A Theology of the Beast: A Critical Examination of the Pastoral and Missiological Implications of *Ilobolo* in the Contemporary South African Church – An Evangelical Perspective.

By

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DECLARATION

Except where explicitly indicated to the contrary, this study is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been submitted in any form to any other institution.

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26 March 2004

Date

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Rev and Mrs Rajuili who sacrificed everything to ensure that I lived a normal life in what was an abnormal South African context during my childhood and youth years. They provided a secure home for me to grow up in and they continue to give whatever support they can even though retired and advanced in years.

A particular person in my life is my mother-in-law, the late Mrs Letta, Popi Dlamini, umaNdumo. She had very little formal school education, all done surreptitiously at night since she was a farm worker in Memel, Free State. She instilled in me the centrality of prayer and a faith to face the many challenges of life. MaNdumo and her husband encouraged all their children and grand children to aim high, giving of herself unreservedly to enable us to have better life chances than she had. She was indeed a Super-Gogo.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AS	African Studies
BS	Bantu Studies
CC	Christian Century, The.
EMQ	Evangelical Missions Quarterly.
ERT	Evangelical Review of Theology
ERT	Evangelical Review of Theology
IBMR	International Bulletin of Missionary Research
IRM	International Review of Missions
JTSA	Journal of Theology for Southern Africa
Miss.	Missionalia.
Paths	Paths of African Theology
Perspectives	Perspectives on the World Christian Movement.
SAJS	South African Journal of Science
SALS	South African Law Journal
SAO	South African Outlook
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Abalingani	Equals. An expression used by the parents of the bride and groom when addressing each other
Amadlozi	Ancestors
Amakholwa	Believers or Christians
Amazemtiti	Christian people who have been exempted from observing traditional customs
Baleka	To run away or flee from somebody or some place
Cubuza	To turn over or pulverise sods
Giya	A joyful dance usually performed by men
Ilawu	Special room set aside for a betrothed couple to have sex-play
Ilobolo	Beasts and/or money given in exchange for a wife.
Imali	Money
Imibondo	Gifts given by woman's family in exchange for the *ilobolo given*
Impahla/ ucu	A token signifying that a marriage proposal has been accepted
Imvulamlomo	Mouth opener or that part of the *ilobolo* given to induce the bride's father to speak
Imvuma	An animal slaughtered to signify that the marriage proposal has been accepted by the bride's family
Indlamu	Dance performed by several men to express joy.
Ingoduso	A woman who is engaged to be married
Ingquthu	A special cow given to the bride's mother
Inkomo	A cow
Iqhikiza	A mature unmarried woman whose duty was to counsel nubile girls
Isangoma	A traditional doctor
Isihlobo	A relative or one's relation
Isinyama	Bad luck
Isishimane	A bachelor whose marriage proposal is not accepted by young women
Izibizo	Wedding gifts that the bride's family expect from the groom's family
Izithunzi	An expression used to refer to ancestors
Tshwala	Beer, usually the home brewed type
Ubuhlalu	Beads

Ubuntu	Humanness
Ukubhabhaza	To be blown by a strong wind
Ukubonda	Normally means to stir – in marriage context it means to return
Ukubulala	To kill
Ukucela	To request something from another person
Ukufohla	To make a forced entry
Ukugana	To marry
Ukukhehla	To adopt a topknot as an engaged girl
Ukukipita	To cohabit with someone
Ukungena	To enter
Ukuqhobosha	A wedding song and dance performed by women
Ukuqoma	To accept a marriage proposal
Ukusoma	Sex-play where penetration is not allowed
Ukweshela	To make a marriage proposal
Ukwethembisa	To make a promise to marry or to be married by someone
Umakoti	A bride, at times she is referred to as an *umlobokazi*
Umalume	Mother's brother
Umbheka	Special beast given to a bride to take to her new home
Umcgacgo	Wedding ceremony
Umfundisi	A minister
Umjendevu	A spinster
Umkhongi	A marriage negotiator
Umndeni	A household
Umphelekezeli	A person who accompanies another
Umthimba	A party of wedding guests.

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ABSTRACT

The research interest is the field of Christianity and culture with specific focus on the interface between the indigenous practice of *ilobolo* and the Christian faith in South Africa. Comparison and contrasts with other African peoples, especially in the subcontinent, is made.

The research is located in Edendale, an urban township of Pietermaritzburg in South Africa. Common wisdom distinguishes between urban and rural Africans whereas under the veneer of urbanisation, the religio-cultural beliefs of Africans on *ilobolo* remain ingrained almost defying the influence of Westernisation. In the post-apartheid era, *ilobolo* has become a highly contested issue, strong arguments for and against its retention have been advanced.

It is in the light of those complexities that the continued practice of *ukulobola* and the rituals associated with it are examined. The thesis is partly descriptive but mainly analytical. Consequently, a brief historical background and current practice of *ilobolo* in an urban setting is offered. The social and religious role played by *ilobolo* cattle, collectively known as *amabheka*, is analysed.

The central thesis of this work is that *ukulobola* has continued to be practised among adherents of traditional religions and African Christians. To both it is regarded as a means of establishing and maintaining family ties and, among the former, it is also the accepted means of uniting the respective ancestors.

From the study it will be apparent that the misuse of *ilobolo* by those people who make impossible demands on the groom with the consequent commodification of women is due to the fact that such people have a jaundiced understanding of the original purpose and intent of the practice.

The study consists of six chapters and a conclusion. Chapter one serves as an introduction to the study. It focuses on technical aspects such as the problem statement, motivation, hypotheses to be tested, theoretical tools used, methodology and a description of the primary site of the research. This leads to a historical chapter based on oral as well as written sources on the origins, purpose and changes that have happened in the practice of *ukulobola* among AmaZulu. The survey leads to a theological reflection on factors yielded by the historical survey of the evolution of *ilobolo*. A third chapter is a social and theological critique of the various positions advanced for its continuation or suggestions on why it should be abolished. Chapter four is an assessment of contemporary people's views on *ilobolo*. The fifth chapter demonstrates how anthropological and theological underpinnings of *ilobolo*, especially the pivotal role played by cattle, have sustained the practice from pre-colonial times to the present time. Chapter six is the major theological treatise of this study. It looks at issues that emerge when the gospel encounters culture, with *ilobolo* chosen as a case study. The concluding chapter makes recommendations and gives pointers to future research. I also suggest a liturgy for marriage taking into account *ilobolo* negotiations.

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem formulation

Among the many concomitants of democratisation and urbanisation in South Africa, as well as in many parts of the continent, are major changes in the understanding and appreciation of African customs. In most parts of the continent, the past fifty years have witnessed both a phenomenal growth of Christianity and a renaissance of African Traditional Religion. In South Africa that development is a more recent phenomenon still in its early stages. Much of the creative energy of civic society at large, and the more socially aware section of the church, were directed at social and political transformation of the country from an apartheid ideology to a democratic state. Consequently the issues of the gospel and culture have not been high on the priority list of most indigenous South Africa because culture was used by the former white governments as a means of legitimising and entrenching divisions within society.

This study will look at the ages-old custom of *ukulobola*[1] among AmaZulu. I have chosen AmaZulu, erroneously referred to as Zulus, because they make the largest single cultural group in South Africa. Ethnographers maintain that they are the descendants of Abambo who settled in the South East corner of Africa, South of St. Lucia Bay in the fifteenth century after migrating from West and Central Africa. Their country was known as *Embo* or Emboland, and it formed part of the present KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa.

These descendants of Malandela, the father of Qwabe and Zulu, moved South from central Africa to the Umhlathuze valley (Krige 1936:5). In time, AmaZulu or the people of Zulu, were sandwiched between two Nguni speaking groupings, AmaSwazi and AmaThonga in the North, and AmaXhosa, AbaThembu and AmaMpondo in the South. All of these Eastern peoples are collectively known as AbeNguni, they share many customs though there are local differences. AmaZulu raised many national heroes, the best known being King Shaka, the son of Senzangakhona.

I will explore *ilobolo* among AmaZulu, aware that in recent times the practice is a highly emotive subject and extremely divisive and can thus not be discussed dispassionately. I will explore the shape and character of the practice, beginning with an examination of how it was observed in pre-industrial times but focusing mainly on its present form. There are four questions I will seek to address. How is it that *ilobolo* has become such a highly contested practice today? What is it that

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[1] *Ukulobola* is a verb in the IsiZulu language that describes the entire process of marriage negotiations between the families of the bride and the groom. *Ilobolo* (noun) is a gift in the form cows or money or both, that the groom's family gives to that of the bride.

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has led to the crisis in the practice and in public discourse on *ilobolo*? What is the nature of that crisis, and above all, what are its theological implications in the contemporary African church? In order to bring this final question into sharper focus, I will have to ask: Does the rationale behind *ukulobola* not legitimise and conveniently conceal oppressive gender relations? What insights could be gained from applying Kanyoro's (2001:163) gender sensitive cultural hermeneutics? To what extent is it possible to translate the ritual and, indeed, the religious symbolism of *ilobolo* items into acceptable and understandable modern equivalents? Here one may cite the *umbheka* beast that the bride takes with her to represent her and her *izithunzi* or shades in her new home. Similarly the *imvuma* goat which is ritually slaughtered by the bride's family in order to report to their shades that the groom has been accepted as a potential relative. The above two examples are representative elements of what Mbiti (1979:84) describes as symbolic theology.

Other related problems have to do with the interface between Christianity and African culture. Questions that demand answers include the following; has post-colonial Christianity fully grasped the close link between African religiosity and life generally? At what point in the *ukulobola* continuum is there a convergence of African and Christian understanding that the couple is legally married? Among AmaZulu, the couple for whom *Ilobolo* has been passed is allowed a certain margin of sexual foreplay, *ukusoma*, care being taken that coitus does not happen. Where does that leave the question of Christian sexual abstinence before marriage?

The abovementioned ethical questions will be analysed against the backdrop of a biblical theology of marriage. I will try to explore a Christian understanding of marriage, looking at what gives marriage its legitimacy. How and to what extent are spouses expected to submit to one another? I will also survey the theological perceptions that have sustained marriage down the centuries. This section will conclude with a comparison of anthropological and theological analyses of marriage. In supporting such a comparison, Kasper (1977:3) offers a cogent argument that a theology of marriage should take into serious account what human sciences have to say about marriage. He is emphatic that a theology of marriage cannot be reduced to a number of anthropological statements, neither can it be adapted to the anonymous pressures of modern social consciousness. Yet to get a specifically Christian understanding of marriage, one would have to compare and contrast it with that view of marriage espoused by the social sciences, especially anthropology.

1.2 A theology of marriage

A composite picture of marriage in the Old Testament is a positive one. This is rooted in Judaism's positive attitude towards life[2] and all creation where, according to von Rad (1961:59) " no evil was laid upon the world by God's hand." Sex within marriage is wholesome and God blessed Adam and Eve and commanded them to replenish and subdue the earth that he had created.[3] Commenting on marriage as the basis for a stable society, Hugget (1981:8) sees it as a means of

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[2] Gen. 1:31
[3] Gen 1:28ff; 2:24.

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" Bringing up children 'in the Lord' (Eph.5: 22-6:4) and the place where our God given sexuality may be expressed (1Cor.7: 1-5). As for the personal relationship of man and wife, marriage is for companionship, helping, completion and togetherness, (Gen. 2:18-23; Pr. 5:18-19)."

With regard to marriage itself, the Old Testament portrays polygamy in an ambivalent way. Patriarchs like Abraham, Jacob, Lamech, Elkanah, David and Solomon are not rebuked by God for violating the Genesis (2:24) command that a man will leave his natal family and cleave to his wife. However, as Hamilton (1991:238) points out, "nearly every polygamous household in the Old Testament suffers most unpleasant and shuttering experiences precisely because of this (polygamous) *ad hoc* relationship." Beside the Genesis (2:24) command, Paul's teaching in (1 Cor. 7;1-8 and 1 Tim. 3;1-14) assumes monogamous marriages for believers. It is also for that reason that church theology has insisted on monogamy as the biblical norm. There have been those Christians like the Anabaptists who have argued differently and allowed polygamy.

Secondly, in Scripture marriage is meant to be a new and a permanent relationship between the spouses. Von Rad (: 83) notes, though, that the statement about a man forsaking his father and mother and being joined to his wife does not accord with patriarchal family customs of ancient Israel where after marriage, it was normally the wife who broke her family ties to join her husband's. He suggests, in my view justifiably, that the narrative is concerned not with the legal custom but with natural drive. A drive stronger than the link to one's own parents, (:82). Similarly, Huggett (:35) makes a helpful observation that the leaving " does not mean they

(husband and wife) must have no relationships outside their partnerships. It does mean that there is no room for entanglements."

The permanence of the marriage bond is underscored by Jesus' teaching in Mark (10: 1ff), where he points out that divorce was a concession, Dt. (24:1-3), made by Moses because of human rebelliousness. In Matthew (19:1-12), Jesus makes an exception allowing for divorce only on the grounds of adultery. Otherwise the biblical teaching is consistent that marriage was meant to be permanent.

Thirdly, marriage and sexual intercourse, as an expression of a self-giving love ' between a man and a woman, is the biblical norm. In light of that, Scripture takes a strong stand against homosexuality and intercourse with animals'.

Fourthly, marriage thrives when the spouses submit one to another. Paul's teaching in Ephesians (5:22-33) and also in Colossians (3:18-19) has, on the one hand, been criticised by some feminists as a classic example of male chauvinism, and on the other, used by some traditionalists to legitimate male supremacy. A different picture and conclusion emerges if the submission motif is read and interpreted in its literary and historical contexts. Taking the literary context first, the apostle's main thrust in Ephesians and Colossians was on mutual responsibilities of believers. They were to live a life of mutual self giving just as Christ did, Eph. (5: 1-2); nurture each other, Eph. (5:19); Col (3:13) and submit each to the other, (Eph 5:21) willingly and out of reference for Christ. In that context, domination of women by men would be very hard to justify.

In a similar manner, Paul's historical context sheds more light on the import of his teaching on submission. He wrote at a time when non-royal Greek, Roman and Hebrew women suffered under various forms of social injustice. A collection of sixty to seventy medical treatises collected from the Greek world in the fourth and fifth centuries B.C. and known as the Hippocratic corpus concluded that women were anatomically different from men (Fantham, *et al.*, 1994:185). Consequently, Fantham *et al.*, (:186) point out that,

> " Greek men generally considered themselves more rational than women and this theory supplied them with anatomical "proof" that by their nature women were predisposed to irrationality."

Greek philosophers, Aristotle, Heraphilus, Soramus, Arelaeus and Galen subscribed to the theory that the female was less perfect than the male. Aristotle, cited in Fantham *et al.*, (:91) believed that a woman was a deformed male, saying:

> " Just as it happens sometimes that deformed offspring are produced by deformed parents, and sometimes not, so the offspring produced by a female are sometimes female, sometimes not, but male. The reason is that the female is as it were a deformed male."

The early Roman view of womanhood was not complementary either. According to Roman family law, the father or the *pater familias* excised lordship over his family (Fantham *et al.*, :227ff). His absolute control over his family gave him full authority to put his wife to death for adultery or for drinking wine.

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[4] Gen. 19:5; Dt. 23:17; Lv. 18 and 20; Exod. 22:19.

de Vaux (1961:39) points out that in Hebrew culture, a woman was required to address her husband as her master or Lord, (Gen. 18:12; Judg. 19:26). He goes on to show that in the Decalogue a man's wife was included in among his possessions, (Exod. 20:17; Dt. 5:12). According to Huggett (: 42) the low view of woman in Judaism was demonstrated by in the ease with which a man could divorce his wife (Dt. 24:1). She points out that the law was interpreted to mean that " a man might divorce his wife if she spoiled his dinner by putting too much salt in the dinner, if she walked in public with her head uncovered," and for other minor indiscretions. Both de Vaux (1961) and Huggett (1981) acknowledge that a Jewish woman did have some rights such as an exception from being sold into slavery, (Dt. 21:7), and also permission to sue for divorce if her husband was apostate or had contracted leprosy or was engaged in a disgraceful trade.

Thus given the generally low position of women in first century Palestine, Paul's teaching in both Ephesians and Colossians was a step forward. His imperative to husbands and wives to be subject to one another negates the prevailing spirit of self-importance, unmitigated power and authoritarianism of Jewish men in the first century and before that time. He does not expect men to abdicate their responsibilities and legitimate roles as leaders of households but their headship was to be patterned after that of Jesus over the church, Eph (5: 25). Thus a biblical authority of marriage is one that recognises the different roles of a wife and a husband, with the spouses being co-equal partners, Gal. (3:28). Having looked at the theology of marriage, we turn now to survey the various Christian perceptions that have legitimised and sustained it down the centuries.

1.3 The legitimisation of marriage: a survey

Throughout church history, the institution of marriage was legitimised and sustained by belief systems extrapolated from a theology of marriage that was current at the time. Bainton (1964:19) outlines three such developments that happened in a chronological order. The first, the sacramental view, followed by the romantic legitimisation of marriage during the Renaissance period and, finally, the partnership model popularised by Puritanism.

The sacramental view has its roots in the Old Testament. Hosea's arbortive marriage to Gomer, found in Hosea (1-3), also Jeremiah's (2:3) and Ezekiel's (16:23) use the marriage relationship to depict a covenant between God and his people. Likewise in the New Testament, Jesus' relationship to the church is expressed in conjugal language. Therefore, building on the above biblical models, the institution of human marriage was regarded as a covenant between a man and woman. During the twelfth century that covenant relationship was sacralized in Catholicism (Kepler 1980:31), and was regarded as a reality of creation. On that understanding, divorce was ruled out in Catholic theology except under two exceptional cases: if there was no consent given to the marriage and if the consent was defective then the marriage could be annulled.

Up to the Middle Ages, the romantic aspect of marriage was disparaged. Bainton (1964:60) puts it this way: " Marriage was sacramental, lifelong, primarily for procreation, unromantic and rating below virginity." The theological foundation of this view was Paul's teaching to the Church in Corinth that marriage is instituted to

obviate licenciousness. Without prescribing, he thus advised Corinthians to stay unmarried, (1 Corinthians 7:7) and for widows to remain unmarried so that they might devote their time to prayer pleasing the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:32 – 35). That pessimistic view of marriage sustained celibacy in sections of the Christian Church.

In contradistinction to the sacramental view, Protestants drew heavily on Luther's understanding of marriage as both a divine and human institution. Luther saw it as being blessed by God and patterned after the relationship between Christ and the church. Thus the theory of marriage as a remedy for sexual desire found little support in Protestantism.

Bainton (:70) makes a further observation that during the Renaissance period (1300-1600), society increasingly accepted tender affection and passionate attachment as important ingredients of a marriage bond. However he notes that "courtly love" had first to be desensualized before being capable of combination with marriage in the Christian sense. In Germany Albrecht von Eyb's lyrics set the stage for the combination of romantic love and marriage. He wrote:

> "Marriage is a joyous delight and sweet. What could be more joyous
> and sweet than the love of father and mother and child and to receive
> from them many sweet kisses."

In Italy Petrarch's love poems had become models for other poets to emulate and so did Pierre de Ronsard's lyric poems on love and nature. Helton (1968:224) writes that a similar development took place in England where Spencer associated romance and marriage.

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We now come to the third theological perception that sustained marriage during and after the Reformation period. It was companionship. Luther as the precursor of companionship in marriage wrote that of the three kinds of love, false, natural and married, the third:

> "Burns as fire and seeks nothing more than the mate. It says 'I wish not yours, I wish neither gold nor silver neither this nor that. I want only you. I want everything or nothing.' All other loves seek something else than that which is love but this love alone desires the beloved completely." Luther cited in (Bainton 1964: 83).

The desire for the beloved and not what one can get out of that relationship set the stage for Puritans, Anabaptists and Quakers contention that Christian marriage is founded on, and can be sustained by companionability (Bainton :99). It was a retrogressive step from the Renaissance position where romantic love legitimated marriage. This was a move to a position similar to one which obtained in the middle ages. Then the belief was that by putting God before relationships, he would enable men and women to labour together without the consciousness of the biological differences (Bainton :103). Love and tenderness towards one's spouse was not completely denied though it was subsumed under a higher calling which was to serve God as co-equal partners. Paul's injunction to the spouse to be subject to one another Eph. (5:21) legitimized the companionability theory in marriage.

In sum, throughout the history of the Church marriage was legitimized by various combinations of divine and human laws as long as society embraced religious laws. However, the modern secularized state guided by the Enlightenment project,

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has resulted in a two-stage marriage contract, namely the civil ceremony and a subsequent blessing by the Christian Church. Either or both stages may be necessary and thus result in issues of pastoral concern. These, according to Kasper (1980:78), include questions such as "how can the Christian view of marriage in the secularized situation be made intelligible; and how can the view be translated in the concrete into practice in the Church?" It is such questions that have motivated me to do a study on Christian marriage in an African context.

1.4 Motivation for the study

The era of missions in which churches on this continent needed constant theological input and care from outsiders is almost over. The new challenge before the African church is to identify and commission an increasing number of theologians who understand a rapidly changing African traditional religious heritage and critically relate it to the Christian gospel.

Missiologists are agreed that in the past two decades the centre of gravity of mission has shifted from the North and Western hemispheres to the South and Eastern ones. There is ample documentation to show that the church grows faster in Africa than in any other continent.[5] However, it concerns me, as it does many others, that the phenomenal growth rate of the church tends to be largely numerical rather than qualitative. While numerical growth is necessary and appreciated, in the long run, depth and quality are more important considerations. Among numerous factors that militate against qualitative growth is the apparent inability

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[5]A.F. Walls, 1984:34, describe Africa as one of the heartlands of the church.

and, in some cases, the reluctance of imported Christianity to engage African cultural forms and practices critically. This is caused by many Westerners' inability or unwillingness to make a distinction between the many positive African cultural elements and those that are contrary to the gospel. New converts are frequently exhorted to keep away from cultural practices, as they are considered maleficent and defiling. Quaison-Sackey (quoted in Bujo 1992:45) speaks to this issue in his observation that missionary Christianity made

> " A deliberate attempt to eradicate or destroy our cultural heritage. Since the practice of drumming as an example, was considered by the church to be a heathen practice, African Christians were at once cut off from the wellsprings of their culture – the rhythms of African music and dance. African medicine too was regarded as inferior; and if you were an African Christian you were expected to seek help from the doctor at the hospital, not from the African herbalist, who had come to be styled as a 'a witch doctor' or 'a medicine man."

Consequently, Christianity was, and in many instances still seen and understood as an entirely new faith and a new way of life that is different from the African heritage. The opposite extreme is to accept everything African uncritically. In recent times, attempts have been made to reverse the above-mentioned extreme tendencies. When that is done, the subjects covered, usually from a phenomenological standpoint, range from the advisability of traditional circumcision, the spirit world, ancestor reverence, African philosophy and worship, to mention just a few. All are very important subjects, each in its own right.

I contend, however, that the most basic of all cultural practices, one that is foundational in the promotion of a better life for all, of economic and social stability and, by extension, a balanced growth into Christian maturity, is a stable and functional family. *Ukulobola* was believed to contribute to the establishment of healthy social relationships. However, Guy (1998:6) cautions against a superficial analysis that ignores the fact that it was and still is " a social transaction that united two great male concerns - women and cattle - in a dynamic totality."

This then leads me to the central thesis of this study, that the continued practice of the custom, exists inspite of various attempts by colonial and church leaders to abolish it, is due to its religious nuances. The *ilobolo* cattle or whatever item was used as legal tender functioned as a means of **establishing and sealing the relationship between the couple, their respective lineages, both the living and the dead, the ancestors or the shades.** However, with Guy, we have to admit that modern *ilobolo* is also a major contributory factor of skewed gender relations and the consequent oppression of women. In Southern Africa and in many parts of the continent where patriarchy is still the norm, *lobol*-ing or the passing of cattle and or money by the family of the groom in exchange for a bride, has and still contributes to unequal power relations and the oppression and exploitation of women.

1.5 Hypotheses to be tested

I hypothesise that the present crisis in the discourse on *ukulobola* is due largely to concerted efforts by its critics to demonise it. In the view of early missionaries and colonial authorities' understanding of African marriages, *ilobolo* was linked to polygamy; that in a polygamous marriage the position of the wife and children was not safeguarded. It is the contention of this study that the link between *ilobolo* and polygamy normally applied to kings and some rich people, (see chapters 2 and 3 below). On some occasions polygamy among AmaZulu was a means of taking care of widows. Therefore the view that polygamy was universal rests on scanty evidence. However, at the present time, the *ilobolo* practice does get misused, but its misuse is due to the lack of an understanding of its original purpose and function.

Secondly, and in spite of that misunderstanding, I hypothesise that the practice is not likely to disappear too easily because of its deep religious significance. The widely held view that *ilobolo* persists because of its commercial value fails to take cognisance of the fact that its value can never be equated to the intrinsic value of the woman.

Thirdly, like all cultural practices, *ilobolo* has been abused. In patriarchal societies it has unfortunately encouraged unequal gender relations. The criticism that it has dehumanised both men and women is not entirely without foundation. In spite of concerted efforts to give a human face to *ukulobola*, in spite of strong pleas by community leaders such as Mlonyeni Mbatha (1992:48) for the retention of

ilobolo, its continued practice contributes to complex social problems. Besides this, *ilobolo* raises thorny issues of what criteria should be used to determine the legality of a marriage in an African setting.

Fourthly, I will argue that modern African society and especially Christians need to isolate the positive aspects of the practice and determine if they do not in fact form what Tshibangu (quoted in Bujo 1992:60) calls " latent theological seeds" and then use these as religious analogues to shed light on other theological problems that face the church in Africa and elsewhere. The purpose of the research is to test the validity or otherwise of the above hypotheses.

1.6 Basic assumptions and theoretical tools

The hypotheses above are premised on a conviction that patriarchy works for men and against the interests of women. For that assumption, I am indebted to Guy's (1988:2) analysis,

> "(i) The history of African women in Southern Africa is a history of their oppression,
>
> (ii) That although this oppression gives women's history a surface continuity - the nature of their oppression, and the nature of the exploitation upon which this oppression is based is dynamic and has undergone qualitative changes..."

I would like to add, thirdly,

That, with its preoccupation with evangelism, organised Christianity in Africa has failed to do a thorough critique of many cultural practices and, in many cases, has given a stamp of approval to oppressive social relations.

I consequently find Michel Foucault's theory of power a useful tool to use in carrying out the research. Foucault finds liberal and Marxist analysis inadequate since, according to him, both operate with models which assume that power is possessed by a specific class of people; it is centralised in the law and is primarily repressive. Having surveyed the history of sexuality, he posits an alternative view that power is exercised, decentralised and it is productive rather than repressive. Foucault (1980:50) concludes that;

> "Given the fact that the social field is a field of power encounter, it is always possible to modify its hold in determined conditions and (by) following a precise strategy."

It is that precise strategy which his study will seek to identify, analyse and present as an alternative to the social imbalance that is created by *ukulobola*. A similar and complementary theory is the feminist theory espoused by Janet Chafetz. She maintains that a theory is feminist if it can be used to "challenge, counteract and change the status quo that disadvantages and dehumanise women." Furthermore, the critical elements of the feminist theory are that; gender should be a central focus in social discourse, that gender relations have to be problematised, and thirdly, those relations are not to be viewed as either natural or immutable. Instead, Chafetz (1988:5) continues,

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"The gender related status quo is viewed as a product of sociological and historical forces which can be created by humans and therefore can potentially be changed by human agency."

Before describing in detail, precedent research in *ilobolo*, the methodology used, its strengths and limitations, it would be useful to insert in this opening chapter a section on Evangelical theology, its historical developments, influence and weaknesses since it will form the lens through which I will view *ilobolo*.

1.7 Evangelicalism

The overall purpose of this study, as stated above, is a theological treatise that seeks to investigate the interface of culture, specifically the aspect of *ilobolo* and the gospel from a particular faith perspective; evangelical theology. Schleiermacher (1966:20) defines Christian theology, of which evangelicalism is a constituent part as

> "That assemblage of scientific knowledge and practical instruction without the possession and application of which a united leadership of the Christian Church, that is, a government of the Church in the fullest sense is not possible."

Its ultimate purpose according to Gaybba (1998:27) is a reflection by Christians on their faith, or as Anslem put it, theology is faith seeking understanding. Gaybba goes on to state that,

"This reflection can take many forms, and that is what distinguishes one type of theology from another. It can take a very basic form of a personal attempt to apply one's faith to one's own life. Or it can take the form of a very abstract detailed and highly sophisticated analysis of a particular aspect of faith utilizing the latest philosophical insights or whatever other insights contemporary knowledge can give us."

Evangelical theology, or evangelicals are described by Johnston, R.K (1997:8) as

" Those with a dedication to the gospel expressed in a personal faith in Christ as Lord, an understanding of the gospel as defined authoritatively by Scripture and a desire to communicate the gospel both in evangelism and social reform."

Thus evangelicalism has been chosen as a lens through which the study is viewed for the following three reasons:

First because of its growth during the latter part of the twentieth century. Johstone (1996) cited in Stott (1999:15) states that "the growth of evangelical believers in the Third World (sic) has accelerated dramatically since World War II." Secondly it is that expression of Christian theology that I am more familiar with and have been shaped by it and, in the process, become familiar with both its strong points and weakness. A special evangelical weakness that is in focus here, relates to how issues of gospel and culture have been mishandled thus contributing to the fragmentation among evangelicals into "conservative, liberal, radical, progressive, open, Reformed charismatic postmodern etc," (Stott 1999:10). Thirdly, open or radical evangelism, one that I would readily associate myself with, has on its own admission regarded itself as faithful to Scripture and contextual. Wells and

Woodbridge (1975:9) make the same point more succinctly in noting,

> "The fact that the movement (evangelicalism)...can now no longer be regarded as reactionary but as vigorously and sometimes creatively speaking to the needs of the contemporary world (and) is a phenomenon that has already brought considerable comment and which deserves full analysis."

Part of that analysis in this study is to establish how successful or otherwise open evangelicalism has become contextual in its approach to gospel and culture. To place the movement in historical perspective I will first trace its developmental and distinctive methodologies during the patristic, medieval reformation and modern eras.

1.7.1 Patristic and Medieval Eras

Ladd (1974:13) posits the view that in the middle ages Catholic Church tradition was the lens through which the Bible was seen and taught. The Bible merely re-enforced Church traditions, practice and dogma hence during this period it was common to speak of dogmatic theology. He states that this theology was characterized by;

> " A habit of cautious conservatism and respect (by the Church fathers) for the authority of the text which was laid down during the collapse of the empire in the fifth century encouraged them to read it with sometimes myopic thoroughness."

Theological thought was prescriptive and a handmaiden of Greek philosophy of that time. The status quo remained almost intact until it was slightly shaken by the

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influence of modernity and the rise of the historical critical studies popularised by
W. Ockham, J Buridan, Thomas of Strasbourg (Evans *et al.* 1986:107).

1.7.2 Reformation roots of evangelicalism

The intellectual foundations of Reformation theology and evangelicalism were laid
down by the African scholar Augustine and popularised in Europe by Luther,
Calvin and Knox. The trio and other Protestant reformers insisted that theology
should be based on the Bible alone. This perspective was frequently stated in form
a slogan *sola scriptura*. Reformation theology favoured a faith based on the
sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus rather than a priest's sacraments, good
works and other Church traditions such as supremacy of the Pope. They
maintained that any theology not based on Christ's atoning work could not secure
salvation. This was expressed in another cardinal conviction of the Reformers
expressed in the phrase *sola fideis*, that salvation is through faith alone. Thus *sola
scriptura, sola fideis* and *sola gracia* were three major methodological principles
of Reformation theology.

In the post Reformation era, literal and historical study of the Bible was replaced
by the orthodoxy of the scholastics. They sought to reverse the gains of the
Reformation and were inclined to revert to the dogmatic theology of the Patristic
and Medieval eras. In doing they set the stage for the critical stance to theology by
Enlightenment theologians.

1.7.3 Evangelicalism and the Enlightenment.

As with the Reformation, the Enlightenment views were not homogenous. According to Evans *et al* (1986:207), Baron d' Holbach summed up the hostility of French philosophers toward religion by arguing "that religion merely encouraged man to fear invisible tyrants, thus making them prone to servility towards earthly tyrants such as those of the ancient regime."

In England and Germany the Enlightenment project was less hostile to religion and sought rather to make a deliberate break with the past which they regarded as backward and limiting. Eighteen-century thinkers, notably Emmanuel Kant, questioned standard religious beliefs and social sanctions. They argued that humans had come of age and should therefore use their reason to discover truth. Major advances in natural science by Newton led many to believe that God had passed His sell-by date. As Maimela (1990:11) puts it:

> "The leading thinkers of the Enlightenment called for a principle of criticism so that the religious propositions of all factions could be critically analyzed, considered and justified 'before the bar of reason'. In so doing they hoped to cultivate a spirit of antidogmaticism, antifanaticism and toleration of matters of faith and conscience."

In direct contrast to Enlightenment views and most likely spurred on by it, philosophical and, latterly, rationalist theology was opposed by German pietists *(collegiae pietatis)* and their Methodist counterparts in England. This group espoused a theology that accentuated the transforming power of the gospel. The

more intellectual side of pietism was promoted by Hoffman (1841), Bengel and Beck and the other members of Erlangen school (Ladd 1975:16). They laid the foundations of historical or *Heilsgeschicte* theology. This gave rise to modern Evangelical theology to whose cardinal beliefs we now turn. However it is true, as happens in all forms of theology, that evangelicalism has a recognizable yet non-uniform spirituality summarised by Grenz (1993:33)

> "As a specific vision of what it means to be a Christian – a specific way of becoming Christian. The vision includes a fervent desire to make the Bible alive in personal and community life. Adding a sense that faith is to be vibrant and central to life, a way of praying and understanding of the Church as a fellowship of believers and a desire to express our joy and praises through vehicles of worship and testimony."

This thesis will therefore be influenced by evangelical theology to the extent that that such a theology seeks to be contextual. In the classification of theologies into three major categories, Moila (2000b:40) points out that there is the abstract, the ideological and contextual theologies. He notes that the first category reflects *only* (Italics added) doctrinal statements. He judges such a theology as inadequate to address the complex issues that confront a new South Africa in that it separates church from politics.

Evangelical faith, properly understood " reaches beyond belief to behaviour; it brings with it a multifaceted challenge to live accordingly (Stott 1999:135). Unlike abstract theology, Stott maintains that evangelical theology identifies itself with Paul's exhortation to the Philippians to live a life worthy of the gospel rather than

merely reflect on doctrinal statements. Stott argues that the *politeumai* (πολιτευμαι), which occurs only twice in the New Testament, originally meant to live as a citizen, *polites* (πολιτης) of a city-state *polis* (πολις). In his call for evangelical integrity, his contention is that Christians are citizens of two kingdoms, this world and the world to come. Therefore authentic evangelicalism that Luther, Calvin, Zwingly, Knox and others promoted, seeks to maintain a close contact between people's conduct and their faith. Stott cites a section from The Letter of Diognetus that emphasises the dual citizenship for Christians. It reads:

> " Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity by country, language or custom ...But while they live in both Greek and barbarian cities ...and follow the local customs in dress and food and other respects of life, at the same time they demonstrate the remarkable and admittedly unusual character of their own citizenship. They live in their own countries, but only as aliens; they participate in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners ... They live on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven ... In a word, what the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world." Stott (1999:137)

It is with that type of faith commitment, which encourages people to live a holistic life on earth while their citizenship is in heaven, that I propose to examine the interface of gospel and culture. Before proceeding, I will turn to the work that has so far been done by anthropologists, novelists and sociologists on the origin and purpose of *ilobolo*. Of major concern in this study will be to show how the church views the implications of *ilobolo* in ministry

1.8 Precedent research on *ilobolo*

Having surveyed the literature in chapters two and three below, I found that much ground has been adequately covered by anthropologists (Vilakazi 1962; Reader 1966; Goody 1973; Krige and Comaroff 1981), by historians and novelists (Msimang 1975; Nyembezi and Nxumalo 1966; Guy 1988). On the whole, their emphasis has been phenomenological and analytical. Legal experts (Koyana 1980; Dlamini, 1994) have presented a politico-legal side of the *ilobolo* debate. Even people like Fr D.W.T Shropshire (1970) and the wide variety of clergy whom he interviewed raised the socio-legal issues connected with *ilobolo*. Beginnings of serious theological reflections on the custom are found in the writings of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians[6]. The majority of these authors are in Central and West Africa. In the Southern tip of the continent cultural issues have been overshadowed by the more pressing political and economic issues. When they have been addressed, it has been by colonial officials, missionaries and Western researchers. Consequently, in the third chapter below I will critique the various views regarding *ilobolo* in Southern Africa.

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[6]See Oduyoye, M and Musimbi, R.A Kanyoro (eds.) 1979. *The Will to Arise, Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books; Oduyoye, M.A 1979. *Daughters of Anowa: African Women in Patriarchy*, New York: Orbis Books; Musimbi, R.A, Kanyoro and Njoroge, N.J (eds.) 1996. *Groaning in Faith - African Women in the household of God*, Acton Publishers; Cox, James, L (ed.) 1998. *Rites of Passage in Contemporary Africa*, Cardiff: Academic Press.

1.9 Contribution to the body of knowledge

In order to grasp the problem facing us and to determine in what ways this study suggests new ways of addressing it, we do well to remind ourselves of earlier solutions. At the conceptual level, the interface between Christianity and culture, an important theme in African theology, laid emphasis, initially on the adaptation of African cultural practices to the Christian faith. The methodology used was to first elucidate Christian doctrines and determine how African traditions could be adapted accordingly so that they would be a perfect fit.

Th. Tshibangu (cited in Bujo 1992:60) was one of the early critics of the adaptation model if all it did was to replace missionaries with African personnel, to adapt the liturgy while the theological formulations remained unchanged. Tshibangu argued, instead, that the African worldview was replete with elements that could be considered as " latent theological seeds." He goes on to suggest that these could be purified and used as " religious analogues" to address theological problems (ibid: 60).

I contend that my study is unique in that it is carried out by a male scholar in South Africa, viewing the practice from 'inside' and using the *ilobolo* custom as a religious analogue to address the perennial problem of the interface of Christianity and culture. , Of particular importance are the pastoral and missiological implications of ilobolo against the backdrop of customary, statutory and church law. As such it adds a new dimension to earlier work in that it addresses issues that are pertinent to the post-apartheid, post-colonial and a post-patriarchal era.

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1.10 Methodology and its limitations

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the researcher used qualitative methodology advocated by Malinowski at the beginning of the twentieth century. Malinowski felt that this methodology is the best instrument to evaluate culture change. Though variously referred to as ethnographic, field, naturalistic, interpretive, - qualitative research has, in the words of Sherman and Webb (1988:7),

> "A direct concern with experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or 'undergone'...qualitative research, then, has the aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel or live it"

Bryman (1988:53) highlights the most important intellectual undercurrents of ethnomethodology. These are:

> A phenomenological approach in which a scientist examines social reality in terms of the actor's own interpretation of his or her action and its motivational background. Bryman termed this symbolic interactionism whereby the individual interprets his or her environment and acts on the basis of that interpretation.

> A Weberian construct known as *verstehen* which posits the view that the study of society requires a different kind of understanding from that of the natural sciences.

> Naturalism, in which, according to Sherman and Webb (1988), enquiry has to be done in a natural setting, minimising all attempts at contriving it.

Ethnogenesis associated with (Harre 1974, 1979,1986; Harre and Secord 1972) and cited in Bryman (1988:60). Such an approach, Bryman contends, "aims to provide a framework for the examination of the genesis of the human social actions"

Qualitative research thus commends itself as the most appropriate methodology in that it best matches the hypotheses enunciated in paragraph 1.3 above as well as the philosophical assumptions which underscore this research. However, like all other methodologies, qualitative research is not without its weaknesses and shortcomings.

1.10.1 Weaknesses

Given the vastly different backgrounds and contexts of the researcher and those of some of the respondents, one might argue that it is a contested issue that a researcher can very accurately represent the views of the respondents. A second built-in weakness of qualitative research is that the interviews are carried out over an extended period of months and sometimes years, the initial perceptions of the respondents do change over time. Culture is a dynamic process.

In making allowance for the first of the two problems mentioned above, I hasten to state that I fully concur with Bryman (1988:73) that "ethnographers rarely adopt a stance of being 'sponges' whereby they simply absorb the subjects' interpretations". The intensive interview and observation is supplemented by other data gathering tools such as surveys, literature search and cross checking with assistant researchers. I also acknowledge that some portions of the data will, of necessity, be left out depending on the researcher's disposition. Bittner (1973)

cited in Bryman (1988:76) correctly points out that research cannot be done in a totally objective manner. The time lapse is accounted for in this research by carrying out the initial field work over 13 months (August 1999 to September 2000) and further field research was be done three years later in August and September 2003 to gauge whether there has been significant change in people's attitudes towards *ilobolo*.

A third major criticism of ethnomethodology is that the findings could easily be based on untested anecdotes. That immediately raises the issue of a legitimate generalisation based on findings of a single locale. To obviate that real possibility, this researcher proposes to link collected data and theory by using Znaniecki's (1934) analytic induction. This procedure starts with a definition of the problem and offers some hypotheses. This has already been done in paragraphs **1.1** and **1.3** above. The next step is to examine case studies to determine how they relate to the hypothes(e)s. If there is a lack of congruence between problem formulation and hypotheses on the one hand, and the initial case studies on the other, we will have to reformulate the problem and hypotheses. Following this, if there are a few negative case studies, they will have to be reformulated. The procedure will be continued until a universal relationship is established (Bryman 1988:82). All that work will be done in chapter four below. The field study will be done in Edendale township (see Appendices A and B below – maps of Edendale)

1.10.2 Edendale Township

Edendale[7] is an urban area situated about ninety kilometres inland from the port of Durban and ten kilometres South West of Pietermaritzburg, the capital city of Kwa-Zulu Natal. Like all areas that were designated 'black' spots or townships by successive white governments, it is currently the home of black South Africans. According to the 1996 South African government statistics[7], the population was estimated at 238, 071[8]. Residents are accommodated in owned and in rented housing, the latter in varying states of disrepair, especially in Dambuza village.

There are 40 schools, both primary, secondary, two technical colleges, a modern library and three community halls. More schools and community halls are currently under construction. Church buildings of various sizes, some dating back to mid nineteenth century, serve as centres for worship by the people of Edendale. As in other South African townships, homes and school classrooms are also used as places of worship by the independent church movement.

Edendale has been chosen as an area for field study because, as Meintjes (1986:125) has observed, its history, though unique, "embodies the effects of colonisation and missionary work on an African Christian community, and that is its value." The Edendale settlement is also a pristine example of the effects of urbanisation on African people's cultural transformation, a phenomenon that is common not only in South Africa, but throughout the continent.

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[7] The size of present day Edendale is 24,900.56 Acres. Information obtained from Mr. Anesh Roopan of the Pietermaritzburg city engineering department and land surveying, 12 July 2000.

Its history dates back to 1851 when a Wesleyan catechist, James Allison, led a multi-ethnic group of nearly five hundred Griquas, Barolong, Basotho, Batlokwa, AmaHlubi, AmaSwazi and AmaZulu and settled them initially in Indaleni near Richmond, Natal in 1847 (Maylan 1986:86). Allison had begun missionary work in the Trans-Orangia in the 1830s then moved with some of the Christian converts to Swaziland, and later to Richmond and finally to Edendale. On arrival in Pietermaritzburg, and on 30 July 1851 Allison paid 1300 pounds sterling to buy 6123 acres of farm land known as Welverdient' from Andries Pretorius, (see Appendix B below). The farm was later renamed Edendale (Meintjes 1986:66; Spenser 1981:39). In this new settlement, the African landowners, most of whom were converts to Christianity and known as *amakholwa* or *oNonhlevu*, embraced civil and customary law. The one condition was that customary law had first to be pronounced by colonial officials not "repugnant to the general principles of humanity and decency recognised throughout the whole civilised world" (Welsh 1971:14). If Colonial officials thought it was, they made concerted efforts to discourage its observance. One clear evidence was the attitude of the acting secretary of Native affairs to a petition by Edendale residents, (refer to SNA 1/1/62, Minute 1883/339, June 7, 1883). Messrs T. Gule, S. Mini and L. Khumalo sent a petition on behalf of the other Edendale residents stating that they were troubled by the passes which they were obliged to carry within the colony and also when they had to travel beyond its borders. They wanted to know when the time would come when their "European masters would trust them." They asked if they

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[8] Information obtained from Statistics South Africa, Census 1996: Community Profile.
[9] See map in Appendix B below, obtained from the office of the Surveyor General, 300 Pietermaritz street.

had not shown sufficient loyalty to Her Majesty the Queen to be trusted. They also felt oppressed by the pass laws that limited their mobility.

In response to the residents' petition, the local magistrate made it clear that if they wished to be exempted from Native law, he would be sympathetic to their concern. However, since in his opinion they required special privileges, he could not recommend that they be exempted unless they " would forgo *lobola* (italics mine) which means joining a Christian denomination." Thus the need to become a Christian was used as a leverage to coerce the residents of Edendale to drop their cultural practices. But the colonial officials ensured that the exemption was not linked to an extension of the franchise. In consequence, the Edendale residents formed an organisation in 1888 called *Funamalungelo* (demand your rights) which would help them to secure their political rights.

Formal schooling for Edendale residents began in the 1870s though limited to literacy and lasting no more than three to four years schooling per child and all the time missionary education put pressure on the economically successful and, by now, productive inhabitants of Edendale to abandon their cultural practices in favour of western norms. Meintjes (1986: 68) writes;

> " Respectability was the hallmark of social distinction. This involved strict rules of etiquette. Informal visits between friends were frowned upon as they fostered gossip. Women who indulged in this kind of thing were dubbed *uyazula* or those with a 'long foot'. Instead, the villagers met one another in church and at formal tea parties."

Another characteristic which Edendale people had, which is a common urban phenomenon, is that they were highly politicised, being in the forefront of the

formation of the Natal Native Congress in the 1900s (: 69). This party later became the African National Congress. It is in this area that the research is located and a sample of its residents was interviewed.

1.10.3 Sampling procedures

For purposes of this study, in-depth information was obtained from a carefully chosen sample of areas marked 1 through to 10 (shown on map in Appendix A). Age, gender, educational levels and home ownership stratified the sample. A discussion guide, (see Appendix C) was used to facilitate the process and a tape recorder used after the initial sessions.

The guide had been tried out before hand in section J Imbali and Kwa-Mpumuza where a snap survey of ten people each lasting nearly thirty minutes was carried out between January and March 2000. In addition, the author interviewed a random sample of five University of Natal and an equal number of Union Bible Institute students.

1.10.4 Limitations

Limitations allowed for were that: the census information was dated and not as accurate as it could be, some people had moved since the last count. *Ilobolo* discussions were viewed by several respondents as "inside" information and not open to "outsiders." There was a real temptation by some of the respondents to tell me what they thought I ought to hear rather than what I needed to hear. We turn next to the second chapter where the historical roots of *ilobolo* be examined.

CHAPTER TWO

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF *ILOBOLO*

2.1 Introduction

The continued popularity of *ilobolo* among black people and the ensuing controversy surrounding its changing legal, religious and social status makes it imperative for any student of African culture to delve into its historical past and examine its present crisis. In this chapter I will trace the origins of *ilobolo* as far back as available literature and oral history will enable me to go. The purpose is not merely to outline the intricacies of the rite but to use it as a lens through which to view a dimension of social and religious change that is largely overlooked by many anthropological and historical studies of African marriage and related issues. I will explore the subject from a specific perspective of Zulu culture in order to gain a deeper understanding and an in-depth analysis of its implications for modern urban marriages. I will also reflect theologically on factors yielded by the historical survey of the evolution of *ilobolo*. Other Southern African peoples will be referred to by way of comparison and contrast.

