadi* shows satisfaction with the wife and buys children. Most informants insist particularly on the 'child-buying' side of *bogari:* 'Its sole purpose is to buy children' (Kuper 1940: 469).

As noted by Solway (1990), in most cases *bogadi* in traditional life was never meant to establish a marriage and it was only within marriage that *bogadi* could be paid:

> [W]hile payment of bride wealth can confirm a marriage it does not always. But it does always legitimise children; it has an effect of defining an individual's social identity and clarifying succession to office and devolution of property (Solway 1990: 45).

The consultation between parents was sufficient to establish marriage, before the giving of *bogadi.* Matthews (1940) also makes similar observations among the Barolong concerning the effects of agencies of acculturation among the Tswana groups. He mentions Christianity and other Bantu tribes as agents of acculturation:

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[14]*Kgobo* refers to a small gift given to a girl by her fiancée after both sets of parents have entered into negotiations and given their consent for the couple to marry. This gift is not *bogadi*.

[…] these foreign elements have introduced among them new conceptions about certain institutions like *bogadi* (bride wealth) e.g. the demand of the full amount of *bogadi* before the consummation of marriage, bargaining about bogadi, the recovery of *bogadi* on the dissolution of the marriage, things which were either unknown among them or regarded as improper (Matthews 1940: 4).

Matthews further observes among the Barolong that, prior to the influence of Christianity, the Barolong left 'to the discretion of the prospective husband the nature and amount of bogadi to be made over' (Matthews 1940: 14). Another area that anthropologists agree on concerning *bogadi* is the observation that *bogadi* was not a subject for negotiation between the parents of the man and those of the woman, but a prerogative of the parents of the man as to when and how much *bogadi* to give (Kuper 1970; Matthews 1940, Schapera 1936, 1940). For instance, Roberts[15] notes that there is no fixed amount of *bogadi*, and it is not subject to negotiation between families. It is a matter to be decided by the man's family alone (Schapera 1936; Kuper 1970; Matthews 1940).

Schapera (1936), Matthews (1940) and Kuper (1970) report the same pattern among the Bakgatla, Barolong and the Bakgalagari, respectively. Their observation is that, in the traditional Tswana system, the amount of *bogadi*, and when to give it, was determined by the groom and it was not to be negotiated with the bride's family. It served the interest of the groom and his family, rather than the establishment of a union as a marriage per se. Until the arrival of Christianity, *bogadi* did not constitute the establishment of marriage. Therefore, the non-payment of *bogadi* did not affect whether a 'marriage' was a relationship consented to by parents. Such a relationship was regarded as marriage, of course with limited rights compared to one in which *bogadi* has been given. The difference lies in the fact that, in a marriage

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[15] Botswana National Archives: BNB 1539 'A Restatement of the Kgatla Law on Domestic Relations' by Simon Roberts.

where *bogadi* has been given, the man enjoys the rights over his children, unlike a man in a marriage where no *bogadi* has been given (Matthews 1940; Kuper 1970). The above discussion reflects what constituted valid traditional Tswana marriage. I continue this discussion below with particular reference to Sekwena marriage before the introduction of Christianity. The point is that before *bogadi* was made a prerequisite for marriage, one could be married socially or legally without the giving of *bogadi*.

Records exist regarding what constituted a valid traditional Tswana marriage before the arrival of Christian Church weddings and the registration of civil marriages. In 1958,[16] a communication between the Government Secretary in Mafikeng and the Divisional Commissioner, South, Lobatsi reveals the following with regard to Sekwena *bogadi*:

Bogadi bo tswa morago ga di tumalano tse di kwadilweng fha godimo. Ke gore nako ngwe fela morago le fa e ka nna ga batsaani ba bone bana ba ba bedi gongwe ba bararo. Palo ya bogadi e mo thateng ya motsei ka fa a nonofileng ka teng le ka fha a itlotlang ka teng.

Bogadi was given after the above agreements have been done. It could be anytime even after the birth of two to three children by the couple. The amount of *bogadi* was entirely upon the groom, depending on his financial capabilities and self-respect] (Botswana National Archives BNB SP/N/1/C Subject: Laws and Customs of Bakwena[17]).

Consistent with what prevails in other Setswana speaking tribes, the payment or non-payment of *bogadi* did not affect the status of a marriage or other form of union as long as couples'

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[16] Botswana National Archives BNB SP/N/1/C Subject: Laws and customs of Bakwena. These laws and customs were prepared in 1947 by a committee of headmen appointed by Chief Kgari.

[17] This document of the Laws and Customs of Bakwena was compiled by a committee of headman in view of the fact that the Bakwena culture was disappearing. So this was an effort to record and preserve the culture of the people. This group of headman define what was traditionally understood as a *Sekwena* marriage

parents had given their consent.

In a communication of 5 November 1951, between Mackenzie[18] and the Government Secretary, Mackenzie writes:

> The two essentials of a Native marriage were the consent of parents and *bogadi*. Before Western contact, it was rather more than a mere consent of parents that was necessary, it was in fact, a contractual agreement between the parents of the spouses (Mackenzie 1951).

