

Cultural traditional determine the social organization of various ethnic groups, for instance the Lambya ethnic group are the patrilineal, and their succession and inheritance is traced through the father's side. They speak (*chi*) Lambya as their original language. Language is important in that it allows people to pass on cultural ideas; beliefs and values from one generation to the next without language culture wouldn't exist.

The Lambya are very hospitable, usually they slaughter a chicken as part of welcoming a visitor. Most would be offended if a person refused to have a meal with them. If one insists that they are satisfied, the best approach is to eat very little. Complete refusal to eat their food might give them a picture that you stingy so you, yourself want them also to refuse to eat when they visit you or you suspect that they have included some medicine in the food (*ukukutegha*).

It is cultural to quickly prepare *ubughali* (thick porridge) made from maize flour eaten together with their favorite relish beans (*a-malima*) for a visitor so that they should replenish the energy. Normally food is eaten after washing hands from a common dish (elderly wash first in order of age) all the participants will eat from the same plate. It is expected that the elder should stop eating where a small piece of food remains for the younger children at the table. Evening left over are delicacy the next morning especially when the relish is boiled beans. The Lambya people also cherish gourd (*a kapale*) soured milk. All these will be explained in the chapters to follow.

The elements that constitute the Lambya culture are many. In this book there has been a selection to the only ones the researcher were exposed to, with regards to the specified time of study. In this case some of these are less detailed, as the researchers didn't get the first hand information, for those which are detailed the author participated and had direct information. As such this book will take a detailed of customs, values, norms, traditions and social organization.

The Lambya marriage custom - *Inyegha*

In Chitipa as in most part of Malawian districts, it is a man who proposes a woman into marriage. Marriage is very important among the Lambya it marks the beginning of a family, which is the structure unit of a society. The Lambya ethnic group respect marriage

procedures and they respect a person who is married and has a family. Disrespecting marriage procedure could cost someone to imprisonment or pay a huge fine.

The Lambya ethnic group follows patrilineal system of marriage, whereby succession and inheritance is traced through the father's side. In patrilineal marriage system one of the procedures demands the payment of lobola (*ivyuma*). For the Lambya *ivyuma* ranges from livestock to money, which are usually transferred from the husband's family to the family of the wife, as a way of saying thank you? It is regarded as the way of appreciation for the care, support and attention provided to their daughter in the course of caring her when she was young. The bride worth is settled to the Lambya to cement the marriage. Lobola is strictly observed among the Lambya to embrace their heritage, which is passed from one generation to the other. When the Lambya observes this tradition, they don't imply buying and selling of female children. In this study a focus group discussion with women who got married to the Lambya men discovered that they belong to some southern and central region ethnic groups, which most follow matrilineal system. The study showed that they were respected to the families and relatives of their husbands, after they lost their Lambya husbands. The widowed mothers who were studied came from Mkombanyama, Kasisi, Kasinde, Lufita, Yamba, Chinunkha, Ifumbo, Kasinde, Titi, Kasisi, Mwamukumbwa, Chisankwa, Nasato and Kameme areas respectively. Most of them said that they were not subjected to any violence or denied opportunity in the village after they lost their husbands. This could perhaps clearly show that lobola system is not the excuse of violating or buying as interpreted by other ethnic groups, but a respect of customs as it was passed from their ancestors. These women have got big maize field for cultivation that used to belong to their Lambya husbands. It is from this that the author want to take a closer look to what we know about the Lambya and what we need to know, by studying their traditions through closer interaction. This will help to answer many questions which are poorly understood by the development organization, human rights groups, civil society groups and institutions that are implementing their projects in the area. From anthropological perspective lobola could be regarded as a custom that strengthens marriage among those ethnic groups practicing the system in most of the northern region districts. This strength comes in due to the protocol of thanks giving that brings relatives from both side who cement the relationship of both the children marrying and the relatives themselves.

Procedures to Lambya marriage

The protocol behind the Lambya marriage can be well understood if one decides to participate in their traditions and customs. It is upon this participation that can lead to a good description and deeper understanding of what it means to marry or get married to the Lambya. The author at least took some six years of observing and participating in the Lambya marriage customs, which were taking place during summer season. From this observation and participation, to come to what is referred to as Lambya marriage one has to go through three broad procedures. Namely, formal proposal (*ukusipa*), lobola charges (*kubika ivyuma/ukwimala*) and thanks giving (*kuzimya amakato*), if someone is married and hasn't gone all these three stages then it is not a fully recognized Lambya marriage. These are described in details in the next chapter. These are very crucial areas when it comes to Lambya marriage. No marriage took place without going through the three procedures. If one of the procedures is skipped it becomes a violation of their customs and heritage or else one face problems when a person whom they have married dies. You can skip one and there will nothing that the relatives of the person whom you have married will do, but when you are faced with serious sickness or when the person whom you have married has died you face it. The other side may demand the protocols of marriage to apply in such situation. We will see these further in the paragraphs to follow.

