Complicating "tradition" and "modernity":

Young South African Women's Perceptions of Lobola

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Declaration

I declare that *Complicating "tradition" and "modernity": Young South African's women's perceptions of lobola* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Full name: Nyaradzo Rudo Nduna

Date: November 2021

Signature……

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I would like to thank God for giving me this chance, something I think was unattainable before but He showed me that anything is possible.

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Abstract

An indigenous cultural practice among the many ethnic groups of South Africa, lobola has changed immensely, especially in highly urbanised towns. It has also been the subject of several interpretations in academia, the media, and popular opinion. These have included ethnographic scholarship that focuses on its cultural significance and its centrality to reciprocal relationships between groups. Other academic and activist views criticize how lobola, as a form of bride wealth, instrumentalises women in patriarchal society. In addition, other interpretive strand acknowledges lobola's patriarchal impacts while also recognizing the agencies and choices of women who embrace it. The work demonstrates that women are neither consistent agents nor constant victims of lobola, but that they experience it in different ways. As a result, the study explores how young women's situated knowledge helps us understand lobola's complex and ambiguous meanings that might assist in comprehending the current connotations of lobola, which are presently complicated and confusing. The current study is concerned with mapping out and analysing the complexities of standpoint knowledge-making that is typically side-lined in the numerous scholarly and activist studies of lobola by selecting a diverse range of young women respondents as well as commentators in the public sphere.

Key words: Lobola, Black women, Feminism, Culture, Power, Gender, Customary practices, "Tradition", Constructionism, Intersectionality, Identity, "Modernity"

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

As a young Zimbabwean woman, I have been intrigued and confused by the persistence of lobola, as a practice that undeniably seems to reinforce women's statuses as objects of exchange. My thinking about lobola has constantly shifted since my preliminary research, and I have become increasingly interested in its multiple meanings and the complex ways in which young people discuss it.

Historically, lobola is a socio-cultural practice in many African societies (Chisi, 2018). Its normative roots rest on the creation of a 'union' between two families, through a groom giving goods, money or livestock to the family of the bride (Khomari, Tebele and Nel, 2012). However, over time, different meanings and perceptions have been attached to the practice, particularly among younger women in rapidly changing African societies. When I started my research, I thought about lobola as being obviously exploitative of women. I also associated it mainly with rural women who had few opportunities to make choices about their reproductive and bodily rights. I have recently come to believe that this understanding is in fact in line with earlier western-centric understandings, which often defines it only as a harmful outmoded practice (Rembe *et al.*, 2011; Mubangizi, 2012, 2015).

Lobola has received scholarly attention and sparked debate between advocates of human and women's rights and those that capture the practice as an integral part of African culture. For instance, Mubangizi (2015) localises the discussion of lobola within the confines of human rights discourse. The argument is that customary marriages are not compatible with human

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rights values enshrined in national and international constitutions. Accordingly, lobola envisages acts of buying and owning human ‘property’ which are interchangeably referred to as 'bride-wealth', 'bride price' or 'marriage payment' (Mubangizi, 2015, p. 40; Chisi, 2018, p. 20). Many feminists and critics of lobola argue that it is inevitably “a problematic tradition that is potentially degrading to a woman, because she is being treated as goods for sale” (Botha cited in Mubangizi, 2015, p. 41).

Conversely, Nsereko (1975) reported that the normative underpinnings of this socio-cultural practice are not reflected in English terminology such as "bride price" that is referred to as 'roora' (in Shona) or ilobolo (in IsiZulu). When acknowledging the normative roots of the practice, there is recognition of its origins in non-capitalist societies in which individual human beings were seen as socially valuable. Therefore, framing such a socio-cultural practice in property or monetary terms is synonymous with committing what is termed as ‘epistemic violence’(Hall, 1996, p. 446). This can described as the imposition of colonial knowledge at the expense of indigenous African knowledge and its socio-cultural practices.

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The interplay between 'continuity' and 'change', 'tradition and 'modernity' is the background against which the current study seeks to unpack the perceptions of young South African women on the practice of lobola. These perceptions draw on contradictions and complications that have seem to be increasingly characteristic of lobola in South Africa. According to Albertyn (2009) women’s ability to participate and decide whom they marry, how they marry, as well as their sexuality and birthing rights fall under the umbrella term of reproductive and bodily freedoms. Hence my interest is in how young women themselves make sense of lobola, and this involves both research with participants as well as research into social media platforms.

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McGaha (2015) summarises popular culture as the entirety of ideas, values and perspectives that are regarded as acceptable as per an informal consensus within a given community. The driving force behind popular culture is mass appeal; it is fuelled by mass media and the diversity of ideas among the general public. This allows it to re-shape and influence dominant ethnic and socio-cultural stereotypes, particularly amongst younger people who are often influenced by it. As a result, popular culture, which includes digital culture, often has a major influence on young people and is utilised as both an influence and a platform for information sharing.

The current breadth and versatility of print and digital media can lead to spirited debates on current and contested practices, and the lobola tradition in South Africa is surely one among them. In this digital age, popular culture has found expression through social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram. Social media platforms, much more than magazines and newspapers, which are often controlled by censors, provide outlets for public issues like lobola to be articulated, discussed, and investigated in forms that represent the viewpoints of individuals who are frequently written about or spoken for.

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In order to acquire a better knowledge of the perspectives of young South African women, the current study focuses on the responses of three participants. These are all university students whose academic backgrounds and scholarly arguments enriched the study. The theoretical justification for using academic students stems from the correlation between education and identity formations. According to Ellis (2002) cited in (Cyprus, 2015, p. 1160) "learning is successful when learners can summon up or construct an identity that enables them to impose their right to be heard".

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Education, when understood as creating the necessary conditions for being able to theorise on the basis of standpoint (Swigonski, 1994; Landman, 2006) allows individuals to negotiate identity formations, values and perceptions on various topics, lobola included. hooks (1994, p. 12) advocates for "teaching that enables transgressions". For instance, of the three participants, two were undergraduate students in Women and Gender Studies. Their use of theories such as *feminist standpoint theory*, and *intersectionality* was instructive in unpacking the interplay between traditional norms and practices and the subjugation of women. The third participant was a Master of Law student whose research focused on the recognition of traditional practices in constitutions and their impact on women's rights. By dealing with views in digital media and popular culture, as well as those of the participants, the study was concerned with mapping out and analysing the diversity of young women's standpoint knowledge-making that is often neglected in many scholarly, media and activist accounts of lobola. Both interviews with my participants as well as the wider print media and digital knowledge-making facilitated the mapping out and analysis of diverse responses.

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The controversy surrounding lobola in modern-day South Africa has made it a popular topic in print and digital media. Recent examples include people talking about how the tradition is crossing racial boundaries (Levitt, 2019) or how it is practiced by people in same-sex relationships (Mkwanaza, 2019). Even blogs and guides have been published on how to go through the process (Ngcobo, 2018) as well as phone applications to calculate how much one's lobola costs (*Lobola Calculator*, no date). Headlines about women paying their lobola have caused heated debates on social media, with some seeing it as desperation, whilst others see it as being assertive (Bambalele, 2019). These lively digital exchanges on the topic demonstrate its pertinence to understanding young black women's complex identity-making and views about their roles in the present today. It is noteworthy that the vibrant digital

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coverage of the issue shapes the views of young women (including my participants) in one way or the other.

My research on young women's responses considered the different ways in which young women produce and circulate knowledge. Dobson and Kanai (2016) note how, "historically women have been associated with the consumption of media rather than its production" . In patriarchal societies, women may often be hesitant to share their thoughts in real-life situations when they are face to face with older people and men. However, digital and print media can enhance women's freedoms of expression. As Caldeira, De Ridder and Van Bauwel (2018) show, women can turn to print and digital media to decompress, create safe spaces and share a sense of their true or imagined selves. Consequently, new media has been labeled as "democratising" and social media has not fallen short of this descriptor (Caldeira, De Ridder and Van Bauwel, 2018, p. 24). Social media has become a crucial contemporary platform for sharing, exchanging and creating archives of knowledge about topics that relatively marginal groups such as young black women find relevant (Vuuren, 2016). These platforms are powerful to the extent that they give women the power to begin movements by sharing a single tweet or posting a picture. For instance, after the murder of a University of Cape Town student Uyinene Mrwetyana by a Post Office employee in 2019 in Cape Town, South Africa the hashtag #AmInext became immensely popular on social media and brought numerous people to the streets to protest(Walker, 2019) . Social media has become a vehicle for unacknowledged forms of social change that may not be intentionally political, and therefore Caldeira calls it "everyday activism"(Caldeira, De Ridder and Van Bauwel, 2018, p. 25).

Lobola's resilience as a practice, as well as its relevance in women's personal lives, private dialogues, and public debates makes it a central focus for concretely comprehending women's

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agencies, the numerous power systems that affect them, and intersectionality. Dealing with the airing of this topic on social media and digital platforms can therefore lead to important understandings of how women are concretely making sense of their identities, freedoms and political challenges today.

1.2 Outlining the structure of the study

The thesis begins by explaining the theoretical framework informing the study. The study concentrates on using multidisciplinary views to examine marriage in relation to the gender order and gender relations. Furthermore, the investigation considers how women's identities should be examined in relation to their intersectional experiences of race, gender, and class. The theoretical framework also emphasizes the significance of women's perspectives and knowledge in comprehending their identities as well as socio-cultural and political experiences. In Chapter 2, the study focuses on presenting an overview of the literature on lobola, demonstrating how it is linked to specific situated knowledges about it. The literature reviewed in the study varies from early ethnographic work to recent feminist research. This section guides the arguments raised and is a basis for my analysis of the research findings in chapter 3 and 4. In chapter 3, the methodological approach used in this study is outlined and it includes a preliminary discourse analysis of findings. The study therefore demonstrates how the interpretation of women's locations can be connected to ways of approaching lobola as experienced by young women.

The themes outlined in chapter 3 are then addressed in detail in chapter 4. This chapter traces the diversity of ways in which lobola can be understood and interpreted among those who are directly affected by the practice, attempting to conceptualize and re-think the tradition of lobola through the lenses of young South African women. The study's summative evaluation

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and conclusions are presented in Chapter 5. This chapter highlights the study's contribution to existing knowledge and research gaps, as well as recommendations for future investigations.

1.3 Theoretical Framework of the Study

Standpoint Theory

Much standpoint theory as developed by feminists holds that "truth" is subjective, with those who are privileged in patriarchal society having and seeing a "reality" that is connected to their positions of dominance (Swigonski, 1994) Standpoint feminists focus on how the epistemological contributions of minorities and women are misappropriated, excluded and suppressed. Patricia Hill Collins (2002), for example, shows that, in the world of academia, academics have continually spoken for marginalised groups, women in particular, and produced texts on their behalf. Such has been the case in studies of traditions such as lobola, which is repeatedly researched from an exclusionary, classist, racist and often sexist and gendered approach. Standpoint feminist ideas about the politics of knowledge-making are directly relevant to my focus on the voices and vantage points of young black women. The interviews I conducted as well as the range of views on social media reveal new insights from the perspective of those in subordinate locations. These often critique or complicate dominant ?????épistémologies and commentary on the subject of the tradition of lobola.

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Constructed worlds

Social constructionism is crucial in revealing how participants identify as subjects whose identities are not innate, but are shaped by social ideas about who they are and what roles they should play. According to Galbin (2014, p. 82) social constructionism, also known as the 'social construction of reality', is focused on interpersonal and social influences and their impact on the existence of human life. Although biological or genetic factors have been noted

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to have an impact on the individual's behavior and personality, social influences have proven to have a far greater impact on the individual and society at large. It would appear that there is a common link between social constructionism and *symbolic interactionism* espoused by Mead & Cooley (2015). At the core of the theory is the focus on *culture* and *society.* According to Mead & Cooley, society is the result of historical processes of interaction between an individual and the cultural world around them. This leads to the argument advanced by standpoint theorists, namely, that knowledge itself should be subjected to social constructionism (Carter and Fuller, 2015).

