



Wedding day.

Photograph by Cedric Nunn, Afrapix

# Will there be lobola in a post-apartheid society?

## A Burning Issue

"Lobola is a burning issue," say Phillipine Mathele and Princess Palepale, who are students at Khanya College in Johannesburg. They went out to ask young people what they thought of lobola in these changing times. The question they asked was: Will there be lobola in a post-apartheid South Africa? The people they spoke to were quite excited about the subject. And they wanted to give their views.

## Our Culture Today - Our Culture Tomorrow

Some people saw lobola as a good part of our cultural heritage, and others saw it as oppressive to women. Some said that the meaning and value of lobola has changed over the years.

Palesa Xorile is a 23 year old student from Soweto. She said: "Because lobola is our culture, and it was there before the emergence of western culture, it should exist in a post-apartheid South Africa. Our great grandparents valued lobola because it shows the pride the parents have in their daughter."

Tumi Mabena is a 20 year old student. He felt there would not be lobola in a post-apartheid South Africa because it does not have any value anymore. He said: "There is no difference because young people stay together without lobola. Especially in the urban areas. The generation of today are less interested in tradition. Today the parents of the bride make business by demanding a lot of money. In return they want the groom to take care of their child in all respects."

## A Common Culture

Evelyn Lehoki, a 20 year old student, feels strongly about the issue of lobola, culture, and the future South Africa. She said: "In a post-apartheid South Africa, we will be guided by an ideal of a non-racial democratic South Africa. So there will be no prejudice on mixed marriages. Therefore we will have to achieve a common culture across the colour line. I believe there will be new norms to replace the marriage negotiations."

## Equal Rights

Earlel Mailula is 27 years old and lives in

Johannesburg. He spoke about the changes in meaning of the tradition of lobola. He said: "In the past the understanding of the bridegroom was that he was accepting a woman as a minor, and accommodating her into the responsibilities of the adult world of the man. But now things have changed. Today lobola is no more done in the old way of paying livestock, but by the academic qualifications of the girl. Today our culture has changed radically. Women are fighting for equal rights with men. In a post-apartheid South Africa, lobola will be there, and it will be shared equally amongst the spouses. Or the price system should be abolished and there will be the exchange of gifts between both parties."

### **Tradition or Business?**

Some people believe that if you do not pay lobola, you do not value the woman. You undervalue her, or get her 'for cheap'. Other people say that lobola has turned into a business. And others say that lobola turns women into things that you can buy, like furniture.

Pauline Motsoane is 23 years old. She said that she felt lobola should be paid. "It gives respect to a girl," she said. "If a man has paid lobola he can have other girlfriends but he cannot forget his wife."

Nomvula Toko is a 19-year-old student. She said: "People will not want to lose their tradition. Lobola restores family pride in the bride. The groom will show the bride's family that he will be able to take care of their daughter since he is able to pay lobola. Lobola is not trade but acceptance of the two families, and bringing the two families together."

Tredgi Maepa is a 19-year-old student from the Northern Transvaal. He said: "I don't foresee the existence of lobola in post-apartheid South Africa because that will be the people's government, whereby the people will be in power. The majority of people are against lobola because lobola has turned into business."

### **Equality or Control of the Woman?**

Have you ever heard a man say: "I can do what I want to my wife. I paid for her. She belongs to me."? Aaron Matlala is worried about this kind of thinking that often goes with lobola. He is a 23-year-old student. He says: "The money paid for lobola brings inequality between men and women because the man will regard his wife as a commodity. He is going to control his wife whenever he wants. And the woman must not say anything because the woman was paid for. If lobola does not exist there will be a contract between men and women that will show the two are married. In that way men and women will be equal, because they will share everything equally."

Joseph Gigimane is 32 years old. He said: "Lobola will not exist in a post-apartheid South Africa. It is no more a sign of goodwill as it was supposed to be. With lobola the bridegroom feels that he has bought the bride in that sense of buying furniture. The wife, like furniture, becomes property and can be shifted around without having a say. It also gives males that unsound idea that they are superior and dominant."

Nana Gumede, 35 years old, refuses to accept that the lobola system is in any way good for women. She said: "Parents demand thousands of rand for their daughter. They don't think about the financial problems that they are putting onto the young couple. And then once the lobola has been paid, the husband does not see the difference between his wife and any other thing he has had to pay for. Then he expects her to jump when he tells her to. I am not interested in lobola. My father knows this and we argue about it. But I say that if he demands five thousand rand, I will pay half and my husband will pay half. There is no ways that I will be paid for."

Lobola is a very important issue that affects most people's lives. We have to make sure that the peoples' culture that we take with us into the post-apartheid South Africa does not oppress women. What do you think about lobola? Write and tell us. Write to: SPEAK Collective, P.O. Box 19375, Dormerton, 4015, Durban,