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I am consciously aware that even within the sub-continent, the sheer size of the region and the rapid cultural transformations that have taken place among its peoples in the post-colonial era preclude any attempt at developing an African view of *ilobolo*. It is thus both unwise and dangerous to assume that *ilobolo* is the same process throughout Southern Africa, less so when one looks at the huge continent of Africa. There are too many variations in detail. Despite regional and local ethnic diversities, there are still enough commonalties to enable one to make a general statement. Industrialisation has not obliterated every trace of African thought forms and cultural practices. In the words of Comaroff (1996:42) "our world gives little evidence of the neo-evolutionary logic of modernisation or secularisation theories, or of the homogenising forces that were meant to erode all local distinction." In support of this view, Ndzimande (1996:43) agrees with Preston-Whyte (1980:177) that,

> "The recognition of kinship relations and assumptions made about them, as well as the nature and implications of marriage, are essentially the same in all Bantu speaking societies in South Africa."

However, a study of *ilobolo* among AmaZulu will be a case study that will raise common concerns in other parts of the sub-continent. I will then move on, in the second half of the chapter, to look at the changes and further complications that have since come about following the introduction of a Western legal system, Christian teaching on marriage and the impact of the cash economy. I will conclude by highlighting the problematic relationship between *ilobolo* custom in the past and attempts at its direct application today.

2.2 The Antiquity of *ilobolo*

Anthropologists[9] have written extensively on *ilobolo* as it was practised in former days in Southern Africa. In more recent times, legal experts have examined juridical implications of the custom,[10] and novelists[11] have drawn out the social and cultural aspects of the custom. Allowing for local and regional differences, most writers agree that *ilobolo* is an age-old custom whose origins are not easy to determine.[12] According to Junod (1941:26), *ilobolo* is not a historical curiosity peculiar to Africans. He points out that it has equivalents in many parts of the world such as the Semitic *mohar* or marriage by appropriation and also the *kalim* of the Turco Mongolians. He states that the same or a similar custom existed among the ancient Greeks where Aristotles refers to the Grecian maiden of Homer's time as an *alphesiboia* or one who brings cattle to her parents. de Vaux (1961: 26) states that in ancient Jewish culture the *mohar* was the price which custom decreed that the father of the bride receive for his

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[9]Evans-Pritchard, E.E 1964 *The position of women in primitive societies and in our own.* In: Evans-Pritchard, EE (ed.) *The position of women in primitive societies and other essays in social anthropology.* London: Faber. Vilakazi, A 1962. *Zulu Transformations: a study in the dynamics of social change.* Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press; Reader, D.H.1966. *Zulu Tribe in Transition. The Makhanya of Southern Natal.* Manchester: Manchester University Press; Preston-Whyte, E.E. 1980 *Kinship and marriage.* In: Hammond-Tooke, W.D (ed.) *The Bantu speaking peoples of South Africa.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Holleman, J.F. 1960 *African marriage at the cross-roads,* (Part 1) In: Race Relations journal 27(4), 1961a *Bantu marriage at the cross-roads* (Part 11). In: Race Relations journal 28(1), 1961b *Bantu marriage at the cross-roads* (Part 111) Race Relations journal 28(2)

[10]Dlamini,C.R.M 1994 *The Juridical Analysis and Critical Evaluation of ilobolo in a Changing Zulu Society.* Pretoria: HSRC Co-operative Research on Marriage and Family; M de Haas 1988 *African Women, Marriage, and the Question of Not Very Customary Law in Natal,* In: Workshop on Regionalism and Restructuring in Natal. Durban: University of Natal. Paper # 18. Koyana, D.S. 1980 *Customary law in a changing society.* Cape Town, Wetton, Johannesburg: Juta & Co. Ltd.

[11]Nyembezi, S and Nxumalo, O.E.H 1966 *Inqolobane Yesizwe.* Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter; Msimang, C.T 1975 *Kusadliwa Ngoludala.* Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter.

[12] Huffman, T.N 1998 *The Antiquity of Lobola.* In: South African Archaeological Bulletin 53:57-62, Vol. 80, No 168, posits a view that recent excavations at Broedestroom near Pretoria and Riverside near Nelspruit point to the possible existence of *ilobolo* in the Early Iron Age among societies in Southern Africa and that from East Africa the custom was brought to the southern tip of the continent

daughter. Genesis (24:1-67) gives the most detailed *ilobolo* narrative. Abraham, who was advanced in years, sent his chief servant to obtain a wife for his son Isaac in Mesopotamia. The servant took ten of Abraham's camels and other presents as *ilobolo* for Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel. In the biblical accounts, the value could vary depending upon the bride's father's wishes, Gen. (34:12) and the social standing of the family, 1 Sam. (18:23). de Vaux cites a similar custom among Palestinian Arabs where the *mohar* was passed to the father of the bride. As it happened among the Jews, its value was not fixed and it was a function of family income and also whether or not the girl was from the same village as the man. In conclusion, de Vaux notes that Babylonian law made provision for the girl's father to receive an identical compensatory gift called *tirhatu*, whereas with the Assyrians the *tirhatu* was given to the bride.

Among the various nationalities on the African continent, *ilobolo* or *bohadi* or *vukosi, ikazi, mahari, or ruracio* is still an important step in the sequence of events that lead to marriage.

2.3 *Ilobolo* among AmaZulu

Throughout the African continent marriage continues to be regarded as an important institution in both rural and in the urban centres. Celibacy for a man or woman who has reached marriageable age is still frowned upon. The main reason, according to Bujo (1992:115) is that;

" In the societies of Africa, a man who dies childless falls into oblivion. He will be unable to find happiness in the next world because, having no children to honour him, he is cut off from the family community."

Even in more modern times, members of society often ask celibates, when do they plan to get married so that the family lineage does not disappear? Mbiti (1969:133) observed two decades ago that;

" For African peoples, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all members of a community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born. All the dimensions of life meet here, and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalised...Therefore marriage is a duty, a requirement for the corporate society and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate."

For a marriage to be deemed to have taken place, two families enter into a protracted negotiation in which ilobolo plays a significant part. Among AmaZulu, the prospective groom shela-s, or declares his amorous intentions to the woman of his choice. It is important to note that, contrary to popular views of some Western researchers[13], arranged marriages were not a regular feature among ordinary citizens. Known incidents of arranged marriages were confined to royalty where king's councils recommended that their monarch marry particular women in order to form strategic alliances. Among AmaZulu that tradition is still extant as evidenced by the fact that the current Zulu monarch has among his wives, a Swazi and a Xhosa woman in order to maintain harmonious relationships with the Northern and Southern neighbours respectively.

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[13] Schapera. T. 1940 *Married life in an African tribe.* London: Faber.

2.4 'The string of beads does not meet round the neck'

However, among the ordinary citizens arranged marriages were not normative. Parents might express a desire for their daughter or son to marry into one or other family, but the major decision still lay with those who were to get married. Ndukwana's [14] observation that when a man was interested in a woman and approached her through an intermediary, she could say of him "I don't want him [i.e. the prospective groom]. He is out of his mind – even if he had cattle". Further evidence to support the freedom of choice of a spouse is seen in that a marriageable woman frequently *balekela*-d (literally run to the home of the man she fancied as a husband) to the home of her lover (Nyembezi and Nxumalo 1966:114). Alternatively, the man could 'abduct' the prospective bride and then send *abakhongi* to *lobola* her.

There is also the famous incident of the women of Ingcugce who defied the king's orders that they reject their chosen lovers and marry men of the iNdhlondhlo regiment. Mtshapi[15] relates how they refused saying "the string of beads does not meet round the neck." For their disobedience and insistence to exercise their freedom of choice, these women were killed. The custom whereby the king married off regiments to particular age groups of women was, according to Welsh (1971:61), short-lived and it had completely broken down by 1879.

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[14] Webb, C. de B. & Wright, J.B. (eds.) 1986 *The James Stewart Archive of recorded oral evidence relating to the history of the Zulu and neighbouring peoples.* Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press and Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban. (hereafter referred to simply as *Stuart Archive*). 4:268, Testimony, Ndukwana, 15.7.1900.

[15] Stuart Archive 4(78-79). Mtshapi, Testimony, 09 04 1918.

2.5 The *loboli-ng* process

The process begins soon after a man's proposal to his beloved has proved successful. A visible sign that the man's proposal had been accepted or that he has been *qoma*-d by the woman was a piece of beadwork that she gave him. And, in exchange, the man gave her a monetary gift, *imali yokuqoma,* half of which was used by the girl to buy presents, *umhlalisi,* for her beloved and his companions. Of all the gifts, the most important was the acceptance token, *impahla* also called *ucu,* in the form of a "love letter" grafted in red beadwork.

After receiving this gift, the boy made a song and dance or *giya*-d before returning to his home to hoist a white flag given to her by his lover for everyone to see that he has been *qoma*-d (Vilakazi 1962:50). The ritual of hoisting a white flag or *ukuhloma iduku elibhabhazayo* was a momentous occation for the young man. The importance of the *qoma* ceremony is underscored by Vilakazi (: 50) in his observation that:

> "The formality and publicity given to the occasion have a social significance which has nothing to do with betrothal and marriage. To *qoma,* i.e. to take a lover for a girl and to be *qonywa'd,* to be accepted as a lover for the boy, are happenings of momentous sociological and psychological importance."

To be accepted boosted a young person's ego in that a *qonywad* young man had been made a human being, *wenziwe umuntu,* otherwise if his advances were declined, and this was done euphemistically by the girl saying *impahla* or *ucu alulingani* (the beadwork does not fit), he was regarded as a social failure and was referred to as *isishimane* or *isigwadi* (Vilakazi :50). According to Vilakazi, the same expression applied to the woman who is *qomad* for only a few days or not at all. If a nubile girl failed altogether to attract attention of

young suitors, she was referred to as *umgod'o nganukwanja* or a bit of excrement so order-less not to even invite the sniff of a dog (Vilakazi : 51). This meant that the girl had bad luck, *isinyama,* and ought to *phalaza* or vomit using white and later red medicine to be cleansed and thus gain favour from suitors.

It is also important to note that the *qoma* ceremony did not bind the lovers to each other. Among AmaZulu there was thus a saying based on bird hunting imagery that stated that *noseyishayile akakayosi, noseyosile akakayidli, oseyidlile usedle icala* (whoever has killed a bird has not yet roasted it, if roasted, it is not yet eaten, if eaten, the person has committed a crime). That expression meant that the woman was free to direct her attention to other suitors, hence another isiZulu expression that *isoka alidli kahle imbangi ikhala* or that the lover is never secure as long as there are rivals (Vilakazi 1961:51).

The two lovers were permitted by custom to visit each other and to practice sex play, care being taken that there was no penetration of the woman. It was the duty of an older sister, *iqhikiza,* to school her younger sibling on proper behaviour during the *soma* visits by warning her not to open herself up to be deflowered, *ungazeneki izinkomo zikababa* which literally meant, she should not expose her father's cattle (Vilakazi :53). Should penetration, resulting in pregnancy occur, the fine the young man paid was two herd of cattle, *ingquthu* or *umqholiso* and another beast called *ufohla,* meaning a forced entry. This was a beast for the ritual cleansing of the girl's peers or *inkomo yokugeza izintombi.*

The next phase after *umqomo* was the *ukucela* or negotiating a relationship with the father of the prospective bride. If agreeable, the two families initiated a marriage process of *ukuganiselana,* what one might compare to a Western

engagement. During the *ukugana* process, the girl motivated the boy to speed up the process by *bonda*-ring. She did so by undertaking several visits to the home of her beloved to take gifts that are said to *cubuza* or pulverize the sods. These engagement visits enabled her and her friends to make a detailed study of the home of her future husband and, conversely, afforded her future in-laws an opportunity to find out what type of person she was.

In Vilakazi's (:60) words, the chief qualities that were considered in a girl would have been " goodness, physical fitness and vigour, the woman's ability to beget children and her humaness, *(ubuntu)*. " Physical beauty was considered, but was not a top priority, because as the saying goes, *ikhiwane elihle ligcwala izibungu* – good figs are usually full of maggots. The boy's sisters would return the honour and in due course both families know each other well enough to enter into a formal marriage negotiations.

Next would be the preparations by his family to begin the negotiations in earnest. Ntshangase (1984:1) notes that the young man who intended to get married, first approached his father and informed him of his intention to take a wife. A serious discussion between father and son took place, the father checking if his son was emotionally and materially ready to take on the new responsibility. If he delayed, the son enlisted the help of his mother who normally speeded up the process resulting in her husband summoning his brothers to his homestead for an *indaba* or meeting to discuss the son's request.

After the proposal, the mutual visits and the engagement comes the third and the major phase of the process, that of *loboli*-ng proper. This included *ukucela* or asking for the hand of the woman from her kin; the passing of nuptial gifts between the two families – *ilobolo* from the man's side and *imibondo* from the

woman's family. In former days there was no lower or upper limit placed on *ilobolo* for a Zulu woman. However it was accepted practice for a princess to fetch a large herd of cattle or *izikomo ezicish'ilanga* (beasts which eclipse the sun). According to Mqaikana[16], King Mswati's daughter was *lobol*-ad with a hundred herd of cattle. Likewise Langalibalele's daughter, Nkomose, was *lobola*-d with eighty herd, most of which were contributed by the uMbongo regiment.

A modern example of a community being expected to contribute towards the *ilobolo* of their *iNkosi* was the main news item in the Echo[17] of 1 June 2000. The news item was about the imminent wedding, on June 10th, of *iNkosi* Sondelani Zondi of Inadi, an area about 20 (twenty) kilometres South West of Pietermaritzburg. He was engaged to be married to a daughter of *iNkosi* Mhlabunzima Mthuli of Ozwathini just outside of Durban. Zondi's subjects had been asked to contribute R30.00 (thirty) per homestead from 1998 towards his *ilobolo* and wedding feast. According the Echo news reporter, the request had been accepted by most people under *iNkosi* Zondi's jurisdiction.

One Mhlengi Nkomo of Ganesokeni justified the general levy on the grounds that the levy " ensured that everyone had contributed towards the lobola of one's chief". A headman or *induna*, by the name of Robert Shabalala, concurred saying " we want to ensure that everyone contributes towards their chief's wedding, as it is tradition." Those who objected based their arguments not on matters of principle but rather on issues of financial accountability and

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[16] Stuart Archive 4:(11- 13) Mqaikana, Testimony, 12 11 1897.

[17] Echo is a once a weekly supplement inserted in the Witness. Besides giving a summary of the week's news reported in the Witness, it covers news items from the black townships situated in the greater Pietermaritzburg area.

the fact that, unlike in former days, chiefs now draw a government salary. Traditionally the huge *ilobolo* was passed ostensibly because an *iNkosi* was getting married, otherwise when a commoner or ordinary citizen was getting married, the *ilobolo* would have been modest.

Evidence of this is that among AmaZulu, each of the *ilobolo* cattle was given a name and it fulfilled a specific function. Starting with the cow *yokumemeza* (the heifer for announcing the impending wedding proposal), there was the *imvulamlomo* (a beast given to induce the girl's father to open his mouth or enter into negotiations). *Ingquthu* beast which, though not forming part of the *ilobolo*, was a special gift given to the girl's mother for her role in bringing up her daughter. The *inkomo yenhloko* or *eyokukhehla* (a beast that gave the bride the right to put up her hair as a sign that she was about to be married (Krige 1936:128).

There is thus enough evidence to show that, traditionally, the size of the *ilobolo* was a function of the social standing of those getting married. Outside of that class, the *ilobolo* was arrived at through the mutual agreement of the negotiating parties. Koyana (1980:154) notes that besides AmaZulu and Vatsonga, where *ilobolo* was fixed by agreement following negotiation, the Basotho, AmaHlubi and Ntlangwini's had a fixed *ilobolo* raging between 20 to 25 (twenty to twenty five) herd of cattle and one or two horses. The exact amount varied according to the district in which the spouses lived.

In traditional societies *loboli*-ng proper started off with the man's maternal uncle, *umalume*, acting as a chief negotiator or *umkhongi*. The Shona called him *munyai* (messenger). Wienrich (1982:48) notes that whereas the marriage negotiator among the Shona, as among AmaZulu was usually a man, among the

Kalanga, the Ndebele and Tonga negotiations were carried out by both men and women. Among AmaZulu, the *umkhongi* would frequently be accompanied by an assistant, *umphelekezeli*. His chief function was to act as a witness in days when receipt books were not known. Ntshangase (1984:2) points out that the chief negotiator was expected to be:

> " Exceptional in interpersonal skills. Have sufficient information on such matters like the current trends in pricing the preliminary ritual items e.g. *ingqaqamazinyo* (unlock the teeth/jaw); *isikhwehlela* (clearing of the throat); *imvulamlomo* (opening of the mouth); *ukwehlisw' emthini* (getting him down from the tree) etc to the crucial issue of the acceptable monetary equivalence of the lobolo cows, bearing in mind that they cannot all be priced the same."

On the appointed day the *umkhongi* and his party proceed to the girl's home for the initial *ukucela* ceremony, and the team or *umthimba* was expected to arrive at the crack of dawn to announce their intention to open marriage negotiations. They had to arrive early in the morning and long before sunrise because the belief was that their request for the bride was addressed both to the living and the departed relatives. The latter were said to visit the homestead at night, hence Khumalo's (1997:44) observation that;

> " *Lokhu kukhuleka ngovivi kuhambisana nazo phela izilokotho zabangasekho. Abangasekho bahambisana nobumnyama bokuhlwa namathunzi... Uma behamba nobumnyama nina nifika sekwaphuma ilanga, nizazethula kobani? Basuke bengasekho lapha ekhaya njengoba sekugcaluza ngisho uswane lapha ekhaya. Lokhu kungesinye sezizathu eziyaye zidalele ukuba abakhongi baxoshwe baphindiselwe emuva ngoba uyise wentombazane engeke aqala udaba ngaphandle koyise noyisemkhulu.* - Negotiations carried out at dawn enable the shades to be included. They prefer to do business at night... If they prefer darkness and you arrive after sunrise, whom are you going to report to? They (shades) have left the home by then.

That is one of the reasons that the negotiators are sometimes sent back because the girl's father has to ensure that the shades are in attendance at the negotiations."

Protocol demanded that *umkhongi* and his party be in their best finery and that they express themselves in measured tones. James Stuart (1986:171) cites one of his informants, Ndaba, who maintained that before the regular *ilobolo* is passed, a beast called *imvulamlomo* (opening of the mouth) was given to the girl's parents as a means of securing their consent to release their daughter to be married off. The *umkhongi* stated the nature of his visit by shouting from outside the entrance of the homestead saying that he had come in peace to build a relationship, or *ukucela isihlobo esihle* (Ntshangase 1984:3). At all times he presented himself and his party as servants, *izikhonzi*, who had been sent by the groom's father to do homage on his behalf (Krige E. 1981:127). Depending on the *isithopho* and *isithakazelo*[18] of the hosts, the *umkhongi* might present his mission in the following manner: (see also Lamula 1963, Msimang 1975);

E! wena Miya, isijekula, isalakulandelwa! Uthi uDlamini, umNtungwa, umtwan'eNkosi, Lokothwayo, Mhayise mthole ngengane yakho. Uthi ngizomcelela isihlobo esihle ngezithole zakhe (usho ezgagula ngamabala)

(You Miya, then follows the *izithopho*. I have been sent by Dlamini, to come to initiate a good friendship. He has sent me to convey his request and support it by giving you cows whose colours are ... (the *umkhongi* describes the colours of the cows).

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[18] *Isithopho* differs from *isithakazelo*, according to Khumalo,R.S (1995) cited in Khumalo, L.Z. (1997:46) in that the former has to do with the genealogy of a family going back to the forebears of the family whereas the latter and is a reference to the head of the particular household.

The shouting of the request would be made several times before the people within the homestead responded. It was not uncommon for the girl's father to suddenly take his sticks and call his dogs and go out to friends to drink beer or *tshwala*.

At times a representative of the bride's family would tell the suitors to come back a week or two later to allow for time to inform the "fathers of the girl" of the imminent wedding (Vilakazi 1962:65). In a subsequent visit, the *umkhongi* repeated verbatim the purpose of his visit. This time the negotiations would be at a delicate stage and had to proceed at an unhurried pace. The whole process was carried out in a spirit ranging from light heartedness to an outward appearance of hostility. The bride's team displaying an attitude of reticence bordering on rudeness. The groom's side, on the other hand, had to exercise great negotiation skill and restraint and absorb the verbal assaults without being flustered, at least, outwardly.

Ntshangase (1984:4) points out that the guests were then welcomed into a specially prepared house and a spokesperson from the girl's family pretending that he did not know the purpose of the visit asks them why they have come. On being told why, he defers to girl's father who up until then had been quiet and would not speak until a non-negotiable R50.00 (fifty) is quickly given to unlock his teeth and induce him to speak. This money, the value of which varies depending on the area, is called *ingqaqamazinyo* or the unlocking of the teeth. That settled, the father may cough slightly and the expectation was that more money is given. He then seals his lips and expects the guests to give some more money. These amounts are not huge, but as Ntshangase points out, they form the traditional way of asking for credentials.

Once that is settled, the *abakhongi* will then ask for a list of *izibizo*[19] or gifts that will be given to key persons in the bride's homestead before the *ilobolo* proper can be negotiated in earnest. When the pressure mounts to produce more *izibizo,* the only recourse the *umkhongi* has is to say that *isithunywa asibulawa* or please do not kill the messenger.

Among *izibizo* there was, among AmaZulu, a special gift in the form of a beast given to the girl's mother. It was also known as *inquthu,* a euphemistic expression for a virginity beast. It did not form part of the *ilobolo* but was an unalienable property of the mother and a means of acknowledging her role in bringing up her daughter. Among the Shona of Zimbabwe, it was believed that if this cow or *mombe* was not given, the bride would become barren or mad and her children would die (Weinrich 1982:42). Among Bavenda the bride's mother was given a *ndadzi* which was usually a cow and its calf (Krige 1981:10). In addition to the *nquthu,* the girl's mother was given a male goat *ubikibiki.* These gifts were evidence that under customary law, before the colonial government in Natal codified it, a woman could own property. Dlamini (1994:66) speaks to this point in his agreement with Suttner (1974), Evans-Pritchard (1964) and Gluckman (1969) that women in the black community were never slaves or altogether outcasts and a class without rights. He concludes that the social system did protect their position, if somewhat unsatisfactorily at the time. In support of this view, Welsh (1971:169) quotes a prominent Zulu *iNkosi* who emphasised that:

[19]The assortment of *izibizo*, according to Msimang (1975:266) included *isembatho somkhwe* i.e. an appropriate garment for the father-in-law and ten spears. The mother-in -law would normally be given a head scarf, a male goat called *ubikibiki* and a virginity cow to thank her for the role she played in bringing up her daughter.

"Before our law was codified there is not the slightest doubt that women did and still own property... There were for instance women *Inyangas*, medicine women and *Izangoma* [diviners] who acquired and owned property. Diligent women wove mats and other handicrafts and accumulated first goats and with goats, cattle that became their own property. Another diligent woman might till her land so well that she uses the surplus to acquire sheep, goats and cattle, and all these became her property without any question...The Code dealt a heavy blow to Native Laws as practised before the advent of the white man. Women feel bitter about this interference on the part of those who codified such wrongs as Native Law."

Molema (1963:125) goes one step further suggesting that among Batswana, the entire *ilobolo* (or *bogadi* in Setswana), may have been a gift to the mother of the girl compensating her for her motherly role[20]. Similarly among the Lovedu, the *ilobolo* for a daughter belonged to the house of her mother and she (the mother) had the final say in the use to which it was put Krige (1981:149). In the Cape, AbeNguni's understanding of *ilobolo* or *ikazi* differed markedly from the other people groups such as Basotho, Batswana, and the Northern AbeNguni – Zulu/Swazi in that *ikazi* accompanied the bride to her new home[21]. According to Soga (1931:277-8) *ikazi*

" Never actually belongs to the bride's parents while she lives, though they often make use of the cattle. They sometimes even sell them to meet their own liabilities, but in such an event they should consult the person to whom it belongs, namely, their daughter. The latter always refers to these cattle as '*ikazi lam*'- 'my dowry'. In the case of a parent squandering his daughter's *ikazi* he becomes liable to her for its restoration...In theory it is unalienable until her death, when it reverts to her parents, but never to her own children."

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[20] In support of this theory Molema points out that the derivation of *bogadi* among Batswana has a meaning of assuaging, mollifying and placating.

[21]See the 1883 Commission, vol. 11: 1,82,93.

This does challenge the commonly held view that under customary law, women were always considered minors and had no property rights. Once the *izibizo* had been given and accepted, the *umkhongi* proceeded with the matter in hand, taking it one step further. He stated that his principals, the groom's lineage, supported their request with cattle whose colours and shape of their horns were then meticulously described. Either on that day or on a subsequent visit after the woman's family had satisfied themselves that negotiations could proceed, her father produced the *imvuma* or the agreement goat which was ritually slaughtered as a way of reporting to the shades or *izithunzi* of the woman that she is about to transfer to another family. Its gall was sprinkled on the *umkhongi* and the gall bladder inflated and tied to his head or arm. This was a sign that his mission had been successful, hence Vilakazi (1962:65) writes:

" The spilling of the blood (*ukuchitha igazi*) and the spilling of the gall on the *umkhongi* (*ukumthela ngenyongo*) are actions symbolic of the reporting. By this act of acceptance, the girl's lineage is accepting the boy's kinship group as potential relatives, and all the obligations and reciprocal duties that affinal bonds bring about."

Part of the *imvuma* goat meat would be cooked and given to the *abakhongi* and the rest of the members of the homestead. On departure they would be given the forequarter and the skin to take back to the groom's home. Among Basotho a similar ceremony called *tlhabiso* was held. On such an occasion it was common for a beast to be slaughtered as a means of acknowledging that the paternity if the children to be born out of the marriage was vested in the husband. According to Murray (1981:113), a Sesotho saying expressed this idea in the following words " *ngwana ke wa dikgomo*" meaning that cows, in the form of *ilobolo* beget a child. *Tlhabiso* not only sealed the marriage but, as

with AmaZulu, it was a way of informing the shades (*badimo*) of the progress and thereby enlisting their support and blessing.

In the event of the groom's father being too poor to produce the required *ilobolo*, two options were open to him; he could either *ethula*[22] his potential granddaughter or secondly, *lobola* with whatever gifts he had. Hence as both Krige (1950:121) and Msimang (1975:265) assert that agricultural produce such as pumpkins, corn and beans constituted acceptable alternatives to *ilobolo* in cattle on the hoof. According to an oral testimony by Dyer D. Macebo[23] *ubuhlalu* or beads were used to *lobola* a women in Tongaland before cattle became legal tender. Likewise, among AmaZulu beads and, later, neck rings or *izimbedu* and armlets, *amasinda* were common *ilobolo* articles. This view was corroborated by a white trader who worked in Delagoa Bay and also by Nkomuza[24] that during Mabundu's reign the length of beads necessary for *ilobolo* was fixed such that:

> " It consisted of a double string the height of a man and falling to the ground on either side if held immediately over his side, i.e. 12 to 14 feet in length."

The choice of *ubuhlalu* as an article of exchange in *loboli*-ng could possibly be due to the fact that the different arrangements and the pattern of colours on the beadwork was the earliest form of visual and, most definitely, early written communication among AmaZulu long before they came into contact with Westerners (Nyembezi and Nxumalo 1966:115).

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[22] *Ukwethula* means borrowing *ilobolo* cattle from another homestead within the family. The owner of the borrowed cattle is promised the first born daughter of the couple of the couple intending to marry. *Ilobolo* given for such a child automatically belongs to the owner of the cattle, Msimang (1975:266). The second and more common options was to give whatever one could afford.
[23] Stuart Achive, 2(44), Testimony of Macebo 02 11 1898.
[24] Stuart Archive, 2(145), Testimony, Mahungane and Nkomuza 08 11 1897.

Both authors point out that among AmaZulu a "letter" was written by arranging beads in specific colour patterns. White beads were used to express a young man's attraction and romantic love for a maiden, *oluyinkankane* or one that is colourful and shiny like the feathers of a hadidah ibis conveyed the thought that he missed his lover.

Among Basotho it was generally believed and universally accepted that *monyala ka pedi o nyala wa hae* – that one or two beasts on the hoof plus an assortment of other articles constituted acceptable *bohadi* or *ilobolo*. A popular Sesotho wedding song expressed this idea in the following lyrics:

Mangwane mpulele ke nelwa ke pula
(Aunt please let me into the house or I will be rained on)

Le ha di le pedi le ha di le tharo nka nyala mosadi
(Two or three cows are enough for me to acquire a wife)

Canon Moses Njoroge[25] attests to the fact that in his home country of Kenya, it was acceptable among the Agikuyu that a young man would offer his open hands as his *ilobolo* thus promising that he would use them to provide for the bride. There is a common Gikuyu saying, according to Njoroge, that " *moko maya makwa nimeguthii gukurimira* or that these hands of mine will go and work for you." Generally among the Agikuyu, their *ruracio* or *ilobolo* was seventy-two (72) goats and it was acceptable that a marriage could proceed even

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[25] Personal interview on 16 February 2000.

if only two goats were available. The buck's function was to seal the agreement while the doe was given to the girl's mother to 'cleanse' her.[26]

Among AmaZulu, once the offer of *ilobolo* was accepted, the next step was for a group from the girl's family to go and see the promised cattle. It was *umkhongi's* duty to point them out to the bridal party. Since custom allowed *umkhongi*, during the early stages of the negotiations to exaggerate the number and quality of the *ilobolo* cows, it often happened that reality did not always coincide with his promises. The way out of the dilemma was for him to say that the rest of the cows had strayed in the veld or grazing area or that the herdboys could not find them. The *umkhongi* was then said to have counted stones, *wa bala amatshe*. He was never censured for his poetic licence. The bridal party would then accept in good faith the revised *ilobolo* presented to them. Similarly, among Basotho stones could be accepted in lieu of cattle but only as a deposit when the would-be husband or his kin had no livestock. Kuper (1970: 22) notes that according to Germond (1976:427-3) the Rev Alfred Casalis wrote in 1897 when cattle had died during the rinderpest epidemic, saying:

" Do you know what they are doing today? So-and-so approaches so-and-so to obtain his daughter ... they proceed to the kraal. The kraal is empty and contains nothing but dry manure. That makes no difference. Into his kraal the would-be-husband brings a number of stones, let us say ten. These ten stones represent ten oxen, it is a debt of honour, it will be paid when the kraal fills with cattle again."

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[26] Personal interview with Sicily and Francis Murithii, 30 May 2000.

Among AmaZulu, a visible sign that the woman's team was satisfied and that the negotiations could proceed, was that the man's father gave the guests an *imvuma* or *indlakudla* goat. It was slaughtered to seal the agreement. From that time onwards, the woman was officially referred to as a bride, *umakoti* or *umlobokazi* and her future husband as *umkhwenyana* or the groom.

The *umkhongi* looked forward to the negotiations culminating in the wedding feast or *umcgacgo* lasting anything between three to five days. Until then, the groom was permitted to visit her bride- to-be, spend a night or more with her in a specially designated room, *elawini*, where custom allowed them to have coitus interruptus or *ukusoma*. This arrangement is markedly different from the Batswana and Basotho where, in the case of the former, various forms of union were recognized. According to Krige (1981:13), these unions ranged from a temporary union with a concubine or *nyatsi* to a full marriage union after the *ilobolo* or *bogadi* had been passed. Among Basotho, Krige (1981:13) notes that there seemed to be no visit of the prospective husband to the future spouse before the marriage formalities had been concluded. This arrangement is similar to the Bapedi where the visit takes place only after the *ilobolo* had been passed and the wedding feast had happened.

2.6 The changing face of *ilobolo* today.

A combination of cultural transformation and historical distance has been instrumental in so modifying *ilobolo* that in some respects, its modern form bears little resemblance to what it was intended for in traditional societies. This raises a number of questions: namely, what significant and irreversible changes have taken place in the historical developments of *ilobolo?* Which aspects of

ilobolo have remained unchanged and why? What problems and opportunities present themselves in the modern application of *ukulobola*? Such new considerations have shifted the *ilobolo* debate, once primarily centered on the establishing and maintaining healthy family relationships in an agrarian society, to what it is that sustains it in modern urban society.

New variables that need to be accounted for are the effects of globalization, deculturation, the replacing of cattle by cash, individualism, migrancy and the introduction of civil and religious contract in marriage. Before examining each of the above variables in some detail, I will first compare and contrast anthropological and Christian analyses of *ilobolo* to determine points of contact and complementarity as well as areas of divergence.

I will ague below that the form of traditional marriage as described above has undergone major changes. One contributory factor is the introduction and spread of Christianity and Western practices. I will thus give a brief description of a typical Christian marriage among AmaZulu.

It is worth noting that the *qoma* ceremony is frowned upon by the church, consequently courtship has become a clandestine affair among many Zulu young people who have embraced the Christian faith. Thus Vilakazi (1962:54) laments the fact that the *shela-qoma* is regarded as undignified, defiled among Christians and even those who are old enough to have lovers. He points out that a Christian girl who has a boyfriend will pretend she did not have one. Consequently:

" To the heathen (sic) this is a sign of sinister deception, for they immediately interpret this denial to mean that the girl wishes to flirt with as many men as possible. So much is the resentment that the saying, *ungiphika njengentombi yekholwa*, i.e. to deny me as a Christian girl does, has become proverbial among the heathens." Vilakazi (1962:54).

With the downplaying of *qoma* ceremony, the traditional role performed by the *iqhikiza* is lessened or removed altogether. Except in rare instances where the church conducts its own pre-marital counselling, young people are left to their own devices with a resultant growth in unplanned pregnancies and their disastrous social consequences.

To obviate this possibility, one of the larger indigenous churches in South Africa, the Back to God Crusade founded by Rev Nicholas Bhengu modified the tradition of *ukuqoma*[27]. As part of discipling its youth, the church devised a method whereby the boy and the girl both approach the local minister, who now plays the role of *iqhikiza*. Having expressed his attraction to the girl the next step would be for the couple to spend time praying over the matter. If the boy is *qonywa*-d the minister of his local church informs him accordingly.

The next step would be to inform the church, and the couple is then told not to be seen to be together without a third party. Other than that prohibition, the boy will follow the traditional practice of making a request to the family of the girl to *lobola*.

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[27] Interview with Rev M.M Ntshangase, 14 September. 2003. Also refer to circular letter # 1 of 1974 regarding courtship of young people in the Assemblies of God Church.

Thus, according to Reader (1966:214), the *qoma* ceremony has not been totally obliterated. A parallel Christian ceremony similar to one described above is called *ukuthembisa* or the public declaration of intention to marry made before church members. For some urban people, the *ukwethembisa* may be followed by, or it may coincide with, an engagement ceremony. On that occation, the couple may exchange rings, though typically it is the man who gives an engagement ring to his fiancée and future wife. Reader (1966:224) concludes, with justification, that in comparing and contrasting the constituent elements of Christian and traditional marriages;

> " The overall conclusion seems that marriage is composed of clusters
> of institutions serving functions which have so much value for the
> people that for the greater part they have successfully resisted change
> from European social values."

However, his further observation that the traditional ancestral religious rites have been replaced is not quite accurate as a general statement of fact.

Similarly *ukucela* or the requesting of the hand of a girl in marriage was performed by *umkhongi* acting as an emissary from the boy's patrikin. That practice has been retained among many Christian people though the size and the composition of the team has changed. It is smaller and characteristically includes the boy's father, and in some instances, the boy himself.

Among most evangelicals the shades are no longer seen as part of the marriage equation. A beast may still be slaughtered to welcome the groom's party, but the purpose may not be anything more than just receiving them and being good hosts. However, what is significant here is that, as in traditional practice, Christian marriage among many African people involves family members coming together and some form of *ilobolo* passed to cement the relationship.

Ngubane (1981:84) describes a traditional wedding as *umendo* or a long journey in one direction, the woman joining the family of the husband on a permanent basis. The counterpart to this is the Christian belief that marriage is a permanent bond between the spouses. Divorce does happen, and sociologists have remarked about the high rate of marriage failure in South Africa. Still, traditionalists and Christians regard marriage as a permanent bond between the spouses and their respective families. We turn now to other forces which have changed the nature of African marriages.

2.6.1 The effects of globalisation

Among the many factors that have brought about changes in the *ilobolo* contract is globalisation. We now live in a global village whose inhabitants increasingly desire to be freed from societal strictures in nearly every area of life. At the dawn of the new century and twenty first millennium, the subsistence economy in which *ilobolo* thrived is being rapidly replaced by an all-pervasive global economy, which impacts the cultural and the environmental spheres. The most telling effect of the global economy is the rapid breakdown of mutual interdependence by members of what used to be extended families. Industrial growth points are confined to the large cities and the young, both male and

female are attracted to these places and leave the rest of the family members in the rural areas. In the course of time, they tend to be financially self-sufficient.

As we take note of those developments, it is crucially important to take cognisance of the fact that we cannot look back with nostalgia at *ilobolo* as it was practised in former days. Present realities confirm that *loboli*-ng has become increasingly problematic especially in urban areas where the African populous is fast undergoing a process of deculturation with *kwaito*[28] having replaced *indlamu* and women's *mokhibo* and *ukuqhobosha* has been overtaken by *kwasa-kwasa* and other art forms that accompany deculturation.

2.6.2 Deculturation

Deculturation has been described as a situation where the victims of subjugation have been forced, under the threat of extinction, to abandon their own culture and adapt to a new behaviour (Magubane 1979:65).[29] With the free market economy has come free access to foreign popular culture and values. In South Africa, the insidious power of the electronic media is likely to offer a stiff challenge to the ideals of the African Renaissance and it looks poised to win because the adulation of anything American is particularly strong among black youth. Legget (1997:113) gives a timely warning when he writes:

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[28] Kwaito and Kwasa-kwasa are new dance forms which are local adaptations of Michael Jackson and other North American artists' jives. *Indlamu* and *mokhibo*, on the other hand, are indigenous rhythms and dances by men and women respectively.

[29] See also Robeiro, D 1972 *The Americas and Civilization*. New York: E.P Datton; Kunene, D.P 1968 *Deculturation – The African Writers' Response* . In: Africa Today, 15(4); Fanon, F. 1968 *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.

" Having experienced a degree of market and cultural isolation, young black South Africans lack the informal antibodies to resist the consumerist virus being imported into their country via the media...Unless the media are affirmatively employed to celebrate those things that make South Africa special, the country and its young people may flounder on the scrapheap of American wannabes."

It is that type of challenge that has urged Nosimo Balindlela, member of the executive council and head of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture in the Eastern Cape to pilot a bill in the legislature to discourage parliamentarians from watching North American soapies such as the Bold and Beautiful and Days of Our Lives.[30]   Taryn, a young person from the Gauteng province expressed her horror at the cultural colonisation of South Africa through television. This is how she describes her feelings which we quote at length:

" I spent my entire Saturday looking for the perfect gift, but all I could find were garments printed with the American flag. American slogans and American heroes. Even the South African labels were covered in Americanisms. I can't understand why we are so obsessed with the United States of America, when we are a thrilling new country. Should we not be taking pride in that which is our own?

This is the new South Africa- where everyone wears baseball caps, even though baseball is not a national sport: where American bandannas hang from rear-view mirrors of cars and where people just accept that what America does, says and produces is the best...

I worry about our lack of confidence and insecurities about our country and why we look to places like America as superior. I don't deny the fact that we can learn many important lessons form them, but I do believe the World can learn from us too! After all we do have biltong, braaivleis and Jonty Rhodes!" Legget *et al.*, (1997:108-109).

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[30] See Sunday Times of 11 June 2000, p. 2.

In the light of cultural neo-colonialism, for the modern urbanised Zulu society, the picture of *ukulobola* must be drawn differently. It is not easy to find enclaves of Zulu or other national and ethic groupings whose customs and traditions have remained untouched by the inevitable passage of time. The cosmopolitan nature of towns, cities and townships has modified most of the traditional customs as more and more people have intermarried and embraced other African and Western norms such as the American influence described above.

Under the new conditions where electronic and printed media have a greater impact on people's perceptions than oral history, *ilobolo*, as it was practised in former days, is fast receding into oblivion. Primary sources are getting fewer by the day and we are compelled to depend on accounts recorded in journals of missionaries and travellers. These tend to be interpretive and have limited usefulness. Besides, many of the missionaries and colonialists made concerted efforts to discourage customs such as *ilobolo* which they viewed purely as a commercial enterprise. They argued that *ilobolo* encouraged polygyny and forced young maidens to marry older men, consequently, missionaries saw polygamous men as being resistant to the gospel[31] Writing in the Natal magazine of March 1879, a Mr Pinkerton reported effusively on how:

[31] See also Dube, J.L (1958:101) *The Arest and Progress of Christianity and the Heathen Tribes of South Africa.* In: Notes on Church History – Summary of the General Missionary Conferences of South Africa from 1904-1932. Grahamstown: Rhodes University.

" The American mission in Natal made *ukulobolisa* a disciplinable offence in the Natal Churches. It saw it as an "evil system that needed to be rooted out as soon as possible." Men were not sanctioned as local preachers who were not known to countenance the practice. James Dube, a native pastor in Inanda gave away his sister in marriage. He refused to receive anything whatever from her (sister's) husband. His 'heathen brothers' loudly protested that he was throwing away the inheritance of their family. He said " I will not have cattle for my sister, if you fear loss, take my cattle and secure them."

In a similar vein, the Natal Missionary conference held in Durban in May 1879 and consisting of Presbyterian, Wesleyan and Congregational missionaries adopted the following resolution;

" That the custom of *ukulobolisa* whatever might have been its character at first, has grown into a sin of such magnitude that the churches should be purged from it by the adoption of such discipline or other measures as may best effect that end." Pinkerton (writing in the Natal Magazine, March 1879).

Junod (1941:31) in a document on Bantu Marriage and Christian Society, summarised the views of the Berlin mission and other churches that tried to destroy *ilobolo*. These groups based their action on the following assumption.

" Lobolo is an inferior form of human marriage; it ties the individual to his clan; it encourages cupidity and sensuality; it renders impossible a true Christian family life and constitutes an obstacle to progress and civilisation; it is the basis of a heathen (sic) society and creates a community in which a woman works and a man idles; the noblest union becomes a business transaction. Therefore the church must break completely away from the past. Every Christian must renounce his right to lobolo or be excluded from the communion of believers."

It was views such as the above that encouraged the church to work in cahoots with the colonial state to either attempt to abolish *ilobolo* altogether because of its perceived promotion of polygamy or to secure an exemption for Christians, *amakholwa* from customary practices which were deemed by them to be in conflict with 'civilised' notions of 'humanity' (Welsh 1971:17-18).

The exemption of other believers from customary practices had the effect dividing the community into *amazemtiti* or the exempted ones and the rest of the society who were under a dual system of colonial and customary law.

To the Western mind polygamy, assumed to be inextricably linked to *ilobolo*, was the epitome of a lack of 'civilised' norms common and acceptable to all humanity. As a result it jarred the religious sensibilities of the colonists. Needless to say that this view was premised on an erroneous belief that Africans were incorrigibly polygamous. What it failed to take into account was that polygamy was a special privilege of *amakhosi* and other men of great means in society. Ordinary men rarely wed more than one wife.[32] When it happened among men of common rank, it was practised as a means of taking care of widows or young maidens who had been deflowered. Among AmaZulu, if a girl had been impregnated out of wedlock, she was married off to an old man as a way of disciplining her and discouraging other girls from following in her bad example.

Finally, in the open multicultural society that characterises South African urban centres, it often becomes difficult to decide which procedures and norms are to be followed when the bride and groom originate from culturally different communities. By way of example, AmaHlubi's have fixed *ilobolo* while for

AmaZulu *ilobolo* for each marriage is settled by negotiation. Even when spouses belong to the same community, they may come from different social classes and religious affiliations within that community. The one might opt for a civil-cum-religious ceremony while the other might opt for a traditional format.

The difficulty in deciding which standards are to be used results in *ilobolo* evolving into a smorgasbord of various cultures. This state of affairs creates cultural conflicts that are not easy to resolve. In commenting on this crisis Simons (1968:17) makes a perceptive observation that:

> " The conflict reflects contrasting social worlds which cannot be reconciled only in the legal sphere. Most Africans belong wholly to neither, but are alienated from each in varying degrees. Since most people combine elements of both cultures, civil marriage is no proof of what is loosely called 'detribalization.' Conversely, a customary union does not demonstrate a thorough going adherence to tribal laws."

2.6.3 Cash replacing cattle

Since money is increasingly replacing livestock as a means of commercial exchange in rural as well as in urban settings, *ilobolo* in cattle has been virtually replaced by cash especially in the urban centres. The change began in the early part of the nineteenth century and was driven by the missionary enterprise. Van der Host cites a missionary by the name of Brownlee who observed that,

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[32] See Wilson, M 1997 *For Men and Elders.* In The International African Institute.

"As the natives come under the influence of the teaching of missionaries, they at once abandoned red clay, and sought to cover themselves with European clothing, and thus, and in proportion to the spread of missionary influence, the desire for the articles of European manufacture grew and spread, and I think will well satisfy this meeting that to the missionary mainly we owe the great revenue from native trade."

In like manner, the Natal Kaffir Commission of 1852/3 recommended that " all kaffirs (sic) should be ordered to go decently dressed" (Simons 1968:22). This essentially meant " all Africans in Durban and Pietermaritzburg were required by proclamation to wear European clothes" (Magubane 1979:61).

Etherington cited in Magubane (1979:62) illustrates the role played by Christian groups such as the Congregationalists, Methodists, Anglicans and Catholics in carrying out the Commission's recommendation. He writes:

" The clothing which missionaries recommended for the sake of modesty was for many of their converts an introduction to a new system of production and exchange. Whether a convert earned his new clothes by wage labour or fabricated them with European looms and needles, he was entering new kinds of economic relationships. The 'upright houses' which rose in all mission stations embodied materials and demanded the use of tools unknown in the pre-colonial period. Indeed, on the assumption that the builders of such houses had become importers of durable goods, African Christians won exemption from Natal's hut tax."

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The hut tax was introduced in 1848 and was levied on every homestead by the colonial government to raise revenue from the African population (Carton 2000:25). During the depression of the 1860's in Natal, Lt. Governor Keate sought other ways of raising revenue from Africans by doubling the hut tax (Welsh 1971:78).

That, coupled with the then colonial secretary's, Sir Theophilus Shepstone's, proposal to appoint a Headman or Chief as a paid government official to witness African weddings, led to more *ilobolo* being requested to meet the new expenses. The commodification of *ilobolo* is thus a recent phenomenon. It was never part of Zulu custom. Commenting on the Shepstonian proposal, the colonial treasurer, J. W. Ayliff noted with satisfaction that such a move,

> " Secures to our interest the co-operation and fidelity of the chiefs and headmen by delegating to them the performance of popular duties and paying them for doing so." Welsh (1971:81).

Shepstone's proposals became law in 1869 and were known among Africans as *isithabathaba sika Somtseu*. According to Lugg (1975:54), Shepstone established *ilobolo* requirements for different categories of people. There was no limit set to the cattle that hereditary *amakhosi* or chiefs gave for their brides. For appointed *amakhosi*, it was set at twenty (20) herd of cattle; brothers and sons of *amakhosi* gave fifteen (15) herd, while commoners were expected to give ten (10) herd. Section 177 of the new law made it mandatory that all cattle were to be delivered on or before the day of the wedding. Africans protested to no avail that *ilobolo* had been perverted. Makubula told the 1881/2 Commission that " by fixing the number of cattle, *ilobolo* had been made a matter of buying and selling."

Toward the end of the nineteenth and into the beginning of the twentieth century, a combination of colonial intrusion[33] and a succession of natural disasters such as the destruction of crops by swarms of locusts, droughts and cattle diseases deprived Africans of their means of independent livelihood. Carton (2000:55) cites a chief in the middle of the Thukela basin who predicted in 1897 that " because of the loses of so many cattle from the disease (rinderpest), many natives will, for a long time to come, fail to comply with he custom regarding the giving of lobola." A hundred years of systematic dispossession notwithstanding, AmaZulu still have a goat and a beast slaughtered in the course of the transaction.