The social construction of gender is based on "beliefs, institutions and relationships" (Hussen, 2011, p. 22). Social construction exposes how beliefs are formed and how they are used to control people's way of living. Through the process of learning from society, friends and family, children gradually learn how to perform their gender. They also learn from watching people perform their gender roles. It is important to remember that the characteristics that define masculinity or femininity vary across class, culture and racial lines (Schippers, 2007). Social subjects therefore learn to perform gender in context-specific ways. For example, Mikell asserts the existence of 'African femininities', where "women sought to affirm their identities and exercise greater public power without challenging or rejecting the overall structure of corporate control of the families, lineages, and localities to which they belong" (Mikell, 1997 cited in Jewkes and Morrell, 2012, p. 1736).

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It is evident that culture, in embedding gender norms and ideology, has a powerful impact on women's experiences, roles and self-perceptions even though culture always evolves and is never static (Ratele, 2007a). McFadden (2001, p. 64) claims that in Africa it has been "constructed as untouchable and sacrosanct; as something which must be guarded and

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protected, especially from external influences" This is what leads to the perpetuation of certain patriarchal beliefs and gender stereotypes. African feminists such as McFadden (2001) think that a lack of awareness of the changeable character of culture is to blame for the exclusion of African women from cultural discourse. Because certain cultures are believed to be untouchable and "under threat", the rituals associated with them are defended even when they are out of synch with metropolitan laws and democratic principles.

Intersectionality and gendered identities

As the preceding discussion of gender, race and culture reveals, it is impossible to analyse gendered roles, meanings and identities without simultaneously dealing with other identities, such as race and culture. Some scholars have written on the missed opportunities, struggles within struggles and the challenges of representation and appropriation regarding the position of black women in society. Yuval-Davis (2006) cites bell hooks' 1981 book *Aint I A Woman* in which she bemoans the invisibilising of black women in systems that identify blackness with reference to masculinity and feminism with reference to white women's experiences. She argues that 'that all women are White and all Blacks are men' (cited in Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.193) implying that black women cannot be classified in terms of dominant frameworks about gender or within influential understandings of race. According to black feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins (2002) intersectionality is the simultaneous experience of the multiple oppressions encountered by black women involving class, race and gender. A further insightful deduction is offered by Kimberle Crenshaw in her work *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.* Crenshaw (1989, p. 140) who is also credited for coining the term "intersectionality", argued that sexism and violence against women is inevitably understood from the perspective of white women or "class-privileged women". The legal and justice system often approach sexism in a generic manner that privileges

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injustices faced by white women. The system also defines racism based on the issues affecting black men (Smith, 2013).

As the study will show, dominant ideas about feminism and anti- racism fail to 'accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender'. It will also show, "because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated"(Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140) . Social identities are constructed in relation to a range of classed, raced and ethinicized positions which all come into play with the performance of gendered subjectivity. Many recent feminist researchers support the view that the different locations in systems of power will have definitive effects on a person's life and identity formation (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Jordan-Zachery, 2007; Brown, 2011; Trahan, 2011).Valentine (2007) reminds us that intersectionality is messy rather than straightforward. Hence, we should not categorize people based on our perceptions of their experiences; instead we should see them as active producers of their narrative. Similarly, one's agency can include both privilege and oppression. Hence academics and the public are encouraged to use a 'matrix thinking' when it comes to understanding intersectionality (Gouws, 2017). Informed by the aforementioned conception of identities, values, perceptions and culture, as products of social constructions, the intersectional approach was used to unpack how young South African women's views are shaped by and respond to the complexities of their worlds.

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CHAPTER TWO: Situating lobola in Research

2.1 Introduction

Following the introduction of the problem and objectives in the prior chapter, this chapter will concentrate on contentious arguments and conceptualizations of 'lobola'. This chapter will begin with a conceptual definition of lobola as a type of African customary marriage that differs from standard Western marriage. One of the chapter's main objectives is to situate lobola's meanings in an interpretive context. This chapter will show that both lobola's conceptualization and its analysis have been the subject of debate in academia for several decades. In doing so the chapter will outline different authoritative perspectives (in scholarship, policy research and intellectual activism) to which many young women are now critically responding and/or which they are selectively using in developing their own positioned understandings of the practice.

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2.2 Conceptualising lobola

Lobola has been the subject of several interpretations in scholarship, media accounts, and public opinion as a prominent indigenous cultural activity in Southern Africa. Lobola entails the potential groom (often with his family) presenting a sum of money or cattle to his future wife's family in order for them to be recognized as husband and wife (Bishai and Grossbard, 2007; Fuseini, 2013; Horne, Dodoo and Dodoo, 2013).Lobola is recognised as a form of customary marriage, with marriage being generally defined as 'a socially or ritually recognized union or legal contract between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between them and their children, and between them and their in-laws'(Ebun, 2014, p. 95).

Gender-based and power-related notions are muted in the rather technical definitions of marriage in general, and lobola in particular. An incisive definition that takes gendered power relations into account has been proffered by Parker (2015) and Nel et al(2018). Here lobola is

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the transfer of cattle (money) from the groom's family in exchange of certain rights from the wife to the husband. The most significant of those rights is that the children born of that union are legally recognized as the descendants of the father's lineage (Chireshe, 2010).

As Ebun (2014) shows, when a man dies, his children bear his name as a sign of the continuation of his bloodline. This is evident in Nigerian Yoruba society where individuals "attach importance to child-bearing. An unfruitful marriage is not only a misfortune but also a curse since the couple would not have contributed to the community of the family and therefore, of the society. A barren woman, however rich, famous or prosperous, is a shame to her race". (Awolalu and Adelumo cited in Ebun, 2014, p. 96).

Although the importance attached to children in African traditions can be rationalised in the context of posterity, the focus on children and male lineages also speaks to the hegemonic constructions of masculinity and concepts of heteronormativity. Steyn and Van Zyl (2009, p. 4) postulate that heteronormativity involves social institutions producing social pressures that compel individuals to follow and act accordingly, in which 'the most prized sexual liaison would be a monogamous same 'race', heterosexual union between two able-bodied adults'. The import is that African customary marriages reinforce the object status of women (women's as instruments and commodities) as resources to an end while amplifying the masculinity of men through seeking to preserve their posterity through children.

Apart from its role in transferring rights, lobola has been found to be multi-functional (Ansell, 2001).It is believed that lobola has a spiritual function which transcends its role and meanings in relation to social organisation and socio-economic matters. Hance and Mwakabana (2002) assert that cultural belief systems and rituals are pertinent to Africans' self-identification because of a symbolic "umbilical cord" attached to them, their ancestors and their community. Therefore, lobola is often seen as a ritual that sustains the integrity of

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African communities. Here it is useful to draw on how Mwamanda (2016, p. 45) defines a ritual as "a formalized mode of behavior in which the members of a group or community regularly engage. Religion represents one of the main contexts in which rituals are practiced. But the scope of ritual behavior extends well beyond religion".

Lobola falls into this conception of rituals, and it is instructive to note that despite changes in socio-religious identities over time, many Africans still attach profound spiritual significance to the tradition of lobola despite their religious disposition as Christians. As will be shown in later chapters, ideas about the sacredness and spirituality of lobola in shaping identity are important among many young women in the present.

Lobola's meaning has been conceptualised in various and complex ways. The multiple complexities characterising the concept speak to the idea of identities being in a constant state of mobility as espoused by Stuart Hall. According to Hall (1994, p. 222), identity cannot be described as an "accomplished fact" as it "undergo[es] constant transformation". Consequently, societal and cultural practices such as lobola are created, re-created and negotiated through multiple values and preferences over some time(Carter and Fuller, 2015).Over time, different meanings and perceptions have been attached to the tradition, particularly among younger people who navigate hybridised postcolonial worlds in which globalised popular culture, neo-liberal individualism and Western modernity is connected to different senses of "being African".

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2.3 Approaches to the tradition of lobola

Anthropological approaches

Earlier research on the tradition of lobola has been mainly anthropological and ethnological. Anthropologists who studied bridewealth from the mid to the late 1900s found it to be multi-

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functional (Evans-Pritchard, 1951; Kuper *et al.*, 1959; Goody, 1973; Tambiah, 1973; Ogbu, 1978; Comaroff and Scheuer, 1980) Amongst its many functions, lobola was seen to establish relationships between families (Radcliffe-Brown, 1941; Kuper *et al.*, 1959; Comaroff and Scheuer, 1980). In addition, it was also reported that in most if not all ethnic groups the groom could not pay the whole lobola at once as it was seen as a sign of disrespect. The groom was expected to gradually finish the payment of lobola after he was married to his wife probably after a couple of decades together. This relationship of "affinity and debt with each other" has been reported as a marker of mutuality (Evans-Pritchard, 1951; Dalton, 1966). The payment of lobola also transfers rights to the husband, meaning he would have control over his wife's reproduction and have rights over the wife's domestic and economic services (Fortes, 1939; Kuper *et al.*, 1959; Comaroff and Scheuer, 1980). Despite that, earlier anthropological work was not concerned with power relations within marriage or with gender roles and heterosexuality was believed to be the norm. Hence the implications or impact of this tradition on the women personally was not a concern of their work.

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In more recent anthropological scholarship Raitala (2015), Pauli and Van Dijk (2017), Mupotsa (2014), Niehaus (2017) and many others it is argued that the payment of lobola transfers certain rights from the wife to the husband, and those rights affect power relations, gender roles and gendered identities. Pauli and Van Dijk (2017, p. 263) state "marriage in the Southern African region remains to be shaped by at times highly unequal relations between the genders, often privileging the power and authority of the man and the patri-clan above that of the woman and her affine".

As described in research done by Horne and Dodoo (2013) the rights transferred solely depend on how much of the lobola has been paid. By using vignettes and questionnaires, they describe a scenario where a woman who has had her lobola paid either takes family planning pills without her husband's consent or loans a friend her business money without the

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husband's consent. They argue that the full payment of lobola for a woman means she is obligated to hand over her reproductive rights to her husband totally (Horne, Dodoo and Dodoo, 2013). It is therefore evident that more recent anthropological approaches exploring lobola's functions draw attention to the role of the practice within heterosexist patriarchies. Patriarchal heterosexual societies are therefore not simply seen to be neutral or inevitable.

There are two main reasons for the limitations of ethnographic explanations of lobola, especially the earlier ones associated with Dalton (1966), Evans-Pritchard (1951), Kressel (1977), Kuper(1959) and Radcliff-Browne(1941). One reason concerns the fact that these anthropological analyses tended to explain the practice from the perspective of the stability and maintenance of the societies explored. In other words, the practice was understood from the viewpoint of 'male' members of the group, and there is a strong emphasis on analysing its logic within a collective, rather than on criticizing the power relations that it reinforces. In Fagerlid's (2007) analysis of Evans-Pritchard's work with the Nuer people, Fagerlid draws attention to the problems with this functionalist approach:

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> [Evans-Pritchard] leaves us with an image of Nuer society as a seamless, timeless, whole devoid of real human beings. But as we know from his own introduction, Nuerland is in full anti-colonial revolt at the moment of writing. And in Evans-Pritchard's own tent, young and proud Nuer men "endlessly visit", talking about nothing but cattle and girls (which "led inevitably to that of cattle") and asking for tobacco without bothering to answer his questions (Fagerlid, 2007, para. 2).

Consequently, anthropologists who were usually white and male, have been accused of using popularised colonialist understandings about societies and neglecting women (Fagerlid, 2007). Such minimalist reasoning has been dismissed for being "male to male encounters masquerading as universal truths" (Bell, 1993, p. 30).

