

Marriage and european dowry custom



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Lobolo or Lobola (Mahadi in Sesotho; sometimes translated as bride price) is a traditional Southern African custom whereby the man pays the family of his fiancée for her hand in marriage (Compare with the European dowry custom where the woman brings assets[citation needed]). The custom is aimed at bringing the two families together, fostering mutual respect, and indicating that the man is capable of supporting his wife financially and emotionally. Traditionally the lobola payment was in cattle as cattle were the primary source of wealth in African society.

However, most modern urban couples have switched to using cash. The process of lobola negotiations can be long and complex, and involves many members from both the bride's and the groom's extended families. Often, to dispel any tensions between the families, a bottle of brandy is placed on the table. This is usually not drunk; it is simply a gesture to welcome the guest family and make everyone feel more relaxed (it is known as mvulamomo, which is Xhosa for 'mouth opener'). Lobola may have some unintended negative effects. It may have created a financial barrier for some young men looking to take a bride.

It is common for a couple that are emotionally ready to commit to each other to stay unmarried if they do not have the financial resources to satisfy the impending traditional ritual. For those who do have the financial means, the issue can be Lobola's opportunity cost. Young men who are in the wealth-creation stage of life may feel that their future is better secured if they invest their money elsewhere to receive significant financial returns. Lobola is seen by some as an extravagance that has little relevance in a society where young

Africans are trying to lift themselves out of inherited poverty. However, the tradition is adhered to as strongly as ever, and in families where tradition and intention override greed, lobola can be a great way of showing commitment between families, not just between the bride and groom. Many traditional marriages utilise a cash-based lobola; this can be then followed by a European-style wedding ceremony, where the lobola funds are used to pay for expenses. In this way, any outlaid costs are returned to the payer in another form, preserving tradition, honour and finances.