The substitution of cash for some or all of the *ilobolo* "has often had the consequence of introducing a mercenary element that was not present in the old days' (Mair 1969:153). It is in the light of these new developments that Khuzwayo (1996:254) laments the fact that:

> " Over the years however, lobola degenerated into a commercial transaction. Husbands tell their wives that they are a purchased commodity to be used (abused) as such."

To further substantiate Khuzwayo's statement, I participated in a marriage negotiation, in July 1999, in which the total *ilobolo* was initially pegged at R17 000 (seventeen thousand South African rands). The justification for this figure was that the bride-to-be had recently completed a secretarial course. The ensuing debate prolonged the negotiations over several months. Depending on the locality of the community, some avaricious fathers and uncles have included previously unknown items such as *amasondo we basi* or the wheels of a bus.

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[33] According to Carton, (2000:59) *Blood from your children*. The 1905 Delimitation Commission gave white sugar planters leases that enabled them to evict many African homesteads along the coast of

This extra money is requested to offset the cost of the bus that is used to convey the bridal party to the husband's home on the day of the wedding. This further complicates and slows down marriage arrangements. Commenting on a similar situation among the Ngoni people of Malawi, Phiri (1997:63) notes that *ilobolo* " delays marriage as most men are unable to afford the prohibitive bride wealth." In the urban centres of South Africa, the inflated *ilobolo* not only delays marriages, it has frequently led to prospective couples deciding to live together without going through the formal marriage ceremony. In due course, children are born to the couple and that further complicates the *ilobolo* negotiations.

The monetarisation of the economy has not only commercialised the transaction, but payment in cash or by cheque tends to be made to the bride's father and her mother loses out on that part of the *ilobolo* that traditionally belonged to her. In commenting on this development, Harriet Ngubane (1978:178) points out that,

> " The monetarisation of lobolo not only erodes a woman's economic position but also destroys the support and legitimisation that come with lobolo payments in cattle."

A second and related complication of a cash based *ilobolo* is that, whereas *amabheka*[34] were usually a mixture of older mature cattle and young heifers whose commercial value even by today's standards would be less that two thousand (2000) South African rands, the current practice is to have a single standard based on grown cows. The value of each cow increases as the value of the rand decreases due to inflation. Consequently, left to market forces, it may

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Natal to clear the ground for cane fields.

[34] *Amabheka* is a collective term for *ilobolo* cattle.

not be long before the average *ilobolo* is in excess of thirty to forty thousand rands or more.

2.6.4 Religious and civil forms of marriage

Ilobolo is further complicated by the introduction of civil and religious elements in African marriage. For most urban dwellers with a high Westernisation index, in addition to the requirements to satisfy the cultural mandate, the Christian or civil ceremony and sometimes both are added. The marriage officer's fees, hire of hall or even a hotel, video equipment, printed invitation cards and a splendid meal all add up to make marriage a very expensive undertaking. This is a particular feature characteristic of expensive urban marriages.

Thus, Maluleke (1995:171) asks a pertinent question, "could the expensive taste" be due the desire to " mitigate the appalling living conditions, landlessness, poverty and a low self-image?" Whatever the reasons could be for the 'high life' adopted by urban dwellers, Maluleke (1995:171) concludes, in my view rightly, that "there is an expensive and almost pompous side of township life which sees poverty as something of a disgrace." In order to finance the extraneous expenses and to project an acceptable and expected image, the value of *ilobolo* continues to escalate.

2.6.5 The rise of rampant individualism

Urbanisation has not only brought with it a cash economy, it is in large measure responsible for the break up of the social bonds that held the extended family together and has created new but lose relationships that revolve around political, economic and religious activities. Christianity, in particular, has promoted

freedom of choice by those people who can afford to do so. A particular interpretation of the Genesis (2:24) account of leaving and cleaving has encouraged newly married couples to start their homes in expensive rented accommodation. Socialisation and industrialisation has separated families both spacially and emotionally. The debt trap is growing and unemployment has weakened family responsibilities. In consequence, the groom has to find most, sometimes all, of his *ilobolo*.

Having provided his own *ilobolo* the urban young man further lays to one side some of the pillars that supported the extended family concept. In consequence, if either spouse should die or the marriage break up, the surviving members are left to their own devices and often turn to overburdened government welfare systems. In providing his own *ilobolo* the young man is left with little extra cash to secure *impahla* or the animal(s) to be ritually slaughtered. Besides, the church has summarily and uncritically discouraged its members from participating in what it perceives to be 'pagan' activities and has not provided an alternative. This again leaves the couple to turn on themselves in times of adversity.

Maluleke (1995:170) describes this state of affairs as " a process that alienates township residents from fellow human beings." Some have dissociated themselves from, while others have been pushed into that situation by market forces. Either way, they are cut off from family support systems where, in Nzimande's (1996:50) words:

> " Mutual participation in sacrificial rituals served to strengthen
> kinship obligations as well as channel emotional support from among
> the members of *umndeni* or lineage."

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Alongside the abovementioned negative aspects of individualism, there is the positive side in that, under the new conditions, the couple is freed from the tutelage of parents and relatives. The man assumes the responsibility of fatherhood earlier than he normally would. The new bride, on the other hand, escapes some of the indignities of being a *makoti* to a capricious mother-in-law if she is fortunate enough to be employed in a city away from the natal home of the husband.

2.6.6 A new form of migrancy

One of the social realities of urban life is the effect of the migratory labour system on individuals and the community. Most young people in townships spend long periods of time in the major cities, initially as students in tertiary institutions and later as migrant workers. Political developments in South Africa since the 1994 democratic elections have produced a new type of migrant worker, this time, and one armed with a mobile telephone and a laptop computer. An increasing number of this 'new elite' secure better paying jobs in the bigger cities such as Durban, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town. This new labour force is needed to fill jobs which until recently were reserved for Whites, Indians and Coloureds.[35] Their buying power has improved, consequently those of them who can afford it, buy homes in the inner city or settle in suburbia which until the 1990's were the sole preserve of the white races.

Like their white predecessors, the black elite change jobs and domicile more than working class African people did in the pre-independence era. While the

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[35] In South African terminology, Coloured refers to persons who are either descendents of Malays brought into the country in the latter part of the seventeenth century, or those South Africans of racially mixed parentage.

new form of migrancy has economic benefits, socially it has spawned a generation of rootless and alienated nomads. By the time they are ready to marry, their home communities do not really know them well enough to support them with *izipheko*[36] even on a limited scale. Thus the curtailment of social bonds places the entire cost of marriage on the prospective bride and groom.

2.7 Conclusion

I have suggested in this chapter that the African continent is too diverse to allow for a development of a monolithic view of *ilobolo* even within Southern Africa. Nevertheless, viewed historically, *ilobolo* in pre-industrial societies established and maintained strong family relationships and, in the words of Bekker, (1989:151) provided " the rock on which customary marriage was founded" and sealed "a contract intended by all parties to create a lifelong conjugal association." Further, it was never meant to be a commercial transaction though in recent years the monetary aspect has become paramount. In its original form *ilobolo* presupposed the active participation of *izithunzi* or the shades whose support was obtained through the performance of marriage rituals.

However, with the passage of time, and taking seriously the effects of the post-modern era, many African traditional practices, including *ilobolo* have not disappeared altogether but they have been radically transformed, in other instances, beyond recognition. Internal, but more especially external, forces have resulted in a voluntary and an involuntary acceptance of a commercialised *ilobolo* with the consequent dehumanisation of women. Therefore any attempt

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[36] These are gifts of food, money and wedding presents which Vilakazi (1962:71) to public subscriptions which must be used for an approved public purpose.

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to directly apply the earlier principles of the practice in the twenty first century yields unsatisfactory results.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

"Bridewealth is such an acceptable and valuable custom and it is not the task of the Church to preach or struggle against it. It provides a guarantee of the sincerity of the bridegroom, a symbol of friendship to the family of the bride, and some impediment to divorce. It proves to the young bride that her marriage is something of real importance and her presence in the husband's home is much valued."

Hastings, A (1973:108)

This chapter surveys literature on *ilobolo* and offers a theological critique of the various positions advanced for the function of the custom among the indigenous[37] peoples of South Africa in a post-colonial era. A thorough critique of an institution that is as old as the human race, and is constantly changing, is a daunting task. I am therefore aware that my effort will not be definitive yet that does not absolve me from declaring my own position, of necessity, tainted by my evangelical background. Methodologically, this will require me to

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[37] The use of indigenous here refers to what van Warmelo (1974) refers to as the Bantu speaking peoples of Africa, South of the Limpopo river. He divides these peoples into four major groupings each subdivided into a number of linguistically related people. First are the Nguni, comprising the AmaXhosa, AmaZulu, AmaSwazi originally located along the East coast of South Africa. The Sotho-Tswana found in Lesotho, Botswana, Northern Cape and the former Transvaal. The third group are the BaTsonga found in Mozambique, parts of the Northern Province and North East Natal. Finally the BaVenda, who inhabited the Northern Province. See also Schapera (1934).

distinguish between what was historically and culturally contingent and assess it against what I believe to be biblical norms.

Since the research is carried out in an urban setting, the primary focus will be on present day function of a cash based *ilobolo*. Where reference is made to the former function of the custom, it will only be as a means of illustrating the contrast with the present. The original significance is not easy to establish because of the scarcity of unbiased documented sources. Oral history, where it can still be accessed, does provide important clues but that is a fast diminishing source with the passing on of older people with a rich store of oral tradition. Besides, Dlamini (1994:2) points out that *ilobolo* was practised for a long time without its real significance being properly investigated. There would have been no real need for that since the custom was part of a common store of knowledge. Dlamini concludes that the custom was part of a " sacred heritage of the people which is not made but exists; something to be observed, appreciated and obeyed but never to be criticised or analysed."

It is the view of this study that, far from being an "accepted and valuable custom " as the above quote from Hastings would have us believe, *ilobolo*, in the past and in its present manifestations, is a highly contested practice in need of radical reappraisal. According to Kathide,[38] the need for the re-evaluation of the custom is necessitated by the fact that;

> "The element of greed has been allowed to distort the whole meaning of ilobola. Properly understood, ilobola does not mean a business deal because there is no purchasing or trade involved, instead there is a simple exchange of gifts."

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[38] Rev Agrippa Kathide writing on Holy Sex and Relationships. City Press 06 07 2003.

Kathide goes on to state his position on the subject in these terms:

> " If my position is properly conveyed, which I hope I am doing, I am not advancing the idea of the abolition of ilobola *per se.* It is only that perhaps we need to revisit the expense of the institution in order to make it easy for our young people to marry. No one must be considered too poor to marry. It is the right of everyone who is marriageable to raise a family."

Inspite of the problems that are raised by Kathide and others, *ilobolo* continues to be practised. Its persistence and adaptability in the face of rapid social change and widespread abuse is due, largely to its religious nuances. In other words, the rituals that are done at different stages of *ilobolo* are mainly responsible for its persistence. Thus my view is that it is the religious overtones that seem to keep the custom alive and may continue to do so for some time to come.

I will first examine and critique the various theories that have been adduced to explain the purpose of *ilobolo*. I will go on to look at the evolution of Colonial law with particular reference to marriage in South Africa against the backdrop of Customary Law and then conclude the chapter by looking at the status of *ilobolo* within the current constitution of the Republic of South Africa. In all of that I will seek to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of previous research on the subject before adding my contribution to the debate.

Although my field work was undertaken in an urban setting in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, and most examples were drawn from the Eastern coastline of the African sub-continent among AbeNguni (AmaXhosa, AmaZulu and AmaSwazi), the literature review of this study is of more diverse provenance and ranges across Southern Africa and into parts of the African continent.

In order to examine the seven theories that have advanced to give the meaning and social significance of *ilobolo*, care has been taken to avoid too heavy a reliance on what Radcliffe-Brown calls pseudo history. He describes such a methodology as starting with a known condition and, conjecturing on *a priori* grounds, the temptation is that the researcher concludes that such a condition could have originated in a particular way. The classical historical approach is equally unhelpful because, contrary to popular theories about the objectivity of written data, history is written from the point of vantage of the historian. I therefore judge that Radcliffe-Brown's method of combining comparison and analysis as commendable and that method has therefore been used below to approximate as nearly as possible the best theory that gives meaning to *ilobolo*. It is to the theories that have been proposed to explain the origin and purpose of *ilobolo* that we now turn.

3.2 *Ilobolo* as a trade in human cargo theory.

One of the earlier theories advanced by anthropologists, missionaries and colonial government officials was that *ilobolo* was a sale or payment by the groom or his family to obtain a wife. In many of the older written texts, *ilobolo* was regarded as a bizarre form of trading in human cargo. The earliest proponent of this hypothesis is Joao dos Santos, a Roman Catholic priest who lived in Sofala, Mozambique. He maintained that;

"The Cafres buy of the parents their wives, for Kine, Clothes, or otherwise according to their abilities. And therefore they which have many daughters are rich. If any mislike his wife, he may returne to him that sold her, but with losse of the price payde; and the parents may sell her again to another husband. The wife hath no liberty to forsake her husband. The ceremonies of marriage are dances, and feastings of the neighbours; every invited guest bringing his present of Meale, mais, Inhames, fitches or other victuall for that dayes expenses" Quoted in Jeffreys (1950:155).

Dos Santos' views were to a very large extent representative of the attitude of many European settlers with regard to *ilobolo*. Among the well known later exponents of the wife purchase theory we may include Casalis (1997), Smith (1861), Bennet (1991) and Sansom (1981). Since Casalis wrote extensively on this theory, his views will be examined more closely. As a missionary working among Basotho, Eugene Casalis was of the conviction that the payment of *bohadi* "reduces a woman to a state bordering on slavery." This conviction, Casalis maintained, was based on Michelet's observation that in ancient Rome, the wife was treated as a sister of the husband's children and, in a similar manner, argued Casalis, " the position of married women among South African tribes could not be better described." In support of his contention, he stated that:

"The Mosuto, in speaking of himself and his family, invariably says "I and my children," and it is understood that the wife is reckoned among the latter."

Casalis was aware that his views were not shared by the people he wrote about, noting that "Natives repel with indignation the epithet of *purchase* which we often apply to their mode of marriage." He was also aware that *bohadi* had many disadvantages yet remained convinced that:

"It cannot be denied that marriage by purchase contracted in the presence of witnesses, and guaranteed by the united interests of several parties, has been an invaluable institution of these barbarous people, who, from the absence of any settled principles of morality, might have fallen into a state of brutal degradation" (1997:183)

With regard to the institution of levirate arrangement where a widow was 'inherited' by a male relative of her husband, Casalis (:190) maintained that though the young widow could have borne children to her deceased husband, and be free to remarry, she remained in his family and this " proves that the purchase of which she was object is the chief obstacle to her liberation."

The Casalian theory of *bohadi* as a purchase of women, which parallels a similar view advanced by Dohne (1981) among AmaZulu, has been convincingly refuted by Shooter (1857:48) who made a perceptive observation that;

> " The (isiZulu) verb for buying is *Tenga* but when a Kaffir speaks of 'buying' a wife, he uses the verb *lobola* which means to take away a cutting and, figuratively, to remove a pain. It would seem therefore that the word, when applied to the act of giving cattle for a girl, refers to the pains which the mother endured in bearing and nurturing her; and that they (cattle) were originally given to remove those pains"

It would seem, from philological studies, that *ilobolo* should best be understood as a social balm, as a means of restoring wholeness in the community. Furthermore, from the standpoint of the families involved, *ilobolo* is not paid but it is given or passed from one family to the other. Even when cash is given, the money is referred to as cattle (*izinkomo* or *amabheka*) thus underscoring the socio-religious significance of the transaction. Furthermore, marriage cattle or their equivalent in cash is used as soon as it is received to buy bedroom

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furniture and linen. What is left over buys food and pays for the wedding expenses, most of which are borne by the bride's family. As such *ilobolo* is little regarded as a source of profit to the man receiving it. By comparison with the overall expenses, what the father receives for her daughter's *ilobolo* is only a fraction of the cost of raising her and marrying her off. The etic approach to the custom is seen in that at its annual general meeting, the American Zulu Mission in Natal, working on the theory that *ilobolo* constituted a buying and selling of women, drafted three proposals that;

(i) To demand cattle from the groom's family is contrary to the spirit of humanity and greatly retards the spirit of civilisation and Christianity.

(ii) That it is the duty of all members of the mission to eradicate the practice from the native churches and, finally,

(iii) That Christians who followed the custom be subject to ecclesiastical discipline.

The majority of the delegates voted in favour of the first two resolutions and the third was dropped. Phillips (1953:370) notes that, by contrast, in Lesotho, the Catholic church did not forbid *bohadi* outright because it believed that " there were still regions [in the country] where *bohadi* had kept its traditional meaning."

In general, among the Protestant missions, the majority view was that *ilobolo* was a sale which ought not to be countenanced among the faithful. Hence in 1923 the General Missionary Council of the Dutch Reformed Church decided that;

" ... this committee entirely condemns the heathen custom of bride-price and instructs the missionaries to oppose the custom by all possible means." (van der Merwe quoted in Phillips 1953:218-219).

Colonial authorities in Natal and the former Transkei were also opposed to *ilobolo* because of its perceived link with and promotion of polygamy. Each of the other provinces passed their own versions of the laws that controlled customary practices. The strongest opposition came from the Orange Free State and the Zuid-Afrikanse Republiek. The latter passed a law in 1876 stating that;

" For the promotion of public morality, the buying of women and polygamy among the coloureds will not be recognized in this republic."

Though recent trends have led to the commercialisation of *ilobolo*, it would be an oversimplification to regard such developments as trajectories backwards and use those as the basis to determine the original meaning of the custom. The generally acknowledged fact that in most African societies there was no fixed *ilobolo* lends credence to the view that commercial overtones are of a more recent origin. The language used in *ilobolo* negotiations is not that of buying or selling (see Shooter *supra*).

Ellenberger (1912:272) refutes the popularly held view that *ilobolo* dehumanised women by pointing out that Basotho had no difficulty in recognising female leadership. The same can be said of Bapedi. She cites the example of the rule of queen Mantatise (Manthatisi) of Batlokwa and the existence of other queendoms in Southern Africa. These women had been *lobola*-d yet they were respected and obeyed by their subjects. Similarly Ogbu (1977:247) bemoans the fact that anthropological discussion[39] on *ilobolo* is

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[39] See Radcliffe-Brown (1950:50) and more recently Mair (1971;49,51).

silent or inexplicit about the woman's marital rights. This, he argues, is partly due to the accepted legal terminology such as rights in *uxorem* which imply that *ilobolo* gives the husband, and him alone, the domestic and sexual rights over his wife. He concurs with Fortes (1962) that *uxorial* rights should be replaced by more inclusive conjugal rights as a deliberate move to correct the distorted view. He rightly contends that;

> " In Africa as in Europe and America, marriage confers certain publicly recognized rights and obligations on the husband as well as on the wife, the violation of which is subject to sanction. The fact that in one case marriage is made through the payment of a state license fee and in another, through the payment of bride-wealth, is beside the point...conjugal rights are reciprocal rights that are bestowed upon husbands and wives at their marriage, the latter being established in Africa by bridewealth payment or some other means recognized by members of a given society."

As shown above, another argument that is used in support of the bride-price theory is that upon the early death of the husband, a *lobol*-ad woman is 'inherited' by the brother or some other relative of the deceased man. Such levirate marriages are regarded by Ellenberger (*ibid:* 272) as not being too problematic if seen against the backdrop that the concept of individualism was unknown in former days. Ellenberger contends that a woman was married not only to an individual man but also to his people. Consequently a Mosotho would say of his daughter that she is married not to that man but to "those people". It thus stands to reason that the bride-purchase theory could not have been the purpose of *ilobolo* in African societies.

The sale of women theory is not only contrary to Scripture, but it could not have been countenanced in African ethics. Trade in human cargo would be against natural justice and would incur the wrath of the supernatural forces who did not look with favour at anyone who moved property boundaries, stole, murdered or deprived his or her neighbour of their rights.

However, the *ilobolo* principle of giving and receiving is at the heart of the biblical message. In the Old Testament life begins when God gives his spirit and breathes it into human beings and they become living beings. Later the idea of life as a gift leads Job (3:23) to ponder why is life given to man? The Psalmist rejoices that God has given the earth to man, Ps. (115:16.)

The New Testament emphasises the act of God giving his Son so that, in receiving him, humanity might have life, John (3:16; 10:10). Those who have been recipients of God's grace are, in turn, encouraged to be generous in giving, (Lk. 6:38; Acts 20:35). It is expected of them to support one another and contribute materially to assist fellow humans in need. At the human level, *ilobolo* and *imibondo* are exchange gifts meant to establish and cement kinship relationships and, in the case of royal weddings, *ilobolo* sealed political alliances.

3.3 Exclusive rights to children theory.

Among the numerous supporters of this theory, alternatively known as the child price theory, are researchers such as (Sansom 1976; Murray 1981; Kuper 1970; Goody 1973; Mair 1971 and Schapera 1940). Among the above theoreticians, Gluckman (1950) and Jeffreys (1951) merit special attention. They laid the

foundation for the exclusive rights to children theory that others have since built upon. Stated briefly the theory holds that *ilobolo* transfers the productive capacity of the woman from her natal home to that of her husband. It gives to the husband and his kin exclusive rights to the children born out of the marriage, that is, the rights *in gentricem*.

In a comparative study of the marriage and kinship systems of the Lozi of the then Northern Rhodesia (modern Zambia) and AmaZulu of Natal, Gluckman (1950:189) concludes that, in the latter group, *ilobolo* gave a man and his agnates exclusive rights to all the children born of a marriage[40]. He maintains that the effects of this right are twofold. First, should the wife die before bearing children or the marriage turn out to be childless, her family was obliged to either send her younger sister as substitute wife to raise children on her behalf failing which ilobolo or a portion of it would have to be returned. If, as in the case of the wife purchase theory above, the man died, the deceased husband's kin identified a suitable substitute to 'inherit' the widow in a leviratic relationship or what in IsiZulu is called *ukungenwa*.

From this Gluckman arrives at two further conclusions. First, that rights *in gentricem* mediated through *ilobolo* made it essential for a woman to bear children. This view is strongly supported by Jeffreys (1951:145) in his assertion that marriage among what he calls the Negro "has as its aim the procreation and rearing of children". Secondly and more importantly, Gluckman points out that among AmaZulu a man who does not wish to forfeit rights to his children, does

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[40] In a study of the Barolong bo Ratsidi, the Comaroffs (1981:34) also come to the same conclusion. This assertion is also supported by Murray (1981:112) in his study of *bohadi* among Basotho. Both researchers concur with Gluckman that the transfer of *bogadi* (Setswana) or *bohali* (Sesotho) effected an absolute transfer of rights *in gentricem* from the woman's kin that of her husband. Consequently a Sesotho saying that *ngoana ke oa dikhomo* or that cattle beget children.

everything to treat his wife well, consequently Zulu marriage, unlike that of the Lozi, is more stable.

However, the most vociferous advocate of the child-price theory is Jeffreys. His central argument is premised on the sharp contrast that he draws between the institution of marriage and what he terms the 'lobolo contract'. In citing Scholtens (1923:183) with whom he agrees, he maintains that marriage is an "agreement creating understanding... (it) is *not* (italics added) a contract," (1950:147). This agreement has the procreation and rearing of children as its aim. *Ilobolo*, on the other hand, is "an institution independent of, and distinct from, marriage and that each can exist independently of the other simultaneously in one and the same Negro society (*ibid*:151). It is an economic institution that transfers rights *in gentricem* to the father and his kin." It was for that reason that Jeffreys coined the term child price to refer to *ilobolo*.

His thesis can be faulted first, on his primary assumption that among the people he researched marriage is not a contract but a social agreement. In support of that etic notion he relies entirely on Dutch, French and South African colonial law and pays scant regard to indigenous law and custom. On the contrary, it needs to be pointed out that among AmaZulu, Basotho and many other Southern African indigenous peoples, *ukwakha ubuhlobo* (Zulu), *ho thea sekhotsi* (Sesotho) both mean to establish an enduring relationship through marriage, it is to establish a social contract sealed with the blood of some sacrificial animal. Such a contract is even stronger than a western legal agreement. Besides, the distinction between marriage and *ilobolo* is contrived rather than real. It is based on an atomic epistemology far removed from a holistic African world-view.

Where an African view was canvassed, an *a priori* conjecture was made that the informant to the 1881 South African Government Commission, Chief Cutalele, could not be trusted. Cutalele had been asked to comment on the nature of a ceremony that completed marriage. His response was that *ilobolo* sealed the marriage. That notwithstanding, Jeffreys still aligns himself with the "many European investigators," (Willoughby 1923; Posselt 1926 and Bullock 1927) who dismiss the link between *ilobolo* and marriage citing as their reason the unreliability of Cutalele's statements on other issues and also that "in their opinion" such link does not exist (Jeffreys 1951:150).

Secondly, De Haas (1987:44) whom I fully concur with, notes that even though Jeffreys purports to discuss *ilobolo* in terms of its functions, his theoretical premises are not. They are rather evolutionary and diffusionist. Jeffreys is yet to produce a more convincing argument that marriage originated in the palaeolithic era and thus preceded *ilobolo* which he claims evolved in the neolithic times (Jeffreys 1950:151).

Thirdly, I contend that Jeffreys argues against his own position by quoting several authors (James 1917; Junod 1927 and Krige 1936) all of whom point out that an African marriage is a rite of passage in which the joining together of a woman and man is effected by a ritual in which a communal meal is eaten. What Jeffreys fails to take cognisance of is that for the communal meal to take place, earnest cattle or goats had to be provided and their meat was used for the communal meal. The meal became a visible sign and statement of intent that a marriage process had begun. The earnest cattle or equivalent are as much part of *ilobolo* as the rest of the cattle which follow during and after the wedding ceremony.

In Zulu and in most African societies, marriage is a continuum that begins with the negotiations and culminates in the wedding festivities and continues far beyond, Ngubane (1981:84).

Similarly among Basotho when the negotiating party makes its first appearance, the leader says *"re tlil'o nyala"*, we have come to marry and not just to pass *bohadi*. It therefore requires more rigorous argument than Jeffreys offers to show that marriage and *ilobolo* are unrelated and the latter is child-price. The inadequacy of the child-price theory has, in my view, been correctly shown to be deficient in that *ilobolo* is often given before children are born[41] (Dlamini 1994:14). Moreover, if there was a direct link between children and *ilobolo*, the more children were born in a marriage the higher the *ilobolo* would have to be but there is no evidence in Zulu or any of the Southern African peoples that such was the case. Also, how would the negotiating parties know beforehand whether or not the marriage would produce more or fewer children? The exclusive right to children theory is therefore inadequate in explaining the origin and purpose of *ilobolo*.

Theologically that theory runs the risk of subjecting the wife to her husband and reduces her to " a man's adjunct, someone attached to him in a permanently dependent and subordinate position, his representative in domestic matters, in particular, bearing and rearing his children and keeping his house clean" (Thatcher 1999:95).

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[41] Notable exceptions are the Batswana (see Comaroffs 1981:34) where *bogadi* is passed after the child is born.

Furthermore, it runs contrary to Paul's teaching that a husband and wife are co-equal partners in marriage, (1 Cor. 7:4). That theory assumes that marriage is primarily for producing children. On that point, Thatcher (1999:133) cautions us against making children the central piece in marriage. He writes:

> " There is nothing about the one-flesh model which puts children in a central place. Jesus' use of the model does not suggest children. Men and women are blessed and commanded to be ' faithful and increase' (Gen. 1:28), but the blessing is not formally connected to the institution of marriage. There is no mention of marriage in the creation account in Genesis 1. The woman, made from the flesh of man is to be a man's helper or partner (Gen.2:18) not a mother."

Theologically therefore the interpretation is to be rejected which proceeds from the premise that *ilobolo* gives a man the exclusive rights to children because, biblically, marriage is more than just a biological arrangement to produce children.

Gluckman's thesis that divorce is rare among those communities where *ilobolo* secures the father's exclusive rights to children has been challenged by Evans-Pritchard (1950:190, see also Schneider 1953) who questions the link between an enduring marriage and the economic motif. Evans-Pritchard asserts that among the Azande of the former Belgian Congo payments give the father rights *in gentricem* yet divorce still does happen. Thus observations among the Congolese and other nationalities lead to the conclusion that,

> "It is morals that censure divorce and the law that refuses to recognise grounds for divorce ensures the stability of the union of the husband and wife (*ibid*:191)."

In defence of the Gluckmanian view we do well to remember that, by his own admission, his theory is confined to rural settings leaving out what he terms "the more developed communities in towns and complex rural communities" (*ibid*:206). In those settings he maintains that allowances have to be made for many complicated variables. We conclude from this that Gluckman's theory is of limited application and can therefore not adequately account for the origin and purpose of *ilobolo*.

3.4 The compensation theory

This is the view espoused by Radcliffe-Brown 1950; Ogbu 1977; Junod 1927, Holleman 1970 and Shropshire 1970, among others. These writers maintain that *ilobolo* is best regarded as a means of compensating the family of the bride for the loss in services of their daughter. Among the proponents of this view three main schools of thought may be delineated; the first is represented by Longmore 1959; Murdock 1949; Radcliffe-Brown 1950, and Junod 1927 who regard *ilobolo* as an economic compensation. In Junod's study of the BaThonga, he maintains that *Ilobolo* 'restores equilibrium between various collective units of the clan'. He goes on to say that in this type of compensation:

> " The first group acquires a new member; the second feels itself diminished, and claims something which permits it to reconstitute itself, in its turn, by acquisition of another woman. *This collectivist conception alone explains all the facts* (italics mine). In this way, the acquired wife, though she keeps her shibongo (clan) name, becomes the property of the first group ...she is owned by the new family, herself and the children who will be born of her, Junod (1927:278)."

Junod's claim that the compensation theory, based on the collectivist concept, explains all the facts, is an overstatement. Furthermore for him to say that the woman who has been *lobol*-ad is owned by the new family does not square up with the fact that she retains her *shibongo* , or maiden name. She certainly becomes united with her new family, but not owned in the sense of a person owning property.

The weakness of this theory is similar to the bride-price theory above. Moreover, it would be a strange type of compensation where the groom gives and continues giving of himself and of his substance long after the passing of the initial *ilobolo*. Normal compensation is based on parties to a transaction exchanging equivalent amounts in money or in kind. Normally the compensator gives a rough equivalent of what they have obtained from the person being compensated. This is clearly not the case in *lobol*-ing. Here the expectation is that the groom becomes what an isiZulu dictum describes as *isigodo sokuqhuzula*. Literally this means that the groom is a stump or log from which one continues getting wood splinters. In other words, a son-in-law has to give and continue giving as long as the marriage relationship lasts. He has to be ever ready and willing to assist his in-laws. On this understanding *ilobolo* transactions go way beyond ordinary compensation.

That being the case, and on close examination, *ilobolo* hardly fits the compensation model. A human life and human value can hardly be measured in material terms.

At the opposite end of the scale are those researchers who divest *ilobolo* of all economic considerations and regard it as a symbolic compensation (Radcliffe-Brown 1950; Soga 1931 and Junod, 1927). Soga (: 264) agrees with Kromf that, among Ama-Xhosa, the primary meaning of *ukulobola* is to compensate or indemnify the father for the loss of his daughter through marriage. This type of compensation restores a social imbalance that has been created. Because of that loss, "he has a just claim for compensation." Radcliffe-Brown also subscribes to a compensation theory with the notable difference that the loss, and hence the compensation, is not economic but social. He bases this view on the understanding that marriage involves a "fission and reordering of social structures. Old relationships are modified and new ones made." This, he contends, is particularly the case in patriarchal and patrilocal communities where the woman leaves her natal home and joins that of her husband. Her family suffers the loss of a valued member. Under those circumstances, *ilobolo* becomes a symbolic means of compensating her family. Radcliffe-Brown concludes, regarding *ilobolo*, that;

> " It is commonly used to replace a daughter by obtaining a wife for some member of the family, usually a brother of the woman who has been lost. A daughter is replaced by a daughter- in-law, a sister by a wife or sister-in-law. The family is compensated for its loss, Radcliffe-Brown (1950:50)."

The compensation, like the bride-price theory is premised on an assumption that *ilobolo* is driven, at best, by the desire to make good the raptured social bonds (Radcliffe-Brown) and at worst, by economic considerations. This is not entirely accurate. We have shown in paragraph 3:1 above that this is fallacious reasoning since traditionally there was no *quid pro quo* in *ilobolo* negotiations. The groom or his family gave what they could afford. In the majority of cases,

even what they undertook to give was passed in small instalments throughout the duration of the marriage and beyond. Secondly, Dlamini (1994:11) has correctly pointed out that in traditional African communities the marriage of girls

> "...was eagerly anticipated, and its realization could not have been interpreted to be a loss in the sense of bereavement. It was a happy though painful event; and the need for compensation, therefore, is out of place."

As further support of that view among Basotho, a maiden who had reached marriageable age yet remained single was referred to as *lefetoa*, one who has been passed by. The isiZulu equivalent expression is *umjendevu*. Both terms were anything but complementary. Marriage thus saved maidens from being seen in a negative light. Under those circumstances, the possibility that *ilobolo* was compensation, economic or social, remains to be demonstrated. However, the probability exists that compensation is a later development that came with industrialisation and the cash economy. Even on that score, *ilobolo* in the majority of cases, is far less than the cost which the woman's family incurred in raising and educating her. Besides her family bearing the greater cost of the wedding ceremony, the bride was often expected to give an assortment of presents to members of her conjugal home, these days almost equal in value to the *ilobolo* given to her natal family.

The compensation theory is closely allied to the wife sale theory. A theological critique of the latter (see 3.1 above) equally applies to it.

3.5 *Ilobolo* and marital stability

One theory that has elicited support from a wide variety of scholars[42] and many modern practitioners of *ilobolo* institution is that *ilobolo* guarantees marital stability. It is based on the belief that, having delivered *ilobolo* for the wife, the husband will value her, and with an eye on the *ilobolo* cattle, he will ensure good treatment lest he looses both cattle and the wife.

According to Krige (1981:4) a properly *lobola*-d Nguni woman became fully incorporated into her husband's lineage; thus virtually ruling out divorce and ensuring marital stability. This is in contrast with the Tsonga and Chopi wife who was not fully incorporated into her husband's group. She retained her links with her natal family and had important role to play in political and ancestral cult (Krige :19). The consequence of this strong marital stability among AbeNguni is that it was acceptable for a younger sister of the bride, if the latter died before bearing children or the marriage was childless, to act as a substitute wife.

Gluckman's (1950:189) own position rests on the belief that among AmaZulu *ilobolo* "transfers and woman's fertility absolutely to her husband's agnatic kin group ... (and) associated with this situation" he maintains " we have rare divorce" in patrilineal communities. At face value this theory has much to commend it. That people tend to value things that they have worked for is beyond question. Consequently a marriage in which *ilobolo* has been passed ought to last more than a casual union.

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[42] See researchers such as Krige, E.J 1981; Wilson, M 1981; Raum, O. & De Jager, E.T 1972; Hunter, 1979; Seymour 1927; of whom Gluckman 1950 is the best known exponent.

However, upon closer examination of the stability or otherwise of marriage among AmaZulu as a result of patriliny, Gluckman's view has been challenged by Fallers (1957:106-121). In an analytical study of marriage and divorce among the Soga of East Uganda Faller's study found that a quarter to half of marriages studied ended in divorce, yet the Soga, like AmaZulu, are a patrilineal society. The inescapable conclusion could thus be that in such communities each of the spouses would have a strong attachment to its agnates, consequently feel lonely in the family of the other. Fallers therefore concludes that Gluckman's hypothesis needs to be modified in order to take cognisance of the fact that there may be some societies where patrilineal institutions act to stabilise marriage and others in which patriliny has the opposite effect.

Secondly the link between *ilobolo* and marital stability presupposes that romance played little or no role in African marriages, that it was all a question of the exchange of cattle. This assertion was strongly refuted by Evans-Pritchard (1934:1947) whom we quote at length:

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" There is no necessary or constant correlation between the ideology of marriage and the psychology of the person concerned ... We should be naive to suppose that in consequence the maintenance of marriage relations is due to economic motives. Yet this assumption is at the basis of the assertion so often made that the function of bride-wealth is to stabilize marriage. The word "function" carries no meaning in this context. Is it true, moreover, that the relations between husband and wife persist through what amounts to economic blackmail? No evidence is adduced to justify belief in and functional relationship between the amount of bride-wealth paid to the bride's group and the durability of her union with her husband. No-one would deny that the difficulty of returning a very large amount of wealth may be a motive in the pressure which the parents of the girl bring to bear on her to remain with her husband, but is a hopeless distortion of social realities to regard this as an explanation of bride-wealth."

In somewhat similar vein, Krige (1936) and Dlamini (1994) argue that the relation between the *ilobolo* passed and marital stability is not proven. Instead Dlamini (:7) broadens[43] the criteria for stability beyond economic considerations by pointing to an isiZulu saying that:

> "*Umbantshi udliwa yinhliziyo*, which means that a "person must marry the woman he loves, (such a saying) attests to the general acceptance of love as being the important consideration in marriage even in traditional society"

Thirdly the view that *ilobolo* stabilises marriage in that the husband would do everything to treat his wife well lest he loses his cattle does not take into account the fact that in former days *ilobolo* was given, not by the groom but by his father and other members of his kin. If the marriage failed, he did not stand to lose personally but rather indirectly. Besides, Simons (1958:336) observes

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[43] Dlamini argues, in our view convincingly, that the low divorce rate in traditional Zulu marriages was due to social, legal and moral considerations. Women were mentally prepared to face the challenges of married life with fortitude. In that sense, and properly *lobola*-d woman stayed in her conjugal home against all odds thus *ilobolo* could be said to also contribute to stable marriages.

that it would not be so difficult for a man to neglect his wife thus putting the onus on her for the break up of the marriage.

In the course of time, the situation has changed in a cash based economy, the man does provide all or almost all the *ilobolo* with little help from his lineage. Even then marriages still end in divorce irrespective of *ilobolo* given. It is therefore inaccurate to suggest that *ilobolo* on its own contributes to marital stability.

In our view, *ilobolo* could have been one of several contributory factors to marital stability, the others being conflict resolution mechanisms that used to be readily provided by members of the extended family; the sedentary nature of traditional communities compared to the modern and highly mobile society and, more importantly, traditional religion which rendered marriage bonds to be permanent relationships.

Theologically what stabilises marriage is not what one can get out of the relationship but rather the ontological nature of marriage as a divine institution. Jesus' reply to the Pharisees' question about divorce brings the issue to the fore. When asked to give his view on divorce, he pointed his interlocutors to the origin of the human race to show that the creation of the human pair and the institution of marriage were divine acts.

A biblically based marriage presupposes a self-giving love that includes romance, companionship and long term commitment. The joy of erotic human love is beautifully portrayed in Song of Songs where the woman is not a mere object of man's love but she takes the initiative in expressing her feelings (Thatcher 1999:11).

It would be simplistic to place too much weight on material possessions and gifts as the glue that keeps marital relationships stable. The history of fallen humanity is replete with well-endowed people with poor relationship skills. Of the numerous causes of interpersonal problems in such relationships one might mention poor communication, James (4:1-3), interpersonal tensions, undefined roles, inflexibility and conflict of values.

3.6 *Ilobolo* as a sign that validates a marriage

There is a theory which maintains that the passing of *ilobolo* validates the marriage. Seen in this light, *ilobolo* acts as a kind of receipt of payment made. Thus Mair (1969:14) commenting on the consequences of cattle payment maintains that the transfer of "the agreed number of cattle from the husband's to the wife's group" was an indispensable element in the validation of marriage. See also (Ogbu 1977:258; Manona 1980:192; Bekker and Coertze 1982:108)

I submit that though this view may reflect the most prevalent understanding of the function of *ilobolo*, it is inaccurate. In most African societies, a marriage was virtually concluded once the *tlhabiso* ceremony[44] had been performed among Basotho, or *indlakudla* goat had been slaughtered among AmaZulu. From that time onwards, and in both societies, the woman was referred to as the bride and the man as groom. Consequently what validates the marriage is the rapprochement mediated between the two families by the negotiator or *umkhongi*. The rest of the *ilobolo* that will be passed in due course is, at best, to

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[44]The *tlhabiso* ceremony among Basotho is the feast at which an ox or sheep is slaughtered by the wife's family as a sign that they are giving consent to the impending union.

be regarded as a seal that ratified an already established relationship. Holleman (1970: 42) has stated the case more succinctly:

> "It is as wrong to base the validity of Bantu marriage upon the transfer of cattle as it is illogical to base the completion of the marriage contract upon the transfer of the woman. Both events are merely steps towards the ultimate completion of the contract, and an affirmation that of a legal validity which was accepted from the time the parties concluded the affination agreement"

Among Batswana, *bogadi* is sometimes witheld until the birth of the first child. Even though *bogadi* is so very important, holding it back or delaying to pass it does not invalidate the marriage. This is a further argument against a view that *ilobolo* is a means of validating a marriage. The validation takes place much earlier before the balance of the *ilobolo* is passed. Besides, *ilobolo* was never given in full before or at the time of the marriage.

An important theological question to be raised with regard to *ilobolo* as a means of validating marriage (Mair 1969, Ogbu 1978, Manona 1980) is to ask how one would describe the union of Adam and Eve and subsequent marriages in Scripture which are silent about whether or not *ilobolo* was passed. What validates marriage in those instances seems to be a willingness to relinquish one's original family ties and give themselves over to their spouse. A marriage is valid if there is mutual consent between the parties and invalid if either or both renege on the commitment. That commitment is exemplified in the fictitious marriage of Hosea and Gomer, Hos. (1-3). It is sustained not by legal but moral requirements. It is as Israel remained faithful to God that the covenant relationship remained intact. In the New Testament, the mutual giving of each other forms the basis of the Ephesians 5 passage on marriage

relationships. Therefore the gifts of *ilobolo* are best regarded as outward expressions and a sign and seal that a valid marriage has taken place.

3.7 *Ilobolo* as a form of economic security for the woman.

Proponents of this view argue that *ilobolo* was a means of according women economic security and social stability. Harriet Ngubane (1987) adopts a positive stance towards *ilobolo* where cattle are given in exchange for a wife. In her view such a practice was advantageous to a woman in two ways. First it provided a direct economic asset to a newly wed woman. She points out that among AmaZulu one of the *ilobolo* cows became the personal property of the bride, its increase accrued to her. Later in life when her daughter married, the bride – now – turned mother was given *inkomo ka nina* or the mother's cow sometimes called the virginity cow to acknowledge the role she played in raising up her daughter.

Gluckman (1950:195) goes beyond the virginity cow as a form of economic security and asserts that, in accordance with what he terms the 'house property complex' practised among the indigenous peoples of South Africa and others North of the Limpopo river, a *lobola*-d Zulu woman had land, cattle and gardens allotted to her by her husband. These became her unalienable possessions while she was alive, even if she were to be divorced. Upon her death, the property would go to her sons or to those of her sister in case of sororal polygamy.

Secondly, in Ngubane's terms, *ilobolo* in cattle became a source of security for the woman in that the cattle she received when she got married would be used to obtain a wife for her brother who, in turn, was obligated to protect her when the need arose. In cases of childlessness, a properly *lobola*-d woman's sister could raise children for her by marrying her husband. In such an arrangement, Ngubane (1978:177) concludes, the substitute woman or *inhlanti* (in isiSwati):

> " Strengthens the household of her sister while at the same time gaining her own household. Thereby the primary axiom of kinship organisation is fulfilled, that everyone should have parents, siblings and children."

A third advantage that Ngubane associates with *ilobolo* cattle is the ritual power that women exerted behind the scenes during the *ilobolo* negotiations. She concludes that "the power of women is implicit and operates within the domestic (kinship) domain, while that of men is explicit and has to do with the external domain."

What she finds difficult to come to terms with in a cash based *ilobolo* is that the marriage transaction becomes privatised; it is commercialised and tends to trivialise marriage. She laments the fact that in such situations:

> " The structure of a kinship-based society, which by definition is one in which rights and obligations derive primarily from bonds of agnation and consanguinity, as in the institution of *lobolo*, is to undermine the whole social fabric."

Ngubane's position seems to be that the custom of *ilobolo* remained unproblematic until the introduction of a cash economy among Africans. As I have argued in chapter two above, some form of exchange dates back to the

origin of *ilobolo* itself. Prior to cattle being used as legal tender, beads and hoes, among other things, were used in exchange for women. Cattle were used later to supplement the other *ilobolo* gifts. Ngubane (1978:173) does acknowledge that in the *loboli*-ng process a combination of cattle and money was the more common practice. Therefore to draw a contrast between *ilobolo* in cattle on the one hand and money on the other is unhelpful. It tends to cloud the fundamental problems associated with *ilobolo*.

In the first instance, that the bride had to bring her own milk cow to her new home underscores the fact that she was regarded as an outsider until she had borne children. Secondly, the theory behind *inkomo ka nina* or the mother's cow seems to have been informed by the belief that girls ought to maintain their virginity until marriage whereas boys seem to have had less stringent measures placed on them.

Even more seriously is the division of responsibilities between women and men in the *loboli*-ng process. The former are said by Ngubane (1987:180) to have exercised their influence and power in the domestic realm " while that of men is explicit and has to do with the external domain." This Parsonian view has been shown to be not above criticism by feminist theoreticians such as Johnson and Smith (1989) and Friedman (1963) among others.

According to Krige (1981:4), a properly *lobola*-d woman became fully incorporated into her husband's lineage thus virtually ruling out any divorce and ensuring marital stability. This is in contrast to the Tsonga and Chopi wife who was not fully incorporated to her husband's group. She retained her links with her natal family and had important roles to play in political and in the ancestral cult (Krige :19). The consequence of this strong marital stability among

AbeNguni is that it was acceptable for a younger sister of a bride to step in as substitute wife if the latter died before bearing children or was childless.

If we were to accept uncritically Ngubane (1987) and Gluckman's (1950) theory that *ilobolo* ensures economic security for the woman, then the mercenary motive would be paramount. It runs counter to the original purpose of why Eve was created to be a companion and a helpmate for the man. In the New Testament, the analogy of Ephesians 5 between husbands and wives, on the one hand, and Christ and the church, on the other underscores the fact that marriage is entered into not for the sake of what one will get out of it, though there is much that one gains, but it is a free relationship entered into out of love for the spouse.

However Ngubane (1978) and Junod's (1941) other observation that *ilobolo* for the sister was used to obtain a bride for him thereby strengthening family ties, has merit. It is premised on the basic unity of the community and the corporate nature of human society. *Ilobolo* as the fundamental means of knitting society together finds strong support in Scripture where members of a household of faith are urged to support and do good to all people but more especially to those of the household of faith, Gal. (3:10).

3.8 *Ilobolo*, some reflections from within.

Having surveyed mainly the outsiders' views and understanding of the origin, function and purpose of *ilobolo* we shall conclude this chapter by examining how insiders, both those who are for and those against the practice estimate the value of *ilobolo*. We will critique each position in the light of modern practice

and then draw some preliminary conclusions which will be tested in the field research in chapter four below.

Looking first at those who maintain a positive attitude to *ilobolo*. J. H. Soga (1931:263) begins his treatise on *ilobolo* by pointing out that;

> "...without *lobola* men would live much as animals do. They would take women, live with them until such time as they desired a change, then discard them for others, and continue to act thus *ad libitum*."

On that view, Soga concludes that *ilobolo* was instituted to 'protect womankind'. He is fully aware that it was practised differently in various African communities, nevertheless its " main object namely, the security of status and the protection of the married woman may be assumed as universal (: 264). Ngubane (1977) concurs with Soga with the one *proviso* that it was *ilobolo* in cattle, not as cash, that secured a woman's economic position and legitimised her status in her conjugal home. Dlamini (1994:19) adds that "the original purpose of *ilobolo* among the Zulus seems to have been the securing of valid marriages and hence the procreation of legitimate children."

