

LOBOLA

**AENEAS
CHIGWEDERE**

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**the pros
and cons**



LOBOLA — THE PROS AND CONS

By AENEAS CHIGWEDERE

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ZIMBABWE GROUP OF AUTHORS



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PREFACE

The question of lobola is a hot one. It is a knotty one too, in spite of the external appearances to the contrary. But in a rapidly changing society as ours today, the issues involved have to be faced squarely. We cannot afford to shun or shelve them. It would be irresponsible of us to leave things as they are at present.

But the practical social reformer must first have the important facts before him before tampering with any legislation affecting the issue. This book provides those basic facts on the subject of lobola. It does so in a manner never yet done in this country. Many there are who take it for granted that they know and understand the subject in question. This book will make you realize how mistaken you are.

It is a book no young man or woman should marry without first reading. It is a book every parent must read before he or she negotiates a marriage deal for his son or daughter. It is a book social reformers must read before they touch on the thorny subject of Lobola. It is a book in a class of its own in social subjects.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY:

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Minister of Community Development and Women's Affairs, Zimbabwe	

INTRODUCTION	1
--------------------	---

PART 1 — DEFINITION OF LOBOLA	1
-------------------------------------	---

PART 2 — LOBOLA PAYMENTS AND PURPOSE	3
--	---

PART 3 — LOVE — PROPOSAL	24
--------------------------------	----

PART 4 — SERVICE TO MAJORITY	31
------------------------------------	----

PART 5 — THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE SYSTEM	35
--	----

PART 6 — EVOLUTION SINCE 1890	40
-------------------------------------	----

PART 7 — REFORM OR ABOLITION?	48
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FOREWORD

All live cultures are dynamic. This dynamism is the mechanism by which the new needs of society are accommodated while the old practices that have outlived their use and thereby become obsolete are discarded. This is a natural process.

In the light of Zimbabwe's new Socio-economic order heralded by our hard-won independence, some of the old Societal practices including the old African traditional ways of life are coming under close scrutiny if these should appear to clash with the demands of modern society and the guiding philosophy of the new nation.

In Zimbabwe the age-old custom of "roora" (lobola) is one of our institutions that is currently attracting much public debate and scrutiny. There are several stances being propounded.

On the one hand the congruency of meaning, interpretation and practical implications of "roora" are being questioned in a society aspiring to Socialist egalitarianism.

On the other hand there are those who can only contemplate a judicious overhauling of the custom to rid it of the mercenary intrusions and thus restore it to its original concept.

There is yet another School of thought that advocates the retention of the custom in its present form on the basis that the form it has taken is in direct response to the present Socio-economic realities.

Mr. Chigwedere's contribution in producing this book which tries to describe the institution and its meaning is a very welcome contribution at this time mainly because it tries to clarify the facts so that evaluators of the custom can do so from a position of better knowledge of the facts.

Mr. Chigwedere goes further to advance arguments for retention of a "purified" form of lobola. This should serve as an opening for the debate. It is to be expected, of course, that other people will put forward their analytical views so that in the near future Zimbabwe will follow a marriage contract arrangement that is well reasoned and consistent with the rest of other developments in our new society.

TEURAI ROPA NHONGO

Minister of Community Development and Women's Affairs, Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION

Those who are in touch with general African opinion in both the rural and urban areas will agree with me that the question of Lobola is a sensitive issue. It is an issue, too, in which the greatest numbers of Africans are highly interested — interested in it for what it is; interested in it for purposes of reforming it; interested in it even for the purpose of abolishing it.

The subject has become a particularly live one since the recent condemnations of the whole institution of Lobola by one or two public figures — condemnations that appeared in our daily papers. The debate on the subject then culminated in the Zimbabwe Television discussion involving a Deputy Minister of our government, a lecturer at our University and myself. Since then, I have become fully aware of the extent to which it is a highly sensitive subject. The decision to write this book was made in response to many appeals made to me by Africans in various walks of life after the Television debate alluded to above.

We can only make constructive criticism of the institution of Lobola if we know what traditional Lobola is all about; we can only introduce meaningful reforms of the institution if we know as much about it as possible; we can only abolish it if we are convinced that it is in the general interests of the country and only if we educate the general public to accept it.

There can be no doubt that our knowledge of this whole subject is clouded. It is not many who know precisely the purposes which Lobola was meant to serve. We do not even find it easy to define Lobola. Blatant extortions have crept in and are looked upon as part of tradition. The son-in-law does not know precisely what he is supposed to pay or what he pays for. In the light of all this; it is necessary to set the record straight. Only this record will enable us to make meaningful and constructive reforms to the institution. Only this can enable us, the government, to peg a path and influence the future development of this long-standing and highly sensitive issue. This book is therefore meant to enlighten the public as much as possible on this subject that affects the overwhelming majority of Zimbabweans.

PART 1

DEFINITION OF LOBOLA

This is possibly the most difficult part of the subject. Yet attempts to define it must be made and have been made.

(1) One group of scholars has called it a **DOWRY**. One dictionary defines dowry as the "portion woman brings to her husband." This definition is clearly out of place. It is so, not because the African woman brings nothing to her husband after marriage, but because what she brings with her to her husband is not part of rowora (lobola). What is paid by the husband and his party and as a part of the marriage deal to the father-in-law and his party, is what we call "rowora." In our system, it is the man who marries (positive) whilst the woman "is married" (passive). As such, all payments connected with the marriage deal are a one way process from the bridegroom

and his party to the father-in-law and his party. "Dowry" is therefore completely out of place as a definition for rowora (lobola).

(2) A second group of scholars defines lobola as **BRIDE WEALTH**. This definition is certainly far better than dowry yet still, it is not very apt. The inclusion of the word "wealth" in the definition has the misleading connotation that the payments made by the son-in-law and his party were for the purposes of enriching the father-in-law and his party, which is not correct. We cannot, of course, deny that it may have that effect depending on the economic power of the bridegroom and his party. Yet it remains true, all the same, that the idea behind it was not to enrich the father-in-law and his party, but to cement relationships between the two families concerned by convincing the bride's party that one meant serious business by paying the traditional dues. Precisely what you paid and how you paid it was immaterial as long as there was agreement between the two parties.

Yet, in spite of this, the Shona word **PFUMA** (derived from "kupfuma" — to be wealthy) used to describe the lobola payments, implies "wealth". In Shona, such statements as "I recovered my daughter (from the son-in-law) because he has not given me my "pfuma", are very common. This could be so because generally, the Shona also refer to cattle as pfuma. Part of the lobola — the most important part — was normally paid in cattle or something that represented cattle. As such, lobola could be referred to as pfuma (wealth) because it was paid for in that item (cattle) that represented wealth and was the sign of wealth in our traditional society. This means that although the definition **BRIDE WEALTH** may not be very apt, it is quite close.

(3) A third group of scholars has suggested **MARRIAGE INSURANCE** as the definition for lobola. That lobola payments helped to keep married couples together — reduced chances of divorce — cannot be doubted. This is to be discussed later in this book. Looked at from this angle, lobola can be likened to some form of insurance. But, as we are going to see later, the purpose of lobola payments was not to reduce chances of divorce, but to gain rights especially over the children. A man could end up with three wives from the same family, but for one set of lobola if the first two wives failed to give him children. This makes it clear that lobola payments were made for children and not for women in their own right. This being the case, it is not proper to describe lobola as "marriage insurance" as if on its own, it guaranteed the success of the marriage. It could be more proper to define it as **CHILDREN INSURANCE** for indeed the bridegroom gained ownership of the children by virtue of lobola payments. If he paid nothing in the way of lobola, the children were not legally his.

(4) From the above, it is clear that it is difficult to find one English word that aptly defines our concept of lobola. For this reason, I shall here define lobola as "all the payments made by the bridegroom and his party to the father-in-law and his party to secure the services of a bride." In our traditional society, the most important of these services was the issue of children. This should be emphasized. Indeed, if lobola is a form of insurance at all, it is a "children insurance."

After the Television discussion alluded to above, one criticism was made by a member of the public that the word payment should not have been used. The gentleman concerned went to the extent of saying that Africans do not pay lobola, but deliver lobola and therefore whatever the son-in-law and his party discharge to the father-in-law and his party should not be described as payments, but deliveries. I have here continued to use the word payments and I will continue to do so for indeed these "deliveries" are payments.

To begin with, every African knows that the lobola "deliveries" are not voluntary on the part of the bridegroom and his party. They are obligatory. The father-in-law and his party demand them and they determine what they should be. An obligatory "delivery" of this sort must necessarily be a payment. Secondly, the lobola "deliveries" entitle the bridegroom to definite rights; they are not made for fun or pleasure. They are made "to buy" the services of the bride. As already hinted above, the most important of these services from the bride to the bridegroom and his party is the issue of children to them. Thus the lobola "deliveries" entitle the bridegroom to the children. Without "delivering" lobola, the bridegroom loses the children to the bride. A "delivery" that gives you definite rights such as these over children must, of necessity, be a payment, for you are initially making it to gain titlement; in this case, you are definitely buying the services of the bride and any "deliveries" you make in buying these services must necessarily be payments. It does not matter from what angle we look at the issue, the "deliveries" are payments and should be called what they are.

PART 2

LOBOLA PAYMENTS AND PURPOSE

It is absolutely necessary to know what payments are made by the bridegroom and his party in the marriage deal and the purpose served by each payment. The exponents of the abolition of lobola argue that the institution subordinates the woman to the man and therefore should be abolished. They are champions of the total liberation of the woman and they want to see total equality between husband and wife. They realise that this cannot be achieved for as long as the bridegroom pays lobola for the bride. They look upon lobola payments as meant to "buy the bride." To them, once the bride "has been bought," she becomes part of the "property" of the bridegroom and therefore cannot claim equality with the purchaser. As far as they are concerned, only the total abolition of lobola can bring about equality between husband and wife. This is the only way in which the woman can be removed from the shackles of the man and take her road to liberty.

But these arguments in themselves demonstrate ignorance of the traditional institution of lobola. This is why it has become necessary here to discuss each item paid in the marriage deal and the purpose for which it was traditionally paid. This should make it very clear that there is no man in our society who buys a wife; there is no woman who is part of the property

of her husband. Although the bride must necessarily identify herself with the home and relatives of her husband, yet at the same time, she identifies herself more with her parents, and her parents' home and dynasty. This should be common knowledge to us but apparently, this does not seem to be the case. It is a fact that the bride does not adopt her husband's totem after marriage; she maintains her totem and in that way continues to identify herself with her parents and her original dynasty. But she picks up the husband's chidawo (sub-totem) and in that way identifies herself with her husband and husband's dynasty. This is normal for indeed after marriage, she is a member of two dynasties — her father's dynasty and her husband's dynasty. Something or somebody bought must of necessity lose its original identity and acquire that of the purchaser. This is clearly not the case with the bride after marriage.

In addition, we should all be fully aware of the role played by the aunt in our traditional society. We are going to come across part of this role here under "love-proposing." She was the main traditional tutor of all her brothers' and cousins' daughters (nieces) from about the age of twelve right up to marriage. She organised all the rituals and initiation ceremonies associated with their approach to puberty. In every way possible, she prepared them for marriage. There was no serious and meaningful love-proposing between a suitor and a niece that could go far without references to or without the intervention of the paternal aunt. This aunt was a central figure in all the marriage negotiations concerning any one of her nieces. When the niece was delivered to her husband's home, she was accompanied by the paternal aunt who could stay at the bridegroom's home for up to a week.

Furthermore, the bride is entitled to certain items of property over which the husband cannot make any claims. It may surprise the outsider to hear that most of the cattle and goats that we see in African homes belong to women and not to their husbands. How they normally acquire them, we are going to see very shortly. After divorce, these and similar items do not remain in the home of the husband; after death (of the bride), these and similar items do not remain in the husband's home; they are surrendered to the relatives of the bride to take to their home.

All that I am trying to demonstrate here is that after marriage, the bride remained a member of her parents' home and dynasty. This is why she continued to carry out the above responsibilities in her original home; this is why she maintained her totem; and this is why her property went back to her home after divorce or death. This in no way suggests that she was the property of her husband. A car dealer cannot claim any rights over my car after I have fully paid for it; my cow cannot claim any rights other than those I choose to give it, which are privileges, after I have bought it. All this should clearly make absurd any notions that African women are sold to their husbands because there is never such a thing in our community. The husbands buy the services of their wives and not wives themselves.

The exponents of total equality between husband and wife are compelled by the logic of their argument to canvass for the total abolition of lobola. They cannot logically demand the abolition of some items of the marriage

deal and at the same time support the maintenance of other items. For as long as the husband pays something to the father-in-law, no matter how small, he will continue to claim a measure of seniority or superiority over his wife and will continue to claim to be the head of the family. This is precisely what the protagonists of women's liberation are against. They want total equality and if such is possible, it can only be achieved through the total abolition of lobola. Let us now proceed to examine what lobola payments consisted of in our traditional society. We can only abolish what we know and understand if we mean to be constructive. Likewise, we can only introduce constructive reforms to an institution if we know and understand that institution.

(1) *THE SMALL ITEMS*

When a prospective son-in-law approached a family through an intermediary (was never done otherwise) to negotiate a marriage deal, the paternal aunts of the bride-to-be were invited and consulted with before any negotiations started. The prospective father-in-law and his party did not charge the son-in-law-to-be until their daughter, through the aunt or elder sister declared in public at the convened court, that she 'knew the suitor.' This in itself was a public declaration that she was in love with the suitor. This done, the father-in-law's party then proceeded to make small charges that are bracketed together as *ZVIDIKI* and this simply means "the small items." These included:

(a) *VHURA MUROMO*

This means "open the mouth." This is so because the payment made in this respect was a request to the father-in-law to "open his mouth" and start the marriage negotiations.

(b) *IBVAI KUMARARA*

Literally, this means "leave the bush and come into the home." When the son-in-law and his party approached the home of the prospective father-in-law, they hid somewhere in the bush, but close to the home and sent over the intermediary (*munyai*) to start the negotiations with the prospective in-laws. Many elders were aware that some intermediaries were unreliable and could hamper the smooth progress of the negotiations by twisting the messages to either side. As such, these elders did all the negotiations through the intermediary, but in the presence of those closely related to the prospective son-in-law and who came over in the company of the intermediary and as the direct representatives of the prospective bridegroom. To make this possible, the party representing the prospective father-in-law made a small charge called 'Ibvai Kumarara' which gave permission to the bridegroom's party 'to leave the bush' in which it was hiding and come into the home of the prospective father-in-law where all the negotiations were to take place. This does not mean that the relatives of the prospective son-in-law and the son-in-law himself had not been visiting this home as friends or neighbours. What it does mean is that from the start of the marriage negotiations they had charted a new relationship with this particular family and for coming into the home in this new capacity, they must be charged a fee by which they declare that they, from then on, come into the home in this new capacity.

(c) *MATEKENYA NDEBVU*

Ndebv means 'beard' and kutekenya means to 'play around with'. The prospective son-in-law pays a small charge for the reason that when his bride was a little girl, she used to play about with the beard of her father. Occasionally, she used to pull it too possibly to the inconvenience of the father who is now to be the bridegroom's father-in-law.

(d) *MAKANDINZWA ANI*

This means "From whom did you hear that I had a beautiful and worthy daughter?" The question is not to be verbally answered, but the answer comes in the form of a small payment which is called Makandinzwa Ani.

(e) *MAPFUKUDZA DUMBU*

Literally translated, this means "distortion of the mother's tummy or posture." Traditionally this was paid by a son-in-law who married a first-born daughter. The argument is that the mother-in-law was shapely before her first pregnancy which gave birth to the daughter now being married. This daughter, when still a foetus, distorted the tummy of her mother and her husband must recompense the mother-in-law for this distortion. The payment goes to the mother-in-law and not to the father-in-law.

Today, however, both the father-in-law and mother-in-law demand a payment for every daughter including the last born who were conceived long after the shapely appearance of their mother had been distorted by those born earlier. This is, therefore, one of those extortions that have crept in.

These little charges together are the main ones of the little payments that fall under the blanket term "The Small Items." I must add that traditionally, the payments were very small indeed. Some sons-in-law paid the equivalent of a hen or a cock for each one of them. Some paid in bangles — mainly copper bangles (*ndarira*) — if they were able to forge them or were related to blacksmiths. Others even paid in small baskets (*tswanda*) or basket-fuls of crops for each one of them, if they had the crops to spare.

It is also necessary for me to state here that in the event of a divorce, these payments were not refundable. For instance, the father-in-law could always argue that he opened his mouth (*Vura muromo*) and negotiated the marriage deal with the son-in-law and this process could not be reversed; he could argue that he admitted the son-in-law and his party into the home (*Ibvai Kumarara*) at the beginning of the marriage deal and divorce could not in any way reverse the process. The result was that none of these small payments was refundable in the event of a divorce.

Although these charges were very small and were no more than token charges, to day they are escalating each day and there is no longer anything small about them except the name. But this should not be looked upon as tradition, but as corruption or extortion that has crept into the institution.

I also need to point out that these small charges are never looked upon as an important element of the marriage deal. They can be omitted without

an adverse effect on the relationships between the bride and her party on one hand and the bridegroom and his party on the other. They have no binding force between husband and wife. In other words, this aspect of lobola can be abolished without any adverse social repercussions on the family or society at large.

Out of interest, one could ask, why was it that the MATEKENYA NDEBVU or MAPFUKUDZA DUMBU was charged for the daughters only and not for the sons as well? Did sons not "play about" with the beard of their fathers? Did they also not distort the tummies of their mothers? The answer is simply that the Shona are patrilineal. This being the case, by playing about with the father's beard, the sons are no more than playing with their own beard since they are the heirs to the fathers. This is different with daughters. After marriage the daughters devote most of their energies to the services of their husbands. It is for these services that bridegrooms pay lobola. Therefore in terms of service to the father and mother, the son and daughter are different after marriage. Because the daughter in practice becomes more part of her husband's home than her parents' home and because the husband's home benefits more from her services than her parents' home, the son-in-law must pay for all the inconveniences caused to his in-laws by his bride when she was young.