Observing the Lambya marriage

Like any other group in northern Malawi, the Lambya are patrilineal, that is descent passes through the male line and on marriage a woman goes to live at husband home.

Phase 1; man proposes to woman (u-kusipa)

The first and foremost what happens is that a man proposes to a woman, without parents knowing. In most Lambya marriage it is the man who proposes to a woman. In this case a boy (*umulumendo*) looks for a girl (*umulindu*) whom he thinks he can marry. When the two have agreed to marry, then a man carefully finds himself a go-between (*umufusya*). This go between is usually a man who associates well with him and his father. He then explains the issue to him. It is this go between who carries the message told by the man who wants to marry to his parents, specifically the message is told to the father who is regarded as owner of the land (*mwenekaya*), and the mother hears it from the father. The message that is told is that, "one of your sons wants to marry" if in the house there are a

number of boys (*umulumendo akulonda pakusenda*; that is how the father report to her wife). The mother is not taught first because he is regarded as a stranger in the village of her husband. He and the mother seats down together and discus further about the newly received message, before they give a go ahead to their son and spread the message to relatives. After some few days then they calls back their son for a sitting. This is done to confirm with him either they accept or reject the message brought by the go between. In this time the parents usually asks a lot of the questions, some of them includes; where he met the woman, if he knows well the family background of the woman and her relatives. From a number of case studies in many villages this is done in this way because the parent's wants to have good basic information to the family their son wants to marry. Because the Lambya believes that if a man marries a wife he even marries the relatives of the woman. This is done in a different way to the female parents of the woman who wants to get married. For a girl she tells her mother only or sometimes she just keeps it as a secret until a symbolic hoe (*i-kasulijembe*) has been shown or discovered in the house of her parents. This will be explained later in bottom paragraph.

If there are no any objections to such questioning then the parents gives a go ahead to their son. He then go to the village of the identified woman together with his relatives to confirm that they are proposing their daughter this process is called *kuzingirila* so that the woman is tied up that she can no longer accept any other proposal from other men. However, when both parents from man's side of woman's side are not satisfied with the either of the behavior of the two family or the children who wish to marry, they sometimes suspend their relationship. *Kuzingirila* is a step where a man makes some serious approach by taking few of his relatives whom he takes them to the relatives of the woman who he wants to marry. During *kuzingirila* a man can give some cash or some gifts to the parents of the woman. *Kuzingirila* happens when either a man stays in another district, country or when he is committed with school or some work somewhere or within the village to show that he is serious of marrying. This is to symbolically tell the wife to be and her relatives that they should not allow any man to propose the girl.

In order to have a deeper insight of the woman family the elders from grooms side usually sends some spies to the village where the family of the woman resides. They usually go to find out more information about how the family is doing their behavior and the general

welfare how they relate with fellow neighbors. When they go into that village they usually buy local beer or go to nearby place and play local games like Bawo (*insolo*) where they ask questions pertaining to the family of the woman their son wants to marry. If they don't find any discouraging stories they recommend and if it's opposite they totally discourage it. If this is done, then it concludes the first proposal a man can do in Lambya tradition, the author regards this as the first propose.

Phase 2: symbolic proposal to a woman

Just after doing preparatory, the man meets the woman to formerly propose her. In this meeting it's where a man buys a metal hoe (*ikasu*) and he hand it to a woman. A woman receives it and she secretly hid it in her parents' home/place. She receives it without anybody from her side knowing. The hoe is hid at a place where her parents like working or doing households chores, but this is always within the household, such places include under the parents bed, in places where they keep washed dishes, and close to where they keep a basket that holds maize flour. The metal hoe is given to the woman without anybody knowing a part from the two and no any ceremony is held.

Symbolically, the metal hoe among the Lambya has got some social meanings. It perhaps means that a man is not lazy; but he practice agriculture and grows foods. It tells the parents of the woman that they should accept his proposal, because their daughter is getting married to a man who isn't lazy, such that their daughter won't stay in poverty or starve. To some extent this could be an equivalent to what some ethnic group in central and southern Malawi do, by calling the ceremony as, *chinkhoswe* (engagement ceremony). In typical Lambya marriage there is no engagement ceremony as special part of marriage. However, it could be related to symbolic metal hoe giving, which formal proposal is done to a woman in present of her parents, relatives and friends. Though it is like this due to globalization, migration, religion and intermarriages, this custom is being dissolved little by little. Only those with keen interests of heritage among the Lambya's, practice and preserve it. To the Lambya who live in urban cities of Mzuzu, Lilongwe, Blantyre and Zomba some do not follow the procedure, as a result of the above mentioned reason and as a result their identity is totally lost because they lack uniqueness as other ethnic do. There is no authentic practice of the typical Lambya custom in urban Malawi. This has

contributed to regards the Lambya ethnic group as a minority and a sub-ethnic group belonging to the neighboring Ngonde ethnic group.