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Another reason for the shortcoming in anthropological accounts written in the mid-1900s is their inattention to major economic, social and cultural changes affecting communities practising lobola. These accounts have been criticised for rewriting the same story about African culture even after years of political and socio- economic transformation. Ansell (2001, p. 711) says,

> African culture as presented through school textbooks, derives largely from colonial portrayals of African culture, designed to support patriarchal authority, through which the stability of the colonised could be assured. Although lobola itself may receive little attention, the general understanding of culture draws upon nineteenth-century European thinking and a view of culture that encompassed female subordination.

One implication of the above is the misrepresentation of African cultures in Eurocentric accounts, leading to what is termed as 'epistemic violence' by Gayatri Spivak. She states:

> The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subjectivity (Spivak, 2003, p. 76).

Colonialism distorted African cultures as oppressive and backwards. Such characterisation and misrepresentations necessitates an inquiry into cultural *relativism* and *emic* approaches. Donnelly (1984) defines cultural relativism as a theory focused on the nature of morality. Morality and cultures are not homogenous and as such (i) objectives universal moral rules do not exist and (ii) cultural and morals rules exist only in cultural contexts. On the one hand, what is culturally and morally permissible is what an individual society regards as acceptable. Cultural relativism becomes an important template to refute misrepresentations and epistemic violence resulting from the characterisation of the tradition of lobola by Eurocentric scholars.

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On the other hand, Olive (2014) looks at the concept of emic as meaning derived from a particular culture, with the researcher focused on capturing 'participants' indigenous meanings of “real-world events" and "looks at things through the eyes of members of the culture being studied" (Willis, Jost and Nilakantha, 2007, p. 100). It would appear that the emic theoretical framework follows the phenomenological approach that seeks to understand individual subjective experiences and how individuals make sense of their material and conceptual environments. In the context of the study, gaps have existed in the manner in which lobola has been understood from anthropological approaches that do not take into account cultural relativism and emic views. Cultural relativism and emic perspectives allow for a perspective that situates lobola within the complex socio-cultural fibre of African societies, as shall be unpacked in the following subsection on the socio-historical analysis of lobola.

Socio-historical analysis of lobola

Historically lobola was explained in a teleological way, with the practice often being seen as a remnant of a static tradition that was somehow impervious to the changes created by western capitalist transformation. Mwamanda (2016, p. 47) says:

> Historically, most accounts of lobola have associated it with the rural production process. Through marriage and payment of lobola, a son could be transformed into a productive asset – upon marriage, he would be granted land. Lobola was, more significantly for the wider community, how lineage elders extracted labour from junior men.

In reflecting on the socio-historical analysis of lobola, it is worth stressing that some literature focused on pre-colonial Africa suggests that the tradition of lobola had both emotional and spiritual connotations. According to Mangena & Ndlovu (2013, p. 473) lobola was used to express a feeling yet at the same time, it cemented ties between the children and

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their maternal ancestors through, for instance, the payment of inkomo yohlanga (cow given to the mother of the bride). It would seem that lobola served the purpose of elevating and reinforcing the status of the woman in a spiritual context. The cow given to the mother of the wife is symbolic in connecting children born in the union with their maternal ancestors. This suggests the spiritual importance of women in the tradition of lobola, thus refuting the blunt notion that lobola inevitably marginalises, objectifies or discriminates against women.

The tradition of lobola underwent significant changes during the epoch of colonialism in Africa. As many researchers agree, traditionally lobola was not defined as "payment"; however, colonialism brought about a domino effect with the emergence of a capitalist economy, and this resulted in the monetisation of lobola (Ansell, 2001; Mawere and Mawere, 2010; Mupotsa, 2014; Rudwick and Posel, 2014; Solway, 2016). Samuriwo (2009, p. 1)states that "the British colonisers imposed criminal and constitutional laws on Africans that promoted distorted and incompatible ideals of Victorian family life. At the same time, they regarded African customary laws as second-class, primitive and barbaric". A defining characteristic of colonial interpretations of lobola is the promulgation of the term 'bride price' whose connotations suggest wives were for financial purchase. Accordingly, lobola has been viewed in envisaged acts of buying and owning human property (Mubangizi, 2015; Chisi, 2018). Recent scholars (Mupotsa, 2014; Solway, 2016; Chisi, 2018) who have researched lobola have not only focused on its social and cultural relevance to groups, but its commercialization in the present.

It is not only colonial accounts of lobola that monetise the practice as "bride price". The change in the commercialisation of the tradition has led to the view that lobola is a product of historical constructions that are in a constant state of mobility (Mangani, 2019). To justify this argument, a careful study of the capitalisation of colonialism and its impact on political and socio-economic relations is important. According to Ansell (2001) colonialism disrupted

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the African way of life in several ways, one of them being the introduction of wage labour and cash as a new way of rewarding work. This affected social relations amongst Africans, including the restructuring of lobola. With colonialism came industrialisation and mining activities which led to the urban migration of young men who earned wages. This made them less reliant on their families to pay for lobola. The lack of oversight of the family and communities and also other rituals associated with lobola saw a paradigm shift from the tradition being a communitarian and family affair to being an individual process. Scholars such as Hunter (2010), Solway (2016) and White (2016) consider whether the practice continues its original purpose of confirming reciprocity and social cohesion in a context where monetary exchange systems and materialism significantly affect interpersonal and intergroup relationships. This is illustrated in Solway's (2016) evaluation of different trajectories in the tradition of lobola in Botswana. The author observes how the payment of bogadi/lobola changed from a lifetime affair into one being done in a few days. By bringing the full bogadi/lobola on the day of, the groom removes the concept of debt that has traditionally been used to maintain the affinal relationship. Previously, bogadi/lobola was a lifetime process for affirming relationships in order to curtail the chances of divorce among Africans. Solway (2016, p. 312) also explains that with instant bogadi/lobola payments, the elders in Botswana communities were disgruntled by the way a socially meaningful "token of appreciation" was reduced to purely functional "payment" for the wife.

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In contemporary Southern Africa, there has been a decline in lobola marriages(Posel, Rudwick and Casale, 2011; White, 2016). Both Posel et al (2011) and White (2016) agree that the main reason for this decline is the high costs of lobola. Many researchers (Chabata, 2010; Thupayagale-Tshweneagae and Seloilwe, 2010; van Dijk, 2017) believe commercialisation has reinforced the patriarchal objectification of women's bodies. Over the years, it has been argued that lobola has involved the exchange and circulation of a range of

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commodities, with these including groceries, cell phones, houses and cars (Chabata, 2010). Western education has also been commoditised in the context of lobola exchanges. The argument is that the more a woman is educated the more her lobola payment should be, since she is said to be worth more than an uneducated woman. Accordingly, “Shona communities now have a separate charge for a girl who gets married soon after University graduation. This particular girl attracts a high charge because she possesses what is called ‘chitupa chinyoro’ translated as “a fresh educational certificate” in English (Mangena and Ndlovu, 2013, p. 476).

Bukelwa (2018) says factors such as migration, ecological changes (involving, for example, limited access to cattle), the adoption of Westernised cultures, and religious fundamentalism have forced a re-evaluation of the significance of lobola in contemporary marriages. According to Bukelwa (2018) Christian and civil courts marriages are now replacing traditions such as lobola. Meanwhile, lobola negotiations between the extended families of the groom and bride have been replaced with contemporary marriages which may consist only of members of the immediate families of the groom and the bride whose role has been reduced to mere spectators (Mubaiwa, 2019). Scholars such as Mupotsa (2014), Pauli and Van Dijk (2017) and Smit (2016) have shown how the traditional wedding or lobola process has been overhauled, with people going out of their way to modernise traditional weddings. With the introduction of elaborate themes, decorations hired catering for the day; many so-called “traditional” weddings have become spectacles demonstrating extreme affluence and conspicuous consumption (Mupotsa, 2014, 2015). Evidence of the "modernisation" and urban performance of lobola has also been extensively described in the mass media (for example, *The Concepts Collection*, 2016; Mbete, 2017) .

Scholars such as Bukelwa (2018), Fuseini (2013), Mubaiwa (2019), Ncube (2018) and Raitala (2015) have established a correlation between the transformation of lobola into a commercialised enterprise and gender-based violence. The argument posited is that with the

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high price of lobola came perceptions that women can be bought as commodities. In addition, the high price of lobola has indirectly led to the disenfranchising of poorer men. As has been argued, these men have in turn viewed women increasingly as assets to be closely guarded, with this often leading to women being ill-treated. The following sub-section will discuss the theme of gender-based violence in detail.

2.4 Feminist and Rights Activists Research

Feminist and rights activist discourse focus on lobola in relation to the nexus of power, gender oppression and masculinity. Nkosi (2011) analyses social reproduction as follows: socialist feminists contend that patriarchy organises society in a sexual order, which ultimately allows men's control over women's biological and sexual reproduction, promoting the dependency and passivity of women. In establishing the economic dimension, socialist feminists contend that patriarchy strives to ensure women's economic dependency and the uncompensated nature of their labour to ensure the continuation of capitalism(Bryson, 1992). Women's domesticated roles such as bearing and raising children and being housewives make them alienated in a capitalist system.

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The socialist feminist theory also builds on the theme of the *alienation* of women. Armstrong (2020) says women become alienated through their sexuality which is accorded to their partners. This is made possible through traditions such as lobola that reduce the role of the woman to that of pleasing her partner's sexual needs, as submissive and passive wives. Nkosi (2011) says women are also alienated from themselves by being alienated from their sexual reproductive rights which means choice about the number of children to have and when to have them. As Nkosi (2011) also notes, a corollary of this is the belief that wives are entirely "taken care of" by husbands in exchange for women's sexual, child-bearing and domestic services.

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Naturally, links have been found between domination and gender-based violence, particularly intimate partner violence(Morgan and Björkert, 2006; Karakurt and Cumbie, 2012). The patriarchal notion that the husband becomes the 'head of the household' after lobola payment is believed to contribute to the perpetuation of gender-based violence within the household (Mwamanda, 2016). In research undertaken by Horne, Dodoo and Dodoo (2013), the researchers include a vignette that describes how the woman is physically punished for her 'insubordination' in a marriage involving lobola. They found that the participants were "more understanding" of the punishment if the lobola was fully paid (Horne, Dodoo and Dodoo, 2013).

In Fuseini's (2013) empirical work on bridewealth and violence, the researcher found a correlation between the payment of bridewealth and the exposure to domestic violence, with women that had their bridewealth fully paid being regular victims of domestic violence. During her ethnographic research in Kenya, Raitala (2015) observed how men who paid bride wealth routinely used violence against their wives, whilst Thupayagale-Tshweneagae and Seloilwe's (2010) research on emotional violence and intimate relationships in Botswana, demonstrated that the payment of bridewealth was one of the causes of women being emotionally abused.

Bridewealth has often been directly linked to sexual abuse because of the way that monetary value has come to be attached to women's bodies in lobola marriages in commodity-obsessed contexts. Women interviewed by Chabata (2010) revealed how their husbands, by making claims to ownership of women's sexuality, forced them to have sex without their consent, consequently putting them at risk of exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV infection. This is largely a result of certain women being less capable of negotiating safe sex with marital partners who consider themselves entitled to "bedding rights" (Schwimmer, 2002; Kambarami, 2006; Madiba and Ngwenya, 2017).

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Mogale, Burns and Ritcher (2012) discuss the 'triple yoke of oppression' in South Africa, citing violence perpetrated on women as a significant characterisation of the apartheid era resulting from customary and common law. Both laws complemented each other in subjugating African women in traditions such as lobola. There have been certain changes in post-apartheid South Africa. As a member of the international community, South Africa has signed various treaties, protocols and conventions that oblige the government to work towards the attainment of women's rights. These include: the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)[1] the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa[2] and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development signed in 2008 (South Africa Development Community, 2008). At the core of all these conventions is the abolition of discrimination on any grounds (Nkomo, 2014).

