


Missional review of the matrifocal role of Makhadzi and of Bathsheba in their patriarchal context

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This article reviews the matrifocal role of Makhadzi and Bathsheba in the patriarchal context from a missional point of view. The role and influence of the king's mother known as the queen mother in the Ancient Near East and the Makhadzi, the king's aunt, in most African traditional societies is still a phenomenon. The South African legislation is silent about Makhadzi's role, while the Bible uncovers a hint of Bathsheba's role in 1 Kings 1 and 2. To narrate the success of the Vhavenda leadership and that of King Solomon without the respective roles and influence of the Makhadzi and Bathsheba, will remain an incomplete story. As such, the question begs an answer: what is so significant about the Makhadzi and Bathsheba, which deserves our attention? Is it relevant in our debate about the role of women within the patriarchal context we live in? In reviewing the roles and influence of the Makhadzi and Bathsheba, within the patriarchal context, this article is set to discuss three aspects from the missional perspective: firstly, the basic role of the Makhadzi, within the Vhavenda leadership; secondly, the critical role of the Makhadzi, within the South African government legislations; and thirdly, the matrifocal role of the Makhadzi in comparison with Bathsheba's role in Israel.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article adds value to an ongoing debate regarding the matrifocal role of the custom-carrier, Makhadzi, within the traditional leadership and culture of the Vhavenda tribe and that of the queen mother, Bathsheba, within Israel. Despite the challenges within their respective patriarchal context, their respective matrifocal role has an influence on the building of their respective families and communities and beyond.

Keywords: Bathsheba; queen mother; missional; patriarchal; toxic context; *Missio Dei*.

Introduction

The South African legislation is silent about the Makhadzi's role (cf. Republic of South Africa 1996; Republic of South Africa 2009). The main scholarly concern and debate is that the Vhavenda's leadership core or key structure and governance remains incomplete without the inclusion of Makhadzi (Mamdani 1996: 56; Oomen 2000:214; Sithole 2009:76). At the same time, the Bible uncovers a hint of Bathsheba's role and influence in 1 Kings 1 and 2. This article highlights that any narrative of the success of the Vhavenda leadership and that of King Solomon remains incomplete without acknowledging the respective roles and influence of the Makhadzi and queen mother, Bathsheba. As such, the questions that beg answer are: what is so significant about the custom-carrier, Makhadzi and queen mother, Bathsheba, which deserve our attention? Is it relevant in our debate about the role of women within the patriarchal context we live in?

In reviewing the roles and influence of the custom-carrier, Makhadzi and queen mother, Bathsheba within the patriarchal context, this article is set to discuss three aspects from the missional perspective: firstly, the basic role of the Makhadzi, within the Vhavenda leadership; secondly, the critical role of the Makhadzi, within the South African government legislations; and thirdly, matrifocal role of the Makhadzi in comparison with Bathsheba's role in Israel.

The basic roles of Makhadzi within the Vhavenda leadership

Makhadzi, the concept in the Vhavenda tribe

The Makhadzi refers to the father's sister in Tshivenda culture, like in most African tribes. In most English-speaking Western countries, the word aunt is used for three kinds of relatives: the father's sister (paternal aunt), the mother's sister (maternal aunt) and an uncle's wife (in most African tribes, the Kinship systems are bilateral). Family members trace descent through both the male

and female lines, and hence in some ways, enjoy the socio-economic positions and benefits including the inheritance rights (Coombs 1980:57; Radcliffe-Brown 1950).

Makhadzi, in the Vhavenda leadership structure and culture

Makhadzi is the prominent members of the tripartite [*triumvirate*] structure of the Vhavenda leadership. The threesome leadership structure, namely, the tribal leader, the Makhadzi (father's sister) and khotsimunene (father's brother) constitute the core triad or the supreme organ (harem) of the Vhavenda royal family leadership. The tribal leader appoints his senior sister (the *khadzi* who is the Makhadzi in making) and his brother (the *ndumi* who is the *khotsimunene* in making) to assist him in leadership. The royal family leadership in collaboration with the royal council (chosen by the royal family leadership) lead the Vhavenda tribe. In that context, the Makhadzi is prominent, powerful and influential advisor in the chieftainship (Buijs 2007:61). When there's problem in the musanda, the chiefly household, the Makhadzi would be summoned and they would offer advice (Stayt 1931:208).