Mackenzie here suggests that before the arrival of Westerners, what validated a union as a marriage was the negotiations and consent of the two sets of parents. However, it was after contacts with the West that *bogadi* became directly related to marriage. This view is also shared by Matthews (1940), Kuper (1970), and Larson (1970). In line with what I have mentioned above, the laws and customs of the Bakwena list the following as constituting a valid Sekwena marriage:

> **Tsebe/Page** 1 ***Tseo*/marriage 4**: ***Tseo ya Sekwena e fhedile fa go dirilwe jaana*** /**A Sekwena marriage is complete once the following have been fulfilled**:
>
>> *i) Tumalano ya babedi batsaani* /Agreement between the two to be married
>>
>> *ii) Tumalano ya borra mosimane le bo rra mosetsana/*Agreement between the parents of the man and the parents of the lady
>>
>> *iii) patlo (*Laws and Customs of Bakwena).

Here, *bogadi* is not immediately listed or mentioned as the <u>main</u> requirement for a valid Sekwena marriage. Therefore, traditionally, the consent of parents was sufficient to declare a male-female union as marriage. Thus, *bogadi* was not an immediate requirement to establish and validate 'marriage'. At the same time, what cannot be ignored is that *bogadi* was nevertheless linked to marriage, for obvious reasons, that it could only be given within

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[18] Botswana National Archives: BNB/ 2 Subject: The Conflict between the native Customary Marriage and Civil Law in Bechuanaland.

marriage. Therefore marriage was a determining factor in the giving of *bogadi*, but *bogadi* was not a determining factor in the validity of marriage until the introduction of Christianity and other external factors.

4.7 Christian influence and the changing role of *bogadi*

Before I discuss how the purpose of *bogadi* has, over time, become incorporated into the aspect of validating a marriage, I will first discuss how Christianity contributed to the change in the views of the Tswana concerning *bogadi* and marriage. It must first be pointed out that Christianity was not the only external influence on the Tswana; however, it played a major role in the changes that took place in this community. The Comaroffs summarize that 'the major objective of the missionaries was to gain control over the practices through which the Southern Tswana produce and reproduce their existence' (Comaroff & Comaroff 1989). Thus, the areas that mark the basis through which a society produces and reproduces itself, like family and means of production, became the targets of missionary work. Schapera (1958) poignantly captures this when he asserts that:

> David Livingstone mentions repeatedly that 'everywhere he went, he was the first European the natives have seen and that before his coming they had never heard the gospel' (Schapera 1958: 1).

This, then, places Christianity as the most significant external contact for the Batswana.

As already indicated, Christianity was Tswana society's first significant external contact (Parsons 1997; Sales 1971). The chiefs were usually the first targets for conversion by the missionaries. Once the chief was converted to Christianity he then changed the customs and laws accordingly. One major area affected was the institution of marriage. The two major

missions to work among the Tswana were the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), among Bakwena and Bakgatla, respectively. Lacking a proper understanding of the significance and purpose of *bogadi* in marriage, the missionaries regarded this custom as the buying of a wife and therefore they perceived it as 'evil'. Schapera explains that 'the introduction of Christianity to the Tswana led to wide spread and extensive modification of traditional usages relating to *bogadi*' (Schapera 1978: 113). Schapera also noted that the missionaries' misperception of *bogadi* temporarily led to the prohibition and abolition of the practice. For instance, *bogadi* was abolished among the Ngwato in 1875 and among the Moremi and Kgatla in 1881 and 1892, respectively (*Ibid*.). However, it was later reinstated following resistance to its banning. It was during the period of its reinstatement that the pattern in the presentation of *bogadi* changed. For instance, after Kgosi Isang of the Bakgatla successfully convinced the DRC that *bogadi* was not inconsistent with Christian morality, the practice was re- introduced in 1928 and it also became part of church marriages. However, the church now insisted upon the payment of *bogadi* as a prerequisite to marriage (*Ibid*.); that is, the church demanded that *bogadi* should be paid before the couple could be married in church. This meant that Christianity redefined what a marriage was. The same law was passed among the Bakwena: 'The only corresponding Kwena law was made by Sechele II. Having joined the Church of England in 1913, he announced in I916 (with the concurrence of the local priest) that nobody might marry in that church "unless they gave bogadi' (*Ibid*. 114).

Schapera's work further shows how comparatively more *bogadi* was given at Christian marriages than by 'heathens'. *Bogadi* became tied to a specific moment in the marital process so that becoming (fully) married stopped being the protracted process it had previously been. As Comaroff and Comaroff (1989) argue, the Christian missionaries had a profound impact on the notions of time and lifetime; weddings and marriage became defined

(and registered) as being marked by a specific moment in time when the process was expected to be concluded. This inevitably excluded those who could not immediately give *bogadi* from marriage and, consequently, resulted in a rise in what were viewed non-marital unions and cohabitation from a Christian perspective (not so much from the local society's perspective). This is how the link between *bogadi* and marriage was established; a condition punctuated in time that was traditionally not part of Tswana marriage. This directly related *bogadi* to the recognition of a marriage and was now about more than the legitimacy of children and the rights of the father over his children, as had traditionally been the case.