In many cases when a woman hid the hoe it is usually discovered by the female parent. This is so because, female parents relates well with their daughters when it comes to discuss issues of marriage than Lambya fathers. When she discovers it, she just knows that one of her daughter has been proposed or found a man to marry. She keeps a secret too, by only telling the father without other household's members knowing. After some 2-3 weeks then both parents calls all their daughters and questions them, who has brought the hoe in the house. This perhaps can be done in absent of the father sometimes. When this has been done the woman reports to the man about how the situation has been discussed amongst her relatives and parents. Sometimes during this stages some parents they invite the man before further stages are considered to see him if he has good manners.

After this, then the fathers of the man who want to marry intervene in the process of helping his son in settling down the lobola. Now the father sends message to the relatives related by blood who in Lambya are known as *a baluko*. This comprises of all blood relatives who traces descendants through the male line. At this time the father chooses a formal go between whose function is to represent the two sides. This go between can be chosen at first or during this time. The first go between is chosen for a short period of time, then the second one as well.

When the go between has been officially declared among *a baluko*, he usually be advised to further process of paying the lobola (*ivyuma*). He is usually sent to meet the relatives of the woman on regular basis. With him carries a hoe (*ikasulijembe*) which is the second hoe and some money that is usually paid when meeting the parents of the woman and her relatives (*a baluko wa ku chikolo*). The second hoe that is carried becomes a little bit bigger than the first one, it is usually called *ifosholo*. The amount that presently is given ranges from MK 6000 – 8000. The second hoe is also accompanied by the ornaments which are attached to it; the ornaments are commonly referred to as *uwambo*, (see Fig 3) which most of the time consist of the different colors. These beads usually give some meaning to the man and relatives of the woman. It simply means that the boy who will marry is a respecter of marriage and he tells the parents of the woman that he did not find

their daughter in a bar (the go between say like this, “*tutamwaghite umwana winyu mu chilabu*”). This is the meaning behind attaching the beads to a hoe. However there is need to research further on symbolic meaning of beads in Lambya to deepen our understanding of the ornaments cross culturally. In addition to this the beads also tell the parents of the woman that their daughter is not a prostitute (*umwana winyu te- wemalaya*).

The first hoe that is given to a woman is not returned back to the man. The second hoe is returned to the go between, so that it will be formally handed in presence of a *baluko* in time of paying lobola. In presence of a *baluko* he is welcomed by songs, dances and ululations by women. This time is when he hands in the second hoe which is accompanied by money to the parents of the woman. The handling in of the second hoes follows some traditional. The hoe from the hands of the go between is placed in the middle of the woman to be married and her relatives while watching. Putting a hoe in the middle, gives a message to the relatives of the woman that the man wants to marry their daughter has got manners and that he will be capable breadwinner. The putting of the hoe on the middle goes with words of respect by the go between to the woman and her relatives. He usually says, “sorry we, from the grooms side want to start drinking water in this house” meaning the house of the parents of the bride to get married. He says this to mean that the side of the groom wants to establish a strong relationship to the family through marriage that is to happen. “*Pepa, pepa nkhumonda tungw’elaghe a minzi munyumba umu*”, these are words of traditional respect among the elders usually said by the go between so that the man’s and the brides families wants to establish a good relationship between them through their children. After the go between has said these words to the relatives of a woman, they respond by saying, “we have never rejected you from drinking water at our house”, then ululations follows, which is a sign of acceptance of proposal (they answer like this, “*tutakulesiyze lumo hagma pakungw’ela a minzi munyumba muno*”). These are positive words of accepting the formal proposal in present of the woman herself and relatives. The elders representing the woman side are the ones who respond like that. In responding like this they accept that their daughter can proceed marrying the man. Instantly, when they have responded the go between reply that, “they need a good relationship with the elders from bride’s family” (*a baluko wa- ku chikolo*). Then *a baluko wakuchikolo* accept this by responding that they have accepted the relationship (*twitikizya ubukamu*).



Figure 4: Some of the tradition ornaments (Uwambo) captured

This is a formal way of proposing a woman in Lambya ethnic group. After this has been done then the go between is sent back to prepare the hearing of lobola that is being prepared by a *baluko* from brides family. When the go between has been sent back the relatives from the woman side are left with the duty of charging the lobola. The moment he is sent back he is usually told a particular date and month when he has to report and hear how much they have charged for the lobola to pay. The time period is set to make sure that the other side gets prepared for the payments. Despite that some smaller payments are paid prior the big lobola, the things paid first include hoes, shoes for the father, a cloth (*ichitambala*) a dress (*idilesi*) for the mother.