Despite the prominence of a human rights approach in South African legislation, some scholars identify a huge gap between the established laws and enforcing them (McFadden, 2001; Gqola, 2011). In addition, the preservation of customary law has not been received well by many feminists and progressive academics as well as the public. As stated by McFadden (2001), customary law has been unfairly used against black women as it maintains patriarchal customs. It is also significant that the status of lobola within "customary marriage" has undergone a shift. Even though lobola was a legal requirement for a customary marriage in most of Southern Africa during the colonial era, that has since changed. Ansell (2001) reported the transition of lobola into customary law in Zimbabwe and Lesotho in the 1930s. However, after Independence, both countries amended the Customary Marriage Act and lobola was no longer a requirement. The same applies to South Africa, where the

[1] Ratified by South Africa in 1996 without a single reservation(Mashalaba, 2012).
[2] Also known as the Maputo protocol signed and ratified in 2003 (African Union Commission, 2003).

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Recognition of Customary Marriages Act of 2000 recognises customary marriages without making lobola a necessary requirement for the validity of such marriages.

In present-day South Africa, therefore, the payment of lobola is not a requirement to register a marriage under the Customary Marriage Act (Republic of South Africa, 2000; Mashalaba, 2012). Nevertheless, there are some discrepancies about what the requirements of a customary marriage are, as the registration of a marriage is subject to the registering officer's discernment (Republic of South Africa, 2000; Mashalaba, 2012). It is noteworthy that the same people who could label one as ‘un-African' if one should choose not to take part in certain rituals are the same people who have the power to declare a customary marriage being valid or not. The implications of this are raised in Kopano Ratele's claim in the article, *Masculinities without tradition*, where he posits how when writing the codified customary laws, lawmakers tend to make them "less restrictive in light of an anxiety that any definition will exclude some aspects of tradition and custom." (Ratele, 2013, p. 139) In conclusion, what it does is, leave the last word of what is lawful, to those in power, usually the patriarchs.

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2.5 Women’s agencies and tradition

Many scholars believe that the transition from the pre-colonial era to colonialism is the root cause of the tradition having side-lined women's powers (Surdarkasa, 1986; Ansell, 2001; Mawere and Mawere, 2010; Mangena and Ndlovu, 2013; Mupotsa, 2014; Mwamanda, 2016; Pauli and Van Dijk, 2017). Surdarkasa (1986, p. 97) argues that initially, women in African society had agency in 'consanguineal' and 'conjugal' roles; "as a mother and a senior consanguineal kinswoman, women were the recipients of deference and wielders of power and authority". They also contributed to politics since women held formal leadership roles in matrilineages and were influential in decision-making patrilineages (Surdarkasa, 1986). Goredema (2010) supports this as she writes about how South African women had various leadership roles before colonialism and capitalist “modernity” downgraded their significance.

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Beyond South Africa, a prominent continental example is that of the Oyo-Yoruba of Nigeria. Oyewumi (1998) claims that before colonialism the Yoruba did not recognise gender in social relations, with this being evident in the fact that gender was not a distinct category in naming; moreover, the different roles of women and men were not really hierarchical and did not lead to their having different social statuses. However, with colonialism, which began the process of capitalist labour and so-called "modernity", women's traditional work was rendered less important, unremunerated, and therefore invisible due to the 'market economy'. Hence they came to depend increasingly on their male counterparts (Surdarkasa, 1986; Ellece, 2012) to survive. This view, therefore, draws attention to the way that lobola, together with other traditional practices, may be perceived as having become increasingly oppressive, and how certain young women might seek to discover traditions that have not been reshaped by colonialism. In a sense, it is capitalist colonialism that is experienced as traditional in the value-laden sense of being "retrogressive", and precolonial society being experiences as an alternative "modernity" and progressive.

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It is not only lobola that has sometimes been seen in a positive light by certain feminists. There is a substantial body of empirical work by African feminists that sees precolonial or so-called traditional practices for women positively (Oyewumi, 1998, 2002; Amadiume, 2001, 2002, 2006). This includes many traditions around marriage, as well as women's sexuality and reproduction (Idang, 2015). For example, there is documentation of pre-colonial and pre-Christian contexts in which women were free to explore their sexuality. Despite the colonialists' portrayal of Africans as primitive and uncontrollable sexual beings, sex was subject to significant social rules, although it was often not repressively controlled. Scholars have shown that both women and men were encouraged to enjoy sex for pleasure that was in no way reproductive; reproduction only became significant when a couple was married (Arnfred, 2006). Amadiume (2006, p. 2) makes a related claim - specifically about

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women's sexual freedoms - when she declares that women "owned their sex and said yes or no together when it mattered". It is this view of women's sexual freedom and agency in the context of "tradition" that many progressive young women in the present either directly or indirectly search for or affirm.

It should be stressed that the volume and range of work on women's powers and freedoms in pre-colonial contexts is not fully acknowledged in many rights discourses that automatically pathologized all non-western traditional practices as "harmful traditional practice". It has been argued that some women were able to maintain or secure sexual, emotional or commercial authority in traditional practices in the colonial rather than in the postcolonial periods (Amadiume, 2006; Tamale, 2008). Tamale shows that, in Uganda, the institution of Senga or sexual initiation that women undergo before marriage empowers young women through "challenging subordination and sexual control"(1990, 2008, p. 60). For example, girls are taught that they do not have to tolerate abuse from their future husbands and they can return to their parent's home if they encounter it. Also, if a husband is not satisfying her sexually she can leave him, this cultural practice is known as 'okunoba' (Tamale, 1990, p. 16).

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Consequently, some women are believed to have had significant power within the lobola process. For instance, Mwamanda (2016) mentions how during the lobola process in Zimbabwe the father's sister known as 'tete' is known to play a significant role before, during and after the lobola process. The author is fascinated by the power held by the aunt and how, "although many authors have argued that the process is extremely patriarchal, it is interesting to view the symbolic power held by the tete (aunt), who has always been a well-known figure in Shona patriarchal rituals"(Mwamanda, 2016, p. 123). When outlining the steps taken

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towards lobola negotiations most participants in Mwamanda's (2016) research state how, firstly they approached the bride's aunt (tete) to initiate their intent to marry, and only through the tete did the lobola process begin. The same applies to the research by Raitala (2015) who discovers that even though the cultural practice is patriarchal, the mother-in-law maintains a considerable amount of power throughout the process.

Also significant is that even contemporary lobola practices, that have been redefined by commodity culture and colonially-shaped gendered identities and relations, have offered spaces of power to some women. This often involves women being able to wield bargaining power, or power based on status and education even in the context of marital partnerships that are unequal or oppressive. For instance, class position, social standing or occupation can lead women to wield relative power based on statuses achieved through education, income or access to rights and other resources. This can mitigate the hold that customary laws have over them (Carmichael, 2011; Arnot *et al*., 2012).In research in a small rural part of Ghana, educated, married couples were found to be better at communicating and made joint decisions on important issues concerning the household issues(Arnot *et al.*, 2012). This is a pattern not often associated with customary marriages in rural areas. Work on the way that education and class status can affect women in customary marriages is important to this study. As will be shown, many confident, assertive and educated women either support or have customary marriages, and these are not seen to undermine their autonomy largely because of the other forms of power (for example, based on class education and lifestyle) they wield.

The subsequent chapters will show how the seemingly very different approaches to lobola in academic and policy research have sometimes been echoed, modified and fused in the standpoint knowledge-making of many young women. What is significant is how their positioned vantage points (as those who are most spoken for in lobola research) is always integral to their distinct efforts to make sense of the practice. Unearthing this personalised

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knowledge-making from the perspectives of those who are generally excluded in what is considered to be "universal" and publicly relevant knowledge is an important epistemological intervention.

CHAPTER THREE: Young Women Making Sense of Lobola: Methodological Approach and Preliminary Findings.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the study's methodological approach by demonstrating how the research approach is linked to investigating and analysing the locations and voices of young women. It begins by describing the qualitative research methodology as an appropriate template for this study of positioned knowledge. The chapter proceeds to explore the sampling technique and methods used in data collection, including semi-structured interviews and secondary data. The chapter also discusses the qualitative discourse analysis as utilized in analysing the voices of young women - both in the interviews and secondary data - as well as the self-reflexive position of the researcher and ethical issues that emerged.

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3.2 Working with participants.

In probing the phenomenon of lobola in an African context, this study utilized a qualitative research methodology. Mohajan (2018, p. 2) says:

> Qualitative research is a form of social action that stresses the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals. It makes the use of interviews, diaries, journals, classroom observations and immersions; and open-ended questionnaires to obtain, analyze, and interpret the data content analysis of visual and textual materials, and oral history.

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The above definition reveals how valuable this type of research methodology can be in fields such as Cultural Studies, History, Anthropology and Sociology, where the objective is often to make sense of phenomena from the viewpoint of the individual, groups and societies under investigation. In explaining this, Punch (2013) argues that the paradigms utilised within qualitative methodology are frequently critical, and interpretivist. This is to say, a qualitative research methodology is interested in the interpretation of social reality, rather than in postulating one definitive meaning of social reality.

Apart from centering around groups' positioned perceptions, feminist standpoint research methods clearly illuminate gendered perspectives in research. Doucet and Mauthner (2006) claim that feminist research is built on three key principles. A first is the production of new knowledge for producing social change. Secondly, feminist research is rooted in the values and beliefs of women, with the focus being on the constructed meanings produced by women and their worlds. Thirdly, feminist research is diverse and interdisciplinary research, and often utilises different to mixed methods in understanding women who have different positionalities. This includes the way that they experience issues such as racism, class oppression, regionally defined neo-colonialism, nationalism, democracy, urban "modernity" and feminist struggles. This study is informed by feminist research in that it is focused on the perspectives of young black women in urban post-apartheid South Africa. I believe that their sense of self-confidence and personal independence lead many to embrace gender equality. At the same time, many young women are desirous of retaining a sense of cultural distinctiveness that prevents them from becoming "coconuts" or "[…] elites who, having internalised the values of modernisation and westernisation, are unwilling to share moral space with alternative models of living" (Nhlapo, 2000, p. 14). Their vantage points are complicated by their classed experiences, since they are embedded in a world of globalised

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urban modernity and have the cultural capital which allows them to make complex and negotiated choices about both "western" and non-western traditions including lobola.

3.3 Utilising social constructionism

In chapter one, a social constructionist perspective was outlined as informing the study. Social constructionism is important in revealing how the participants identify as subjects whose identities are not innate but are shaped by social ideas about who they are, and what roles they should play. Although it is more easily understood that identities are socially constructed, my research is equally concerned with how knowledge and meaning-making is socially crafted.

3.4Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is pertinent to this study as an approach that allows the researcher to interpret others' knowledge-making. Kamalu and Osisanwo (2015) postulate that discourse analysis, is often used in disciplines such as communication, media and cultural studies, to deconstruct spoken or written language attached to a specific social practice. Therefore, discourse analysis is focused on language, definitions and meanings given to certain social phenomena by schools of thought or a person being interviewed. Phillips and Jørgensen (Bardici, 2012, p. 32) state that discourse analysis includes an interrogation "of the patterns 'people's utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life". This approach unpacks how social action is constructed through discourse. Speakers on various issues as well as authors of texts (including my interviewees) advance their socially situated viewpoint concerning a particular social action or context. The importance of language in feminist research is of emphasis, "take language fully into consideration so as to avoid essentialist constructions of black womanhood and to remain alert [both to how gender is entangled with race], *and* to how divisions along nationality, class and education occur within the category of 'black women'" (Christian cited in Chireka ,2015, p. 66). In this study,

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therefore, discourse analysis unveils the socially situated use of language by interviewees as this reveals their intersectionality and also very distinct vantage points.