While Larson (1970) commented that, 'because of its [*bogadi*] association with children, it was not an essential part before the marriage could be consummated,' today, because of the changes mentioned, *bogadi* is closely associated with marriage. Hence, the common response, reflected in a quote from one of my cohabiting informants concerning marriage without the giving of *bogadi*:

> Oh, that will not be marriage, that will just be marriage on paper because *bogadi*, *ga o sa batliwa ebile o sa ntshetswa magadi o ngwana ga o kake wa tsenelela merero, lenyalo la gago le tla bo le le loliya'* 'without *patlo* and the payment of *bogadi* one will always be considered a child and will never take part in adult meetings or consultations. Your marriage will be without value; especially during marriage consultations where the unmarried have no room in the negotiations. So, it is better I wait while cohabiting until we have money for *bogadi*. But I am very grateful for having waited because finally I am being rewarded. I am finally getting married.

A cohabiting man (in Molepolole, in an interview?) said the following in relation to why he could not get married without giving *bogadi* for his wife:

Really if you do not give *bogadi* you cannot say you are married. *'Mosadi ga se wa gago, bana gase ba gago: ga o sa ba ntsetsa magadi ga se ba gago.'* 'The woman is not your wife and children are not yours'. That marriage will just be nothing; so, it is better to cohabit until you can marry because if you wait (while cohabiting) then you know you are still owing but if you officiate the marriage without *bogadi* you will relax but people won't keep quiet, especially the wife and her family. They will always remind you that you are not married. *Go lo moo go go diga serite.* The scenario questions your integrity.

In sum, at the point of contact between the Western world, through conversion to Christianity, and the traditional Tswana way of life, a social arena or platform for negotiation was created concerning *bogadi* and marriage, resulting in new meanings of the relationships between the two. I argue that the changes in the relationship between *bogadi* (i.e. the timing of the giving of *bogadi*) and marriage are that prior to the encounter with missionaries, *bogadi* was never a hindrance to marriage, but after the encounter marriage could be hindered or delayed by a failure to pay *bogadi*. Christianity also introduced the notion of children being born 'out of wedlock', as discussed by Pauli (2010) in relation to marriage in Namibia, where she explores how child bearing and sexuality are exclusively tied to marriage. However, the reality is that non-marriage or the delay of marriage does not mean that people are abstaining from forming relationships. If individuals cannot marry because they are not able to give *bogadi*, but do have children, what kind of relationships are they engaged in? What implications did this change have for those who could not immediately give *bogadi*? It gave rise to non-marital relationships as a bottle-neck was created as one entered into marriage. Many of the poor were excluded from marrying. As will be discussed in the

chapters that follow, now, instead of parents meeting and doing *patlo,* depending on the socio-economic status of the groom and (his family) they either meet for *patlo* (where the groom is financially ready to marry) or for *go adima mosadi* or *go bulela ntlu* (where the groom is not financially ready to marry).

In the latter scenario, what was traditionally accepted as marriage is now reduced to mere cohabitation. Christianity also demanded the registration of marriage. To date, churches can officiate a marriage and usually have marriage officers. With the registration of marriages, these unions were classified as Christian marriages and enjoyed more advantages than customary marriages (Shropshire 1946). Later, Christianity began to appreciate *bogadi*, but made the giving of *bogadi* a prerequisite. Christianity also wanted to impact the quality of relationships in terms of sexuality (Van Dijk 2013).

4.8 Conclusions

The chapter began by giving the geographical positioning of the people, followed by the socio-economic indices, and the anthropological background. Christianity has been a dominant feature of the Batswana's cultural landscape. Through the presentation of the historical developments in the processes and procedures of the giving of *bogadi* before and after the introduction of Christianity, this chapter explored how the rollercoaster of rejection-abolition-acceptance-and the ultimate embrace of *bogadi* by Christianity led to new ways of giving *bogadi*. Traditionally, *bogadi* was not a prerequisite to marriage, but, as the church embraced the practice, the church then made it a requirement, thereby creating difficulties for those who were economically challenged. Such individuals became excluded or delayed from participating in marriage, inevitably giving rise to non-marital unions. By demanding full payment of bride-price in church marriages, the church made *bogadi* the basis of marriage, a new development that had not previously been part of Setswana culture. Thus, the church

significantly contributed to the rise of non-marital unions by re-defining what marriage is: a demand for monogamy and the rejection of unions that were traditionally accepted as marriage (polygamy and levirate marriages). Finally, some scholars have related the rise of non-marital relationships, including cohabitation, with the loss of parental authority over the lives and decision-making of their adult children (Brown 1983; Schapera 1939). On the contrary, parents remain central to the practice and play a big role in negotiations about cohabitation in some cases. The next chapter discusses how cohabiting unions were formed among my informants. This is a largely retrospective approach as I did not observe such unions in the process of formation, they were already in existence when I embarked on my fieldwork. The most important findings of the chapter are that cohabiting unions are not homogenous and parents are not always excluded from their formation.