Another important point to make about the Lambya marriage customs of marriage is that the uncle (*mujomba*) or aunts (*nasenje*) are very important. They are regarded as guardian and counselor of the female and male children in their marriage. Whenever the woman or a man is facing problems in their marriage the first person who is supposed to know is the uncle. Therefore the uncles and aunts in Lambya ethnic groups play a big role of a counselor when it comes to solving family affairs problems. Children cannot get married without their uncle or aunt knowing, doing so is against their customs. The uncle and aunt of the children getting married also receives a special portion of lobola when paid, specifically when it is a girl child getting married.

Lobola hearing (*U-kwimala*)

When the go between goes for the second time the hoe and the ornaments are returned back to the go between, this is done to show that the bride relatives doesn't have anything against the man who is to marry their daughter. This time again, the daughters are called if they are more than two in the family. They appear in presence of relatives and the go

between. This is done to formally confirm that their relatives have nothing against the relationship that is to take place. The relatives of the woman then ask the go between to identify the girl behind all the protocol (*tulangizye yo mwatungula kuno*). He then directly point out the woman, usually the go between and the girl must have met somewhere before all such events, for him to know her name and familiarize himself to her. When the go between mentions and identify the girl, instantly she is called out by her relatives to confirm it in presence of them. If she accepts the calling of the go between, she is then questioned by her relatives if at all she knows the go between and the man he represents. This is the groom who is in relationship with the daughter being questioned. This custom is done for formality sake, despite that everyone knows that so and so will get married. Later the bride acknowledges the go between and whom he represents in the midst of her relatives. The relatives usually asks questions like; what is the name of her groom (*ingamu yache ni zina*), where did they meet (*ko wakakomana nu mulumendo uyo*), in what ways does he knows the man (*amumenye mwinzila yoni umulumendo uyo*), where does he live (*akwikala kwi*) and questions dealing with the grooms personal profile. In fact these questions are not meant to be answered in audible voice in presence of the relatives, but they are meant to represent some acceptance by the woman who gets married. When she has been asked these questions, she now brings the two hoes together, the smaller and bigger one. The bigger one being on top and the smaller one down, symbolizing that she has accepted marrying the groom. This is an acknowledgement done symbolically to responds to the questions she has been asked. In doing this she tells her relatives that yes he knows the groom whom is to marry her, of course after this, some sought of probing takes place to the bride by her relatives just to be much sure about the groom. This is done by asking some questions to the bride, if at all they should accept the relations and start using lobola that has been partly paid. The leader of the woman's elder says, "Should we start using the paid lobola" (*twande pakulya ivyuma ivyi*). If she says yes (*inga*), then they decide charging *ivyuma*. The hearing of *ivyuma* is done only by the go between and absolutely without the relatives of the man who wants to marry.

Ivyuma inclusive

For the Lambya lobola consists of the following;

- ~ Opening fee (*indalama iya kwiulira ivya kunena*, usually paid by the grooms relatives)
- ~ Closing fee (*indalama iya kwighalirira ivya kunena* also paid by grooms relatives)

If the two fees are not paid then, there couldn't be any proceeding of telling the go between how much have been charged or else the relatives of the bride will only be talking without a go between contributing something. The two fees allow the go between to negotiate the lobola. The ranges of these two fees currently are at Mk 500 to 1000. This money is shared among the elders of from brides side (a *waluko wakuchikolo*). This fee however, is not fixed, as it depends on how much the other side has, specifically how wealth a groom is. If this fee has been paid, then the elders from female side starts dictating *ivyuma*, from a written piece of paper, previously they were just orally said, every elder from the side of the bride could mention what they feel could be charged for their daughter, this has been changed over time.

When the charging has been finished all the lobola is written on a piece of paper and the leading elder from brides side read it loud in presence of the go between and the elders from the side of the groom. In many cases observed *ichuma* among the Lambyas is an inclusive of the following things

- ~ Livestock which include minimum of six cattle's (*ing'ombe*) and goats (*imbuzi*). Cattle's includes two male that's *inkhambako* and four female known as *inkhusi*.
- ~ Special gifts for the bride's mother *,intoba/nthoba*, which is payment consisting of two female cattle's, dress (*idilesi*), cloth (*ichitambala*), money (*amakopala*) for the mother's bride known as *inkwamba* and a goat.

There is no other than *ivyuma* apart from these that makes the Lambya's lobola. If the go between is prepared sometimes he could instantly pay the money charged and live other things for another day. If not prepared he begs an extension of days so that he can prepare for the charged lobola. In current urban areas all that is said above has been replaced by money, when children are getting married they settle lobola by paying the relatives of the woman money. This is fueling the loss of Lambya customs as their heritage.

Phase three: delivering ivyuma (Lobola)

This is time period when the side of the groom together with the elders and the go between delivers what they have been charged. This is when all the lobola has been sourced. They usually go to the particular date they gave them through the go between. The protocol to be followed is that first livestock have to be handed in, before the rest charged lobola. Usually this is done by following a particular traditional whereby a late evening ceremony is done.