Makhadzi as mediator in succession battle

When a man succeeds his father—whether as the family head, the chief or the king—the process is often fraught with many complexities and controversies (Stayt 1931:196). To avoid conflicts, disputes and/or bloodshed between the factions of rival brothers of royal wives, some mechanisms are usually put in place to ensure continuity and consistency in the succession procedures and processes (cf. Van Warmelo & Phophi 1948:67). The Makhadzi is best fitted for the task within the royal family (Matshidze 2013:43; Rambau 1999:78; Stayt 1931:198). The Makhadzi is at the centre not only of approving the successor (the heir) who will continue the family lineage with integrity but also in giving direction, in terms of succession procedures and process to ensure that the customs (beliefs, norm, values and practices) are adhered to (Van Warmelo & Phophi 1949:1027).

Makhadzi as a regent in tripartite alliance

In essence, the father's senior sister (aunt, Makhadzi) plays a very crucial role in Venda life, sharing with her elder brother the privileges pertaining to the head of the family (Stayt 1931:174). She usually acts as regents in the Vhavenda tribal leadership. A regent is a person selected to act as a head of a state (ruling or not) when a ruler is a minor, absent, weak or dead. In essence, her social position is that of the chief as she rules together with chief (Stayt 1931:196ff). The tribal leader cannot arbitrarily take crucial decisions without consulting or seeking advice of Makhadzi and that of *khotsimunene* (father's brother) (Buijs 2007:61; Rambau 1999:78). Normally, the succession is hereditary, passing from the deceased father to the oldest son of the senior wife. It is then the responsibility of the father's oldest sister (Makhadzi) to approve and appoint the heir to the

family or suggest a new heir if that son proves to be incapable.

Makhadzi as regent in the tribal leadership

'[A]ll vital matters connected to the state must be referred to her [*the Makhadzi*]' (Stayt 1931:196).

The Makhadzi is so highly regarded as the custodian of the indigenous customary laws (norms and values) that she can intervene, negotiate, mediate, counsel, reconcile marriages, families and relatives who are involved in conflicts or disputes to maintain family unity, integrity and stability (Matshidze 2013:28; Tamale 2005:9). The threesome leadership structure, namely, the tribal leader, Makhadzi (father's sister) and khotsimunene (father's brother) and the tribal leader's senior sister (the *khadzi*) and his brother (the *ndumi*) as the royal family leadership in collaboration with the royal council do some check and balance regarding the power and authority to the help the traditional leader in reaching most decisions in mutual agreements or consensus (Stayt 1931:208). In the event of a deadlock, it is usually the Makhadzi who will have the final say as she is the respected women within the traditional leadership.

Makhadzi as a mediator in royal family

According to Rambau (1999:78), socially and traditionally the Makhadzi is like a mediator for the family where disputes arise between the husband and wife, the child and father, the bride and bridegroom, the father-in-law and mother-in-law. As a mediator she would listen to both sides and adjudicate on the matter and in most instances her decision is final. Family members in some cases would consult the Makhadzi in search for a wife as she was known for being very instrumental in arranging marriages of the preferred wife-to-be and avoiding intermarriages with girls with dubious life and family background (Van Warmelo & Phophi 1949:28).

The critical role of Makhadzi in the traditional leadership

The conundrum regarding Makhadzi and her role

The South African legislation is silent about the Makhadzi's status and role in the traditional leadership structure and culture (cf. Republic of South Africa 1996; Republic of South Africa 2003; Republic of South Africa 2009). In this regard, the main scholarly debate (concern) is that the Vhavenda's leadership core or key structure, culture and governance remain incomplete without the Makhadzi's status and role (Mamdani 1996:56; Oomen 2000:214; Sithole 2009:76). These Acts and Bills recognise the traditional leader as the sole leader in the traditional leadership and the dynamics of the tripartite alliance and check and balances of power and/or authority of the traditional leaders are ignored by the South African democratic government.

The replacement of the status and the role of Makhadzi

The *South African National Assembly of the Traditional Leadership and Government Framework Act* and the *Traditional Court Bill, B1 of 2012, Section 17* states that (Republic of South Africa 2003; Republic of South Africa 2009):

The Minister may, within the resources available at the magistrate's court in which jurisdiction the traditional court sits, assign one or more officers to assist a traditional court in performing its functions under this Act.

