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The role of Mzansi Magic's '*Makoti, Are You the One'* in facilitating gender discourses.

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A dissertation in partial fulfilment of a Masters Degree in Critical Diversity Studies

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March 2023

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation on The Role of Mzansi Magic's *Makoti*, *Are You the One* in facilitating gender discourses is my own original and unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Arts in Critical Diversity Studies by Coursework and Research Report at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.



_____

Ncumisa Vabaza

15 March 2023

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Dedication

To my late grandmother (uKhulu) Thandiwe Dingiswayo.

Abstract

The South African Bill of rights prohibits all forms of discrimination based on gender and sex. The government through the National Development Plan encourages stakeholder involvement in the promotion of gender equality. Yet, the experiences of women in various spheres reveal that normative patriarchal socialization persists. This research evaluates the role of local media in facilitating gender discourses that permeate modern-day South African society. This research employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) and critical diversity literacy (CDL) to interpret the dominant gender discourses on the locally produced reality television show *Makoti Are You the One?* CDA and CDL are used to interpret the representation techniques used to empower and disempower men and women respectively. The research adopts a qualitative research approach, specifically non-participatory observation to comprehend the dynamics in the relationships between the show's male-female participants as well as the inter-group relationships between female participants on the show. Using discourse, framing and gender theories the study provides an understanding of the techniques used by the media in representing gender, and how these contribute to the co-construction of social meanings assigned to gender. The findings show a persistent imbalance in the representation of gender through local programming, by hegemonically positioning men in superior standing to women who are represented as subjects in their homes and the broader society. These imbalances are contrary to the ideals of gender equality.

Key words: gender, discourse, representation, media, equality, patriarchy, hegemony, reality television

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Popa and Gavriliu (2015) make a distinction between sex and gender. They argue that gender does not refer to biology but rather 'a socially constructed set of behavioural patterns' (Popa & Gavriliu, 2015, p.1200). The current research project analyses the constructs of gender through discourse and the effects that media has on gender equality framing by focusing on Mzansi Magic's reality television series *Makoti Are You the One*? In a reality television show, gender discourses are given meaning within cultural ethos. This is evident in the use of the name *Makoti* which means daughter-in-law in isiZulu and other South Africa indigenous languages (Nganase, 2016).

This research also seeks to understand how female subjects (i.e., *Makoti*) are constructed in gender discourses and how they are positioned within gendered hierarchies. Gendered hierarchies in South Africa are currently the concern of gender equality initiatives. Gender equality is an ideal of the National Development Plan (NDP) (2011), which is aimed at eliminating poverty and reducing inequality by the year 2030. The NDP is a blueprint for creating an inclusive South Africa. The plan further acknowledges that despite government institutions and legislation aimed at achieving gender equality, women continue to be discriminated against in various social spaces including the workplace, family structures, and educational institutions (NDP, 2011, p. 419).

The NDP identifies impactful key stakeholders in the successful rollout of the plan. Among the stakeholders, identified in the NDP is the media as a vehicle that reaches a wide audience. The NDP also considers the media as a partner in that can effectively drive the ideals of the NDP. It acknowledges that 'the media has an impact on the values that people hold and the lives they aspire to' (NDP, 2011, p.463). The media consequently have the power to shape public opinion. Also stated in the NDP (2011) is that; 'radio, television, film, and the other products of the culture industries provide the models of what it means to be male or female, successful

or a failure, powerful or powerless' (p.463). Under this section, the NDP also acknowledges that media content is not value-neutral but reflects the values of the owners. Therein is the acknowledgement of the constitutional rights of members of the media to exercise freedom of speech. The NDP views freedom of speech as a vehicle through which the voices of the marginalised are heard.

Rolleri (2013) defines gender equality as 'a social condition whereby men and women share equal rights and a balance of power, equal opportunities, and rewards' (p.4). Scholars widely note patriarchy as a system that promotes gender inequality in South African communities, Coetzee (2001) highlights that patriarchy as a system of male supremacy denies women of agency as it is deeply rooted in the social fibre of the South African society. As reflective of the broader society, Mudau and Obadire (2017) asserts that women in family settings assume inferior positions. This forms part of the cultural identity of most South African communities, according to Albertyn (2013) this is due to the ongoing contestations between gender equality and culture The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology defines culture as 'distinctive features that characterise a society or social group, including the fundamental rights of the human being to exercise traditions that define their collective value system' (cited in Ratele, 2007, p.67). Ortner (1974) views constructions of women as closely linked to nature and men connected to culture, which overall, positions men as custodians of culture. Culture is a central subtext in the reality television series *Makoti Are You the One?*

The show explores the dynamics of what constitutes a 'good *Makoti*', by documenting the 21-day journey of the 'potential' as she tries to gain the blessings of the 'potential in-laws' to marry their son. At the end of the 21 days, the 'potential husband' and his family decide whether to proceed with the marriage or end the relationship. Against this backdrop, this research unpacks the gender discourses that are reflected and expressed in the show as collectively understood within our dichotomous modern society and the historical African traditions on gender identity and roles. The role of local media in the context of this research is analysed within a media framing heuristic. The media framing heuristic views media as a powerful object of gender discourse reproduction.

Previous research focusing on the gender imbalances of mainstream media representations stresses the importance of media representation on gender (Morna, 2002; Geertsema, 2008; Krijnen, 2020). This research seeks to fill the gap in the literature on the role that reality television plays in mediating gender (in)equality. Mntungwa and Ngema (2018) note that television content has shifted significantly to mirror society on various issues including gender identities. Therefore, reality television would reflect the dominant understandings of gender dynamics as they play out in the broader South African society (Ngcongo, 2022) .

1.2 Problem Statement

There is wide scholarship on gender representation in reality television programming (Boylorn, 2008; Warner, 2015; Alameen-Shavers *et. al*., 2016). However, as a relatively new genre in South African media, there is limited literature that focuses on the role of reality television in mediating gendered discourses in South Africa. Despite legislative strategies and campaigns aimed at empowering women to establish a gender-equal society, there is evidence to suggest that the construction of gender roles positions women in inferior roles at home and by extension in society (Shefer *et. al*., 2008). Additionally, crime statistics indicate a rise in gendered violence year after year. Of the reported cases, South African Minister of Police Bheki Cele revealed the crime statistics report as indicating an increase of 13.7% in gender-based crimes in the first quarter of 2022. The report further notes that most crimes reported were against women and often occurred in their homes by perpetrators that are known to the victims (Quarter Four Crime Statistics, 2022).

Due to the increase in the call for stakeholder involvement, there are ongoing contestations on who needs to get involved and how they need to get involved to promote the equal rights of women. Literature has been produced to explore the role of stakeholder collaboration in enforcing gender equality in South Africa. This work focused on various centres of power including politics and the state to enforce existing legislation on gender equality with stricter punishment for gender-based violence (van der Heijden *et al*., 2019; Amisi, 2020; Dlamini, 2021). Political will in relation to interventions towards gender-based violence has been under scrutiny in the recent past following political elites and government leaders standing as some of the accused in gender-related crimes. One such case is the rape trial of former president

Jacob Zuma, with scholars such as Gqola (2007) and Suttner (2009) highlighting the key narratives which dominated discussions at the time of former President Zuma's rape trial.

Structures with varying analyses included the media in the reporting of the trial (Robins, 2008; Prinsloo, 2009; Worthington, 2010) and civil society organisations that expressed strong sentiments on HIV/AIDS and the status of gender equality (Moffett, 2008; Gouws, 2008; Frenkel; 2008). During the rape trial, former president Zuma's counsel had revealed that Khwezi (accuser) had been wearing a 'kanga[1]' when the incident took place. The kanga became a focal point in media discussions, with different symbolic meanings (Motsei, 2007; Robins, 2008; Reddy & Potgieter, 2006). From this literature, one can see emerging intersectional perspectives of society and the discourses around gender (in)equality in post-apartheid South Africa. Different viewpoints on the role of media, specifically reality television on the framing of gender representation are therefore of significance.

1.3 The purpose of the study

Thisresearch explores the role of reality television in influencing positive or negative gender representation in South Africa. By analysing reality television content, this study seeks to understand the hegemonic discourses on gender and in so doing deepen conversations around mass communication content and the possible harmful effects it has on gender equality. Hegemony in this study refers to the unequal power the male and female participants of the reality television show *Makoti, Are You the One*. Additionally, the study raises questions about media freedom and their contribution towards the national agenda on gender equality.

Reality television in South Africa often focuses on documenting 'white' and 'traditional' forms of weddings (Smit, 2016; Mbunyuza-Memani, 2017; Smit & Bosch, 2020). The weddings take western forms, also referred to as 'white weddings' and these are aired on shows such as *Our Perfect Wedding* (Mzansi Magic) and *Top Billing* (SABC 3). Shows such as *Our Traditional Wedding* on Moja Love showcase the more traditional forms of a wedding with a strong emphasis on family and the community coming together in celebration. From my observations,

[1] Kanga – is a colourful, message bearing cloth worn by women in many parts of East Africa

the reality television programme *Makoti, Are You the One* was well received by audiences. Week on week the programme was 'trending' on Twitter and sparking conversations and debates around the subjectivity of women. The popularity of the show was indicative of its unique offering. This study contributes to the ongoing research in understanding the framing role of media and in particular the genre of reality television. This study focused on the unique traits of the show *Makoti, Are You the One*, which occupies the space of '*hybridity*'[2] between tradition and modernity.

The channel Mzansi Magic which airs the show *Makoti, Are You the One* is governed by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA). This regulatory body in its policy mandate is guided by governments' key National Plans which include the NDP which aims at "reducing poverty and inequality in South Africa" (ICASA Strategic Plan 2020/21-2024/25, p.19). Therefore, using the data collected from the show and literature covering the various facets that make *Makoti, Are You the One*, this study takes a closer look into the role of South African local media in the co-construction of knowledge and meaning making.

1.4 Research question

Badenhorst (2007, p.25) states that research questions help to 'unpack the research problem.' Therefore, the research questions are a guide to the different themes of the research. The main research question for the current study is:

(a) How does the show *Makoti Are You the One?* frame discourses around gender equality in South Africa?

1.4.1 Sub-research questions

(a) Which gender discourses are given currency through dialogue on *Makoti Are You the One*?

(b) What does *Makoti Are You the One's*? construction of women's identities tell us about gender (in)equality?

[2] Hybridity refers to a repertoire of conflicting positions neither here nor there (Bhabha)

(c) What sentiments were expressed by female participants on the show *Makoti Are You the One?* to suggest acceptance and/or resistance to the construction of gendered roles?