3.5 Research Participants

Participants	Gender	Qualification	Language
Nandi	Female	Masters of Laws	IsiZulu
Trish	Female	Women & Gender Studies (Undergraduate)	Sepedi
Anele	Female	Women & Gender Studies (Undergraduate)	IsiXhosa

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According to Meissner et al (2011), purposeful sampling entails identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are extremely knowledgeable about a phenomenon being studied or are particularly experienced with regard to a given research topic. The criteria for involving participants in the research were that they were women students registered students at the University of the Western Cape pursuing studies that encourage their critical attention to the subject of this research. This is connected to the definition of standpoint knowledge as defined by feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins, who argues that standpoint knowledge grows not only out of lived experience of oppression, but also out of subject's *critical interpretation* of that experience. In other words, marginalised groups can develop a cognitive ability to "see from below" on the basis of their lived experiences (Collins, 2002). As outlined in Chapter One, of the three participants, two were

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undergraduate students in Women's and Gender studies. Their familiarity with conceptual tools provided by, for example, intersectionality and the construction of gender and race encouraged them to connect the personal to the political in their own lives, and, more specifically, to unpack the interplay between traditional norms and practices in relation to their raced and gendered locations and experiences. The third participant was a Master of Laws student whose research focused on the recognition of traditional practices in constitutions and their proclivity to undermining women's rights. All of these participants were therefore selected using the purposive sampling technique as defined by Etikan et al (2016) as judgmental sampling or subjective sampling. Here, the researcher relies on their judgment when selecting the constituency of the population for the study. At the time of the study, I was a registered post-graduate student in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of the Western Cape. Participants were selected because of their geographical and academic proximity to the researcher, as students in the same department and also as young black women pursuing similar academic/career interests.

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3.6 Methods of data collection

Semi-structured interviews

According to Jayaratne (1983, p. 145) qualitative feminist research utilises semi and unstructured interviews because they "convey a deeper feeling for or more emotional closeness to the research participants". Semi-structured interviews, according to DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019), comprise a dialogue between the participants and the researcher that is directed by a flexible interview guide and supplemented by probes, comments, and questions. This interviewing approach places emphasis on depth and quality over a large number of participants.

This form of data gathering strategy allows the researcher to delve deeply into the thoughts, feelings, opinions, and beliefs of individual participants. Although some scholars in other

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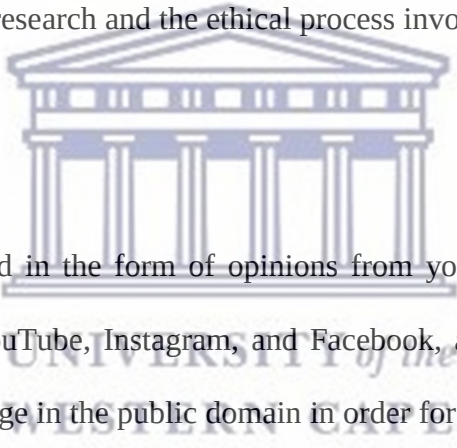
disciplines may find the use of a small number of interviewees to be limiting, many feminist qualitative researchers would argue that this focus encourages insight into the complexities of participants' lives and perceptions, as well as the production of new insights rather than generalizations (Parry, 2020). The choice of semi-structured interviews allowed for the examination of themes and concepts from the participants' perspectives. The interviews were done in the Department of Women and Gender Studies in order to foster a sense of trust and commonality among the participants in regard to a supportive political environment. Having reviewed previous studies using a comprehensive data analysis technique, questions were generated and prepared before the time of the interviews. When the interviews commenced, the overall objectives of the research and the ethical process involved were explained.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Social Media

Secondary data was gathered in the form of opinions from young women found on social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, as well as the blogsphere. It was vital to explore knowledge in the public domain in order for me to broaden a sense of the participants' viewpoints. As a feminist, I wanted to identify neglected spaces and forms through which young women articulate views that are regarded as “insignificant” or "unintellectual." Many social media platforms can be viewed as ‘independent’ outlets for their views in a world where mainstream media has dictated their opinions (Lewis, Hussen and Van Vuuren, 2013).The conversations were randomly selected from the internet; the only criteria was that this had to be dialogue concerning lobola. The benefit of using this information is how these conversations are in the public domain and can be shared without requiring the publishers’ or writers’ permission.

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3.5 Data analysis

Data analysis can be described as:

> The classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it. Meaning-making can refer to subjective or social meanings. Qualitative data analysis also is applied to discover and describe issues in the field of structures and processes in routines and practices (Flick, 2013, p. 5)

Discourse analysis is not limited to a single approach; rather it is a combination of multiple approaches. The study utilised a discourse analysis that is hinged on different analytical lenses connected to the theoretical frameworks outlined in a previous chapter. The subject-matter of this approach focuses on four main areas that include (i) objects, (ii) social actors, (iii) language and rhetoric, and (iv) ideological standpoints.

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Regarding objects, this approach determines discursive topics and how they are identified and presented within the text (Bardici, 2012). This relates to how authors and actors construct realities concerning lobola in different socio-cultural and historical contexts. It is often argued that discursive objects are not always directly defined. This makes it critical to understand and deconstruct how themes or topics can be framed within specific discourses (Bardici, 2012). As indicated in the section that follows, a first step in my discourse analysis – directly connected to my work with participants – was to tease out themes or objects of analysis raised by my participants. This identification of themes is linked to ideological perspectives, and involved working out how different, young women create distinct arguments or interpretations of lobola.

Recognising the role of social actors means determining and understanding the positioning of subjects as active agents within their texts, even while they are situated within power

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relations that significantly influence these texts. Fairclough (1993) argues that through text, the identities of social actors and their relations to social contexts is illuminated. In this study, the participants and women on social media platforms were the social actors that are often represented as "objects of analysis" in various scholarly texts. When looking at social actors it is important to acknowledge how there is a hierarchy with some within the hierarchy yielding more power than others (Ahlstrand, 2018). With regards to lobola there are culturally dominant actors and the research draws attention to how these voices influence (without wholly defining) the distinct voices of my participants. Since lobola is a contested tradition, some actors were more persuasive and dominant in their perspectives than others. This has been conceptualised as the 'power of framing' by Fairhurst (2010). Fairhurst (2010) says framing is used as an analytical tool on how the language used by social actors defines relations, construct realities and identify who yields power.

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Regarding the use of language and rhetoric, the focus is on the style of writing, speaking and use of diction in the representation of social realities (Fairclough, 1992). The research looked at the use of argumentative, rhetorical and general communicative styles in various constructions of lobola. Therefore, it took into account how participants' voices or black women's texts were concerned with challenging patriarchal views, and how the style of this communication formed part of the "content" of these voices and texts. With regards to rhetoric, the focus was on the utilisation of language effectively for persuasion (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). In the context of the study, persuasion is connected to the themes or "objects" that black women identify in their struggles to resist ageism and authoritarianism, elitism, patriarchy and racism – among other dynamics.

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Ideology forms an integral part of all written and spoken texts (Bardici, 2012). Ideological standpoints on the tradition of lobola inform the formulation and meanings of all the scholarly, popular, informal and verbal utterances dealt with in this study and of course in lobola discourses generally. Carvalho (2007, p. 225) argues how "ideologies are axiological, normative and political" hence influencing the representation of objects, actors, the language and discursive strategies used in a text. However, one should not expect ideological standpoints to always be explicit in the text; identifying them often requires a good deal of interpretive work' and is connected to the challenges in identifying "objects".

Reflexivity and ethical considerations

Feminist research is attentive to reflexivity and it is expected that the researcher's own historical and social life experiences have a bearing on the research and data-gathering processes. Consequently, as a feminist researcher, I interrogated my biases when it came to the tradition. As a young Zimbabwean woman, I began this research process with a certain cynicism and even arrogance about the lobola practice. I became progressively more interested in how young women experience it, and was fascinated by the range and volume of opinions about the tradition in the public domain. The interviewing process was also very enriching in revealing what participants felt about different aspects of lobola and why they felt the way they did. As an interested party, with strong feelings about and interest in the subject, I tried not to be presumptuous in thinking that my participants would conceptualise things through my lenses and based neatly on their identities as black and women. I wanted them to understand that my location as a feminist researcher sought to understand their perceptions, however different they could be. A major issue I confronted was to refrain from investigative journalism[3], which would have compromised standpoints and localities. I was also aware of my role as a social actor and that at the end of the day I would be interpreting

[3] Investigative journalism aims to dig up a secret or what is hidden which can lead to an interrogation instead of an interview.

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the work from my understanding. Hence my work is "open for re-interpretation and counter interpretation"(Bardici, 2012, p. 39)

3.6 Identifying "objects" and ideological standpoints in discourse analysis

The following subsection is focused on how young South African women appropriate the tradition of lobola and its relations to gendered and other identities. Using discourse analysis techniques, interview materials are analysed in this subsection with reference to the themes of "modernity and tradition", "women's status and roles", "contradictions in ideological perspectives" and "symbolic and spiritual meanings".

Modernity and tradition

Nandi, a postgraduate in Masters of Law student was the first participant to be interviewed. As argued elsewhere, formal education, especially in the humanities and social sciences[4] often provides the impetus for critically exploring identity formations, values and perceptions on various societal issues. This is consistent with the views advanced by Cyprus (2015) that learning is successful when learners can summon up or construct an identity that enables them to impose their right to be heard. Although **Nandi**'s academic pursuits are focused on the recognition of traditional practices in constitutions and their proclivity to undermining women's rights, her views on the importance of lobola were different.

Nandi: Lobola is a symbolic gesture…the woman is not being sold and you cannot put a price on a human being so it's just symbolic

Rudo: How has the tradition changed?

Nandi: The practice has lost its initial value…because now it's commoditized, it's been made this whole hoopla like women are being sold.

[4] It is significant that formal education need not necessarily generate critical understandings of power; however students often turn to the social sciences, humanities and law studies based on their interest in social struggles. Students focusing on gender have a particular interest in exploring power and the gendered worlds in which we all live and work.

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Nandi acknowledges how the tradition has been misconstrued within Western interpretations that views it as the 'buying' and 'selling' of women; however she is adamant about the importance of taking part in the tradition as she views it as symbolically important in certain forms of collective belonging. She also conveys the point that current socio-economic relations and circumstances are destroying what seems to have been the original spiritual and symbolic meaning of the tradition by commercializing it and defining it only or mainly as a commercial transaction.

Other views, which actually resonated interestingly with **Nandi**'s, were expressed by the second and third participants, **Anele** and **Trish**, both undergraduate students in Women's and Gender studies. When talking about the choice of either having a civil or customary marriage, both these participants share their thoughts about leeway for women to define and reshape lobola. This, interestingly, contests the view generally espoused in human rights and feminist quarters (as explored in a previous chapter), namely, that lobola automatically objectivities women or removes their agency in marriages:

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"Look, I think it depends on the couple if you are happy if both of you are fine with it…however if it is civil or customary then it's fine, it's your relationship at the end of the day, it's nobody else's" **Anele**

"I think now it should depend on the couple rather on the opinions of the families" **Trish.**

In **Anele** and **Trish**'s view, over time, different meanings and perceptions have been attached to the tradition. Like **Nandi**, they say that in the context of commodity capitalism, many non-Western traditions have been redefined by the dominant capitalist systems. They therefore hold onto the ideal of a spiritually and symbolically meaningful form, but state that this is rarely a reality among youth in African societies. **Anele** saying "it's your relationship at the end of the day" and Trish weighs in and states "rather than on the opinion of the families".

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These assertions qualify as ideological standpoints that insist on women's agency to redefine cultural practices in the context of commercialization, patriarchy and western modernity. This thinking clearly departs from a cultural nationalist approach that emphasizes the key role played by the elders, by men and extended families in the practice of marriage. Rather, an approach focusing on individual agency, especially young women's agency focuses on their human rights and equality as citizens. This also means refusing to abandon a cultural practice often seen as "pre-modern" or as preceding an era of rights and agencies for women. It is revealing, however, that emphasis is also put on the role of a "modern woman" in choice-making. In some ways, these two participants are arguing that it is mainly "modern" young women who have learned to claim their agency and autonomy; at the same time they seem to be challenging many assumptions embedded in western modernity's assumption of "modern" being the opposite of "tradition" and a non-western world that is usually defined as "modernity". Therefore, the sentiments postulated by **Anele** and **Trish** signal their complex positioning: on one hand, they are situated in worlds that elevate formal education and conventional notions of modernity; on the other they question worldviews that narrowly define tradition or pre-colonial practices as "pre-modern" and oppressive to women.