The second purpose of *ilobolo*, Soga notes, is " to secure the acquiescence of both parties to the marriage contract" (: 265). Once the parents of the girl had satisfied themselves that the young man could marry their daughter, he would pledge his sincerity by presenting a *lobola* cow or ox or simply pledge his faith to marry the young woman. In either case, he would be *loboli*-ng. The acceptance of the animals represented a peace treaty between the two families and a guarantee protecting the wife[45]

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[45] See Lobola and the Law in Echo (supplement to the Witness. Thursday, October 15, 1998 p.7. Anonymous writer.

Following Krige, Dlamini (1994:19) analyses the formal address used by the negotiators and points out that in their mannerisms and careful choice of words, their mission was clearly aimed at establishing a social and spiritual bond between the families of the bride and the groom. He aligns himself with Allot (1968) who reasons that;

> "The 'bride-price' serves several legal purposes in African law. To begin with, its ceremonial transfer from the husband's to the wife's people is a public record and expression of the coming into being of a new matrimonial relationship. It is thus both evidence of a solemn transaction and also the validating act by which it is concluded."

As an indication that such a bond was meant to be permanent, there was traditionally no fixed number of *ilobolo* cattle and the groom's family were expected to continue passing *ilobolo* throughout the duration of the relationship. The words of Vilakazi (1961:63) are apt;

> "The passing of *ilobolo* which is reciprocated by *umbondo* is a continuous process that initiates, maintains and strengthens the relationship between the two households."

The same idea is expressed by a Sesotho saying that "*mosadi ha a qetwe*" which literally translates that it is not expected that *bohadi* for a wife will ever be fully paid off.

A third emic understanding of *ilobolo* is one suggested by Canon Luke Pato who posits the view that *ilobolo* should not be understood as a commercial transaction, rather it should be viewed as a "symbol that legitimises the marriage. Among AbeNguni this would mean that a woman has legitimate

rights in the house established by her marriage. Krige (1981:3) points out that those rights include:

> " Cattle and available lands (however small nowadays) allocated to her house, bride-wealth received in respect of its daughters, produce from its own field and any livestock or assets earned by the wife on her own account."

In more recent times Majeke (1998:49), arguing in favour of the preferred use of the term *lobola* over bride-wealth by the South African Law Commission, maintained that "*lobola* is a blood contract, a mandatory and an imperative *sine qua non* condition for any marriage in indigenous African communities." And in our view, it was and remains as the recognised means of uniting a man and his wife, and she with his shades, hence Skosana's (1998:51) plea that "abolishing lobolo would be an assault on African religion."

In his famous "I am an African" declaration and that he was proud of his ancestry and culture, Marwede (1945; 6) made an impassioned plea for the retention of *ilobolo* on the grounds that it was a central pillar of African culture. He outlined its purpose as a means of encouraging young men to be industrious, obedient and served as a means of maintaining high moral standards. According to him, all of that constituted the central characteristics of *ubuntu*. He argued that in its environment, *lobolo* was a 'good and serviceable custom. It worked in harmony with other customs characteristic of clan organisation."

Lindiwe (not her name) cited in Thabo Masemola (Witness, Thursday July 24, 1997 p.7) expresses her pride "that my husband paid *ilobolo*. He proved his worth in the eyes of my parents and relatives. Without *ilobolo* I'd feel

cheapened. I don't believe my husband would respect me if he got me for nothing."

As indicated above, among insiders, Soga (1931) is the most enthusiastic of the supporters of *ilobolo* since, in his words, it was instituted to protect womanhood. Likewise Vilakazi (1961) and Marwede (1945) are two other important proponents of the custom. These writers regard *ilobolo* as a key pillar to African culture. A pertinent theological issue that presents itself then becomes the question of how one achieves a balance between cultural relevancy and biblical faithfulness?

Supporters of the culture of *ilobolo* can refer to many precedents in Scripture where in Luke (4:16) Jesus is portrayed as someone who maintained his links with the Jewish synagogue. He did not shun a social event such as a wedding ceremony at Cana, John (2:1-11), or avoid the accepted teaching methods of his time where parables and illustrations drawn from life were used by rabbis.

However, the same Christ made very strong statements against Judaism and its fixation to human rules. The traditions of the Pharisees received sharp criticism from him, Acts (15:1ff). His attitude to culture in a changing context during his earthly ministry is summed up in a cryptic statement that wisdom demands that new wine has to be poured into new wine skins in order to preserve both, Matthew (9:17). Similarly, with *ilobolo* it is not enough for its supporters to preserve it because it happens to be an old custom. Social changes demand that adjustments be made even to old customs.

As will be shown in chapter four below, *ilobolo* remains and highly contentious issue even among the insiders. In response to Marwede's Africanist argument, Mamabolo (1945:18) retorts that custom only "justifies its continuance when the purpose it serves is good and big enough to outweigh the inconvenience accompanying its observance." Most of those who express a contrary view to Marwede's (Chigwedere 1982; Masondo 1992; Radebe 1997) bemoan the fact that it remains a cultural symbol unfortunately denuded of the elements of that culture. Thus the cultural argument has severe limitations.

Whereas *ilobolo* was a mandatory requirement of customary marriage, with the rapid changes from an agricultural economy to the modern industrial state whose influence reaches to the remotest corners of rural settings, the questions being asked now are: how helpful is it to remain with the past? Should we rather not build on foreground now (Mamabolo 1954:30)? This leads us to the recent debate on the status of *ilobolo* and colonial law, its role in and post-colonial and post-apartheid society.

3.9 *Ilobolo* and Colonial Law

The former Natal and Zululand, currently referred to as KwaZulu-Natal since 1994, lies on the Eastern part of South Africa and is bordered in the North by Swaziland and Mozambique and, in the South, by the Umzimkhulu river. The British took control of this province in 1843 and annexed it as a separate British colony in 1856. Blacks who lived in that part of the country, as did others

elsewhere in South Africa, were administered under a dual legal system, namely the Roman Dutch law or the colonial law as well as Customary law.[46]

Contact and conflict between the two legal systems came into sharp focus by the middle of the nineteenth century. Prior to that the colonists paid scant regard for the legal and social systems of the indigenous peoples of South Africa. Justification for non-recognition of customary laws being the fear by the colonists of subjecting "a section of the population to an inferior brand of justice."[47] With regard to the marriage customs of Black persons in the Natal colony and also in the other provinces, the Government passed Ordinance 3 of 1849 which grudgingly recognised polygamy and *ilobolo*. It allowed courts the freedom to operate a dual legal system in cases involving Black persons provided that Customary law " was not repugnant to the general principles of humanity observed throughout the civilised world" (Bennett 1985:70). However, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, colonialists and missionaries were strongly opposed to customary marriage and the passing of *ilobolo* on the grounds that such unions amounted to the purchase of women, encouraged polygamy and reduced women to slaves.

It does seem, however, that economic considerations were the real motive behind the colonial government embarking on a systematic attempt to abolish customary marriages. Welsh (1971: 69) notes how a memorandum presented to the Lieutenant –Governor Scott in 1856 by colonists in Durban argued that;

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[46] Customary marriage law refers to marriage according to African law and practice. In pre-colonial days the minimum requirements were that the families of the spouses agree to the union and, as evidence, secondly, *ilobolo* in cattle, money or other goods of value in varying combinations, be passed by the groom's family to that of the bride and, finally, and ritual be performed to separate the bride from her lineage both the living and the shades and be incorporated to that of her husband.

[47] See South African Law Commission Report, 1999:6, herein after to be referred to simply as *Report*.

" This evil (polygamy and *ilobolo*) destroys all love between man and wife- it encourages war as a means of procuring cattle to pay for (wives) and panders to their (i.e. men) lust and idleness; and by fearful destruction of life, brings about an inequality of the sexes...Polygamy thus renders them (men) *unquiet subjects of Government, and useless for the purposes of industry – bad citizens and disinclined to labour"* (texts within brackets and italics have been added.)

Seven years later in 1863 another memorandum declared that polygamy;

"...is associated with customs that are peculiarly odious; that are revolting alike to the good sense and the Christian feeling of the entire European population of this settlement; and ...loudly call for the early adoption of judicious measures by the Government to restrain and prohibit them."

Such judicious measures were proposed by Sir Theophilus Shepstone and enacted as marriage law in 1869. The law stipulated the number of cattle to be passed as *ilobolo* by different categories of people; that the Government appoints its official representative or *iphoyisa* (policeman) to officiate in African weddings for a fee.[48] His function, according to Vilakazi (1962:71), was to *buzela* or ask the bride three times, on behalf of the state, if she really loved the man who asked for her hand in marriage. The Act exempted Africans from customary stipulations if they wished to marry by Christian rites and in the latter case *ilobolo* was made optional and *iphoyisa* dispensed with (Welsh, 1971:103).

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[48]Welsh (1971:77) notes that one shilling was to be paid to the government in order to register the first marriage of a Zulu couple. For every subsequent marriage, three shillings were to be paid in every pound sterling of the lobolo given or to be given. The hut tax raised from seven to eleven shillings. Both developments were designed to produce substantial revenue for the colonial government while at the same time discouraging *ilobolo* and polygamy.

The Act created as many problems as it tried to solve. Problems persisted and the colonial Government codified African law in 1884 and 1887. The codified documents 'were so starkly and sketchily made that administrators of native law continued to enforce their own version of customary law' (Welsh 1971:166)

We turn now to other parts of the county to consider the effects of colonial law on African customary marriages. Following the annexation of the Transkei to the Cape Colony between 1877 to 1894, magistrates in the annexed territories were given discretionary powers to apply customary law,

> "...provided that such Black law shall not be opposed to the principles
> of public policy or natural justice; provided further that it shall not be
> lawful for any court to declare that the custom of *lobola* or *bogadi* or
> similar custom is repugnant to such principles," Bekker (1989:41).

The status quo was upheld with minor modification until 1988.[49] The general import of the recognition of customary law was that where there was potential for conflict between customary and colonial laws, the latter was taken as the norm and the court had to decide whether the former was dispensed with.

In the Transvaal Republic, which included the present provinces of Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Northern and parts of the North West provinces, and also in the Cape Province, customary marriages founded on the passing of *bogadi* (Setswana) were not recognised by the courts until the passing of legislation in 1885 which included the repugnancy clause. Likewise, according to Olivier *et al.*, (1995; 190) customary law was not recognised in the Orange Free State except in Thaba-Nchu and Witsieshoek where the commandant was empowered to hear appeals from the chief's courts.

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[49]See s1 of the law of Evidence Amendment Act 45 of 1988

The next major milestone in the development of the dual system was the 1927 Black Administration Act which, while retaining the repugnancy clause, afforded greater recognition to customary laws in South Africa. Bennet (1980:46) avers that the real intent of the Act may have been to avert a growing urban political threat to White hegemony. Consequently the government revived traditional institutions with the hope that they would act as political decoys. Commissioners' courts were given discretionary powers by the Act to apply Customary law:

> " Notwithstanding the provisions of any other law, it shall be in the discretion of the Commissioners' Courts in all suits and proceedings between Blacks involving questions of customs followed by Blacks, to decide such questions according to the Black law applying to such customs except in so far as it shall have been repealed or modified: Provided that such Black law shall not be opposed to the principles of public policy or natural justice: Provided further that it shall not be lawful for any court to declare that the custom of *lobola* or *bogadi* or other similar custom is repugnant to such principles," Olivier *et al.*, (1995:199).

This principle remained in force until 1988 when the Law of Evidence Amendment Act extended this application of customary law to all persons other than those of the Black race. Secondly the sphere of application of customary law was extended to all courts in the country (Report, 1999:13).

Following the passing of the 1988 Amendment Act, *ilobolo* is no longer essential[50] in respect of civil marriages among Blacks but it is a legally enforceable contract if promised. Its payment or non-payment does not affect the validity of a marriage. According to Olivier *et al.*, (1995:93) the husband and the woman's father enter into an ancillary contract in regard to the passing of *ilobolo*. The relationship or contract is thus governed by customary principle (Report, 1999:53). In view of the many customary systems in South Africa, the Law Commission recommended that the new law 'display a flexibility that allows for groups to marry according to their own customary laws' (Report, 1998:41).

In case of divorce, the action is to be conducted by a competent court of law and the consideration for the return of *ilobolo* is unlinked to the divorce process because, the *ilobolo* contract is between the man and his father- in- law whereas the marriage is between the man and his wife if both are over the age of twenty one at the time of marriage (Report, 1998:60-61). The husband, if he is the aggrieved party, is free to claim return of *ilobolo* subject to the necessary deductions.

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[50] According to the South African Law Commission's Report (1998:53) that decision came about following and recommendation of and workshop in the (South Region), Adv. N. Cassim, the Women's Lobby, the House of Traditional leaders (Free State), Mr A.M Moleko and the Rural Women's Movement. Exception to this recommendation was voiced by the Traditional leaders in the Northern Province and Eastern Cape as well as a Commission's workshop in Mpumalanga.

The former TBVC states and the six self-governing territories[51] were given greater powers to legislate with respect of marriage laws. Consequently in Transkei customary and civil marriages were placed on an equal footing. The couple was free to choose which form they were going to follow after the registering officers had fully explained the differences. The marriage would thus be governed by the rules applying to their choice at the time. This means, for instance, that if customary rites were followed, polygamy would be permissible (Olivier *et al.*, 1995:96). The South African Marriage Act of 1980 and the Black Administration Act of 1927 which were in force before 1988 governed the citizens of Bophuthatswana. Similarly, Venda and Ciskei did not pass their own marriage laws.

In terms of section 229 of the *Constitution of South Africa*, laws that were in force in the TBVC states and the six self- governing territories were to remain in force until repealed or amended. When clashes emerged as a result of upholding legal pluralism in South Africa, the three options to be followed were that first; procedural norms for the conflict of laws were to be applied, secondly, the two systems would have to be eventually integrated and finally, it was conceivable that one of the systems would have to be abolished (Olivier *et al.*, 1995:219). The *stutus quo* in South Africa is that under the new marriages Act, known as the Recognition of Customary marriages Act of 1998, both customary and civil or Christian marriages are on *par* and the couple is free to choose either option (Report, 1999:53).

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[51] The TBVC states refers to the former semi autonomous 'states' or Black homelands within the Republic of South Africa. These included Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei. The six self governing territories were even less autonomous and these were Gazankulu, Lebowa, Kwa-Ndebele, Kwa-Zulu and Qwa-qwa and Ka-Ngwane.

3.10 Recognition of Customary Marriages Act[52].

The Act was assented to on 20 November 1998 and commenced on 15 November 2000. First, it legalised all marriages that were entered into following customary rites before the date of enactment and it covered all subsequent marriages from that time onwards. However, following the commencement of the Act, additional requirement were that prospective spouses must both be above 18 (eighteen) years in age; they must consent to be married under customary law provided that at least one of the participants should be following the customs of his or her community as applicable in South Africa.

Secondly, either spouse of a customary marriage entered into before the 15 November is required to register such a marriage before 14 November 2002. All other customary marriages are to be registered three months after the conclusion of the ceremony or even longer as the Minister may prescribe. In registering the marriage, article 4(a) states:

> " A registering officer, if satisfied that the spouses concluded a valid customary marriage, must register the marriage by recording the identity of the spouses, the date of the marriage, any lobolo agreed to and any other particulars prescribed."

A certificate of registration has to be issued. However, failure to register a customary marriage does not affect its validity. Once married, either of the spouses has full status and capacity to acquire and dispose of assets. Thirdly, polygamy is allowed if entered into following customary rites and the interests of all parties are sufficiently safeguarded. Finally, provision for divorce is made

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[52] Statutes of the Republic of South Africa - Husband and Wife, see Recognition of Customary Marriages Act, No. 120 of 1998; Issues 33 and 36 - Supplementary, p 671-683.

in that a court of law may grant a divorce decree if it is on the grounds of irretrievable breakdown of the marriage.

3.11 Conclusion

In this chapter we have shown that *ilobolo* is an essential element of customary marriage not only in Southern Africa but also throughout most parts of the African continent. That contrary to the widespread view that the custom has had an economic import as its main focus, according to the view that is widely accepted among its practitioners, its aim was to establish new relationships between the living lineages and the respective shades or the living dead. The various positions that have been advanced to account for its origin and purpose have been evaluated in the light of Scripture.

At present, it must however be admitted that the economistic motif tends to occupy centre stage thus problematising the practice in its modern application. That notwithstanding, all the problems raised by *ilobolo* especially the gender imbalance does not seem to bring the practice to an end. Its tenacity could be due to its religious connotations. The validity of that theory will have to be tested in chapter four below. Of immediate concern in the next chapter will be to determine whether *ilobolo* is gaining popularity or is it about to outlive its usefulness. If so, why and if not, why not?

CHAPTER FOUR

ASSESSMENT OF CONTEMPORARY PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES

TOWARDS *ILOBOLO*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will identify and elucidate what was judged to be the most appropriate methods and techniques used to collect data both to support as well as refute the theory enunciated in chapter one above, that *ilobolo* has been sustained and may continue to be practised because of its religious significance and this has important pastoral and missiological concerns. We align ourselves with scholars such as Sjoberg *et al.* (1991:29) who postulate that "theory and research methods intersect and (interact)." In other words, the research method used should be one that is congruent with the theory to be tested. It is the view of this researcher that ethnomethodology, with its emphasis on the quality of time spent with respondents, is likely to produce the best results.

I shall therefore explicate the premises underlying the qualitative methodology and contrast it with the conventional quantitative method. Most important still, I contend that, like all research tools, the qualitative approach has its own weaknesses. I will indicate what steps were taken to minimise their effect during the field research undertaken in order to test the attitude of the residents of Edendale towards *ilobolo*.

In assembling the data, three interrelated approaches were used. First, I gathered the views on *ilobolo* of a cross section of residents of Pietermaritzburg and surrounding towns of Kwa-Zulu Natal. My source of information was The Natal Witness, commonly known as The Witness. The Echo, a weekly insert of The Witness, as well as other newspaper articles published between 1990 and 2000 were also used to assess readers' views on *ilobolo*. The ten-year period was selected as a means of enabling me to see if there was an observable shift in people's attitude towards *ilobolo* in recent years. If so, how much, and also what could have caused it. As with most such media reports, they necessarily paint in broad-brush strokes the terrain covered by debates on *ilobolo*.

Next, I isolated themes that emerged from that research, compared and contrasted my findings with the results of a snap survey of ten people in Edendale and surrounding townships. A third phase of the data gathering process was in-depth interviews of ten selected informants both male and female, married and unmarried. Fourthly, I completed the data gathering exercise by recording my *observations* and *reflections* of two marriage negotiations in which I was involved in over several months. Schematically the procedure is shown in the diagram shown in Fig. **4.1.1** below.

Fig. 4.1.1

Analysis of 14 newspaper reports

1990-2000

Snap survey of ten Edendale

Residents

10 intensive interviews

2 case histories
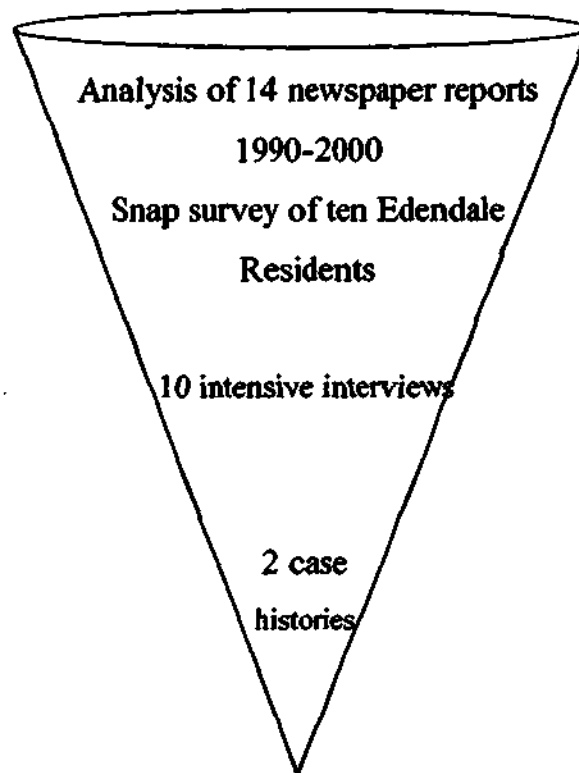
4.2 Choice and description of research methodology

Given the fact that the central concern of this study is to seek to understand not so much the nature, but the impact, both pastoral and missiological, of a cash based *ilobolo* on contemporary Zulu community, I shall seek to find out how modern isiZulu speakers make sense of a world in which *ilobolo* plays such a pivotal role in people's lives. My focus is not on that society generally but on Zulu believers in an urban environment. Unlike the more commonly used quantitative approach which, in the words of Stake (1995:35), "nullifies context in order to find the most general and pervasive explanatory relationships," qualitative methodology, also referred to as ethnomethodology, phenomenological, holistic, naturalistic, biographical research takes on board "a wide sweep of contexts: temporal, spatial, historical, political, economic,

cultural, social and personal (: 43)". It recognises that social research is first and foremost a social enterprise (Sjoberg *et al.* 1991:31).

Social scientists have, in the last thirty years, since observed that social norms and practices are in a constant state of flux and lie beyond the narrow confines of quantitative approach with its emphasis on massive statistics to test propositions. By contrast, the qualitative method, with its bias towards looking at phenomena through the perspective of the people being researched, is by far the better choice. Its intent is to examine the reasons for the existence of social practices, how they are produced and reproduced (Sharrock and Anderson 1986:113).

At the turn of the twentieth century anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski, Margaret Mead, Evans-Pritchard and Emtree introduced ethnography as a means of studying small communities in pre-industrial societies. In the cause of time, an increasing number of anthropologists and sociologists recognised the need to come close to the subjects they were investigating. Thus this new research design took centre stage in sociological debates in the late 1960's. Until then, functionalist and positivist sociologists such as Talcott Parsons believed that their social theory was capable of being objective and scientific. By contrast, ethnomethodologists such as Alfred Schutz, Aron Gurwitsch and others[53] argued differently and saw other possibilities.

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[53] **Harvey Sacks** (1965) who promoted and developed the idea of analysing ordinary conversation as a tool to understanding society; **Aaron Cicourel** (1964) critiqued conventional sociological methods which he saw as carrying out "measurement by fiat"; **Kenneth Leiter** (1980) was concerned to link research and texts.

Building on the foundations laid down by his mentor Husserl, Schutz applied his phenomenology to the social sciences showing particularly how members of a society construct social reality (Leiter 1980:4). He maintained that they do so by making use of the stock of knowledge. This knowledge is socially derived and expressed in a language medium embedded in culture. Thirdly, they practice common sense reasoning. However, the foremost writer who laid the foundations of, and popularised modern ethnomethodology twenty years earlier was Harold Garfinkel. He argued that a study of everyday common sense knowledge or experience would assist sociologists to understand social interaction. That common sense knowledge is a fruitful starting point if we are to understand our world. However, as Sharrock and Anderson (1986:10) point out, the appeal to common sense knowledge does not imply a debunking of objectivity and replacing it with subjective experience. Rather, it is to show that objectivity originates in experience. Leiter (1968:20) advances four reasons why ethnomethodology places emphasis on studying common sense knowledge:

> " First, the sociological version of the problem of social order depends on commonsense knowledge for its solution. Second, the everyday practice of sociological research rests on the use of commonsense knowledge. Third, social forces that influence social conduct are ultimately rooted in people's use of commonsense knowledge as a way of studying macro phenomena where it really counts – the level of everyday life".

In the use of common sense knowledge, members of a given society make use of everyday expressions whose meanings are not universal but are dependent upon context (Bailey 1978:249). Their meanings, Bar-Hillel (1954:363) maintained, are understood only through reference to the pragmatic context in which they are used, hence he coined the name indexical expressions to refer to them. *Ilobolo* fits into that category for Africans. Expressions used to describe

the *lobol*-ing process are embedded in culture and their specific cultural context gives them meaning. Examples are the *isikhwehlela* beast. Literally and in ordinary common usage, *isikhwehlela* is human sputum, the yellow and jelly-like kind that is expectorated after clearing one's throat. Within the context of *lobol*-ing, and according to Prof. Zungu[54] *isikhwehlela* euphemistically refers to the sperm that the bride's father contributed during the conception of his daughter who is now about to get married. So the *isikhwehlela* beast is a special thank you gift to the father for his part in the reproductive process. Likewise, Zungu continues, *ubikibiki* is an onomatopoeic expression which refers to the white of an egg, hence the female reproductive elements.

Though contexts enhance the meanings of indexical expressions, ethnomethodologists acknowledge that meanings are not bound by contexts because they do change in time, therefore meaning is not enslaved to them. To quote Leiter (1968:112), " the context should not be treated as a set of meta rules governing meaning." Thus a possibility exists that the cultural practices such as *ukulobola* may be understood and analysed by an outsider looking inward into the practice. However, that takes place best at the level of face to face interaction.

I set out to personally interview my informants in the relaxed atmosphere of their own homes. Where this was not possible, interviews were conducted in 'safe' areas that were conducive to open discussions. Haralambos & Holborn (1995:848) point out that qualitative methodology uses a multiplicity of research tools such as case studies, life histories, structured and unstructured interviews, observation and participant observation. How such a method works,

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[54] Prof. Zungu - An unpublished paper read at a seminar organised by the Institute of Constructive Theology, Daikonia centre, Durban, Sunday June 16, 2002.

is described by Lofland & Lofland, (1984:12) who maintain that ethnomethodology works as;

> " A guided conversation whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis... The intensive interview seeks to *discover* the informant's *experience* of a particular topic or situation."

4.2.1 Use of case studies as a tool for social measurement.

In qualitative research, case study or case history plays a crucial role in data collecting procedures. In more recent times, a case has been defined by Orum *et al.* (1991:2, see also Stake (1995: xi) as " an in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, of a single social phenomenon." Since a single phenomenon is what is under investigation in this study, the data collecting procedure should allow the researcher to go into greater depths in investigating the complexities, and pressures both to retain and to modify or totally do away with what some see as a social anachronism. Such a process would not have been as easy if the quantitative method, with its emphasis on statistical data were to be used

Commenting the case study method, Orum (*et al.,* 1991:9) point out that,

> " It can permit the research to examine not only the complex life in which people are implicated but also the *impact on beliefs and decisions* of the complex web of social interaction." (Italics added).

Similarly, and in the words of Stake, "the researcher is enabled to see a social action holistically, understanding the complex interrelationships among all that exists" (Stake 1995:37).

Not only is case study contextual but it is unobtrusive, it discourages the researcher from imposing his/her agenda on the subjects. By contrast, and again to quote Stake (1995:44), the researchers will " try to see what would have happened had they not been there."

4.2.2 The limitations of the method.

Even the most ardent proponents of the qualitative method are aware of its limitations. Cicourel, cited in Bryman (1988:144) asks whether in an interview process researchers "capture the daily life, conditions, opinions, values, attitudes, and knowledge base of those we study as expressed in their natural habitat." Critics of ethnomethodology have also pointed out that, over time, respondents may alter their views. It has also been pointed out that the interviewer could also inadvertently influence the interviewee into giving certain responses. On this issue, Lofland and Lofland (1984:16) agree with Fred Davis (1973:336,338) that there exists a possible error in the collection of data that could arise due to the particular relationship that the investigator has with the particular setting. Lofland and Lofland write:

> " The point for the prospective investigator assessing for access is simply this: If you are already (or will become) a member of the setting, you almost "naturally" possess (or will possess) the convert stance. You have easy access to understanding. You need, therefore, to seek mechanisms for distancing. Conversely, if you are an outsider to the setting, a stranger to the social life under investigation, your access to questioning will be equally natural. You need, then, to seek mechanisms for reducing that distance."

Consequently, in doing the field study I selected some persons who were well known to me, and to use Fred Davis' (1973) terminology, I was able to adopt a "convert's" stance. In cases where I did not know the persons, I initially spent some time introducing myself and the purpose of my research. My informants were articulate individuals spanning a range of educational and economic levels. They consisted of six Zulu women, the youngest was single, a university graduate in the social sciences and a freelance research assistant; the second was engaged to be married and she works as a receptionist for a Christian organisation. The third, is a gender officer and field worker and the fourth, another receptionist. In addition to the four above, I also interviewed two women training to be Christian workers. The same selection procedures were applied in the selection of four male respondents. It was comparatively easy to probe a little deeper, seek more clarification while interviewing persons known to me rather than be regarded as an outsider and have to first seek acceptance.

The other problem that I had to contend with had to do with the genuiness of the responses, or lack of it. That problem is not peculiar to ethnomethodology, nearly all forms of social research are susceptible to the Hawthone effect, which posits the view that there are far too many variables that affect the results of field experiment especially when the subjects are aware that they are being studied. To minimise this particular problem, I made informants aware that I was conducting research on *ilobolo* and that their input would be treated with sensitivity and their identities would be kept confidential if they so wished. All ten interviewees gave me permission to quote them by name thus indicating that what they shared were, in all probability, authentic responses.

Of the four men whom I interviewed, one was a recent theology graduate and was about to get married. The other was married pastor in a mainline Protestant church and a former deputy principal who was working, at that time, as a part-time lecturer at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. These two were also well known to me and therefore least likely to hold back crucial information. The other two were students training for the ministry. In order to further facilitate openness, I gave each of my informants a bilingual interview guide, (see Appendix C below) and asked them to study it, and I spent forty five minutes to an hour with each as they wrote down their answers or gave oral responses.

4.3 Instrumentation

In designing the interview tool care was taken to ensure that the personal details of the interviewee were captured; questions were kept as simple as possible without being simplistic; they were designed in such a way that they elicited emic issues. Care was taken to avoid leading questions and wide margins and spaces left to allow the interviewer to probe and make notes during and after the session.

During the interview process, I had real difficulty holding back my urban cultural background with its loose attachment to cultural practices. Equally, my evangelical beliefs had to be held in check until later thus enabling me to listen and hear what was being said especially the role of ancestors in life generally, but more specifically in the institution of *ilobolo*.

During follow up visits, informants were presented with my write up of what they had said. They were asked to verify the contents and even modify what they had said if they so desired. The same procedure, with minor adjustments, was followed during the participatory observation in actual marriage negotiations.

The most telling critique of ethnomethodology is that its conclusions are based on limited data. The point at issue, critics ask, is how is it possible to build a general theory based on a small sample? Would a more accurate result not be better achieved by conventional scientific methods of survey and statistical analysis, a method that is presumably easy to repeat and verify? In our case, researching the views of fourteen newspaper readers, a snap survey of ten residents of Pietermaritzburg and an in-depth interview of ten carefully and intentionally chosen persons constituted the first three phases of data gathering. Next, this researcher participated in two *ilobolo* negotiations out of which two case histories were compiled. The data thus gathered was analysed and a theory developed.

In response to those legitimate concerns, Weber, quoted in Shils and Finch (1949:74) maintains that, while holding on to the scientific method:

> " In the social sciences we are concerned with psychological and intellectual phenomena the empathetic understanding of which is naturally a problem of a specifically different type from those which schemes of the exact natural sciences in general can or seek to solve."

In researching a deeply rooted and historically ancient cultural practice such as *ilobolo*, it is clear that we are faced with a psychological phenomenon with deep religious nuances. Reliance on quantity alone may not be the best route to understand and evaluate it. I would therefore concur with Van Mannen's (1988:120) observation that;

> " The value of ethnography is found not in its analysis and interpretation of culture, but in its decision to examine culture in the first place; to conceptualise it; reflect on it; narrate it and, ultimately, to evaluate it."

Bryman (1988:90) has also pointed out that the problem of generalising on the basis of a few cases is not insurmountable if one takes into account the aim of ethnographic study. He points out that " a misconception arises from a tendency to approach a case as if it were a sample of one drawn from a wider universe of such cases." The weakness of that line of thought, Bryman maintains, is that just like a survey, only quantitatively less so, in case studies " a wide range of people and activities are studied" (: 90). Secondly, Bryman agrees with Mitchell (1983) and Yin (1984) that the generalisation is in relation to theoretical propositions rather than to the population or the universe. Consequently, and based on Glasser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory, the critical concern in this study will not be so much on whether the residents of Edendale and Pietermaritzburg embrace or spurn modern *ilobolo* leading to a conclusion that the community is typical of other urban environments. On the contrary, we will seek to establish the view of a cross section of people. The results will then be extrapolated in other similar locales.

4.3.1 Importance of accurate interpretation

In the compilation of the two case studies this researcher spent a two years (May 1999 to April 2001) in the field interacting personally with informants. In the process, great care was taken to interpret collected data as honestly as possible in order "partially to redirect observations and pursue emerging issues" (Stake 1995:42). In a rapidly changing context of city life, it is of crucial importance to listen not only at what is said but also what is *becoming* of a people. Accurate interpretation demands that the researcher probes, formulates and reformulates questions and allows the respondent enough space to explore other possibilities.

The same interview guide used for the in-depth sessions, but modified as appropriately, was used to draw out those emic issues which reflected the world-view and the concerns of the informants during case study sessions. By carefully and sensitively engaging with those concerns, the researcher's own agenda was merged with the interviewees' responses thus opening up new vistas of mutually beneficial knowledge. This section would not be complete if I did not point out some of the inherent weaknesses of the case study method.

Ethnomethodologists are often hard pressed to assure critics that findings can be replicated, that there is a reasonable measure of the validation of observations. In this study, applying Denzil's (1978:50) triangulation protocols enhanced the validity of the results. These demand that, first there will be a team of researchers or research assistants with whom the primary researcher cross checks his/her findings. Secondly, that different case studies are contrasted and compared and, thirdly, supplementary material is used to corroborate the

narrative. These include census figures, maps, paper clippings, and records of meetings. However the cross checking is not to be regarded as an admission that narrative cannot be honest. It can. In this study, research assistants were not used but the other two protocols were taken into account.

Closely related to the problem of replicability of the case studies is the concern that the paradigm is subjective. Stake's (1995:45) response has a lot of merit in our view when he states that subjectivity need not be regarded as " a failing needing to be eliminated but is an essential element of understanding". All research is a human effort and as such will inevitably have a measure of bias and error. Consequently Lofland & Lofland (1994:51) suggest that the researcher should see to it that the report is first hand, observe the spatial location of the reporter, self-serving error and bias, the reporter's track record and the internal consistency of the report. Even with all of that taken into account, they do warn that:

> " Reports can pass all these tests and still be false. Against that possibility, we offer the maxim that the truthful observation/listening depends heavily upon the sincere good faith, open-mindedness and thoroughness of the observer."

A handful of cases, compared to hundreds and even thousands of responses to a survey leads to the query: how possible is it for the chosen cases to represent, say, modern Zulu society's attitude towards *ilobolo*? Are the cases not too few to give an accurate picture? In this study, as stated above, an effort was made to minimise that problem by analysing the views of a cross-section of newspaper readers drawn from a wide rage of ages, men and women in different professions.

4.4 Survey of newspaper reports 1990-2000

From January to April 1999, the researcher assembled data on *ilobolo* collected by news reporters in Pietermaritzburg, Durban and Port Shepstone. In an article entitled "Should lobola still be practised, how much should be paid?[55], Musa Ndwandwe maintained that "though no scientific survey has proved this, an overwhelming majority of Africans still agree to the practice of lobola." He continued, " whether in rural or urban areas, the age-old custom of lobola remains a non-negotiable prerequisite that any potential groom must meet in order to marry the woman of his choice." Ndwandwe does concede the fact that the practise is a subject of heated debate because of its direct link to finance. Among the people Ndwandwe interviewed in a survey, was the Southern Natal chairperson of the ANC, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. She expressed her views as follows:

> " My attitude is that lobola, as it was practised in the past, is a symbol of friendship...it was not a way of selling women to the highest bidder."

Dlamini-Zuma pointed out, though, that women did suffer negative consequences in marriage and these were directly linked to *ilobolo*. She cited the fact that a woman's "behaviour may now be judged against the value paid for her." In modern times, Dlamini-Zuma concluded, many educated young women were regarded as an investment by their parents resulting in " pressure being applied to educated women to marry only rich men who can afford the rates."

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[55] Echo 26 September 1991, p.8.

Another Witness reporter, Thabo Masemola[56], tested the views of members of the Pietermaritzburg community with regard to *ilobolo* in modern times. Masemola's informant, Sipho Nkomonde did not see why " we are still required to pay *ilobolo* because girls today are very unfaithful, they no longer respect their bodies and go with several men at a time." He saw *ilobolo* as a business scam not to be retained in modern times. Another interviewee, Lindiwe thought differently, maintaining that the custom should be continued. Her argument was:

> " I'm proud that my husband paid *ilobolo*. He proved his worth in the eyes of my parents and relatives. Without *ilobolo*, I'd feel cheapened. I don't believe that my husband would respect me if he got me for nothing."

Her views corresponded with those of policeman, Themba Mkhize, who associated *ilobolo* with marital stability, and he continued:

> " A man will quarrel with his wife and get so angry that he considers leaving her. But when he sits down and thinks about the money he paid for her, he reconsiders. So it keeps families intact in difficult times."

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[56] Witness, 24 July 1997, p.9.

Thulie Radebe, a librarian at the University of Natal, bemoaned the commercialisation of the practice. She agreed with Mzokhona Msane's[57] concern that it " is now common for people to demand upwards of R 20 000 (twenty thousand) for their daughters." However, Msane was adamant that *ilobolo* must stay because he saw it as a " solemn token that safeguards marriage." Radebe, though not advocating that *ilobolo* be dropped, drew attention to the fact that:

> " In the olden days, cattle were in the yard. They were used for *ilobolo*. But now there are no cattle. Money is not in the yard, it does not grow on trees. So the parents should be more considerate. They should not demand exorbitant amounts of money to the detriment of the young couple."

The Witness reporter, Thabo Masemola maintained that in former times *ilobolo* legitimised marriage, but sadly, it entrenched male dominance in that " women never took part in the *ilobolo* process. The men haggled in the privacy of their huts, a calabash of beer in the hand." He went on to state that in the olden days, " *ilobolo* was usually 10 (ten) cattle on the hoof for a commoner's daughter and 15 (fifteen) for a man of high standing such as an Induna or a chief."

In response to Masemola's views, Moshe Rajuili[58] refuted the statement that in former times women were treated as a commodity and that *ilobolo* was usually 10 (ten) and 15 (fifteen) head of cattle for commoners and chiefs respectively. That stipulation was a later imposition introduced by Sir Theophilus Shepstone.

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[57] Echo, 5 April 2001, p, 7.

[58] Witness 30 July 1997, p.9

Until then, there was no stipulated lower or upper limit which would support the commodity theory. Instead, says Rajuili, *ilobolo* was " an open ended extravagant form of African generosity." Furthermore, Rajuili pointed out that its value lay in "establishing a socio-religious agreement between the families of the couple. However, he noted that the commercialisation of modern *ilobolo* could not be denied. That is the issue that needs to be addressed urgently. The table shown in Figure 4.4.1 below gives a schematic representation of views gleaned from newspaper interviews over a ten-year period starting in 1990.

Figure 4.4.1

	Establishing family relationships	Enhances sense of being	Stabilises marriage	Legitimises marriage	Sign of appreciation	Promotes African culture	Establishes religious bonds	Entrenches gender stereotypes	Measure of worth	Co-modification	Illicit marriage/ ukukipita	Encourages polygamy	Abolish ilobolo Y	Abolish ilobolo N	Marital Status S	Marital Status M	Marital Status ?
Anonymous	*	*	*				*										*
Langa Lindiwe		*														*	
Madlala Mbu	*							*							*		
Madlala M.						*											*
Masemola Thabo										*							
Mbanjwa S	*							*				*	*		*		*
Mkhize Themba			*														*
Msane Mzo	*	*								*	*			*			*
Ndwandwe Musa	*	*		*							*			*			*
Nkomonde Sipho										*							*
Radebe Thulie										*				*		*	
Rajuili Moshe	*	*			*		*			*				*		*	
Zondi Mathomo										*			*		*		
Zuma Nkosazana								*	*	*				*		*	

Positive view of *ilobolo*   Negative view of *ilobolo*

A number of conclusions may be drawn from the comments made by the readers and recorded by journalists. First, it is clear that there is a preponderance of male responses (refer to Figure **4.4.1** above). It is highly probable that this is due to the fact that it is them who have to provide *ilobolo* and therefore have a

greater vested interest in the subject. They expressed their views, for and against it, in stronger terms than did the female respondents. Masemola expressed his disquiet that even in traditional times, *ilobolo* was a male preserve and he regarded it as "a tradition threatened by the times."[59] Madlala[60], on the other hand, wondered whether " *lobola* has any meaning today," he saw the practice as a "greedy habit ...where daughters are regarded as investments."

Secondly, nearly all the positive comments by both men and women respondents related to *ilobolo* in its original pre-industrial, non-monetary context. There was therefore a tacit acknowledgement that modern *ilobolo* is problematic. That view was underscored by Msane's article that Lobolo needs a rethink.[61] He noted that in a modern industrial society, the groom's family "often turn a blind eye when their son blossoms into a loafer who sucks his wife's blood. He is her responsibility, isn't he? After all he did pay lobolo." From the perspective of the woman, Msane observed that, in anticipation of the husband being a loafer, and their daughter being a professional woman who may have to find herself supporting her husband, " a girl's parents may fleece their prospective son-in-law in the name of lobolo." Thus in its present form, *ilobolo* was judged by nearly all respondents to be problematic. A few exceptions were those who saw it as an African custom which was above question.

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[59] Witness 24 July 1997; p, 9.

[60] Echo, 2 September 1999; p,7

[61] Echo,5 April 2001; p, 7. See also Sibonelo Mbanjwa, Echo 22 September 2000. He critiques traditionalists who show lack of vision in applying traditional customs such as *ukulobola*. He says that such people "sell off their daughters to would-be husbands."

Thirdly, and inspite of its many drawbacks in the context of modern urban society, only one person interviewed by Masemola[62], Mathomo Zondi, was emphatic that " *ilobolo* should be abolished. Nobody gains from the whole thing. I don't want to be bought." Mathomo's views corresponded with those of Katise Mashego [63] who claimed to detect too many flaws in the *ilobolo* tradition. He asks,

"Is the paying of lobola not akin to slave trading? After all, you pay for the woman and she literally becomes your lifelong slave. She is compelled to do as you say, when you say, until death you do part."

Mashego makes it clear that he does not wish to do away with all African traditions, saying

" I am black and proud of it ...I am not saying we must discard our traditions, because many African nations are rich with beautiful customs and we cannot neglect our heritage."

The rest of the interviewees saw the possibility of the custom being revised and its original intent being approximated. To this end Radebe maintained that parents should consider the welfare of the intending couple and not make unreasonable demands. Msane advocated that *ilobolo* should be retained only as a means of according a married woman the respect that she deserved and also a means of strengthening the ties between the families.

In the intensive interviews carried out by the researcher, (see paragraph **4.6** below) even the most vociferous critics of the custom, (Gwala and Dlomo) did

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[62] Witness 24 July 1997, p.9.

63 Pace Magazine, December 1999, p.16.

not go as far as advocating that it be abolished. Female interviewees, likewise, preferred to see the custom transformed and applied in a more humane manner rather than abolish it.

Fourthly, those respondents who did not see any major problem with modern ilobolo cited the fact that African traditions should not be interfered with. Responding to the Recognition of Customary Law and its stipulation that the payment of *ilobolo* is to be left to the discretion of parties to the marriage, Ndlela Ntshangase's[64] response was that " *umbhedo lo* [this is nonsense] ..But this new law, in so far as *lobolo* is concerned, promotes individuality and seems to want to equate Customary marriage with Western marriages." The sacredness of *ilobolo* in the eyes of most of the respondents was seen in statements expressing the belief that marriage takes place "at the time when goats are slaughtered and the bride and groom are united with the "biologically dead," according to Gwala. Others such as Ngubane underscored the sacredness of the practice by noting that when a man sends negotiators to a prospective bride's home to ask for her hand in marriage, "the form of address is directed to the living and the dead/deceased." In his reply to Masemola's[65] article Rajuili argued that;

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[64] Witness 11 Dec 1998, p. 7

[65] Witness 30 July 1997; p, 9.

" The common yet erroneous belief that *ukulobola* is a form of slave trade is based on an unsound premise that a Zulu woman who was *lobola*-d was to be treated as a possession. On the contrary, not only was her envied status as a married woman confirmed, but her offspring and her family rights would be protected. That is because *ilobolo* was a means of establishing a socio-religious agreement rather than an economic and even a legal one."

A fifth observation that was shared by all the respondents was that, inspite of its many shortcomings, modern or traditional *ilobolo* was a means of establishing and maintaining cordial relationships between the spouses and their respective families. There was a further consensus among the respondents that *ilobolo* stabilises marriages as a woman who had been *lobol*-ad tended to be highly valued by her husband and his people. The five observations above were held up as a backdrop against which to judge a snap survey carried out by the researcher.

4.5 Snap Survey

From January to June 1999, the researcher assembled data on *ilobolo* through a snap survey of greater Edendale residents, (see map in Appendix A). The respondents were randomly selected and individually asked to express their views on *ilobolo*. A interview guide (see Appendix C) was used to elicit responses.

S'bongile Ndlovu, 5 January 1999.

Asked why she thought *ilobolo* continues to be practised in urban areas, her reply was that it was an important African custom. As with all human customs, it had been corrupted. However, Ndlovu did not think *ilobolo* ought to be abolished. For her it remained a practice that showed "how much a woman is valued by her future husband." She was of the conviction that " if a man really loved a woman, he would make means to find *ilobolo* for her."

She also did not think that *ilobolo* on its own promoted patriarchy. She maintained that whether *ilobolo* was practised or not, patriarchal attitudes would remain part and parcel of society unless challenged. She pointed out that even in Western societies, where *ilobolo* is not practised, patriarchy persists. Asked to comment on the practice of the handing over of the bride to the groom by her father[66] Ndlovu was of the opinion that a continuation of that practice could dehumanise a woman.

She was emphatic that the law of the land should not interfere with a private practice like *ilobolo*. She believed that " the establishing and maintaining of friendly relationships should not be legislated." However the church had a major role to play in " teaching children about what was good about the *ilobolo* custom." According to her, priests should form part of the negotiating team in *loboli-ng* and should teach members of the two families entering into a marriage agreement what the Scriptures teach about marriage and also what to expect in married life.

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[66] The handing over of the bride to the groom by her father is not an African custom. Traditionally the bride was accompanied to her new home by one or two girl friends, *izimpelesi*.

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Asked to comment on what for her constituted a valid marriage, this forty-year-old teacher, wife and university graduate felt that the church ceremony, at which God's blessings are sought, was what constituted a valid marriage.

Thoko Madlala 8 January 1999

She felt that the problems associated with *ilobolo* are outweighed by the fellowship that results after families have exchanged *ilobolo* and *imibondo*. She also did not see the handing over of a bride by her father to her husband as a serious problem. For her that action indicated that the father had consented to the marriage and was fully supportive of the union. As she put it " the handing over of the bride is an acknowledgement by the father that his daughter was legally married to the man."

Asked to comment on the possible link between high *ilobolo* and cohabitation, Madlala's view was that such a link was tenuous. She pointed out that those couples who cohabit do so because they are " *amahlongandlebe*" literally translated the expression means that such people are without ears or naughty. She agreed with Ndlovu (see above) that if the husband loved his future wife, he would manage to get the *ilobolo*.

With regard to the law of the land or the church being directly involved in *ilobolo*, Madlala was adamant that neither the law nor the church should be involved in what is strictly a cultural practice. According to her, marriage is a family issue. Neither legislators nor priests could fully understand the intricacies of the process especially if they belonged to a different cultural group to that of the bride and groom. She did not see how the law could help establish

friendships. According to Madlala, a couple was married once the two families had agreed to exchange *ilobolo* and *imibondo*.

Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi, 16 May 1999.

Mkhwanazi, a twenty three-(23) year old theology student felt that *ilobolo* persists because " it establishes a lasting relationship between the living and the non-living." According to him, the problems that society experiences in carrying out the custom are due to the fact that many African communities no longer understand the purpose of *ilobolo*. He noted that " that is why there is an increase in the abuse of the practice and also immorality associated with it."