It is clearly articulated that the motive (positive intention) behind these South African legislations is co-operation (working together) of the modern and traditional leadership and courts system in democratic era to avoid the conundrum. However, a conundrum persists regarding the status and role of the Makhadzi in African tribal context of Vhavenda. Her status and roles are replaced by powers given to the South African democratic government officers in the performance of the traditional leadership and the traditional courts system at the local level in alliance with the South African democratic principles of governance. This is also evident when the royal family in collaboration with the royal council take decision about the successor. According to the South African legislations, they should inform provincial government about their choice of a successor and their motivations thereof. The new traditional leader is accessed (if it done correctly), approved and registered at provincial level. The date of installation is also required to be confirmed and regulated by the national and provincial legislation.

Makhadzi and the dichotomy between the local municipality and traditional leadership

The *Constitution of 1996* not only impacted the Makhadzi's prestige and relevance in the South African's new democracy but it also stripped the traditional leadership of its power and authority to carry out their functions for their subjects. The *Traditional Leadership and Government Framework Act 41 of 2003, Section 13* is established to necessitate the good working relationship between the traditional and government leadership to avoid unnecessary tension between them. The *Traditional Leadership and Government Framework Act 41 of 2003, Section 13* deals with the appointment of a regent when a successor to a traditional leadership position is still a minor. The royal family led by the Makhadzi should identify a regent to assume leadership on behalf of the minor. The incompatibility between the local municipalities and local traditional leadership creates tensions in many aspects, given the state of the South African legislation. For instance, in many local tribal areas, there are still questions regarding the custodianship and allocation of the residential, graze and arable land (Houston 1996:25f). It is this tension or gap that has necessitated this review, given the Makhadzi status, role her significant and relevant contributions which are not accommodates in the South African legislations.

Makhadzi and the dichotomy between the civil and customary marriages

The *Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 120 of 1998* recognises the customary marriages. There are contestations

and dichotomy regarding the customary and civil marriages. Without getting into the merits of the matter, this article highlights the fact that the South African legislation is silent on the status and role of the Makhadzi. She is known in the Vhavenda families and culture to be the legitimate custodian of the customary moral code (norms, values and practices), which are not only known and transmitted from the past generations but also carried over, held on, sustained and adhered to by the Makhadzi to be transmitted to the next generation. For instance, Makhadzi is instrumental in ensuring that the marriages are arranged, negotiated and concluded in accordance with the customary norms, values and practices to promote continuity of the family lineage. In the leadership context, Makhadzi ensures that the leader (chief) marries a woman from a noble family or another chief to ensure a noble offspring (son) (Van Warmelo & Phophi 1932:37). In that regard, Makhadzi used to be consulted, for her advice on and approval of a possible wife to marry and her family background (Stayt 1931:174) and thus the families suspected of witchcraft were avoided (Van Warmelo & Phophi 1949:27). In that way, most marriages among the Venda were culturally acceptable marriages by either being arranged or preferred. This article is not about the merit of these matters, but about the status and the role (influence) of Makhadzi in the Vhavenda culture. The following section compares and links the matrifocal role of the Makhadzi, the custom-carrier, within the traditional leadership and culture of the Vhavenda tribe to the role of the queen mother, Bathsheba within the ancient Israel. Despite the challenges within their respective patriarchal context, their respective matrifocal role has an influence in the building of their respective families and communities, and beyond.

Matrifocal role of the Makhadzi vs. the role of Bathsheba in ancient Israel

Bathsheba: From one of the most prominent families in Israel

Bathsheba came from one of the most prominent families in Israel. Without disregarding other family members, this section focuses on the nine men in Bathsheba's early life who are revealed in the Bible. The first man in her early life was her father, Eliam (2 Sm 11:3), also known as Ammiel (cf. 1 Chr 3:5) was ranked as one of the 37 'mighty men of David' (cf. 2 Sm 23:34). Her father gave her the birth name Bathshua, which means 'daughter of my prosperity' and later her name was changed to Bathsheba, which means 'daughter of an oath' (cf. Strong 1890); this shows that she meant a lot her father.