What happens is that the groom side elders and relatives assemble together in the evening and they start the journey to the brides place. If where they are going is very far away they hire cars, however most couldn't afford this as a result many walk towards the woman's place. They carry food, sweet beer (*ubala*), sour milk (*ulukama ulutoni*) and all the charged lobola. All relatives of the groom side and elders escort the lobola. Doing this late evening is to respect the custom of their ancestors (*mwiho*). When walking, they start around 2-3 pm so that they can get to their destination around late afternoon. That is if the place is very far away. Upon arriving at their designated place they are deliberately stopped by elders from bride's side, while they ululate (*kumogha*). The stopping is done so that some payments should be done (*indalama iya kwiulira ivya kunena*), to allow them talk with the elders of the brides side. All this is done on the road before reaching the exact place or home. When they get home the people from groom's side are not welcomed, deliberately. This is to tell them that the establishments of relationship of not yet over until *ivyuma* are fully paid; often times many do not finish paying lobola at once. The fees that are paid in this tradition are also referred to as opening and closing fee (*indalama iya kwiulira, ni-indalama iya kwighalirira*). As usual this fee is based on arbitrary and is fully negotiated. When the people from the grooms side arrives at the home of the bride after passing through the obstacles of paying; the aunt of the bride stands on the cattle kraal door trying to resist the cattle not to enter in the kraal when elders from grooms side are trying to bring them inside. Later at the moment she asks them, if the ropes (*inkhusa*) should be taken "*tusende ninkhusa zyene*". If they say no then some payment are made to the aunt as her gift, if she says yes then no charges are due. This marks the paying of great lobola in Lambya traditions. This is accompanied by the relatives from both side together to witness the livestock and comment about them. If the relatives of the bride are not satisfied with the livestock, they sometimes reject the livestock so that what is given is in good condition, that is shouldn't be sick. When they have agreed, they assemble together for feasting and dancing (*kumogha*), until late evening to celebrate the lobola giving. This happens at the home of the bride, when the feasting and drinking is over, the bride relatives also pays back some sort of reciprocal by going back to the grooms place with food, same day, where they also host another tradition feasting and tradition. All these traditions are done in late evening and very early in the morning- to respect their *mwiho*. The going of elders to the grooms place after they have paid lobola is referred to as *ukupiilira* also known as *kuzimya a makato*, which means, clearing off the foot prints of men who brought the

lobola. It's one way of saying thank you for the lobola, it's a sought of unbalanced reciprocal process.

Kuzimya a makato --- Kupiilira (unbalanced reciprocal)

Kupiilira means the happiness that is shown by the relatives from bride's side to the groom's side for their kindness in paying the lobola charged and a way of saying thank you. In Lambya they say; "*twahowoka uswe wakuchikolo pakuti mwabika ivyuma*" (we are happy for paying us this lobola). Therefore, this is done to show happiness of the delivered lobola. The ceremony to celebrate this is called lubing off the footprints (*kuzimya a makato*). A *makato* are the footprints on of men and relatives of the groom who brought the livestock of lobola to the village of the bride. Therefore, food and local drinks are prepared to comfort and show happiness at man's place. The elders from female side when going to lab off the footprints they carry baskets (*i-vitundu*) special for the father in law (*awakayemba wa ku chanavuli*) aunt (*mwina-senje*) a fee is charged for bringing food to the side of the bride which is paid by elders from grooms village. After doing all a man and a woman can now get married, despite unfinished lobola. The type of marriage depends on the two. Either to have a holy matrimony in the church or the bride goes straight to the home of her groom and begins their marriage. The church is not involved in any process of lobola payment. However this is not the interest of the author to discuss how holy matrimony is done.

Marriage tradition in Chitipa: Lobola

Each ethnic group in Malawi has got its value, customs and traditional those identify them and make them different from others. Often times the ethnic groups of the northern Malawi have been criticized with the tradition of lobola. This book is written to show the importance of heritage amongst the Lambya ethnic group of Chitipa district. Lobola here is not considered as a way of doing financial transaction but as a value part of the Lambya ethnic group and those ethnic group that practice it, in the northern Malawi.