1.5 Research aims

This study analyses the role that South African locally produced reality television content plays in facilitating gender discourses. This research aims to bring a closer focus on local media and the unique ways in which shows such as *Makoti Are You the One?* contribute to the ongoing construction of gender in South Africa.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

The research analyses broadcast episodes of the reality television show *Makoti, Are You the One?* The show was broadcast on DSTV's Mzansi Magic channel 161. Reality television show forms the main content of the analysis. I conducted desktop research which employs textual analysis and not interviews. This presented a challenge of lacking direct engagements with participants to evaluate their personal experiences on the reality television show *Makoti, Are You the One?* This would have added greater value to this study. Also, given the scope and the research method applied in this study, there was no direct way of measuring the impact that the reality show *Makoti, Are You the One* had on its audiences and the possible shifts it caused in audience perspectives of gender and equality. To curb this challenge, a limited amount of social media comments was included in the analysis to highlight the broader impact of the show on South African viewers.

1.7 Structure of the research report

This research report is structured as follows Chapter One provided a background of the study. Additionally, this section of the research report covered the problem statement, the aims of the study and the research questions intended to be answered in the research. This will be followed by a literature review and theoretical lenses which ground the research study in Chapter Two. Chapter Three details the research methods applied to generate data for analysis. After this an

analysis of the data focusing on the complexities of culture, gender and media is discussed in Chapter Four. Concluding remarks and recommendations are covered in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Literature review

This section of the research study first looks at gender equality and the role of the media as per the National Development Plan. Thereafter, it explores the literature on the role of media in society and the unique offering of reality television. Also covered in the literature review are the ways that discourse functions in media as well as gender representation in the media. Lastly, this chapter covers literature on culture and marriages in the South African context and the complexities posed by gender equality as a human right recognised in the constitution. The literature reviewed is aligned with this research to bring in the different elements that address the research problem of this study. Research gaps are also brought out throughout the review.

2.2 The role of the media in mediating the NDP's gender equality.

The focus of this research is on the role of the media in mediating the NDP's framing of gender equality. Gender equality is prioritised in the NDP (2011), a working document seeking to address and redress issues of inequality in South Africa. The NDP acknowledges the inequality of women comes as a legacy of past oppressive systems. Furthermore, under the section of the NDP titled *Women and the Plan* it is noted that women are the most affected by poverty and as such, the plan encourages collective participation to ensure gender equality through programs which empower women. Interventions are noted briefly along with the need to create opportunities for employment without discrimination, the right to practice religious and cultural beliefs and the freedom to live free of any forms of violence and oppression (NDP, 2011, p. 43). The media's role in creating gender equality in all of the above is highlighted in the following section.

2.2.1 The role of media in the NDP

In the NDP the media is noted as an important stakeholder in promoting social values. The NDP posits that:

> The media has an impact on the values that people hold and the lives they aspire to. Radio, television, film, and other product of the culture-industries provide the models of what it means to be male or female, successful or a failure, powerful or powerless. Media culture also provides the materials out of which many people construct their sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality, of 'us' and 'them' (p.426).

The plan further encourages the need for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) to promote values of inclusion and equality through local programming. The inclusion of the role of media in the NDP is an acknowledgement that media is a valuable stakeholder in the work towards a gender-equal society. It also elucidates the need for further attention to be given towards equal gender representation as a way of shifting society's stereotypical views of women.

2.3 Media and Society

2.3.1 Local media as a Public Sphere

According to Steenveld (2002), modern media in broader society facilitate equal distribution of power throughout society. Equally so, modern media channels are also meant to maintain a neutral position on issues that shape power structures in society. The media can therefore be considered a modern-day public sphere. The term public sphere referred to a group of members of the public coming together to deliberate collective interests aimed at influencing authority (Habermas, 1989). The importance of the public sphere is largely linked to democracy and its ability for citizens to form part of decision-making in governance issues,

giving views and opinions on societal developments (Gerhards & Schäfer, 2009). In essence, the ideology of a public sphere was centred around the ability to exercise freedom of speech.

Local television programming provides a mass media platform that can thus be viewed as a public sphere 'enabling dialogue between diverse components of a community, building on a common background, shared culture and experience' (Forde *et al*., 2002, p. 56). The media convergence between mainstream media and social media has allowed for a space where debates and discussions on content can take place. Using social media pages and hashtags, viewers can come together to give input and deliberate on consumed media content. Pressure groups also use these platforms to voice dissatisfaction and call for accountability and change. According to Keefer and Khemani (2014), the influence of local media goes beyond active viewers, depending on the level of influence the viewers have, they can exert their influence on the broader community members.

According to Habermas, there is a need for the public sphere to be free of external influence, noting that the media is the key institution that can drive the lifeworld of the public sphere (Habermas, 1967). While Habermas recognises the benefits of the independence of the public sphere from state control, Fraser (1992) argues that such independence poses danger to the existing exclusions that exist in the public sphere. Vickery (1993) notes that the Victorian separation model was a tool for the exclusion of voices affected by deliberations made in public discussions.

In social research, mass media is evaluated based on the influence and the effect it has on society (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Kepplinger, 2007). McQuail (1977) asserts that there is a co-dependency between media and society, while the media draws from society, there is equally an expectation from society to learn from media's different kinds of social roles and the accompanying expectations, in the sphere of work, family life, political behaviour and so on' (p.14). This positions media as an integral part of society in knowledge production and ways of knowing.

2.3.2 Convergence and the reimagination of the public sphere

Jenkins and Deuze (2008) argue that the power relations between media and audiences bring forth the effects of the convergence of old media with new media channels. According to Jenkins, there are increasingly blurred lines in the functioning of different media platforms as new technologies continue to function in unpredictable ways. New media has created forms of participatory culture and collective intelligence where power shifts between media representatives and media consumers (p.2). Multimedia convergence culture has resulted in the ability for information to circulate on different media channels. Also, media producers are more open to collective intelligence, which requires greater collaborations with the audiences (Holmes, 2004). Additionally, there are expectations that media consumers have in the need for media to be topical and timely.

The integration between mass media channels such as television and the collective intelligence with social media participants has thus become a re-imagination of the Public Sphere. For some, it has become an elitist space where the power for meaning making reserved for a select few that actively partake in the medium of talk where social meanings get redefined and modified. Convergence overall creates a public sphere where issues are discursive, reproduced and presented in the media over long periods (Carvalho, 2008, p.164; Dahan & Gittens, 2010; Black & Wiederhold, 2014). Similarly, *Makoti, Are the One* follows an already existing international pattern of reality media such as the *Real Housewives* franchise and other local programs such as *Date my Family* where the media commodify the lives of *'ordinary'* people for public discussion. The patterns also include the generation of a collective understanding of popular concepts and discourses online.

2.3.3 Reality Television

Reality television can be understood as content which involves the filming of participants in their daily lives (Nabi et al. 2003; Deller, 2016; Omowale & Sanusi 2015). Mass media uses different techniques to portray reality in the content they produce. Whether content is deemed to be real depends on the age of the viewer and the genre of the content presented (Hall, 2009). The emergence of the genre of 'reality television' and the surge in its popularity has created large scholarly interest. Much of the interest has been in the viewer's perception of

what constitutes reality television and the effects that such programming has on its viewers. Scholars such as Nabi (2003, 2006), Hill (2005) and Hall (2009) have evaluated reality television, the claims of its authenticity and the effects of consumption. The collective findings suggest that the popularity of reality television can be attributed to several factors including the non-professionalism of participants in reality television programming that viewers find relatable. Studies of reality television, however, note that entertainment and keeping the viewers engaged often supersedes the need to remain authentic (Rose & Wood, 2005; Tran & Strutton, 2014). Regardless of what the case might be, reality television offers a platform for people to get talking about important topics.

2.3.4 Media and Gender (mis)representation

Stuart Hall brought forward strong ideas on media representation. Concerning representation, Hall highlights that:

> The media are more and more responsible, for providing the basis on which groups construct an 'image' of the lives, meanings, practices, and values of other groups and classes, for providing the images, representations and ideas around which the social totality, composed of all these separate and fragmented pieces, can be coherently grasped as a 'whole' (98, p.340).

Representation is partly about who is responsible for creating images for circulation. Krijnen (2020) identifies a link between the number of women in positions of media content production and gender equality. Krijnen (2020, p.2) articulates this link on the basis that the representation of women in decision-making roles in mass media is limited. This has a huge bearing on the content produced for mass media consumption. Men and women are thus portrayed in the media stereotypically to represent traditional roles that depict men as the cultural standard while women occupy an inferior position (Wood, 1994). Gender roles are not 'uniformly sex-linked' but are learnt since childhood (Bandura, 1999, p.33.). Therefore, gender essentialism acts to influence the construction and modifying of gender in society. This relies on the value that society attached to media as an object of knowledge, to which Gauntlett (2008) argues that whether we are conscious or unconscious of the effect of media in everyday life, the level of consumption of such mediums plays a role in shaping our daily lives and the way we give meaning to our environment.

An autoethnographic study conducted by Bylorn (2008) identified a challenge in the representation of black women in mainstream media, particularly in reality television. Bylorn (2008) goes on to state that 'Black women often find other Black women to be their mirror image - seeing Black women boxed into stereotypes is like seeing yourself there" (p.415). Representation thus becomes key in how women see their roles portrayed. Thus, the framing of black women within the social stereotypes, re-affirms their position in society as defined by such. The sticky nature of stereotypes deems the '*othered'* less human (Puar & Rai, 2002), who is in our minds 'reduced from a whole and usual person to a tainted discounted one' (Goffman, 1997). Therefore, the representation of women of colour over time has a direct impact on their position in society, in how they view themselves and how society views them.

For example, Boonzaier (2017) explains that when female victims of abuse are portrayed negatively in the media, this makes them vulnerable to further victimisation. The media framing of the victims gives them an identity through which they are known by the public. The representation of women in the media has a ripple effect on the collective understanding of the characteristics and colonial constructions of a 'perfect victim' (Brodie, 2021) versus the marked bodies that Gqola (2015) refers to as 'unrapable' bodies. Perfect victims are white women whereas the unrapable are black women. These beliefs are transmitted and carried out through the media, which acts as a 'mirror' of society (Shamilishvili, 2019). However, the view of media as a mirror of existing social practices neglects the independence of media in using various methods and techniques to set new agendas which regardless of their reflection of society increase viewership and revenue.

Overall, the internalization of gender discourses that are legitimately recognised as common sense through media circulation and other forms of social engagements form the basis for the subjects becoming active agents in self-regulation and the regulation of others. This is an important dynamic in the social operations of power (Eagly & Wood, 2012) anchored and practised over long periods. Popular gender discourses are then conflated with biological traits of femininity and masculinity.