The second man in her early life was her grandfather, Ahithophel, who was the chief political adviser or counsellor of David and of Absalom. He was so wise that his counsels were 'as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God' (cf. 2 Sm 16:23) and hence he was ranked above the priests Abiathar and Jehoiada (1 Chr 27:33f).

The third man in her early life was her brother, Machir, who remained loyal, in the times of political crisis, not only to the house of Jonathan (Saul's son and friend of David-cf. 2 Sm 9:3) but also to David during the times of Absalom's rebellion (2 Sm 17:27ff).

The fourth man in her early life was Uriah, Bathsheba's first husband, who was among the David's elite palace guard and the 'mighty men' (2 Sm 23:39). Although a Hittite by nationality, he was likely a Jew by religion; his name contains the suffix *-iah* for Jehovah and *Ur* for the light or flame, and therefore he was called the flame (light) of Jehovah (Orr 1915). These four men in Bathsheba's early life were well-known in David's palace. Whether Bathsheba was known by David or not, is still a debatable matter.

The fifth man in her life was David. David was 'a man after God's own heart' (cf. Ac 13:22; 1 Sm 13:22). The narrator indicates that David's adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah, were premeditated sin. David had asked about her identity and knew that she was the granddaughter of his closest adviser, the daughter and the wife of two of his top soldiers and the sister of the man who remained loyal to the houses of Saul and David, the two kings of Israel (cf. 2 Sm 11:3f; Hagensick 1996).

The sixth man in her life was Nathan, the prophet who confronted and accused David of his sin. Yet, he remained a trusted adviser and counsellor of the family of David and Bathsheba. He even intervened when Adonijah (one of David's sons) was about to take over the kingdom of Israel and helped Bathsheba to fight for Solomon to be David's successor (cf. 1 Ki 1 and 2).

The seventh man in her life was her first Son with David. Bathsheba as well as the people learned a lot from David who fasted and prayed for the life of the child. But when the child died of sickness at the age of 7 years without a name, David immediately laid aside the garments of repentance and mourning and stopped fasting and went to the house of the Lord and worshipped. Rather than accusing God of taking the life of his son or being bitter that he was being punished, he accepted the discipline of the Lord.

The eighth man in her life was her second son with David. David named him Solomon, meaning, 'peaceful' (cf. 2 Sm 12:24) while Nathan, the prophet, named him Jedidiah,

meaning, 'beloved of Jehovah' (cf. 2 Sm 12:25). Through these names, the readers gain insight into the hearts of David and Bathsheba; they found peace with God, who pardoned their sin out of His love for them.

The ninth man in her life was her third son with David. Bathsheba named him Nathan (2 Sm 5:14; 1 Chr 3:5; 14:4). Nathan means 'gift of God,' 'he gave,' or 'given'. Bathsheba acknowledge God for her son and also Nathan, whom she regard as her friend, adviser and/or counsellor. God's forgiveness of sin of David and Bathsheba is further highlighted by the fact that Nathan is the ancestor of Mary – the mother of Jesus (cf. Lk 3:31) and Joseph – the stepfather of Jesus Christ is a descendant of Solomon (Mt 1:6, 16).

Bathsheba and other women living in the ancient Israelite (patriarchal) context

Table 1 illustrates a sample of women who were and are still living in diverse patriarchal context: firstly, that they were in diverse socio-economic positions and conditions, for some were rich like the rich woman of Shumen (cf. 2 Ki 4:8–31) and some were widows, barren, prostitute, foreigners among others. Secondly, that they were distinct or noticeable above the rest of women in those times, for they cry or speak out. Some made a silent protest (cf. 2 Sm 21:8ff), some made a silent prayer (cf. 1 Sm 1:10ff), some spoke in different forums from private to public court of justice as indicated in Table 1. What is distinct about it, is that they took a bold step about their positions and conditions and refused to condone a status quo of the time but sought a change in their diverse ways, which caught attention of the biblical narrators. Thirdly, that they had a sense of progeny (seed or offspring), and legacy continuity which moved them to action in the time when their husbands or men seem to be ignorant or dormant as implied by the biblical texts mentioned in Table 1. Fourthly, that they sought restorative justice as their goal, and this is what this article is all about. Many examples can be used to argue this point including, (1) some women like Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba among others sought restorative justice for they gave birth to the heir or breadwinner with or without the knowledge that he will be God's promised seed (offspring); (2) some women, like the two prostitutes and the two so-called 'cannibal' women, as indicated in Table 1, shows that despite their bad profile a women will still sacrifice in

