

MACEBO, DYER D.

<2.11.1898>

File 74, pp. 10-11, 67-8.

10 Discussion with Dyer D. Macebo, of Umvoti mission station,¹ at the British consulate, Swaziland,² this 2nd day of November. Dyer is 28 years of age. He speaks English well. His father is of the Tulwane regiment³ (about 65) but is a Christian.

Dyer is of opinion that the word *lobola* has not the sense of 'purchase' about it but of 'gift'. He says in 1869 or 1870 Sir T. Shepstone proclaimed that all marriageable girls in Natal were to be married off at once in accordance with the then existing custom, and that from that time forth succeeding girls were to be paid *lobola* for at the rate of 10 head a piece.⁴ Under the new Native Code⁵ cattle are paid over (*they leave the place where the herd gathers*) at the spot where and on the day when the marriage takes place. They must be complete. If only nine are forthcoming, marriage cannot take place, even though both parties be willing. In the old days marriage took place before even one beast was paid. Prior to the Native Code referred to, marriage took place although the full number of cattle had not been handed over. This was found to cause litigation at a later date, hence the revised regulations. Dyer considers that European legislation has tended to define or crystallize what was indefinite or in a state of flux, or rather it has conveyed a quite false impression of the custom.

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I pointed out that *beads* were the first form of *lobola* in Tongaland. They were an article of value, and a definite quantity seems to have *lobola'd* a girl. Zulus also *lobola'd* with beads, also *neck-rings* and *metal armlets*, before they took to cattle, so whatever was meant in the former kinds of *lobola* should be taken to apply to the last form - cattle. I added that beads, *neck-rings* etc. were things of beauty, and not useful except for ornament. Cattle however were not only valuable but useful. The transition from the aesthetic to the utilitarian ethical view is interesting and deserving of most careful enquiry. Again I said Europeans give the bride a plain gold ring (wedding ring). The sentiments of all men are very much alike in matters so personal as that of marriage. The sentiment which prompts the giving of what is known as *lobola* may be exactly the same as that which applies to the wedding ring. The one is given to the father, the other to his daughter. Both, although articles of value, are tokens or pledges.

Dyer prefers to regard *lobola* as a token or an evidence or a pledge, not as a final transaction between bridegroom and father-in-law, as if there is a complete severance between them, as between

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buyer and seller when the article to be purchased has changed hands. *Lobola*, if it must have something of the sense of purchase about it, may be regarded then as a debt which can never be satisfied or discharged by the son-in-law. In the old days, as D. observes, the *lobola* claim in respect to one particular girl used to go on perhaps from generation to generation; this showed that it was not like ordinary business transactions. I must say I am very much in favour of regarding *lobola* not as in any way implying a purchase, however it may have come to get that meaning in recent years (thanks to European legislation), but merely as a pledge and a recognition by the bridegroom of his being a member of his wife's family or house, as a strengthening of that tie which should exist between a father-in-law and his daughter's husband. Dyer says his father knows a good deal about this custom and can support with fact.

[No doubt the main reason for fixing the *lobola* at 10 head was to create a uniform standard by which claims for *lobola* could be judged. This would greatly facilitate the administration of justice, and save time and therefore expense. But is *lobola* a business transaction and therefore cognizable by courts of justice? Is it a pure case of buying and selling? Should it not be an unwritten social law? No doubt under the old plan it was extremely difficult to get at the truth, and often only the evidence of the old and decrepit could be of any value.]

67 Per Dyer D. Macebo of Groutville, Umvoti. 2.11.1898.

Dyer tells me of the following case of which he has personal knowledge. About five years ago several of the chief Mqawe's⁶ wives who had wished to become Christians wished to join the church. This occurred at the mission station at Inanda.⁷ As Groutville was of the same diocese as Inanda mission station, the matter was taken up by Groutville natives. A meeting was held. They came to the conclusion that it was unjust to prevent the women (two or three, but Dyer does not know exactly) joining their church, which is American Congregational. At Sunday school in church, attended by men of Groutville, the subject was brought up. The teacher (Rev. H.D. Goodenough) gave as his opinion or ruling that the women could not be permitted to join, as they wished to do, as wives under polygamy. They must first leave their husband (be divorced) or they could not be admitted. Were the husband himself to become a Christian with all his wives, he could not be admitted (baptised) unless he separated from all his wives except one, whom he should then marry under Christian rites. The natives exclaimed that the women, on leaving their husband, would lead immoral lives, as they would then have no one to depend upon. Men at Groutville did not push the matter further, as it was one belonging to another place although of the same diocese.

Dyer says he understands that chief Teteleku,⁸ near Pietermaritzburg, has lately become a Christian and been baptized, having thrown over all his 23 wives except one. [Follow this up. He saw this in the Witness during 1898.]

68 Dyer does not agree with Mqayikana⁹ that all or pretty well all *kolwas* (monogamists) are in the habit of practising the *hlobonga* custom; he would only say that some do.

At Groutville, he says, native *kolwas* have been known to relapse or lapse into polygamy. Some were ejected or driven off mission

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lands but others, having title to land, could not be interfered with.

Notes

¹The American Board mission station at Groutville near the mouth of the umVothi river.

²Presumably the consulate at Bremersdorp (Manzini), the administrative centre of Swaziland under the 'protectorate' established by the South African Republic in 1895.

³Formed in the early 1850s of men born in the early 1830s.

⁴On the steps taken by the Natal government in the late 1860s to amend certain African marriage practices see Welsh, Roots of Segregation, pp. 78 ff.

⁵Presumably the Natal Code of Native Law enacted in 1891.

⁶Chief of the Qadi in the Ndwedwe division.

⁷A station of the American Board mission situated north-west of Durban.

⁸Teteleku kaNobanda, chief of the Mpumuza section of the Zondi (Nadi) people, was another of Stuart's informants.

⁹Mqayikana's evidence will appear in a later volume of the Stuart Archive.