(2) THE BRIDE'S SHARE

After the completion of the negotiations over the "Small Items," the girl in the centre of the marriage proceedings was then invited to come and pick her share. Her share is generally referred to as "KUNONGA" and this means "to pick." Rarely did she come forth personally to do the picking. This was often done either by the paternal aunt or her sister or a cousin in the range of sisters (extended family). But what was to be picked was discussed between the bride concerned and her aunt and sister or cousin and an agreement was reached in advance. The bridegroom or his representative was approached on the matter and an agreement was reached between him on one side and the bride's paternal aunt, the bride herself and her sister or cousin on the other over what was to "be picked." This was necessary because it was feared that they might ask for something the bridegroom's party did not have or could not afford and in that way cause embarrassments, inconveniences and delays.

This part of lobola was not meant to enrich the bride. It served as a public declaration that the bride consented to marry the suitor. In a way, it was also meant to enable the bride to start acquiring her own personal property, which she could use as a new family woman. What it was to be that she picked depended on her, on her paternal aunt, on her sisters and on what the bridegroom's party could afford. It could be so many copper bangles; it could be a certain quantity of beads; it could even be a certain number of special sea shells of her liking. This was to be her personal property although she was expected to give part of it to her paternal aunt partly as a sign that she was married and partly in appreciation of her help in all the marriage proceedings. She could even give part of "this pick" to her elder sister for the same reasons.

Here again, although the quantities of these items demanded by the brides were traditionally very small partly because the brides did not want to inconvenience their parents and partly because the mercenary attitudes were controlled by the extended family, these brides' shares are today escalating each day and they no longer serve the purposes they traditionally served. Today, all the brides pick nothing but money. There are many brides who would like to pick very little mainly because they sympathise with their bridegrooms and partly because they realise that by impoverishing their bridegrooms, they are only impoverishing themselves and are financially putting their new families on a poor footing. But they are subjected to great pressure by their relatives including aunts, mothers, sisters and indirectly, even fathers to pick as much as possible. Because they cannot altogether flout the feelings of their relatives, they come to some compromise with them. At the same time, there are brides who approach the whole issue with a punitive attitude and would want to collect (pick) as much as possible. I know of many women who swore that they would "never go" for less than so much. They seem to feel that they are going "to be taxed" so much at the other end and must therefore be paid heavily for it. Here again, the relatives (or some) try to control such an attitude. But others encourage it. All in all, tradition is thrown overboard although everything is still done in the name of tradition.

The greatest extortion that has crept into the institution lies in the fact that today it is no longer the bride alone who "picks her share." Several others have come into it to make capital out of the system. The greatest culprits in this respect are the people in the Gutu — Nyanda areas. They have also influenced the people in the southern parts of Buhera — the area next to Gutu. In addition, because there are many people from other regions who are marrying into these regions and are charged exorbitant sums of money, when their own daughters marry, they now also tend to charge high sums of money partly in imitation of what they experienced in Gutu and Nyanda and partly "in retaliation" for the charges made on them. The result is now that the Bride's Share which was traditionally a personal and single bride's share of the lobola, has grown into a family share.

What now happens especially in the Gutu and Nyanda areas is that, after the bride has "picked" her own share, the paternal aunt assisting the bride comes in next to pick her share too. Next, the elder sister of the bride, or a sister or cousin representing the elder sister, comes in to pick her share as well. After her, the mother-in-law also comes in to pick her share. Finally, the remainder of the money may be picked by the father-in-law. So, we end up with no less than five people picking for themselves sums of money where according to tradition, only one, the bride herself should have picked something. All this started with the introduction of money into the system — it is a feature of the post-colonial era. But unfortunately, it is all being done in the name of tradition.

I believe this is the area that can be reformed without doing any harm to the individual family or nation at large. This aspect of lobola personally concerns the bride and, of course, the bridegroom. If the bride demands rather too much for her share, she could injure the feelings of her partner

and in that way put the new family on a poor footing. On the other hand, if she demands nothing for her share, her husband is very likely to give the family a smooth and cordial take-off. But of course we have unreasonable men who are likely to taunt her by saying something like "You picked nothing, because you knew you were worth nothing." Such an attitude can be painful to the bride.

All in all, however, this is not a thorny area and the complexities associated with it can be ironed out without difficulty. I believe too that widespread social education alone can eliminate most of the corruption and extortion that is creeping into this particular area. Even ultimate abolition of this aspect of lobola cannot do any harm to the individual family and to the community at large. But a lot of education would be necessary before such a step is taken.

(3) THE MAIN MARRIAGE DEAL

When anybody mentions the word lobola, it is not likely that the items that have been discussed above or those that are to be discussed after "The Main Marriage Deal" will ever occur to the mind of the listener. What immediately springs to his mind is what I have here decided to call "The Main Marriage Deal". This is indeed the real lobola. When we talk of reforming the institution of lobola, it is this area that we are mainly referring to; likewise, when anybody talks of abolishing lobola, he or she should realise that this is the main area she or he is talking about. I doubt if many Africans would feel so incensed if the "Small Items" and the "Brides Share" above were abolished as much as they would if anybody talked of abolishing the Main Marriage Deal that is the subject of this section. This Main Marriage Deal is divided into two parts.

(a) RUSAMBO or RUGABA

After paying the Small Items and the Bride's Share, the new son-in-law cannot claim legal rights over his bride-to-be. He has not married yet, but has only started marriage proceedings. It is necessary to make this clear early. When the future son-in-law goes to the home of his prospective father-in-law to pay the Small Items and the Bride's Share of the lobola only, the Shona say "Ayenda Kunobvunzira". This means "he has gone to request marriage". After the initial visit, the Shona ask, "Agashirwa here?" and this means "has he been accepted?" If you try to propose love to a girl who has been paid Small Items and Bride's Share, for, you may be advised, "Do not propose love to her 'nokuti akabvunzirwa'" and this means "do not propose love to her because she was asked for."

The traditional Shona do not say "do not propose love to her because she is not married yet." To pay the Small Items and the Bride's Share is therefore only to express your intention to marry; it is to request (Kukumbira, Kubvunzira) for permission to embark on marriage proceedings. When the prospective father-in-law receives your payment for the Small Items and the Bride's Consent, he has only indicated to you that he accepts you as his son-in-law and has granted you permission to embark on marriage proceedings. This opens the door to you to the real lobola. You are not married yet and you have no legal rights over your bride-to-be. Of course these

payments impose immediate limitations on the freedom and general behaviour of the girl concerned for she must start to behave as if she was already somebody's wife.

The real lobola starts with the payment of what we call RUSAMBO or RUGABA. Rusambo is a derivative from SHAMBO which meant "a string of beads". Rugaba is a derivative from GABA which means "a tin container or metal container". In the past, this portion of lobola was paid in beads which were obtained from the Moor traders who plied the east coast of Africa. Some of these beads were threaded into strings (shambo) and a certain length of these strings was looked upon as the standard string that covered part of the lobola that we today call RUSAMBO. One such string was enough to cover this part. How long it was, I have no idea at present. The beads that were not in strings were loaded into a container of a particular size. One full such container was looked upon as adequate to cover this particular portion of lobola. Because this part of lobola was paid in beads that were in strings called SHAMBO, it became known as RUSAMBO. This is the name by which it is known in the bigger part of the Shona world to this day. Alternatively, because unthreaded beads were put into particular sizes of metal containers called MAGABA (plural) and for the same purpose, it was also called RUGABA. This is the name by which it is known in the Gutu and Nyanda areas to this day. From this, you can see that these traditional practices have historical origins.

Rusambo or Rugaba is specifically a payment to the prospective father-in-law for the bride. It is not meant to buy the bride — the person of the bride — but all the services rendered to the son-in-law and his relatives excluding the birth of the children to them. The service "magnifying" the bridegroom and his party by bearing them children is to be treated next under "Cattle". It is not necessary to enumerate here all the services rendered to the bridegroom and his party by the bride for which RUSAMBO is paid. She cooks for the bridegroom, she washes clothing for him and his relatives, she tills the fields for them, she gives the bridegroom his marital rights; she gives the bridegroom and his party what help and comfort she can. These are some of the services for which Rusambo was traditionally paid. This was why, if the bride neglected her responsibilities to her husband and his relatives, both the husband and the relatives kicked dust into her eyes. They could even return her to her home for more education and if this failed to improve her, divorce could follow.

It was because they had paid for these services and they were entitled to them by virtue of this. After paying Rusambo, the man claimed to be married and claimed title to the bride even though no cattle had yet been paid. Likewise, after this stage, the woman was married and claimed title to the husband and was entitled to certain definite rights and privileges. Let me repeat that the bridegroom never pays for the person of the bride, but for the services of the bride. There is no husband who buys a wife in our society.

Whilst as hinted above, Rusambo was traditionally paid for in beads, today it is paid for entirely in money. Whilst traditionally it was the second biggest lobola item after cattle, today it has eclipsed cattle in many areas and has become the biggest item mainly because it concerns money. Whilst

for a long time after 1890 the Rusambo charge stabilized between \$30,00 to \$40,00, it has of late escalated to hundreds of dollars. Whilst traditionally there was a standard charge for every daughter regardless of how beautiful or industrious she might be, today the charge depends on how educated the bride might be. In some cases, one even comes to the conclusion that the physical appearance of the bride is taken into account in determining the charge. In other words, the modern son-in-law is entirely at the mercy of the father-in-law and his party. One factor that certainly influences the charges of the father-in-law and his party is the economic ability of the son-in-law. If he is known to have a good job and is believed to be getting a good salary, he pays very handsomely for it. On the other hand, if he is known to be poor and possibly unemployed, the father-in-law and his party scale down the Rusambo to a reasonable figure. What all this means is that today, there is no such thing as "standard rusambo". Much of what happens depends entirely on the whims of the father-in-law and his party. I know of bridegrooms who were charged \$1 000,00 each for rusambo alone because one of the brides was a State-Registered nurse and the other was a T1 teacher. Yet bridegrooms who married their less educated sisters paid no more than \$100,00 for rusambo. Certainly tradition has been thrown overboard and we should not pretend to do any of these things in the name of tradition. The names we are sticking to are certainly traditional; the principle of lobola is also certainly part of our tradition, but the extortions that have crept into the system have nothing to do with tradition. We have lost the essence of what lobola meant to our forefathers and we are after no more than monetary gains regardless of the consequences of this on the young couple getting into married life, and that needs a lot of encouragement and financial help to make a healthy start.

(b) CATTLE

Traditionally, as hinted earlier, cattle were the most important item of lobola. To this day in most parts of Mashonaland, they are still the biggest and most important item. But in many parts of the Gutu and Nyanda areas, they have been eclipsed by RUGABA (Rusambo) and have become the second most important item. This is all a result of ignorance of the traditional purpose of cattle in the marriage deal. It is also, of course, a result of mercenary attitudes alluded to earlier.

As made clear earlier, after paying Rusambo, the bridegroom could claim title to the bride and looked upon himself as married. But he had no title to the children of the marriage if he happened to have any before paying cattle or their equivalent. This was so because he had not paid for them and this was the traditional purpose of cattle in the marriage deal.

Traditionally, the greatest service the bride rendered to her husband lay in "keeping him alive". In the Shona society if not the whole African equally crudely, the greatest service rendered by the bride to her husband lay in "keeping him alive". In the Shona society if not the whole African community at large, the truly dead African is he without children; he with several children is very much alive although he might have been buried a decade or more ago. The greatest curse the traditional African could have was failure to have children because this meant "permanant death" to that

African. Likewise, the greatest blessing the traditional African could have was the birth of children to him or her. This immediately meant that the main purpose of ever marrying was children. Everything else was secondary. A marriage without children had very slim chances of surviving. It could only survive on condition that the father-in-law concerned gave a second daughter to the bridegroom capable of having children by him. Alternatively, it could survive if the bridegroom married another wife capable of having children from elsewhere. The wife without children could remain in the home, but was not much above the status of a concubine.

If a newly married couple failed to have children because the bridegroom was impotent, the situation was not looked upon as hopeless. The family concerned looked for "potent" traditional doctors who could administer the necessary medicines to make him potent. If this failed completely, the family concerned did still not give up. This was a struggle for the existence on earth of one of their members and nobody can choose to give up life if he is normal. As such, a close relative of the bridegroom (normally a brother) was brought onto the scene by the elders of the family concerned. A suggestion was made to the bridegroom that an effective traditional doctor was known to exist in a particular region of the country — generally a long distance away from the home of the bridegroom. The elders concerned then suggested to him that he should visit this doctor. They then proceeded to select one or two people to accompany him to this doctor and to keep him there for a reasonable time.

In the meantime, arrangements were made to enable his brother to visit his wife at night. This was a top secret which was kept to very few. At the far end, the traditional doctor pretended to do his best to make the bridegroom potent. After detaining him for a reasonable time, for instance a month or longer, the doctor gave him a big parcel of herbs to take home with instructions to continue to administer them. At the same time, he gave him assurances that he was going to have a child. At the near end, the bridegroom's brother had been doing his best to visit his brother's bride as regularly as possible.

About two weeks or so after the return of the bridegroom from his doctor, his wife could say "something appears to have happened, it is too early to say, but something appears to have happened." After about two months, she could tell her husband that she was definitely pregnant. The husband was obviously over-elated by the news and anxiously waited for the birth of "his child" and after another vain attempt at a second child, the bridegroom was most likely to be the first to suggest that he should visit the "potent" traditional doctor who accounted for the first child. The trick was played again and again until this man had three or four children. He was then deemed "alive" and more visits to the traditional doctor were no longer looked upon as necessary. The children born to him by his wife were his because in our traditional society, your brother's children were as much yours as your real children. Secondly, these children were his because they were born in his name and by his wife.

I have related all this to demonstrate the significance of children in our traditional society. We have now reached a stage when we can legitimately

say that the purpose of marriage was children. It follows immediately that the greatest service a bride could render to her husband was to give him children. It also follows that the most important and largest part of the lobola deal should be associated with children. Indeed, traditionally, this was the case and this was why cattle were the biggest and most important aspect of the whole marriage deal.

We have seen that RUSAMBO was traditionally paid for all the services except children, that the bride rendered to her husband. We now discover that cattle generally referred to as DANGA (Kraal) were paid specifically for the children. If we abide by tradition, lobola charges for the children (Cattle or Danga) should remain the highest since the bearing of children was deemed the greatest and most important service the bride rendered to her husband. This makes it clear that those who are today making higher charges for Rusambo are not abiding by tradition and may no longer be aware of the purposes of these charges. Yet they continue to claim to be making the charges in the name of tradition.

That cattle in the marriage deal were specifically for children is not difficult to prove. For instance, if a man paid six head of cattle for a bride, but the bride failed to give him children because she was infertile, he was given another bride by his father-in-law, very likely, his wife's sister. He ended up with two wives from the same family, but did not pay any extra cattle. He could be asked to pay a second Rusambo, but certainly not cattle. Alternatively, if he married and paid six head of cattle, but divorced after three children, the father-in-law refunded to him three head of cattle. Or if the wife died, but after giving him two children, the father-in-law refunded him four head of cattle unless he was prepared to give him another daughter and if the bridegroom accepted such an arrangement.

What this clearly means is that the cattle paid by the bridegroom in the marriage deal were for the purposes of securing rights over children and not the wife. If the bridegroom paid RUSAMBO, but not cattle and had any number of children by his wife, he had no legal claim to any of the children. We have many people in our society who adopted the totems of their maternal uncles (their mother's totems) because their fathers could not claim them for the reason that they did not pay cattle to their fathers-in-law. In this case, the children belong to the mother and not to the father. To give yet another example, if you made a girl pregnant, but you were not prepared to marry her, you might be charged for damages, but on top of that you had to produce one head of cattle to claim your child. If you had two children by this woman, but were still not prepared to marry her, you had to produce two head of cattle in order to claim both children. There is no doubt that cattle were specifically for children. There is no doubt, too, that one head of cattle was looked upon as equivalent to the service of one child.

What I am demonstrating here is that African men do not buy their wives. They buy the services of their wives. If you hire me to build you a house, you have not bought me, but have bought my services. We should distinguish between the services and the person who provides the services. To buy the services is not equivalent to buying the person who does these services. Likewise, to buy the services of your wife is not the same as buying

the woman herself. The African woman after marriage was entitled to definite rights. In addition, she was still a very strong member of her parents' family as demonstrated by the activities of the aunts above. Furthermore, if her rights and freedom were seriously tampered with, she could obtain a divorce and go back to her original home and remarry if she so chose to. The outright property of a husband could not do that. It is necessary to stress all this because there are so many people today who so freely and loosely talk of the sale and purchase of wives in our traditional communities. Whoever they may be, it is very clear that they are totally ignorant of the intricacies of the traditional institution of lobola. If parents sell their daughters to their sons-in-law today, that has nothing to do with tradition; instead, that has something to do with modern capitalism. We should clearly distinguish between tradition and corruption. It is not fair or logical to condemn tradition for the corruption that has crept into the institution.

Finally, we need to know how many cattle, on average, were paid for children in our traditional society. Here again, we are very ignorant of tradition although we glibly talk of tradition. The fact that this aspect of lobola which is called CATTLE or DANGA should not mislead us into imagining that this was always paid in cattle. Cattle were very few and only a few had them. These included chiefs, big spirit mediums and powerful and influential traditional doctors. The rank-and-file did not have any cattle in our traditional society. This being so, the rank-and-file of bridegrooms did not pay lobola in cattle at all.