Post-feminism and christonormativity have entered the global discourse of gender by presenting gender movements with pressure to curtail their work (Memani, 2017). The idea of post-feminism is built on 'abstract individualism' which has entered the media discourse to promote 'the assumption that women's movements have accomplished its goals, and barriers facing women have been removed' (Ferber, 2012, p.67). This discourse will have one believe that no further attempts are required towards gender equality. This view is endorsed by the imagery in the media, framed to represent an equal power relation between men and women (McRobbie,2004). Concerning *Makoti, Are You the One?* the circulation of discourse is monitored in the interpersonal exchange between the participants.

2.4 Gender equality and cultural marriages in South Africa

Butler (2002, p.10) describes gender as 'cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes.' South African literature has explored gender extensively on the complexities of customary marriages against the ideals of gender equality as espoused in the South African constitution. Ndlovu (2021) notes that in Africa, society is the cornerstone of cultural marriages, which makes it different from western forms of marriage. Rudwick and Shange (2009), Sibanda (2010) and Nhlapo (2017) explore the traditional concept of *ukuhlonipha* 'the custom of respect' in a customary marriage. *Ukuhlonipha* is largely based on the social behaviour of *uMakoti* and how she manages to comply with the strict rules of the practice. Rudwick and Shange (2009), however, identify the challenges that this practice poses on the principles of gender equality arguing that 'the power dynamics of *hlonipha* in contemporary rural and traditionalist Zulu homes remain far from the idealised gender-equal respect patterns' (p.72). Bongela (2001) however, explains that the custom of *hlonipha* is still relevant among Xhosa people and the demise of such practices could negatively taint the identity of Xhosa people in how they view themselves as part of a collective.

The South African constitution embraces culture as an integral part of society's identity collectively practised and as a right for all citizens to practice their cultures under the banner of diversity and tolerance. Such a recognition emerges from post-colonial and post-apartheid pasts that disregarded diversity through culture. Archer (1996) however, posits that there are weaknesses in the structural systems of culture, explaining that the integration of culture can be in two arguments. The first is logical consistency which refers to 'the internal

compatibility between the components of culture' (Archer 2003:19). The second is consensus consistency which refers to 'the degree of social uniformity produced by the ideational influence of one set of people on another' (Archer 2003:19). In a country as culturally diverse as South Africa, uniformity thus become a challenge as interpretation and meaning making on a set of cultural concepts and understanding may differ. Therefore, to view culture as having homogenous and collective meaning to those who practice it would be to neglect that meaning precedes the subjects that practice the culture. Culture is thus designed as a form of control meant for one group to maintain hegemony over the other and this is kept by the belief in community and coherence (Archer, 2003). Steyn (2015) posits that over time hegemonic relationships gain a status of naturalization, where both parties accept the conditions as resulting from nature.

Culture, therefore, is more reliant on the embodiment of knowledge and practice and less on personal preferences and agency. Ndlovu (2021) notes the following characteristics as constituting an African cultural marriage (p.18):

> The arranging of when and whom young persons are to marry where the opinion of senior members of the kindred is likely to be more important than that of the young people themselves. (b) Clear rules to which kindred the children of the union will belong as a marriage links people of two different kindreds. (c) Some way of compensating the other kindred for the "losses" of their female member as a result of her being given into marriage. (d) The institutional provision against childlessness since marriage is related so closely to the continuance of society (Hastings 1973, p.28).

In *Makoti, Are You the One?* the marriage arrangement includes the mother of the groom-to-be and his extended family having decisive power on whether the marriage ultimately takes place after the 21-days of the reality show. This highlights the integral role of the family in the formation of the marriage while the 'community' plays a part in the upkeep of the marriage, where the married couple must abide by a set of rules that are seen as contributing to the betterment of the broader society. Community in *Makoti, Are You the One* is reflected in the interactions with friends of both the male and female participants who freely express their interests the relations between the prospective wives and husbands on the show. A sense of

community through marriage is also built and strengthened by the members of the family. In retrospect, *Makoti's* entrance into the family is seen as having a positive rippling effect through reproduction, labour and unity. For instance, Ngidi (2012) notes that:

> When a woman gets married, she marries the whole clan. From ukukhonga (lobola negotiations) to umgcagco (the wedding), things are done for the whole family and not solely for the couple. Hence, you would hear the groom saying '*ngivusa umuzi kababa'* (I am rebuilding my father's household), or '*ngifuna umuntu ozophekela umama*' (I want someone who will cook for my mother). The slaughtering of the goat to report the arrival of the bride is a sign that she is part of the family from then onwards (p.39).

The role of the wife is thus positioned as crucial in the sustenance of the marriage, in growing the marriage and in ensuring the well-being of the family and the community at large.

Due to the nature of the role of the wife in some instances, consent to enter marriage is not sought from the girl. This is seen in the practice of *ukuthwala* (forced marriage) where a girl is identified by either the intending husband or his family and abducted. Mwambene and Sloth-Nielsen (2011) and Curran and Bonthuys (2005) locate the origins of this practice in Xhosa ethnic groups, but it has since been adopted by other groups including Sotho men. In the practice of *ukuthwala,* Mwambene and Sloth-Nielsen (p.6-7) explains that the intending groom lures the girl to the area of his family home, then with the help of his friends forcefully carries her to his home. According to the traditions of this practice, the bride will have been aware of the intentions of the groom before the abduction. This constitutes consent on the part of the intending bride; however, this is not always the case. There are instances where the girl would be ambushed completely unaware. In both instances, the bride would need to visibly resist the abduction, which in the case where consent has been given, this act is said to 'preserve her maiden dignity' in sight of possible onlookers. What is not clear from the literature on *ukuthwala*, is the act of resistance during *ukuthwala* as a rejection of the proposal. This presents a gap in the balanced understanding of consent during the practice of *ukuthwala* and the role played by the onlookers in a different scenario.

In a study conducted in Ngcobo (Eastern Cape) Mwambene and Kruuse (2017), they discovered that the community expressed a deep sense of appreciation for the practice, as

promoting social cohesion and is an important part of their collective identity. For the community of Engcobo, the causes for the failure of marriages under this practice as resulting from a lack of respect between children and parents ('Girls are cheeky now'); the abuse of alcohol and drugs by young men (leading to an abuse of the custom); extra-marital relationships by women in the community (leading to, in the community's view, a woman who has been *thwalaed* (abducted) falsely accusing her new husband of rape because she wants to stay with her pre-existing 'boyfriend'); and continued schooling after the *thwala* (leading the girl/woman to turn away from her marriage) (Mwambene & Kruuse, 2017p.7).

This data reveals the role of the community and its participation in the gatekeeping of practices of customary marriage and thus the enforcers of the practices. Feminist studies have engaged critically on the positions women occupy in society and the role society plays collectively, citing patriarchy as a system of power that allows for the continuation of the oppression of women (Gqola, 2007; Albertyn, 2009; Dube; 2012). For Curran and Bonthuys (2005) it is within customary marriage that domestic abuse thrives without contestation. Therefore, as Albertyn (2009, p.171) explains 'culture sustains male power and interests and maintains women in positions of inequality and subordination.'

Mndende (2013) contends with the view of culture as oppressive, but rather offers a different perspective noting that African traditional religion and its practices have been 'relegated to a barbaric and outdated African culture with a secular spirituality' (p.74) in favour of Christianity structurally and otherwise. Mndende further asserts that power relations in religion as promoted in the South African Constitution remain in favour of Christianity over other religions. Much of the critique of practices associated with African religion as practised through culture had more to do with the stigma and stereotypes attached to African religion and the failure of the government to promote it.

2.5 Conclusion

Literature in this section of the review addressed the complexities of gender, women's rights, and the diversity in cultural beliefs and practices of marriage in South Africa. This is to address the cultural aspect of this study and contextualise the role of *Makoti* as it is the primary focus of the reality television show *Makoti, Are You the One*. The literature

highlighted in this section also reviewed the postmodern forms of the public sphere, the integration of social media with mainstream media and the positioning of women in mass media. The section also explored reality television as a site for reality television and its popularity. The literature aligns with the aim of the study which seeks to evaluate the role that media plays in the co-construction and circulation of gender discourses.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

2.6.1 Introduction

This section of the research report unpacks the theoretical frameworks that underpin this study. The beginning of this section covers the theoretical frameworks that are the lenses through which the data is analysed. The Foucauldian Discourse theory (Foucault, 2002) gives insights into the formation and the functions of discourse in society. Framing theory by Erving Goffman (1974) is used in this research to explore the role of media in framing what they want the audiences to think about. The two theoretical frameworks are used in interrelation with each other as applicable to this research study.

2.6.2 Discourse, Power, and Knowledge

Information passed as knowledge through mass media platforms is in keeping up with Foucault's discourse theory which states that knowledge circulated overtime eventually occupies the status of 'commonsense.' Foucault (2013) also posits that discourse produces the subject and attaches meaning to how the subject is known. In other words, how people come to know gender is in the everyday construction and re-construction which over time gains a status of acceptable 'everyday language'. The wide reach of mass media makes it an important element in the dissemination and penetration of discourses in society. This study looks at media as a producer of knowledge that contributes to the construction of meaning that is attached to gender. Dominant gender discourses are used to define and measure attitudes that constitute a good or bad *Makoti* as seen on *Makoti, Are You the One*? The study conceives of gender as discursive because gender's meaning is located in discourse (i.e., everyday language).

According to Foucault (2013), in discourse, language is not value-free but is produced and used as an exercise of power. Concerning identity Weatherall (2005) highlights language as a site where construction and meaning are formed. The link between language and discourse as an exercise of power lies in the set of statements (what is said), made dominant and the speaking rights (who speaks) which qualify the discourse. The weight and value of the discourse lie in the relationship between the speaker and the audience. Speaking rights are managed and regulated within the formal and informal structures of power (He, 2017).

Hall (2003) further notes that in mass media communication, the:

> process requires at the production end, its material instruments "its means" as well as its own sets of social (production) relations thereafter, the discourse must then be translated, transformed again into social practices if the circuit is to be both completed and effective (p.143).

In discourse, a subject is then produced and viewed and positioned in a particular manner, as intended by the discourse. Richardson and Jensen (2003, p.16) explain that a 'discourse can be understood as expressing a particular conceptualization of reality and knowledge that attempts to gain hegemony.' According to Antonio Gramsci (cited in Robinson, 2005; Malgaras; 2013; Gross, 2015) hegemony refers the ruling of one party over the other through consent. This implies that both parties are clear on the positions they occupy in the relationship. Hegemony in this study is evident in binary gender relations (male to female) and intergroup gender relations (female to female) as played out in *Makoti, Are You the One*?