TABLE 1: Sample of women in the Bible who sought restorative justice.

| Diverse cases in the Bible | Women who cry or speak out | Before (God via) authority | Voiceless or helpless victims | They sought restorative justice |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Gn 12; 15; 16; 27; 30 | Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel-Leah | Abraham, Isaac, Jacob | The husband's name goes on. | Restoring the seed and/or legacy in faith |
| Gn 38; Jos 2; Rt; 2 Ki 2 | Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba | Judah, Salmon, Boas, David | The husband's name goes on. | Restoring the seed and/or legacy in faith |
| 1 Sm 1; 2; 3; 2 Sm 14:1–11 | Hannah and the woman of Tekoa | To Priest Eli, to king David | A plea for the son, living son | Giving birth, second chance despite sins |
| 2 Sm 21:8–13 | Rizpah-Saul's Concubine | To king Saul | Cry for dead sons' bodies | Seeking their decent burial |
| 1 Ki 3:16–28 | The two prostitute women | To king Solomon | Claim the living son as theirs | No, let the living son live! |
| 2 Ki 4:1–7 | The widow of deceased prophet | To prophet Elisha | Save two sons from slavery | Husband's debt is to be paid |
| 2 Ki 4:8–31 | The rich woman of Shunem | To prophet Elisha | To raise her dead sons | Her only son with her old husband. |
| 2 Ki 6:26 | The two 'cannibal' women | To king Joram | The living son is to be eaten | No, let the living son live! |

Note: Please see the full reference list of Muswubi, T.A., 2026, 'Missional review of the matrifocal role of Makhadzi and of Bathsheba in their patriarchal context', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 47(1), a3722. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v47i1.3722>

seeking restorative justice (and/or salvation) especially for her children; (3) some women, such as Rizpah show resilience even in silence in the face of unspeakable grief until it got to the ears of those in power (cf., Olojede 2013:767ff); and (4) some women like the wise widow of Tekoa, and the rich women of Shunem will seek restorative justice by fighting for the salvation of their living and/or the pronounced dead children (in sin) as indicated in Table 1. These cases can be well elaborated in the life of Bathsheba.

The matrifocal role of the queen mother in the Ancient Near East

Smith (1998:146) notes regarding the queen mother [*Gēbîrâ*], 'her power may well have derived originally from her position in the court, even though it was her own qualities that enabled her to wield it effectively'. The term *Gēbîrâ* appears 15 times in Old Testament, with variant meanings, although used mostly in relation to the king. The meaning ranges from the mistress (woman) in charge of a house, household, such as Sarah (cf. Gn 16) and Naaman's wife (cf. 2 Ki 5) to the first (or great or principal) lady who is the highly ranked or positioned (woman) in the royal courts of the nation with the royal power and authority (influence), who is commonly called queen mother (De Vaux 1961:117; Smith 1998:144). In comparative studies, scholars relatively categorised the known variant meanings into three divisions (Ben-Barak 1991:23; cf. Holladay 1988:54). The national records or register called the regnal formulas, also left evidence that the queen mother is the most powerful person in the nation next to (or after) the king (cf. 2 Ki 24:8, 15; Jr 13:18; 22:24–27; and 29:2).

The matrifocal role of Bathsheba, the queen mother within the kingdom of Israel

Bathsheba is the first official queen mother of the monarchy. She was the former wife of Uriah, who became David's wife and Solomon's mother. Bathsheba became active figure, when she serves as a queen mother, helping Solomon to succeed his father, David (1 Ki 1:11–22), otherwise she was a passive figure who watched her first child die as part of God's punishment for adultery (cf. 2 Sm 11–12). This article highlight her role as the mother of Solomon not only to ensure that Solomon succeeds his father David, and to secure her status as the queen mother but also her sociopolitical and religious role beyond the court of justice. Bathsheba's relationship with king Solomon paints her status and role as a queen mother and there are at least five ways among many that demonstrated it. Firstly, she interceded for him to succeed his father against his rivals and hence help in securing the Davidic dynasty (1 Ki 2:13–24). Secondly, she was his personal advisor and/or counsellor. Thirdly, she crowned Solomon upon his accession (Song 3:11). Fourthly, Solomon as the crowned king bowed to her and set a throne for her on his right hand (1 Ki 2:19), signs of respect and authority. The following sub-section discusses the three main ways among many that paint Bathsheba as one of the queen mother (the Hebrew, גִּבִּיָּרָה, *Gēbîrâ*) who was very influential woman in the Ancient Near East.