Part of the abuse was that in its present format, *ilobolo* entrenched patriarchy. Asked to comment on the practice of the handing over of the bride, Mkhwanazi saw that as a symbolic action "of an ongoing relationship that started with the *ilobolo* negotiations."

Since *ilobolo* was a means of establishing familial relationships, Mkhwanazi felt that the law of the land should not interfere with the practice. As he put it "since there is no legal paper in *loboling,* once the law is brought in and papers are signed, there will no longer be any trust between the spouses." Cohabitation or *ukukipita* will happen among people whether or not they *lobola*. It is a result of moral degradation and that is why Mkhwanazi felt that the church should double its efforts to teach and disciple its members by reminding them of their customs. He noted that " Jesus followed the customs of his time. Therefore his disciples should do likewise. Jesus never said he had come to destroy people's cultural practices," Mkhwanazi concluded.

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With regard to the point when a marriage could be said to have happened, Mkhwanazi maintained that once the request for marriage has been accepted by the girl and her family and *ilobolo* or a portion of it has been passed, then the couple can legitimately be said to be married.

On the 12th June 1999 I interviewed a forty six (46) year old married teacher, Nombulelo Mabaso. She did not see any serious problems associated with *ilobolo*. She regarded the practice as a good custom that encourages mutual respect and builds lasting relationships. Beyond that, it gave a woman who had been *lobol*-ad a special status among her in-laws.

Asked to comment on the possible link between *ilobolo* and patriarchy, Mabaso was adamant that it had little to contribute towards sustaining patriarchy. She maintained that *lobol*-ad girls were respected by their peers and valued by their husbands.

Adv.

My informant felt that the law of the land should not be allowed to interfere with the custom of *lobol*-ing. However, according to her, the church could play a very helpful role in promoting good behaviour patterns. For that to happen, the priests or clergy should play a significant role in *ilobolo* negotiations, according to Mabaso. If and when marital problems arise, the priest will be in a better position to do effective counselling since he/she will have been involved with the couple at a very early stage of their relationship.

My informant did not see cohabitation as being directly linked to *ilobolo*. She maintained that it was a modern behaviour pattern. On the question of when a marriage could be said to be legal, my informant said that the passing of *ilobolo* and the solemnisation of the union made the marriage legal.

Nontobeko Shabalala was twenty-five (25) years old when I interviewed her on 15 September 2003. At the time, she was a third year Bible college student. She attributed the persistence of *ilobolo* to a commonly held belief that without it the marriage would not be authentic. According to her, the boy needs to inform the ancestors. He does so through observing *ilobolo* practices. As she put it, before a man takes a wife he has to:

> *"Khuluma nabadala babikele kumndeni walapha ekhaya ukuze kukhishwe izikomo zalapha ekhaya ziyiswe kubokantobazane ebikwe lapha ekhaya.* – the man has to inform the elders so that they inform members of the lineage who will give cattle from the man's home to be taken to the woman's family. The members of the lineage have to be informed.

Shabalala observed that some Christians believe there is a biblical precedent for *ilobolo*. For others, *ilobolo* is a compensation to the woman's family. Besides, if the woman is not *lobol*-ad, some people believe that her husband will not value her and may even go on to " take another woman since he will get her free – *umfana uma ilobolo lingakhishwa angaba nabafazi abaningi ngoba uvele azithathele yena uma efuna umfazi.*"

According to Shabalala, a notable difference between *lobol*-ing among Christians and traditionalists is that the former do not observe traditional rituals of " *ukwembesa obaba Mkhulu* (to clothe the grandfathers)." Christians do not practice *ukusoma* – sex play.

Asked to comment on the advantages of *ilobolo* Shabalala pointed out that the custom establishes a healthy relationship between the families; the bride's family are rewarded; *ilobolo* becomes a proof that the groom is capable of supporting his bride and is a sign that he values her. My informant also pointed out that if the commercial motif is paramount, the custom becomes problematic. However, she did not think that co-habitation was caused by *ilobolo*.

She felt that *ilobolo* negotiations do not and should not involve the church during the initial stages of the negotiations. Her view was that the young man should first approach the woman and once the two agree to marry, only then could the priest be involved, and through him, the church.

My informant felt that a couple may be legitimately regarded as married after the church ceremony and in the presence of many witnesses. She maintained that the handing over of the bride by her father to the groom marked a transition form being single to being a married woman.

Her final comments on how *ilobolo* is practised in urban areas is that increasingly parents wish to see *ilobolo* as a means of providing for the needs of the newly married couple. Many no longer make unreasonable demands.

Sandisiwe Sifanelo, interviewed on 20 October 2003, attributed the persistence of *ilobolo* to the fact that it is a means of building relationships between the families of the bride and groom. She felt that among many Africans if there was no *ilobolo* passed, the bride might feel that she " was just being thrown away."

My informant maintained that for traditionalists *ilobolo* has turned out to be " a money making business" whereas most Christians " just want a little something." The advantages of the custom, according to Sifanelo, were that it minimised the rate of divorce and separation.

On the relationship between *ilobolo* and cohabitation, she was of the conviction that the two are not related. *Ilobolo* involved members of two families, that of the bride and the groom whereas, *ukukipita* was between the man and the woman. Therefore, she maintained that Christians would be unwise to try and stop *ilobolo*. Instead, they should ensure that it is not turned into a moneymaking business. Where possible, Christians should help one another in raising *ilobolo*.

Marriage could be declared legal, according to Sifanelo, only after the church ceremony because, as she put it: " all people will have witnessed the marriage and know that the couple are joined before God and man."

On the 25th October, 2003 I interviewed Xolile Shinga, a twenty five (25) year old first year Bible college student. She felt that *ilobolo* persists because it is not easy for most people to do away with traditional customs. Besides, said Shinga, if a man does not *lobola* a woman, the likelihood is that he will not respect her.

Shinga felt that there was a notable difference of opinion between Christians and traditionalists. Some Christians are keen to do away with *ilobolo* whereas most traditionalists would be reluctant to do so. According to her, the major advantages of *ilobolo* are that it provides the money needed in order to have a "

good wedding." However, my informant did not support those people who, in a desperate attempt to enrich themselves, asked for excessive *ilobolo*.

According to Shinga, marriage would be legal if part of *ilobolo* had been passed and a public ceremony conducted in church. The handing over of the bride was, according to her, a symbolic action that the woman was now married. That she had taken a non-reversible step of giving herself totally to her husband. In receiving her, her groom also commits herself to love and care for her and support her in the step she has taken to be a wife and companion.

In sum Shinga felt that *ilobolo* was a good custom if it was practised in a way that builds community or " *umalisetshenziswa ngendlela eyakhayo.* " She was of the conviction that parents should think first of the future of their children and not the size of the *ilobolo*. If it is excessive, it causes the groom to feel he was exploited and that does cause marital problems later.

Three years ealier, on 14th March, I had the privilege of interviewing Nombulelo Mabaso, a forty six (46) year old married teacher from Endaleni, near Richmond, Natal. She attributed the persistence of *ilobolo* to its function as means of building relationships between families, of showing mutual giving and receiving.

Asked to comment on the possible link between *ilobolo* and patriarchal attitudes, my informant felt otherwise. According to her, *ilobolo* was a source of joy and pride to the woman for whom it is passed. Girls in her age group respect a woman who is *lobol*-ad because that is a sign that she maintained a pure and upright life.

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Mabaso did not think that the law of the country should affect the way *ilobolo* is practised. However, the church should be involved in marriage negotiations and train young people on how to lead good and upright lives. If the minister " *uMfundisi* is involved at the beginning of the negotiations, he would be well placed to offer counsel when problems arise later. According to her, a marriage would be valid if the couple had received a church blessing.

Samson Dlamini, was a primary school teacher and at forty, (40) that gentleman felt that *ilobolo* plays a vital role in strengthening relationships between spouses. He felt proud that he did not "just take a wife" but gave back something precious in return.

He acknowledged that in modern times, some people do commercialise the practice and it was for that reason that he felt the law of the land as well as the church should play a leading role in eliminating abuses.

In an article[67] entitled " Lobola, the price of love" Macdonald Chaava expressed his own views and those of other Christian young people on *ilobolo*. He pointed out that traditionally *ilobolo* united the families of the bride and the groom " into one extended family" (: 20). The expectation was that:

> " Even though a young man might be rich enough to settle the price, each member must be invited to contribute whatever small amount he can."

However, with the advent of Western culture, and the stress it laid on individualism and materialism as well as the growth of Christianity,

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[67] See Today magazine, May 1996, p.20-22.

" Young Christians graduating into manhood now stand at a cultural cross roads. This new generation, loosely attached to the past, is firmly rooted in the future, affected by the old value systems yet not entirely at ease with them, (: 22)

That results in fierce debates on whether to continue with *ilobolo* or not. Chaava cites Mike, a young white man married to a black woman. He was initially put off by *ilobolo*, yet on further reflection came to realise that there "as nothing to contradict my faith with paying lobola." For him *ilobolo* was "a sort of test of determination on the part of the man."

Other Christian people thought differently. Among these, Chaava cites Veronica whose scepticism is expressed in the following words: "*Lobola* is a deterrent to poor men wanting to marry girls like me, educated and from a relatively well-to-do family." Others like Mildred are opposed to the custom because, as women, they are not included in the negotiations.

Chaava's own view on *ilobolo* is that some aspects of the practice agree with Christian teaching on hard work and mutual submission of the spouses. The often-protracted marriage negotiations are a test of one's patience, one of the virtues taught in Scripture. However, he is aware that " lobola price these days is too high and there is fear that lobola may simply become big-time business" (: 22). His proposed solution is that those Christians who have daughters " need to deal with lobola carefully so as not to allow greed of money to control their decisions, but rather the furtherance of God's love by creating a harmonious atmosphere for both families."

4.6 Intensive Interviews

Interview 1.

My first intensive interview was done on 4th May 1999. The interviewee was a twenty nine-year-old single man who was engaged to be married. Chris Dlomo had recently completed a three-year ministerial diploma and was getting ready to take a pastoral charge where his focus would be on leadership development. When I asked him to comment on the continued practice of *ilobolo*, he made it clear at the onset that the question had a special poignancy for him, given the fact that he was engaged. As a recent graduate, hoping to proceed to university, he had not saved enough money for *ilobolo*.

During the interview, he often answered my questions on his own terms, giving his own reflections on the subject of *ilobolo* and expressing mixed emotions freely. As with the other interviewees below, I allowed him enough space for silences so that he would be free to share what he wished and withhold any information that he did not wish to divulge. I made notes as he spoke, and at appropriate times, summarised what I felt he had said and reflected his thoughts back to him so that he could edit any information or add what he had left out as was necessary.

During the interview and also later when I was on my own reflecting on the answers, I was aware of the problem of representation. Two years prior to the interview, I had been Dlomo's teacher and mentor and that relationship had a very real possibility of creating hierarchical relationships between us. I had grown up in Soweto in an environment that tends to question practices more

than the one Dlomo grew up in. Besides, he was by nature a very laid back person and I tend to be curious and probing. Finally, I was significantly older than he was. With all those differences in mind, I made a special effort to listen attentively and empathetically to what he said on the subject of *ilobolo*. Burley-Allen, cited in a training manual, Learning to Listen[68] (2000:5, no author given), makes the point that when we listen to someone with a problem or moral dilemma such as Dlomo had:

> "Active listening alleviates a problem by giving the person a chance to talk it through while experiencing emotional release, while, at the same time, providing limited and empathetic input that conveys to the speaker your concern and non-judgmental attitude..."

With regard to the continuation of *ilobolo*, Dlomo replied that it should remain because " it provides money to cover the expenses of marriage such as food, hiring of the hall, clothes and liquor." He continued and said " a woman does not feel she is properly married if she is not *lobol*-ad. She will not feel fully incorporated into the husband's homestead." What is more, " she will not be accepted by the ancestors. If she gets ill, the belief will be that she had not been *lobol*-ad."

Asked to comment on the differences between Christians and traditionalists' attitude towards *ilobolo*, Dlomo felt that the former are more likely to make every effort to be faithful to the *ilobolo* requirements, though among them there would be differences in their commitment to the practice.

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[68] Christian Listners: KZN. Acon Christian Foundation, 2000.

When I asked him to reflect on the role that the law of the land should play in *loboli*-ng, my informant felt that any form of intervention by state law would amount to interference in what is essentially a cultural practice. If it did, "there would be a clash of values."

Of the problems associated with *ilobolo, ukukipita* is the most common and according to my informant, the church needs to be involved first in assisting the prospective groom with *ilobolo* and also provide the support system to the couple once they start their life together.

Interview 2.

At the time of the interview on the 6 May 1999 Marjorie Dlamini was a forty three-year-old (43) primary school teacher in Edendale. She was emphatic that *ilobolo* should be retained. Inspite of the many problems which she acknowledged did exist, she felt that " if someone loved a woman, he should be willing to *lobola* her as a way of thanking the woman's parents for their role in the upbringing of their daughter."

Without my asking about the type of *ilobolo* that she would prefer, she was in favour of *ilobolo* in " young cattle" because, as she pointed out, " those ones will continue to give birth" and in some mysterious way, " induce the bride to also give birth." She concluded by saying that " such a child bearing woman would be valued by her husband's family."

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Dlamini was in full agreement with her forty-one (41) year colleague, Khanyile, whose home is in Bruntville, Mooi River, that when *ilobolo* is passed, the bride is accepted by the husband's ancestors and that gave her status in society. She saw no serious faults with the custom as it is practised at present, hence she felt that the ten herd of cattle suggested by Theophilus Shepstone (Somtseu) represented a minimum number and she would not be perturbed if the number was increased to more than that. Consequently, she did not think that either the church or the law of the land should "interfere" with the custom.

Interview 3.

On the 13 May 1999, a receptionist at one of the local church based organisations (CBOs), a 38 years old lady by the name of Thoko Zulu expressed her views in a forthright manner. On the question of the continuation and value of *ilobolo*, Zulu said *ilobolo* has been practised and retained up to now because it "concretises the relationship between, on the one hand, the families of the spouses and, on the other, the spouses themselves."

Ilobolo and unequal gender relations? She was of the view that *ilobolo* did not cause unequal power and gender relations. However where there was ignorance of what *ilobolo* was all about, my informant felt that "It is possible for a woman to be looked down on and be treated as inferior in a patriarchal society."

The giving of the bride to the groom by her father was interpreted by my informant as a sign that "she is given by us (i.e. her natal family) and not taking herself to her new home. She is being transferred from one family to another."

Ilobolo and the law of the land?   Zulu was of the conviction that "the law of the land should deal with macro issues but cultural practices such as *ukulobola* should be left undisturbed. The law could guard against opportunism and lay general guidelines but it should not interfere with the practice as such," was her considered opinion.

With regards to when could marriage be said to have taken place, Zulu maintained that it was after the signing of marriage documents. Asked to explain why, her answer was in a form of an analogy: "think of someone getting ready for baptism. The process starts when the decision is made and is finalised at immersion."

What about excessive *ilobolo* and moral compromise? That excessive *ilobolo* is often demanded was no excuse for moral compromises according to my informant. She was persuaded that if a man really loved a woman, he would find legitimate ways and means to raise *ilobolo*. She concluded: "where there is love there is a way." However, "transformation is necessary to remove the stumbling blocks," she concluded.

Interview 4.

27 May 1999. A fourth interviewee, Nonhlanhla Magubane, was a single lady in her early thirties, a research assistant and a community worker attached to the Institute of the study of the Bible (I.S.B) linked to the school of Theology at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus.

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Asked to reflect on why *ilobolo* continues to be practised inspite of the many problems associated with it, Magubane felt that:

> "..it gives [maintains] our national pride. It is the best way of finding out whether there is a commitment between the two partners because a man has to pay, and it is not easy to pay if he does not believe that he is committed. The woman also does something in return, e.g. in the process, when she has become *ingoduso* [betrothed woman] and a death happens among her in-laws, she has to go to his [fiancée's] family to show sympathy by buying a lot of food. She also has to bring something for her in-laws, *izibondo.* "

With regard to Christians participating in *ilobolo* negotiations, she replied:

> " To us as Christians it does apply also because we believe that something has to be done or paid before we hand over our daughter to people. Like Jacob worked for his wife for seven years, we regard that as a form of *lobola.* When the people from a man's side go to a woman's people for the first time, in their introduction they say *"nina bakwa Magubane, Jiyane, Nkomose siyakhuleka...*[we have come to pay homage to you members of the family of Magubane, also known as Jiyane, Nkomose]." That form of address is directed to the living and the <u>dead/deceased</u> family members, especially the latter. Then the whole process of *lobola* is not done from the perspective of the living people because our belief [is that] a wife is for the groom's forefathers (including those who are deceased).
>
> Our belief in dead/deceased is a question here. It then depends on how we view the issue of *amadlozi* (shades). If we believe in them, we should strongly go for lobola, if we don't strongly believe in them we can be flexible in our dealing with the lobola issue."

Asked to comment on the giving of the bride to the groom by her father, my informant maintained that the action:

> " Is not dehumanising to her but it gives her a pride so that everyone knows she is now leaving her family and joining the other family."

As to how such an action might entrench gender stereotypes in an environment where men are regarded as initiators, my informant agreed that:

> "It does encourage it [stereotyping] because a man always feels big in that he is the one who paid for the relationship. He always feels the woman does not know anything, she is just like a property to him."

Asked to expand on what role the law of the land could play in *lobol*-ing, and what stance the church could adopt toward the practice, she replied thus:

> " There should not be any legal interference in the matters of *lobola* because every family clan, cultural group and nation has its own different perceptions about it. They need to decide on their own about it. Also with the same family clan you might find different religions and beliefs so there is no way that the law can bind either the family clan about matters of *lobola*.
>
> The church should take the transformist view. As Christians we are also human and are always affected by our cultures. Deep inside my veins and my blood there is something that requires that something in material form or something tangible should be exchanged or be done to show my parents how much I am loved so that I will get married. Then sometimes a man does not have money or cows, but he has something else instead. He may already have a good house fully furnished. He doesn't have to sell it in order to pay for *lobola* because after all when we are married where I'm I going to stay? I would suggest that he dedicates that house to me, show my parents what he has done for me."

On the question of the impact of excessive *ilobolo* and also the role that *ilobolo* plays in the solemnisation of the marriage bond, my informant did not say much on the first issue except point out that excessive *ilobolo*,

" in some way encourages people to stay together without being married to each other because the man does not have cows or money, yet since the couple love each other, they decide to stay together. This becomes a sociological problem in the end because there is no binding force, the marriage breaks easily and the children suffer."

Her comment on the relationship between marriage and *ilobolo*, she expressed her views thus:

" In ordinary way/situation, I think once people are in love and are committed to each other, they are already a couple. It's just that they don't have material things such as money for *lobola* and for marriage preparation.

But in the Christian context, people does [do] not form a couple until somebody, *umfundisi* [minister or priest] declares them married and before the crowds see them. In my view it would be better if the issue of *lobola* would be less considered because not many people in South Africa are able always to have money. If there could be a judgement based on other criteria that will make the officials see that the concerned people are committed to each other. It is not only the *lobola* that can do that for us. For instance, love cannot be seen through the eyes of money but it can be seen in many other ways like respect for each other, tolerance and care."

Interview 5.

The fifth interviewee was a former school deputy principal. At the time of the interview, (6 June 2000) he was a pastor as well as a part-time student and a junior lecturer at the University of Natal. S'busiso Gwala maintained that *ilobolo* had persisted inspite of its abuse because it was based on an important African principle of exchange of gifts. He argued that over the years it had adapted itself to changing times. He noted that in modern times, money had replaced cattle as legal tender. Unlike the first two interviewees above, Gwala was forthright in his contention that *ilobolo* does entrench patriarchy,

" In the sense that a wife becomes a possession of a man. The more expensive the *lobola* is, the more possessive the husband is likely to be because he thinks he owns the wife. This is likely to lead to the "last word is mine" situation. Wives, consequently, cannot have the same voice as husbands thus gender imbalances, especially in the home, will continue."

With regard to the giving of the bride to the husband by her father, Gwala remarked that such an action " ... does dehumanise a woman because she is treated as a possession, being given to someone to possess. "Why" he asked "don't we have men given in marriage?"

Because of the above concerns, my informant felt that the law of the land should intervene to standardise the practice and ensure that *ilobolo* is not exploitative. Similarly, according to him, the church should find a way of transforming the practice and offer some guidelines. However, he concluded, " If the church says *lobola* should be abolished, it would be dangerous to its (church's) course. For far too long the church has been about abolition."

On the question of when a marriage could be said to have to have taken place, my informant expressed the belief that "it takes place at the time when the goats are slaughtered and are united with the biologically dead. The thing of the minister presiding over the wedding in church is only a state requirement."

Interview 6.

17 June 2000. A sixth person to be interviewed, also associated with the University of Natal was a personal assistant of the principal of the Evangelical Theological House of Studies (ETHOS). Ethos is an evangelical community of staff and students who, like the Institute for the study of the Bible, (ISB), forms

an integral part of the school of Theology at the University of Natal. At the time of the interview, Sanele Khambule, the youngest of the informants, was getting ready to be married. She attributed the persistence of *ilobolo* to the fact that,

> " Culture is a very deep thing, especially among African people. People are proud of it even though they gain wrongly from this [*ilobolo*] but it would be a shame to the family if they got nothing for their daughter. So they want something."

Asked for her considered view on the relationship between *ukulobola* and gender relations, my informant said;

> " I think culture has put men above women. This is a result of the way children are taught at home. To my great amazement, it is the women who teach their children this way. A boy will be allowed to go out of the house and play while a girl would be expected to wash dishes. If women need things to be changed, they are best placed to teach children the value of equality. *Lobola* then would be a gift to the girl. One needs not forget too that in the whole process gifts are exchanged. ...The white people do not have *ilobolo* but even with them there is [gender] imbalance. So then *ilobolo* could not be blamed totally for that, it is how the practice is carried out which is problematic, not the practice itself."

The role of the church and the attitude of Christians to *ilobolo* elicited the following responses from Khambule;

> "I think the church should try to transform *lobola* system. I think people that are Christians will be regarded as married after the church service. *Lobolo* is the bridal price, not the marriage. But in Zulu culture people are married after *ilobolo* is passed ...It depends which system you use but either way *ilobolo* does not constitute a marriage."

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On the question of the bride being the one who is given in marriage, my informant expressed herself in the following way;

> " I think that being given in marriage is a form of respect given to the woman. It is an indication that her parents are proud of her, otherwise there would be no one to go with her [she would be unaccompanied]. The *lobola* therefore gives a certain status to the woman ... especially if the parties concerned were agreeable during the negotiations."

Would an excessive *ilobolo* be responsible for the high rate of informal marriages known as *ukukipita*?

> " I think that *ukukipita* is caused by people not wanting to commit themselves to one person. Some of them have money but refuse to marry. If a man wants to marry you, he will. When my father married my mother, he was earning R4.50 per week. At that time such an amount was a lot of money. The point though is that *ilobola* can be one of the reasons for *ukukipita* but not the main one."

Interview 7

25 September 2003. Queen Masondo is a forty one (41) year old former businesswoman and at the time of interview she was a third year student for the ministry at the Union Bible Institute, (UBI). She agreed that *ilobolo* is a contested practice yet it continues to be practised because spouses are often drawn from different cultural and religious backgrounds. The one may be a committed Christian while the other may not. In order to reach a compromise, families proceed with *ilobolo*.

When asked to comment on whether there was any noticeable difference between Christians and traditionalists in their respective attitudes towards *ilobolo*, Masondo felt that for most Christians *ilobolo* was not that important whereas traditionalists attached the value of a bride to the amount of ilobolo passed. For the latter group this link was so important that when problems arose and the woman was judged to be responsible for the break up of the marriage, the *ilobolo* cattle were demanded by the husband's family. Secondly, according to Masondo, *ilobolo* was important to traditionalists because of its link with ancestors. But for most Christians, the link with ancestors was not that important, hence *ilobolo* for them was less crucial in the institution of marriage.

My informant could see no advantages in the *ilobolo* custom. She saw more disadvantages to the young couple that was about to marry. For the groom these included the obligation to part with large sums of money at a time when the couple needed it most to start their own home. " Why" she asked "should the parents not be the ones who give money to their children and not the other way round?" She informed me that when her own daughter was about to marry, she decided to ask the prospective groom to secure a house where the couple would stay rather than ask for *ilobolo*. According to my informant, many marriages experience difficulty as a result of *ilobolo*. She felt that orphans and unemployed people are disadvantaged when *ilobolo* is demanded.

With regard to the relationship between the law and *ilobolo*, my informant felt very strongly that legislators should set the standard *ilobolo* that would be affordable to all people. If not, it would encourage extortion as in the case of some parents who have asked for a motor vehicle as *ilobolo* for their supposedly

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highly educated daughter. Masondo felt that men are also educated therefore the education argument is not valid.

Did she see any direct link between *ilobolo* and *ukukipita?* Her response was that *ukukipita* would happen with some people whether or not *ilobolo* was asked for. She indicated that traditionally if a man wanted to get married but did not have *ilobolo*, it would still be possible to go ahead, hence the isiZulu saying that *sobala amahleza emzini* or that the groom or his family will offer symbolic *ilobolo.*

My informant was totally against *ilobolo* being practised by Christians primarily because of the link that *ilobolo* had with the ancestors. However, if the families agreed among themselves to exchange gifts, she did not see why they could not go ahead even when they were Christians. According to her, such gifts would help to defray marriage expenses. Except for such practical purposes, she was totally against *ilobolo* for Christians, especially when it was demanded.

With regard to when she would consider a couple married, my informant felt that it was only after the church had given its blessing to the union. Besides giving its blessing, the church ought to play a supportive role to the newly weds by teaching the wife to obey her husband under all circumstances, Masondo concluded.

Asked to comment on the effect that the handing over of the bride to her husband by her father, Masondo saw this action in a positive light. She regarded it as a highly symbolic act that transfers the care and responsibility over the bride by her father to her husband. Final comments by my informant

were that *ilobolo* should not be seen as a pact and also that too much *ilobolo* gives it a commercial slant.

Interview 8

26 September 2003. Jabulane Motsai is a twenty seven year old and former primary school teacher. At the time of the interview he was training for the ministry at UBI. He got married four years ago in 1999 and was aware of the ongoing debate between supporters and opponents of *ilobolo*. In supporting *ilobolo*, he made it clear that he saw it as a means of establishing friendship between the families of the bride and the groom. He acknowledged that some people have commercialised the practice but, according to him, that was not reason enough for society to do away with it. A *lobol*-ad woman feels honoured. She regards herself as *umfazi wezinkomo* literally translated as a woman of cattle or one whose marriage was supported by the passing of cattle. That, according to Motsai, was a sign that her natal family valued her.

In order to counter the business-making tendency, Motsai felt strongly that parents of both the man and the woman should negotiate directly rather than engage an outsider to be an *umkhongi*. The value of direct negotiation is twofold. First, because the parents have vested interest in the marriage of their children they are less likely to make unreasonable demands. Secondly, they will be available to offer support and counsel to the newly married couple in a way that an ordinary *umkhongi* would not.

Asked whether he noted any major difference in the commitment to *ilobolo* between Christians and traditionalists, Motsai felt that traditionalists regarded *ilobolo* as being very important and without it marriage was not quite complete.

Christians on the other hand did not attach too much importance to the practice and some do not ask for *ilobolo* for their daughters.

On the role that state law and the church should play in *ilobolo*, Motsai felt that the law should not interfere with private matters like marriage and especially a cultural custom such as *ilobolo*. However, the church has an important role to play in *ilobolo*. Motsai saw the Genesis (24:1-67) as an example of *ilobolo* in Scripture. He added that among Christians *ilobolo* should be regarded as a gift and the church should assist grooms with *ilobolo*.

Asked to comment on the link between *ilobolo* and cohabitation, my informant felt that if the two families discussed the issue thoroughly, a compromise could be reached for the marriage to proceed even if the groom did not have *ilobolo*. He agreed that cohabitation is partly caused by lack of money hence the need for the families to come together and solve any problems with regard to *ilobolo*.

On the issue of what constituted marriage, my informant felt that once the families are agreed and there is an external witness such as a marriage certificate issued by the church, a magistrate or an *inkosi* or his representative, that would constitute a valid marriage. He did not see any specific instruction given in the Scriptures on how people should marry.

Interview 9

27 September 2003. Lindiwe Zulu attributed the persistence of *ilobolo* to the fact that it establishes strong family ties. Furthermore, when marital problems do arise, the *lobol*-ad bride could expect help from her in-laws. According to Zulu, Christians did not attach too much importance to *ilobolo* even though

biblical precedent did exist. Her concern was that Christian men's attitude to *ilobolo* could lead to some of them missing out on a potentially good wife and marrying a second best because they were not willing to pass *ilobolo*.

Asked to comment on any problems that could be associated with the practice, Zulu pointed out that when problems arose, and the bride returned to her natal home, she is frequently sent back to her husband since he passed *ilobolo* for her. The bond is so strong that even if the couple separate or divorce and she remarries, when her former husband dies, she is expected to mourn for him.

The link between cohabitation and *ilobolo* did exist according to Zulu. When *ilobolo* was excessive, the couple were inclined to cohabit. However, my informant also attributed cohabitation to low moral values. It was for that reason that she felt Christians should *lobola* but then set the standard by not asking for too much *ilobolo*.

The point at which marriage may be said to have been concluded was after the *ilobolo* had been passed. My informant felt that a certificate should also be issued as a public testimony that the marriage was legal. She also felt that a bride's father should hand her daughter to her future husband. That would be an indication that the father supported the union and that his daughter had maintained her virginity.

Interview 10

The final intensive interview was in a form of an article published in Pace magazine, December 1999. The author, Katise Mashego, declares: " I am not convinced of the need to maintain *ilobolo* " as a means of " appeasing the wrath

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of *amadlozi* from the bride's family." He sees *ilobolo* as a " form of punishment for the groom" in that it has become a "get-rich-quick scheme for greedy parents." Mashego goes on to ask:

> " Is paying lobola not akin slave trade? After all, you pay for the woman and she literally becomes your lifelong slave. She is compelled to do as you say, when you say, until death you do part."

He states that as a black man, and being proud of his heritage, he does not say " we must discard our traditions" because many of them are beautiful and form part of a heritage that should not be neglected. However, he was against the greed that has resulted in " a misinterpretation of the once meaningful tradition." Excessive *ilobolo*, according to Mashego, " causes young people to sleep around no matter what rules are laid down." He went on to state that,

> " This immoral lifestyle will see our mortuaries filling with Aids victims. Is this what parents want? Don't call me a rebel – I am simply telling the truth."

He concluded by acknowledging the need for men to show appreciation for their wives and therefore give *ilobolo* for them. However, if the price is too high, " it is time for the tradition to die a natural death because it has ruined too many families. I am tempted to bring my goat to the party and shout: *Phansi nge – lobola, phansi* (away with *ilobolo*)."

4.7 Case histories

4.7.1 Case history One, Masuku-Mlima.

On 8th May 1997, my attention was drawn to *ilobolo* negotiations that were taking place between the Masuku and Mlima families. Since I knew both the bride and the groom, I requested and was granted permission to be present at the second negotiation meeting. Solomon Masuku's team consisted of two main *abakhongi,* one reportedly selected by himself and the other by church leadership in Edendale where both bride and groom were members. According to the groom, his preference was that Gininza [from Swaziland] should have been the chief negotiator. The bride's party was made up of her uncle and aunt, a neighbour and her mother joined the discussions later. The meeting took place in a village near Shaka's Rock.

On 12 August 2002, I interviewed the groom and the bride as well as one of the *abakhongi*. The purpose was to ask them to reflect back on the very tough negotiations process that took place five years earlier. Masuku recalled that form the onset of the *ilobolo* negotiations, he was aware that the exercise was going to be a difficult one. It would have been unwise, he maintained, not to spiritualise the issues. *Ilobolo* negotiations, he conceded involved a "war" of words and the need to challenge injustices by standing one's ground. His view was that Christian principles of fair play did not apply in such situations, and sadly for him, his team was divided in its approach and the bride's uncle was inebriated, thus further contributing to the slow progress.

The bride, now mother of one and expecting their second child recalled that her family had used as a standard for determining her *ilobolo* a formula that had been applied to determine that of her niece. The *ilobolo* and *izibizo* thus amounted to nearly R17 000.00. Included was the father's cow or *inkomo ka baba*. This and other *izibizo* were not necessary according to the bride since she did not believe that the dead should be honoured by having cows dedicated to them. Her uncle, as leader of the bridal team, insisted that the shades would be angry with him if he did not follow through with all the customary *izibizo* requirements. He maintained that he could also not avoid slaughtering and by so doing reporting to the shades as well as provide enough meat for the guests on the wedding day.

In consequence, the two teams remained entrenched in their positions. The bridal party maintained that the unusually large delegation of church people from an Edendale and Swaziland could afford the *ilobolo* requested. The guests, on the other hand, pleaded that the amount be reduced since the groom was a seminary student and had not saved much money.

In the ensuing arguments and counter-arguments, the groom angrily threatened to withdraw his intention to go ahead with the marriage plans. At that point the negotiations paused, his party left the room to consult among themselves. When the parties reconvened, the bride's mother helped steer the negotiations back on track. She made it clear that as a parent, neither she nor any member of her family would ever want to frustrate their daughter's wedding plans by making impossible demands. She continued and said that if the groom's party had clarified their indigent position, the *ilobolo* could have been much less. Further discussions led to the *ilobolo* being almost halved the expectation being that

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when the groom started earning a salary, he would voluntarily make good the balance.

The couple has now been happily married for five years. The groom reports that he is now wholeheartedly accepted by his in-laws, likewise the bride by his family. Sadly, the relationship between them and the church that played a supporting role during their wedding preparations soured.

4.7.2 Case history 2, Ndlela- Nogiya, June 1999.

The Rev and Mrs Ndlela of Westgate in Pietermaritzburg are parents of two grown up daughters and a son. The younger of the two daughters, Patience, holds a Masters degree in psychology and works in Pretoria where she met Phinda Nogiya and the two decided to get married. Upon informing her father, Rev Ndlela convened a family gathering to inform his family of the imminent wedding. He had taken a decision, earlier when the children were younger that he would neither ask for nor refuse to accept *ilobolo* for either one of his daughters. In his view the essence of *ilobolo* and its stipulations would have been fully met if a friendship was struck between the families and the young couple established a home and cared for each other and their respective families.

During the family gathering in preparation for the wedding, the rest of the family members including the bride-to-be were all of one mind that their father should accept *ilobolo* if offered lest the Nogiyas feel slighted that a cultural norm had been set aside unilaterally. Following the family discussions and decision, Rev Ndlela approached me (June 1999) asking whether I would be willing and open to join him when the prospective *abalingani* or in-laws came to Pietermaritzburg. I agreed and Rev Ndlela and I devised a simple strategy that would honour the family's earlier decision.

As part of the strategy, Rev Ndlela and I decided that we would neither have a receipt book on hand nor would we be open to drawing up a written contract. We would rather ask that agreements be based on mutual trust and goodwill. We would certainly not ask for any *ilobolo* but would accept whatever we were offered on the day of negotiation or at a subsequent visit.

On the appointed day the Nogiyas (father, older son, family friend and prospective groom) arrived, after the normal pleasantries, they stated the purpose of their visit. The bride was called in, she agreed that the negotiations could go ahead and her father and I put forward our viewpoint as outlined above. The Nogiyas were visibly surprised and, on their own, asked that we allow them to confer outside. On their return, they expressed their gratitude and amazement. They stated that what they saw and heard expressed their own understanding of *ikazi* or *ilobolo*. They proceeded to hand over the cash that they had brought promising to bring some more at a later date. The money was passed on to the bride's mother and after a few more pleasantries, the two teams shared a meal.

On the second visit, the groom's mother accompanied the negotiating team saying she had wished to come on the first visit but felt that might have violated protocol. She expressed her own appreciation for the progress thus far. Again the two families shared a meal.

4.8 Data analysis and interpretation

In order to analyse the data and interpret the findings of the newspaper survey, the snap survey, intensive interview and the case studies, I made use of insights gained from theory elaboration, (Blumer 1969; Glasser and Strauss 1967). Rangin and Becker (1992:175) describe it as "a method of developing general theories of a particular phenomenon through qualitative case analysis." The two authors point out that theory elaboration rests, in the last analysis, on four premises.

First, that each interview conducted or case study compiled has to be examined independently of the others, respect its uniqueness, and find its idiosyncrasies in order to maximise theoretical insight. Blumer (1969:148) expresses this eloquently when he says:

> " Every object of our consideration – be it a person, group, institution –
> has a distinctive and unique character and is embedded within a context
> of a similarly distinctive character. [We] have to accept, develop, and
> use the distinctive expression in order to detect and study the
> community."

Consequently each of the interviews and case studies above was carried out and analysed individually before comparing it with the others. Blumer maintains that the comparative method would enable the researcher to see both the differences and

commonalities in the cases and use the latter to arrive at a new theory. In this regard, what was common in most of the interviews was that *ilobolo* established and maintained good family relationships, that even when too high, it could not be totally responsible for a growing urban practice of cohabitation. Human relationships thrive on love, therefore the law of the land should not interfere with *ilobolo*. Instead, the church was seen by many to have an important role to play in promoting moral values of fairness and justice and thus promoting lasting relationships.

Secondly theory elaboration maintains that data can contradict or reveal previously unseen inadequacies in the theoretical notions guiding the research while at the same time it provides a basis for reassessment and or rejection. It is therefore important that the researcher does not force the data to fit some predetermined mould. Chafetz's feminist and Guy's patriarchal theories (see **1.6** above) guide this thesis. Both theoreticians challenge oppressive social relations. However, the data gathered from field studies reveals inherent inadequacies in the two theories. The majority of women and men interviewed did not associate *ilobolo* with oppressive patriarchal attitudes. They pointed out that even in cultures where *ilobolo* is not practised, sexist attitudes do exist.

It does seem that Foucault's theory, (elaborated in **1.6** above), that in the social field where there is power encounter, it is always possible to modify repressive conditions by following specific strategies. Interviewees noted the negative aspects of *ilobolo* and suggested ways of overcoming them without rejecting the practice in its totality.

In the third instance, confirmation or contradiction may result from one and the same case study. In the Mlima- Masuku case history, Masuku maintained that his understanding of Christian principles of fair play and justice did not apply in *ilobolo* negotiations, yet he and his party were part of the *ilobolo* negotiations. Five years later, the couple reflected back on the very difficult negotiations and were thankful that the initial problems had been overcome.

Similarly, in the Mashego article (interview 10 above), the author states emphatically his oposition to *ilobolo* because he sees it as a means of appeasing the wrath of the ancestors. Yet a little later his Africanist views would not let him to " discard our traditions."

Finally, theory elaboration requires that in analysing the data, the researcher must assess guiding theoretical notions in the light of the findings. Having done so, my conclusion from the field data is that the persistence of *ilobolo* is due to its religious base. At the social level, there are problems with the way the custom is practiced but most of the problem areas are caused by lack of understanding of the primary function of *ilobolo* which is to establish and maintain family relationships.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter began by showing why ethnomethodology, its inherent weaknesses notwithstanding, was judged to be the best approach to test people's attitude towards *ilobolo*. Field data was assembled from three sources, a random sample of Pietermaritzburg African residents who were interviewed by journalists. Their views and comments were analysed, compared and contrasted with those of a

second source, a smaller sample of ten carefully selected informants. Thirdly, issues that emerged from two case histories were compared with findings obtained from the interviews.

During the interview process, the five themes which emerged formed the backdrop against which the case histories were analysed. In the first instance, the most vocal responses were those of male respondents. More importantly, these respondents deplored the inherent weaknesses of modern *ilobolo*, significantly none of them felt that *ilobolo* ought to be abolished. In both case studies, the negotiating parties consisted of males. In the Masuku-Mlima case, the bride's mother was present from the beginning most likely because her husband had died. However, she joined the negotiations towards the end. She, together with her brother, the bride's uncle, represented the Mlima family. In the second case, Mrs Ndlela only came during the second visit. We may thus conclude that the *ilobolo* negotiations are still very much a male dominated exercise.

Secondly, the general feeling by both male and female respondents was that most people sadly misunderstand the real purpose of ilobolo today. Therefore, thirdly, there is an urgent need to transform contemporary *ilobolo* so that it approximates as nearly as possible, its original intent of establishing and maintaining close family ties. In the Masuku-Mlima case the *ilobolo* was a bit excessive at R17000.00. The groom was a recent graduate from a Bible seminary and not in a position to raise such a huge amount. During the tough negotiations, the bride's family reduced the figure substantially. They pointed out that had they known or if they had been informed of the groom's indigence, they could have asked for less. One got the feeling that though they started at a different point from that of the second case

history, in the final analysis all understood that *ilobolo* is negotiable contract and its purpose is to establish and maintain good family relationships. Two female respondents, from among the twenty four interviewed, were adamant that *ilobolo* be abolished because, as they put it, neither wanted to be 'sold' when they got married or, in Queen's case when time came for her daughter to get married.

To a large extent, the informants' response to *ilobolo* and the law; *ilobolo* and the church and particularly the increasing compromised situation that men who fail or are unable to give *ilobolo* find themselves in, was that the practice should not be interfered with. They maintained that it was an ancient and sacrosanct custom. Three of the informants linked the *loboli*-ng process to uniting both the living and their respective shades. This understanding characterised the first case history where the bride's uncle was a traditional healer, *isangoma*. Throughout the negotiation, he was dressed in special regalia that *izangoma* wear and was seated on the floor as is custom. It took quite some time for the bride's family to waive some of the *ilobolo* requirements ostensibly because doing so interfered with obligations to the shades. In the second case history the negotiations were easy from the very beginning. No animals were slaughtered, the two parties consisted of church people who shared a common freedom from traditional practices.

The role of the shades in the first case history touched on African cosmology and its impact on society generally and the urban communities in particular. In consequence, the next chapter on the theology of the cow will draw on insights of African theology in order to tease out the role played by *amabheka* or *ilobolo* beasts in marriage. In this study, we contend that the rituals of spilling of blood, the

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uniting of the shades are the underlying reasons why *ilobolo* could have persisted to the present time and is likely to do so for the foreseeable future.

CHAPTER FIVE

A THEOLOGY OF THE BEAST

5.1 Introduction

Right at the very onset we wish to dispel any possible misunderstanding that might arise from the title of this chapter. It would be inaccurate to conclude from it that a cow or a beast is capable of doing theology. That is not the point. Much less do we want to suggest the existence of a lower brand of theology so simple that persons with a mental capacity equal to that of cattle can understand it. What we do hope to achieve, however in this section on the theology of the beast, is throw some light on the role that cattle played and still play in African people's understanding of, communication with, and relationship to God.

The chapter seeks to highlight one of Africa's key cultural heritages and demonstrates its deep socio-religious roots. Examining the work of selected African women theologians will highlight its complex nature. The chapter is crucial to the entire study in that it seeks to draw together strands from earlier discussion on Zulu self-understanding and the spirituality of marriage. In it we will explore the religious symbolism of cattle, their ownership and the central role they play in the rituals of purification and the bonding of African communities through marriage. All of the above will be viewed against the backdrop of a recognition and acknowledgement of the existence of a creator God, the mediatorial role of the

ancestors and their ownership of cattle held in trust for them by household heads and other community leaders. The chapter will also act as a bridge to enable me to move on to the next chapter on the interface of the gospel and culture.

In the South African context, and among AmaZulu, it is my contention that cattle or beast theology provides an interpretative key to understanding the persistence of *ilobolo* not only in the community selected for study, but in many others as well. That kind of theology takes seriously its context and is likely to make a lasting impact on its recipients in that it deals with issues closest to the peoples concerned. How such a theology works will be the topic of discussion in subsequent paragraphs.

5.2 Africa's theological heritage

5.2.1 Religion, a foreign concept to Africa?

Three centuries ago Dapper (1668:75) wrote this about Africans in Southern Africa;

> " No one however thoroughly he has enquired, has ever been able to find among all the Kaffirs [Bantu] or Hottentots or Beachrangers [Bushmen] any trace of religion, or any show of honour to God or the Devil."

That view was reiterated in religious gatherings at the turn of the twentieth century, notably the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh 1910. Barrett[69] reports that the optimistic expectation by delegates to evangelise the world in this generation was tempered by the belief that, should " things continue as they are now tending,

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[69] See Barrett's report on AD 2000: 350 Million Christians in Africa, In: *IRM* , vol. 59, January 1970, p 39-54.

[with little or no theological understanding among Africans], Africa may become a Mohammedan continent." At that gathering there was a general belief among European interpreters of Africa that what they termed noble savages could articulate any form of theology, that religion was foreign to the animistic people of Africa. Not only were such statements inaccurate and untested, but they showed lack of understanding of the theological heritage of African people. That view remained current until after the a second missionary conference in Le Zoute, Belgium at which, according to Smith (1926) cited in Bediako (2000:4), delegates this time affirmed that:

> " It has now become recognised that Africans have been prepared by previous experience for the reception of the Gospel and that their experience contains elements of high religious value."

Tutu and many other proponents of African theology[70] brought about a welcome corrective to the view popularised during the Edinburgh conference by pointing out that God was known among Africans long before missionaries arrived. One African woman put it this way, " missionaries did not bring God to Africa, but God brought missionaries to Africa."

5.2.2 To the known God of African religion.

Unlike the inhabitants of first century Athens who worshipped idols[71], Africans have always embraced a monotheistic faith. Religion has always been at the very

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[70] See Bolaji Idowu 1962:1969 on Communicating the old and the new in Africa's religious experience; Kenneth Cragg 1980:194 on Integrity in consciousness; Fashole-Luke 1975:267 on Conversion in cultural continuity.

[71] Acts 17:22f.

heart of Africa's traditional societies and, still to a very large extent, urban communities as well. The recent growth and impact of eastern religions notwithstanding, the monotheistic faith existed on the African soil long before the arrival of Western missionaries. In the words of Bujo (1992:17), " God was recognised as the source of all life" by Africans. They held that both the animate and inanimate did not just emerge, they were created by God. Consequently land and, for the particular purpose of this chapter, cattle were regarded as religious or theological symbols rather than being seen as mere articles of trade and exchange. God's rule and domain encompassed life in its totality, hence Mbiti (1969:29) could write that;

> " God is the origin and sustenance of all things ...He is outside and beyond His creation. On the one hand, He is personally involved in His creation, so that it is not outside of Him or His reach. God is thus simultaneously transcendent and immanent; and a balanced understanding of these two extremes is necessary in our discussion of African conceptions of God."

By way of illustration, recently[72] I was driving along the Edendale road past Imbali township towards Edendale hospital. I stopped at a traffic intersection and saw on the left a store in an informal settlement with a caption *Bongumusa weNkosi* (thank God for his grace) Mini Market. This was a classic example of the close link between business and the religious values of the proprietor. It is not uncommon to see mini-bus taxis in many of South Africa's urban centres with religious inscriptions such as Jehovah Jireh, or Jesus Saves, hence Bediako (2000:xii) could write:

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[72] 03 05 2002

" In Africa, religion remains part of African consciousness as a whole. Identity is tied up with it and so it relates more fully to everyday life, in contrast to the European secular self-understanding."

Africa's theology, disparagingly referred to by outsiders as fetishes, superstition, or traditional religion[73] is nevertheless a theology because it is the African's own reflection on the nature and character of God and his relation to the universe that he created. It laid a firm foundation for the introduction of the Christian faith by missionaries in the nineteenth century in that, according to Th. Kamainda, cited in Bujo (1992:18);

> " The novelty of Christianity for Africans did not consist in its proclamation of one God, but rather in the more complete and definitive proclamation of one God whom Africa already knew, and also in the God of Jesus Christ. It showed more clearly than the African tradition was able to show how this one God wishes to be, and can be in fact, better known and loved."

This God was known and he revealed himself in acts of benevolence such as providing fields and increasing fertility, ensuring that there was enduring peace in the land, plenty of rain and cattle. Among the Basotho this belief is expressed in their national anthem:

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[73] The more commonly used term even in recent literature is African Traditional Religion (ATR). One hardly ever hears of American, German or English traditional religion. Their reflections on God and the universe is assumed to be theology while that of Africans has to remain traditional religion.