Limitations with the Foucauldian discourse theory have been noted in the application of the theory, with critiques arguing it is only applicable verbally and textually, which is limiting to applying transdisciplinary (Sharp & Richardson, 2010; Parker, 2013). Also, human agency in the construction of the subject through discourse is noted as a limitation in the application of the Foucauldian discourse analysis (Newton, 1998; Reed, 2000; Vighi & Feldner, 2007). Fadyl and Nicholls (2012) further note that the Foucauldian form of discourse theory is based solely on the premise that nothing exists outside of discourse, therefore the use of interviews

as a form of research is a reproduction of discourse where one hegemonic institution is replaced with another and thus no real intervention for social change can be viewed as fully just.

The focus of this research is on how reality television programme uses cultural concepts to give meaning to gender. For this reason, the Foucauldian discourse theory is relevant in assessing the meanings that the programme attaches to gender discourses. Linking knowledge to power this research study is concerned with the gender discourses that are given currency through the broadcasting of the reality television series *Makoti, Are You the One*? The Foucauldian theory is most pertinent in this study as it engages with spoken and textual language, evaluating meaning-making that is expressed by participants on the reality television programme. Discourse theory, therefore, is applied in this research to gain an understanding of how existing gender discourses are reproduced on the programme.

2.6.3 Framing Theory

The framing theory informs this research. The origins of the framing theory are derived from the works of Erving Goffman (1974). According to Goffman, 'all individual's judgments and perceptions occur within certain frames of reference' (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2019, p.18). Mass media is an accessible reference point for knowledge and information. The framing theory is concerned with the 'origin, evolution, presentation and effects of the message' (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2019, p.19), therefore framing a narrative or an idea is a process that requires a result, where the messaging is intended to provoke some action. This aligns with the agenda-setting theory that McCombs et al.(1998) note as linked to framing within a broader media effects theory. Similar to the framing theory, media agenda setting is concerned with the outcome in determining not only what the public should focus on but in shaping the narrative to gain overall influence.

Miller (1990) asserts that institutions such as media that construct and reproduce discourses are never neutral, but rather create pieces of knowledge as an exercise of power (framing). Many scholars have also argued that media exercises its power by prioritising certain topics over others (Kosicki, 1993; McCombs, 2005; Boydstun, 2013). This is also known as agenda-

setting, a term which relates to the ideas and topics that mass media select, which can influence the public to also focus on (Coleman *et al*., 2009).

Carragee and Roefs (2004) argue that the view of framing as a media strategy needs to consider the extent of external influence as contributing to the framing of media content. Carragee and Roefs (2004) further assert that political influence and sponsorship play a crucial role in the meaning construction that is carried out in the media. What this suggests is that considerations in the research of media frames need to be observed internally (media personnel) and externally (external stakeholders) for the influence which directly impacts the order of the frames. Using 'ordinary citizens' as participants of the programme *Makoti, Are You the One?* falls within the genre of reality television. It is the 'ordinariness' of the show's participants that makes its framing convincing.

Nabi et al. (2003) identify the unique characteristics of reality television as unscripted content that is not filmed in a professional set for entertaining viewers (p.304). These characteristics make this genre of programming unique to the traditional forms of television programming. The popularity of this form of entertainment has resulted in growing interest from brands to form part of their marketing mix (Deery, 2013; Hill, 2018). Sponsorship deals between brands and media houses are often either in financial assistance, in-kind, or both. The implications of sponsorships in reality television programming may therefore result in external influence on the strategic intent and arranging and framing of content to accommodate the needs of the sponsorship. In media framing, therefore, Nelson (2019) explains that through sponsorship brands have influence that allows them to 'frame through the media' (p.34).

Other external influences include stakeholders in politics, government and other pressure groups that may influence the framing of the media content based on topics that are timely and relevant during a particular period. According to Scheufele (1999), five factors influence the media framing of any given issue namely, 'social norms and values, organizational pressures and constraints, pressures of interest groups, journalistic routines and ideological or

political orientations of journalists' (p.109). These factors highlight key stakeholder interests and influence mass media framing.

According to Brown (1969) in framing a narrative, frames are intentional and are organised according to the value placed on the set of information. Information that is deemed as less important does not gain the spotlight. Framing is a strategy that is used by the media to highlight certain topics that the media deems important. 'Frames serve as bridges between elite discourse about a problem or issue, and popular comprehension of that issue' (Nelson et *al*., 1997, p.224). Goffman (1974) however, is of the view that the user of the frame defines information and events thereafter giving their meaning to it. In this sense, the extent of media influence on the audiences is largely dependent on the meaning that individual audience members place on the media content.

The framing theory is used in this study as supplementary to the discourse theory to identify the order of importance that is afforded to the discourses that are played out on *Makoti, Are You the One?* The dominant discourses represent and highlight the value that is placed on certain topics over others on the programme. Understanding the order of the frames used by the platform directly addresses the main research question of this study on the role of *Makoti, Are You the One*? in facilitating gender discourses.

2.6.4 Gender theory

Gender theory is concerned with how social construction shapes our understanding of gender. According to Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1988), gender is a social construct that propels the social experiences of men and women, thus the is a need to deconstruct the meaning attached to gender discourses. According to Butler (2004):

> "To be female is, according to that distinction, a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of "woman," to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project" (p.902).

Critical feminist theory as normative, as is concerned with destructive efforts that seek to improve the lives of women in various spheres of life, to improve their socio-economic realities (Cudd, 2005). Gender theory allows for critical interpretation and the deconstruction of social discourse on what it means to be ‘male’ and ‘female’.

2.5.4 Conclusion

This section covered the theoretical frameworks that are used in this research study. The first two theories, namely Foucauldian Discourse and Framing theory, look at the impact of discourse and media on society, while the Gender theory is used to highlight popular conceptions of gender. Furthermore, the chapter covered literature on the evolution of media over time, the complex relations between mass media and media consumers and the emergence and popularity of reality television and its effect on gender representation. The next chapter will look at research methods and methodology.

CHAPTER THREE: Research Methods and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the methodology and methods used in the collection of data, the limitations identified in the research and the ethical considerations applied to the research process. Mukul (2011) describes the process of research methodology as ‘a systematic way to solve the research problem’ (p.11). The chapter starts with the research approach to which I now turn.

3.2 Research Approach

This study uses Critical Qualitative as a research approach. Critical qualitative studies, seek to investigate the complexities of our social world (Tuffour, 2017). Fossey *et al*. (2002) further explains that qualitative studies aim to ‘address questions concerned with developing an understanding of the meaning and experience dimensions of humans’ lives and social

worlds' (p.717). Since this study is concerned with meaning-making of discourses on gender, this research approach was identified as ideal in the textual analysis of *Makoti, Are You the One*?

3.3 Data collection

This section details the selected methods employed in the collection of primary data. Pawar (2004) notes as in social research the process of data collection does 'to a great extent affects the quality, quantity, adequacy and the appropriateness of the data' (p.3). Non-participatory observation was the primary data collection tool for the research.

3.3.1 Non-participatory observation method

The study employed a non-participatory observation method. According to Clark, *et al*. (2009) non-participatory research methods are 'devised for recording basic data about the characteristics, location and activities of groups and individuals within selected observation sites' (p.5). Kellehear (2020) lists the benefits of this research method as, non-disturbance to the participants, allowing for a re-checking of findings for validity and reliability, providing an easier compared to the planning process involved with interviews, being cost-effective and lastly possibilities for the data to be archived for future reference.

Data for the study was collected from the television channel 1Magic (Mzansi Magic) accessible on DSTV channel 103. The researcher watched the 13-episodes reality television series *Makoti, Are You the One*, which aired between the period of January 2021 to March 2021. Using the DSTV recording function, all 13 episodes were recorded for reference during the research period. Notes from each episode which averaged between 30-40 minutes per episode, were taken according to their relevance to the research study.

In the reality television programme *Makoti, Are You the One?* the audience engaged mostly on Facebook and Twitter under the hashtag #MakotiAreYouTheOne. Additional data was collected from the social media platform Twitter, using the Twitter search engine, under the hashtag #MakotiAreYouTheOne during the period when the series aired. The hashtag week

on week topped the trending list on Twitter. The social media commentary mostly took place after each episode aired. Notably, the engagements with the content of the programme were mostly based on the audience's accounts and interpretations of the content, with others drawing from their own lived experiences while others expressing how they would have dealt with the situations that the four *Makotis* were faced with.

The purpose of collecting the data from the platform was to assess social reactions as part of the analysis of the data. The collection of data from social media further assisted the researcher to evaluate how audiences made sense of discourses expressed in the broadcasting of the reality series.

3.3.2 Sampling

Following the 13 episodes of the series *Makoti, Are You the One?* the study employed purposive sampling. Rai and Thapa (2015) note that purposive sampling "relies on the judgment of the researcher". In this study, the sample comprises of all 13 episodes, identifying themes relevant to this study. Additionally, data is filtered according to relevant themes that address the research question. The data collected on social media platform Twitter is also selected to align with relevant themes of this research study.

3.4 Data Analysis

This research employed content analysis. The content was analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Critical Diversity Literacy (CDL).

3.4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

This study used Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. The Fairclough approach as explained in Janks (1997) consists of three interrelated dimensions of discourse. One of the dimensions is the object of analysis. In the context of this study, the object of analysis is the verbal exchange of discourse relating to gender. Analysis of this study adopted an approach that studies data that is both expressed verbally and in the unsaid. This is because the unsaid and unclear elements reveal the complexity of discourse. Janks (1997) encourages social researchers to lean into this complexity of the visible and the invisible.

This relates to the research question on the agency that is afforded *Makoti* amid restrictive rules enforced under the discourse of *Ukuhlonipha*.

The second entry step for discourse analysis by Fairclough is the process by which the subject is produced and received. This entry point acknowledges and reveals power dynamics between the person speaking and the one receiving the information. In the context of this research, this is explored in two folds, with one focusing on the information as it flows between *Makoti*- the potential husband- and the in-laws. Secondly, this is explored in the techniques that the production channel uses to 'spotlight' certain incidents and discourses.

The third and final entry-level analysis deals with the socio-historical context. At this level, the analysis focuses on the role of our gendered history in shaping current discourses on *Makoti, Are You the One?* As discussed in the second step of the analysis, the production channel possesses the ability to 'spotlight' certain information depending on the messaging they want to communicate and thus frame certain discourses at the expense of others. There are power dynamics that are revealed at each level of analysis.

3.4.2 Critical Diversity Literacy (CDL)

Critical Diversity Literacy (CDL) was conceptualised by Steyn (2015) as a framework to understand power dynamics between individuals, societies and institutions CDL unpacks the power dynamics that hide underneath everyday language. Wodak and Ludwig (1999) indicate that there is no correct interpretation of language, as language is subjective and as such, it may sometimes be difficult to identify oppressive elements in everyday language. Steyn (2015) explains that it is because hegemonic language is aimed to obfuscate and conceal the power of the dominant group whilst maintaining social control.