The most highly valued item was, however, cattle. They were a sign of wealth; they were wealth itself. This is why they were referred to as PFUMA and this meant "wealth". Up to at least about 1750, those who had cattle paid no more than one head to cover all the children. I have numerous examples in history to prove this. For instance, the famous Svosve Mbire aunt Chikombo, married around 1750. Because she became a sub-chief-tainess, she refused to be paid lobola for. Instead, she paid lobola for her own husband who was called Nechiware and whose totem was Tembo. For this, she was given, by her brothers, one head of cattle which she paid to Nechiware. By virtue of this, she won title to the children who as a result, adopted her own totem, Soko. Those interested in the details of this are referred to my "Dynastic Histories" Book I.

A better example still is the case of a MUGARIRI. In our traditional society, this was a poor man who could not afford to pay lobola for a bride. He offered his services to a prospective father-in-law and worked for him for an agreed number of years — generally ten years — in return for a wife. If after serving ten years, the prospective father-in-law was unable to give him one of his daughters, he gave him one head of cattle with which he proceeded to marry into some other family. This was adequate because cattle were highly valued and were a rare commodity. The large numbers of cattle we pay today are not a feature of tradition. This should be fully understood and appreciated.

Because cattle were scarce, the vast numbers of bridegrooms did not pay lobola in cattle at all. As cited above, the very poor ones paid in labour services and were known as VAGARIRI. By far the biggest number paid

lobola in goats. These were more numerous and multiplied much faster than cattle. If the father-in-law thought that five goats were adequate, the bridegroom paid five. If he thought ten were more appropriate, he demanded ten from his son-in-law. It would be misleading to suggest that there was any fixed number of goats to be paid. It is also necessary here to stress that these goats were not all demanded at one go. Many married and paid only a few. They paid the balance from the lobola of their own daughters — daughters out of these marriages. Many died before they had paid off part of the balance and this was completed by their heirs. This is something the Shona know too well.

A very significant number of bridegroom's paid lobola (cattle) in hoes and one hoe was looked upon as adequate to gain title to all the children. This is why to this day, the "cattle part" of lobola is referred to as "badza" (hoe). When demanding their cattle from sons-in-law today, many fathers-in-law say, "Ndinoda badza rangu" — I want my hoe. This is so because traditionally, many bridegrooms were unable to produce cattle and instead produced hoes to substitute cattle.

Many there were too, who paid the "cattle part" of lobola with grain. During years of famine, many saved their families from starvation by offering their daughters to those who had more than they needed for their immediate needs in return for grain. An agreed number of baskets-full of grain covered Rusambo and another agreed number covered cattle. Even in good years, families that did not have cattle or goats or hoes offered to pay lobola in grain. If the prospective father-in-law accepted the proposition, details were worked out and an agreed formula was arrived at.

What all this means is that there were no hard and fast rules about this aspect of lobola. Each party concerned worked out its own formula. What was important was to cover in unison every part of the lobola deal to enable the bridegroom to have legal title to both the services of the bride and the children. Our traditional society was very flexible and almost any valuable item could be used to cover this or that part of lobola. This was the only logical thing to do under the circumstances or else many would not have been able to marry at all and such a prospect would not have benefitted anybody.

I must, however, add here that sheep were never used and are still never used for lobola purposes to this day. In fact, they are never used for any ritual except those associated with the great spirits of the land. This is so because in our traditional society, sheep are associated with witches in the minds of our people. Therefore, to pay any part of lobola in sheep was tantamount to declaring that you were marrying a witch. To dedicate a sheep to a female ancestor was tantamount to the same. Such would be a serious affront to those concerned. But as you will see in my "Birth of Bantu Africa", our greatest ancestors are closely associated with sheep and rams are dedicated to them. This is so because of their association with the Egyptian Sun-God, Amun, who was symbolized by the ram.

I want to stress again that the greatest service the bride rendered to her husband was the birth of children to him. This being so the highest (greatest, most important, most expensive) part of the whole lobola deal was that asso-

ciated with children and this was the item we call "cattle" or Danga. To charge a Rusambo or any other part that is higher than Danga is to throw tradition overboard. This is in fact what has happened especially in the southern part of Zimbabwe. This can only be justified if values have significantly changed, but this does not appear to be the case. It is not many African marriages that can survive to this day, without children. This means that children are still the most highly valued part of the marriage alliance. I doubt if those who charge higher Rusambo than Danga have any logical reasons in defence of their practice. The motive appears to be purely mercenary.

(c) CHIMANDA

I define lobola as everything paid by the bridegroom and his party in the marriage deal, to the father-in-law and his party. Therefore, we cannot afford to leave out any of these payments. If lobola is to be reformed we ought to know what we are reforming; if it is to be abolished, we ought to know what it is we are abolishing.

After the bridegroom had paid certain important parts of the lobola deal, the bride was delivered to the home of her bridegroom by her paternal aunt to start her new life with her husband. Alternatively, she eloped to her boy friend's home whether anything had been paid for her or not. This again marked the beginning of her new life with her husband. But this elopement was never done without the knowledge and connivance of the paternal aunts and her sisters. Whichever way it came, she ended up at the home of her bridegroom. From that point onwards, the bride, the bridegroom and their party, lost all official contacts with the father-in-law and his party. These were to be re-established by the ritual called CHIMANDA or MASUNGIRO.

During the period when official contacts were severed between the bridegroom and his party (including the bride) on the one hand and the father-in-law and his party on the other, the bride fell pregnant. But according to tradition, she delivered her first baby at her original home — at her parents' home. So when she was pregnant for about five or six months, the bridegroom and his party re-established official links with the father-in-law and his party to enable the bride to go back to her parents' home. This was the occasion when the CHIMANDA or MASUNGIRO came in.

The standard traditional way of doing it was this; the bridegroom and his party looked for a beast (to be specified shortly); they also looked for a goat. They then sent their intermediary (munyai) to the home of the father-in-law to say that they wanted to come over to his home for the masungiro ritual. This was done to enable the father-in-law and mother-in-law to invite relatives looked upon as important for the occasion. This ritual could never be conducted in the absence of the mother-in-law. It was more for her than for her husband.

On an agreed day, the intermediary arrived in the home of the father-in-law with his beast and goat leaving the bridegroom and his party together with the bride, hidden some distance away from the home. I shall here omit the details that do not matter. What we are interested in is the significance

of the ritual and that of the CHIMANDA that goes with it. After certain discussions had taken place, the bride, the bridegroom and their party were then admitted into the home of the father-in-law. Their beast was slaughtered and certain parts of it were cooked. Rapoko sadza was also cooked. Both were dedicated to ancestors and the purpose of the ritual made clear to them. The food (both the meat and the sadza) were shared between the bride and her relatives and the bridegroom and his relatives. The goat was normally kept in the home and became the property of the mother-in-law.

This ritual is called MASUNGIRO for a reason. The word Masungiro itself is derived from "Kusunga" or "Kusungira" which means to bind or tie together. This is so because the purpose of the ritual is to bind together, to bring together formally, the family of the bride and the family of the bridegroom.

The children to be born of the marriage of whom the first one "was close" were the bond of unity between them. Before this ritual, the relations between the two families were informal, but from this point onward, the relations were formal and members of one family freely visited the members of the other family and each started to help the other in every way possible. This was the traditional purpose of the MASUNGIRO ritual. The consumption of dedicated meat and rapoko sadza together meant "we are now in some respects one family".

The beast that was brought forth by the son-in-law and that was killed for the ritual was traditionally, a heifer. This was so because the bride, before marriage, was a "heifer". This is a reference to her virginity. This was why the beast itself was referred to as CHIMANDA which means "fat" or "fatness". This was an oblique reference to the virginity of the bride. Any girl who was not a virgin was not "fat". She could only be looked upon as "fat" if the man now marrying her was responsible for the destruction of her virginity even though that might have happened long before marriage.

On the other hand, if the bride was no longer a virgin at the point of marriage and if her bridegroom was not responsible for the destruction of her virginity, the Masungiro ritual was conducted without a beast. The bridegroom brought only the goat with him and this was slaughtered and consumed together with rapoko sadza to bind formally the two families together. The goat itself had to be a she-goat in every case because the character (bride) who was the chief binding force (by virtue of the children she gives birth to) was a woman. In the case of the particular bride who was no longer virgin at the point of marriage, the appropriate goat for the ritual was an old she-goat and this symbolized that the bride was no longer "new" at the point of marriage. In the case of a virgin, both the beast and the she-goat had to be fat ones that had never given birth. This symbolized the virginity (fatness) of the bride.

If on the other hand, the bridegroom was rich and he wanted to conduct the Masungiro ritual with a beast in spite of the fact that his bride was no longer a virgin at the point of marriage (and he was not responsible for the destruction of that virginity), he could do so, but with a cow (and not a

heifer) and an old she-goat. These in themselves conveyed the message to both the mother-in-law and father-in-law and their parties that their daughter had already misbehaved herself with some other man before marriage to her bridegroom.

All this means that, according to our tradition, there is no beast to be slaughtered for the Masungiro ritual of any woman marrying for the second time; there is no beast to be slaughtered for any woman who has had any illicit relations with any man other than the one marrying her. The beast was slaughtered only for a virgin and no more. For any woman who was not a virgin, a beast could only be slaughtered out of the generosity of the bridegroom and that beast had to be a cow accompanied by an old she-goat.

This needs emphasis because what is going on today is downright robbery on the part of the father-in-law and the mother-in-law. They demand the beast and the goat regardless of the state of their daughter at the point of marriage and in the name of tradition. The son-in-law is ignorant of the significance of these animals and struggles to find them when he should never do so. The young man is advised to know what he is paying for; the vast majority of young men pay for the "fat" they never "consumed".

All this demonstrates how very highly prized virginity was in our traditional society. It was worth a young fat beast and these beasts were not easy to come by. The moment of the slaughter of this beast and the consumption of its meat was one of greatest pride to the parents of the bride. It was the moment of public declaration that their daughter had been upright up to the moment of marriage; it was a moment when they could boast that they had done their job well in nursing and directing their daughter along the right path. It was also indeed a moment of great pride to the bridegroom for, by producing the beast, he was declaring that he had married "a complete girl". On the other hand, those who failed to get heifers because their daughters were no longer "complete girls" at the point of marriage, hid their faces in shame on the day of this ritual.

(d) MOMBE YOUNGAI — BEAST FOR MOTHERHOOD

The "marriage journey" of the young man (and old as well) was indeed long. After having one or two children by his bride, the bridegroom was expected to pay to his mother-in-law a beast generally known as "the beast for motherhood" — mombe youmai. It was specifically for the mother-in-law and had virtually nothing to do with the father-in-law other than it also stayed in his cattle kraal and in his home. Let me state categorically that the father-in-law had no rights over it at all for he was not part of that "motherhood" that this was meant to pay for.

So far, every part of lobola that we have seen the bridegroom paying went to the father-in-law except for Mapfukudza Dumbu (distortion of the Tummy) which we came across under "Small Items". But the bride is a product of two parties, the father and the mother. Although we are patrilineal, the mother must get a reward for her part. This came in the form of "cow for motherhood".

In our traditional society, this cow was never demanded by the mother-in-law in the way the other aspects of lobola were demanded. Indeed,

many never asked for it, but left it to the bridegroom and his party to decide when to pay it or whether they should pay it or not. This was so because it has religious connotations and if the bridegroom was loathe to pay it, it was believed that the invisible religious forces of the mother-in-law would teach him a lesson the hard way.

To understand the purpose of this beast, I better bring in the Ndebele name for it here. The Ndebele call it "KANGAZIWE" and this means "I should be known". The character who demands to be known is the mother-in-law. This means that her contribution in the birth and growth and the general development of the bridegroom's wife should be recognised by a payment. That payment was in the form of this beast for motherhood. So, the beast for motherhood was the payment by which the son-in-law declared that he recognised and appreciated the role played by the mother-in-law in the development of his wife. Phrased differently, it was the lobola payment for the mother-in-law as distinct from the lobola payments for the father-in-law. Traditionally, the beast for motherhood was expected to be a heifer. This was so because the bride for whom it was paid was expected to be a virgin.

This beast was to be accompanied by a goat that was also "a heifer" and for the same reason. To produce an old cow or no cow at all, was again a public declaration that the bride was no longer a virgin at the point of marriage and that you were not responsible for the destruction of her virginity. To produce a heifer accompanied by an old she-goat was a contradiction because the heifer suggested that the bride was a virgin at the point of marriage whereas the old she-goat suggested she was not. The father-in-law's party might seek clarification on such a contradiction unless they attributed it to the ignorance of the bridegroom and his party, which was unlikely. One can see from this that our lobola tradition was systematic and well calculated and the actions of one party were closely scrutinized. This should also make you aware that you could do lots of things that were full of meaning without knowing it.

Whether the bride was a virgin or not, the beast for motherhood was to be produced by the son-in-law and his party for as long as the bride had children. Whether the bride was marrying for the second or third time, this beast was produced for as long as the bride had children with her bridegroom. This means that a woman whose daughter married three different men from three different families and had children with all three men ended up in her life with three different sets of cattle for the same daughter. These beasts were a payment to the mother-in-law for the children her daughter gave to her husband. Each man therefore paid for his children. Even if the bridegroom had only one child with the woman, he had to produce the beast because that one child needed the support and protection of the religious forces of the mother-in-law-grandmother. At the same time, according to tradition, no man is supposed to pay this beast if he has no children with his wife because the religious forces of the mother-in-law have no grandchildren to look after. This needs emphasis because there are few who are aware of this today.

Earlier, I said that the majority of the goats and cattle in African

kraals belonged to women. You can now see how this comes about. If a woman had five daughters and all married, she ended up with five heifers and five goats. Because these beasts cannot be tampered with, with impunity, (unlike those of the father-in-law that can be diverted elsewhere to fetch another wife or daughter-in-law) they multiply and by the time the mother-in-law is an old woman, they could be very many.

It is necessary here to relate briefly how the beasts are looked after because things have gone grossly wrong in this respect. I have already hinted that each beast is accompanied by a she-goat. The she-goat is referred to as MUDONZVO or MUNONGEDZO (pointing stick). This means that the she-goat is used as the instrument for pointing at the mother-in-law's beast when it is being dedicated to her ancestry. This goat is never kept in the home of the mother-in-law. It is slaughtered after both the beast and the goat itself have been dedicated to the ancestors of the mother-in-law. Rapoko sadza is cooked and so is some of the goat meat. These are then dedicated to the ancestors of the mother-in-law with special attention to the maternal line. Thereafter, they are consumed.

The heifer should never be tampered with and remains in the home. After the cow has given birth to two or three young ones, the son-in-law is invited into the home and one of them is slaughtered and dedicated to the ancestors of the mother-in-law. It is wrong to kill a male beast for this purpose because the real owners of these cattle are the maternal grandmothers of the mother-in-law. This is why greater emphasis is placed on the female line. These are female and therefore only female beasts should appropriately be slaughtered and dedicated to them. During the course of the ritual, these ancestors are beckoned to protect and "prosper" the grandchildren whose father produced the cattle. After another four or five years, the ritual is conducted again and so it goes on.

Let me emphasise here that for as long as one of the children of the son-in-law concerned is alive, some of these cattle must remain and the rituals should continue. When the last one of these children dies, then the cattle lose their value and they can all be dispensed with. This makes it very clear that those who try to pay for these beasts in money are wasting their time and throwing away their money.

Because some families could not get cattle, payment for "motherhood" was done very often in goats. Some parts of the country were also tsetse fly-ridden and had no cattle. Such regions also resorted to goats for these payments. For reasons already given, sheep were never used in the exercise. It had to be either cattle or goats. Where goats were used, they had to be accompanied by hens which were killed on the day of the ritual and these represented the MUNONGEDZO for the goat. Look around and see how much is being wrongly done, but in the name of tradition.

(e) MBUDZIZUKURU or IMBWAZUKURU

The purpose of this payment is explained by the name of the payment itself. Mbudzizukuru means "goats for the nephews and nieces". Greatest confusion reigns in this area. Not many know precisely what they are

supposed to pay, the destination of the payment and why they pay it. In our traditional society, this payment, like the beast for motherhood, was never demanded as part of lobola by the father-in-law and mother-in-law. It was destined for the ancestors and it was believed that whoever did not pay, would be taught the hard way by the spiritual forces concerned.

As suggested by the name of the payment, it was never paid until the bride and bridegroom had one child or more. Precisely when the bridegroom was to pay this was up to him, but it was always advisable to pay it as early as possible, preferably before the third child was born and before the children were vexed by the spiritual forces concerned.

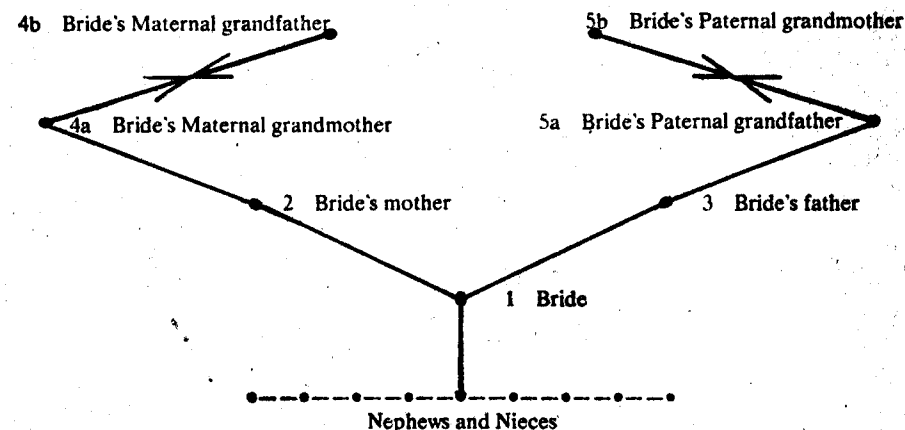
The destinations of the goats were the maternal grandmother and the paternal grandfather of the bride. The destination of the beast for motherhood was, as we have seen, the mother of the bride. But her strength lies in the forces "from behind her" (from her ancestors) and these must be brought into the picture too. These are the maternal grandmother and paternal grandfather of the bride. These, in turn, were the maternal grandparents of the nieces and nephews who need help, protection and blessings. These are the vazukuru and this is why the payment is called mbudzizukuru.