Lesotho fatse la bo Ntata rona	Lesotho land of our forbears
Hara mafatse le letle ke lona	It is the most beautiful of all lands
Re na le masimo	We have our fields
Re na le likhomo	Our own cattle
Re ea le rata	We love our land
Modimo a k'o boloke Lesotho	God (we pray) keep Lesotho
U felise lintoa le matsoenyeho	End all her troubles
Oho fatse lena	Oh! This land
Labo Ntata rona	That you gave to our forbears
Le be le khotso	May it experience abiding peace

Similarly the longer, unabridged and original isiXhosa version of *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*[74] expresses similar sentiments. Sontonga composed the first verse and the rest were added on by Samuel Mqayi in 1927 and published in the Presbyterian hymn book. As Harper (1994:10) points out, the verses express a prayer and a ' hope that the *aMakhosi* will remember and revere their creator, public officials and youth will carry the land with patience, wives and young women will be blessed, ministers will be filled with the Holy Spirit, agriculture and stock raising will flourish and so will efforts on self-upliftment.' Among AmaZulu, likewise, the knowledge of an immanent God, ready to bless his creatures is part of the traditional and present culture.

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[74] *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* - God Bless Africa, is today a component of a new South African national anthem. It was composed in 1897 by Enoch Sontonga, a school teacher who lived in Klipspruit just outside Johannesburg, in a conglomerate of townships known today as Soweto (South Western Townships). The lyrics and the tune were adopted by several countries in the sub-continent until about twenty years ago when these countries became independent and composed their own national anthems.

If the majority of Africans have such a high view of God, it would be incongruous to say that they were animists, as many of anthropologists and sociologists think. The World Book Encyclopaedia, (1969:476) defines animism as,

> " A belief that all things in nature have spirits, even lifeless objects such as stones. An animist tries to please the Spirits so that they will not harm him. Animists also believe that a spirit may be transferred to another object. For example, an evil spirit may 'possess' a person's body. Many people who live in Africa, Asia and the Pacific Islands believe in animism."

Leslie *et al.* (1980:441) define animism and fetishism

> " As a most personal form of religion compared to most other belief systems that involve groups. Fetishism also locates power in lifeless objects, whereas most other religions locate it in living ones."

If the two definitions above represent the accepted understanding of animism or fetishism, then Africans are not animists because they do not believe that lifeless objects such as stones possess supernatural powers. To argue otherwise amounts to what Hay (1989:424) terms "the fog of incomprehension." I will show below that according the world- view of Africans, power is located in living beings and in an immanent and transcendent God.

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5.2.3 An immanent and a transcendent God

In spite of God's involvement in the daily lives and needs of his people as shown above, his transcendence was also recognised. Among Basotho, Bapedi and Batswana it is seen in the common root *–hodimo* (up or high) of their translation for God which translates as *Modimo*. Likewise among AbeNguni, their understanding was that God inhabited the heavens above. Among AmaZulu, it was considered a sign of disrespect for humans to point at the heavenly seat of God by using one's index finger. If there was compelling need to point in the direction heaven, one did so by means of a clenched fist or discreetly turned their eyes in that direction. The belief in a God who inhabited the heavens was balanced by a recognition that he does involve himself in daily affairs. Like all theologies, African theology is not without its weaknesses.

5.2.4 A blind spot of African theology

Given that balanced understanding of a God who is intimately involved in the world that he created, other African theologians such as Oduyoye, have pointed out that an African theology's concept of God, while addressing economic and racial issues, has sadly ignored gender issues (Oduyoye 1995:176). In doing so, it has developed a blind spot to its own socio-historical roots where the 'gender of God does not have a big role to play in Africa's religious language... [and] the African mind contains an image of a motherly Father or a fatherly Mother as the Source of Being,' (: 179).

The main reason, which Oduyoye advances for the marginalisation of women, is that African theology depends on gendered European languages as media of communication, thus women have been ignored in theological discourse. As a corrective, Oduyoye's plea is that African Christian writers make greater use of their inclusive languages and be intentional in ' including both women and men with humility.'(: 181)

A complete understanding of a creator God does not permit a classification of people in sexist categories. So to be 'authentic, Christian theology must promote the interdependence of distinctive beings and stand by the principles of inclusiveness and interdependence,'(: 181). We move then from a general understanding of God in Africa and focus in on the notion of God among AmaZulu.

5.3 The notion of God among AmaZulu

5.3.1 *uNkulunkulu* and *uMvelinqangi* controversy

Zulu tradition knows a great deal more about God than they are credited with. Much has been written on the controversy among early missionaries and linguists regarding the best isiZulu translation for the Christian idea of God. Smith notes that missionaries and their interpreters introduced the isiXhosa expression *uThixo* as an isiZulu term for God. However, according to him, Bishop Colenso objected saying that *uThixo* was foreign to the isiZulu language, branding the borrowed term as "a barbarous unmeaning Hottentot name" (Smith *et al.* 1961:103). Colenso opted instead for *uNkulunkulu* or *uMvelinqangi* as the nearest Zulu translations for God.

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Smith notes that even those translations were not satisfactory for Colenso, he found them too long and he suggested names such as *uMphezulu,* the One Who is Above, or even using an isiZulu version of the Latin Deus and rendering it *uDio.*

Many missionaries disagreed with Colenso. The Wesleyans translated God by using *uJehova.* Similarly, Callaway (1870:7), after conferring with many isiZulu speakers, concluded from informants such as uFulatela Sitole that *uMvelinqangi* – variously translated as 'The One who came out first, The first outcomer, One who emerged first from the origin of all things' – those expressions were the best and nearest translations for God. As the prior source of being, *uMvelinqangi* was believed by AmaZulu to have emerged – *wadabuka-* from a bed of reeds whose locale is shrouded in mystery. He was also referred to as *uQili* or the Wise One, or *uMdali,* the Creator. All that Zulu sages could confirm was that *uMvelinqangi* " *wa vela lapho abantu badabuka khona ohlangeni-* that *uMvelinqangi* emerged or broke off from the reeds where all humans come from. This view of God, considered alongside other[75] appellations of him as the Wise One, the Creator, the Powerful One, belie the common assertion that Africans cannot think in abstract terms.

Smith (*et al.* 1961:109) notes that AmaZulu expressed God's power in abstract terms such as *uDumakude* or the one who thunders since long far off times- from the beginning. Also as *uMabonga-kutuk'izizwe-zonke,* The One who roars so that all nations are struck with terror. This happens, according to Berglund's informants (1976:37) when the male thunder, *elenduna,* murmurs at some distance and then becomes louder and louder as it approaches. " This kind is not feared but looked

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[75] Berglund (1976:36) adds expressions such as *uMpande* which he says is formed from a stem meaning a root. Also *uNsondo* or someone whose good actions are repeated over and over again like a wheel in motion.

upon with awe and respect." The female thunder, *elesifazane,* on the other hand, was believed to be caused by *uMvelinqangi* when he was not in a good mood. This is the type accompanied by lightning and heavy rainfall (*ibid:* 38).

Smith cites Father Wanger as saying that in his (Wanger's) encounter with AmaZulu, he came across other hard to explain expressions even among AmaZulu themselves for God, such as *Icibi-eli[n]omnqwazi-pezulu.* The probable meaning being that God is " the immense ocean whose circular head-dress is the heaven (horizon)." Other tittles of God such as *uZivelele* - He who came of himself into being, led Wanger to conclude that AmaZulu had;

> " A God-name more philosophical and theological, more precise and significative than any European people can boast of." Smith (*et al.,*1961:109).

This agrees with Callaway's observations that there was a common belief among AmaZulu that God was not created, he came into being. One of Callaway's informants, uNsukuzonke Memela (1870:42) attests to the prior existence of, and the creative abilities of *uMvelinqangi* in that way back in history;

> " There sprang up a man and a woman. The name of both was Unkulunkulu. They sprang from a reed, the reed which is in the water. The reed was made by uMvelinqangi. UMvelinqangi caused the grass and trees to grow; he created all wild animals, and cattle, and game, and snakes, and birds, and water, and mountains."

5.3.2 The relationship between *uNkulunkulu* and *uMvelinqangi*

From oral evidence gathered from Callaway's informants it is clear that they were not agreed on the exact relationship between *uNkulunkulu* and *uMvelinqangi*. Some regarded both expressions as interchangeable (Sitole :7; Zimase :38; Memela: 41), while others such as uMpengula Mbanda (1870:16) maintained that *uMvelinqangi* gave rise to *uNkulunkulu* and his wife. The pair begat the ancestors who begat the great grand ancestors and so on right down to the present living beings. According to this view, *uNkulunkulu* was the first being, the originator of each family in the human race, hence all families had each their own proto-ancestors, who had since died and those who were still alive. They were known collectively as *onkulunkulu* or the gods. The secondary nature of *uNkulunkulu* and the belief that he/she was created by *uMvelingqangi* is further attested to by the existence in Zulu folklore of a species of caterpillar that travelled about in an encasing of bits of wood. It was know as *unkulunkulu* (Doke *et al.*, 1990:580.)

Besides *uNkulunkulu*, AmaZulu believed in a female deity known as *uNomkhubulwana*, the Princess of heaven. She was believed to be a virgin and a daughter of *uMvelinqangi*. It was said of her that she caused plentiful harvest and fertility among animals and humans. She is also said to have lived in the sky with her father and came to earth annually carried by morning mists and would be visible to children and young maidens (Berglund 1976:65). At times she revealed herself to the community in the form of a rainbow, *uthingo lwenkosazana*, believed to be supple sticks that formed part of her hut. Consequently isiZulu huts were built with

soft wattle saplings in the form of an arch because the princess taught people to build that way (*ibid:* 70).

In order to honour her presence, girls traditionally performed a ceremony known as *unomdede* as a means of driving away evil spirits from crops. On that occasion, they would dress in men's clothing, herd the cattle to the grazing fields early in the morning, taking with them specially brewed beer and seeds for *Nomkhubulwana* to bless. The belief was that the Princess would communicate to her earthly sisters what her father wished them to know about good behaviour. This included sexual purity or virginity until marriage. For a more detailed treatment of the subject, see (Zwane 2003). The notion of God among AmaZulu would not be complete without at the same time considering the world of the ancestors, to which we now turn.

5.4 Ancestorology

Ancestorology [76] is a crucial component of African religious belief system and is closely allied to their relationship to God. In this section we will outline the structure of the cult of the ancestors, examine how it impacts the daily life of many Africans in rural and also in urban areas. The belief is still deeply embedded in the hearts and minds of many, hence Gwembe (1995:30) writes:

> " For this reason, in many African societies, people take important oaths over the graves, in the presence of the ancestors. It is also very significant that for

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[76] For purposes of this study we shall define ancestorology as a prevalent belief among most Africans that the 'living dead' (J.S Mbiti's term) positively influence the day to day affairs of the living if they (ancestors) are remembered and honoured, and negatively if neglected.

Africans the land (home) of one's origin is not where one was born but where the ancestors are buried. The desire to die at one's own home in order to be buried together with the ancestors is characteristic of every African."

5.4.1 The body, soul and *isithunzi* dialectic in humans.

Vilakazi (1962:87) distinguishes three aspects which AmaZulu regarded as making up a living being. These are a person's physical body or *inyama /umzimba*. The body was believed to form the outward part of the human that is seen and ultimately disintegrates after death. Secondly, the spirit or *umoya* was regarded as the vital force that gives life to the body and when it leaves the body, a person dies. He notes that the spirit can also be understood as representing a person's instinct or foreboding as in the case where an isiZulu speaker would be heard to say:

" *Umoya wami awuvumi ukuba ngenze lento,* my spirit does not allow me to do such- and-such a thing; or, my spirit does not allow me to go to such-and-such a place. Sometimes it can give to a person a foreboding, so that a man says, I won't do so-and-so because my spirit *(umoya)* is not quite free about it. In this sense it could be likened to Jung's " unconscious psyche." Vilakazi (:87).

Finally, is the third aspect, *isithunzi* or shadow/ shade which is a disembodied spirit. At death, Vilakazi's informants, told him that the spirit passes into the air and remains there until it is brought back to the nether world, the world of the ancestors, through a ceremony known as *ukubuyisa, (ibid* :89). Depending on the quality of life that such a person lived and also who they were, their spirit became an ancestor. In more recent times there has been a debate regarding the expression which accurately describes this disembodied spirit, ancestor or shade.

5.4.2 Terminological impasse and resolution

A great majority of anthropology and theology works- (Berglund 1976, Kidd 1904 and Mbiti 1969 are notable exceptions)- refer to the spirits of the dead as the ancestors. Mbiti (1970:76) refers to them as the living dead, an expression informed by a common African belief that, though people die physically, their spirits live eternally and maintain contact with their descendants. Berglund (1976:78), on the other hand, translates those spiritual beings as the shades, that being a direct translation of the isiZulu term *isithunzi* or its plural form *izithunzi.*

In this study, ancestors or shades will be used interchangeably though shades will take precedence when the technical understanding is uppermost. That second expression conveys the understanding that those 'beings' are souls of the departed members of the homesteads who maintain a dynamic contact with members of their families who are still alive. It is important to emphasise that, contrary to Western interpretations of their role as being ogres that constantly demand to be appeased, Ela (1988:19) has shown, in a most illuminating study of the subject that:

> " In Africa the dead are part of the family. As such, they do not represent hostile "powers" whose harmful influences must be neutralised by magical rites. Neither are they excluded from happenings in the life of the clan; rather, their presence is authentically experienced as the participation of the invisible world in the world of the living. So the libations and food offered to them are signs of respect and fraternity in a cultural context where communication with the invisible is just one aspect of the total reality of people's lives."

An ancestor, on the other hand, has tended to be an undifferentiated bland expression whose meaning may convey anything ranging from one's long forgotten forebear who died long ago and is vaguely remembered by his living descendants, to a grandparent, dead or alive and everybody else who falls between the two extremes.

By contrast Berglund's (1976:78) expression, in our view, captures the essence of those spiritual beings who, though dead, remain in the memory of their descendants. More than just being remembered, the belief among many African people is that the shades take on a miniature human form though lacking in solid substance except when revealing themselves to members of a homestead. In African theology, shades are believed to reveal themselves to the community in the form of snakes. A shade would transform itself into a green and brown snake known as *inyandezulu* if the departed person was of high rank such as an *iNkosi*. Lesser shades were believed to take the form of snakes such as *umhlwazi, umsenene, ubulube* and *umzingandlu,*(see Krige 1936:285; Vilakazi 1962:89). When such a visit took place, it was cause of great jubilation, marked by a slaughtering of a sacrificial beast.

Dreams were another means of communication with the departed. The belief, according to a writer from the Congo, was that the soul of a living member of the community could leave his body while he slept and;

" Operate independently of it and return to it at will. It is the explanation of a dream. The soul slips out of the body and talks, sees, hears, travels and capers entirely on its own account. When out of the body, which it leaves smug under its blanket, it knows neither time nor space. It hunts in distant jungles, interviews dead acquaintances, enjoys the most delightful excursions, performs sensational feats and gets back to its old clay tenement before the cocks begin to crow in the morning." Willoughby (1928:4).

5.4.3 Shades and their relationship to God in time and space.

Among AmaZulu, *uMvelinqangi* was believed to be too far removed in time and space to be approached directly by living beings. Consequently the departed members of their community who had distinguished themselves by leading upright and exemplary lives, who died at a ripe old age and left an offspring, and whose *izibongo* or praise names were known, were believed to have formed the hallowed company of the gods of the people otherwise known as *amathongo, amadlozi* and even *onkulunkulu*. The shades were believed to have a more privileged access to *uMvelinqangi* than their living descendants and could thus act as intermediaries between the community and God.

With regard to their origin, Mbiti (1969:75) maintains that they could be divided into two categories. The one group consisting of those beings who belong to an ontological mode of existence. In this regard, he agrees with Callaway's findings among AmaZulu that *amathongo* were created, though the exact time of that creation is not exactly known except to say it was prior to the creation of humans. Mbiti's second category consists of those shades who were once humans but have

since died, naturally.[77] As spiritual beings, they are believed to be ordinarily invisible but always ubiquitous.

5.4.4 The spatial location and powers of the shades.

After studying many African communities, W.C. Willoughby (1928:57) concluded that a common belief was that the shades inhabited the underworld. Hence among Batswana, Willoughby notes that men were buried just outside the cattle pan while the great wife was buried under the threshing floor. He cites Junod (*ibid*:58) whose association with the Thonga people also led him to a similar conclusion that the abode of the shades is in the netherworld. For Junod, this belief was expressed in a sacrificial chant which, translated, reads:

> " They (the oxen) are coming, they see me as I mourn for thee, father and mother, my gods. I have remained outside (on the earth). I am wretched; but I received life from you who are in the earth down. I slaughter oxen, here they are; I mourn over thee! Let us eat peace together, father and mother, give me life, me and my children, that we may live without cough, here at home."

The Tswana and Thonga belief is replicated among AmaZulu who regarded the shades as *abaphantsi* or those who are below the surface of the earth. A parallel expression is *amathongo* or those who sleep. In consequence, Casalis (*ibid*:60), agreeing with Arbousset, concluded that:

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[77]See also Krige E.J (1936:284) and Sikhakhane J. OMI (1995:101) on those requirements that qualified one to be declared an ancestor. Sikhakhane lists the following as the necessary conditions for one to be regarded as a shade: natural death of an elderly person; observance of proper burial rites; the rite of incorporation or *ukubuyisa* and, finally, that the progeny of the shades has to have a blood relationship with the shade in question.

> " All the natives believe the world of the spirits to be in the bowels of the earth. They call the mysterious region *mosima* (abyss); *mosima o sa tlaleng* or the abyss that is never filled."

It is perhaps an exaggeration to say that all 'natives' believe that the world of the spirits is in the netherworld. While there may be those who do, there are others, as Adeyemo (1997:63) correctly points out, who maintain that the land of the dead is either in the woods, the wilderness, rocks and pools, in caves, above the clouds or simply in heaven above. Wherever they are, the spirits are, in the words of Smith (*et al.,*1961:84)

> " Guardians of the heart; they see everything, hear everything, are interested in all the affairs, and wish above everything to be remembered and be told happenings. Unless they are neglected, they act benevolently."

If they were not remembered, the belief was that *idlozi* would turn its face away from the offending person(s) thus allowing misfortune to plague such a one. When faced with such a calamitous situation, the sufferer would bemoan the fact that his or her *idlozi* had turned its back on him\her and would say, *idlozi or amadlozi akithi angifulathele.* In order to appease an angry shade, a sacrificial beast or goat would be slaughtered imploring the ancestor to look with favour on the afflicted person. Whether it was in acknowledging a visitation from *idlozi* or offering a sacrifice to appease angry ones, the ceremony was a private affair of that particular family. Therefore the modern urban practice of inviting and including strangers, church members and members of other families in honouring ancestors is out of keeping with traditional belief. UMpengula Mbanda, Callaway's informant underlines this fact by saying;

" Black people do not worship all amatongo indifferently, that is, all the dead of their tribe. Speaking generally, the head of each house is worshipped by the children of that house; for they do not know the ancients who are dead, nor their laud-giving names, nor their names. But their father whom they begin and end their prayer, for they know him best, and his love for his children; they remember his kindness to them while he was living, they compare his treatment of them whilst he was living, support themselves by it and say, "he will treat us in the same way now he is dead. We do not know why he should regard others besides us; he will regard us only." Callaway (1970:144).

From Mbanda's translated statement above, it is clear that each family had its own chant or *ihubo* known exclusively by family members. Berglund's (1976:199) informants contend that an *ihubo* was a regimental song introduced by king Shaka. It was sung in order to strengthen the regiments against their enemies. More than that, Bryant (1949:231) points out that an *ihubo* was essentially a sacred clan song, each clan having its own, and it was sung in the cattle enclosure because that is where the shades were believed to stay. When sung, members stood still and the men held their shields raised in a symbol of peace (Berglund 1976:199).

Secondly, it is doubtful if worship, in the technical sense in which it is used and understood in the Bible, is the correct translation of the isiZulu verb of *ukukhuleka* which, like a similar expression *ukukhonza*, could mean either to worship or it could simply mean to greet, acknowledge or honour someone. A close examination of the context in which *ukukhuleka* is used in Mbanda's isiZulu text and translated worship, does seem to suggest the second of the two meanings. In the ordinary run of things in the home, children did not worship their father while he was alive, they honoured and respected him. I see no compelling reason therefore why they would

worship him now that he is dead. In an isiZulu culture, worship and prayers were addressed ultimately to *uMvelinqangi*. The shades were informed or spoken to, or as AmaZulu would say, *abaphantsi bayabikelwa*. In the case of someone who had acted in an anti-social manner, the warning to them was that they make amends because, as Ntshangase[78] observes ; *"idlozi liyabhekelwa."* Having being informed, they are requested to play a mediatorial role between *uMvelinqangi* and the people.

Furthermore, it is not uncommon even today to hear an isiZulu speaker greet his or her hosts by saying, *sikhulekile ekhaya*. The meaning is clearly not that the visitor worships the hosts, but is merely acknowledging their presence. To further clarify my argument, and in relation to another South African people group, Batswana, Setiloane (1986:18) makes the point that;

> " Africans, unless they have grown to internalize the "Westerners" views of themselves, strongly resent the suggestion that they "worship" Badimo. They argue that the European word "worship" does not properly convey the same meaning as that of 'service' (*tirelo*) which they perform in relation to their ancestors. That 'service' which is rendered to Badimo is in fact of the same quality and level as that rendered to one's parents while they are living. In SeTswana: ' *Re direla Badimo*': We serve (fulfil all proper duties towards them and provide them with the necessities of life, food, clothing, etc.) but ' *Re rapela Modimo*': We pray to Modimo."

Older people within the community, those about to pass on to the next phase of their existence through death were frequently also referred to as *amadlozi* (Thorpe 1991:38, Bediako 2000:30). Of special importance among AmaZulu was that such a person did not automatically become an ancestor after death, they had first to be

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[78] N.N. Ntshangase cited on page 2 of an undated document: *Can I teach you my religion? Should I? How? Life orientation workshop. Stories told by the descendants of Ntu.*

brought home through a ritual ceremony of dragging a branch of a tree, *ihlahla* starting from where the person died. The branch would then be taken to the home where the person lived before death (Hammond-Tooke 1974:328).

The belief in ancestors was informed by two considerations. First, as Willoughby (1928:2) put it, " to the Bantu, survival after death is not a matter for argument or speculation; it is an axiom of life." Though one's relatives died physically, they continued to exist beyond death. Belief in immortality is based on an old African legend, with many local variations, that after God had created human beings, he sent a slow animal, AmaZulu say it was a chameleon, *unwabo* to tell human beings that they would not die or if they died, they would rise again.

A second animal, *intulo* or a lizard, was sent with the same message but in its haste to deliver the message, it altered it to say that human beings would die one day. It reached its destination and delivered the wrong message. When the sluggish first messenger arrived death had set in and AmaZulu were not open to receive the original message saying *sesibambe elentulo* meaning, we have decided to hang on to the first message received, a message of death.

Secondly, traditional protocol decreed that a younger person did not directly approach their superior but did so through a mediator who was his or her senior. She or he did not dare call an elderly person by name. Remnants of this practice are still evident in current African settings including the academia where students will often find some ways other than use the first names of their mentors. They will use expressions such as *moruti/mfundisi* (teacher), *Rra/ baba* (father), professor or some

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such respectful term. It would thus have been inconceivable for African people to approach God directly. They did so through the shades.

Inspite of their privileged position as mediators, the shades possessed limited powers. According to Vilakazi (1962:88) their powers could be circumscribed and the shades could even be kept captive by means of medicines through a process known as *ukuthwebula*. He goes on to state that Zulu belief maintained that shades could also be created by means of dangerous medicines. Therefore it was possible for some shades to act rashly by displaying a fiery temper thus earning themselves the name of *izithutha* or fools, (*ibid*:90).

5.5 Symbolic value of cattle

From what has been shown above, it is clear that animals played a vital role in Africa's belief system. Family groupings among Blacks in South Africa even today still relate to each other through descent from a line of forbears and also through identification with particular animals, terrestrial and aquatic. Members of a sib refer to themselves either as *Bakoena* (those who unite themselves under a crocodile), *Bathlaping* (the fish) even *Batsweneng* (the monkey) and so forth. Of all the animals, the cow occupied a special place of honour and among Bagaduwa people who live North of Pretoria, their favourite expression for greeting one another is, *kgomo Bagaduwa!* (Bagaduwa, we greet you in the name of a cow), similarly among Basotho, a variation of that expression is used in greetings. One frequently hears them say, in greeting one another, *kgomo tseo, le manamane a tsona,* literally translated as " those cows and their calves." Basotho also refer to the cow as *modimo o nko e metsi* or a god with a wet nose. As with all animals,

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the cow was not worshipped but the important role it played in society was recognised.

According to my informant[79], an 86 year old Rev B.S. Rajuili, a cow was not only valued for its commercial value among Basotho, it also conferred to its owner an important status symbol in society. If a man did not own cattle, he was regarded as a non-person and his contribution carried little weight at *khotla* or village council. At death, the corpse of an adult was wrapped in a skin of a freshly slaughtered beast as if to say the cow will take the departed back to his forbears.

A continuation of wrapping in fresh skin is today seen in that at death, a newly purchased and very expensive blanket is draped over the coffin prior to the dead person being solemnly buried. It is therefore evident that the theology of most African peoples, especially those who were pastoralists centred around the cow which remains an important symbol of God's provision and a means of people showing their gratitude through sacrificing it, or its substitute, to the shades so that they, in turn can relay the message to God.

It was for that reason that Hoernle (1925:481) in a paper she presented at the university of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg made the point that in many African cultures there is such intimate bond between the people and cattle that if an evil affects the people, cattle are also affected and vice versa. Cattle and their milk, and I wish to add that their skins as well, played such a pivotal role in everyday life of the people that Hoernle studied, that she concludes;

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[79] Personal interview conducted on 28th October 2001.

"We can never hope to understand the real and original function of such customs as the lobola transfer of cattle for a bride or the sacrifices to the dead, until we realise that we are in contact with ideas of cattle different from our own ... The customs are part of a tradition handed down from the distant past, and it is we who must, by a careful analysis, seek to understand the significance and their function (*ibid.*, 482)."

Not only are outsiders the only ones who are not fully informed about the significance of cattle in the marriage of African peoples, an increasing number of urban dwellers is fast losing that information as well. The old sages are fast dying out and taking with them a rich store of the knowledge that has been passed from generation to generation. Furthermore, in South Africa, cattle ownership among the Black community was severely curtailed by diseases such as the rinderpest at the end of the last century; by urbanisation and industrialisation and thirdly, the systematic dispossession of arable and pastoral land from Africans by successive White governments since 1913[80].

The diminishing impact of African oral history and urbanisation notwithstanding, it is the view of this researcher that the stubborn persistence of *ilobolo* inspite of concerted efforts from church and state to eradicate it, has to do with its link to cattle. Thus for a better appreciation of the persistence of *ilobolo*, its adaptability to different social, political and religious contexts, it is essential to do an analysis of a theology of cattle. Cattle as we have shown above, have traditionally been

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[80] Act No 27 of 1913 was signed into law by the British Governor-general of South Africa on June 16 1913 and enforced three days later. It carved out some parts of South Africa as the only areas where natives (sic) could enter into limited land transactions. This infamous Act, also known as The Natives Land Act, was repealed on June 30 1991 when the Abolition of Racially Based Land Measures Act No. 108 of 1991 was signed into the statute book.

important vehicles of African theology. Consequently *ilobolo* may be regarded essentially as a spiritual custom that is firmly etched in the very being of African peoples.

In modern and rural settings, even when *ilobolo* is given in money, the understanding and the expression used to refer to it is that of cattle. Among AmaZulu and other South African peoples, the negotiator will often say, when handing over the money, 'here are the cows from my principals to you (referring to the bride's people).' These cattle belong ultimately to God though entrusted to the shades and through them, to the community. We turn next to the central role that cattle play in African cultural and religious beliefs and we will do so by examining Adam Kuper's and Melville Herskovitz' cattle complex in East Africa.

5.6 Kuper's and Herskovitz' cattle complex

A group of German ethnologists, the chief of whom is F. Graebner, have mapped out certain geographical areas in different continents and named them culture areas or *kulturkreise*. A *kulturkreise*, according to Herskovitz (1888:230),

> " Is conceived as the area wherein there prevails a given culture complex, - where all the cultural elements of the complex are to be found in the most, approximately, pure form."

Using the Graebnerian construct, Herskovitz delineates the East African culture area as a chunk of land stretching to the South and East from lake Rudolf to the Indian ocean. The Northernmost part of this area is inhabited by the Shilluk, Beir, Nuer and Dinka peoples. It extends to the South, including countries such as

Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Mozambique all the way up to the Eastern half of South Africa. (see Fig **5.6.1** below)

Fig 5.6.1
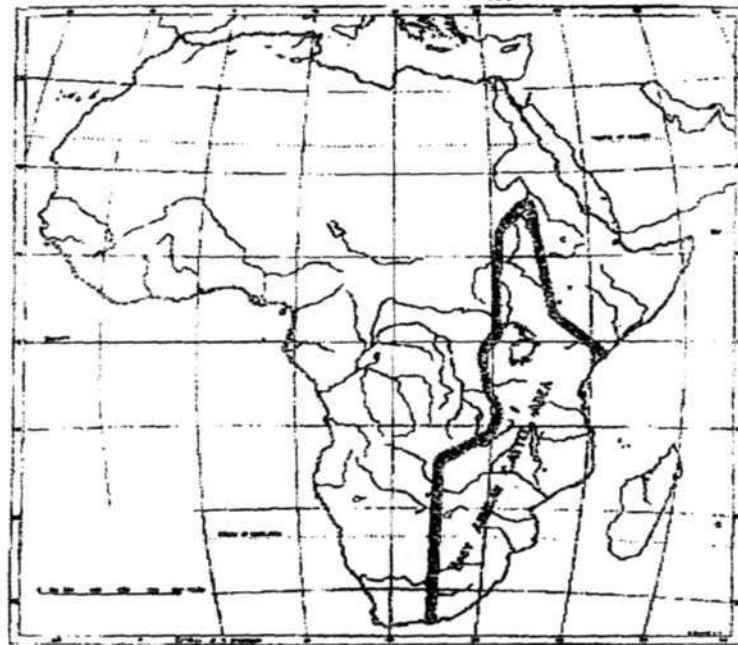
[**Source:** American Anthropologist, Vol 28, Issue 1926, p. 247]

Within this extensive Eastern culture area, Herskovitz (1888:248) notes that there are sub areas inhabited by peoples or tribes, as he calls them, with common cultural traits which will differ from those of peoples who are far removed from them. However, he notes that the common features in the entire cultural area is ownership of cattle. That these cattle play a vital role in the life of the people of the area. It is his contention that there is a clear subdivision of labour in the area, with women doing all the agricultural work and the men being hunter pastoralists, (1888:259).

In his critique of the Herskovitzian construct, Kuper (1982:11) maintains that the geographical distribution of the area is not sufficiently differentiated and that it had to be revised several times. Having pointed that out, Kuper agrees broadly with the main thrust of Herkovitz' analysis that in the Eastern cultural area, agriculture is the domain of women and is not as prestigious as the pastoral responsibilities of men. In contradistinction to crops, cattle are used in rituals, in sacrifice and in bridewealth.

Though Kuper does agree with Herkovitz' division of labour between men and women in the Eastern area, he does point out that the division is not as clear-cut as Herskovitz makes it out to be. There are many cases, Kuper argues, where men help to clear the fields and also participate in ploughing them using cattle drawn implements. So there were times when ploughing was done by both men and women.

5.7 Ownership of cattle

Cattle ownership was not merely a sign of economic success and social prestige, but it was primarily exercising stewardship, original owner of cattle being the family ancestors (Kuper 1982:11,15). He illustrates this point eloquently by proposing a hierarchical structure reproduced in Figure 5.7.1 below.

Figure 5. 7.1


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         ┌────────────────────────┐
         │    TRIBAL ANCESTORS    │
         └────────────────────────┘
        original │ owners of the land

        land, rain,  │  victory, prosperity

        sacrifices: │ oxen, beer

              ┌──────────┐
              │   RULE   │
              └──────────┘
     Ultimate owner of land, major source of cattle

              Land, rain, cattle
                                      ┌───────────────────────┐
                                      │    FAMILY ANCESTORS   │
                                      └───────────────────────┘
                                      Original owners of family cattle

                                      Fertility, health, family herd

   Tribute: labour, meat, beer        Sacrifices: cattle, beer

                   ┌────────────────┐
                   │   HOUSEHOLD    │
                   └────────────────┘
             immediate owner of cattle and land-

                cattle, fields, semen

                 Labour, │ food

                   ┌────────────┐
                   │   WIVES    │
                   └────────────┘
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[**Source**: Wives for Cattle by Kuper, A. 1982, page 17]

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He argues that the figure above provides the necessary background for one to understand marriage exchanges in that the superiors, be they ancestors, chiefs and fathers provide cattle and food to those directly below them while they, in turn, give labour meat and corn. They also pay tribute by offering sacrifices and beer (:14). He concurs with Hunter that cattle were inherited from the ancestors who were believed to "pay and receive bridewealth." Citing Hunter, Kuper (:17) maintains that;

> "Cattle received as ikhazi for a daughter are of special ritual importance ... being given 'in exchange of the blood of the family' ... and conversely the passage of cattle put the girl received in exchange ... in close relationship with ancestral spirits of the family from which the cattle came."

A second Kuperian link between cattle exchange and wives has to do with what he regards as the belief among AbeNguni that cattle and cattle products such as dung and gall bladder and hair are heating and fertilising agents. In that context, the transfer of cattle to the woman's sibs becomes necessary for female fertility.

5.8 My critique of Kuper's bridewealth system

Though Kuper (:25) purports to disagree with Herskovitz' argument that the use of cattle in bridewealth was a consequence of the ideological value attached to them in a particular culture, he nonetheless starts from a premise that is not too far removed from that of Herskovitz. It is qualified, yes, but in essence not too different. Herskovitz' thesis, as shown above was that the East African societies were structured in such a way that males were pastoralists and hunters while females

were agriculturists and gatherers. Similarly, Kuper's (:11) position, spelt out in his Wives for Cattle treatise, is that;

> " The association of men with cattle keeping and of women with horticulture, corn and cooking will keep recurring. This *is the central theme of the culture- so pervasive, indeed, as almost to defy apt illustration.*[italics added]"
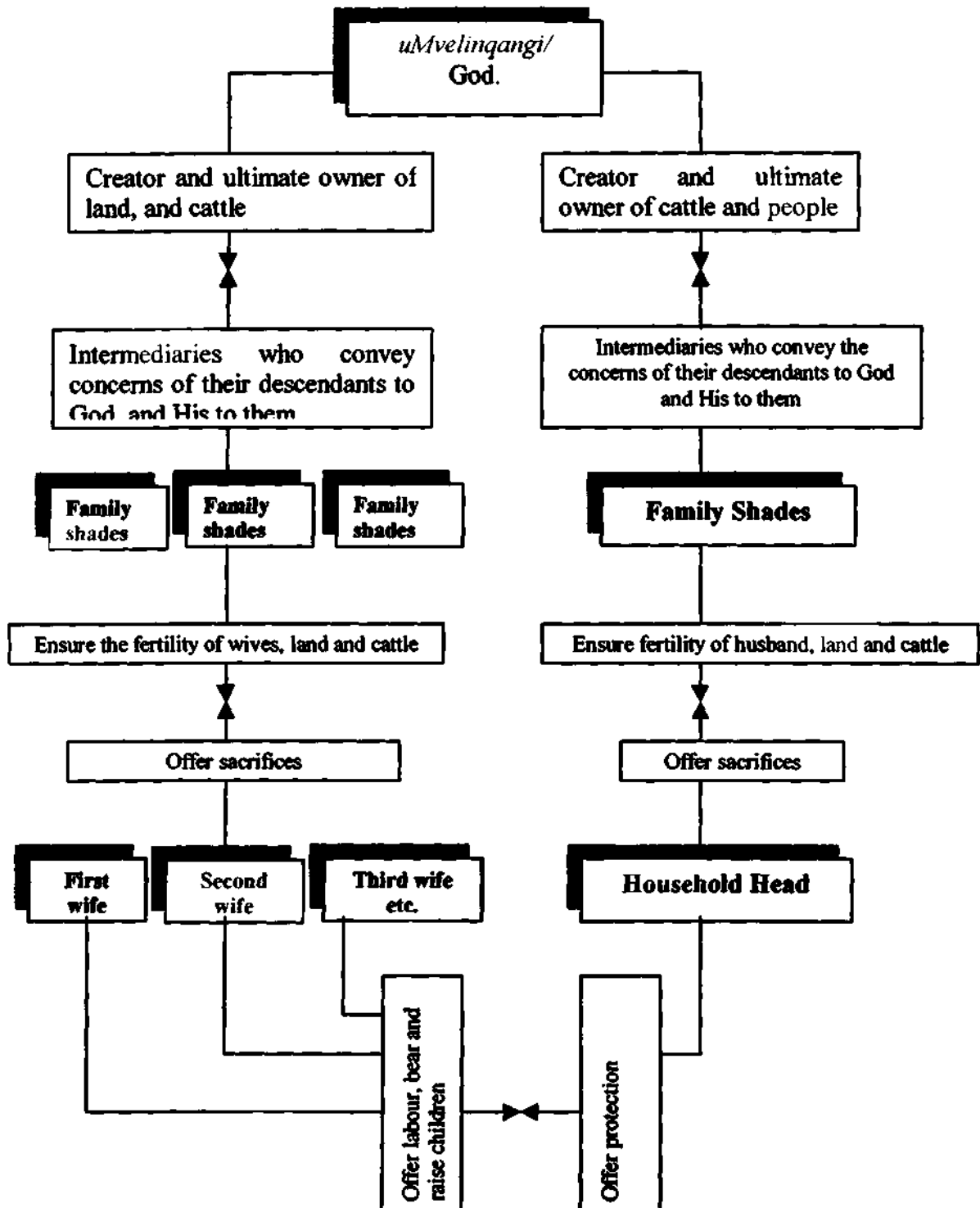
Based on that premise, his conclusion is that pastoral and agricultural products may be exchanged for each other and that is seen as a central social exchange (:14). He maintains that these exchanges provided the background that enables one to understand why a wife's parents would normally provide grain, beer and their daughter in exchange for cattle and labour. Another level of exchange, according to Kuper, is between ancestors and their descendants where the former gave cattle and the latter responded by providing meat and corn. The figure above helps to clarify that point.

The most significant observation of Kuper's structure shown above is that it leaves God out of the picture. In it he suggests that the exchanges are between the shades, or what he calls ancestors, on the one hand and their living counterparts, rulers, household heads and wives on the other. This linear hierarchical structure needs qualification. Granted that Kuper makes no claim to be writing from a faith perspective, nevertheless his construct is inadequate as an expose of African anthropology. It does not take too deep an analysis of African culture for one to realise that Africans do not make any sharp distinctions between religion and life, between the sacred and the secular. For Africans, life is an integrated whole, founded and sustained by the creator God.

The Kuperian linear model is deficient, thirdly, in that it is constructed exclusively from a male perspective. It shows national and family ancestors at one end and the household head on the other end, with the wives tagged on as convenient appendages. To the contrary, in African belief systems, wives do have their family ancestors not shown in the Kuperian model. The bond between a woman and her ancestors remains intact even after she is married. This is supported by the fact that traditionally she retained her maiden surname. She remained a maNkosi though married to the Zumas, for example. Furthermore, when difficult situations arose, or when luck came her way, an African woman, if she was a Mosotho, would exclaim "*Bataung ke bao*" which translated literally meant " Behold the Bataung (ancestors)."

Essentially, then, the principle of mutual responsibility as suggested by Kuper has merit. However, I would suggest a circular model shown in Figure **5.8.1** below.

Fig 5.8.1

uMvelinqangi/
God.

| Creator and ultimate owner of land, and cattle | Creator and ultimate owner of cattle and people |

| Intermediaries who convey concerns of their descendants to God and His to them | Intermediaries who convey the concerns of their descendants to God and His to them |

| Family shades | Family shades | Family shades | Family Shades |

| Ensure the fertility of wives, land and cattle | Ensure fertility of husband, land and cattle |

| Offer sacrifices | Offer sacrifices |

| First wife | Second wife | Third wife etc. | Household Head |

Offer labour, bear and raise children

Offer protection

In the suggested model above, cattle play a crucial role in a chain linking God or *uMvelinqangi* to humans. Unlike in Kuper's model, here God is the owner and creator of humans, their cattle and lands. Those lands and cattle are entrusted to the shades who not only watch over them but also ensure that they are productive. This is based on the African belief that the shades are 'alive' and continue to be important members of the families to which they belonged. The shades of both the husband and wife or wives in polygynous marriages, act as middle persons in a two way communication between the ultimate owner, God and human beneficiaries. We may thus legitimately speak about the existence of a theology of cattle.

Notwithstanding the shortcomings of the Kuperian construct, he makes a helpful point in highlighting the communal aspect of the African world view. The strong relationships that exist between the ancestors, the rulers and ordinary people are bound together by cattle. It is for that reason that AmaZulu will often say of the marriage bond, *sihlanganiswe inkomo* or we have been united by a beast. For a deeper understanding of how that belief works, we are indebted to Axel-Ivar Berglund's more complete view of the links between the creator God and his creation via the medium of cattle.

5.9 God, shades, humans and cattle linkages in Berglund's hermeneutic.

In a section of his book that addresses cattle and the cattle enclosure, Berglund (1976:110) makes a very poignant point that in Zulu thought patterns, there existed a strong relationship between cattle and humans. He cites a diviner who maintained that since both a woman and a cow give birth on the tenth month after conception, "

a cow is like a human." Furthermore, cattle, or at least their calves, traditionally shared the same homesteads that people live in.

Cattle were said to belong not only to the father of the homestead but to the lineage shades. Thus this joint ownership, according to the Berglundian construct, gave the shades the right to periodically demand that a cow be slaughtered to feed them from "their own flock," (*ibid* :110). In consequence, one could not interfere with the household cattle without, at the same time, causing problems to the male population and the lineage shades.

In cases of sickness, the popular belief was that a cow ought to be ceremonially slaughtered and the sick person sprinkled with its gall and the gall bladder fixed to his or her hair. The shades, in licking the gall, were said to be able to bring about healing to the sick person. Similarly, when a woman left her natal home to join that of her husband, the transfer was effected and sealed by the slaughtering of one of the *ukwendisa* or marriage beasts known as *isikhumba* or skin beast. It was supplied by her family, and the groom's family supplied a corresponding *inkomo yokucola*. Berglund (*ibid* :117) notes that tradition demanded that the two beasts be slaughtered simultaneously in the cattle enclosure and their gall poured out on the bride's feet. The meaning behind this ceremony was to ensure " the mutual acceptance of the bride and the bridegroom by the shades of the two parties."

Citing Krige (1936:42) and Jenkinson (1884:52) with whom he agrees, Berglund (*ibid:*112) further underscores another link between humans and cattle by pointing out that both an isiZulu hut and the cattle enclosure were frequented by the shades. Thus the construction of the two structures was similar, with the door of the hut

corresponding to the gateway of the cattle byre; its centre corresponding to the hearth and finally, *umsamo* or that part of the hut opposite the door and farthest from it, was a counterpart to a similar section in the cattle enclosure. If Berglund is right, the theological linkages between humans and cattle can hardly be missed.

Having looked at the links between cattle and humans; between humans and shades, and also that humans revere and talk to the them, we conclude this section by examining the relationship between the shades and *uMvelinqangi*. If, as argued above, AmaZulu do not worship the shades, a question has often been raised by those who study their culture and that question has to do with whether or not it would be accurate then to say they worshipped *uMvelinqangi*. Berglund (1976:42), agreeing with Fritsch[81] (1872:98) and Wangemann (1875:225) is of the view that they did not worship uMvelinqangi either. This is attributed to the belief that AmaZulu regarded God as too high and lifted up and to approach him directly was not easy. For them, Berglund argues, the legitimate method of approaching God would have been through the shades. Accordingly, as an informant put it:

> " If there is something we wish to be brought before him we say to those who look after us, ' We salute you, you of our people, you who see the kings we do not see! We say to you, go and kneel on our behalf! ... We are just requesting you, our fathers, we say to you who know the manner of approaching him (the Lord-of-the-Sky), bring this thing before him so that we do not die of hunger." Berglund (1976:43).

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[81] Fritsch, G. 1872 Die Eingeborenen Sud-Afrikas. Breslau; Wangemann, H. Th., 1875 Die Berliner Mission im Zulu-Lande. Berlin.

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That, in our view, and contrary to Berglund, Fritsch and Wangemann, is worship except that it is directed to God through the shades. Like Christ, the shades act as mediators between God and humans. The worship of God would be impossible if not difficult without the shades. Berglund traces the strong link between cattle and humans, he does so by pointing out that there exists a similarity in the reproductive processes of both. This link is extended to include the shades in that household cattle are owned jointly by the *pater familias* and the shades. Furthermore, cattle play an important role in healing and in uniting lineages in marriage bonds.

I have thus far looked at marriage and the *loboli*-ng process and examined the religious role played by cattle in effecting the union. This was viewed from the perspective of males among AmaZulu. As with polygyny and other sensitive cultural practices, what is written has up until very recently reflected a male perspective. Men have appointed themselves to be determiners of culture and society has presumed that they speak for women as well. In order to get a balanced picture, I turn, next, to the views of selected African women theologians.

5.10 African women theologians and *ilobolo*

In September 1989 African women theologians met in Accra, Ghana to examine the role that African religion has in shaping Christian faith on the continent. That meeting resulted in the formation of a forum currently known as the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (CCAWT), or simply as the Circle. Its primary task has been to critique cultural practices that impact on the lives of women. Beyond that, they review Africa's history, its social institutions and how

these affect the lives of both men and women. In the paragraphs below, I will explore the views on marriage, and especially *ilobolo*, that come out of the reflections of members of the Circle.

5.10.1 Oduyoye's *Daughters of Anowa*

In a penetrating study entitled *Daughters of Anowa*; African women and Patriarchy, Oduyoye takes a critical look at her current West African context and analyses her historical background as an Akan woman married into a Yoruba culture. That reflection is undertaken as a first step towards motivating herself and other women of Africa whom she gives a mythical name of being daughters of Anowa. Through a new and a positive self-understanding, the daughters of Anowa are more likely to be empowered to create ' the quality of life that frees African women to the fullness for which God created them' (Oduyoye 1995:9).

According to Oduyoye, among the several factors that she maintains limit African women from attaining their full potential, is being party to a marriage in a patriarchal society. In that context, unexamined cultural norms and practices such as *ilobolo* or as it is called in West Africa, the *aseda*, together with their religious nuances 'often hide a multitude of wrongs' (*ibid:* 131). Therefore, Christian women, even at the risk of being labelled traitors to their family and nation, ought to 'tell it as it is.' She makes several important observations that could aid in promoting an open discussion on the marginalization of women through the misuse of culture.

5.10.2 A public display of domestic rags

She suggests that African women theologians should be bold to ask probing questions. For Oduyoye (*ibid*:132) these include an examination of the status of;

> " The African woman within marriage, the transitional rite that establishes and solidifies relationships that enable her to function as a channel by which the ancestors can return to the community...how women function as members of their kin group and that of their husbands; what roles do they perform and what rewards do they obtain?"

The traditional marriages of the Asante of Ghana, modified and influenced by Western, Islamic and Christian norms, are no longer easy to identify. However, what has remained as an abiding principle is that ' they are political alliances between groups instead of two individuals.' Similarly, among AmaZulu, as pointed in chapter two above, the politicisation of marriage among royalty is still an extant practice.