The first criterion used addresses the question of hegemonic positionalities. This criterion unpacks power in the relations between masculinity and femininity and the popular discourses that govern social gender hierarchies (Steyn, 2015). The second criterion explains social identities as 'an outcome of social practices' (Steyn, 2015, p.385). This criterion

unpacks the relationship between media and society in the co-construction of gender identities.

3.5 Reflexivity

Robson (2002) describes reflexivity in research as an 'awareness of how the researcher as an individual with a particular social identity and background has an impact on the research process' (p. 22). Moya (2011) explains the importance of the researcher's identity in knowledge production as a contributing factor to the kind of knowledge that they produce. This references the extent to which the researcher's positionality informs how they view social realities, also known as, their 'interpretive horizon.' I occasionally reflected on my categorical positionality as a married, black, middle-class female sharing a common identity with the research participants *(Makotis)* as affecting how I interpret and create meaning of the data. Further, my interpretations of culture are subjective. By using different secondary sources I was able to articulate a more multifaceted view of culture.

3.6 Limitations

Several limitations were encountered in the research. First, the research did not include human subjects that were directly involved in the reality series *Makoti, Are You the One?* for insights and feedback on their experiences. This was supplemented using Twitter individual posts and reactions to the show.

3.7 Ethical consideration

Ethics in research refers to the moral obligation of the researcher toward the research itself and the human subjects to be researched, in ensuring the privacy of the human subjects (Neuman, 2011). For this study, there was no direct contact with any participants, which reduced ethical risks that could potentially violate the acceptable norms of conducting field research. Thus, an ethics waiver was granted by the University of Witwatersrand under the School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee. Waiver number DIV2710221 was granted for the duration of the study.

3.8 Conclusion

The chapter outlined in detail the research methods employed in this research study, and the frameworks used for data analysis. The chapter then concluded with the researcher's reflexivity and the ethical consideration applied in the conduction of the research study. The next chapter will look at the research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: Findings and Discussions

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the data collected, and conducts a brief overview and background on the reality television series *Makoti, Are You the One?* The initial analysis addresses the biography of the reality series provided on the webpage of the Mzansi Magic Channel, which aims to highlight the selling points of the production. The analysis is arranged according to dominant themes as framed in the reality television series. I will now turn to the background of the reality television series.

4.2 Background to *Makoti, Are You the One*

A brief biography of the reality series as part of its marketing efforts is outlined on the Mzansi Magic (1 Magic) webpage. A webpage is internet accessible through a search engine and it forms an important element in the marketing mix for a brand due to its wide reach (Proulx & Shepatin, 2012). It is therefore worth evaluating the content on the webpage as an integral part of this research. The Mzansi Magic home page is a legitimate voice of the production channel. The information on the page reads:

> *What happens when four potential wives choose to move into their potential mother-in-law's home, with the hopes of earning their blessing to marry her son? That's the premise of 1Magic's ground-breaking new reality series, Makoti… Are You the One? (DSTV webpage)*

The framing of this first paragraph in the biography provided on the channel webpage starts with a rhetorical question. To arouse interest, the question is qualified with a suspenseful note concerning the potential wife's 'hopes of earning blessings from the mother-in-law to marry her son.' This supposes that the *Makoti* is seeking her in-law's blessing before marriage. This statement aligns with the question in the title of the series *Makoti, Are You the One?,* which is a question directed to *Makoti* by her potential in-laws. The title calls the four female participants to labour for the legitimacy of the title of *Makoti* to be bestowed upon them. On the other hand, the framing of the of the first paragraph on the DSTV website suggests that the only work that is required from the mother-in-law is that of judging *Makoti's* conduct to determine if she is a suitable wife for her son.

The title of the show thus carries an undertone and a theme for framing content that may be read as oppressive towards the four *Makotis* and threatening to equality as it poses no direct order towards the male partners. The framing of the title implies that the outcome be it positive or negative is solely dependent on the performance of the *Makoti*. Had the name carried a different undertone, one that is directed towards welcoming the *Makoti* the case would have been different. This is based on existing research which shows that the framing of television content is directly informed by the title of the programme (Cleary, 2016).

The wording goes on to state the following:

> *There's only one way to find out – by the potential wife moving in with her potential in-laws for 21 days, so that she can master and execute tasks that test if she is indeed someone who can fit into her new family.*

This statement suggests that it is the responsibility of the *Makoti* to win over the approval of the family as affirmed in the fourth paragraph of the insert, which advises *Makoti* to 'master and executes tasks that test if she is indeed someone who can fit into her new family.' The call to work for approval is indicative of a patriarchal society, where femininity works in service of masculinity. The statement propels the agency of the four *Makotis* to work towards what is framed as here as the goal of approval from the in-laws. As Rudwick and Shange explain, society places value on the ability of a *Makoti* to sustain her marriage through hard work such that a woman who is unable to sustain her marriage is rebuked. Steyn (2015) notes that in patriarchal societies, power is exercised through processes of *rewards* and *penalties* based on systems of inclusion and exclusion, depending on the extent to which one is (un)able to perform their womanhood.

Below is the summary of the show that alludes to the concept of *Ukukotiza:*

> *Makoti… Are You the One? takes the cultural practice referred to as 'ukukotiza' in isiZulu – a period where a woman moves in with her in-laws after lobola is paid – and brings it earlier into the courtship, allowing couples to possibly stop themselves from making what could be a huge mistake.*

This paragraph sells what is referred to in isiZulu as "*ukukipita*" (cohabitation) and "*ukukotiza*". This practice falls outside of the cultural norms among the Zulu nation (Posel & Rudwick, 2014). Hunter (2016) notes that there is a cultural process that needs to be followed

as means of legitimising *ukukipita*. This process also applies in situations where there is a clear intention for the couple to marry. Therefore, the principal of the show expedites *ukukipita* (cohabitation) even though it is a process that ought to follow lobola negotiations. This falls outside of the cultural norms of traditional marriage. This shows how culture is not essential but can be bent to satiate the desires of those in power.

The next statement shows the clash of cultures that takes place in the show:

> *Premiering on 7 January 2021, the brand new 13-episode reality show follows couples from vastly different backgrounds who are hoping to take their relationship to the ultimate step, marriage. But will their ideological, religious, socioeconomic and cultural differences get in the way of their happiness?*

In the above paragraph of the insert where the following question is posed: *Will their ideological, religious, socioeconomic and cultural differences get in the way of their happiness?* This statement flags potential cultural differences that may cause a hindrance in making the relationship between *Makoti* and the family work.

I contend that the use of the word *happiness* serves as a selling point to the idea that when couples marry that automatically leads to happiness. In *Makoti Are You the One?* happiness is defined in patriarchal ways that subjugate women in different ways. Erhabor and Ndlovu (2013) connect the idea of marital happiness with the degree to which individual needs are met in the union. In the context of the show, the process of *ukukotiza* is focused on women performing certain rituals that will lead to marriage. Therefore, the happiness that is sold in the statement relies on the subjugation of female participants. Other scholars also have noted the selling of 'happiness in marriage*'* as a *blessing* reserved for heterosexual couples and reflective to the extent to which they can abide by their Christian values (emphasis added) (Worthington, 1990; Nathan, 2002; Vanyoro, 2021) and/or cultural values (Posel, 1994; Albertyn, 2009; Mwambene, 2017).

The text goes further to state that:

> *By the end of the season, the couples will either make it out stronger, or crumble. What happens if the mothers-in-law doesn't approve of their potential makotis – will the son go ahead and marry the woman they love without*

Mommy's consent? What if the makoti herself decides this isn't the family she wants to marry into? Can love conquer all? It will make for riveting viewing![3].

In the following statement, 'What happens if the mothers-in-law doesn't approve of their potential makotis – will the son go ahead and marry the woman they love without Mommy's consent?' approval and consent are the property of the mother-in-law. The role of the mother-in-law thus becomes that of gate keeper to patriarchy. Such a framing calls for a nuanced understanding of how patriarchy also thrives under the complicity of women, a socially oppressed social group. This has been referred to as self-policing by some thinkers. According to Walby, (1989), self-policing is indicative of a patriarchal culture which is institutionally fixed and internalised.

4.2.1 Background on the participating families

Four families participated in *Makoti, Are You the One?* A brief background of the couples is provided below. The background also includes geographical areas and the languages used in communication by these families. This is to highlight the cultural and linguistic diversity in the selection of participants in *Makoti Are You the One*?:

Family No.1

Name of the *Makoti*: Ntombi

Name of the Husband: Nzwakele/ Nhlanhla

Based in KwaZulu Natal

Language of communication: IsiZulu

Family No.2

Name of the *Makoti*: Lona

Name of the Husband: Sipho (Obama)

Based in Gauteng

Language of communication: IsiXhosa, SeTswana and IsiZulu

[3] DSTV 1 Magic webpage - https://www.dstv.com/onemagic/en-za/news/1magic-s-bold-new-reality-show-makoti-are-you-the-one-coming-to-your-small-screen-in-january

Family No.3

Name of the *Makoti*: Gcina

Name of the Husband: Sabelo

Based in Gauteng

Language of communication: IsiZulu

Family No.4

Name of the *Makoti*: Lindiwe

Name of the Husband: Mbongeni

Based in Eastern Cape

Language of communication: IsiXhosa[4]

In the first episode, Lona and Lindiwe appear to meet with their in-laws for the first time. There is no indication of any familiarity between these parties before this introduction. However, for Ntombi and Gcina there are indications that there are existing relations before the documenting of the reality series *Makoti, Are You the One*. The filming of the series took a two-part approach highlighting the dynamics of the relationship of the couple and the relationship between the *Makoti* and her in-laws as separate relationships. The data presented similarities and differences across the four families. The differences were highlighted in the broadcast of the reality series to represent unique, easily identifiable features in the relations of each of the *Makotis* and their in-laws. There is minimal information given on the background of all four (4) *Makotis* including their social backgrounds. Further, there is no indication given of the financial background of *Makoti*. However, for some of their male partners, there is occasional mention of their financial and professional status. Therefore, the financial (in)dependence of the *Makotis* is not clear from the onset.

Information on the socio-economic status of the *Makotis* would give insight into the economic and professional aspects of their lives. This would show who they are aside from being mere extensions of their male partners. The concealed and silenced aspect of their full lives is indicative of what Foucault refers to as the 'political in the unsaid.' The *Makoti's* life

[4] This family exited the programme after 5 episodes and rejoined at the final reunion episode

is there framed as centred on their domesticity. This aligns with the overall theme of the programme, which requires that *Makotis* must prove their worth in the kitchen and the bedroom.