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It is important to note how significant class is as a marker of difference amongst groups. It does not only separate groups but separate people within a group as well. In Rich's (2005) research with young women navigating their 20s, she found how self-reliance in the form of financial independence among other things is a source of independence and empowerment. Higher education is also a significant driver of societal change and can bring about a paradigm shift for women: in many instances, since the more highly educated a woman is, the stronger the likelihood will be that she can demand a relationship that is based on equality, education will provide her with capital to make more choices (Pettifor *et al.*, 2012).

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Women's statuses and roles

All the participants give opinions on the role of women in actual lobola negotiations they know about. Their views are given within the broader context of a culture that defines a woman as secondary to her male counterparts. The participants all described how negotiations mirror gendered power dynamics. Traditionally, lobola negotiations have been known to be a man's obligation, and it is men who pay and negotiate. The uncles who are usually the brothers to the father of the bride and the father of the groom are responsible for planning the day and negotiating (Nkosi, 2011). When describing the lobola negotiation, all the participants were explicit about how the bride does not play a role in the negotiations unless she goes to be identified by the groom's family. The participants explain how she is made to be complicit and has no awareness of the goings-on around her negotiations:

"The woman, she can be in the house, but the family cannot see her…both of them can't say a single thing" **Nandi**

"She is kind of locked up in her room, the families are meeting up, the uncles whatever and they discuss the price…" **Anele**

"I do not really know how they do it but I have heard that the girl's uncles negotiate for her lobola but she should not be there" **Trish**

In my analysis of the interviews the objective was to establish whether the absence of women in the negotiations had implications. **All the participants** use phrasing that suggests a condemnation of the way the bride is absent during negotiations, as male family members decide on her future. **Anele** refers to the bride being "locked up in her room", while **Nandi**'s phrasing, "she…can't say a single thing" and **Trish** explicitly stating "the girl's uncle negotiates for her lobola but she should not be there" are clearly critical.

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Contradictions in ideological perspectives

Under the rubric of discourse analysis, it is important to pay careful attention to silences, uneven-ness and contradictions. This indicates that social subjects are always both acting and at the same time being acted upon. Regarding women's relations to ideals of feminist equality and freedom, many women may express a desire for equality and a different gendered order, while also desiring roles and identities that they have been socialized to accept. It is interesting to note that these admissions of desiring conventional femininity often surfaced once participants felt more comfortable and relaxed in the interviewing process. The following indicates this:

Rudo: Say you are so certain this is the man you want to get married to but he cannot afford. What would you do?

Anele: Well if I was able to afford it and he didn't mind me paying for it and if it truly is what my parents want then I would pay.

Rudo: Would you let your parents know you are the one who is paying?

Anele: Mmh I don't think so

Rudo: Why?

Anele: Because I don't want them to look at him like less of a man because he couldn't afford at that time.

As a researcher and critical young black woman/ feminist I found this very revealing. It indicates that **Anele** is herself personally willing to challenge gender roles and perform the masculine provider role in a key cultural institution; at the same time, it reflects her sense of obedience and conformity - in being unwilling to challenge her family's belief system. In a sense, **Anele** wants the "respect" of her family, and admits that she would not be performing

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her femininity appropriately if she did not show others that her husband performed a conventional masculine providing role.

Elsewhere, she seems consistent in critiquing patriarchal traditions in which women and men have clearcut roles and statuses, and where men take responsibility for caring for women. For instance when I ask her initially if she would want lobola to be paid for her, she says,

'Truthfully no, because I feel like I'm being bought but I understand its customary and it has to happen" and when asked about gender roles she expresses, "you see, I don't believe in gender roles" **Anele**

However, it is important to note that marriage is an institution that features very prominently in the socialisation of men and women. Popular culture, and other socializing agents that include families, teach women to want to be cared for and looked after within marriages in which men "take charge". **Anele** uses the term "less of a man"; such a term is rooted in the conventional context in which a man should retain the title of the 'man of the house'.

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Testimonies such as the above show how young women are defiant about traditions they view as discriminatory or one-sided, yet also naturalise the cultural construct of a man's "proper" role, and what women "should expect. This proves how significant performances and constructions of femininity are in reproducing gendered hierarchical systems. It also demonstrates the ongoing impact of institutions such as marriage in disciplining women (and men) – despite the fact that they live in a world where ideas about equality for women have become more widespread. The following discussion is of the researcher and **Trish** explaining how she does not understand why lobola has to be paid for her but insists it gets paid.

Rudo: When you get married do you want lobola to be paid for you?

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Trish: It has to be paid cause it's what my family believes in so I have to respect that!

Rudo: Even though you don't believe in it?

Trish: Even though I do not believe in it.

Rudo: So let's say for instance you have your boyfriend and now you want to get married but he doesn't have the money. What would you do?

Trish: We would have to wait because at the end of the day I have to respect my family and I will not go over what they say and I have to wait until there is enough money.

In essence, women who live by the principle and portray a "respectable" way of living or what Mupotsa (2014) calls "respectable femininities" are treated well; on the other hand women who are viewed as "not respectable" are mistreated (Khumalo, McKay and Freimund, 2015). Therefore, the "recognition as a respectable woman is contingent on entering into and maintaining conduct consistent with a "patriarchal bargain" (Khumalo, McKay and Freimund, 2015, p. 49). Consequently, these discourses "… language and symbols […] reproduce structures of domination and hierarchy" (Morgan and Björkert, 2006, p. 445).

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This tension is not unique to particular groups of women; it is characteristic of all socially constructed subjects' struggles to resist deeply embedded gendered systems. For many black South Africans, the lobola negotiations are crucial arenas for performing respected gendered identities; by abandoning or questioning them, one risks losing the respect of families or communities.

Symbolic and spiritual meanings

As has already been indicated, young black women's defense of lobola's symbolic meaning is important. It suggests how they value aspects of identity that transcend political and material relationships. These aspects of identification could simply be seen as "cultural". It is

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significant that the language used by participants draws attention to their deep spiritual, emotional and existential meanings.

Consequently, certain kinds of language have an impact on the young women's understanding or perceptions of lobola. Throughout the interviews (and, as will be shown, in social media communication), words and language such as *"respect"* or *"taboo*" recur. Also prominent are (positive) references to things that cannot and should not be done, that are somehow sacred and meaningful in a non-rational way.

The following statements reveal how these words recur when the participants speak about lobola: "Lobola is a symbolic gesture…the woman is not being sold and you cannot put a price on a human being so it's just symbolic" **Nandi**

"Oh no. I think the best part of getting married is knowing that your man made an effort, no matter how small or big it may be. Some things we women just cannot do" **Trish**

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This sheds important light on the meanings that young black women may attach to respect and respectability. Respectability need not always be a matter of conforming to or supporting gendered roles through lobola. It can involve constructing a sense of self-worth and dignity associated with being black and female. Both overtly racist and neo-colonial discourses define pre-colonial traditions such as lobola as backward, unenlightened and pre-modern.

Yet some of the language around lobola is filled with symbols and references that perpetuate the idea of its sanctity and collective value. Words or phrases synonymous with words like 'taboo' and 'respectful' - especially for people who seek lives of dignity and self-respect - can result in them viewing lobola as a unifying ritual that invaluably enriches those who participate in it.

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As demonstrated in the next chapter it is clear how these young women's views are not representative of all young, black South African women. However the language and discourse they use is echoed by some of the young women on social media.

CHAPTER FOUR: Young Women Making Sense of Lobola: Discourse Analysis and findings.

4.1 Introduction

Throughout the study, I have been insisting that the tradition of lobola is framed in distinct ways by and among young black women in South Africa. The previous chapter considered lobola discourses from the viewpoints of participants. This chapter focuses on its representation in social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and blog posts. By examining such platforms, I will illustrate some of the competing and sometimes overlapping discourses on the tradition, and therefore adopt the postulation that 'truth is a discursive construction' (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 49). I expand on the preceding chapter's analysis and expand on its treatment of objects, social actors, language and rhetoric, and ideological standpoints. "Lobola, young women, and commodity culture", "Good versus bad lobola", "Lobola and a sense of belonging", and "Gendered self-image" are the subheadings I use to organize my findings. I offer a summative evaluation at the end of the chapter to extract the most important overall findings.

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Lobola, Young Women and Commodity Culture

During a YouTube discussion titled *'Let's talk Lobola'* Mkhize (2017) two young women discussed lobola. A discussant named Talent said, "I am not living in my house (parents' home) for less than 10 000 grand". Her comment highlights the classed positions and

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commercialized features of lobola discourse and practice in contemporary society, and focuses on its stark materialism. The commercialisation of lobola is a pivotal element in standpoint discourses. As cited elsewhere in the study, a "standpoint arises when people occupying a subordinate social location engage in the political struggle to change the conditions of their lives and so engage in an analysis of these conditions to change them" Potter cited in (Steckle, 2018, p. 14). Potter is gesturing towards the ways in which particular "subalterns" negotiate pockets of freedom in the face of their (relatively) subordinate localities. As this example indicates, the commercialisation of lobola means that its price can become an instrumentally used tool to negotiate the relative bargaining powers of certain relatively privileged women in lobola'd marriages. The discussant in this example articulates the values of a neo-liberal environment in which "freedom" is defined primarily in financial terms and as affecting the atomised "self".

The corollary of this example is embedded in the popularised idea that lower prices of lobola mean a disgrace to the family and the woman in question. The idea advanced is that a woman that is highly educated or comes from a wealthy and respected family deserves a higher bridal price. During the YouTube discussion, Talent continues to express the importance of her future husband paying the lobola according to what was spent on her,

> "My mum said she paid at least a $100 grand raising me which is probably a lie but she wants it back obviously so if you want to come and take me from my house because this product is not for free" Talent

Women of lower status are those that have been either married before or had children outside wedlock. They are regarded as 'faulty', 'old' or 'off the market'. A Facebook comment by Lebaka-Moeti (2021) said "I don't think my family can ask for that much for my lobola - or maybe it's because I'm old bathong. But between me and this girl who's worth R20 000 at least?" The question of age, sexuality and reproduction is a running thread in the comment by

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Lebaka-Moeti ‘or maybe because I’m old bathong’. She is probably past childbearing age and no longer ‘on the market’ because she is not ‘young’ and therefore cannot produce any children. What is therefore significant is how pre-capitalist notions of linking women’s value to their reproductive potential is linked to emphatically capitalist and commodity-driven ideas about the value of women’s bodies.

This is evident in the stark evaluation of women in a comment on Facebook by Marcia Leeuw (2020) titled “*Lobola Price List After Corona*” (coronavirus pandemic). This list of lobola prices among women valued in terms of reproductive status, “purity” and education is linked to fluctuations in the economy caused by Covid-19.

Virgin + Degree = R80 000
Non-Virgin + Degree = R50 000
1Child + Degree/Diploma = R40 000
Virgin + Matric = R35 000
Virgin + No Matric = R30 000
Non-Virgin + Matric = R20 000
1Child + Matric = R15 000
1Child + No Matric = R4 500
2Kids + Matric = R3 000
2Kids + No Matric = R0,00
Uyeke ba awufuni

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On one hand, this recalls the valuation of women in non-capitalist societies according to their potential in reproducing labour. On the other hand, the meticulous itemising of characteristics for evaluating women with reference to their cultural capital, their reproductive potential, their age and their lack of or having financial burdens is a feature of contemporary commodity capitalism. Thus, having two children and no metric makes a woman a burden and therefore of no commercial value, and she is “off market”. The objectification of women as “assets” or “burdens” clearly objectifies and commodities women’s bodies. At the same

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time, valuations such as these reveal the extent to which women, in confirming their worth in society, need to follow the laws and logic of the market.