The paternal grandparents of these nephews and nieces needed no special beckoning because our system was and is patrilineal. It was the ancestors of the mother that needed such beckoning. Each living being needed the protection and guidance of both sides of the ancestry, i.e. the paternal grandfather and paternal grandmother (who needed no special beckoning) on one side and the maternal grandparents on the other.

Ask a traditional doctor "To whom is the mbudzizukuru given?" He is most likely to tell you that it is given to the maternal grandmother of the bride. In our tradition, to give this to the maternal grandmother of the bride alone is worse than not to pay at all and the traditionalist who knows his customs will tell you that your fortunes will get worse if you do it this way. This is so because while in a way it appeases the maternal grandmother of the bride, it causes great rage on the side of the paternal grandfather of the bride and at the same time brings about rancour between this grandfather and the above grandmother of the bride. It implies that her paternal side is worthless. As a result, it is believed that the paternal side will force you the hard way to recognise its existence and its power. This it does partly by "throttling" the maternal side and partly by vexing the children of the bride. This is why you find many traditional doctors advising you to divide the mbudzizukuru goat into two — one side for the maternal side of the bride and the other for the paternal side.

But here again, this will not do the trick and again, it may be worse than not paying at all. If you buy a she-goat and then kill it and give one side of it to the maternal grandmother of the bride and the other side to her paternal grandfather, you have declared that this grandfather "is a woman" which to him is an annoying contradiction. This is so because in our tradition, male animals are dedicated to male ancestors and female animals to

female ancestors. To dedicate a she-goat to a grandfather is therefore tantamount to declaring that "he is a woman", and this upsets and annoys him.



This diagram should help us to understand what is done and why it is done. The bride, like everybody else, has two spiritual pillars supporting her — the maternal and the paternal pillars. For all to be well with her children (and this is why the bridegroom never makes the payment in question) the support of both pillars must be recruited. The pivot on her paternal side is the grandfather; the pivot on her maternal side is the grandmother. They cannot be given parts of the same animal because their sexes are different; they cannot share the same animal because they are not related by blood and their totems are different. Therefore, they must be given two different animals appropriate to their sexes. What is therefore traditionally done is this; the bridegroom must pay two goats, one male and one female. The female goat is given to the mother of the bride (2); the he-goat is given to the father of the bride (3). The mother dedicates the she-goat to her maternal grandmother (4a) and beckons her to eat it together with her husband (4b); the father dedicates the he-goat to his own father (5a) and beckons him to eat it together with his wife (5b). In this way, the bridegroom recruits the support of both sides of the maternal line of his children. There are no short cuts to this; the bridegroom has to produce two goats because he is catering for two different ancestral lines.

The purpose of the goats is to inform these grandparents that "I the bridegroom, have married into your family; here are my tokens (goats) by which I make myself known to you; therefore, I implore you by means of these goats, to protect, guide and bless my children who, by virtue of their descent from your grandchild (bride) are also your grandchildren". It is believed in traditional circles that without the payment of these goats, these maternal grandparents argue that they do not know that their granddaughter (bride) was married and has children and therefore they cannot protect what they do not know to exist. The payment is therefore specifically for the

guidance, protection and blessing of the bridegroom's children by the ancestors of his wife. It is for this that it is appropriately called mbudzizukuru.

The he-goat given to the bride's father is never kept in the home; it is killed and dedicated together with rapoka sadza. The she-goat given to the bride's mother is normally kept in the home and becomes part of the property of the bride's mother. The payments have no meaning if they are made in money; live goats have to be produced and be dedicated to the appropriate ancestors. No such goats were paid if the family had no children.

(f) RUKUSHA

Mbudzizukuru was really the last of the payments made by the bridegroom. I am not suggesting this could not be paid before the "beast for motherhood". Which one came first depended on the bridegroom for both were meant for the well-being of his children. However, there was another little payment made by the bridegroom which was called RUKUSHA or simply HUSHA. This was in the form of leather strings or leather girdles and these are known as HUSHA to this day.

When a woman falls pregnant, her tummy is distended by the foetus. After delivery, efforts are made to make it normal again. This is encouraged by binding it with leather strings (husha). The HUSHA was made by the bridegroom to his mother-in-law for suffering the inconvenience of binding her tummy after the delivery of the bride who is now the bridegroom's wife. It was compensation to the mother-in-law for all this inconvenience.

After 1890 when materials became plentiful, the leather strings were replaced by a black material about the breadth of an average scarf and about a metre long. Soon, this was replaced by a material called CHARI and about the size of a small blanket. As we became more and more mercenary, more items were added to this and the mother-in-law started to demand overcoats. Today, the mothers-in-law demand shoes, costumes, hats and even household utensils in addition to CHARI. The fathers-in-law demand shoes, suits, hats, pipes and even vests — a complete outfit. Today, all these items fall under the general heading MAJASI which means overcoats. These mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law go to the extent of dictating to the bridegroom what types of clothing they want and what quality — in terms of prices. This has nothing to do with tradition and is simply one of the corruptions that have crept into the system. The adult Shona may also remember that today, at every marriage gathering, the father-in-law and his party also demand meat, bread, sugar, soft drinks and even crates of beer. Here again, this has nothing to do with tradition. What the traditional fathers-in-law used to ask for was a cock, which was killed and consumed during the course of the initial marriage negotiations. Yet today, the young bridegroom spends a fortune on these food items; he spends an even greater fortune on clothing for both the father-in-law and the mother-in-law and all in the name of tradition. This is blatant exploitation of the bridegroom and causes a lot of inconvenience to his infant family.

Having now known what traditional lobola was — what was paid and why it was paid at all — let us now proceed to examine the nature of traditional marriages.

PART 3

LOVE — PROPOSAL

What I have given you above are the lobola payments and why they are traditionally made. What I intend to give you now is the nature of the traditional marriage. One thing that makes the nature of these traditional marriages very clear is the traditional process of the love-proposal itself. Possibly the greatest mistake is to look at our traditional society with our 1980 eyes. This can never give us the correct picture of the values of the traditional societies under examination. People change and so do values. We are bound to describe the Europeans of 600 or 1 000 AD as barbarians if we look at them and their society with our twentieth century eyes; the twentieth century Briton is bound to describe his 18th and even 19th century (before the Factory Acts of the 1830's and after) ancestor as a savage if he looks at him with twentieth century eyes. What these people valued is not what we value today and vice versa. Therefore, in order for us to make a balanced and fair judgement of them, we must know and understand their values. Likewise, in order for us to make a balanced and fair judgement of the traditional and appreciate the values of the traditional African, we should realise that he was culturally different from us and his values were necessarily different. The society he catered for is not the society we are catering for. It is necessary to stress this because it is largely ignorance of the traditional African that persuades many of us to criticise what in fact we do not know, in the name of enlightenment and knowledge. Today in this country, the values of Europeans here are different from us because they are culturally different. Likewise, the values of the African of 1500 or 1800 are not identical to our values today because we are culturally different. Threads of our ancient culture remain, but at the same time, we have acquired threads of a new culture. That makes us culturally different from our 15th or 18th century ancestors and that in turn makes our values different.

As stated earlier, the traditional process of love-proposal very much helps to reveal the nature of the traditional marriage. Traditional love-proposal was far less personal than our love-proposal is today. More than this, it was far more than an individual affair. This was so because marriage itself was far more than an individual affair. Traditional love-proposal was a family and in some cases a community affair. This was so because it was paving the way for a family marriage and in some respects, for a community marriage. It is important to understand and appreciate this before we go further.

Occasions when a young man initiated a love affair in our traditional society were far fewer than occasions when it was started for him from another corner. From about the age of twelve when girls started to be conscious of themselves as girls and boys became conscious of themselves as boys, their education diverged diametrically. Girls were given education for women in preparation for responsibilities as adult married women in society. Boys were given education for men in preparation for their responsibilities as married men in society. As they grew towards sixteen the

distance between them became even bigger as each group became conscious of its sex and identified itself more with its peers.

It is no exaggeration to say that a state of polarity between them came into existence. Girls walked around with other girls and older women; boys walked about with other boys and older men. It was looked upon as a sign of moral weakness for a girl to associate regularly with boys. It was looked upon as "unmanly" of a man to associate publicly and regularly with women. This was the essence of the traditional fire-place (dare). The women's counterpart of the "dare" was the kitchen. In the rural areas, this polarity is not dead even today. This education and this polarity made it very difficult for boys to get into direct touch with their female counterparts and make direct love negotiations. It is, however, true that some made it and were bound to make it.

The second reason why boys did not find it easy to make direct love approaches was that our traditional society did not take seriously the suggestions of a youth. Each youth had parents, uncles, aunts and other important elders to represent her if the suggestion was serious. If a boy therefore made a direct love approach to a girl, the girl herself could not hide it from her elders if she was a reliable and honest girl. She always feared the censure of her elders and sought advice from them. The boy feared the censure of his elders because his action was looked upon as unilateral. That was not expected of an honest boy who had good relationships with his elders.

Boys certainly did initiate love affairs. But the traditional way of doing it was that, if a young man spotted a girl who attracted him, he went back to his elders such as the aunts, the uncle, the grandfather or even an older brother to hint he had feelings for a particular girl. Much of what happened thereafter did not depend on him, but on the elders.

The third factor that restricted the freedom of the young man to make direct and independent love approaches to a girl, was economic. Lobola payments for the bride of the young man came from his parents and close relatives. He himself had nothing of his own to offer. He, therefore, feared to embark on adventures that were unknown and might not be sanctioned by the elders who were going to pay the lobola for him. If they did not approve of his actions and he decided to go ahead, they could refuse to pay for him and he could find himself in an embarrassing position.

One of the most important factors was certainly that traditional Africans were more interested in the family the young man was marrying into than the individual girl he married. This sounds rather odd to the outsider yet this is very true. This was so largely because the marriage between a young man and a young woman was looked upon as far more than a personal affair; as I said earlier, it was a family affair. The relations being established between the two were not temporary, but permanent and could bring about a series of other relationships.

For instance, the girl the boy might be angling for could fail to give him children and he could end up being given by the father-in-law, her sister or even her brother's daughter or even her uncle's daughter (anybody in the category of the bride's sisters and nieces). Alternatively, after the marriage

of the young man to his bride, several of his own relatives could end up marrying into the same family or into relatives of the same family.

So, in exploring love relationships, whoever was concerned was in actual fact opening up flood gates for his own relatives. He was paving the way for several other relationships. This being the case, any love-proposing activity was not favourably looked upon by the relatives of both the boy and the girl concerned, if they were unilateral.

Because the boy was young and inexperienced, he did not know the "good" families to marry into. He had to depend on the knowledge and advice of his elders and relatives. If, therefore, he was attracted by a particular girl, he brought this to the attention of his elders. These then explored the "goodness" or otherwise of the girl's family before formal approaches were made. Some families were known to be generally harsh and cruel; some were known to be associated with witchcraft; some were known to have murderers among their ranks; some were known to be generally indolent. On the other hand, other families were known to be generally industrious and prosperous; they were known to be kind-hearted and generous; they were known to be generally constructive and sociable; they had no bad habits associated with them. The young man attempting to propose love was not expected to know these traits and had to rely much on his own relatives. This was also true of the young girl being approached by the young man. There was generally, therefore, no room for unilateral action, since the relationship the two were forging was far more than a personal and individual affair.

When a boy spotted a girl therefore, he came back to his elders to express his feelings to them. These elders were initially not interested in the particular girl. Their first question was almost always, "To what family does she belong?"

The relatives of the girl also asked the same question. Having found the answer to this question, they would next ask, "Whose daughter is she?" They would then go on, "Which particular daughter of so-and-so is she?" It is clear from this that what was of greatest concern to the traditional African was not the prospective daughter-in-law or son-in-law, but the family of the girl or boy concerned. In all this, the dominant principle of our traditional ancestors was covered by the saying, "Vanowanirana vema-tongo" meaning "we marry into families traditionally associated with us". This was so because these families knew each other closely and appreciated each other's traits. But it was the elders who knew these traits and not the young man or young woman only attracted by the physical appearance of the other. To these traditional Africans, to marry into an unknown family was a serious and dangerous adventure which no elders could sanction lightly. All these considerations imposed serious hurdles not only in the love-proposing adventures of the young man, but in the interests of himself, his progeny and the extended family at large. You can see that this was far more than individual love; far more than personal love. It was love between families and in some cases, between communities. This was so because the girl and boy concerned were paving the way for a family or community marriage.

Our society was communal and there was desire on the part of everybody to be in "good books" with one's relatives. Much of your progress depended on the good will and co-operation of these relatives. You could not brush them aside with impunity.

Because this was the set-up, the love affair of the young man was far more likely to start from another corner than from his own corner. Aunts, sisters and female cousins married elsewhere spotted girls in their localities; uncles, fathers, mothers, grandfathers and distant cousins always had particular families in their minds. Alternatively, they spotted girls in families they admired for special traits. Any of these relatives could start the love affair of the young man. What each one was likely to do was that after spotting such a girl and possibly after showing indirect and guarded interest, he invited the young man "to come and see what I have seen". Such a relative would then speak on behalf of the girl highlighting her good traits and those of her family at large. If the young man approved of her, the matter was then introduced to the circle of the boy's elders. If they approved of it, a formal approach was then made not to the girl, but to her elders through her aunt — paternal aunt.

Alternatively, the elders of the families that had associated for a long time offered to tighten their relations by bonds of marriage. One of them negotiated for the daughter of the other to take to marriage. After general agreement was reached, one family offered a son. In this case, the consent of both the boy and girl was not deemed necessary. Each one of them was told who his future wife or future husband was going to be. Initial lobola payment was made when it was deemed "ripe" to do so. The community knew better what was in its interest and what was in the interests of its daughter and son.

We also need to be fully aware that many boys and girls grew up already married. They were bethrothed (kuzvarirwa) to young men or young women by their elders long before they were competent to make a choice for themselves. Some of the reasons for this, we are going to come across later. Again, the reasoning was that the elders of the community knew their neighbours better and also knew what was in the interests of their young ones.

I could go further and say that many girls were born already married or were married at birth. After hearing that a daughter had been born to a family he admired, a man could go into the bush and collect a log of wood. He then carried it on his shoulders and threw it near the doorsteps of the mother of the newly born girl. This was a message to the family of the girl that this man was interested in marrying the baby. It could be that he himself personally wanted the girl to be his wife; it could be that he wanted her for his son or another relative. The details were ironed out later. But he could, if accepted by the family of the new girl, start paying lobola for her before she was one year old.

We know the case of a MUGARIRI. He was the poor man who paid his lobola in labour service. He approached the elders of a family he admired and offered his services in return for a daughter to take to wife. The family concerned might not have had "a free daughter" at that moment. The MUGARIRI offered his services in return for the next daughter to be born

to the family. So, he started to work for his prospective father-in-law even before his wife was born. By the time he had completed ten years, his wife could be seven years old. When the girl was about sixteen, the formalities were completed and the MUGARIRI took away his wife after she had reached the stage of puberty. By then, he himself could be fifty or sixty years old. As we are going to see, this was irrelevant.

I have described some love affairs as community love affairs and marriages resulting from them as community marriages. Good examples of this were the love affairs and marriages of chiefs and heirs to chieftainships. The chief was the father of his community; his wife was the mother of this community. It was not only his relatives that had an interest in the marriage deal of the chief; it was the whole of his community especially if this concerned his most senior wife (vahosi). If it was chief Seke marrying into Mangwende's family for instance, the whole Seke community looked upon itself as marrying into the whole Mangwende community. The Seke wards could even make contributions to assist their chief in the payment of lobola. On the day the bride was delivered, all might stop work and spend the day feasting, singing and dancing to celebrate the advent of "the mother of the community". This was clearly far more than a family marriage; it was a marriage of a community into a community.

It is clear from this that our traditional idea of love is different from our idea of love today. Today, our love is personal and individual; in our traditional society, love was less personal and more communal. I have not said that personal and individual love did not exist. There are some today who argue that personal and individual love did not exist. This is just not correct. What I have said is that the sense of community was very strong. I have given examples of young men initiating love affairs above; they could not have been motivated by anything other than personal love. Some marriages came about no doubt as a result of the indirect initiatives of the brides themselves; they too could not have been motivated by anything other than personal love. In addition the consent, especially of the boy, was almost always sought if the love affair was initiated from another corner. What was necessary was the general approval of the extended family. The whole family felt concerned because the bride was going to be part of it. If she was a witch, she was not going to affect her husband only, but everybody in her neighbourhood. Members of the boy's extended family could not lightly ignore this.

THE IRRELEVANCE OF AGE

In our traditional society, the age of both the bride and the bridegroom was irrelevant. We have seen examples of infants being married; we have seen examples of daughters being married at birth; we have come across examples of girls who were married before they were born or even conceived. Men continued to marry girls of fifteen or sixteen when they were sixty or over. This should not leave us in any doubt that in the marriage deal, age was completely irrelevant. This has prompted modern critics to describe the traditional girl as unreasonable and stupid. This criticism is unreasonable because it does not take into account the nature of the society of the day.

Such a critic is like a twentieth century historian who looks at 15th century European history with a twentieth century eye. It is the historian who is unreasonable and not 15th century European history.