5.10.3 How secure are marriage securities?

Among the commoners, however, Oduyoye concedes that nuptial gifts, or what she terms marriage securities represent the binding factor between the families, (*ibid*:134). Again, as with *ilobolo* cattle among AmaZulu, marriage securities are always given by the husband's family to the lineage of the woman. If indeed they are gifts, Oduyoye questions why they are not reciprocated? Secondly, if the marriage fails, there is an expectation that marriage securities have to be refunded.

The pertinent question that Oduyoye poses then is how secure are these marriage securities? Why return them when the marriage breaks up? In so doing, are Africans not buttressing what they regard as a Western misinterpretation that they do in fact sell their daughters? If that is not an African self-understanding, Oduyoye (*ibid*: 136) asks, " why must cows, gold and money not be dissociated from the transaction and a piece of paper with signature be enough to establish a marriage?" These are not idle questions. Her suggestion is that " gifts should be treated as gifts, and loans as loans; no refund should be demanded of used articles,"(*ibid*:136). Furthermore, there is no gainsaying the fact that marriage securities in the form of the *aseda* in West Africa and *ilobolo* in the Southern part of the continent;

> " Locates a woman in a socially validated relationship that enables her to procreate to the advantage of either her matrikin or her affinal kin. Not much attention is paid to a woman's personal biological or psychological need to be the locus of life." (*Ibid*:143)

Among AmaZulu a subliminal and an indirect belief that the passing of *ilobolo* cattle secures the procreative ability of the woman is often expressed in statements such as *zibuyile izinkomo zamaNgwane* meaning that the cattle of Ngwane people have been paid back now that a child has been born to the bride, especially if that child is a boy. Consequently, Njoroge challenges men's view that *ilobolo* is a gift with no commercial overtones. She cites Rosalind Mutua's contention that:

> " In cases where young girls are married off to relatively elderly rich men, dowry is paid to the girl's father ... What does this kind of arrangement mean to the girl? This makes it difficult for her to be anything but at best the man's favourite toy or at worst a chattel," Njoroge (2000:85).

5.10.4 Bahemuka and Nasimiyu-Wasike on *ilobolo* and polygamy.

In an essay entitled Social Changes and Women's attitudes towards marriage in East Africa, Judith Bahemuka makes a critical assessment of recent developments in the institution of marriage in East Africa, especially the relationship between *ilobolo* and polygyny. She traces the changes that have happened in society and how women react to them. Though she confesses to not being a professionally trained theologian, she does give an illuminating analysis of what she regards as oppressive structures that have accompanied changes in African customs. Furthermore, her analysis bears close resemblance to similar developments among AmaZulu.

Similarly, in her critique of polygyny, Nasimiyu-Wasike contends that, in patriarchal systems, the passing of *ilobolo* was intricately related to the belief that a woman was essentially a children's' factory and thus valued for her procreative capacity as a " vessel of life or a fertile field in which a man planted his seeds" (Nasimiyu-Wasike 1995:102). The more children she bore, the stronger was the personal immortality of her husband which depended on the number of children a man had fathered. Not only was his immortality thus guaranteed, polygyny placed a man on a social pedestal from where he looked down on multitudes of subordinates who depended on him for their livelihood. Such a man;

> " Enjoyed a prestigious and privileged social position. The women [were] servers and maintainers of the system that continues to relegate them to inferior status in society," Nasimiyu-Wasike (1995:104).

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Bahemuka (1995:112) argues that, traditionally a wealthy man with a large herd of cattle for *ilobolo* transactions, could easily sustain a polygynous marriage. In an agrarian society such a marriage provided him with a labour force of wives and their children that was essential in maintaining the means of production of his homestead. Nasimiyu-Wasike (1995:102) points out that for a man with a big family, the biblical sayings that children were a blessing from the Lord[82] have been interpreted and understood to mean that such a blessing accrues exclusively to the man. Consequently, in patriarchal societies, if a couple was childless, the blame was placed on the woman in some African communities. Such a woman was then pressurised to give *ilobolo* to a family of a younger woman who then acted a substitute wife to raise children for the senior wife (Nasimiyu-Wasike 1995:103). Alternately, the husband of a supposedly barren wife would return her to her natal home a demand the refund of *ilobolo* cattle in order to marry another wife.

In South Africa, among the indigenous peoples, that practice was followed until the passing of the Recognition of the Customary Marriages Act in 1998. Among the Babusuku, Nasimiyu-Wasike notes that if a woman who had been sent back to her home later bore children, her husband could buy back 'his' daughters for three herd of cattle each and, if sons, for two herd.

In more recent times, Bahemuka points out that Christian teaching and discipleship, formal Western education and a downturn in the agrarian economy have together resulted in polygyny being replaced by monogamy. Ostensibly fewer cattle for *ilobolo* meant that polygyny was no longer that easy. In consequence, she notes

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[82] Ps. 127:3-5; Prov. 17:6;

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that all the attendant positive off spins of the practice such as the conferring a new social status to the first wife and the status symbol associated with that, all those have come to be replaced by sequential polygyny especially in the urban centres. This spells insecurity for the first wife and " although the mistresses may be treated better than the first wife, they do not achieve the status of a wife" (1995:129).

It is for that reason that, oppressive as polygyny was and still is, it nevertheless evokes differing resposes from women, (*ibid*:132). Those who tacitly support it point to the human urge to love and be loved[83]. Nasimiyu-Wasike also makes reference to a new form of polygyny practised by young women. While rejecting the traditional form of a man married to several wives, in this new form of multiple marriage arrangements, driven by economic exigencies and social change, a woman agrees with her husband that she takes on several men as her lovers. This becomes a loose arrangement where she may dispose of them at will. By contrast, other women (Bahemuka, Nasimiyu-Wasike) espouse a different position from one which says polygyny has some advantages as outlined above, they maintain that it undermines a woman's dignity, (1995:133).

5.10.5 Voices from the South: Mncube, Mpumlwana and Bam.

I conclude this section with reflections of Christian women in South Africa on issues of justice, leadership and a need for a re-evaluation of cultural practices. Though none of the Southern contributors raised the *ilobolo* debate *per se*, the

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[83] See Mbiti, J. (1968 :143) *Love and Marriage in Africa*, where he and other scholars such as Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel and Jungen Moltmann in Becoming Human in a New Community, In: *The Community of Men and Women in the Church.*

general tenor of their arguments does address it. Mncube (1991:356) notes that political liberation does not necessarily lead to the emancipation of women from traditional practices which treat them as though they were:

> " Created in the image of man, shaped by male perceptions, organised on the basis of male priorities and needs, operated to facilitate male work and pleasure. "

We saw in the writings of Bahemuka and Nasimiyu-Wasike above how polygyny promoted in former times, and still legal in South Africa, does satisfy male pleasure. The South African Commission of Gender equality, while broadly supporting the 1988 Marriages Bill, maintains that it does have serious shortcomings in that, according to Ntombela-Nzimande[84]

> " The bill perpetuates gender inequality by continuing an institution which benefits men at the expense of women, in the name of culture.. Many women also have serious concerns about polygamy because of the threat of Aids and the transfer of sexually transmitted diseases. "

Bam (1991:366) likewise reminds South Africans that, having struggled long and hard in their campaign against apartheid, time has come to reflect on the liberation of women from those structures and practices such a polygamy that still oppress them. She asks why is it that society will hold tenaciously on to culture when the issues being discussed involve women and yet that same society will be prepared to transcend culture at other times?

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[84] The Witness, 11 December, 1998, p.7.

Commenting on a Bill which he saw as potentially upgrading the status of women, a security guard Dinga Mchunu[85] of Vulindlela, born and brought up in a polygamous home, spoke for many when he expressed his disquiet that:

> " As far as I am aware, if a man wishes to have multiple wives, he should first consult his wife. If she does not consent, she should pack and go. I won't beg her because I paid money for her and her people will have to refund me."

It is in the light of such sexist statements that Mncube points out that oppression of women in South Africa was partly the result of apartheid. She goes on to caution against a simplistic analysis that fails to see the equally damaging role of cultural fixations. She maintains that since culture is dynamic (see also Mpumlwana 1991:357; Bam 1991:367) there is no need to be held captive by stipulations of the past.

To illustrate this, Mncube (1991:357) points out that one of the widely accepted and supposedly indigenous cultural practices such as the cutting of faces arose as a result of Africans wanting to protect themselves against slave traders who were loath to capture slaves with disfigured faces. Her plea is that, before accepting with equanimity the oppressive nature of some of the cultural practices, African scholars and the rest of the community should trace their origins and not "speak of our culture...think it is some kind of eternal given thing."

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[85] *Ibid* p.8.

This leads her to propose specific strategies for the emancipation of women. These include an analysis of gender oppression and its effects. Secondly, the need for women to be instrumental in their own emancipation as they speak with one voice (also Bam, 1991:365) on issues that affect them negatively. Mpumlwana (1991:379) urges women to engage in serious theological reflection which should be done contextually, saying:

> " I do not mind a cultural practice if it does not contribute to the belittling of women. Once people exploit, discriminate against and despise women of their God-given status, in the name of culture, I begin to have problems as a Christian."

5.11 My assessment of African woman scholars

Women's approach to culture is that it must be resisted to the extent that it treats and regards them as being less than what God intended them to be. The theologians among them have correctly called for a re-reading of the Biblical record and pointed out that on the whole it liberates women and men in the church and society from all kinds of oppression. The Bible does this by separating biblical culture which is time-bound from the gospel which is universal. In my view that is a voice that society at large and the church needs to hear afresh. According to Kanyoro and Oduyoye (1995:1), as long as men and foreign researchers speak on behalf of women as if they were dead, patriarchy will continue to bedevil Africa.

Ilobolo becomes problematic if it is not reciprocated because it would encourage most men to regard their wives as producers of children especially in polygynous marriages. In my view what is missing or perhaps understated in the work of scholars from Central and North Africa, unlike their Southern sisters, is an acknowledgement that there is a growing number of men who are their allies, also that *ilobolo* is reciprocated in an exchange of gifts that take place between families.

However, their central point is valid that women and men need to engage in serious theological reflection if Africans are to be liberated from the negative impact of patriarchy. Kanyoro is right that women can find peace and justice through a careful reading of the Scriptures. Besides, by revisiting traditional African cultural practices and not look at them through Western lenses, it should be possible to realise that women occupied places of honour in society as political and religious leaders in shrines.

5.12 Conclusion

It is important to understand the deep socio-religious underpinnings of *ilobolo*. To this purpose I showed how the shades or ancestors, as the spiritual beings believed by African people as intermediaries between God and human beings are involved in the marriage bond which was believed to be between the couple, their respective families including members who have since passed on, the shades.

The recognised method of uniting the nuclear and extended families was for the groom to hand over cattle or their equivalents in cash as *ilobolo*. Thus cattle provide the interpretative key to understanding the persistence of *ilobolo*. Of all other animals, cattle were preferred because of their symbolic value as God's gift to the shades who, in turn, gave them to humans. Thus a strong bond that exists between God, the shades and ordinary human beings was made possible by cattle. The ritual slaughter of designated *ilobolo* beasts was the recognised mode of communication between humans and the shades.

After examining the theology of cattle or the theology of the beast and its central role in effecting the marriage bond in accordance with the cultural dictates of AmaZulu, I turned the focus to the views of African women theologians. The socio-religious aspect of *ilobolo* notwithstanding, women have cautioned against African society being imprisoned by culture. They point to the need to re-orient our thinking about those aspects of it which belittle or militate against the acceptance of them as co-equal partners in marriage. Seen in this light *ilobolo* is not a mere cultural practice, it is ultimately theological. This then throws open the debate on a legitimate relationship between gospel and culture. The next chapter will address this subject in greater detail.

CHAPTER SIX

ILOBOLO AND THE GOSPEL

6.1 Introduction

Scripture does not directly address every conceivable human custom such as *ilobolo*, but it does give broad guidelines and important principles on how human culture relates to the gospel. However, because of human finitude, such guidelines are in constant need of refinement. This need still exists inspite of the fact that the debate on the relationship between gospel and culture has occupied biblical scholars since the foundation of the church in the first century. It extends even earlier into the Old Testament times when the Jewish faith in Yahweh encountered Babylonian and Canaanite religions.

It would be impossible in one chapter to do more than suggest some of the essential aspects of the debate. Nevertheless, I will outline principles enunciated by Niebuhr, Kraft, Lutzbetak, Moila, Bediako, Nyamiti and Bujo and then offer my own reflections. In chapter five above, I examined the views of selected female scholars drawn from South, East and West Africa. In this chapter I will engage seven male

scholars and evaluate their approach in resolving the tension that exists between the interface of gospel and culture.

In South Africa, the first democratic elections in 1994 resulted, on the one hand, in a call for an African renaissance where the indigenous African people have been re-discovering their roots, and on the other hand, the change in government has brought to an end legalised residential segregation. Consequently, there has been a birth and growth of a new black professional elite, the so-called *Buppies*[1] moving into formerly whites only suburbs. The net result of the two developments is that there has been a paradigm shift with some of the black elite seeking to appropriate their cultural heritage while others see such a search as a social anachronism. In either case, many have been left alienated. The believers among them have found new religious homes in African initiated churches which have taken big strides forward in contextualizing worship, governance and other external expressions of the faith yet still lack trained literary theologians.[86] The rest have joined neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic movements which, in the main, are ill-equipped to present a balanced view of the gospel culture interface. That lends a sense of urgency for South African missiologists to develop a culturally sensitive evangelistic strategy as well as a contextual discipleship programme.

In this chapter, I raise issues of missiological and pastoral interest all centering around *ilobolo* as a case study. For instance, with Kimpa Vita, Samuel Crowther, Kwesi Dickson and others, I want to explore in what ways one could become faithful to the

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[1] Yuppies has traditionally been used as an expression to refer to young white elites who are now being joined by an emerging black middle and upper class commonly known as Buppies

[86] For an in-depth critique of indigenous churches see Sawyerr, H. *What is African theology* In: ATJ (4) 1971

gospel yet remain authentically African? Does culture act as an interpretative key to unlocking Scripture or does Scripture help us understand and appreciate culture? How does one apply Scriptural principles and teaching in a marriage where one of the partners is steeped in tradition while the other is not as passionate about it? How is the church in the twenty first century expected to fulfil its missiological and pastoral role in such a family?

I do not presume to be able to give definitive answers to the very complex problems posed above, yet I will attempt to move beyond the diagnostic mode and identify some pointers of what could be done. Those are raised in chapter seven below where the study is summarised, conclusions and recommendations are made.

Meanwhile, in this chapter, I proceed in five steps. Firstly, I begin my reflection with definitions of culture and gospel. That leads, secondly, to a survey of biblical and historical foundations of the gospel-culture relationships. The third section will propose a relevant Christology in a community that still maintains a strong belief in the influence of the shades especially in the institution of marriage. The fourth section will seek to find out whether left on its own, culture is liberative or oppressive. Finally, I will argue that, since there is no cultureless Christianity, or what Boff[67] terms, "a naked gospel," the contemporary African Church is called upon to develop a marriage liturgy that incorporates the positive aspects of *ilobolo*. I have argued in earlier chapters that, like all cultural practices, *ilobolo* does have its own limitations and shortcomings. Moila (2002a:75) articulates this more eloquently in his observation of all cultures :

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[67]   Boff, L *Good News to the Poor.* p.3.

" That none is anywhere near perfect, since all are shared and operated by sinful human beings. *But none in its healthy state is to be considered invalid, inadequate, or unusable by God and humankind.*"

6.2 Culture defined

In presenting my own understanding of culture, I have chosen to base myself on the recent work by Bate (1995) since he locates his definition of culture within South Africa. Whereas he treats the popular and the academic interpretations of culture separately, I will conflate the two and show how an underlying academic understanding of culture informs what ordinary people believe it to be.

With the apartheid ideology less than ten years behind us, it is conceivable that many South Africans might still subscribe to a politicised definition of culture. Bate (1995:208), agreeing with Tomaselli (1992:61), sees two diametrically opposed understandings of culture. Prior to the advent of the democratic era, these two authors pointed out that for many white South Africans culture was associated with the martial and fine arts. According to that understanding, Bate notes that for members of the then ruling classes, "culture is what [they] do in their free time and its pursuit is considered the finer aspect of the "civilisation" that they represent," Bate (:208).

On the other hand, many within the black community associated culture with the arts, except that for them the goal was not primarily entertainment or relaxation but it was used as a tool for socio-political change (Tomaselli 1992:61). Of the various components of culture, music more than any other art form, was used subversively as

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a vehicle for galvanising the black community to stand together as a united body against oppressive forces.

A second distinctly South African understanding of culture, according to Bate's analysis, is one that equates it with a people group or an *ethnos*. Among the major architects of the ethnos theory we may include the names of Eiselen, Coertze, Diedericks (Sharp 1981 cited in Bate 1995:211). Consequently, official government publications of the former white regime conceived of the country as being made up of Zulu, Xhosa, Indian, Afrikaner and several other cultural formations. That particular understanding of culture, Bate (:211) argues, was not confined to *ethnos* theoreticians referred to above, but also to a wide variety of academics including black theologians such as Dwane (1988) and Tlhagale (1983) who correlated culture and ethnic groups. I would add that even the African National Congress' Freedom Charter of 1955 linked culture with national groupings. In a section that addresses national groups and their rights, the Charter reads:

> "All people shall have equal rights to use their own languages, and to develop their own *folk culture and customs* (italics added); All national groups shall be protected by law against insults to their race and national pride. [88]

Streek (1990:2,23) notes that such a racially based understanding of culture was vigorously opposed by Azapo.

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[88] ANC Historical Documents Archive 'Selected Historical Documents- The Freedom Charter'< http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/charter.html> accessed 3 November 2002

Whereas the two popular understandings of culture that have been outlined above are gradually receding into the background, a third view which regards culture as an attitude, negative or positive, has survived into the post-apartheid era. Positively, Bate (1995:210, citing Nolan 1992, Jana 1992, Hindle 1992 and the printed media[89]) shows how this usage finds expression in typical South Africanisms such as " a culture of democracy, a culture of peace or a culture of leaning." Conversely, similar terms used in a different context could refer to negative values, what Bate (:210) calls disvalues such as a culture of recklessness, or violence, or a culture of resistance." Whether used positively or negatively, in either instance culture refers to a mental attitude or societal values.

According to Murduck (1940:361) and Moila (2002a:74), these attitudes do not appear automatically, they are learnt during the process of cultural transmission from one generation to the next. It is for that reason that Moila (:74) rightly points out that during cultural transmission, the recipients of cultural values: "conditioned by members of their society in countless, largely unconscious ways to accept as natural to follow rather uncritically the cultural patterns of their society."

And as a result, he continues,

" Humans may be regarded as culture-shaped and culture transmitting beings."

Accordingly, culture plays a major role in forming people's perceptions of reality and it determines what constitutes ideal norms (Murduck :361). I therefore conclude that culture consists of everything that contributes to making society what it is,

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89Daily Mail, 26 June 1990; New Nation 1992b:26.

guides and directs what people do in communicating values, and also determines how they do so. All of that happens at a subliminal level. On a more reflective level, it does seem to me that all societies, starting with the most simple rural community and stretching all the way to the highly mechanised twenty first century digital communities and everything in-between, all of them do possess a culture. No one culture is better than others, cultures are different from each other, and all are used as a means of communication. If it is true that culture consists of what and how people communicate values and norms, its link with the gospel is difficult to miss. This then leads us to consider a definition of gospel and how it relates to culture.

6.3 What is the gospel?

Inspite of the frequency[90] of the noun *euaggelion/* ευαγγελοιν (evangel or good news or gospel) its meaning is often not very clear to many people both inside and outside church. At the popular level, the gospel has been imbued with a variety of meanings ranging all the way from its usage as an adjective carrying the meaning of reliability in statements such as a gospel truth or authentic truth. At the othe extreme we are also familiar with the type of music known as gospel which generally refers to newer versions of songs of worship usually of an Afro-American variety or any modern religious music with a particular appeal to younger people. The Christian content need not be too high, at times it may even be non-existent.

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[90] Ευαγγελιον occurs 72 times in the New Testament and 54 of those occurrences are in Paul's writings.

Gospel could also refer to a record of the life of Christ as found in the first four books of the New Testament. Bediako (1999:2) points out that people may read them, appreciate their contents and even be impressed by their spiritual principles and use them as a pattern for their ethical conduct, but all of that, important as it is, does not constitute the essence of the gospel. For purposes of this study, gospel will be used in its technical sense as the good news that, in and through Christ, God is reconciling the world to himself.[91]

Though most of the references to the gospel are found in the New Testament, its usage dates back to the Old Testament where, in Isaiah,[92] the good news refers to the declaration that Jerusalem will be delivered from bondage. Isaiah characteristically uses two words *Basar* which means to preach good tidings concerning righteousness (cf. Ps. 40:9), and *kara* which means proclaim to liberty to those who are in bondage.

I argue elsewhere, Rajuili (1989:30) that in Scripture the good news dates back to the Genesis account where God chose Abraham and later the nation of Israel, the prophets and finally Jesus to be the bearer of the good news. In his programmatic statement found in Luke (4:16-30) and based on Isaiah 58 and 61, the central message of Jesus was that " he did not introduce an entirely new theme of mission to the Gentiles, but [he] carried forward God's concern for the nations," Rajuili (1989:60). Thus for a fuller understanding of its usage in Scripture, we will consider first the content, then the demands and finally the communication of the gospel.

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[91] 2 Corinthians 5:20

[92] Isaiah 40:9; 52:7.

6.3.1 The content of the gospel

Packer (2000:31) notes that, while the New Testament writers, notably Paul, would regard the gospel as the whole counsel of God[93], or the entire story of God's redemptive action, there is a distinction between the gospel as good news to unbelievers who are not yet part of God's reign. To such people, Packer, agreeing with Stott (:55) and Adeyemo (1990:192), points out that the good news is tied in with the plan of salvation. It is:

> " God's plan whereby He brings people out of darkness into the light, out of death into life, and leads us through this world to the glory that He has in store for us."

It is important to note that in Paul's theology *euaggelizomai/*ευαγγελιζομαι (to evangelise) also applies to believers. In the letter to the Romans[94] he expresses his eagerness to preach the gospel *also* (emphasis mine) to you who are in Rome. It is instructive to remember that the recipients of the letter were believers who " are loved by God and called to be saints."[95] To such people, Packer (:31) correctly points out that the subject of the gospel is Jesus.[96]

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[93] Acts 20:26-27;

[94] Rm. 1:15.

[95] Rm. 1:7.

[96] Mk.1;1; 2 Cor. 4:4; 9:3; 10:14.

To those who are already believers, who have responded in faith to be followers and disciples of Christ, Paul's theology, expressed in his letters, stresses the fact that Jesus is at the heart of the gospel. It is for that reason that Packer, (:31) could write that the gospel is about:

> " King Jesus: glorious Jesus: Jesus the divine Saviour: Jesus head of the church: Jesus Lord of the angels; Jesus our prophet, priest and king; Jesus the one through whom all grace comes from God; Jesus whose praise we are called to give this life and to on giving through all eternity; Jesus our joy."

What this says is that the gospel message does not call women and men to a church, no matter how big and impressive it may be. The gospel does not call us to embrace a religion or a philosophy of life no matter how noble and sophisticated. Understood properly, the gospel is both a message from a God who loved the world so much that he sacrificed his only Son, Jesus the Christ. A Christ who, during his earthly life, ministered to the needs of all types of people, died to redeem us and will come again in glory to establish his eternal kingdom. Again, in the words of Packer ((:37)

> " In the Bible the gospel is the entire saving plan of God, all revolving around the person, the place and the power of our Saviour Jesus Christ – the incarnate, crucified, risen, reigning, returning Lord."

6.3.2 The demands and demonstration of the gospel.

A careful reading of the Scriptures reveals that those who accept the gospel are expected to demonstrate the fruit of repentance. That takes the form of holding on to some basic theological beliefs and living lives that are in conformity with those beliefs. Watson (1976:26) and also Palau (1989) express this point eloquently. Palau writes, " in issuing a gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship." If we do, we run the risk of peddling a half gospel, which in Kuzmic's (1990:201) and Forsyth's estimation, "has no dignity and no future. Like the famous mule [it] neither has pride of ancestry or hope of posterity."

A biblically based gospel has to be personally appropriated. Even though no one is compelled to receive it, the gospel is to be personally and willingly accepted by faith. Thus Jesus compared the good news of the kingdom of heaven to a treasure hidden in a field and to fine pearls which have to be sought, owned and prized above everything else.[97] Stromberg (1983:18) speaks to this issue when she says;

> " The proclamation of the gospel includes an invitation to recognise and accept in a personal decision the saving lordship of Christ. It is the announcement of a personal encounter mediated by the Holy Spirit, with the living Christ, receiving his forgiveness, and making a personal acceptance of the call to discipleship and a life of service." (see also Shorter 1994:10).

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[97] Mk. 13:44f.

Secondly, we note with Bauckham (1989:23) that the acceptance of the gospel makes it imperative that old habits be replaced by stipulations of cultic holiness "exemplified in the provision of social love and justice."[98] Or as Adeyemo (1991:194) puts it, " a grateful recipient of the gospel will follow in [Jesus'] steps and show compassion to a world ravaged by sin and all forms of social, political and economic injustices."

Third, as with all good news, the gospel, by its very nature is to be prayerfully shared with all people,[99] but that has to be done sensitively yet with a sense of urgency.[100] A biblical injunction for the proclamation of the gospel is graphically expressed by Senft (cited in Watson 1976:36) who maintains that preaching ought to be done;

> " By a herald, by the town crier in the full light of day, to the sound of a trumpet, up-to-the-minute, addressed to everyone because it comes from the king himself... Of the herald the chief requirement is absolute fidelity: he does not have to express his own ideas, but to deliver a message laid upon him; he is not asked for his opinion on the questions at issue, he is merely the mouthpiece of him who has commissioned him."

While recognising the importance of the *kerugma* (κηρυγμα) or proclamation, Shorter (1994:15f.) gives a timely warning that the gospel must not be reduced to a set of neat propositions. In arguing for an intimate relation between proclamation and praxis, he correctly points out that to be convincing, it must move from the theoretical to the practical level. It must result in the birth of a community of faith

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[98] Lk. 5:8f.; 6:20; 7:36.

[99] Mk. 13:10; 16:15; and Acts 15:7.

[100] 1Cor. 9:16.

which, having been evangelised,[101] becomes itself an agent of evangelising. In the process of evangelisation, Shorter (:16) concludes that true evangelisation;

> " Does not isolate people or cause them to withdraw form active life in their community. It does not create a ghetto in which people are insulated against the perverse influences of the outside world. On the contrary, it involves people and reinserts them in their world as agents of beneficial change."

It is as people are inserted in their world that a tension results from the interaction of the gospel and human culture. It is in order to address that tension that we move next to consider how we may best resolve it without compromising the gospel on the one hand, and unnecessarily violating and even destroying culture, on the other. We will do this by examining biblical models taken from both the Old and the New testaments and from church history.

6.4 Insights from the Old Testament

During the two thousand years between the death of Joshua and the rise of the monarchy under Saul (i.e. c. 1200 – 1000 B.C), the Israelite Confederacy faced two important challenges as soon as they settled in the Fertile Crescent. The one was rivalry from Canaanite neighbours (Joshua 2:6 – 16:31) who occupied the plains as well as from the Moabites, Ammonites (Judg. 3:10-12) and the Midianites (Judg. 6-8), all from across Western side of the Jordan. The Philistines posed a threat on the South Eastern coastline (Judg. 3:5, and 13-16). However, for purposes of this study,

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[101] Shorter (1994:5) is aware that either of the expressions, evangelisation and evangelism means "to make known the Good News of Jesus Christ." However, he prefers the latter expression which he regards as a more comprehensive term that equally emphasizes a proclaimed and a faith that is lived out.

the most virulent threat was what Anderson (1967:99) terms the ideological struggle between loyalty to Yahweh on the one hand, and religious influences and the cultures of the neighbouring peoples, on the other.

In that context, Anderson (:103) notes that " there was a strong tendency for the two faiths to coalesce in popular worship." It was therefore understandable that there would be a fusion of the faith in Yahweh and the religious practices of the Canaanites. This fusion, Anderson maintains, was seen in that:

> " Former Canaanite sanctuaries like Bethel, Shechem and perhaps Gilgal were rededicated to Yahweh, and Canaanite agricultural calendar was adopted for the timing of the pilgrimage festivals (Exodus 34: 22-23). Parents began naming their children after Baal, apparently with no thought of abandoning Yahweh. One of the Judges, Gideon, was also named Jerub-baal which means " let Baal contend," or perhaps "may Baal multiply." Saul and David, both ardent devotees of Yahweh, gave Baal names to their children."

What seems to have happened when the Israelites first settled in Canaan, and for many years afterwards, is that an allowance was made for some degree of religious accommodation or what may be called strategic syncretism. Elements of Hebrew culture and beliefs of the host people were used a substratum on which Yahwism was developed or introduced.

According to Kumar (1980:33), biblical scholars take it as a given that culture, with all its merits and limitations, is closely interwoven with the Scriptures and even acts as an important channel for revelation. Two examples, the creation narrative and the flood epic, will be used below as representative samples in the Old Testament.

In Genesis, the authors record a particular creation narrative to portray God's self disclosure to humanity. We also find Near Eastern creation myths used as tools to convey theological teaching. This becomes apparent when the Gilgamesh creation epic is compared and contrasted with the Genesis account. Walton (1989:29) points out that in the former, the god Enki "wields a pickax to break open the hard surface of the ground, [and] man springs out of the ground, whereas in the Genesis account God is involved directly."

In the Mesopotamian account, people were created to work for the gods who were tired and needed human assistance. In the Israelite version, by contrast, people were created to rule (:29). Thus the creation myths that Israel shared with her neighbouring peoples seem to have been modified and used by God to communicate with humanity. The differences remained apparent yet the central point of divine and human communication stood. In both cases it was done through the medium of culture.

A second example where God uses known and familiar cultural elements to communicate with his people is in the flood epic. Again the comparison between the Genesis and the Mesopotamian versions are instructive. Walton (:26) shows how in the Atrahasis and Gilgamesh epics the god Enhil, disturbed by the noise of human beings who had overpopulated the world, tried to remedy the situation by reducing the population through various means. When all else failed, he persuaded the divine assembly to approve the use of a flood as the most effective tool of reducing the numbers.

His father Ea undermined the planned mass destruction by informing a king to build a seven storey boat, coated with pitch. It had to be big enough to preserve not only the royal family but artisans, animals and birds. Rain fell for seven days and nights and when the water subsided, the boat landed on mount Nasir. A dove and swallow were sent out, later a raven was despatched to determine the level of the water. The raven did not return. The king and his family and everyone aboard disembarked and they immediately offered sacrifices to the gods and the king was offered immortality.

As with the creation narrative, the Mesopotamian flood epic has striking similarities and significant differences with a parallel story in Genesis. Old Testament scholars are not agreed on whether Genesis borrowed from the Babylonian accounts or the reverse was true. There is a second view that the various accounts may have had a common source. Whatever the solution to that problem, what is apposite for us in this study is that the God of Israel used the cultural store house to reveal himself. Sanneh (1995;49) speaks to this issue when he says, in discussion about religion and culture:

> " There is a recurrent idea that religious truth is inseparable from culture not just in the fortuitous way culture entangles religion but in the drastic sense that the cultural configuration of religion is also its final and essential form."

6.5 The gospel and culture in New Testament times

Sanneh's observation is borne out by the fact that the New Testament text reflected the thought patterns of first century Palestine. The Graeco-Roman cultures became the form that the writers used to convey their message. The crucial question to ask, therefore, is to what extent could such culture bound texts speak with authority to a twenty first century person without loosing their import?

According to Marshall (1981:22), classical theology identified two possible routes to resolve the impasse. One advocated by Jewett (1975) is that in applying biblical principles to our modern context, obsolete and time bound teaching may be disregarded since it represents " a hangover from the past and [modern people] should not be governed by it." Closely related to this approach is a second one proposed by Bultmann. He suggested that in the communication of the gospel to modern society, the first century myths that form part of its content should be stripped and replaced by modern ones that make sense to a scientific society. Marshall (:23) rightly notes that, while Jewett's and Bultmann's approaches seek to make the gospel intelligible to modern readers, it is difficult to avoid subjectivism in Jewett's case and that Bultmann fails to recognise the value of the supernatural.

By contrast, Marshall (:25) suggests that for the gospel to take root in cultural contexts other than the Hebrew and Aramaic, it " made use of the cultural stock of the Graeco-Roman world." In support of his view, he cites Acts (17:28) and Col. (1:17f) as incidents where Paul made use of thought patterns and vocabulary of his hearers to convey the Christian message to them.

Therefore, as with the Old Testament, I agree with Marshall that New Testament writers made use of categories drawn from their cultural milieu to express divine teaching. They did so by selecting positive data, Phil. (4:8), and used it as a useful vehicle to re-interpret and apply the gospel. A case can therefore be made for using the positive elements of *ilobolo* to convey Christian virtues of mutual sharing and the establishment and sustaining community.

6.6 Insights from Niebuhr, Lutzbetak, Kraft and Nida

Richard Niebuhr's classic on Christ and Culture (1951) has remained a foundational work on the subject. Influenced by Troeltsch and Malinowski, Niebuhr delineates five approaches that have been followed by Christians in order to solve the problem of the relation between culture and the gospel. In assessing each of the positions, he notes the impossibility of fitting people very tightly into theological pigeon holes. However, for the sake of analysis, he accepts that " if we cannot say anything adequately, we can say some things inadequately (1951:14)."

First, he notes that over the centuries, there have been some Christians who have regarded Christ as being against culture. Among these was Tertullian who maintained that " the conflict of the believer is not with nature but with culture, for it is in culture that sin chiefly resides (:52)." Thus Niebuhr observes that several monastic orders, sectarian movements and some modern missionaries and individuals such as Leo Toslstoy have felt that loyalty to Christ necessarily demands that one withdraw from culture (:57). While recognising the sincerity of the anti-cultural Christians or what he terms the radical Christians, Niebuhr regards them as "half-

baked and muddle-headed men, (:65)." He advances a counter argument pointing out that " humans speak and think with the aid of language and culture" (:69). More significant is the need for the radical Christian to accept the fact that;

> " Sin is in him, not outside of his soul and body. If sin is more deeply rooted and more extensive than the first answer of radical Christianity indicates, then the strategy of the Christian faith in gaining victory over the world needs to include other tactics than those of withdrawal from culture and defence of new-won holiness, (: 79)."

A second group takes an opposite stance to the radical Christians. Historically this group included Gnostics and its later representatives include Abelard, J Locke and A Ritschil. They have been collectively referred to as liberals or culture Protestants (:84). According to Niebuhr, this group has "sought to maintain a positive concern for culture with fundamental loyalty to Jesus" (: 85).

Positively, Niebuhr (:104) maintains that culture Protestants have successfully commended Christ to leading groups in society, but negatively, they have tended to highlight those aspects of the life of Christ which support their position. They have thus been accused of reductionism, maintaining;

> " A loyalty to contemporary culture [which] has so far qualified the loyalty to Christ that he has been abandoned in favour of an idol called by his name, (:110)."

A third group broadly agrees with culture Protestants. Like them they see Christ as the fulfilment of cultural aspirations and the restorer of the institutions of true society (: 42). This group, represented by Thomas Aquinas, also believed that Christ is above culture.

A fourth group is likewise not that far removed from the position held by radical Christians. They may conveniently be referred to as dualists, recognising the authority of Christ and of culture and attempting to be subject to both. With Martin Luther, they regard human beings as " subject to two moralities and are [seen by them as] citizens of two worlds (:45)."

A fifth and final group in Niebuhr's schemata are the conversionists. With Augustine as their main representative, this group maintains that Christ is the transformer of human culture. This is a culture which they believe to be tainted by human sin. Christ transforms it in that;

> " He tries the hearts and judges the subconscious life [and] deals with
> what is deepest and most fundamental in man, (:191)"

Unlike the radicals, Niebuhr notes that this group is not anti-culture but believes that human culture is subject to God's sovereign rule. Culture is a "perverted good and not an evil" and therefore the Christian must carry on cultural work in obedience to the Lord. Conversionists have thus developed a Christology that takes seriously creation, redemption, incarnation and atonement. This is informed by a conviction, based on what Niebuhr regards as Johannine theology, and its teaching is that;

> " To God all things are possible in a history that is not fundamentally a
> course of merely human events but always a dramatic interaction between
> God and man, (:194)."

As with Augustine, Calvin is a conversionist, but unlike Luther, he sees all human life as thoroughly permeated by the gospel and as being made of cultural activities in which humans " may express their faith and love and may glorify God in their calling...(:217)." A similar view is shared by J. Wesley, J. Edwards and F.D Maurice. For Wesley, Christ transforms life justifying humans by giving them faith in the present time (:219)." For Edwards, Christ is the regenerator of man in his culture, (:220)," and Maurice sums this position well by stating that:

> " There is no phase of human culture over which Christ does not rule and no human work which is not subject to his transforming power over self-will, (:227)."

Having surveyed the five positions that Christians have taken in regard to the relation between Christ and culture, Niebuhr admits, in my view correctly, that the subject is so wide and complex that it would be naïve for him or anyone to hastily come up with what could be termed the definitive Christian answer (:231). Nevertheless, it is imperative for believers, cognisant of all the problems, to make their own contributions, imperfect as those might be. Niebuhr writes;

> " We must make our own decisions, carry on our reasoning, and gain our experience as particular men in particular times with particular duties, (:237)."

Recognising the limitations of such decisions, he encourages faith in a faithful God and openness to correction by other believers. With those provisos, he concludes, with conversionists, that God transforms culture, that " the world of culture – man's achievement - exists within the world of grace – God's Kingdom (: 256)."

Lutzbetak's (1991) approach to the culture and gospel relationship is based on the most recent insights gained from missiological anthropology. He uses that approach as a tool to assess the transformative role of the church or Christian faith in a multicultural society. The overall purpose is to contextualise the gospel in local communities. He starts off by laying three theological foundations for missiological anthropology. These are that the Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in mission; that those involved in mission must be persons with a genuine spirituality and, thirdly, human knowledge and skill is indispensable to effective mission. He agrees with Stott and Coote (1979:21-131) that " mission calls for a supernatural–plus–natural strategy in imitation of God himself."

With regard to the issue of gospel-culture interface, Lutzbetak, a strong proponent of a contextualised Christianity, believes that the gospel is best incarnated into a society from within (:47). According to him, members of given society, and not outsiders, are better qualified to contextualise the gospel. He nevertheless hastens to point out that culture is not to be regarded as an absolute untouchable closed system (:52). That would be possible if members of a society recognised and avoided the temptation to adopt an ethnocentric model which, in Lutzbetak's (:65) words:

> " Regards the ways and values of one's own society as the normal, right, proper and certainly the best way of thinking, feeling, speaking and doing things, whether it be in regard to eating, sleeping, dressing, disposing of garbage, marrying, burying the dead or speaking to God."

A second inadequate model, according to Lutzbetak, is the accommodational approach. He sees its weaknesses stemming from the fact that, as an outsider's perspective, heavily overlaid with ethnocentrisms, its promoters regard certain cultural practices of the host people as 'building blocks' upon which a new Christian community might be built (:67). Accommodation, Lutzbetak maintains, regards such building blocks or stepping stones as neutral and naturally good elements which might be employed as contact points with Christianity. He has no difficulty with the accommodation view *per se,* he describes it as a beautiful theory which, in practice, has tended to " be shallow affecting only the surface of culture." He deems it an overcautious, paternalistic and distrustful of the local community, (:68).

Thus his chief indigment against accommodation in the past was that it was too much in the hands of outsiders bent on transplanting rather than sowing Christianity. Accommodation was seen as appropriate for "infant, immature" and " not-as-yet-fully-developed" Christian communities, (:68).

Kraft's view on the relationship between the gospel and culture is premised on what he terms a Christian ethnotheological position. That, according to him, means insights from both anthropology and theology ought to complement each other and that both these human disciplines should be equally embraced if we are to have an adequate understanding of the gospel-culture interface. As he puts it (:311):

> " Our theology ... must be informed by anthropology and our anthropology informed by theology."

He argues that a Christianity that is informed by anthropology is better positioned to identify the functions and meanings behind cultural forms (:312). The former he regards as constants and as being of primary concern to God while the cultural forms constitute observable parts such as words, rituals, behaviour, beliefs and practices which all go towards making up culture. Cultural forms ought to be of subsidiary importance and negotiable in religious discourse. In support of that position, Kraft (:312) cites Jesus' inveigh against the Pharisees who:

> " In their strict adherence to the forms of their orthodox doctrines, rituals and behaviour had ignored the fact that these forms had changed their meanings."

He notes that the Pharisees failed to take cognisance of the fact that they were using cultural forms to oppress rather than liberate, to reject others rather than accept them. In that way, they were blind to the fact that:

> " The beliefs and practices are simply the cultural vehicles (the forms) through which God-motivated concern, interest and acceptance are to be expressed. And these forms must be continually watched and altered to make sure that they are fulfilling their proper function – the transmission of the eternal message of God. As culture changes, these forms of belief and behaviour must be updated in order to preserve the eternal message, (:314).

Kraft does not disregard forms totally but sees their value as useful means of communicating the gospel, (:313). As with a riverbed which guides the direction of the flow of water, he says that forms determine the destination of the meanings, they are a means to an end.

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Together with Smalley (1955) and Reyburn (1948), Kraft (1979:309) maintains that God is transcendent in relation to human culture. However, he (Kraft) claims to take a different position from Smalley's superculture approach which states that God is above and beyond human culture. Instead, Kraft maintains that God is not bound by any culture in his dealings with human beings. In support of this view, he agrees with Nida (1954:282) that God, being the supreme creator, " is the only absolute *being* in the universe (:315)." Unlike Smalley, Kraft perceives of God as being supracultural and therefore above and outside of culture. He transcends culture except when he chooses to operate within its confines. On those occasions, according to Kraft (:317) God;

> " Adopts his approach to human beings, to the cultural, sociological and psychological limitations in which humans exists."

This is exemplified in Paul's approach to mission as seen in 1 Cor. 9:19-21, Acts 17 and Rom. 1:14ff. These and similar incidents show that God is not culture bound (Smalley cited in Kraft :318). This leads Kraft to consider Biblical cultural relativism. This model asserts that we ought to neither to absolutise human cultural institutions nor relativise God. Kraft (:319) cites Nida with approval, saying that in his (Nada's) discussion of the Bible and cultures, the Bible;

> " Clearly recognises that different cultures have different standards and that these differences are recognised by God as having different values. The relativism of the Bible is relative to three principal features, (1) the endowment and opportunities of people, (2) the extent of revelation, and (3) the cultural patterns of the society in question."

He elaborates on these three factors by showing first that in the New Testament[102] parables of the talents and minas, Jesus teaches modified relativism where "rewards and judgements are relative to people's endowments". Kraft points out that this is not absolute relativity because the supracultural principle of accountability holds but the judgement of the servants " is relative to both what they have been given and what they do with it, (:320)."

Secondly, Kraft points out that human accountability before God is in proportion to the extent of revelation that they have received.[103] At different eras, and depending on whether people are "informationally AD or BC"[104] Jesus uses appropriate judgements to assess them.

Thirdly, though God works with people for culture change, Kraft (:321) notes that God " conditions his expectations for each society to take account of the cultural patterns in terms of which their lives are lived." Kraft's biblical cultural relativism leads him to conclude, and in my judgement correctly, that a contextualised approach to biblical interpretation deals more adequately with the gospel and culture engagement especially in inter-cultural communication.[105] Such a dialogical hermeneutics that highlights the importance of the context of both the interpreter and the receptor, should not, in Kraft's (:343) view, "diminish our concern for the Scripture as our tether and yardstick."

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[102] Math. 25:14-30; Lk. 19:12-27, 48.
[103] Lv. 24:20; Math 5:38-39, 44.
[104] See Christianity in Culture 237-257.
[105] For an in-depth treatment of a culture sensitive interpretation, see Padilla R. 1978.

In an effort to address the tension between the church and culture, **Eugene** Nida (1960) starts from the premise that for centuries Christian truth has been embedded in culture and to separate the two is not an easy task (:206). Given the inseparability of the two, Nida's primary concern is to describe the salient features of the divine-human communication. He examines two contrasting types, the "common ground" and the "point of contact" methodologies (:211).

The common ground approach holds that a communicator of the gospel should study the culture of a host people, find its common ground for religious understanding (:212). In other words, such a communicator is to take the cultural forms and imbue them with a Christian belief system. Nida is of the conviction that this approach, commended by Pope Gregory the Great to Milletus and Augustine in the sixth century, did not work among the English. The main reason that he advances is that it became impossible to separate cultural forms from pagan faith.

Nida suggests that a more profitable approach would be to search for points of contact between a culture of a people and the Christian faith (:213). This is best done by identifying similar elements between Christianity and the particular culture. These are then used as points of departure in the process of communicating a distinctly Christian message. Citing Jesus as a model, Nida points out that he (Jesus) built on Jewish expectations of the messianic age then superceded it by showing that his kingdom was not of this world, Jn. 18:36. He upheld Old Testament revelation but showed that he had come to fulfil it, (Mth. 5:22, 22, 28 etc.) Thus Nida's argument is that Jesus' view towards culture of his time was that of continuity and discontinuity, (:215).

Continuity would apply to institutions such as

> " The tea ceremony in Japan, indigenous music in India; native clothing in South Pacific ... housing among the Indians in the Amazon. [And] it is now recognised that the *lobola* or "bride-price" arrangement in African society is not altogether wrong, as so many missionaries first thought. It is and was undoubtedly abused, but in the interest of greater stability in marriage and greater sense of responsibility to children, it should not have been ruthlessly denounced (:218)."

However, discontinuity would apply to those institutions which may have had a valid function in their society but have been corrupted to such an extent that they are in conflict with the biblical mandate. In such instances, Nida recommends that functional substitutes be set up. Examples would include the substitution of the initiation rites of the mystery cults by Christian baptism. We turn next to consider the approaches of African theologians in the gospel culture debate.

6.7 Africa's christological models re-examined: conversations with Bujo, Nyamiti, Moila and Bediako.

A creative and necessary step in contextualizing the gospel has been a development of a Christologies that correspond to two main schools of contemporary African theology, namely, the inculturationists and the liberationists (Nyamiti 1991:3). Since the former is the most developed of the two, and since it addresses the issues of gospel and culture, we shall examine its methodology and assess its effectiveness in contexualising the gospel.

There are those among the inculturationists who, according to Nyamiti (:3) construct an African Christology by starting from the biblical records and identify similarities and differences between them and the African worldview (Mbiti 1968 and Appiah-Kubi 1977). Other inculturationist theologians have suggested that a viable African Christology could be constructed starting with an analysis of the African worldview or culture. This would be a Christology from below.

In works such as those of Schreiter (1991) and Parrat (1995), inculturation theologians maintain that the gospel can be more effectively communicated in Africa if Jesus is interpreted as an ancestor. In the theology of **Benezet Bujo,** there is an impassioned plea that the incarnation of the gospel ought to bring together the fundamentals of both Christianity and African cultural theology to the end that Africans may be at home in the resulting Christianity, (1992:75). Bujo is concerned that academic theology is designed and packaged for the export market and fails to engage pressing African issues. He thus seeks to strike a balance between the temptation to romanticise the past or to denigrate everything African. Therefore he advocates what he terms Proto-Ancestor theology,

> " Premised on the fact that in as much as good ancestors in African culture mediated the life force to those who are still alive, similarly Jesus as proto-ancestor is one who has come to give life in its fullness, (John 10:10)."
> (Bujo :105).

He insists that such a theology is possible if we confront genuine African tradition with the biblical material and also " allow that the legitimate yearning of African ancestors are not only taken up in Jesus, but are also transcended in him, (:84)." He concedes that Jesus' ministry stretches beyond the confines of ethnicity to encompass

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all humanity. Given those two *provisos*, Bujo suggests that Jesus becomes the Proto-Ancestor or Ancestor par excellence. The natural ancestors he regards as "forerunners or images" of Jesus the Proto-Ancestor, (1992:83). Unlike Nyamiti (see below) who insists on a common biological origin between Christ and humans, Bujo (:94) takes a metaphysical view of the Jesus- human relationship, arguing that;

> " To say Jesus is ancestor is not to treat him as an ancestor in any crudely biological sense. It is to regard him as an ancestor par excellence, that we find in him one who begets us in a mystical and supernatural life."