This is consistent with the milieu of "intense sociocultural and discoursal change" argued by (Fairclough, 1992, p. 269)in which “discourses are marred with dilemmas, inconsistencies, and the representations of social actors in subjective and interchangeable positions”. When making sense of why so many young women accept current forms of the practice, therefore, it is imperative to note the intense commercialisation of the tradition, with specific reference to the value placed on cash, cars, houses, and cows and less on other traditionally accepted forms of exchange that include social and cultural values. The value placed on these forms of payment indicates a departure from non-capitalist social and economic values to commercialised entrepreneurship. The value attached to lobola speaks to the material perspectives and meanings through which many young women define their sense of “self-value”.

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‘Good versus Bad Lobola’

In the social media commentary on **“**good versus bad lobola”, observations included cognitive dissonance, conferring the legitimacy of oppression, toxic masculinity and the correlation between materialism and the oppression of women. The commentary also illuminated how young South African women observed lobola from an interdependency viewpoint, in which families used lobola as resources to assist newly married couples. In the *Daily Sun* blog titled ‘To Lobola or Not to Lobola written by Nkosi (2019) one of the discussants, Veli Sibiya, said “I don’t care how modernised we are. Ilobolo is a must. The man should pay ilobolo because you are not fully married unless it has been paid”. It is instructive to note that the use of words such as ‘IIbolo is a must’ and ‘the man should pay

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ilobolo' demonstrates grammatical roles that reinforce the categorisation of social actors and societal expectations placed on them. 'Should' and 'must' enunciate the compulsory societal role of a man.

It has been established that power relates to the ability to exercise dominance over others: the practice of lobola retains power that activates men and passivates women as social actors. Normatively, lobola reinforces the status of a female in society as a married woman. Therefore, it is "good lobola". If lobola is not paid, the status of a woman as someone's wife is either questioned or illegitimate. The text frames masculinity as a system in which men are allocated the roles of active social actors, that wield the power to activate or passivate women as social actors (Ahlstrand, 2018). Utilising Fairclough (2001)'s social practices layer of analysis, which demonstrates how texts emerge and fit into societal practices, the notion that "you are not fully married unless it has been paid" exposes power distributions between social actors.

What is often considered to be "bad lobola" is framed within a commercialised discourse. This suggests the South African discourse of 'stingy men' as articulated by one of the discussants Muntu Nkosi, who claims that men who do not want to pay lobola are stingy. 'Stingy men' describes the nature of relations between men and women and how these relations are framed in the context of commodity culture and materialism. In a blog discussion on lobola titled 'Blankets and Weaves: The Story of Lobola' (2019) a discussant named Vanessa observed that:

> But seriously. I you look back and brush up on facts, you would know that Lobola did not start like this. The whole thing with placing value on daughters based on their upbringings was something a British man suggested. Lobola meant a different thing back in 300 BC, it was about the guy giving what he can as a gift to the family for the

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> Home that the woman would build for him. It was a sign of good relations, to create good relations between the families. That's what lobola was about, and the white man came and suggested how we must price it and negotiate and all this nonsense. And the Blacks just ran with the idea and today, you find families that exploit the whole thing and demand so much money and you find children living apart from their parents because the fathers cannot afford what they ask for in lobola. It's sad. I was actually shocked that this tradition that people take so seriously and stop people who are in love from marrying was actually initiated by a white man. Like WOW

As a young woman in South Africa, Vanessa views lobola as a product of social construction and contestations. Its identity is in a state of mobility, therefore attracting different meanings and values over time. The theme of broken families because of exorbitant prices of lobola deserves attention in signaling "bad lobola". Vanessa intimates that "you find children living apart from their parents because the fathers cannot afford what they ask for in lobola". This theme speaks to the modern-day characterisation of the family unit in which both parents are not present due to financial reasons such as a man's failure to afford lobola. Thus, "bad lobola" tears the fabric of South African societies. This also demonstrates a two-way relationship, where discourse is socially constitutive and socially shaped as well (Sipra and Rashid, 2013). Thus, the text reflects views shared across millennials and segments of young women across South Africa on the material dimension of a man.

Even though my sample is made up of young black women and their knowledge and commentary, I am aware that women are multi-faceted, complex people and they have different interpretations. An observation that extends my preceding discussion relates to the nexus between materialism, lobola and unintended consequences. A Twitter post by Ayanda Mponda, (2021) said,

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> "Dear 'Future Brides' Lobola was never meant to enrich your parents and especially your uncles who don't even know your birthday. If you don't speak up for your man, you will enter a marriage full of loans and debt caused by your own family".

The Twitter post underpins some of the challenges inherently found in the discourse of lobola in South Africa such as debts and loans accumulated by grooms to pay exorbitant lobola prices. It would appear that the speaker's observation dovetails with the view that bad lobola results from the authoritative role played by parents and uncles, as the main social actors in the practice, and the perception of how passive brides and grooms are in this process. As a result of being passive actors, women would have to endure some of the unintended consequences such as financial constraints on their marriages.

It is also informative to note the views expressed by another discussant in the *Daily Sun* (Nkosi, 2019) who said "My whole perspective has changed. The money we pay helps the bride's family prepare both for the bride and the groom". This speaks to the notion of "good lobola". Its normative roots are hinged on the creation of 'relations' between families and building 'unions' between families. Even though the material dimensions of lobola have been cast in an unfavourable light, the interdependency of lobola within familial relations described by the discussant demonstrates that lobola is a resource that can be used for a positive purpose and be construed "good lobola".

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Lobola and a Sense of Belonging

In a YouTube discussion titled 'Let's talk Lobola' conducted by Mkize (2017), one discussant intimated that if a man were to pay less lobola "this would be a disgrace to the family, and the woman in question". Her observations indicated the distribution of power among social actors and how women use lobola as a tool for negotiating their sense of belonging and acceptability within the family and society. This strongly echoes a thread in

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my research with participants, who often - surprisingly - confirmed their need for social acceptance, even when this may have meant compromising their desires for independence and ability to make choices about and in marriage. In the YouTube discussion, the statement indicates the patriarchal context in which the views of the family and society hold sway; when lobola is not fully paid, it is the family that is disgraced more than the woman. Therefore, a woman's sense of belonging is embedded in the broader interests of the family and society in which the family is activated, and the woman is passivated as a social actor. This is consistent with Lebaka-Moeti (2021)'s Facebook post in which the speaker declares: "I don't think my family can ask for that much for my lobola". The reference to 'family' indicates how a woman's sense of belonging is embedded in the dominant interests of her family. Discourse practices speak to the execution of social norms and values through discourse. Therefore, many women's sense of belonging is submerged in the tradition of lobola which is integrated into the broader historical-social context.

A sense of belonging is a critical element in standpoint theory. The theory postulates that an individual's perspectives are largely shaped by the broader political and social context. Patriarchy reinforces the dominance of men and elders and produces outsiders and insiders, in which young women become subordinates. It is through the tradition of lobola that young women can fit in and be respected and considered worthy. The style of a speaker is important in the evaluation of discourse. Fairclough (1992)'s discursive practices use relational values as a tool to analyse speech. Relational values establish the nexus between speaker and audience. The discussant was evoking a young women's audience. In a sense, she appeals to others who are likely to understand her predicament by speculating "I don't think that…" and defining her point of view in contrast to that of her family. It is evident from the above that lobola in marriage is often a critical component of young women's identity. It is a practice that is akin to other forms of identity such as dressing, talking, eating, and behaving.

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Individuals are said to dress, talk, eat, and behave in a manner that reflects a certain type of dignity (or lack thereof), respectability (or absence of this), class positioning and overall social identity.

In another Youtube video titled *#Wedding season: Magadi (Lobola) Negotations | Traditional Wedding | #VuyoWedsKopano*. Kopano shares her lobola negotiations and how the process made he a proud Tswana child,

> "In African Culture my uncles and my aunts are my mothers and fathers so my aunts call me their daughter. Even my mother and father were not in that room, the people that were in that room called me their daughter and they married to Vuyo's family ,to their son…and in that moment when things go beautifully a transformation happens and a young girl, being me, goes through that transformation and seeing that makes me very happy. What makes me happy is seeing the effort that my family has to go through, his family has to go through and how much love is in that moment and in this whole process. And those are the moments that make me so happy that ke ngwanyana wa Motswana". Kopano (Shimange, 2018)

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This YouTube video demonstrates how lobola is closely connected to a sense of communal belonging. The bride feels happy because her uncles and aunts acted like her parents. Kopano's account is instructive in unpacking the role played by parents and the elders. This position reiterates the hegemonic role of parents and family members as primary social actors and how these actors negotiate a sense of belonging for children, as subordinate social actors. Their approval is a critical component in cultivating a sense of belonging for young women such as Kopano.

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Gendered self-images

The theme of gendered self-image reveals how women, even as they often confirm their subordination to families, future grooms or elders, often situate themselves as active social actors that play an agential role in lobola practices. A YouTube video titled *The Code Switch S1 EP 5 - 'Lobola 2.0* demonstrates how non-compliance and non-conformity coalesce in young women's perceptions of lobola in South Africa (*Vangaurd Magazine*, 2014). The performance of strong black womanhood for a radical, educated, young woman like Panashe Chigumadzi is often linked to her assertion of a sense of blackness and African tradition. The example of Chigumadzi is culturally and publicly significant, since she is a prominent figure in young black feminist debates nationally and is often treated as a young black or African feminist icon. Chigumadzi says:

> "I am also more than willing to participate, to say look we think it is probably going to be a figure of two cattle and let me also start saving for the other (one of the cattle) and let us come together because ultimately, it cannot be something that he magically comes up with, I should also contribute because I believe this is about two families coming together, and not about me being paid for as a woman. In that way it can be regarded as progressive particularly for a middle-class woman, I think I have more rights than a rural woman would have"

She therefore espouses a 'lobola' that may be radically different from that defended by male traditional leaders. This includes her jointly paying lobola with her future husband (*Vanguard* Magazine, 2014). If lobola is symbolic in amplifying masculinity and degrading a woman to the status of an appendage, the interpretation defended by Panashe Chigumadzi appears to deconstruct its masculinisation and invent an egalitarian or even feminist alternative. This allows a woman to negotiate her sexual rights and at the same time refuse her status as "property" of the husband. The 'feminist consciousness' as articulated by Chigumadzi can be

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textually analysed as the expression of power by young women as they negotiate the practice of lobola. Chigumadzi in the *Vanguard Magazine* blog is driven by a millennial and feminist viewpoint in which women are active social actors who can negotiate how lobola is practiced.

Others may not be as bold in their assertion of women's independence and autonomy. Yet they can be seen to be exercising agency when they defend aspects of lobola that serve their economic interests or social security. An examples is the following speaker's financial literacy when she states that "I would not like my uncles and aunts to overcharge, because it is coming out of my household". The gendered self-image of this woman indicates that she is proactive in assessing her long-term financial interests and material well-being. This refutes the notion of uncles, the elders and aunts who inevitably decide on the process of lobola. Another comment from a young woman named Dr Linda Ncube-Nkomo (2021) confirms a complex gendered self-image resulting from a woman paying lobola for herself. Ncube Nkomo said,

> "I know one who did that & 23 years later, she's still paying the price for that move. Guy has zero respect for her & tells her the way she brought herself into the marriage is the same way she can take herself out. It's not a wise thing to do, it makes the woman seem desperate".