Often time's people have raised critiques and others have interpreted the practice of lobola as the buying and selling of women, which is not true. People have advised their children not to marry or get married to the northerners, reason being ethnic groups from the north buy women through lobola, which is not true. This is the perspective of anybody who may

not be practicing the system. Perhaps many who criticize this are ethnic groups from central and southern Malawi; the likes of Chewa, Yao, Lomwe among others. The coming of several human rights activists have concluded that the practice of lobola as trade too which is not true at all. Most of those who argue about this perhaps they may be lacking an interest in cultural preservation as most of their arguments are based on the focus of the human rights. This argument comes in without the solid base of culture or heritage. Lobola is not the trade but an act of showing gratitude to the parents of the woman, which is done formerly by giving some special gifts to the parents of the woman. This kind of appreciation varies from one ethnic to another, just as lobola gifts varies from ethnic to ethnic. The argument of lobola being trade was not welcomed to many women belonging to other ethnic groups in Malawi, who got married to the Lambya men but currently living amongst the lobola practicing ethnic group. They refuted any association of lobola as trade. The following was revealed in the focus group discussions with some old women in Mwabulambya village:

- ~ One of the woman from Chikombwe in Ifumbo village said, “*ivyuma vikung’anamula, kusalifya ko abapapi wakabika kwa mwana umulindu*” –Lobola is done just to show an appreciation to what parents of the woman did in raising their daughter.
- ~ Na Nyondo of Nkhonje village expressed her views by saying that in giving lobola the side of the man wants to appreciate the good work they did to their daughter, so it’s not buying (*pakubika ivyuma awakuchanavuli, wakulonda pakusalifya abapapi, pa mbombo inyiza yo bakaionba pakukuzya umwana wawo mulindu*).
- ~ *Kubika ivyuma kukwavwa abana na bapapi kuti wakokhaye akayilo akinza po vyatamya nyegha yabo* (paying lobola assist to use the procedure as a channel for counseling the couple in marriage).

Within these expressions by elder’s women to women it simply shows that lobola is not interpreted as buying of the bride, rather it is an appreciative way done traditionally to the two concerned families.

Lobola as opposite of commercial transaction

Lobola the provision of gifts to the parents of a bride, usually in form of cash or livestock is an entrenched part of marriage in Lambya community. Lobola is an old tradition

commonly found throughout northern Malawi and some parts of the southern Malawi. This system requires that a price be paid for the right to marry a woman.

Over the past nearly two centuries of European involvement in northern Malawi lobola has been interpreted by western observers in many ways. These engaging interpretations relate in part to the changes which have taken place in the nature and the way in which lobola is practiced and understood has changed over time. This must be interpreted in the light of wider economic and social context, or do functions remain constant across time and space. Northern region of Malawi districts bride wealth system varies and even where they are structurally similar. Their individual functions and meanings cannot be read as identical.

Role of lobola in Lambya society

Lobola arguably serves a multiplicity of purposes within the northern districts, materials in terms of the distribution of both productive and consumable resources, symbolic transition of adulthood and establishing the nature of relationships between people. It is impossible amongst the Lambya and other ethnic groups who practices Lobola northern Malawi to isolate the material or economic aspect of lobola transfer from their cultural aspect and ascribe priority to one or the other. Lobola is culturally amongst the Lambya in that it affects resolutions of personal identity with reference to the transactions and they also rationalize such transactions retrospectively. Lobola is also economic in that transfer in livestock and cash which are substantial items of income and expenditure in the household budgets. Materially lobola serves to redistribute both scarce consumption resources (cattle's as meat and cash) and rights over reproductive resources, land cattle and labor.

To the Lambya lobola is payment that a groom pays so that the bride's family can allow to create relationship between the two families and their ancestors. This also helps parents from both sides to use the proper procedure as a channel for counseling the couple on marriage matters. It's an African culture that dates back centuries and still alive in the contemporary society. Basically what happens is that as soon as the groom realizes that he wants to marry his bride he then sent her uncle's to talk to the bride family. Once the date of the visit has been arranged and the bride family explains how much they want their

Lobola, money or livestock then payments are made. It all depends on who the bride is, so daughters are pride of their family in Lambya.

Lobola being an old custom which is still alive today as it was in old days ago is a very important custom to the lambya and those that follows it. Both families of the bride and groom would be scandalized if they didn't adhere to this custom. On the surface lobola is complex and very formal process of negotiation between the two families to come to a mutual agreement of the price that the groom has to pay in order to marry the bride. This may seem like a purchase and scale, but this is very opposite of a commercial transaction.

What makes lobola so important for the Lambya marriage is that it is based on process that brings the two families together. Mutual respect and dignity are woven into the process and the love between the man and woman is expanded to include the immediate and extended families. But like all traditional customs, it is open to abuse and distortion in the modern society.

The lobola process is often complicated and often sometimes confusing for the modern couple. The process is very formal and traditional and has certain protocols that have to be adhered to. For example although the two families concerned might have lived next to each other for years all negotiations between the parents must be conducted in writing. This is done to know each other on the level of lobola, seriousness and sanctify of marriage.

The arrangement for the meeting between the families involves endless formalities. Often negotiations are not conducted by the parents of prospective groom, at all, but can be conducted via relatives, usually uncles and aunties of the groom. The reason for this is that extended family is an important element in Lambya culture especially in the institution of marriage. Many people do not realize that there is no a sense of personal enrichment in lobola. The money received by bride's family is used to help the young bride set up house. Lobola is also a gesture of gratitude on the part of groom's family for looking after and bringing up the young bride.