The constructions of the programme within the premises of the traditional relationship between a *Makoti* and the mother-in-law speak to intra- categorical intersectionality in the hierarchy of who has the power to decide over the other. This is how intersectionality speaks to differences within groups often assumed to be similar. Intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) who proposed a way of knowing and unpacking the social realities in the lived experiences of women under oppressive systems. According to Crenshaw (1989), women are a non-homogenous group and as such their social identities consist of intersecting axes of difference. In the context of the relationship between *Makoti* and the mother-in-law on *Makoti, Are You the One?* One sees evidence of power dynamics within the same gender category. The mother-in-law and the other female relatives from the side of the groom hold power in the decision-making regarding the *Makoti's* worth and right to belong to the family. The new home *Makoti* finds herself governs her movement and agency. Even the groom too has little power in determining if the family will like his partner, bearing witness to the fluidity of power. The next section of this study focuses on the emerging themes from the primary data. The analysis makes use of primary and secondary data.

4.3 The blurred lines of reality in *Makoti, Are You the One*

Reality television content is understood as mirroring society. However, it is important to note that the primary focus of media content is designed to entertain. The reality series *Makoti, Are You the One*? is grounded in cultural belief systems that surround traditional marriages. There are however some critiques of reality television programming who question the reliability of the content and its claims to authenticity (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004). For example, in traditional or customary marriages, the name *Makoti* is assigned to the new bride following a series of cultural rituals between the family of the bride and that of the groom (Mbatyoti, 2018). Therefore, culturally there is a clear distinction between a *girlfriend* and a *Makoti*. In episode 1 Gcina is corrected following referring to herself as Mrs Mkhonto. This is because her in-laws understand that the cultural processes are yet to be conducted and approval in

favour of the marriage is yet to be ascertained, thus the arrangement goes against traditional socialization in entertaining the arrangement of the four Makoti's moving in with the in-laws. Accordingly, the reference to the four female participants as *Makotis* is an inaccurate representation of reality. Referring to these women as *Makoti* while they are still '*testing the waters'* is different from how this takes place in actual society, becoming a misrepresentation of African traditions and/or culture. The complexity that is brought forth by this compromised representation of culture results in immense confusion from cast members in performing each of their roles – as *Makotis*, husbands and in-laws.

For the four female participants, there are expectations from the families and through the structuring of the production of *Makoti, Are You the One*, to perform the roles of *Makoti* before receiving the blessing to marry. This does not align with the *reality* of culture but is formulated by television production in the *likeness* of culture. Instead of representing reality, the media re-present reality. For instance, in episode 7, a traditional ceremony is performed in honour of Lindiwe by the in-laws. Lindiwe is seen dressed in the traditional Xhosa attire for a new bride and is given a new name as per the cultural custom of amaXhosa. However, during Lindiwe's diary session, she expresses the hope that following the ceremony Mbongeni will pay lobola and follow the cultural protocols. This positioning of the four female participants in the ambiguity of culture and media entertainment can also be viewed as positioning the women as human commodities put through the oppressive conditions framed as reflective of the 'African culture' for the benefit of entertaining audiences.

Entertainment in reality television programming is largely built on affect, the documenting of the emotions of the four female participants. The voices and opinions of other participants are also highlighted in the diary sessions. The focus in all diary sessions is on the perceived conduct of the *Makoti* – as part of their continuous evaluation. Through the voices, all participants' gender discourses are expressed consciously and unconsciously. With a mass media platform such as television, the effects of such discourse may be continuously reproduced with widespread influence on audiences. Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) however, argue that the impact of any media content is largely dependent on the relationship that the viewer has with the media content and how they create meaning from the content consumed.

4.4 Gender roles

4.4.1 *Ukukotiza*

This section shows how gender discourses are given currency on *Makoti, Are You the One*? Across all four families, the concept of *ukukotiza* is communicated regularly throughout the 13 episodes. *Ukukotiza* is a term derived from *Makoti* referring to the functions and duties performed by uMakoti in the household (Maenetja & Mogoboya, 2021; Maqubela, 2014). The function of ukukotiza is distinguished through gender roles and can only be performed by the feminine gender. In explaining the performative nature of gender, Butler (1990, cited in Luthuli, 2007, p.21) defines it as 'the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory frame which over time produce the appearance of substance, of a 'natural' 'kind of being.' Mwambene and Sloth-Nielson (2011) posit that there is a level of emotional labour required in the performance of *ukukotiza*. At times the intending wife is required to consciously 'forfeit' and 'manage' her agency to conform to the demands of the practice of ukukotiza (Mbatyoti, 2018, p.29).

It is evident from the first episode that there are expectations from all the families for the new *Makotis* to perform *ukukotiza*. In the first episode, *ukukotiza* is communicated by all four in-laws as a key determining factor on whether *Makoti* is worthy of being accepted and being granted a space of belonging in the family. It is upon the satisfactory conduct of such performance that they can be in good standing with their in-laws. Chores such as cooking, cleaning, doing the laundry and other household chores are immediately designated to the new *Makoti* so that she can prove herself. The family of the potential husband, mostly female members take on the responsibility to evaluate the performance of the *Makoti*, as well as the assigning of duties that need to be carried out by the new *Makoti*.

In episode 1 Gcina is given the responsibility to prepare the children in the household for school, which will require that she wakes up by 5 am. In episode 2 the family advises Lona that dinner must be ready at 5 pm every evening. In episode 6 Ntombi is given the responsibility to do the laundry for her in-laws. Her mother-in-law insists that the clothes need to be strictly hand-washed. Later in episode 10, Ntombi's in-laws voice their

dissatisfaction with her labelling her extremely lazy because she fails to do the most basic chores. Indeed, *ukukotiza* is a discursive function of culture that exercises hegemony over female bodies which are marked through culture as inherently inferior.

In episode 8 Lona is seen preparing Sunday lunch for her in-laws. Two of the family members expressed their dissatisfaction with the meal, condemning Lona for having used pre-packed vegetables from a retail store. Her failure to prepare the vegetables herself is expressed as unsatisfactory conduct. The aunt further refers to this observation as a telling reflection of Lona's poor upbringing "*Uyambona nje ukuthi uphuma ekhayeni, elinjani*" (You can just tell the type of family she comes from). Rudwick and Shange (2012) note that the failures of the *Makoti*, carry a stigma. The stigma on the side of the *Makoti* is taken to mean that she has failed to represent her entire family well.

When Lona irons the clothing items of her brother-in-law in episode 9, Sipho is seen expressing deep frustration and anger, arguing that Lona should not be ironing his brothers' clothing since he has his girlfriend. This later results in a threat of physical violence by Lona's sister-in-law who suspects that Lona may be intentionally trying to cause a division between the two brothers. Lona's mother-in-law later stresses "*angithi ulana ukuthi awashele wonk'umuntu*" (she is here to do the laundry for the whole family). The differing views indicate a different understanding of the boundaries of *ukukotiza* as understood intergenerationally between Sipho and his mother.

Throughout the 13 episodes, Nzwakele's family conveys dissatisfaction with Ntombi noting that she does not cook and clean. Ntombi's inability to perform *ukukotiza* to the satisfaction of her in-laws results in her being constantly compared to Nzwakele's former girlfriend (Mandwandwe) by her in-laws. There is an evident hierarchy to which Ntombi and Mndwandwe are held by Nzwakele's mother and grandmother in how they refer to the two individuals. There is deliberate avoidance from both the mother and the grandmother to refer to Ntombi as MaZulu per the Zulu culture of addressing u*Makoti*. In isiZulu, the *Makoti* is addressed using her surname (Irvine & Gunner, 2018). Using other offensive names to refer to Ntombi is a signal of their rejection and denial to grant her the status of *Umakoti.*

There is a difference in how the *Makotis* interpret *ukukotiza,* with some embracing the practice while others reject it. This is because the culture views gender in the categories of male and female as homogenous and does not allow for the complexity of differences (Xue, 2008). In *Makoti, Are You the One*? the resistance of the *Makotis* is framed through various dialogues and interactions between the participants as a sign of laziness and defiance of cultural norms and practices. According to Steyn (2015) structures and systems of power are made strictly as a method of sustaining power over *others* who are marked as inferior. Although there is a general understanding of the expectations of *ukukotiza* by the *Makotis*, how they navigate the expectations of the practice differs.

Ntombi resists some of the duties of *ukukotiza* expressing that she sees no need to do the laundry herself when she can pay for the service and still get the same results. Such resistance results in a deeper strain in the relationship between Ntombi and her in-laws. Lona actively tries throughout the season to perform to the requirement of *ukukotiza*, seeking to meet the demands of her in-laws. In her attempt to satisfy and meet the demands of the practice of *ukukotiza*, she views the criticism as constructive, as a means of teaching her to be a suitable *makoti* for Sipho. Gcina on the other hand expresses her displeasure and lack of desire for any form of 'domestic labour.' However, she expresses that she understands that the practice is part of the cultural processes that she must go through, an integration into her new family. Gcina's understanding of domestic work as labour is in keeping up with feminist understandings of domestic work as unpaid labour.

The role of the mother-in-law in the reality programme *Makoti, Are You the One*? appears to carry great significance for giving guidance to the incoming *Makoti* and contributing to the final decision-making on the fate of the *Makoti*. The intergenerational understanding of *ukukotiza,* is expressed differently throughout *Makoti, Are You the One*? There is an apparent gap in the value placed on *ukukotiza* by the in-laws in particular the female members and the *Makotis*. For the older members of the in-law *ukukotiza* is a mandatory practice that the *makoti* needs to go through. On the other hand, all four *makotis* express a view of the practice as ancient, oppressive, and non-aligned with the freedom and rights of women in post-apartheid South Africa. The sentiments of the *Makotis* are shared by the social media

audiences who express disagreement and disappointment with the treatment that the *Makotis* are subjected to and the tasks assigned to them as part of the practice of *ukukotiza*.

The practice of *ukukotiza* has been on the agenda of post-colonial African feminists who argue that it is embedded in patriarchal values which continue to threaten gender equality in South Africa, highlighting the lived experiences of women in social settings (De Lauretis, 1990). This argument is based on the belief that the practice positions women as inferior subjects that require policing in speech and conduct. Magoqwana *et al*,. (2019) argue 'care work' is an expectation from female academics in institutions of higher learning. Women are expected to perform the role of care workers to students without compensation. For Magoqwana *et al*., (2019) this is due to the patriarchal nature of society. Consequently, the authors note how association of care work to femininity limits the progression of women into leadership roles in institutions with a rippling effect that contradicts equality as espoused in the NDP.