It is absolutely necessary to talk about this irrelevance of age in traditional African societies because this does a great deal to reveal the nature of these societies. We can only understand the nature of the African marriage in the context of the society of the day. The traditional African did not live in isolation, but was a member of a society and in view of the dangers around him, he very highly valued his membership of that society. This is not very true of us today.

Were indeed the girls of fifteen, sane in marrying old men of sixty or over? Were parents sane to betroth their infant daughters to men of forty and over? Were the old men of the day sane to marry sixteen year old girls when they were sixty and might not live with them for more than five years? To describe all these people as unreasonable and insane is to describe the whole African society of the day as unreasonable and insane. Indeed is there such a society anywhere in the world and has there been one? Might it not be us who are unreasonable? Are such criticisms not prompted by our ignorance of the traditional African society?

Age was irrelevant because the bride was not marrying an individual, but a family. This is what I meant to demonstrate by examining the process of love-proposing. The old man marrying a young girl was a member of an extended family. That extended family consisted of old people; it consisted of middle-aged people; it consisted of young people including the bridegroom's brothers and sons with their senior wives. When it came to inheriting his wivs, all these people including his own sons, qualified. Because of this set-up, the bridegroom had many heirs and had nothing to fear in the event of his death. Because of the same set-up, the young bride, too, had no reason to fear marriage to an old man. For exactly the same reason, parents were not reluctant to betroth their young daughters and infants to men twice or three times their age. There is nothing that demonstrates the nature of the traditional African marriage more than this. The communal element is powerfully demonstrated.

What, therefore, happened was that when an old man of sixty married a young bride of, let us say, eighteen, he was fully aware that he was going to die leaving the bride quite young. The young bride was fully aware of this fact too. The two were not expected to show any concern over it. When the bridegroom died, the young bride had a whole year during which to make up her mind on who was to inherit her. This was so because according to tradition, she was not to be inherited or to remarry until after the "Cleansing Ritual" (Kuchenura, Kurova guva) of her late husband. This was conducted about a year after his death. During all that period, the bride was to remain chaste. On the day of the ritual, she was subjected to a test to prove whether or not she had remained chaste.

It was during this period of chastity that she was to cast her eye around to choose the man to inherit her. That man had to be a member of the

extended family of the deceased. In the meantime, the close relatives of the deceased were also over the same period angling for the widow in order to come to some understanding with her before the day of the Cleansing Ritual. When the Ritual day came and the estate of the deceased was inherited, the widow was inherited too.

There is a notion in modern circles that the inheritance was imposed on her. This is far from the truth. Her choice was very free; she could even choose not to be inherited at all. On the inheritance day, she was given a dish of water and some oil. A mat was spread by her side. The elder brother of the deceased was the first one to be given the chance to inherit the widow. He was asked to sit on the mat. The widow was then asked to wash his face and oil it. If she did so, that was a sign that she had accepted inheritance by this man. If she refused to do so, that was a sign that she did not want to be inherited by him. The next brother of the deceased was tried and then the next one until all the brothers of the deceased had had a chance. They sat on the mat only if they too were prepared to inherit the widow.

If she refused to accept all these brothers, the sons of the widower were tried one after the other in their order of seniority. If she refused all of them, the cousins of the deceased who were in his category of brothers were also given a chance. In this way, the widow was given the opportunity to choose the one she loved. It was almost certain that she had already come to some understanding with him before the ritual day. It is clear from this that the widow was given a very wide choice. It is clear too that she was not coerced in any way. No relative of the deceased was in a position to impose himself on her against her will. We of the twentieth century tend to imagine that it was all a dictatorship. This is not correct.

However, what I am attempting to demonstrate is that traditional marriages were community marriages. From the above, we can see why even at the point of love-proposing, the families concerned were more interested in the families they were marrying into rather than the individuals their daughters or sons were marrying. The bride could end up married to somebody very different from her original husband as long as he was a member of the extended family of her husband. Therefore, from the very beginning, she herself and her family were more interested in the family into which she intended to marry. But we have also seen that even the bridegroom could end up with another wife from his bride's family in the event of his bride failing to give him children.

All this explains why age on the part of the bridegroom was irrelevant. The traditional society had a mechanism to cater for the death of everyone of its members, brides included. Some old men even died before they had lived together with young brides they had paid for. This still did not matter because it was not the whole of the extended family that had passed away. It is absolutely necessary to stress this vital point. It is our ignorance of the nature of the traditional society that prompts us to make unfounded criticisms of traditional institutions.

PART 4

SERVICE TO MAJORITY

The essence of female marriage was service to her community. In this respect, the services of a daughter to her community and her father's family were vastly greater than those of a son to his community. This seems to contradict the general impression of the modern scholar and the general public. Today, we are generally of the impression that the traditional daughter was of little value and the traditional son was of the greatest value. In one or two respects, this was so, but in most respects, the reverse was true. As emphasised many times before, the traditional African was a community animal. He always thought in terms of his community. Whatever he did was done in society, and to benefit that society in general. In terms of service, which was all-important, the daughters were far more valuable than the sons. The traditional African was fully aware of this and used his daughters to the advantage of his community. Indeed, the whole essence of female marriage was service to the family and to the community. It is necessary to stress this in order to understand why traditional Africans did what they did and the way they did it.

The son was very valuable to his father, I agree. The main reason for it was simply that our society was patrilineal and patrilocal. As such, the son was the heir to the father, to the grandfather and to the whole paternal ancestry. If a man did not have sons, but had daughters only, "death" threatened him, and he was sure of it. This means that his lineage was coming to an end with the death of his daughter. To the traditional African, a man without male descendants was a truly dead man. A daughter could not keep him "alive" because her children belonged to the son-in-law's lineage. The great desire for sons in our traditional society reflected a struggle to remain alive on the part of each man — a struggle for existence. A man with male descendants was looked upon as very much alive. For this reason and because our society was and is patrilineal, sons were indispensable.

In yet another respect, sons were more valuable than daughters and again because our society was patrilineal and patrilocal. When the children were young, it was the responsibility of the parents and their relatives to look after them in every way and nurse them to adulthood. But as the children grew and the parents got older and became unable to fend for themselves, these positions were reversed. It became the responsibility of the children to look after these parents. This was mainly the responsibility of the sons and grandsons and not so much of the daughters and granddaughters. This was so partly because they were the heirs to these fathers and grandfathers and partly because they lived in the homes of their fathers and grandfathers. On the other hand, after marriage, the daughters left their parents' homes for their husbands' homes. By virtue of this, they were not well placed to look after their old parents.

Secondly, their ability to give help to their own parents depended largely upon the nature and ability of their husband. They could not do what they pleased, because they were married to foreign families and they were subordinated to these families.

In these two respects, sons were extremely valuable and in fact, were looked upon as indispensable. But in the majority of other respects, all the families depended on daughters. The general well-being of each family depended on daughters; in the majority of cases, the rise of the family to a higher economic and social status was effected through daughters; the survival of many families depended on daughters and not sons; the physical growth of the family itself depended on daughters and not sons. The vast majority of the brides married into a family were effected through daughters. In this way, daughters were of the greatest service to their parents' communities through their marriages. They themselves were fully conscious of this and this was why the majority of them did not resist the idea of marrying men they would never have chosen to marry, were it not because of the entreaties of their parents and relatives. Paramount in their minds as in the minds of their parents, was service to the majority of the members of their families.

Many chieftainships and sub-chieftainships in this country were won through daughters. A chief married into the family of a commoner. The wife gave good service to him. In return for this, the chief gave a district to his wife's father to rule. In some cases he did so merely to honour the father-in-law. Such a chieftainship or sub-chieftainship in reality belonged to the daughter married to the chief. Her parents appreciated this and highly honoured the daughter to whom they owed the chieftainship. The social status of a man into whose family a chief married rose immediately whether he himself became chief or not. Even if his son-in-law (chief) did not make him a chief or a sub-chief, he was almost certainly going to give him a measure of autonomy by giving him a kraalheadship. This was a highly coveted position in our traditional society. In this way and through a daughter, the status of the whole extended family of the bride shot up overnight.

Families were vexed by disease or serious problems. Some of these problems were associated with spiritual forces such as the NGOZI (avenging foreign spirit) or the witchcraft shavi. Several members of a particular family could lose their minds through this (become mentally deranged) or die in quick succession. To solve the problem, the intervention of a powerful traditional doctor was necessary. The elders of the family concerned could pledge one of their daughters to such a doctor in return for his services; the doctor himself might agree to help only on condition that he was given a daughter to take to wife; one daughter might offer herself to be wife of the doctor if he could rescue the family from the disaster. Whichever way it came, the family was saved by the daughter because the family itself might not have had any cattle or their equivalent to give to this doctor. So, in return for a daughter, the doctor came and rendered his services to the miserable family.

In this way, one daughter rescued a whole family from disaster. She might be unhappy at the other end, but her happiness was far less important than the lives of her parents' family and, of course, herself too.

Traditional methods of farming were backward and surpluses of food were rare. Raids were common and homes and food were lost in the process. Rains failed with the consequent visitations of famine. Through any of

these or all of them, families perished. But there were always a few who saved enough from the previous year or who were not affected by raids or who had managed to hide their food in inaccessible places or who were lucky to be living near rivers or waterlogged places that did not dry up so quickly. In the event of a famine disaster threatening certain families, the elders of the families concerned offered their daughters to these men in return for certain quantities of food. In this way, whole families were saved from extermination through the agency of their daughters and the daughters themselves were proud of the services they had rendered to their families. Here again, they may have been unhappy at their bridegroom's homes, but their happiness was less important than the lives of their parents, brothers and sisters.

We have seen that the greatest value of the son lay in keeping the lineage of his father, his grandfather and his own, alive. But the one person who enabled him to do this effectively was his sister and his daughter. The strength of each extended family depended on its numbers; its security depended on these numbers. But these numbers were determined by the numbers of women married into the home. These numbers of women married into the home largely depended on the numbers of daughters born into the home. Without many daughters, the family was unlikely to marry many sons-in-law and, therefore, was unlikely to expand rapidly and, consequently, its security was in danger. This also means that many lineages were likely to come to an end i.e. many male members of this particular family were likely "to die a permanent death".

The numbers of women married into the family depended on the ability of the family to pay lobola. The chief was easily able to marry ten or more wives because he was easily the wealthiest member of his community. The MUGARIRI we came across above was very unlikely to marry a second wife because he did not have the means to do so. The lineage of the chief was assured of continuity because he had many male members resulting from many wives; the lineage of the MUGARIRI was likely to die out because it depended on the issue of one wife who might give him one son or no son at all. What I am saying here is that the survival of the lineage depended on many wives. But the majority of these wives were brought into the home by the daughters of the home. This means that the survival of the lineage depended on the daughters born into the home. Because I have already said that the man without children or without sons was the only "truly dead" African in our traditional society, the above means that "true life" (continuous life) depended on the numbers of daughters born into the home. We cannot run away from this conclusion if we are aware of the facts. Phrased differently, although the direct agent of "life-continuity" is the son, the indirect agent is the daughter. Without the daughter, the son is a helpless agent.

But how can this be? We have already seen that the young man intending to marry had no property of his own. His lobola payments were made by the parents and close relatives. But this lobola itself was very likely to come from another home in payment of lobola for one of the daughters of this particular home. This was the normal thing in our circles.

Let me give an example here: if a man had three sons and six daughters, the elder son was given the elder sister for his lobola; the second son was given the second oldest daughter for his lobola, the third son was given the third oldest daughter for his lobola. What therefore happened was that when each one of these daughters was married, the lobola payments made for her were passed on to a father-in-law as lobola payments for the wife of the brother to whom she was given. In other words, lobola payments for daughters served as lobola payments for daughters-in-law.

This done, the father concerned had completed his marriage responsibilities to his son. If this son wanted a second wife, this was no longer the responsibility of his father. What he generally did, therefore, was to wait for the growth and marriage of his own daughters. When these daughters married, he passed on some of the lobola payments to other men to fetch wives for his own sons. But some of them he passed on to his fathers-in-law to fetch new wives for himself. I am not suggesting that all lobola payments came from lobola payments. Chiefs had many sources of wealth and did not have to wait for their daughters to marry in order for them to marry new wives. This was also true of famous traditional doctors, spirit mediums, and big hunters. But the vast majority of men depended for lobola on their own daughters.

This makes it very clear that a man with several daughters was most likely to end up with many wives and therefore many descendants. He was also likely to end up wealthy by the standards of the day. He had no problem, too, in making payments for his own sons. Through these daughters, he could end up as chief or sub-chief or kraalhead. In other words, his daughters enhanced his economic and social position. By obtaining more wives for himself and for his sons and therefore bringing about the general physical growth of this family, the daughters were also enhancing the security of their family. Given this, is it not true that the indirect and more important agent of the prosperity and growth of this family was the daughter? This being so, does it not follow that "the life-continuity" of each family depended on its daughters? It is clear from this that if a family were deprived of its daughters, it became a helpless and miserable family.

At this stage, look back and compare the services of the son to his family with that of the daughter to the same family. We cannot doubt that it was the daughter through whom the family pitch-forked itself onto a new economic and social rung.

The chances of a poor son marrying into chiefly families were nil. The daughter was all-important and determined the future of her father's family. Of course, the daughter and the son were complementary, but the services of the daughter to her family were vastly greater. The importance of the son lay in the fact that he was the heir to the father and was the direct agent of the continuity of his father's lineage — the struggle for existence. But as we now know, even in this, he was not independent of the daughter. The plain truth from this exercise is that if the daughters sacrificed any of their freedom and happiness, they did so in the interests of the majority members of their families. Our ancestors were too conscious of themselves as members of a community. The community and not the individual, was all-important.

What was, therefore, paramount in their minds was service to the people, service to the majority and that meant the community. In this, the daughter played the most prominent role. Our present assertions that the daughter was a second class citizen and was of no value are most ill-founded and prompted by ignorance of the nature of our traditional society.

PART 5

THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE SYSTEM

We cannot logically talk about the advantages and disadvantages of a system that we know little about. This is precisely what the majority of us have been doing up to now. My analysis above of the institution of lobola was meant to enlighten the reader on lobola and what it was all about. But lobola itself was an institution of a people and a particular people. Therefore, in order not to quote it out of context, we have to know and understand the people concerned and especially their values. Furthermore, in examining the advantages and disadvantages of the system, it should be advantages and disadvantages to these traditional people and not to us. We have somewhat changed since 1890 and therefore our values have changed too. We cannot logically talk of the advantages of a traditional system to us as if we are part of that tradition. This is what makes us see an institution with a wrong eye.

(a) ADVANTAGES

In our traditional society, both the man and the woman were literally born for marriage unless he or she was physically or mentally abnormal, which was unfortunate. Failure to marry meant failure to have children and, therefore, in turn meant "certain and permanent death" to the individual concerned. We have already seen that there was a real struggle to "keep alive" and that meant having children. To choose not to marry amounted to volunteering to "die" which no normal person was expected to do. Therefore, we are essentially not wrong to say that everybody was born to marry in order to perpetuate himself or herself. The result of this was that from the age of about eleven or twelve, education was geared more and more towards marriage and married life. There were tutors for the young man and there were tutors for the young woman and they saw to it that they did their duty and properly. The failure of their young man or young woman was looked upon as their failure; the misbehaviour of a young man or young woman after marriage was looked upon as reflecting on his or her elders. Each married young man or young woman was looked upon as a young ambassador for the family concerned. If he or she did well, the result was a good name for the family and that attracted more suitors. If she or he messed things up, the result was dishonour to the family concerned. To make sure that the family was not misrepresented by its sons and daughters, each group of elders concerned played its part conscientiously to give the necessary education to its young men and young women in respect of marriage and married life. The young woman was taught to know her place as a bride and to accept it. Likewise, the young man was taught to know his place and responsibilities as a bridegroom and as a member of the

community and to accept this. This means that there was no fumbling after marriage. Each knew his or her place and responsibilities. The chances of the success of a marriage between two characters reared in this manner were very bright. This is precisely what is lacking in our present society. No wonder the rate at which our marriages are collapsing is alarmingly high.

Secondly, each young man and young woman was an apprentice in life. The education given to them was practical education to do with actual life. The young girl joined older girls and women and actually did the job such as fetching firewood, grinding grain, cooking and looking after younger brothers and sisters, with them. The young man joined older boys and men in looking after animals, hunting, fighting, building cattle pens, building and repairing huts and caring for the younger brothers and sisters. When both reached a marriageable age, they were made to organize mock families (Mahumbwe) where each chose a mock partner and mock children and built a mock house, looked for food for their mock families and in every way demonstrated that they were ready for marriage. The elders had intense interest in this and looked for shortfalls with the intention of rectifying them before marriage. These were annual affairs organized after harvests and each family wanted to satisfy itself that both the young man and young woman married when he or she was ready for it. This took the families a long way towards success in married life even before they began that life. The whole idea was to make married life a success.