The modern usage of lobola does not always have a happy outcome. However, there are many instances when families use lobola to acquire money to pay their debt. Worse still

some men see women as goods that have been paid for. This creates a marital climate that is not conducive to trust and love. These are aberrations and do not detract from the essence of lobola itself. It remains a custom that is still popular because it promotes harmony between married couples and their families, as well as promoting a sense of dignity and supports that can aid the marriage and promote a harmonious union.

After paying lobola a bride can go back home, if there are problems in marriage. Centuries ago there was no way this could happen, for a bride, no matter how much hardship she encounters in marriage. There was no way she could go back home. Now things have changed, the situation has changed so much on what I explained elsewhere. The existence of democracy and human rights in our country means that the bride can do what suits.

The wide sentiment is that lobola is part of the Lambya culture and doing away with it is tantamount to rejecting the Lambya cultural heritage.

Unlawful marriage (*Kusemya / Kuposola*)

When a man has impregnated a girl and later marries her unlawfully, it is referred to as *kuposola/kusemya*. It simply means no protocols of lobola have been adhered to. In doing this a man is supposed to pay a fine which is filed by elders or parents from impregnated woman. A court is not involved in this early stage. When a fine has been issued a man pays it straight to the elders from woman side. The moment the fine has been paid, and then all the above protocol is supposed to be followed formally. In this case a man pays a fine in form of cash. In going back again to the protocols of lobola there is usually a ceremony that the side of the woman observes. What they do is that elders or parents of the impregnated woman pretend that their daughter has gone missing. In normal case they know that she is at the home of a man who impregnated her. They usually go to the place of a man, and report that their daughter is missing. In addition to this they tell them that they have been searching for her in nearby bushes because they thought that maybe she has been lost. Now they later say, in the cause of searching her in the bushes, they have been pierced by thorns and bushes, “*mwewayaya, umwana witu umulindu asobela, potwayiye munthundu pakumulonda, loli tutamwaghite, po pakumulonda twalasiwa na muwva*. These words are harmonious in many villages, in fact they are said because the parents of the woman wants to force the man who impregnated their daughter to pay *intoba* which is part

of lobola. When the man goes back in following the protocol the wife stays with him and lobola is paid while the two are already in marriage.

Inheritance (*Impyanika/ Impyana*); Levirate marriage

This is when a brother or sister of the deceased takes over the house of the deceased in form of marriage. This has changed because of the diseases that are cropping the world. However, in some few places people have resisted to modify it the practice, and they still practice the old way of inheritance (*impyanika*).

Inheritance comes in after death of deceased man/woman. If the protocol of lobola was adhered, the relatives of the man/woman don't want to let the woman leave the village where she was staying with the deceased man/woman and they want the woman to raise and look after the children of the man/woman left. In this what happens is that the brother/sister is supposed to take over the house of the deceased. Previously this was happening in contemporary society this rarely.

The process starts just after burying the deceased. People spent the mourning period at the deceased place, with an inclusion of the elders and relatives. Before they start to select a person who shall inherit they first report the issue to the chief in the village (*umwene*) that they will be on inheritance ceremony (*impyanika*) on a particular date. This is formally reported to the chief so that on particular set date the chief should have mobilized people to attend and witness the traditional marriage.

Levirate marriage

The woman of the deceased is brought at the present of the people together with the aunt of the deceased man. Then the elders of the man (*baluko*) make a line while seated on the ground on a small mat (*akatefu*). The mother of the deceased also seats together with the elders. Then the aunt of the deceased is asked to pick anything that belonged to the deceased. Usually they choose one thing that a dead person liked. When the things have been found, they give it to the woman (*umufwile*) who later gives it to the chief (*umwene*). Then she starts choosing amongst the elders/relatives who formed a line, whom she think can inherit her. These days women restrict select the responsible man with at least good characters. Previously it was automatically a brother who was supposed to inherit widow. The woman crawls on the courtyard searching for the man to inherit. If she finds one then

she takes the things given earlier to put where the chosen man is seating. The moment she put the items down ululation starts like it's a weeding. Immediate after this has happened then counseling is given as a newly weeded couples. They counsel them about their welfare, behavior they denounce all unnecessarily behaviors observed in the couples. However in contemporary society a man/woman are not supposed to sleep together or engage in sexual practices, but only providing social support.

Levirate marriage; at the hair shaving ceremony which terminates the mourning for the deceased husband, the widow marriage guardian ascertains whether there are any close relatives of the deceased willing to contract a levirate marriage with the widow. If there are, they may be requested to put sticks in the courtyard of the deceased house in the presence of the widow. When a suitor has been selected, the widow sometime may brew a special beer to mark the conclusion of the negotiation. Therefore, on the same day the levir and the widow may commerce cohabitation. Inheritance protocols are done because of the death of a man. This type of procedure currently across the Lambya's has changed drastically to suit the presence human rights and democratic world the two do not get married due to the dangerous of HIV/AIDS.