According to Dillaway and Paré (2008) when popular media portray women, there appears to be a dichotomy between care work (stay-at-home) and paid work (employment). Similarly, in *Makoti Are You the One*? while there is regular mention of their professional occupation, none of the *Makotis* is framed as doing any professional work and thus having time to perform *ukukotiza* for the duration of the 21-day programme. The NDP acknowledges that women are the most affected by poverty due to unemployment and other social factors, recent statistics released in the second quarter of 2021 showed an improvement with 43.4% of the workforce in South Africa said to be women (Statistics South Africa, 2021). The media reframing of the four *Makotis* plays into the narrative of women as belonging within spaces of care work (at home) while their male partners are presented as the providers. This view, in turn, troubles the ideals of gender-equal representation through a potentially transformative platform such as the media.

4.4.2 Performative masculinity and its hegemonic role over femininity

"Uzoqina nini njengendoda ubeke umthetho for lentombazana"(When will you man up and lay down the law for this girl) - (Sipho's Aunt to Sipho in episode 10 during a family meeting to discuss Lona's unsatisfactory conduct)

Masculine and feminine expectations present challenges and opportunities for the participants on the show. The intending husbands on the reality series are from time to time reprimanded by family members for the poor performance of their masculinity. This is highlighted particularly for two participants Sipho and Nzwakele, whose prospective wives also struggle to gain acceptance from the family. Family members argue that the inability of Lona and Ntombi to perform accordingly is due to Sipho and Nzwakele's '*weakened'* sense of hegemonic masculinity over their female partners.

According to Schippers (2007), the relationship between femininity and masculinity is hierarchical. Masculinity naturally gains hegemony over femininity. Schippers also notes that hegemony resides in femininity, under a much different set of rules to that of hegemonic masculinity. Schippers (2007) notes that hegemonic femininity:

> consists of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimise a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (p. 94).

This highlights the relationship between femininity and masculinity as interdependent. In gender equality, the diverse nature of gender ideologies poses a challenge to how power relations and inequality is dealt with in a given society (Philips, 2014). Stoddart (2007) argues that the binary view of gender is built on discourses that have gained power over time. As Foucault asserts that the flow of power in discourse is through continuous commentary which reaffirms the discourse.

Mass media as products of culture result in the 'diffusion of culture throughout society represents a superficial democratization that is misleading' (Stoddart, 2007, p.198). In other words, the media must be a platform that is value-free with equal and fair representation,

however, this is often not the case. Due to the varied influences of media entities, representation is often affected by dominant forces of power setting the agenda, internally and externally. In this way, reaffirming the dominance of masculinity over femininity in mass media platforms may be a contributing factor to gender disparity and the view of power as residing in masculinity and not in femininity.

4.5 Gendered framing of witchcraft

"Mamela ke sisi indoda ayidliswa"(Listen young lady it is wrong to use a love potion on a man) – (*Sipho's mother to Lona in episode 9 following a confrontation about Lona's unexpected pregnancy*)

This section shows how the gender discourses on *Makoti, Are You the One?* construct identities of women concerning witchcraft. The history of labelling women as witches was intended to degrade and dehumanize and to mark the accused as undesirable others (Garett, 1977; Adinkrah, 2004; Ebohiyehi, 2017; Baruah & Thakur, 2019). Male witches are often referred to as wizards and this carries a different understanding that does not subject them to the same treatment as that of female witches (Brain, 1996; Adinkari & Adhikari, 2014).

The masculine ideologies of culture dictate how men and women ought to behave. A perceived weakness in masculine traits supports a belief that the female partner may have used traditional medicine also known as a love potion (*muthi*) to make the man love the woman more which in turn results in a reversal in the gender binary roles. The reversal is understood as the female occupying what is viewed as the masculine role of power and authority. In society when a man is accused of using *muthi* in a love relationship, a different value is placed on the accusation. The justification is often a necessary attempt to strengthen his relationship/marriage or to enhance their sexual performance to the benefit of the relationship/ marriage (Niehaus, 2002). Ward *et al.* (2006) notes that one of the key traits of masculinity is hostility. Attitudes of hostility are culturally deemed valid if projected on the weaker gender (female), in most cases the intimate partner. In patriarchal societies, it is therefore widely believed that when the female partner is the one presenting masculine traits, that *muthi* has been used. Such is the case with Sipho and Nzwakele. Resulting of both Sipho and Nzwakele's lack of performative masculinity, their partners are then accused of having

used *muthi* on them, which socially constructs them as witches. The two families display an understanding of masculinity as linked with the ability to lead and make all decisions.

In a separate incident in episode 8, Ntombi and Nzwakele were travelling with some of the crew members of the production team and were involved in an accident. During Ntombi's diary session, she voices concern over how she would potentially be accused of having a hand in the accident. She notes that her physical presence in the household as an already rejected member of the family deems her as a potential suspect for witchcraft. Rosen (2017) argues that the media framing of women as witches re-enforces gender inequality in society, altering the human status of the female gender. Accusations of witchcraft in women often have more to do with the socioeconomic status of the accused (Okonkwo, et. al., 2021) with less evidence of the act itself. Gender economic disparities thus play a role in the accusations of witchcraft.

Zwissler (2018) sees the framing of women with witchcraft in modern media as having evolved to align with feminist ideologies positioning women as powerful. This argument is based on how female witches are portrayed in media as the protagonist, removing the negative stigma of witchcraft carried over centuries which in some instances have led to the killing of women accused of witchcraft. In the context of this research, the accusation of witchcraft carries a negative connotation for the two *Makotis*. Lona's mother-in-law warns her in the presence of Sipho stating that "*mamela ke sisi indoda ayidliswa*" (listen, young lady, it is wrong to use a love potion on a man). The statement also comes as a warning to Sipho to be more vigilant of Lona's intentions and power over him.

The NDP (2011: 427) under the section: 'Promoting values using media', states that 'Media should be harnessed so that it plays a positive role in nation building, but strong measures should exist to ensure that content does not tilt towards propaganda.' Reality television, unlike other media genres, is designed as non-fictional to reflect the realities of society as they exist. While an argument emerges, that the reality programme *Makoti, Are You the One* promotes the devaluation of women in the framing of the Lona and Ntombi as practising witchcraft, the links between mainstream media platforms such as television with social

media platforms create a dynamic from which one can evaluate the impact such programming has in the broader society. For instance, reactions on Twitter on the specific subject of witchcraft as played out in the reality programme *Makoti, Are You the One*? question (1) the role of women as active agents of patriarchy and (2) gender equality in society. All commentary tracked under the hashtag #makotiareyoutheone suggests that the content of the reality programme *Makoti, Are You the One?* is received by audiences as relatable and reflective of current society, prompting discussions on cultural practices and their role in gender equality. This is supported by some commentary on personal accounts and lived experiences of the online users that are similar to those experienced by the *Makotis*. After it was revealed on the show that Nzwakele's grandmother had physically assaulted Ntombi before, one user commented "*Honestly speaking, I wouldn't have let this gogo beat me and get away with it, she would be in jail the same night. Yeeer ebile she can keep her blessing (in fact she can keep her blessing)"* Another user responded to the same incident "*And when Ntombi defends herself uthi (she says) she is rude and disrespectful!!"*. Following an episode where Ntombi was referred to by Nzwakele's grandmother as 'a reject' a Twitter user commented *"Ntombi should have smacked that gogo, pensioners always do nonsense and hide behind being old*". The commentary suggests a level of relatability to the content and experiences on *Makoti, Are You the One*.

4.5.1 Children out-of-wedlock – 'the Reject(s)'

In episode 3 during a conversation between Nzwakele and his grandmother, the grandmother questions why Nzwakele out of all girls would go for someone who already has a child out of wedlock. She then references Ntombi as a "*reject*" for that reason. As the grandmother explains, having a child while Nzwakele has none, makes Ntombi too old and more experienced to become the first wife of Nzwakele. The naming of Ntombi as a *reject* is derived from the father of her child's lack of desire to marry her even after having his child.

Some scholars argue that the ideal of a nuclear family within a heteronormative society is a colonial construct (Chang, 1997; McEwen, 2017; O'Laughlin, 2020). The social engineering of the nuclear family as the ideal leads to a stigma that is attached to women that have

children out of wedlock (Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006; Smithbattle, 2013) and similarly children born out of wedlock carry a similar stigma (Gerber, 2012; Obladen, 2022). This is because there is a cultural expectation for women to maintain their purity and wait for marriage before engaging in sexual activities. If they have sex, God forbid they fall pregnant. The child borne out of wedlock thus becomes a physical representation of the impurity of the mother. The condemnation, however, is not just limited to the mother, but the child becomes subject to derogatory names which highlight the child's illegitimacy (Lamla, 1985). As a cultural mechanism to preserve female purity, practices such as *ukuhlolwa* (virginity testing) are prominent in some South African rural communities, especially in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (Khuzwayo, 2000). This framing of the practice is said to encourage girl children to not engage in sexual intercourse that may lead to teenage pregnancies, fatherless children, and sexually transmitted diseases.

In the reality programme *Makoti Are You the One?*, the topic of women who have children out of wedlock comes up often, in particular regarding Ntombi and Lona. In episode 8 during a surprise birthday celebration in honour of Lona, Sipho introduces Lona's first-born child. Sipho's family later express shock that Lona already has a child. The revelation that Lona has another child before her relationship with Sipho comes after the family found out that Lona is expecting Sipho's child. Later in the episode, Sipho's aunt expresses during her diary session that the possible reason that Lona wants to marry Sipho is that having a second child out of wedlock would bring shame to her family.

Although Gcina had a child with Sabelo before they got married, this appears to bear no change in how Sabelo's family views Gcina as they continue to support their relationship. This is not the case with Lona and Ntombi who are constantly devalued because of this. Throughout the season there is regular mention of Sipho's child from a previous relationship. The context in which Sipho's child is mentioned in the programme and within the family setting is different and bears no correlation with his values as an unmarried man. This difference is picked up by the online viewers, who note the treatment of Lona as unfair considering that Sipho also has a child.

The role of the *Makoti* as stepmothers is explored extensively during the season. For instance, during a family therapy session in episode 9, Gcina is made aware of her shortcomings in mothering Sabelo's other children. For Gcina, since all the children still have their mothers, she feels no obligation to play that role. Lona on the other hand is condemned by Sipho when she requests to meet with the mother of Sipho's child. She claims that the introduction is necessary to integrate Sipho's child and the mother into the new family and set clear boundaries. In customary marriages, there is an expectation that when a woman marries a man who already had children, she then must assume the role of mothering all the children. This assumption is based on the gender discourse of women as mothers and nurturers. Therefore, as a sign of strength and a sincere commitment for the *Makoti* in embracing her new family, she is expected to play the role of motherhood within the household to all the children related to the family she is marrying.