The queen mother, Bathsheba as an intercessor in her son's succession

As an intercessor, queen mother, Bathsheba secures the nation by persuading David to consider the succession plan. This privilege belongs to the queen mother and not to David or priest or prophet. In fear for the lives of the royal family (cf. 1 Ki 1:12), Nathan understood this privilege and hence approached Bathsheba regarding Adonijah's actions and insisted that she petitioned David to secure Solomon's succession to save their lives and position (Bathsheba as queen mother under Solomon instead of Haggith under Adonijah) (cf. Rice 1990:11). Nathan could have understood that Bathsheba was crucial to make a petition to David for Solomon's royal succession (cf. Lunceford 2009:67). As the queen mother, she was privileged to ensure that Solomon becomes God's rightful and chosen successor of David and that she will place a crown on his head at his royal coronation (cf. Song 3:11; 1 Ki 2:13–18; Ackerman 1998:136). The normal procedure was that the first born succeeds his father. As David's health was waning (1 Ki 1:1), his son, Adonijah, the oldest surviving¹ son, and Haggith stepped forward and gathered 50 soldiers around him for the coronation and declared himself as king and David did not question it (1 Ki 1:5f). There was an apparent tension in the house of king David. One of the clear signs was the tension between Adonijah's followers and Solomon's followers as Solomon and his followers were not invited to Adonijah's coronation (1 Ki 1:9–10). Bathsheba intervened and put an end to the rivalry by ensuring that her son, Solomon, inherited, and kept the throne as the next king of Israel (1 Ki 1:15ff; Nowell 2008:8). Based on this story, the heir of David is the beloved of God who is destined to build a house for Yahweh (2 Sm 12:24; 1 Ki 6:11ff; Borgman 2008:137).

Queen mother, Bathsheba, spoke on behalf of Solomon before king David

Bathsheba, as the queen mother showed her assertive, forceful, vigorous and intellectual persuasion as she craftily reminded David not only of the oath that he swore to Yahweh that Solomon, her son Solomon, would be his heir and his successor as the king of Israel, but also reminded David that when he dies, she and Solomon will be in danger of being killed (cf. 1 Ki 1:20; Brueggemann 2000:15; Cogan 2001:159f; Fretheim 1994:24; Fritz 2003:20; Klein 2000:59ff; Rice 1990:11f). She managed to remind David of his oath and hence he proclaimed Solomon as king, Adonijah and his followers made no claims to kill Solomon and his followers and acknowledging Solomon as the one of whom God approves for the throne (1 Ki 2:15).

¹Two of his oldest sons, Amnon and Absalom, had passed away (2 Sm 13:23–33; 18:14–17), there were still many other sons to choose from David's six sons while in Hebron and other sons while in Jerusalem, including four sons with Bathsheba as well as nine other sons with his concubines (1 Chr 3:1ff). Adonijah, Solomon's older half-brother and the heir apparent, tried to take advantage of their father's old age (1 Ki 1) and seize the throne (2 Sm 3:1–5). God promised David that one of his sons would succeed him as king, without mentioning who that son would be (2 Sm 7:12). In 1 Kings 1:17, David had told Bathsheba that Solomon would take over the kingdom. As a result, Nathan urged Bathsheba to inform David of Adonijah's declaration to be the new king. David intervened immediately and Solomon was anointed as Israel's next king (1 Ki 1:39).

The origin of the United Kingdom of Israel: Bathsheba, the queen mother of the nation-Israel

Bathsheba is the first official queen mother of the monarchy. She was the former wife of Uriah, who became David's wife and Solomon's mother. Bathsheba became active figure, when she served as a queen mother, helping Solomon to succeed his father, David (1 Ki 1:11–22), otherwise she was a passive figure who watched her first child die as part of God's punishment for adultery (cf. 2 Sm 11–12).