Divorce (*Ukusoka*)

This happens when a married man/woman are in disagreement between them. It is not an easy thing for a Lambya man to divorce his wife, than a way a woman can do it. If a woman is divorcing because of the reasons like a man is a drunkard, violent and any sort of abuse a woman goes to court, but before court she meets her guardian, elders and the chief. If all agrees with her she goes to court to open a case to her husband. The procedure for divorce is that the aggravated spouse complains to his/her marriage guardian. The guardian tries to reconcile the partner. If this attempt fails, a further attempt at reconciliation takes place before the village headman. If either party is adamant in the desire for a divorce, the headman refers them to local court. The local court to which the disputes are referred again tries to reconcile the spouses. Normally, divorce will be granted if no amicable settlement can be reached, but the court may refuse to make an order for a divorce unless a serious matrimonial offence has been established against the defendant. The local court may also refuse a divorce if man divorces before little children are grown up; if this happens he is

financed to support the children he has left. He does this by paying an amount ranging from 20,000- 30,000 Mk/ per month.

Pre-arranged marriage (*Kupimbira*)

Kupimbira is the exchange of material wealth for young girls for marriage in advance. A practice that has faced large criticism from the public and the human rights bodies in Malawi. It has been regarded as a bad practice which is fueling the spread of HIV/AIDS, because material wealth was given to young girls while still young. In modern world this is against human rights and democracy. This kind of practice is still being practiced in some parts of Chitipa district though heavily modified to suit the present generation. When I was in the field I spoke to a number of women and men who entered into marriage through the practice. They gave different views about the practice which we will see them later below. According to many human rights activists based in Chitipa and across the country have appealed to the chiefs to end the practice, however it is very difficult to cut the people from their heritage.

From anthropological perspective I would argue that the practice should not end but the involved parties should modify the practice as it has been with other traditions like inheritance whereby no real marriage happens but only sponsorship and other kind of activities happens to show care to the children and wife who has been left as a widower and widow. Therefore, the tradition should be there to symbolize its existence and importance to the people who practice it as part of their heritage.

Pregnancy and birth (*ulwanda, nu kupapa*)

Pregnancy is a joyful period for the woman and her family. If it is the first pregnancy for her, it definitely assures the community that she is able to bear children. Once that is known, her marriage is secured and both relatives treat her with respect. In traditional Lambya village there are always women who are called upon to act as traditional birth attendants when the time of delivery arrives. In Bulambya traditions varies concerning expectant mother. In some Lambya villages the expectant mother has to return to her parents to give birth at their home, while in some places they don't. This is done to prevent

any other accident that may be caused during the delivery which may be attributed to the man; hence being regarded as strangers in the village of the man.

Naming the baby (*Kumwita izina umwana*)

The naming customs for the Lambya, the name is chosen after the baby is born surrounded by a ritual of naming. Among the Lambya there is a naming ritual, which is done when babies are born in a new family. This ritual is attended by members of the family, relatives, neighbors and friends. The ritual varies when the child is the first born to a new family or when just a child has been born to already established family. The first born children in Lambya families are named by their grandmothers (*unyinakulu*) from paternal side and when it is not the first born child the grandmother from maternal side. If either of these is not alive then one of the grannies from one side takes the responsibility of naming the child. When naming a child the grandmother prepares a gift to give the mother of the newly born baby, congratulating her for bringing life on earth. This is a ritual that is observed amongst the Lambya villages across Chitipa and among other ethnic groups in the district. It takes place soon after the mother has been discharged from the health centre. She is not allowed to take the baby out of the house until a name has been given. The message of the newly born baby is carried out to the village by guardians and friends who escorted the pregnant mother to the health centre. The first to receive this kind of message is the father of the baby and the grandparents of the baby in the village; the moment this message has reached the grandmother quickly rushes to see the baby. To see the baby she prepares a gift by cooking some traditional foods like sweet beer. In naming the baby the grandmother takes some water in her mouth. This water is then split to the baby who lies on the small mat (*ichinyasi/akalutefu*) naked. When she starts splitting the water from her mouth she then starts mentioning the name of the child that she has given the baby; (for example, if she wants the name to be Davie she says, *kufuma isiku ili izina lyako we Davie, Davie twakupokela mu chisumuno*; from today your name is Davie, Davie we have welcomed you in this world). Often times the names that are given are names of somebody within the clan or lineages. In some Lambya parts this custom is accompanied by some traditional medicine to protect the child from witches. In Chitipa north, a cockerel accompanies the announcement of the birth of a baby boy while a small hen accompanies the announcement of the birth of a baby girl.