Women who marry and have an existing child from a previous relationship, are advised that culturally the children belong with their maternal grandparents who assume the role of the child's parents (Moshikaro, 2019). When a woman then marries, she is expected to leave her child with her parents, unless cultural processes are followed which allow the child to live with the newly married couple. Therefore, in *Makoti, Are You the One,* the same concept of children borne out of wedlock is highlighted differently along gender lines (between the *Makotis* and their partners) and categorically within the women themselves. Overall women are not idle in these processes. They also practice some degree of agency, a subject to which I now turn.

4.6 Embodied agency

This section focuses on the verbal exchanges on acceptance and resistance of gender discourses among the participants of *Makoti, Are You the One*? Tanassi (2004, p.2055) describes the embodied agency as 'subjects who even though no longer agents of their intentions, continued to see themselves on a trajectory of subjectification and development.' The dichotomy of female objectification through a patriarchal practice versus a subjective desire to marry can be argued to represent the embodied agency.

Unlike in *ukuthwala* indications are emerging from the reality television series *Makoti, Are You the One?* that suggests the relationships of the four couples existed before the filming of the reality series. This indicates a level of mutual desire from both parties to advance their relationship through this given channel. For the *Makotis*, their involvement in the reality television series can be viewed and understood as personal consent to partake in this reality television programme with the given cultural conditions. However, personal consent is understood to have no bearing on the agenda of the channel. Also, although contractual agreements between the cast and the channel are not clear, we see in episode 6 an announcement on the departure of the Mbalana family. The message on the departure is framed to suggest that the family had on their own accord requested to be recused from the reality series. This further suggests an ability for the cast to exist in the reality television series at any given moment.

However, in patriarchy female compliance can also be coerced. Here I speculate that the *Makotis*, in their desire to marry their partners, endure and comply with the patriarchal system of culture with the hopes to fulfil their desire for marriage. Butler (2002, p.4) however, argues that in oppressive systems such as patriarchy, 'subjects regulated by such structures are, under being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced per the requirements of those structures.' This assertion suggests that women are produced as subjects in the discourse of culture. The discursive naturalised state of culture troubles the idea of free will and agency. However, following the context of this study where a media platform is used for compliance, the following section will explore the media techniques used to allow for the agency.

4.7 The mediated voice of the Makoti

Speaking rights are a fundamental aspect of culture. Women in particular married women are regulated in speech under the practice of *hlonipha*. The regulations vary from what to speak (vocabulary that can be used) to where to speak (the settings in which they are permitted to speak). The modernity that the reality series presents troubles the cultural concept of the speaking rights of Makoti. Through diary sessions, all cast members including the *Makotis* are given a platform to express their thoughts. This compensates for the discomforts while allowing all cast members to interpret events and conversations retrospectively while making

sense of them outside of the actual context. For Aslama and Pantti (2002), the diary sessions represent 'the participant given a voice alone with the camera as empowered' (p.178). Diary sessions occur frequently throughout the 13 episodes, and the opportunity to give reflections on any matter is afforded to different voices that were involved in the matter reflected upon.

The diary sessions allowed all four *Makotis* to speak freely, exercising their agency in giving individual opinions and insight while expressing their feelings on how they are affected by the different incidents. The diary sessions allowed the *Makotis* to occasionally divert from the cultural practice of *hlonipha*. Speech and language are the key requirement under the practice of *hlonipha* which dictates that women use one of the two options they have in speech which is either use 'hype-polite' language that is not offensive or rather reserve their views completely (Luthuli, 2007, p.23). The diary sessions thus suggest a scenario that both aligns and rejects *hlonipha*. In aligning with *hlonipha*, the *Makoti*'s use the platform to avoid confrontation with other cast members in particular their male partners and senior members of the families. In rejecting *hlonipha*, the platforms allow for free speech – and the *Makotis* express strong feelings towards their partners and in-laws.

Diary sessions are a built-in mechanism of reality television programming. For instance, Bente and Feist (2000, p.114) note that reality television consists of 'the most private stories of non-prominent people to a mass audience, crossing traditional borders of privacy and intimacy.' The confessional voice appears to be at the popularity of reality television (White, 2002 cited in Aslama & Pantti, 2006). The emotional shifts between the monologue and group engagements when there is an interviewer who has direct questions on the emotions expressed during filming constitute for reality element in reality television.

The final episode of the reality series was set up as a *reunion* episode. In the reunion episode, all four couples and the families participate in the question-and-answer session. Specific events from preceding episodes are brought to the fore, through the host and live engagements and questions from social media platforms. Different members of the cast are meant to account for comments and actions from all preceding episodes. The engagement with social media commentary makes the reunion different from the diary sessions. In addition, the cast members also get an opportunity to engage, give an opinion and ask questions to any of the cast members of the reality series.

The reunion allows for a broader community engagement, to question and re-evaluate the magnitude of various discourses. For instance, in the reunion episode, Mzwanele's and Sipho's families were made to account for the ill-treatment of Ntombi and Lona during their 21-day stay with their in-laws, with many noting them as having been victimized by their in-laws. The criticism levelled against the in-laws highlighted the generational gaps in society, the in-laws represented an internalized system of patriarchy by an older generation. On the other hand, the social media participants represented a more modern view of society that sees no place for patriarchy in society but embraces a more gender-equal society. The mechanism of the reunion episode gives an opportunity therefore to unpack the discourse while assessing the possible shifts that relate to gender equality from the broader public. Topics that caused the most discomfort emerged in the final episode as the most popular. The final episode is also recorded live unlike the preceding episodes. This is to allow for real-time engagement between the cast members and the public.

4.8 Conclusion

This section analysed the data using primary collected on the media platform (DSTV Mzansi Magic, channel 103) and secondary data from existing literature on gendered discourses. The first section of the analysis focused on content on the webpage of Mzansi Magic as part of the publicity for the programme *Makoti, Are You the One*? This is followed by themes that are arranged by the researcher to respond to the research question of this study. In the next chapter, I make conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Local media programming as a structure of society demonstrates an attempt to bridge social gaps to bring about cohesion and equality caused by past oppressive systems which led to the neglect of an entire black segment of society (Smit & Bosch, 2020). It is thus through local media programming that local identity patterns of equality are affected and refined by local media content. As such, media representation must encompass local values while mirroring the local demographic. With reality television, the balance between what is real and how to entertain audiences appears to be an ongoing phenomenon.

Gender discourses as a means of sustaining power over the '*othered'* in society are directly impacted and promoted through local social cultures that give meaning to gender. Thus, the experiences of men and women largely reflect the products of such discourses, in turn producing men and women as subjects of such discourses. The linguistic process of discourse as Hall (2003) explains requires encoding and decoding processes which are influenced by the frames of knowledge (how language is given meaning), structures of production (speaking rights) and technical infrastructure (media). What the data revealed in this study is the degrees of correlation between the locally produced reality television show *Makoti, Are You the One?* and the experiences of women in communities.

Although the experiences of the women in *Makoti, Are You the One*, reflect the women as social actors also restricted and produced as subjects of discourse, there are identifiable patterns of manipulation through various media techniques to cater to the element of entertainment. Evident in this claim is the distortion in fundamental processes of culture to produce the female subject as lacking agency. Why this is significant, is the study of the programme Makoti, Are You the One as a locally produced programme is reflective of the South African dynamic. The social media commentary on the content appears to be an extension of the diary session confessionals of the 4 *Makoti* participants. This observation is consistent with Agenda setting techniques deployed by the media. The lack of opposing views to the programme respondents on social media is indicative of a lack of diversity in the audience members who represent a limited segment of the broader society. In addition, there

also appears to be a lack of diversity in the chosen participants (the *Makotis*), although literature (Ngidi, 2012; Mndende, 2013; Mbatyoti, 2018,) seems to suggest that there is a lot more diversity in how women respond and are receptive of cultural practices and customs. As a consequence of the lack of diversity, intergroup representation of equality cannot be measured.

During the 21 days of filming, the *Makotis* are expected to perform *ukukotiza* and carry themselves within the principles of *ukuhlonipha*. Using cultural concepts, Makoti Are You the One, uses monolithic frames of viewing the female participants (*Makotis*) in line with the argument by Dillaway and Paré (2008) which says that media portrays women as either employed or as stay-at-home. This view is removed from the reality that women in South Africa occupy multiple spaces of society. Portraying women in the light of the reality television programme reinforces the narrative of women as belonging in care-work within households.

The role of Makoti Are You the One, appears to carry an inherent contradiction of power as it resides in gender binaries. Culture and modernity are used interchangeably in a reality television programme. I am basing this argument on the formation of the programme as a cultural concept where men occupy a positionality of power and authority over women, while the discourses that circulate within the programme are regulated and challenged in the diary sessions as means of the women using agency. Unlike in traditional settings, the ability of the *Makotis* to add a voice to the circulating discourses is set up as currency to reclaim their identities and co-construct discourses that are framed to produce them as inferior subjects. The men on the programme are presented to be in a constant exchange of power between them and their female partners. The pivotal inquiry brought forth by the link with social media is the cultural positionality of male dominance vs gender equality as a basic human right in post-apartheid South Africa.

How reality television integrates with the ideals of gender equality as per the NDP forms the basis for contestation for this research study. The question that the researcher had to contend with, is whether the role of local media as a reflection of society bears any opportunities to

progress gender equality. The marginalization of women in South African society is embedded in the ideological attachments to culture. How this plays out then in local media becomes a re-circulation of discourses that are potentially harmful to gender equality and progressive gender ideals as an end goal – as witnessed in *Makoti, Are You the One*.

5.2 Strengths and Limitations

The study was limited by several factors including time, budget constraints and scope. More work could have been done but all these factors affected the research approach I employed.

5.3 Recommendations for Practitioners

Below are recommendations for practitioners based on the research. There is a need for:

- Gender sensitization and training for media personnel in content production.
- Stronger policy collaborations between media houses and the government (Department of Women, Department of Social Development) are needed to include the visions of the National Development Plan on gender equality.
- Strategic efforts to strengthen budget reforms that seek to financially empower women.
- Stronger collaborations between government, civil society and the business sector on implementing gender mainstreaming policies.
- Educate and sensitize women on gender construction and how it plays out in their everyday lives.

5.4 Recommendation for future research

Considering the unique background of South Africa, a similar quantitative study of the media is recommended to measure possible shifts in the role that local media plays in promoting gender equality which will inform policies that regulate the media.

A research study that will evaluate the relationship between reality television and consumption and the impact it has on gender equality ideals in South Africa is recommended for future research.

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