Queen mother, Bathsheba, spoke on behalf of Adonijah before king Solomon

After Solomon's succession, the narrative depicts Bathsheba as a counsellor to her son. One day, Adonijah approached Bathsheba with a request that he should graciously be given Abishag to be his wife. Abishag is a young woman who was chosen to inflame David's passion in his old age, although he never had sexual intercourse with her. She was now a part of David's wives. Bathsheba neither affirmed nor denied Adonijah's request but agreed to go to Solomon with Adonijah's request without questioning Adonijah's intentions and ulterior motives (DeVries 1985:37; Hens-Piazza 2003:27; Jacob 2007:80f; Phillips 2008:171f; Sakenfeld 2003:77). Apparently, both Adonijah and Bathsheba were so naïve, for they knew what they were doing regarding the royal protocol (1 Ki 2:13). In her capacity, Bathsheba intentionally exposed Adonijah (Solomon's chief rival) in that, she was literally giving Solomon a reason to justify why he should execute Adonijah (1 Ki 2:20; Cohn 2010a:95ff; 2010b:107ff) and hence Solomon understands such an intention (Andreasen 1983:189). He interprets Adonijah's request not as a simple consolation, but as intent and attempt to lay claim to the throne (kingship) (cf. Rice 1990:23). He could not take his mother's word but reacted violently not only to the opposing faction after his succession but also to the request of Adonijah and hence sentenced him to death for that petition (1 Ki 1:13ff; Jacobs 2007:80; Sweeney 2007:68). Adonijah was so terrified, assuming that he is going to be killed and hence went to the sanctuary in the Temple (Brueggemann 2000:22).

The queen mother, Bathsheba, coronates her son Solomon to the throne

Bathsheba, as the queen mother, entered in court, Solomon (1) rose to meet her; (2) bow down; (3) greet her; (4) set a throne; (5) on her seat (position); or (6) throne [כִּסֵּא] on his right hand (1 Ki 2:19). All are symbolical. It reveals her position, paint a picture of her status as a queen mother, vested (delegated) with honour, respect, power and authority (Ps 80:18; 11:1). A common practice: the king will remain seated on his own throne when any person enters throne room (cf. Ackerman 1998:137; DeVries 1995:38; Lunceford 2009:68, 80; Walsh 1996:52).

Conclusion

This article reviews the matrifocal role of Makhadzi and Bathsheba in the patriarchal context from a missional point

of view. The role and influence of the king's mother known as the queen mother in the Ancient Near East and the Makhadzi, the king's aunt, in most African traditional societies was a significant. The South African legislation is silent about Makhadzi's role (cf. Republic of South Africa 1996; Republic of South Africa 2009). The main scholarly concern and debate is that the Vhavenda's leadership core or key structure and governance remains incomplete without the Makhadzi's role (Mamdani 1996:56; Oomen 2000:214; Sithole 2009:76). At the same time, the Bible uncovers a hint of Bathsheba's role and influence in 1 Kings 1 and 1 Kings 2. In this article it is highlighted that to narrate the success of the Vhavenda leadership and that of King Solomon without the respective roles and influence of the Makhadzi and queen mother, Bathsheba, will remain an incomplete story. This article answers the question as to what is so significant about the custom-carrier, Makhadzi and queen mother, Bathsheba, which deserve our attention? Is it relevant in our debate about the role of women within the patriarchal context we live in? In reviewing the roles and influence of the Makhadzi and Bathsheba within the patriarchal context, this article is set to discuss three aspects from the missional perspective: firstly, the basic role of the Makhadzi, within the Vhavenda leadership; secondly, the critical role of the Makhadzi, within the South African government legislations; and thirdly, matrifocal role of the Makhadzi in comparison with Bathsheba's role in Israel. This article adds value to an ongoing debate regarding the matrifocal role of the custom-carrier, Makhadzi within the traditional leadership and culture of the Vhavenda tribe and that of the queen mother, Bathsheba within the ancient Israel. Despite the challenges within their respective patriarchal context, their respective matrifocal role has an influence in the building of their respective families and communities and even beyond.

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The author declares that no financial or personal relationships inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

CRedit authorship contribution

Takalani A. Muswubi: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft. The author confirms that this work is entirely his own. The author has reviewed the article,

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Data availability

The author confirms that the data supporting this study and its findings are available within the article and its listed references.

Disclaimer

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