Thirdly, the involvement of the extended family in the education of the young, the involvement of the extended family in the love-proposing processes and in the payment of lobola meant the involvement of the extended family in the life of the young married couple. Because each family was after making a good name for itself and in maintaining that good name for the benefit of its future young men and women, each group of elders saw to it that its young product did not misrepresent it after marriage. A harsh and cruel young man made a bad name for his extended family; an uncouth and generally arrogant young bride made a bad name for her extended family. The elders of both sides worked ceaselessly after marriage to suppress such practices and attitudes because they were no good for their name and therefore for their future sons and daughters. Such a son did not only prejudice the chances of his young brothers and cousins of marrying into highly reputed families, but also prejudiced his own chances of getting a second wife. Such a daughter, apart from prejudicing chances of marriage of her young sisters, ran the risk of being divorced if she lost the support of the extended family of her husband. Furthermore, she could actually be sent back to her home for more education and this was looked upon as very humiliating to her and her extended family upon which her behaviour reflected. What this does mean is that the attitudes and behaviour of both the young bridegroom and his bride were very much controlled by members of their extended families. We glibly talk of the brutality of the traditional man; this was not the case. The traditional man did not live in isolation and could not afford to flout the feelings of the extended family which initially did so much to find him a wife and to pay lobola for him. Of course brutal men were there and will always be there, lobola abolished or

not, because of what they are. Fourthly, the continued involvement of the extended family led to the success of traditional marriages. The aim in our traditional society was not only to marry, but to make the marriage a success. Having discovered what sort of a husband a daughter had fished out, the members of her family gave her necessary advice on what to do to be on good terms with him. On the other side, the bridegroom could not unilaterally choose to divorce his wife. When he courted her, he was not alone. The choice might not even have been his; the lobola itself might not have come from him. This being the case, he could not afford to brush aside the views of his extended family. So, when there was a crisis in the family, secret diplomacy was applied to help the young family. If this was not effective, elders assembled and tried to help the couple. They could hold their young man to ransom for ill-treatment of the bride. On the other hand, the bride could not just walk away to her home without the approval of her own elders and those of her husband. The result of all this was that marriages held together up to death. In short, most marriages were easily a success because of the involvement of the extended families of both sides.

Fifthly, items of lobola were not easy to come by. This means that marriage was a very major commitment which no man could afford to retreat from. Divorce meant remarriage and this in turn meant new lobola payments. The bridegroom of course recovered part of the lobola after divorce, but only part. Fear of losing part of this lobola and of looking for new lobola items altogether for a new marriage frightened him and persuaded him to do justice to his wife in order to keep the marriage together. On the other hand, the bride was conscious of the fact that the lobola payments made for her were spent by her relatives and they might not have anything to refund to the husband if she divorced him. She would impose a real strain on her parents if she got divorced. This thought, too, controlled the attitudes of the bride and like that of her husband, contributed much towards the success of traditional marriages.

Sixthly, the system catered for widows, widowers and orphans. As we saw earlier, the bride was inherited ritually after the death of her husband. There was a wide circle of men that could inherit her. A vacuum was never allowed to develop. The widower, too, was given the sister of his late wife, or a cousin in the category of sisters or one of the daughters of the widow's brothers. Interest was on catering for both the widower and the children. It was also on maintaining the ties already established. It was felt that a relative of the widow would have real love for the children of the widow and would look after them better than a new wife unrelated to the widow. Whether the widow accepted inheritance or not, somebody was always chosen to look after the children of the deceased. Even if every relative of the deceased refused to inherit the widow, somebody was still chosen to look after the family of the deceased. Absence of an equivalent arrangement is one of the greatest weakness of our system — if we have one — today.

Lastly, I must point out that the success of traditional marriages, as a result of the involvement of the extended families in the affairs of the young married couple, was very much in the interests of the children. Children of divorced families experienced problems and today they experience even

greater problems. The divorced mother tried to win the sympathy and support of the children and so did the father. This often caused serious rifts between the fathers and their children and it does so even more today. What this does mean is that the success of the traditional marriages was in the interests of the majority because the father and mother were a minority in each family as they continue to be even today. Therefore, the sacrifices made by both the bride and the bridegroom were worth it because they were in the interests of the majority.

(b) *DISADVANTAGES*

There is no system that is perfect and even our present systems are far from being perfect. They may even be more faulty than the traditional ones. In short, every institution has advantages and disadvantages, and our traditional system was no exception. It is all a matter of weighing the advantages against the disadvantages. Certainly, the success of the whole system was achieved at the expense of the personal freedom and sometimes, happiness of the woman. The man did not make comparable sacrifices nor was he inconvenienced so much.

To begin with, the woman had very little say in the choice of her husband. It is true that most men had their wives chosen for them too. For instance, young men were betrothed to young women regardless of age. But in spite of this, the system favoured the men more than the women. There were no young men betrothed to older women. This is understandable because what the society of the day was after were children and a young man of twenty would not get more than a child or two from an old woman of forty. The feelings of the young girls were never really taken into account. There is no doubt that the majority of women married men they would never have chosen to marry. This may be true of the men, but they always consoled themselves with the knowledge that they could marry a second and third wife largely of their own choice. The woman had no way of improving the position once she was married. After his marriage of the second and third wives of his own choice, the husband relegated his senior wife to the status of a third class wife. This was so not only because he had married other women, but also because he had no strong feelings for her even at the beginning. The sufferer here was not the husband, but the woman.

Secondly, in her husband's home, the woman was treated as an overgrown child in relation to her husband. She was there to make her husband happy and comfortable, but the husband was not there to make his wife happy and comfortable. The women had no say in most of the decisions made in the home — and made for them too. No doubt they exerted what pressure they could from behind doors and through their husbands, but they were not given the chance to do so openly. This assumed that the women were not constructive or were not as intelligent and as reasonable as men.

But this could never have been true of all women. As today, there can be no doubt that there were women who were more intelligent, more constructive and with greater common sense than men. Such women were largely brushed aside, but no doubt at the expense of the families concerned which could have benefitted from their ideas. Women had rights as much

as men had rights, but they were looked upon as mere appendages of their husbands.

Thirdly, modern critics feel that genuine and personal love could never have existed under the traditional circumstances. They are both right and wrong. Many men married women of their own choice; likewise, many women married men of their own choice. What was necessary was not the initiative, but the approval of the family elders. In cases like this, there was genuine and personal love such as ours of today. There were cases when choices made by the family elders were as good as the young girl or young boy could have made. If both the boy and the girl felt they had made a good score, there was nothing to interfere with the development of genuine and personal love. There were also cases when both the boy and the girl adopted the attitude "my elders know better and I have to do the best under the circumstances". Alternatively, the girl might appreciate the great services rendered to her family by the man to whom she was surrendered by her parents. For this reason, she grew really attached to the husband. What this means is that although the partner might be such that the girl or boy would not have chosen him, real love developed between them as if they had chosen each other.

In spite of this, we cannot deny that there were cases when love failed to develop in the end. An example of this is a young man made to marry a woman whom, at heart, he did not love. The result of it was that he hurried into marrying a second one, this time, of his choice. After this second marriage, he literally abandoned his first wife. The second case was that of a woman forced to marry an old man of fifty or over. In this case, one thing was certain that the husband was going to die leaving her young. One other thing was certain too: that she was going to be inherited after the death of her husband. The natural thing for her to do was to cast her eyes around for the man to inherit her. In the meantime, the men related to the bridegroom were also conscious of the same fact and were looking forward to the day when the old man would die. Some of them might even make vague and guarded approaches to the bride before the death of the bridegroom. The bride herself might even do the same to the heir she loved. The result was that an understanding was established between the bride and the heir before the death of the bridegroom. In some cases real love affairs between the two started before the death of the bridegroom. Indeed, we have numerous examples of this happening in our society. To quote one royal example. Chiweshe and Gutsa (brothers) ran away from Nyashanu to end up establishing the Shava Mufakose and Shava Mutenhesanwa dynasties of today because one of them had fallen in love with their father's junior wife (the then reigning Nyashanu) and made her pregnant. The father wanted them to be killed and they ran away to end up in the present Harare area. At less royal levels, this was much more common.

Under the circumstances, can we legitimately argue that this woman ever had love, real love, for her aged husband? But was it not the system itself that created this situation for her? From all this, we can see that cases of genuine love existed, but they existed side by side with cases where genuine love never developed. This is what prompted my statement that

modern critics who say that real love, as we know it today, did not exist in traditional society were both correct and wrong.

All in all, my feeling is that the personal freedom and happiness of the bride were rather too much sacrificed to the interests of the bridegroom and society at large. Of course the community as a whole was more important than the individual and therefore its interests were held paramount. But was there a reason why the bride had to make greater sacrifices than the bridegroom? At any rate, the interests of society must begin with the interests of the individual. I think the same results could have been achieved together with greater personal freedom and happiness for the woman. The balance between the bride and the bridegroom was too heavily weighted against the bride and in favour of the husband.

It may not be out of place, too, to argue that the system encouraged mischief and rancour in some cases. After a bride married to an old man had reached an understanding with somebody, but before the death of the old man, we cannot rule out the possibility of the two conspiring to eliminate the old man in any way possible because in their view, he was taking too long to die. In addition, after the death of the old man, there could have been many and there were almost always many who aspired to the inheritance of his junior wives. These men could vie with each other for the widow. They could do direct physical harm to each other. Furthermore, after the inheritance ritual, the relations of him who won the widow might never again be the same as before with these that lost to him.

PART 6

EVOLUTION SINCE 1890

What I am looking upon as the traditional system is the system that prevailed around 1890 and before. We cannot pretend that what existed in 1890 is what we have today. There should be no suggestion, too, that what existed should be brought back in toto. Such a suggestion would amount to suggesting that our society is static which, as everybody is fully aware, is never the case. Changes have taken place in society and all the institutions and will continue to take place. I look upon our main duty as to direct the course of the evolution. However, at the moment, let us examine the main changes that have taken place in the lobola system. I must be quick to add that these changes are a reflection of the changes that have taken place in our society.

(a) COLLAPSE OF BETROTHAL

The first casualty in the process of our evolution was certainly the practice of betrothal (kuzvarira). After 1890, parents continued to betroth their daughters. But on growing and receiving rudiments of education, those daughters refused to go to the homes of the husbands chosen for them. Instead, they went to the homes of the husbands of their own choice against the will of their parents. This was encouraged by both the missionaries and the District Commissioners. As revealed in the documents in our National Archives, most of the civil cases the D.C.'s dealt with after 1890 concerned daughters who refused to take up the husbands chosen for them

by their elders. In the meantime, their prospective husbands had already paid part of the lobola for them and proceeded to demand it back. The D.C.s, imposed a penalty on parents who betrothed their daughters against their will. The result was that this custom became one of the earliest casualties in the process of our evolution after 1890.

It is true that it may not be dead altogether. Cases of it are known to exist on the Mocambique border. But these no longer count much and the custom can be looked upon as permanently buried. There is no way in which it can creep back.

(b) *PERSONAL LOVE*

The second casualty during the course of our evolution was impersonal love and community love. This has been replaced by personal individual love. The collapse of the betrothal custom inevitably meant the greater development of personal individual love. This was aided by several factors. Probably the most important of them was the greater mobility of people within our society.

Mines and farms came into operation after 1890 and many young men went to them to seek employment; towns developed and more young men went to them for employment; schools were opened up including boarding schools where young men and young women came together and were attracted to each other without any influence from their elders; the young men and women who looked upon themselves as educated started to cast aspersions on their parents' values and institutions and boasted that they knew what was good for them far more than their elders; the church, which controlled all education in the early days laid stress on personal individual love and urged its members to resort to Christian marriages. Equally important was the fact that the young man could work and collect enough money to pay lobola for himself. In other words, he was largely financially independent of his family elders and relatives.

The result of all this social revolution was that the family elders were presented by the young man and young woman with an accomplished fact. Some of these young people presented their elders with the partners they were going to marry. They did not seek advice on whether to marry them or not, but merely informed them of their decisions. Some, living in Harare or Bulawayo or some other centre lived with their partners and had children by them even without the knowledge of their elders. They then went home to present their parents with wives and grandchildren. There was nothing these parents could do. These family elders continue to try to advise and caution their daughters and sons, but in the majority of cases, they are brushed aside and have to give it up. That what prevails today is personal and individual love is indisputable. Of course family elders do gather to formalize the marriage and to determine how much to charge the son-in-law, but still, they have no voice in the choice of the partner.

(c) *THE COLLAPSE OF THE EXTENDED FAMILY*

The collapse of betrothal and the greater development of personal individual love are themselves results and reflections of the collapse of the extended family. This is certainly a major casualty in the process of our

evolution after 1890. Here again, the greater mobility of the population after 1890 is an important factor.

Aunts who were such a powerful force in our traditional education, courting and marriage negotiations have married hundreds of miles away from home; many families have established permanent homes in urban areas; many have bought farms in the purchase areas, which again may be hundreds of miles away from the original home; the population has risen sharply and many have moved away from their traditional homes to establish their own homes where land was available. In other words, the extended family as a geographical unit, disintegrated. With it also disintegrated its authority and influence.

Cash economy and economic disparity between members of the extended family have delivered a death blow to the extended family itself. One or two members of the extended family may be lucky to get reasonable jobs and get more money than all the others. Either they try to drag the whole extended family with them, sharing their salaries with them, or withdraw into an economic and social cocoon. The former would nullify their efforts and ruin them, the latter only gains them the jealousies, envy and hatred of their relatives. There is much disharmony between members of the extended family today. The main reason is simply that some have been luckier than others and those who have not been so lucky are envious and jealous of those who have been lucky. Some happened to be intelligent and they got the chances of going to school. From school they got good jobs and ended up with cars and businesses. The other members became jealous of them and tried to do them down. All this does not aid the continuation of the extended family as a social force at all. Many try to assist members of the extended family and will continue to do so, but cannot go beyond a certain point without ruining their families. One problem is certainly that the unfortunate members (or some of them) of the extended family expect too much from the fortunate ones. They literally have no limits to their demands and one can only comply with them to one's ruin.

We gather together and in one form or another we will continue to do so, but the extended family as a social force has collapsed and cannot be revived. It is its collapse that has set loose bedlum. Here and there, aunts and uncles will continue to be invited for marriages and ritual beers, but the fact remains that the extended family as a social force, is dead. With it went all its influence and control of the young bride and her partner.

(d) *COLLAPSE OF MARRIAGES*

The most immediate effect of the collapse of the authority and influence of the family elders is the soaring divorce rate. As many marriages are collapsing as those that come into existence each day. This is largely because the issue of whether to divorce or not has become an individual and personal affair on the part of both the bride and the bridegroom. But this is so largely because the marriage itself was in the first place, personal and individual, it being in turn the result of personal and individual love initiatives. The absence of the influence of family elders or any interested and constructive elders at all, from the married life of the young man and

young woman, is an important factor accounting for the collapse of marriage today.

But the story does not begin there; it begins with the social education given to the young before marriage. The traditional families were more successful not only because family elders maintained their interest in the survival of the marriages of their sons and daughters, but also because the juniors were given the necessary education before marriage.

This education became very direct as one moved closer to marriage. The goal of every young person was looked upon as marriage and therefore in traditional education, greatest emphasis was on one's responsibilities after marriage. It was on what to do to accommodate the partner. This being the case, nobody lived in dream land before marriage. The young girl knew what to expect after marriage and so did the young man. This is precisely what is lacking in our modern world. The result is that many of our young have rosy, idealistic and artificial ideas about married life. On entering it and on discovering how different the real thing is from the idealistic, they are quickly fed up, but still hope to get somebody who might give them that represented by the perfect man or perfect woman they have in mind — who in fact does not exist. In the meantime, their first marriage has already collapsed.

Marriage is a big commitment and should not be left to the whims of chance. Yet the extended family is gone and can simply not be revived: so what?

Cash economy has certainly done a lot to destroy families. I can do no more than give a few examples. A man gets a good job and marries. He lives in a big urban centre and is counted as one of those socially well up. His wife inevitably rises to the same status and gets used to a certain standard and way of life. After ten or fifteen years, the husband loses his job and finds it difficult to get another one or gets one that gives him hardly half his former salary. He plunges to the bottom of the social ladder and so does his wife and family. The high life the family has been enjoying becomes impossible. Unless the wife is cool-headed and reliable, this family is likely to find itself under serious social strain and may collapse. The wife could try to maintain her previous standards of life by means which can destroy the family. She could even hope for a socially better husband and engineer the family into a divorce. If this man fails to get a job altogether and decides to leave the urban centre for home and depend on subsistence farming, the wife could refuse to go to the country and depend on tilling the soil partly because she did not expect it and partly because to her, the social descent is too sharp and humiliating. In a case like this, a divorce is almost certain.

Alternatively, a man married to a not-so-well-educated woman. In the course of his married life, highly qualified and employed women throw themselves in his way. He calculates his salary and compares it with that of a highly qualified woman. He comes to the conclusion that he can become rich overnight if only he married this one. He proceeds to make firm promises to her. In the meantime, he has started to kick dust into the eyes of

his wife. Ultimately, divorce must follow unless this man changes his mind. We cannot deny that there are men who marry money and not woman — marry women for their money rather than for what they are as persons. This is apparently not restricted to Africans. I have read in the papers, cases of European boys of twenty "marrying" grandmothers of eighty. Is such a man after a wife?

Cash economy has destroyed marriages in yet other ways. Most Africans have two homes, one at their places of employment and the second, out in the country. For part of the year, the wife is at home in the rural areas; for part of it, she is at her husband's place of employment. This living apart subjects both the husband and wife to serious temptations. African men have gone to South Africa for five or more years leaving their wives at home. Many women have managed to stand it, but can we deny that equally many were not able to stand it?

Whilst the wife was expected to remain chaste all these years and probably remained so, did the husband do so, too? Might he not be having three or four other children with a South African woman? All this is an element of cash economy and in this way has helped to destroy marriages. This is an aspect of the evolution of our society which has brought about evolution in our marriage customs. Collapse of marriages is one of the consequences of this evolution.

The attitudes of the in-laws also do much to destroy marriages. The greatest culprit in this respect is the father of the bride and his circle. To begin with, they demand crippling lobola payments from the son-in-law. Their approach and attitude are clearly exploitative. Their charges depend on the economic ability of the son-in-law rather than on tradition. Furthermore, one son-in-law may be charged so many dollars this week by one father-in-law. The same father-in-law charges twice or thrice this amount the following week for his second, but more educated daughter. He does not even hesitate to tell the son-in-law that he is charging so much because the daughter is educated. The son-in-law cannot avoid concluding that he is paying back the father-in-law all the money he spent on educating the daughter. There is, therefore, no reason why the bridegroom cannot claim that he educated his wife and also bought her. When it comes to issues of rights or equality in the family, this young bridegroom can be very adamant after making enormous monetary sacrifices. In the first place, he is injured in terms of feelings by the exploitative attitude of the father-in-law. Secondly, he is economically crippled by the father-in-law. His relations with his bride's family are impaired before his family even takes off. His feelings towards his own wife may even be watered down.