This is an interesting response to Chigumadzi's argument that women's statuses in marriages are improved when they contribute financially to lobola transactions. Nkomo's cautionary observations speak to the broader patriarchal context in which "real women" are actively sought and pursued by "real men". Within this broader context that bestows women's identities, women may seek to create a positive gendered self-image, one which is not "seen" let alone respected by men and the broader society. Her paying her own lobola is not "brave" or "independent", but degrades her by making her "seem desperate". This statement is familiar in conservative societies that frown upon women who propose, marry and pay lobola

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for men. This also reveals how being a 'middle-class woman', with the resources and ability to play an agential role in lobola transactions, contradicts the social image of being a "proper woman". Paradoxically, demonstrating economic power in lobola transactions can ultimately erode women's social statuses and potentially open them up to social condemnation and even disgrace. It could also make them vulnerable to abuse and even violence from sexist husbands who experience an erosion of their "masculinity" when their wives are known to play roles that families and communities expect men to play.

4.2 Summative evaluation

Lobola is a practice that has become increasingly enmeshed with wide-ranging and rapidly changing economic conditions, gender relations and globalised ideas about the self and self-empowerment or personal security. It is therefore also a product of broad societal constructions and contestations. The intersectional identities within what could be seen as a web of social, economic, gendered, familial, communal and global forces reveal that the identities it makes available to young women are in a constant state of mobility and interaction. The animated dialogues, interventions, advice and performative displays of self-worth in terms of class, gender and race are strongly apparent in the interactive world of social media. A superficial examination of many of these may confirm the blunt conclusions about the practice that has been offered by scholars and many feminist and human rights activists. Yet careful attention to the perspectives of those who are affected by the practice and the discourses around it reveal the positioned logic of their situated struggles.

Intersectionality can reveal how aspects of identity can lead to both privileges and discriminations. Although on the surface, the tradition of lobola disadvantages women from a patriarchal viewpoint, the study identified classed positions, in which some women are at an advantage over other women due to their social capital. At the same time, social capital is not

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necessarily a guarantee of freedoms. Certain women may have economic power, but this can contradict their ascribed identities as "proper women", and therefore undermine their social standing and statuses in society. Here it is ironic that in the present context, higher education leads to women's being valued more than women who are not. It would seem that educated women with more financial independence are expected to possess certain advantages as symbolic capital only. They are not socially valued for demonstrating these.

In terms of power relations between social actors, the analysis of lobola commentary in social media spaces established that lobola has the potential to be activated by women as social actors. However, this agential power cannot be neatly evaluated in terms of its clearly reflecting "feminist" or "anti-feminist" consiousness, or even degrees of feminist consciousness.

At times, resisting the prescribed gendered role of being financially dependent can lead to women being seen as "not properly African" or not a woman deserving of the family's or community's respect. Also important is the fact that "being African" or "being authentically black" is often contingent on dominant gendered hierarchies and norms that are mediated by family and community members with close emotional ties to women. Consequently, even if women may be highly critical of, and willing to resist patriarchal authority, or gendered rules dictated by family members or grooms, their emotional investment in maintaining close ties of kinship or communal belonging (which integral to "being authentically black") can tremendously constrain their ability to act. Chapter 3 demonstrated how my participants sometimes saw lobola in ways often associated with religious belief. Ideas about the spiritual or existential significance of lobola make it a practice that cannot be fully understood from a secular or politically logical or rationalist viewpoint. This makes lived struggles for feminist freedoms within identifications that seem to transcend western logics extremely complex. Seedat (2017) remarks on the way that religion can pose complex levels of threat and

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vulnerability to women. Her conclusion here is also partly applicable to women who navigate loyalties to "African tradition". Quoting Elizabeth Peterson, Seedat (2017, p. 7) writes: "a rights discourse such as ours in South Africa 'is not in itself an effective intervention strategy in contexts where religion (embedded in culture) is a social determinant of hierarchical gender power-relations".

Summative Conclusion on Young South African Women's Perceptions of Lobola

The commercialisation and commodification of the tradition of lobola are expressions of liberal western-centric discourses in contemporary societal practices, even when these practices are defined as traditional or precapitalist. Contemporary commodity culture gives commercial meaning to certain practices by attaching exorbitant prices to lobola. Classed positions among women, as social actors, allow those that possess social capital (especially educational qualifications) or who inherit from a wealthy background, to negotiate higher lobola price than those who are not educated. Participants and social media commentators in this study testified to the fact that the commercialisation of lobola seems to be turning women into commodities to which prices can be attached in ways that differ significantly from the valuing of women in lobola before. I would not go so far as to say that women were not objectified or subordinated in lobola transactions before the introduction of colonialism and its capitalist economy. However, in the current context of lobola, the fixation with the potential bride's financial or other social resources (or lack thereof) has made women's access to resources a significant negotiating tool in defining the terms of their entry into marriage.

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However, it is significant that many women do not act as independent decision-makers when it comes to marriage. As evidenced by the participants and many digitally circulated discussions, women attach a great deal of significance to how they are seen and respected by family members and their communities. This often over-rides any doubts they may have about the personal value of lobola. It is also clear that women with economic and social capital do not guarantee their freedom and autonomy if they contribute equally to lobola payments or even if they are the ones that make these payments. The fact that many women discuss and share this dilemma makes it clear that women in lobola marriages are often far from unaware of the complexity of their gendered politics. Rather, they make strategic choices frequently based on understanding how personal power can be compromised and even erased in a context where patriarchy gives men absolute power irrespective of the man's financial or social status. Such power is likely to be amplified in the home and domestic sphere. Here men often use their entitlement as "heads of the household", with this status leading some men to use abuse or violence.

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Another important factor leading women to endorse lobola despite their realisation of the potential oppressiveness of this practice is their investment in the sense of belonging with which it is associated. As indicated in my research with participants as well as social media data, women do not always express an explicit desire to be socially recognised in racial, ethnic or nationalist terms by choosing lobola marriages. However, they often express a need to be respected and accepted by their families and communities. In many ways, therefore, these family or community members act as custodians of racial, ethnic or national groupings; this, in order to belong or be properly "black, "African", or the proud member of a certain ethnic group, women may embrace a form of marriage which certain custodians defend. The study has demonstrated that this sense of belonging cannot be underestimated. It can give a woman a sense of self without which she feels she has not real identity. In a context where

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many educated young women feel strongly about decoloniality, the challenge of ongoing racism despite the dismantling of apartheid, this sense of being black or Africa - often mediated by mothers, fathers, uncles or aunts— the belief in and claiming of this identity is psychologically and existentially crucial. By paying attention to how young women express themselves about group loyalty and by understanding their standpoint, it is possible tomato sense of their choices even though these may seem illogical or detrimental to their freedoms.

Despite many young women's support for lobola for reasons summarised above and also dealt with in detail throughout the study, they are also dealing with norms that limit their lives in various ways. The prominence of lobola discussions on social media, especially in posts or responses that reveal intimate feelings and thoughts, is evidence of women desiring spaces for sharing their standpoint views, and for dialogues based on mutual respect and understanding. Apart from the need for sharing, certain women are outspoken about redefining lobola. This is the case even when the lobola "norm" involves very specific arrangements that prioritise the agency and economic dominance of men and elders.

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The discussion also suggested a feminist consciousness in which lobola was viewed instrumentally as a tool that could enhance a woman's gendered self-image. Traditionally, lobola is understood as amplifying masculinity and degrading a woman to the status of an appendage. However, the study established that some of the participants' and discussants' perceptions were focused on deconstructing the masculinisation of lobola through jointly paying lobola.

Arguments that women should also pay lobola reveal the fact that many young women are eager to embrace customs that predate the colonial impact. And it is significant that colonialism and apartheid and, indeed, current neoliberal modernity, continues to see many indigenous practices are "premodern" and obsolete. Certain black South African women are

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therefore echoing many African feminists efforts to revive a sense of "being African" that does not entrench gender hierarchies and patriarchy while also embracing elements that are associated with pre-colonial and therefore "traditional" African rituals. Whether their efforts to reinvent lobola are successful in the patriarchal contexts that they enter into and experience marriage within should not - from the perspective of recognising their standpoint knowledge - be the most important concern. What is crucially important is the spirited, reflective and independent way in which they seek to make sense of what is often condemned as an "anti-feminist" custom from the perspective of their multiple identifications and affiliations.

5.1 Suggestions for future research

For many women, the tradition of lobola is a critical component of a broader South African identity. Consequently, the scale of research on the tradition of lobola is diverse and extensive. However, to comprehensively confront the meanings of lobola in South Africa, there is need for more research that focuses on young South Africans' – actually, both men's and women's - perspectives on the tradition. There is also a need to explore lobola in the broader context of marriage, which would involve exploring actual marriage dynamics that follow lobola. This is likely to shift discussion beyond binaristic thinking about the binary of "tradition versus modernity" of lobola, and lead to more nuanced discussion of how "modernity" is often linked to what has been understood as tradition, and vice versa. It would also complement and even transcend the advocacy-orientated and scholarly research that is often done by those who have little first-hand experience or knowledge of the practice. Lastly, it could conceivably lead to more African feminist responses (in research or in public debate or on social media) that opens up spaces and discourses for reassessing traditions that have been misrepresented or distorted. This in turn could lead to adaptations of the practice in ways that do not objectify, subordinate or disempower women. And it is worth stressing that studies with men may deepen understanding of how patriarchy and masculinity can often

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harm men's overall wellbeing as well. A re-imagined lobola practice could ensure that women and men enter into partnerships that are based on mutual trust and respect and that foster both partners' overall well-being.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Consent Form University of the Western Cape

Complicating "tradition" and "modernity": Young South African Women's Perceptions of Lobola

Researcher: Nyaradzo Nduna

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. ☐
3. I understand my responses and personal data will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the reports or publications that result for the research. ☐
4. I understand that I may decline to be audio-recorded at any point. ☐
5. I agree that the data collected from me may be used in future research. ☐
6. I agree to take part in the above research project. ☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

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Appendix 2

Interview guide

1. How do you define lobola? (Reasons for the practice)
2. Why do you think it is the responsibility of the man to pay? (Probe: Can a woman pay?)
3. When you get married do you want lobola to be paid? Why? (Probe: What happens if you boyfriend cannot afford your lobola? What happens if lobola is not paid for you?)
4. Do you think lobola has changed over the years? For better or for worse?
5. Would you like anything about the tradition to be changed? Why?
6. Do you believe in gender roles in a marriage? (Probe: Do you think the roles are different if lobola is or is not paid?)
7. What are your perceptions of customary marriages (lobola) in comparison to civil marriages? (Do you think a civil marriage is necessary?)
8. Can you please describe the lobola process? (How does the bride and groom take part in the process? Who is in charge of the process?)
9. What would be your reaction to woman paying lobola?
10. Can a couple take part in civil marriage and not in customary marriage?

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Appendix 3

Information sheet

Title: Complicating "tradition" and "modernity": Young South African Women's Perceptions of Lobola

Hello, my name is Nyaradzo Nduna and I am doing a research project for my Master's degree in women's and gender studies at the University of the Western Cape. The research project will look at young South African's women perceptions of traditional marriage. How the transition of the lobola system has influenced the modern African woman's way of participating in the tradition.

I will have a one on one interview with you and the interview will be audio recorded on my phone with your permission. Whatever you share during the interviews will be confidential and I will not use your real name when typing the transcripts. No one will have access to the interviews and the scripts other than me and my supervisor. The interviews will be held in a private place where you are comfortable.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study you will be provided with an informed consent form, at the beginning of the interview that you have to sign. This is when confidentiality will be explained in detail. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be destroyed.

There may be some risks from participating in this research study. All human interactions and talking about self or others carry some amount of risks.I will nevertheless minimise such risks and act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological during the process of your participation in this study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a social worker on campus for further assistance or intervention.

If you have any concerns or queries concerning the research you can contact myself, Nyaradzo Nduna on 0618081918 or 3688894@myuwc.ac.za or my supervisor Prof. D Lewis on +27 21 9592911 or dlewis@myuwc.ac.za

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