Such a Jesus becomes the founder and exemplar of the "new clan of those who believe in his name, Jn.(1:12-13)." Bujo (:112) continues, "membership of this clan makes demands far more radical than the old clan loyalties."

With regard to the institution of marriage, he argues that ancestor theology calls for a new spirituality that challenges the temptation to hide behind ancient traditions. Bujo (:121) concludes, "we need a common basis, rooted in ancestral spirituality and centered on Jesus Christ as the Proto-Ancestor." Consequently, ancestor theology, as an entrée to the gospel-culture debate, has been further developed by **Charles Nyamiti.**

In developing his Christology, Nyamiti integrates traditional Christian doctrines with African thought patterns and suggests that the two are compatible. More specifically, he examines the similarities between African ancestral functions and Christ's pastoral and redemptive roles to draw conclusions that demonstrate how much more Christ can do for us. He points out that African ancestors heal, serve as prophets and as pastoral advisors. Like these ordinary ancestors, Nyamiti (1984:28) contends that Christ's close relationship with us is best understood from his

consanguinity with humanity "through his Adamic origin."

In his view, the common origin between humans and Christ is based on a shared descent, and Nyamiti writes;

> " It is obvious that when seen from this purely human perspective Christ was like all men a descendant of Adam, and had natural family, clanic and tribal relationships. After his death He became – again like all men – a Brother-Ancestor in Adam. This Brother-Ancestorship is purely natural, it is Christian in that the origin of all men is in Adam. In this case, however, Jesus became the natural Brother-Ancestor "only of those who lived on earth after His death, (1984:28)."

The underlying point of Nyamiti's Brother-ancestor Christology is that it is made possible "through the habitual grace whereby we become adopted as sons of the Father and brothers of the logos (:30). However, he does concede the fact that there is a qualitative difference between Christ and normal ancestors because, as he puts it:

> " Christ's exemplarity includes also his quality as our proto-type of the divine nature...As noted earlier our Lord makes us his brother-descendants by communicating His divine life and nature to us and incorporating us into His own body."

By combining the consanguineous origin of Christ with humanity on the one hand, and his divine nature, on the other, Nyamiti (:80-81) ends up with a bipolar Christology that starts its reflection from above and includes a perspective from below. He argues strongly in favour of a Christology from below saying that Christ's humanity can be used to elucidate the Christian message for the ancestor venerating people of Africa.

We have examined the Christology of two Catholic scholars and we turn now to Protestant scholars in the Reformed tradition, Moila and Bediako.

In outlining his view on the African perception of Christ, **Moeahabo Moila** (2002b:67) uses symbolic interactionism as an analytical tool. He analyses those cultural features that influence African's view of Christ. Of particular importance, their perceptions of Christ as " a special and superior ancestor." Moila starts from the premise that the persistence of the ancestor cult among African Christians is reinforced by their belief that Christ is one of the regular ancestors, though a superior one, and this he regards as an " African contextualisation of Christology" (:67).

Among Bapedi, the persons who qualify for ancestorhood, according to Moila (:69), [see also Setiloane (1989:18) and Monnig (1978:55)], are parents who died at a ripe old age; also younger parents who left a progeny and lived exemplary lives as well as young people who performed heroic acts. These people are all believed to inhabit heaven or *legodimo* and consequently wield unlimited power over their descendants. However, there is a derived power given to them by God, hence Moila writes:

> " Some intercede with God for us, others are responsible for the animal kingdoms of the universe. It is believed that the ancestors are closer to God who is the source of all dynamic power."

Having outlined his view of the role of the ancestors and the identification of Jesus as a superior ancestor among African Christians, Moila goes a step further than Bujo and Nyamiti. He raises several important questions pertaining to the ancestorship of Jesus such as: In what ways would Jesus qualify to be regarded as an ancestor, given

the fact that he never married, neither did he have children of his own? He was not even a chief. Both considerations disqualify him from being an African ancestor. Secondly, Moila points out that Jesus died outside of Africa and traditional funerary rites were not performed for him. Thirdly, if ordinary ancestors are venerated and not worshipped, does it mean, therefore, that Jesus is venerated and not worshipped? Moila's fourth concern is that if libations and sacrifices are made to pacify ancestors, who carries out those rituals at Christ's death and why? If African Christians are the ones who perform those rituals, Moila (:71) asks, " would that not restrict Jesus' active involvement in the human struggle ?" These are not idle questions.

As a way of addressing them, Moila posits a view, based on a reading and interpretation of the New Testament, that African Christians should distinguish between ordinary human ancestors and Christ as the superior ancestor who entered the world of the living dead "through the unusual process." In support of Christ's uniqueness, he points out that among Bapedi, the idea of Christ as the son of God formed part of their traditional belief system. God, whom they referred to as Kgobe, was believed to have had a son Kgobeane (Monnig quoted in Moila :72). Similarly, among Basotho, Christ's uniqueness was expressed in the Sesotho song or prayer that;[106]

> " *Modimo of motja, o diatla di maroba, di marothodi a pula; rapela Modimo wa kgale* (O! young God, whose pierced hands discharge drops of rain, pray to the God of old."

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[106] See Maboea A.T (1982) cited in Moila(2002:72-73)

It is possible that the song belongs to the post missionary era, given the evangelisation of the Basotho early in the nineteenth century. Whatever its date and origin, Moila's (:72) point remains inviolate that the New Testament teaching on the humanity and sonship of Jesus was unique and agreed with African belief systems. Jesus' humanity and extraordinary deeds placed him among African ancestors, though as Moila points out, Jesus was a Prime Ancestor. He writes that;

> " [Jesus] is further accepted as an ancestor not in the normal sense. In other words, his status as the Son of God gives him a status of extraordinary ancestor or Prime Ancestor. His works affirm this point. He did what no human being is able to do. For example, according to the Pedi He created man, whereas according to the Southern Sotho, He is the giver of rain."

Further attestations to Christ as the Prime Ancestor are his miraculous conception, triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the resurrection and ascension into heaven (:73). By reflecting on these attributes, and placing them alongside similar cultural stories, Basotho, for example, understand Christ better by comparing his exploits with those of Moshanyan'a Senkatana.[107]

Other attributes of Jesus which are recorded in the New Testament such as his priestly function as a universal mediator; Lordship over all life and his sacrificial death to save humanity are acts which are in line with Africans' view of ancestors.

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[107] Maboea, cited in Moila (2002:72) gives an account of Basotho myth where a young worrior known as Moshanyan'a Senkatana, born of a virgin, freed the Basotho nation from certain death after they had been swallowed by a beast, *Kgodumudumo*. He was later proclaimed king and upon his death his heart ascended to heaven

However, Moila (:75) agreeing with von Allmen and Oduyoye, believes that Christ supercedes ordinary ancestors, serving not only the tribe but an entire world doing what –

> " His fellow human beings could not do. He is continuing to do these things as ancestor of the highest rank. Unlike other ancestors He cares for all of humanity."

Kwame Bediako's (2000:20) approach to African Christology has much in common with that of scholars such as Idowu (1962), Mbiti (1970), Moila (2002a), Setiloane (1976), Taylor (1963), Turner (1977) and Walls (1978). Bediako points out that, contrary to popular Western thinking that the primal religions held " no preparation for Christianity (Gairdner 1910 cited in Bediako 2000:21)." Christian conversion does not introduce a new God " unrelated to the traditions of our past, but to One who brings to fulfilment all the highest religious and cultural aspirations of our heritage."(:21).

In an African context, Bediako contends that Christ fulfils those aspirations if he is seen to be addressing issues which arise in the spirit world of the African. Of particular importance to African believers is the way in which Jesus relates to the ancestors and thus engages traditional religious piety.

In answer to Pobee's (1979) and Moila's (2002a) concern that ancestors essentially relate to a lineage, that their influence is traditionally to members of a particular family, Bediako (:24) agreeing with Walls (1978:18) points out that Jesus " is not a stranger to our [African] heritage." Africans, like the rest of humanity, share in a human identity which is not to be understood,

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" Primarily in terms of racial, cultural, national or lineage categories, but in Jesus Christ himself. The true children of Abraham are those who put their faith in Jesus Christ in the same way that Abraham trusted God, (Romans 4:11-12)."

Together with Walls (1978:13) Bediako concludes from the statement above that;

" We [Africans] have not merely our natural past through our faith in Jesus, we have also an "adoptive" past, the past of God reaching into biblical history itself, aptly described as the "Abrahamic link."

Once that universal relevance of Christ is accepted, Bediako (:25) argues that the struggle to accommodate the Gospel to African culture becomes unnecessary since the gospel is also Africa's story in that;

" Our Lord has been from the beginning the word of God for us as for all people everywhere. He has been the source of our life and illuminator of our path in life, though like all people everywhere, we also failed to understand him aright."

Working from that premise, Bediako (:26) concludes[108] that Jesus becomes for Africans, an " Elder Brother who has shared our African experience in every respect, except in our sin and alienation from God."

He continues;

" Being our true Elder Brother now in the presence of His Father and our Father, he displaces the mediatorial function of our natural ' spirit fathers'...He is truly our high priest who meets our needs to the full."

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108 Heb.8:6, 9:15; 1 Cor 15:47; 1 Tim. 2:5.

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Drawing extensively from the letter to the Hebrews, Bediako argues powerfully that a more profitable appreciation of the high priestly role of Christ is achieved by tracing a trajectory backwards and working *from* the achievement of Jesus in the meaning of his death and resurrection, *into* the biblical tradition of sacrifice and high priestly mediation. (:28).

It is my considered view that such an approach provides a more abiding solution to the gospel culture tensions in our time and provides a step forward in reformulating themes of an African Christology and allows them to be evaluated against biblical records. To that end, the middle section of the letter to Hebrews has valuable insights that the contemporary African church can draw on. A study of the epistle reveals that the numerous challenges faced by Hebrews culminated in a crisis of faith, notably a lack of understanding of the nature and the role of Christ for their new faith. As Linders (1991:10) puts it:

> " The central argument of the letter is precisely a compelling case for the complete and abiding efficacy of Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice."

That particular challenge is not too far removed from where a large section of contemporary African Christianity finds itself today. For example, it is common knowledge that when tragedy strikes, the neat distinctions between revering and invoking the support and assistance of the shades often gets blurred. What many within the church believe about the mediatorial role of the shades and how they act in offering sacrifices to them results in a similar crisis of faith. In Nurnberger's (1995:160) words, that happens when those who have accepted the biblical faith

divide their loyalty between God and the father of Jesus Christ, on the one hand, and the ancestors on the other. As he puts it:

> " For the Israelites, exclusive loyalty to Yahweh, their God, was the foundation for the covenant, entrenched in the first commandment and endlessly reiterated by the law and the prophets. Consulting the spirits was strictly forbidden. Parents were to be honoured for the sake of Yahweh, but it was Yahweh who was to be loved and obeyed. The biblical God is a jealous God."

From a pastoral and missiological view point, it is crucial to consider Christology that begins with an acknowledgement of the role of the shades as religious analogues but then proceeds, as the writer to Hebrews does, to regard Christ as the perfect and only mediator. This is premised on the conviction that "Africans can affirm that God has not been absent from all their serious efforts to make sense of their own life and destiny from the days of their earliest forebears up to the present," Moila (2002a:77). For Bediako (2000:22) the crucial issue in understanding Christ authentically in an African setting is to regard Him in relation to the spirit power in an African context. He goes on to state that;

> " Since 'salvation' in the traditional African world involves a certain view of the realm of spirit-power and its effects upon the physical and spiritual dimensions of human existence, our reflection about Christ must speak to the questions posed by such a world-view."

Failure to do so could render the gospel ineffective. In support of that argument, Moila (2002a:77) cites Sundkler's (1960) student who wrote;

" Our first missionaries missed the gate. They would have won many people by transforming the old belief into the new and by changing the way of approaching the Almighty. The deceased would have been compared to the angels of God which are never worshipped but just praised as God's messengers. Something must be done (to establish contact) between the old belief and Christianity. Contact with both is therefore the key to enter the African door and the African's heart."

Taking the cue from the writer to the Hebrews, missiologists could resolve the crisis of faith of many African people by proceeding from the known to the unknown and back to the known (Lindars 1991:27). I would thus agree with Masoga (1995:63) that such an approach shows a sense of value and respect to traditional practices, but I differ with him when he goes to state that in respecting the traditional world-view and thought patterns;

" They should be treated as an *equal partner* (emphasis mine). One should avoid superimposition. It would not benefit one to pick and choose what one considers to be good about a particular cultural pattern and to discard what one considers to be "problematic" and "indigestible". A cultural practice needs to be treated in a holistic sense. "

Masoga does concede that cultural practices do have inherent flaws and may have to be adapted in the course of time yet in arguing for a case for a Pedi christological paradigm, he maintains that;

" Acknowledgement of practices is not enough. There is need to endorse practices as an indication of approval or ratification...[that] Approval and ratification of Pedi practices presupposes a total "recovery of the worth of these practices."

On the contrary, my reading of Hebrews chapters 7-10 shows that while there may be elements of commonality, there exists several definite contrasts between the author's preferred Christology and Jewish, and by extension, traditional African concepts of mediators or priests. For Brown (1982:126) the identification of Christ with Melchizedek[109] whose genealogy has no known beginning is meant to magnify Christ. The writer to Hebrews does it in such a way as to help his contemporaries to understand the superiority of Christ's priesthood when set against Levitical priests.

Additionally, Lane (1998:103) notes that in Melchizedek the offices king and priest were combined thus prefiguring Christ. The royal priesthood of Christ is underscored in Hebrews (7:1-28) and is meant to last forever. Furthermore, Lane notes that, reflected in the person of Melchizedek, there are other important features that would belong to Christ. In receiving the tithe from Abraham and also blessing him (7:1-2, 9-10 cf. Gen. 14) Melchizedek was shown to be greater than the patriarch and his lineage. Similarly, Jesus can be shown to be greater than Abraham (see also Ellingworth 1993:351).

Melchizedek did not belong to the house of Aaron (7:12) thus breaking with tradition. Likewise Jesus descended from the tribe of Judah and departed from former regulations that were weak and useless (7:18). What the writer to Hebrews says has enormous implications for an African based Christology. First, and as I argued in chapter five above, the shades were the acknowledged mediators or priests in an African worldview. As such they were but one of the various ways in which God spoke to our forefathers. But in these last days he speaks through one who, like

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[109] Hebrews 7:1-19

Melchizedek, has neither a beginning nor an end, Jesus who thus supercedes the shades.

Secondly, as with the high priest who had to be holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners and exalted above the heavens[110], I showed in chapter 5 (five) above that for one to qualify as a shade they had to be of a ripe old age, well respected in the community and above reproach. There was thus a common departure point between traditional Zulu belief system and the Christology of Hebrews. But that is as far as it goes. Whereas human mediators are effective for as long as they remain in the memory of their descendants, Hebrews[111] declares that;

> " Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them."

Thus by showing the similarities and differences between Christ as presented in Hebrews and the role of shades in Zulu culture, it should be possible to point out and move traditionalists to a higher Christology outlined in Hebrews (7-10). It should be less difficult to demonstrate the superiority of Christ, a subject to which we now turn.

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[110] Hebrews 7:26

[111] Hebrews 7:24-25.

6.8 The superiority of Christ

In chapters 8 and 9 of Hebrews the author introduces a second of the four[112] important themes of the Jewish priestly system, the sanctuary. Having introduced the nature of the priesthood of Christ, the author turns next to its locus of operation – the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven or the sanctuary (8:1-2). The African worldview, with its belief that the shades are spacially closest to God and interceding on behalf of their descendants, provides a solid base on which to build an understanding of the superiority of the ministry of Christ.

Like the Jewish mediators, the work of African ancestors is a copy and a shadow of one performed by Christ, the High Priest who sits at the right of the throne of the Divine Majesty in heaven. In and through Christ God has established a superior covenant with his people. The inadequacy of the traditional view lies in the fact that, unlike Christ, the shades fall short of being mediators of a new covenant established as a result of Christ's death on the cross. Jeremiah (31:31-34) whom the author of Hebrews quotes with approval, describes this new covenant as one in which God says;

> " I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be
> their God and they will be my people...For I will forgive their wickedness
> and will remember their sins no more."

The Christology of Hebrews is within easy reach of the religious comprehension of most believers if, in their reflections on the interface of the gospel and culture,

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[112] Brown R 1982 *Christ above all; the message of Hebrews.* He points out that the Jewish system consisted of four great themes: the priesthood itself expounded in chapter 7, the sanctuary 8:1-5, the covenant and sacrifice.

African theologians start by acknowledging that what made the shades accepted mediators was the belief that they were closer to God than their living descendants. However, according to Hebrews, these mediators served in a sanctuary that was a copy and a shadow of what is in heaven (8:5). The relationship or covenant that they mediated was, in Lane's (1985:117) words, "imperfect and provisional... the old covenant was defective; it developed faults on the human side." That notwithstanding, it should be easier, starting from traditional beliefs, to commend Christ as the door to that new covenant.

An African understanding of Christ would not be complete without reference to his substitutionary death on the cross. That immediately brings in the role of blood in cleansing sinners and uniting them with God, (9:14). That teaching, viewed against traditional beliefs where blood fulfils a similar role opens, another gate to an Africa's own understanding of Christology.

It is a well known and accepted practice that traditional mediators such as rulers or what Kuper (1975) terms family or tribal ancestors have first to receive labour, beer and sacrifices in exchange for conveying people's concerns to God. The writer to Hebrews, on the other hand, maintains that Christ is the one and only perfect mediator who was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people. He will appear a second time not to bear sin but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (9:28).

An effective Christology will have to make the transition from the role that the blood of goats and cattle plays in cleansing humanity from sin and securing a total salvation.

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6.9 Conclusion

Our discussion has centred on what would constitute an orthodox relationship between culture and the gospel. Starting with the views of African women scholars (see Chapter five above), I have proceeded to examine both the Old and the New Testament texts, and also a selection of world renowned mission theologians before offering my own view on the subject.

In this chapter, culture has been described as the sum total of a people's behaviour especially the way they develop and communicate values and norms. The gospel, on the other hand, has been described as the good news that through Christ, God frees the world from all forms of bondage and reconciles it to himself. Those who have been freed have the responsibility to share the good news with others while demonstrating the fruit of repentance in both word and deed.

An examination of both the Old and New Testament revealed that God used culture as a vehicle for communicating the message of liberation. Necessary adjustments had to be made, yet a people's culture consistently formed the substratum for communicating the gospel.

Of the North American mission theologians interrogated, the following points emerged: In the process of communicating the gospel, God does transform culture, (Niebuhr). Lutzbetak, a proponent of contextualisation, maintains that mission calls for a supernatural and natural strategy. Kraft's view of the relation between gospel and culture is that progress is made when anthropology and theology are allowed to

complement each other. Nida proposes a common ground approach where an effective communication of the gospel is likely to take place once the communicator has established common points of contact between the gospel and culture. Once found, these common points, or functional substitutes, could be profitably used to convey a distinctly Christian message.

African scholars who opt for a contextual approach to Christianity suggest that the gospel culture debate could best be addressed by developing a Christology that engages African belief systems. Consequently Bujo advocates a Proto-Ancestor theology while Nyamiti finds the Brother-Ancestor theology more useful. Moila moves the debate a bit further and cautions against too hasty an identification of Christ with African ancestors. His view is that Christ is best seen as a Superior-Ancestor. He shares this concern with Bediako, who, making reference to the letter to Hebrews, concludes that Jesus is to be regarded as a Brother.

Given the relationship between the gospel and culture outlined above, the final conclusion of this study, summarised in chapter seven below, will propose some practical pastoral and missiological approaches to the *ilobolo* debate within a Christian context.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7. 1 Introduction

The concluding chapter of this dissertation will cover three aspects namely; a summary of the findings of the research, followed, secondly, by six conclusions derived from those findings leading to three key pastoral and missiological issues for consideration, and concluding with four recommendations for further reflection and research.

At the beginning of this study I set out to test the validity or otherwise of three interrelated hypotheses with regard to *ilobolo* among AmaZulu. First, that the present crisis in the discourse on *ukulobola* is not likely to cause the practice to disappear in a hurry. Secondly that its survival, in the face of concerted efforts by colonial officials, anthropologists and missionaries to eliminate it, could be due to its religious underpinnings. Crucial to this perspective is that African marriage unites not only the spouses but also their respective families, both the living and the living dead. The research has led me to the following six conclusions.

7.2 Conclusions

In assessing *ilobolo* from an evangelical perspective, I have attempted to draw out those positive aspects of the custom that can be used as religious analogues in the gospel-culture debate. In those respects, I have sought to maintain an open and critical perspective, noting that culture is dynamic and that there are elements within each and every culture that are in conflict with biblical teaching. However, the pivotal role played by ancestors or the shades in the *loboli*-ng process as mediators can be used as a launching pad for understanding the role of Christ among the people of Africa. As several African mission theologians[113] have pointed out, and also the letter to the Hebrews clearly affirms, Jesus is the mediator par excellence, Heb. (1:1; 4:14; 8:1-2) or in the words of these theologians, Jesus is the superior ancestor who has come to replace human mediators.

I have argued in chapter two above that though it would be fallacious to say that there is a monolithic view of *ilobolo* in matrilineal and patrilineal societies and also in various parts of the African continent, at its most basic level, *ilobolo* is an instrument of social exchange. It is characteristically accompanied by a mutual exchange of gifts – *ilobolo* cattle (*amabheka*) or their equivalent and *imibondo* and *umembeso*. Traditionally, the nature of these gifts differed in accordance with the social and economic status of those involved in the transaction.

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113 Bediako, K (2000), Moila, M (2002), Pobee, J.(1979) and Nyamiti, C (1984).

The fixed amounts that characterise modern *ilobolo* are extrinsic to the practice. Colonial legislation, the effects of globalisation, deculturation, a cash economy and human greed have together resulted in a commodification of *ilobolo*. This is not to say that if these external factors did not exist, *ilobolo* might have escaped corruption. The likelihood is that it would. Culture, like theology, is a human endeavour and therefore tainted by human sinfulness and has inherent limitations.

Given the present status of the custom, an overwhelming majority of people interviewed deplored the commercialisation of the practice and a very small number among them felt that the custom has to be abolished. A cross section of the respondents expressed an urgent conviction that the custom should be transformed so that it approximates as nearly as possible its original intent.

It was also part of the initial impulse of this study to test the existence of a link between *ilobolo* and African religiosity. This was premised on the holistic nature of the African worldview where cultural practices form an integral part of the religious system. What has emerged from the research is that *ilobolo* cattle fulfil not only an important social role but also perform a religious function of uniting the spouses and their respective kin. On this score, I concur with Moila's (2002b:15) analysis when he writes:

" The tools and domestic animals used by Africans have both a religious and practical significance ... Africans also rear cattle for the purpose of making sacrifices to the ancestors. Thus the African economic system is in all respects sustained by religion. It is a symbol of unity among the living and between them and the ancestors."

Consequently, in Africa marriage is seen not only as a mere social contract but primarily as a religious one.

Ilobolo as a key constituent of marriage, likewise has cultural, religious and therefore theological value for Africans. Today many Western writers regard it as being a backward tradition yet this research has established that *ilobolo* helps Africans to build friendships and establish family networks inspite of the apparently unnecessary haggling over cattle.

In addition, it is during the lengthy *loboli*-ng process that African negotiation skills and conflict management abilities emerge. As shown in chapter two above, an *umkhongi* (marriage negotiator) was expected to excel in the mastery of language and in social protocol. Consequently, in a largely oral culture, these skills were of high educational value.

Indeed it is curious that those who have summarily dismissed *ilobolo* as a social anachronism have not made a conscious attempt to point out that *loboli*-ng is one of important occasion when male chauvinism is made to stand on its head and all social distinctions are laid aside. Evidence of this is in the fact that parents of the spouses refer to each other as *abalingani* (equals) or in Sesotho *Bakgotsi* (friends).

However, *if* the cultural and educational import of the practice is misread, *ilobolo* critics are right to point out that the custom can and does get reduced to a commercial transaction that dehumanises both men and women. What Oduyoye (1995:135) says about Akan marriages does have parallels among AmaZulu *if* traditional checks and balances are ignored. Her assessment of Akan marriage is that:

> " Marriage simply transfers the Akan woman from one suzerain (her maternal uncle) to another (her husband) in order that she might serve the interests of both kin groups; she provides children to the one (her matrilineal family) and physical service to the other. Whereas marriage confers full responsibility and a measure of autonomy, the woman remains a "subject"."

The outcome of the research underscored the following three pastoral and missiological concerns.

7.3 Pastoral and missiological implications.

First, Ngubane argued cogently that AmaZulu have always understood marriage or *umendo* to be a life-long process. She points out that an isiZulu marriage is viewed as a long journey, starting with the tortuous negotiations of *ilobolo* and continuing until the bride is fully incorporated into her husband's lineage.

From that we may conclude that a contexualized pastoral theology and marriage counselling could benefit and be enriched by viewing marriage as a life-long relationship. The implications would be that in preparing couples for marriage, the

pros and cons of *ilobolo* should form part of a marriage counselling syllabus. The church might also have to seriously consider how to appropriately involve itself, through its pastoral workers, in *ilobolo* negotiations, reminding the prospective couple (and the respective families) about the original intent of *ilobolo*. The church's pastoral oversight would have to continue beyond the wedding ceremony to include the different stages in the couple's married life.

The possibility thus exists that the African church could increase the number of well-rounded and theologically grounded members thus reversing the rising divorce rate among its members. In that way, a genuine theology which seeks a synthesis of Christian commitment and positive elements of culture will be developed or promoted where it already exists.

Secondly, *ilobolo* makes the point very powerfully that marriage is foregrounded on good relationships between the couple and members of the extended family. How these are established during the *loboli*-ng process may seem strange to a casual observer. Yet if healthy interpersonal relationships form the bedrock of lasting African marriages, Christian workers would do well to build on that foundation and the pastoral care and mission outreach would cover a wider circle of people.

Structurally this calls on ministers and priests to reclaim their role as people who prepare God's people for the work of service Eph.(4:12-16) rather than continue to function as ecclesiastical chief executive officers dispensing theological truths to lethargic congregants. A minister's primary function is to make disciples and Getz (1974:79) is right that radical discipleship,

" ...is far more inclusive than transmissive learning experiences. It must go beyond mere dissemination of Scriptural content and even beyond interaction with that content by those who are being taught. This learning process must be in the context of relational Christianity – fellowship with God and with one another. It must also be in the context of dynamic Christian witness and outreach."

As leaders within the church are equipped for outreach, the present clericalism where overworked priests often find themselves having to exercise the ministry of the word and sacraments and also act as general counselors would be reversed. Trained church leaders would develop stronger relations between newly married couples and thus be in a stronger position to provide ongoing support as they face normal challenges of matrimonial life.

A third pastoral concern, and one drawn from the chapter on *ilobolo* and the gospel, is that for the church to be effective in the world, for it to be salt and light (Mat. 5:13-16), the common tendency among Christians to be world-denying is foreign to biblical revelation and certainly does not form part of authentic evangelical theology. Starting with proto-evangelicals like Augustine through to John Wycliffe, Martin Luther to the Wesleys, William Wilberforce and George Whitefield, the consistent evangelical message was that those who have been regenerated by grace through faith ought to engage the world and address its many challenges. Stott (1999:21) expresses this more eloquently when he says:

" Authentic evangelicals, however, acknowledge that all truth is God's truth, that our minds are God-given, being a vital aspect of the divine image we bear, that we insult God if we refuse to think, and that we honour him when, whether through science or Scripture [*and culture*], we think God's thoughts after him, (Johann Kepler)." Italics are my addition.

Here is where the *ilobolo* debate, with its strong cultural roots, becomes germane. Among AmaZulu, Christianity is likely to make greater impact if it seriously engages the ancestral belief system which, as I have argued above, forms an important part of *ilobolo*. To illustrate the nature of that engagement, a filtration diagram below might be helpful.

Culture A

B Different Genres of Scripture

C Purified Culture
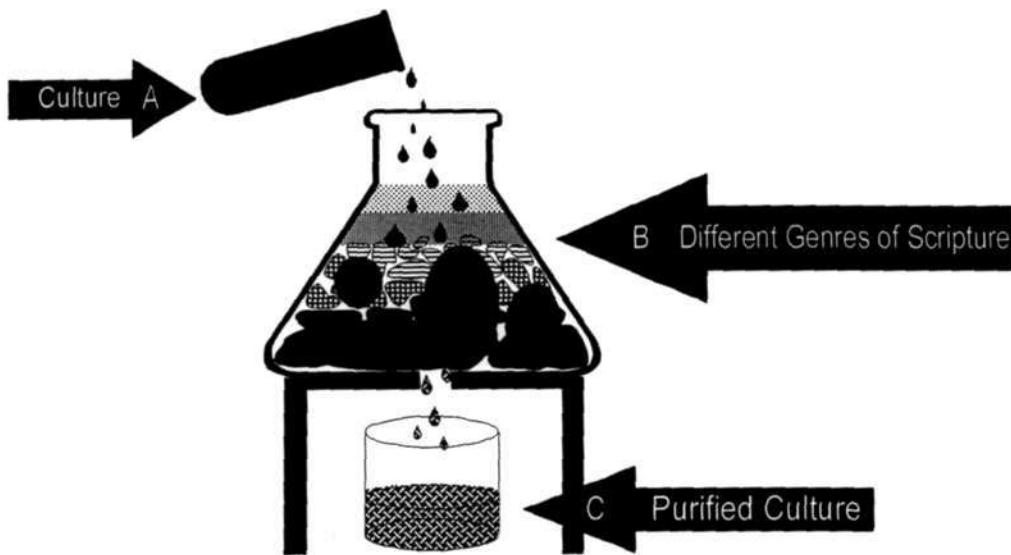
In the illustration above, the contents of test tube A may be taken to represent a culture of a people, and the raw material that missionaries could use as a starting point in sharing the good news. If the contents of container B are different genres of biblical revelation, mediated through the culture of its own era, then the filtrate C is what one would desire to obtain after culture has been exposed to the light of Scripture. It will be modified and hopefully purified in the process.

Paragraph **7.4** below is a proposed Afro-centric liturgy for a marriage ceremony. I propose that before the marriage ceremony, the minister or the licensing officer will have met with the spouses to advice them on legal preliminaries and check with them that the cultural requirements of *ilobolo* and *umbondo* have been complied with. The couple will also have to be appraised of the Christian understanding of marriage as well as its obligations. Some of the prayers and parts of the service could be led by members of bride and the groom's family or their friends. This will, of necessity, be a departure from normal Western marriage ceremony where the officiating priest normally does everything and the congregants become spectators. A participatory format would be inclusive and more African in its orientation. The footnotes explain departures from and modifications of the current Western marriage liturgy, as well as point to Scripture references.

7.4 Proposed marriage liturgy

The bride and groom, each[114] accompanied by their parents or legal guardians enter the church hall or the venue of the wedding where guests welcome them with a jubilant wedding song or hymn. Women ululate while and *imbongi* (praise singer) narrates the history and pedigree of the spouses.

Minister . Welcomes everyone present and encourages them to join in the celebration.

Prayer: An appropriate prayer is said to commit the bride and groom, their families and friends and the entire service to the Lord·[115]

Minister: Friends, we are gathered here in the sight of God to witness the marriage of A and B; to wish them and their respective families[116] God's blessing and we have come to share their joy with them.

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[114] In contrast to the Western patriarchal form where the father or male relative of bride 'hands' over the bride to the waiting groom, it would be highly symbolic and thoroughly African if parents or guardians of the bride and groom accompanied their charge and united them. Where possible, they would enter the church through opposite doors for the bride and groom to meet at the alter.

[115] It could be said by the Minister or a member of either family or even by an invited friend of the bride or the groom. This would have the effect of making the ceremony a community affair rather than simply a church occation as often happens.

[116] It is important to include the families who have been involved in the *ilobolo* negotiations rather than focus on the bride and groom as is often the case in Western weddings services.

According to the Scriptures,[117] marriage is a life long union of a man and a woman who love and are committed to each other, therefore it should not be entered into lightly or thoughtlessly. It is founded on self-giving love[118,] mutual respect, companionship and willingness to serve each other, thus honouring and glorifying God.

It is for that reason that Scripture[119] teaches that a man shall mentally and emotionally leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

A and B, having exchanged *ilobolo* and *imibondo* wish to make public today their desire to be husband and wife.

Minister: The law of the land[120] requires you both, in the presence of God and the assembled witnesses, to declare that if either of you know any legal prohibition to you entering into holy marriage, you declare it.

Woman/Man (either together or individually) I (we) solemnly declare that I (we) do not know of any legal prohibition to my (our) marriage to (name of either spouse).

Minister: Since marriage is also a social contract, I request you to declare

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[117] Mark 10 and Matthew 19.

[118] Eph. 5
[119] Gen 2:24

publicly that you and/or your respective families have fulfilled the social requirements of *ilobolo* and *umabo*, (use appropriate terminology if couple is not Zulu).

Man or Woman (either together or individually)
Representatives of my family present here today and myself (ourselves) have fulfilled the normal social requirements of marriage.

Minister: Do you wish to exchange visible tokens[121] of your commitment to each other. If you do, please turn around and face the congregation as you do so.
Almighty God the author and sustainer of all life, we thank you for A and B. For protecting and leading them up to this point in their life where they have declared their deep love for and commitment to each other in marriage.

We thank you for their respective families who have nurtured them and have undertaken to continue to support them into married life. We thank you Father for the marriage gifts that they have given to each other. May these serve as constant reminders to them that is more blessed to give than to receive. That while retaining their individuality, they are no longer two separate individuals but have been fused into one. May they and their respective extended families mutually support and enrich each other.

We pray that A and B will enjoy and cherish each other's companionship and

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Provisions
[121] Wedding rings or whatever tokens the couple have decided upon may be exchanged at this point in full view of

that you will help them overcome the challenges that accompany married life. May their love for each other be like yours, holy and self giving. This we ask in the precious name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Amen.

Minister: Asks the man and woman to stand make their vows to each other. Preferably these could be done spontaneously, each expressing a voluntary undertaking, under God, to be wife/ husband to the other from the day of the wedding through to eternity or until Jesus comes.

The same invitation could be extended to couples in the audience and be encouraged to renew their vows to each other silently.

The vows will be for each spouse to promise and undertake to love honour and respect the other and remain faithful to them for as long as they live. If their marriage is blessed with children, to bring them up in the fear of the Lord.

At this point, the praise singer *(imbongi/seroki)* from both families may once again sing their praises.

the congregation.

Minister: The minister charges the respective families saying: Will you, members of the family of A and B support this man and woman unconditionally and pray that through the power of the Holy Spirit, they will keep their vows to each other? If so, will you indicate your commitment by standing and remain standing. Could everybody now stand.

Minister: Asks A and B to hold hands and face the congregation. Then s/he says:

A and B as you have committed yourselves to marriage in the presence of God and the assembled people as witnesses, I now pronounce you husband and wife in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Those whom God has brought together in marriage, may no one seek to separate them.

Sermon[122]

A final prayer is said, a hymn sung and the congregation dismissed with an appropriate blessing by the minister.

As a final conclusion, I would like to make three recommendations for further research.

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[122] The text of the sermon could be based on any of the following passages. Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Cor.13:4-8, 13; 1 John 4:7-13; John 15:9-13.

7.5 Recommendations and issues for further research

- An examination of the nature of *ilobolo* in mixed race marriages in South Africa.
- The modalities of equipping the so-called 'lay leaders' to be accredited marriage officers and pastoral counselors.
- An examination of who is best qualified to determine the accepted norm in cultura changes.
- *Ilobolo*, evangelicals and virginity testing, what are the questions?

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PIETERMARITZBURG → DURBAN
+ EDENDALE
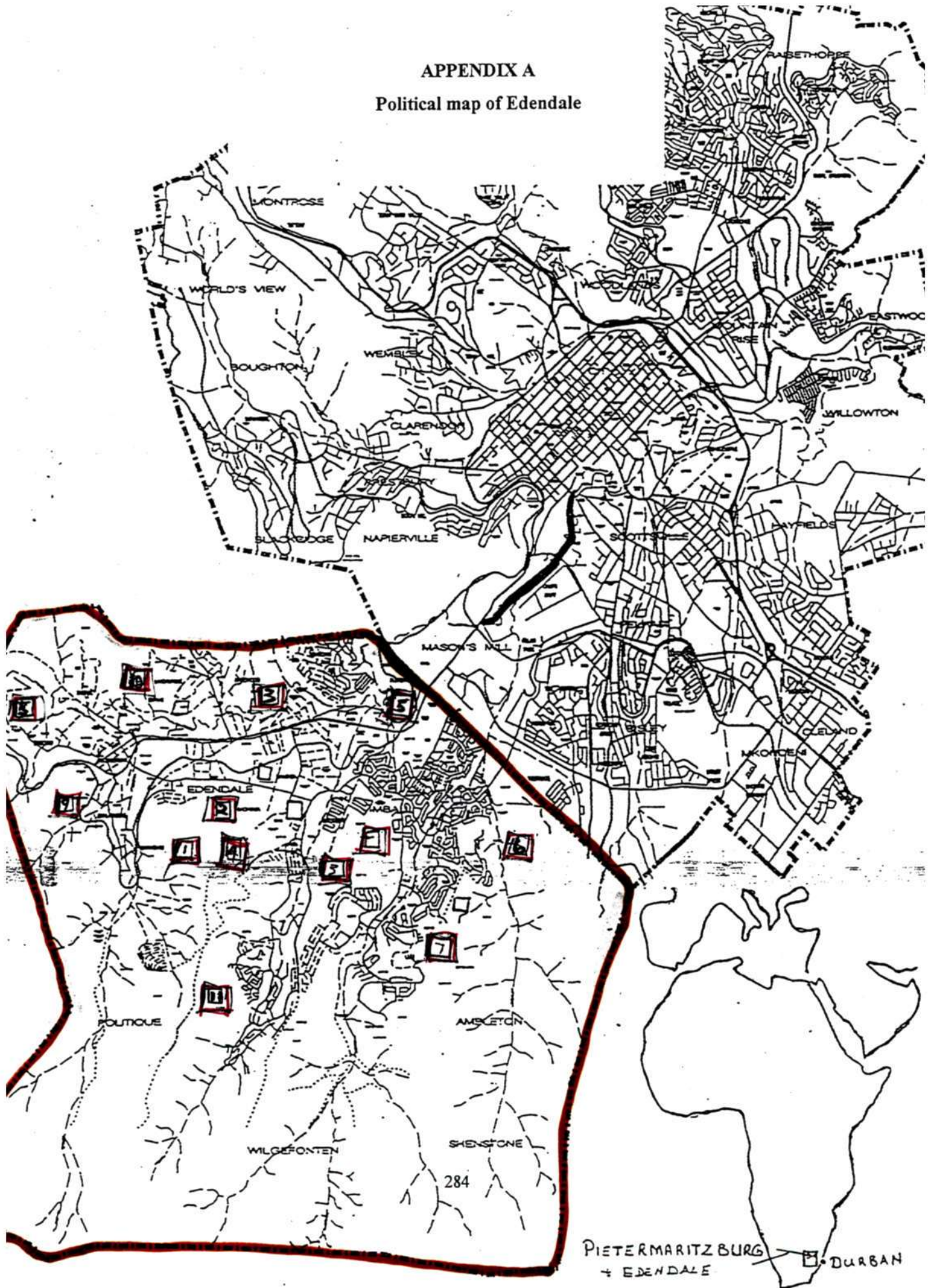
APPENDIX B

Physical map of Edendale
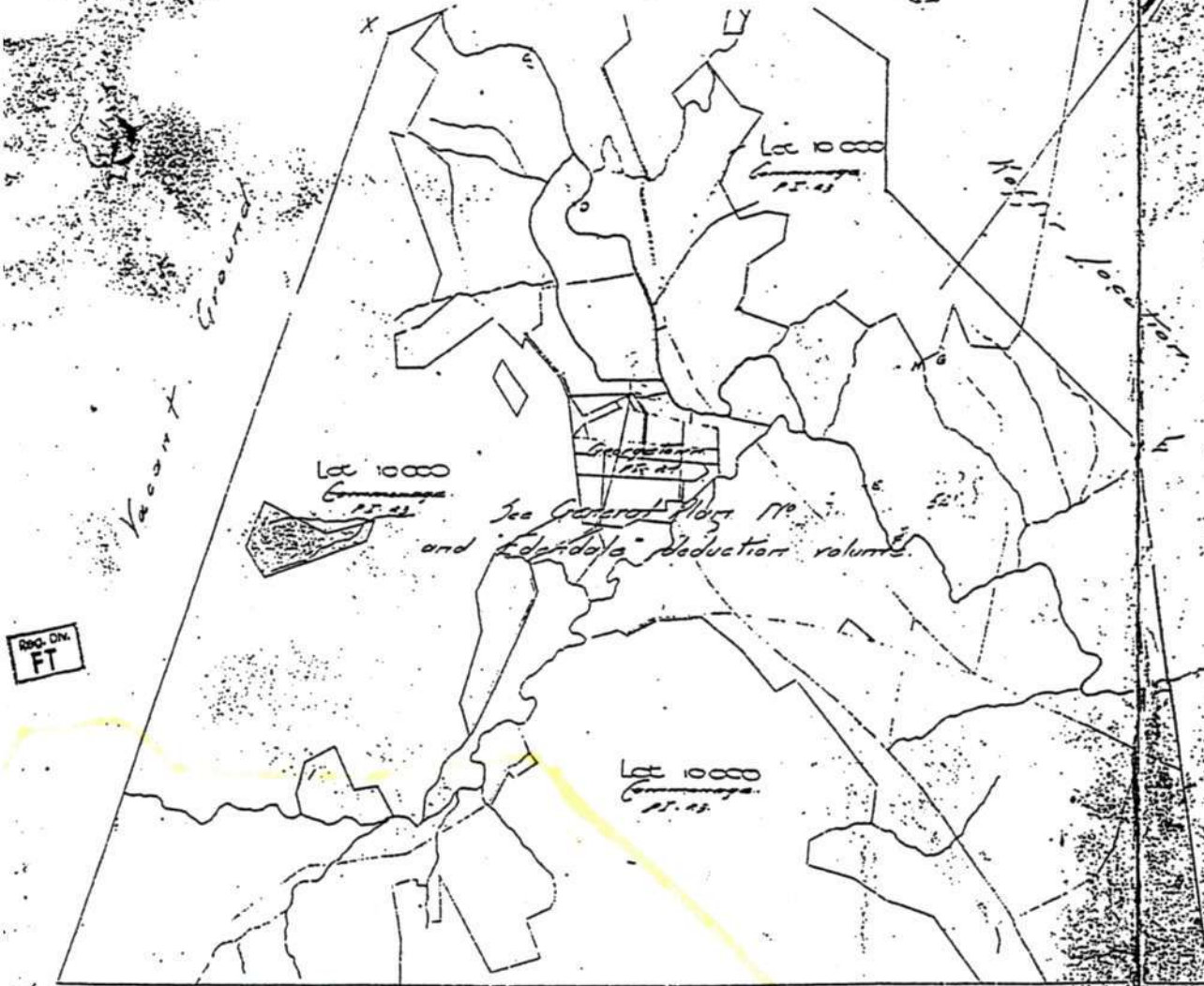
APPENDIX C

Interview Guide in English and in IsiZulu

1. *Could you please comment on why the ilobolo has continued to be practised inspite of the fierce debates for and against it.*

   Ake uthi fahla fahla ukuthi kungani ukuthi lelisiko lelobolo lisaqhubeka phezu kokuba kuphikiswanwa kanganka ngalo abanye belivuma, abanye belichitha

2. *Are you aware of any differences between Christians and traditionalists with regard to their attitude towards* ilobolo?

   Ngabe unalo yini ulwazi mayelana nokwehlukana kwemibono phakathi kwabakholwa nguKristu nalaba abamele nabakhuthaza ezamasiko na?

3. *In your view, what are the most obvious advantages and disadvantages of* ilobolo?

   Ngokubona kwakho, yikuphi okuhle nokusizayo, yikuphi okubi nokungasiziyo mayelana nelobolo?

4. *To what extent should the law of the land (South African constitution) affect or address* ilobolo?

Wena ubona ukuthi umthetho wezwe *(iSouth Africa)* uyingene kangakanani indaba yelobolo?

5. *Some people maintain that* ukukhipita *is directly related to* ilobolo. *What is your comment on that statement?*

Kukhona abathi ukukipita kubangwa yilobolo. Wena uthini ngalokho?

6. *What role do you think Christianity should play in* ilobolo?

Ngokwakho ubona ukuthi ukukholwa nguKristu kufanele kuyithinte kanjani indaba yelobolo?

7. *When would you consider a couple to be married, when the first* ilobolo *instalment is passed or after the Church or civil ceremony. Please support your view.*

Wena ngokwakho ungabamukela uma sekwenziweni abantu ukuthi sebeshade ngokufaneleyo; uma sekukhishwe inxenye yelobolo noma uma sekwenziwe umcimbi omiswe yibandla (umshado wasesontweni) noma omiswe uhulumeni (ukubhalisa umshado wesikholwa noma wesiko)?

8 *In your view, what impact does "the giving" of a bride to the groom have on her self-image?*

Ngokubona kwakho, ukunikezwa kukamakoti ngabazali bakhe kumkhwenyana

kumenzenjani yena ebuntwini bakhe, kumenze azibone enjani?

9. *Do you have any further comments to make on the custom of* ilobolo *as it is practiced in urban areas?*

Kukhona yini okunye ofisa ukukusho mayelana nesiko lelobolo njengalokho lisetshenziswa emadolobheni manje?

APPENDIX D

Interviews

Dladla Thembi	Mrs	Edendale, Caluza	1999 04 13
Dlamini Marjorie		Kwa-Mpumuza	1999 05 06
Dlamini Sunshine	Mrs	Edendale, Caluza	1999 07 16
Dlomo Chris	Rev	Pietermaritzburg	1999 05 04
Goba Elmon	Mrs	Edendale, Unit J	1999 08 21
Goba Thobile	Mr	Edendale, Unit J	2001 07 26
Gwala Sibusiso	Rev	Scottsville	2000 06 06
Khambule Sanele	Ms	Scottsville	2000 06 17
Khumalo Luke	Mr	Sweetwaters	2003 09 28
Mabaso Nombulelo	Ms	Kwa-Mpumuza	1999 06 12
Madlala Thoko	Ms	Kwa- Mpumuza	1999 01 08
Magubane Nonhlanhla	Ms	Edendale, Unit 18	1999 05 27
Masondo Queen	Ms	Sweetwaters	2003 09 25
Masuku Sibongile	Mrs	Esikhawini	2002 08 12
Masuku Solomon	Rev	Esikhawini	2002 08 12
Mathonsi Vusi	Mr	Edendale	2001 09 21
Mkhwanazi Nhlanhla	Ms	Edendale	1999 08 17
Mkhwanazi Nhlanhla	Mr	Edendale	1999 05 16
Motsai Jabulane	Mr	Sweetwaters	2003 09 26
Ncgobo Mpiyakhe	Mr	Edendale, Unit 15	1999 03 01
Ndlela-Nogiyiya	Mr	Westgate	1999 06 06
Ndlovu S'bongile	Ms	Pietermaritzburg	1999 01 05
Ntshangase Moses	Rev	Edendale,	2002 04 16
Rajuili Benjamin	Rev	Soweto	2001 07 18
Shabalala Nontobeko	Ms	Sweetwaters	2003 08 15
Sifanelo Sandisiwe	Ms	Sweetwaters	2003 10 20
Zulu Lindiwe	Ms	Sweetwaters	2003 08 27
Zulu Thoko	Ms	Pietermaritzburg	1999 05 13

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