To make matters worse, the father-in-law continues to ask for help from the son-in-law. He may even give him one or two of his younger children to educate. I know of a few cases when the father-in-law visited the son-in-law at the end of the month to demand the salary of his daughter. In one case, the marriage of the daughter collapsed in three months. The son-in-law could simply not stand it.

Even some mothers-in-law are not constructive and do a lot of damage

to the families of their daughters. They are extortionate too and when marriage deals are being negotiated they tell their daughters, "You are going to do a lot of work for him; you cannot 'die' for nothing. Charge him very heavily".

In addition, they create cases against the son-in-law simply in order to screw money out of him. For instance, they can spread a mat in the hut in which the marriage deal is negotiated. As the young and unsuspecting bridegroom or his representative walks into the hut, he is asked to sit on the mat. During the course of the negotiations, the son-in-law is charged so much for sitting allegedly on his mother-in-law's mat which, of course, is traditionally prohibited. Alternatively, the son-in-law could be asked to sit on a chair or even bench. After doing so, the relatives of the bride then proceed to charge him so much because he sat where his father-in-law normally sits. All this does not suggest a constructive frame of mind on the part of the bride's relatives, and does a lot of harm to their relations with their new son-in-law and inevitably between the son-in-law and his wife. The son-in-law has to be convinced that the father-in-law and the mother-in-law are genuinely interested in him and mean to be fair to him. An exploitative attitude helps his new family in no way. To cripple him economically is to treat him as a foreigner from whom they should or could make as much profit as possible. There is no son-in-law who can be indifferent to such an attitude, and anything that dampens his feelings to the in-laws and the bride must be looked upon as a factor that contributes to divorce. After all, these are the very elders that should do their best to stabilize the marriage of the young couple.

Many mothers of the bridegrooms are also destructive. These are often assisted by the sisters of the bridegroom. They sit back and expect all the work to be done for them by the bride; they order the bride around as if she were a little child; they demand that her husband should leave whatever money he leaves behind, in their hands and not in the bride's hands; when he comes from town, they demand that he should give them all the parcels including bread, sugar and the like and then they can give a share of that to the bride; they charge that she is posting money and domestic items to her parents home behind their backs. Indeed, they give her credit only if she agrees to be their virtual slave. If only she makes an attempt to stand her ground or to query some of their attitudes towards her, they will look for the worst possible adjectives for her and try to convince her husband that she is what the adjectives mean. Yet these sisters never accepted such a treatment when applied to them at their own husband's homes. This is certainly one of the paradoxes of our modern African society. Yet these are the very people who should be struggling to make this young marriage succeed. From every corner therefore, the very forces that traditionally worked for the stability of marriages are the very ones that are working to destroy marriages. The bride has feelings like everybody else and has rights. She cannot, therefore, accept being treated as a slave and by the people who made no contribution towards her presence in the home. Inevitably, her patience will one day be exhausted and she will react against the mother-in-law and her daughters. Her husband may not like it and a crisis between them might develop and culminate in divorce. If the bridegroom

is not open-minded and cool-headed, he is likely to take all the stories of his relatives as fact. The ultimate result of it all will be the collapse of his marriage engineered by his own relatives.

One factor that has done a lot of harm to African marriages is what I shall call here "overspeed" on the part of the women and "underspeed" on the part of the men. I have already made it clear that in our traditional society, the freedom and happiness of the woman was sacrificed to those of the man and community. At the same time, I have suggested that the woman won a measure of liberty after 1890 as reflected by the collapse of the betrothal custom. On one hand, the woman realizes that she can win greater liberty; on the other, the man feels that he is losing part of his authority over the woman. The woman wants to move faster in the direction of equality with her husband; the husband is adjusting too slowly for the woman. The situation can be likened to the political situation that existed in the country before independence. Because the African had everything to gain and nothing to lose, he wanted rapid transformation of the political situation in the country; because the European had everything to lose and nothing to gain, he did not want any political changes in the political setup. Those of them who accepted change, wanted slow change and only up to a certain "safe point" from their point of view. This is exactly the situation that prevails between the African man and the African woman today.

We have champions of the liberation of women. They have been there for a long time except that in this country, this was overshadowed by the political issue. Some of them want nothing short of total equality between husband and wife, between man and woman in every walk of life. Women have more to gain from this and naturally they would like this to come by tomorrow. Men have little to gain from this and practically everything to lose because the women can only gain what the men lose. Naturally, some men want to resist any change; some would tolerate changes, but on condition that they come slowly and only up to a certain point. The result is that the modern woman tries to assert her new authority or tries to exact this from the man; the man tries to prove to the woman that he is still present and still wields authority over her. As the woman pushes and the man resists, the gulf between them widens. Because the man is physically stronger, he tries to prove to his wife that he has authority over her and can maintain his authority over her. This he does by physical means which if often resorted to, can only destroy the marriage. It is not many men who would stand what they look upon as arrogance from their wives. As long as the debate on equality (whatever this may mean) between husband and wife remains a debate, not many husbands would worry about it. But when it comes to a practical assertion of it by women, most men would stand their ground even at the risk of the collapse of their marriages. Indeed, many have foundered on this and will continue to do so.

Cash economy has destroyed marriages in yet another way. In this respect some husbands have proved to be unreasonable and selfish and in that way have been powerful agents for the destruction of their marriages. Because they paid lobola for their wives, they believe that everything earned by the wife is automatically theirs and should use it in any way they like

regardless of the feelings of their wife. What therefore happens is that at the end of each month, the husband receives the whole salary of the wife from the employer or demands it from the wife. He then disregards the wife altogether and squanders her salary in his own way. Part of it may be squandered in beerhalls and pubs; much of it may be squandered on girl friends. The wife has no say on how her own salary is spent; the family including the wife has no benefit from this salary. Women cannot be expected to accept this sort of thing without a struggle. After all, the family may be experiencing serious shortages because the husband himself squanders his own salary on things that do not profit the family in any way. It might be this situation that initially persuaded, if not forced, her to work. But the husband nullifies all her efforts and the family makes no economic and social improvement because of the selfishness and unreasonableness of one person.

Either the wife gives up her job because her efforts do not benefit her and her children or she fights to have a share at least, in the disbursement of her salary. The husband resists this and a crisis develops and in many cases end up in a divorce. Such a marriage has been destroyed by the husband alone.

By going for work, the woman has made up her mind to make sacrifices in the interests of the whole family. But the attitude of the husband nullifies all her efforts and in some respects, creates more problems for the whole family than before the woman was employed. The salary of the wife has brought the husband into a large circle of women some of whom aspired to marry him and in that way threaten the security of his wife. Either the wife demands her salary or she gives up her employment or she at least demands a say in the disbursement of her own salary. If the husband is adamant — and most men who practise this sort of thing are adamant — the marriage is not likely to survive. If it collapses over this, the husband must be held responsible. No woman can be expected to be indifferent to how her own salary is spent by her husband. By simply going to work, she is making a personal sacrifice and has to be satisfied that the sacrifices are worth it from the point of view of herself and her children. The whole family and not one selfish and unreasonable person, must benefit from it.

I am here dealing with a difficult and thorny area. A law such as "the wife has complete autonomy over her salary" will, in practice, cause upheavals in families. Likewise, a law such as "the husband has complete autonomy over his wife's salary" will cause equal upheavals in families. Whilst the best way out of this is certainly to leave the couple to sort out its own salary problems, we have to realize that unreasonable men and women are there and will continue to be there.

As such, the wife's say at least, in the disbursement of her salary needs to be guaranteed and this is in the general interest of the whole family. Otherwise, educated and well-paid women would rather break up their marriages under the circumstances and at least spend their money on themselves and their children rather than "work for nothing" or give up their good jobs. This area needs serious and cautious attention.

It is clear from all this that there are many factors accounting for the soaring divorce rate in our society. I do not claim to have exhausted them

and it was not my intention to do so. But I feel that the most important of them are associated with the absence of appropriate education or education at all, for both our boys and girls before marriage. The traditional tutor has fallen away and no replacement has been found for him or her. A vacuum has developed in part of our society. The result is that young boys and girls plunge into marriage without knowing what it entails — without knowing their responsibilities to each other. From the word go, they embark on experiments based on half-naked and possibly not very constructive ideas collected from friends, neighbours and passers-by. The young bride might have been influenced most by the extreme views of a champion of the women's liberation movement, the young bridegroom might have been influenced most by extreme conservative elements who have hardly departed from 1890. These two people are in totally different worlds and they will have been very successful if their marriage lasts three years. Indeed, the majority of young men and women fumble their way in marriage and the course of such a marriage is not likely to be smooth and this is why many more marriages are collapsing now than before.

PART 7

REFORM OR ABOLITION?

It is foolish of anybody to try to reform what he does not know; it is equally foolish to attempt to abolish what he or she does not know. Both reform and abolition can only be embarked on in the interests of the majority. Therefore, before any suggestions to reform or abolish the lobola custom are made, we should first, convince ourselves that we know sufficiently about the intricacies of the traditional lobola system. My aim in analysing the traditional lobola system is to equip the public for this debate.

CASE FOR ABOLITION

I must say that the case for abolition of lobola is a particularly weak one. The main argument of the abolitionists is that payment of lobola by the bridegroom subordinates the bride to the bridegroom and makes equality between husband and wife difficult if not impossible. We are moving into an egalitarian society and therefore husband and wife must be equal and anything that is a stumbling block to equality between husband and wife must be eliminated. Lobola is seen as the chief one of these stumbling blocks. The husband claims or has the right to claim that he "bought his wife" and cannot, therefore, be looked upon as equal to "his property" and for as long as he pays lobola, he will continue to claim superiority over his wife.

The abolitionists need to define precisely what they mean by equality between husband and wife. If they mean that before the law, the right of the bride must be recognised and guaranteed in the way the rights of the husband are recognised and guaranteed, many would not quarrel with this. If they mean that the husband should not be allowed to ill-treat his wife as much as the wife herself should not be allowed to ill-treat the husband, again, no one would quarrel with them. But if by equality they mean that the husband should not claim the headship of the family; that the children

should be divided equally between the father and the mother in the event of a divorce; that if the father's totem is Shumba and the mother is Soko, half the children should be Shumba and half be Soko; that the heir to the father and chief should be the oldest child regardless of sex; that the children should not adopt the surname of the father, but should either use two surnames, that of the father and that of the mother or half should use that of the father and half that of the mother — if this is what the abolitionists mean by equality between husband and wife, then they mean to turn all our social institutions upside down and they have no hope of making any headway. The abolitionists should fully understand that total equality between husband and wife must mean all this and at the same time realize that our society will not agree to be turned upside down for no very good reason. At any rate, has this been possible anywhere in the world?

To begin with, we now have a Ministry of Education and Culture. This must be the result of the realization by our leaders that our culture is important. One of the aims of this ministry must be to rehabilitate our culture. This does not mean going back to the position as it was in 1890; the details are changing and change must be encouraged, but the framework must be retained if we are to maintain our cultural identity as a nation. What the abolitionists are in fact suggesting is that we should, overnight throw overboard all our cultural institutions and this goes dead against the expectations of the rank-and-file of the Africans and our Ministry of Education and Culture.

Secondly, we are not the first country in the world to aim at egalitarianism. We are only trying to imitate several countries that are already looked upon as egalitarian. The majority of the eastern European countries are looked upon as such. But in these countries, has total equality between the husband and wife been achieved and has that been one of their aims at all? Is the husband not still the head of the family and are the sons still not the heirs to the fathers? Have they abolished patrilineage in favour of what might be called "patramatrilinage?" Is little Zimbabwe going to be an exception in the world community and establish some social system that does not exist anywhere? We are part of Africa and the world and both will continue to exert their influence on us and we will continue to identify ourselves with them. In the western world, the husband does not pay lobola; but is there total equality between husband and wife? Are we so sure that total equality between husband and wife will come to Zimbabwe if we abolish the whole institution of lobola?

The second argument of the abolition school is that the institution of lobola has grown corrupt and the fathers-in-law are exploiting the sons-in-law much to the unhappiness and discomfort of the young bridegroom and his wife. It is very true that corruption has crept into the institution and I have gone a long way to demonstrate this. But to suggest that the whole system of lobola should be abolished because it has become corrupt is like suggesting that governments should be abolished because they have become corrupt or that a cow should be killed because it has been infected with a disease. Clearly people who reason this way fail to distinguish between the institution of governments and its corruption or between the goat and the disease. Surely,

what people do not want is the corruption of the government and not the abolition of government itself or the goat's disease and not the goat itself! What they proceed to do therefore is to eliminate the corruption within the government or to eliminate the particular government itself and replace it with a less corrupt one. In the case of the goat, they eliminate the disease to protect the goat. They kill the goat only if the disease is incurable and if it endangers other goats. Corruption in lobola is not the tradition; it is a distortion of tradition and must be eliminated.

The third argument of the abolition school is that we have communities in Africa that do not pay lobola. There has been no chaos within their societies because of this. Why should social upheavals be expected within our own society if lobola is abolished?

This is undoubtedly a reference especially to the Tonga communities in Malawi and Zambia. But these people practise what they do because it is their tradition; we practise what we do because it is our tradition. This is all part of culture. We are not going to start practising what the Indians do because we are not Indian. Secondly, the argument that we should abolish lobola because there are African communities that do not pay lobola, misleads the listener. The fact that Tonga men do not pay lobola does not mean that there is equality between the husband and wife. The Tonga are matrilineal (the opposite of what we are). They are also matrilineal and this again is the opposite of what we are. This means that when a Tonga man marries, he leaves his home for that of his wife. The head of the family is not the husband, but the wife; the children do not belong to the father, but to the mother; succession is through the mother's line and not the father's line; the children adopt the totem and surname of the mother and not that of the father. Whilst in our system, the head of the family and the superior partner is the father. In the Tonga society, the head of the family and the superior partner is the mother. Is there total equality here between husband and wife? The abolitionists here base their argument on half-baked ideas. The fourth argument of the abolitionists is that Zimbabwean women played an important role in both Liberation Wars. Through this, they demonstrated that they were fully capable of doing what men can do. The bullets of the colonial regime did not discriminate between men and women. Women suffered to the same extent that men did.

All this is very true and it is certainly an argument in favour of improving the status of women in every way possible. I believe there is no dispute over this. But Zimbabwean women are not the first in the world to play an important role in a war. Between 1914 and 1918 and again between 1939 and 1945, women in Europe played a very important role in the two World Wars. After these wars, everybody felt that the status of women should be improved because they had proved their worth. There was no serious argument over this and women made enormous strides forward as a result of both wars. But did they win total equality with their men? Is the European marriage and social system now matrilineal or patro-matrilineal? Secondly, whilst large numbers of our women directly took part in the war, what was the ratio of men to that of women? Was it 1 — 1? I would have thought that the numbers of men were vastly greater than those of women!

Is this refutable at all? Certainly the status of women should be improved but total equality is a dream and will remain unattainable and any practical attempt to bring it about can only bring about disastrous social upheavals to our society and which nobody can profit from. Either the husband is the superior partner or the wife is; patrilineage has no room anywhere and should be assigned to the realm of dreams.

The fifth argument of the abolition school is that lobola cripples the young family concerned. If it were abolished, the economic foundation of the young bridegroom and his bride would be stronger. This is certainly a reasonable argument and there is some validity in it. It does not matter how small the charge may be, it does up to a point cripple the young family. We, however, should realize that traditionally, lobola was no more than a token to institutionalize the marriage. Secondly, as we have already discovered, our elders were very flexible and accepted almost anything for lobola payment depending on what the son-in-law could afford. Furthermore, we have discovered that the traditional sons-in-law took their time to pay this lobola. We have come across cases of lobola being paid for a bride from the lobola paid for her own children. This cannot be looked on as crippling in any way. It is our modern lobolas that are crippling. This is so because the fathers-in-law and their parties demand vast sums of money and they demand that they should be paid as early as possible. This certainly cripples the young family, for the bridegroom has to work ceaselessly to attend to the demands of his father-in-law or else the bride is taken away from him. But this should not be looked upon as the tradition because it is not. It is a distortion of tradition and is an element of modern corruption that has crept into our system.

CASE AGAINST ABOLITION

The greatest mistake the abolitionists are making is that they are looking upon the man and woman at our University or teaching at some High School or holding a high post in commerce and industry as the standard Zimbabwean African. This is a very serious mistake and it is a view based on a fallacy. It is interesting to note that the most outspoken abolitionists have all spent years out of this country at foreign Universities. The fact that they express their views so freely in itself shows the extent to which they are out of touch with reality in this country. But they have only themselves and no one else, to blame for this. I would expect any clever and mature politician or public figure to seal his or her lips until he has fully assessed the situation in his country or locality. I must stress that Zimbabwe is not the man or woman at University or high school; it is not the man and woman in high positions in Harare and Bulawayo; furthermore, it is not Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare or any urban centre; Zimbabwe is the rural area. The vast majority of our people are out in the country; they *are* the country. Whatever the government does should be in their interests and not in the interests of those at University, high school or in the urban centres.

This being the case, if lobola is not binding on you and me, is it also not binding on those vast numbers who are the country? Is the government going to listen to you and me and abolish lobola because we have called for it, but at the expense of the nation?

From the very start, our government has been laying so much stress on grassroots support. It has stressed that the people are the government and that the government itself will do what the people want. Any democratic government must, of course, lay stress on this because it was elected by the people and must be there to uphold the interests of the people. But these people are in the rural areas and not at a high school or University. That is where the grassroots are. Has there been a debate in the rural areas on whether to abolish lobola or not? There is certainly a strongly felt concern throughout the country over the escalating lobola charges and extortion in general; this is different from abolition. This is a clamour for control and reform and not abolition.

The abolitionists might argue that the educated are the elite; therefore it is their responsibility to steer the nation by means of education to the idea of abolition. My own assessment of the situation is that at least 90% of the Africans in this country are against the idea of abolition. To me, this means that there is no debate in the country on whether to abolish lobola or not. We are creating, manufacturing the debate. Even to give the opportunity to the ten percent to "educate" and steer the ninety per cent into accepting abolition of lobola is to allow the nation to be bamboozled by the minority. Furthermore, is it true that all the educated favour abolition? This is far from it and I know better from their response to the Television interview that has brought this book about. I doubt if the abolitionists are as much as 2% of our people. Is the debate worth it? Even the very woman whose interests the abolitionists think they are championing, are violently against abolition. Whose interests are they therefore championing?

That in our society lobola and not cohabitation, gives extra dignity and respect to the women, is indisputable. The approach of a normal man to a married woman who has been paid lobola for is guarded, cautious and respectful. It borders on fear. There are thousands of women who cohabit with men who have not paid anything for them especially in urban centres. The feeling and approach of the same normal men to these women are not the same. In his eyes is disrespect, if not contempt as well, for such women. The neighbouring married women do not look upon her as one of their members and even fear to associate closely with her lest their own husbands become suspicious of them too. It is not cohabitation with a man that gives the woman this respect and dignity; it is payment of lobola for her no matter how small it may have been.

That lobola helps to keep marriages together is equally indisputable. Whilst this may not be true of you and me, I again wish to stress that it is the rural areas that are Zimbabwe the nation, and not you and me. Any African woman who treats her marriage lightly borders on insanity because her chances of a second marriage and to a single man are almost nil.

Secondly, the knowledge that if she gets divorced, her parents will be called upon to pay back at least part of the lobola, frightens her. Those parents may not have any money or cattle to refund to the son-in-law. Any considerate daughter would not want to be a burden to her parents. Inevitably, she tries to make her marriage a success. This she does partly by behaving herself; partly by carrying out her responsibilities to her husband

and family conscientiously and partly by tolerating what she would not tolerate under normal circumstances.

The thought of a divorce also frightens the husband. This is so because if he does get divorced, he will have to look for another wife. This immediately means that he has to start paying lobola all over again. This is not anything he will enter into light-heartedly. Therefore, he, too, will make an effort to make his marriage a success. This he does by being reasonable to his wife and by treating her in a way that will not compel her to leave him. We are here talking about the ordinary African man and woman, but who, we should never forget, are the majority. It is clear from this that lobola does not only help to keep marriages together, but also helps to sober down both the husband and the wife.

No doubt the abolitionists will jump up and say, "But husband and wife should in no way be "forced" to live together." My reply is that the greatest commitment in life the ordinary man and woman makes is marriage. Therefore both sides should make sacrifices. The husband is one entity; the wife is another in every way. Each has to make concessions to the other if they are to live together at all smoothly. Secondly, Husband and wife are not the majority in any average family. Take the average number of children to be six. The father and the mother are together only one quarter of the family. The sacrifices they make are not only in their interests, but more the interests of the children who also constitute the majority in the family. Would any of the above sacrifices not be worth it if they served the interests of the majority? Is there a normal mother and normal father who brushes aside the interests of his or her children?

That the influence and control of the extended family on a young married couple was very effective and prevented the break up of marriages is also indisputable. The family elders of the bride helped her in every way after marriage to cope with her new situation. If the husband was difficult, they gave her advice on how best she could cope. In the meantime, the elders of the bridegroom would also be exerting similar influences on their young man. If things went wrong, the blame was not on the bride and bridegroom alone, but on their parents' families as well. Misbehaviour on the part of the bride did damage to the whole of her parents' family; likewise, misbehaviour on the part of the bridegroom did damage to the whole of his extended family in the eyes of the community. Therefore, it was incumbent upon every member of both families to make the marriage a success. Because of this, the bride and bridegroom were forced to be community-conscious and this very much restrained their attitudes and behaviour. As a result, many marriages survived which, if left to the two directly concerned, would never have survived at all. This again, was in the interests of the children (who were the majority) and the society in general.

There is no one who starts a business with the intention of failing; there is no one who goes to school with the intention of failing. Likewise, there is no one who enters into a marriage deal with the intention of failing. Businessmen fail and students too, but not without a struggle. Likewise marriages should not be allowed to collapse without a struggle, being the major engagements they are. This is why our elders struggle to prevent their

collapse and this is also why we should struggle to prevent their collapse.

I do not doubt that if lobola is abolished, marriages will tumble to the ground like ripe fruit. The mere collapse of the influence and control of the extended family has resulted in the well-known soaring of the divorce rate. If lobola is withdrawn, the divorce rate is likely to be far worse than it is at present. Love is a binding force, but in the majority of rural cases, lobola may be a greater binding force and the rural areas are the country. I also want to warn that the ordinary urban dweller may not be as sophisticated mentally as he suggests externally; he is very much like his rural counterpart. Economically the ordinary urban dweller is struggling to make ends meet. So, he, too, is deterred from divorce by the escalating costs of lobola. At any rate, two binding forces, love and lobola, are better than one binding force (love) and therefore both love and lobola are likely to make marriages last longer than love alone.

If lobola is abolished because it is contrary to the concept of equality between husband and wife, the women will make a practical attempt to assert their authority. The husband, moving slowly as he is doing and reluctant to lose his privileged position and dominance, will certainly resist the assertions of the woman. The woman will continue to exert her pressure; the man will only look upon this as women's arrogance and will continue to resist. The result of it all must be the collapse of their marriage. Let us also not make the mistake of looking upon every ordinary man as reasonable. There are men who think that changing women is, in itself, an achievement. If lobola is abolished, such men might well attempt to change them at the rate they change their suits. In such a game, it will only be the woman, the child and the society who suffer. The more binding forces we can find, the better for everybody. Lobola is certainly the greatest of such forces as far as the ordinary uneducated person is concerned.

Lobola defines the position of the husband in the family; it also defines the position of the woman in the family. There is no quarrel over who is the head of the family. The two may be equal, but there is always "a first among equals" and there is "a second among equals". This in itself goes a long way towards solving problems between husband and wife. If lobola is withdrawn, the arrogant woman will see no reason why she should be looked upon as "second among equals." A status quarrel will ensue and the ultimate result must be divorce. It is unthinkable that the African man will ever accept the idea of being second to his wife because that has not been his tradition. We cannot pretend either that it will in practice ever be possible to establish total equality between husband and wife. Either the husband is the superior partner or the wife is, such as in the Tonga community. It is necessary to emphasize this.

The British or the French man does not pay lobola for his wife; is there total equality between husband and wife in the family? Is the husband not looked upon as the head of the family? I think our abolitionists are stretching the concept of equality to unattainable proportions — to idealistic proportions. Every society is interested in what works and not what sounds nice.

CASE FOR REFORM

The case for the abolition of lobola does not exist; we are manufacturing it. The case against abolition is overwhelmingly strong. But our society has changed, is changing and will continue to change. That change should not be left to the whims of chance; it needs to be directed along healthy lines. This means reform. Reform does not mean abandonment; it means guided adaptation to suit the modern conditions.

The first task of our government is to eliminate or at least reduce extortion — corruption that has crept into our institution of lobola. In this, it has the overwhelming backing of the country, educated and uneducated alike. What will matter more is not what the government does, but how it does it. This is a delicate problem and it needs very careful handling. Whilst it may be easy to enact a law against extortions in lobola, relations within families can easily be worsened by it and the good effects of it nullified. The aim should be to improve relations between bride and bridegroom and between the bride's family and the bridegroom's family. By this, the hope is to strengthen the ties between the bride and bridegroom and reduce the chances of the break-up of their marriage. But if this is not done cautiously, the effects can be counterproductive.

What I feel is needed before any legal action is taken against these extortions, this distortion of our lobola traditions, is a campaign to educate the public. The radio can be very effective. But it should be followed up by literature for reading and discussion. The children in schools are the future leaders of the country and should very much be brought into it. The students in teacher training colleges should also be brought into the scheme. The children in schools will very much depend on them. As many people as possible should be made aware of the traditional nature and purpose of lobola. They should be made aware of the corruption that has crept into the system. They should also be made aware of the harm these extortions are making to marriages. The son-in-law should know what he traditionally paid and what he paid for.

I believe that this programme of education can be much more effective than a government law against certain aspects of lobola. Colonial regimes made an attempt to restrict lobola charges, but failed dismally. The parents will certainly make a strong attempt to resist anything that will appear to be government meddling in their domestic affairs. Whilst it is true that the issue of marriage and lobola payments fall under the domestic affairs of the family, the social repercussions of the extortions are a national problem and the government cannot be expected to remain indifferent to them. For instance, the soaring divorce rate to which this corruption contributes cannot be looked upon as a domestic problem. It is a national problem and the government has to step into the scene.

The local government councils that have just been elected can be put to very good use in this respect. They will be the direct governments of the regions and districts and will always be in touch with the rank-and-file of the people. They can do a great deal to educate the masses at their local meetings and by disseminating literature. After this programme of education, the central government can then move in and outlaw certain practices.

There are certain aspects of lobola that we can do nothing about. I do not believe that the public will ever support the idea that *mombe youmai* or *mbudzizukuru* can ever be tampered with. These concern aspects of our traditional religion and cannot be tampered with without at the same time tampering with spiritual forces. In fact, it is for this reason that extortions associated with them have not been possible. Any problems associated with them arise from our ignorance. It is not many people who know precisely how these animals were traditionally handled and, of course, the precise purpose they were meant to serve.

Reform of the lobola system must first concern itself with changing attitudes of the bride's father and mother. They must never appear to be selling their daughter as they are not meant to sell their daughter. They must convince the son-in-law that they welcome him as a new son of theirs side by side with their daughter and that they do not mean to exploit him. Instead, they should help the young family in every way possible to get onto its feet. The attitude of the son-in-law, that by paying lobola, he is buying a wife, should also be destroyed. It is this attitude that makes certain husbands look upon their wives only as superior servants. Lobola was never traditionally meant to buy the woman, but her services and should remain so.

After this exercise, an onslaught can then be made on lobola proper. The practice of buying a whole clothing outfit for the mother-in-law and father-in-law is not part of our tradition. This is possibly the clearest example of the exploitation of the son-in-law by the parents of the bride. This can all be abolished without any adverse repercussions from the spiritual world because it is not part of our tradition. Maybe, instead of abolishing it altogether, we should continue buying an overcoat for the father-in-law and a blanket for the mother-in-law.

The area of the "Small Items" certainly needs attention. The only important one of these items is *Vura Muromo* for the purpose of starting off the marriage negotiations. Maybe, something like \$10,00 could be charged to cover all the small items and could be divided equally between the father-in-law and the mother-in-law. Certainly such charges as *Ibvai Kumarara*, *Matekenya Ndebvu* and *Makandinzwa Ani* mean nothing to us. For instance, how many of the modern fathers-in-law have a long beard? Why then continue to make the charge and why is the charge growing each day? I believe these can be abolished easily and maybe a little charge for *Vura Muromo* could be maintained to formalize the marriage discussions. I wish to remind the reader that in the event of a divorce, these items were not refundable because they were not looked upon as part of lobola, but as preliminaries to lobola. They were, therefore, not important, but we are giving them undue importance today.

The area of the BRIDE'S SHARE needs reform. As already indicated, the bride "picked" her bit to indicate that she loved the man initiating the lobola negotiations. What she picked was personally hers. If it was beads, she decked herself in them to indicate that her status had changed; if it was bangles, again she decorated herself with them to indicate that her status had changed. She did not part with them for the whole of her life and this was an indication that she was a married woman. Indeed, the bride's share can

be likened to the wedding ring in the European system. The appearance of the ring on the girl's finger indicates that she is either engaged or married; the appearance of the ring on an elderly woman suggests that she is legally married. This is what the bride's share indicated in our system, but in the form of beads or bangles or shells.

But now, the elder sisters of the bride, the aunts, even the mothers-in-law and even the fathers, have stealthily found their way into it; they also pick their shares. Can they explain why they have come into it other than that they want to make capital out of the new bridegroom? Traditionally, it was the bride herself who gave a bit of her share to her paternal aunt, and if she wished, to one of her elder sisters or cousins partly as a token to them to indicate she was married and partly to thank them for the assistance they had given her up to the point of marriage and including the marriage negotiations. This was given to those who fell in the bridegroom's range of sisters-in-law (varamu) and the most important of them was the paternal aunt of the bride. The fathers-in-law and their wives clearly do not fall into this category and should have nothing to do with the bride's share. After all, they have their own shares of the lobola, as we have seen above — how many shares do they want?

I believe that most young brides are intelligent and reasonable enough to know that by overcharging their husbands, they are only ruining themselves and doing harm to their new alliance with their husbands. They can only be encouraged to maintain this attitude. Above all, no other person should have the privilege to "pick" more shares from what should only be the bride's share because this has no meaning in our traditions. There is no reason of course why the brides should not continue giving tokens of their own shares to their aunts and elder sisters to indicate that they are married, if they so wish.

The most important area of course concerns RUSAMBO and DANGA. These two charges constitute the real lobola and deserve the greatest attention. As shown above, DANGA was traditionally looked upon as much more important than RUSAMBO because it gave the son-in-law title to the children. The provision of children were the greatest service the bride did for the bridegroom. Today, we can only charge a rusambo greater than danga if we come to the conclusion that children have become secondary to all other services rendered by the bride. Values, of course, change. But if we still look upon the children as the greatest service rendered to the bridegroom by the bride, then we have no justification for charging a high rusambo. Traditionally rusambo gained the bridegroom title to the bride; danga gained him title to the children. To a large extent, this has remained so to this day although generally the son-in-law is not sure of what he really pays for. As you can see, these are the two payments that really matter. All the others apart from those that concern spiritual forces, are not important. These need greatest control because modern fathers-in-law literally have no limit to what they charge and in that way do a lot of economic and moral damage to the son-in-law and, therefore, to the whole marriage. It is not for me to suggest figures, but to point to the need for reform in the area.

The food that the son-in-law is required to pay on the first day of the

lobola negotiations is of no value and is not part of our tradition. Traditionally the son-in-law produced a cock which was slaughtered and consumed during the course of the marriage discussions. Today, he is required to produce at least a dozen loaves of bread, sugar, crates of soft drinks, crates of beer and several other items. My view is that the son-in-law should continue to produce a cock. Thereafter, everything else should be provided by the father-in-law and his party. It is they who should rejoice that their daughter is married and therefore should invite as many of their relatives as possible and feed them together with the son-in-law in merriment. It is they who are welcoming a new relative (son-in-law) into their home and therefore it is their duty to feed him and make him happy in every way. If we do it this way, all the corruption associated with this area will disappear immediately.

Above all, the young boy and young girl should receive the necessary education before marriage. They should be made fully aware of their responsibilities to each other before marriage. This is different from saying that they should be given the details of what we call sex education today. Traditionally, the aunts, the uncles and the grandfather and grandmother gave the necessary education to the young boys and girls. But as we saw above, the extended family is, in this respect, dead. We cannot allow a vacuum to develop within our society. Yet it is unrealistic to imagine that these traditional tutors can resume their responsibilities. The best alternative as far as I can see, is the school teacher and college lecturer. They are also the individuals in whom the secondary school and college students have faith and respect. What is therefore needed primarily is to equip both the secondary school teacher and the college lecturer with the material. A new subject called "Culture" can be introduced into the classroom. This can even be covered by what we call "Education for Living", today. Each school or college can have one or two specialists in this area. I look upon all this as vital because the greatest engagement the ordinary citizen ever makes in his or her life is marriage and should not be left to the whims of chance. The social repercussions of divorce are not local. I seriously believe that such an approach can make a significant reduction in our divorce rate. As things stand at present, the young man and young woman have been abandoned and have to fumble their way in marriage from beginning to end. This is not good enough!

Here is part of the report of marriage guidance counsellors that appeared in the Herald of 1st December, 1980: "Nearly one in every three marriages in Zimbabwe ends in divorce. Last year, an average of forty-six went through every week (add to these possibly greater numbers that are not taken to court).

"The main victims of the high divorce rate are the children of the broken homes. Three day centres in Harare are so overstretched that they have to turn children away.

Mrs. Anne Graham, head of one of the day centres agrees that an immature approach to marriage is largely to blame for the high divorce rate."

I totally accept the belief that marriages are tumbling largely because of the immaturity of the young bride and her partner. But surely, this does

not mean that they are marrying when they are physically rather young. This is a reference to social immaturity. They marry without knowing what marriage is really all about. They marry without knowing their responsibilities to each other, to the children and to the community. But in view of the disappearance of the traditional tutor from the scene, how do we expect them to know all this without creating another avenue of education to replace the traditional one? Are these young brides and bridegrooms really to blame for the collapse of their marriages? A social vacuum has developed in our society and it is our responsibility to eliminate it by replacing the traditional tutor.

What happens in future in regard to the institution of lobola is the responsibility of our society at large. My own view is that a community without a history and without its own culture, has no identity. Total abolition means loss of identity; reform means adaptation to suit modern needs and modern circumstances.

The "PROS AND CONS OF LOBOLA" is the author's second book to be published after "FROM MUTAPA TO RHODES" (MACMILLAN). He brings to the topic of "LOBOLA" a combative and controversial approach which comes like a bracing breeze to the current examination of the custom of "LOBOLA". In the closing chapters of the book he declares. "Businessmen fail, and students too, but not without a struggle. Likewise marriage should not be allowed to collapse without a struggle."

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