DESPERATELY SEEKING STRUCTURES; OR, THE FUTILITY OF FORM WITHOUT CONTENT

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Abstract: A recent discussion of Kwoma asymmetric affinal exchanges (especially those concluding funerals) argues that their importance is such that affinal alliances are created solely in order to bring about such exchanges, a position that evidence from the Daribi and the Chimbu (where asymmetric affinal exchange is also the rule) seems to support; and that only in terms of such concepts as "asymmetry" and "affine" can these customs be explained. The present paper argues to the contrary that these exchanges are more usefully seen as a local expression of social relations—specifically, that affinity is less important than siblingship in the cases considered; and that abstract terms, stripped of their local reference, are without explanatory power.

Résumé: Une discussion récente concernant les échanges asymétriques chez les Kwomas entre partenaires possédant des relations d'affinités (surtout ceux qui concluent les enterrements) prétend que leur importance est telle que des alliances d'affinité sont créées purement pour évoquer de tels échanges—une position qui semble être soutenue par les recherches effectuées chez les Daribis et les Chimbus qui, eux aussi, entreprennent des échanges asymétriques entre partenaires possédant des relations d'affinité. Ce n'est qu'avec l'aide de concepts tels que «asymétrie» et «affinité» que l'on peut expliquer ces coutumes. Cette étude prétend, au contraire, que ces échanges devraient être considérés comme l'expression locale des relations sociales—spécifiquement que dans les cas considérés, l'affinité porte moins d'importance que les relations familiales biologiques; et que des termes abstraits démunis de leur référence locale, manquent de pouvoir explicatif.

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Introduction

Like the "descent theory" that preceded it, the theory of "prescriptive marriage alliance" that developed from Lévi-Strauss's concept of elementary structures implied a totalizing view of society. The analysis of unilineal descent groups, although it stressed the corporate property-holding unit, had incorporated as well the claims and ties of individuals in other units through the notion of complementary filiation, the category of parent-child relation that co-exists with that of descent. Alliance theory shifted the emphasis from the *holding* of property to the exchange of wealth, and from the building of corporate collectives out of individual marriages and relational bonds to the collective or formal provision for marital alliance encoded in kin practice and terminology. But it entailed the social unit or segment, although with a different emphasis, just as surely as descent theory made provision for what Radcliffe-Brown had called "relations of consociation or alliance."

Though it became evident very early that there are serious problems with both approaches in application if not in theory (Schneider 1965), the modelling of subsequent accounts of social structure upon these exemplars carried with it an expectation of societal consistency. The mutual implication of exchange or reciprocity and relationship would seem to be intrinsic to the matter, particularly in its indigenous conceptualization, though the strict definition of descent units or the ability to develop sound conclusions out of the charting of marriage possibilities might be open to serious ethnographic doubts. Pursued independently as major indicators of the "structural" nature of the society or of the effectiveness of one's theoretical orientation, these are likely to prove deceptive.

This is nowhere more evident than in the case of affinity, the creation of social ties or relationships through the conventions and transactions of marriage alone. As the mere artifact of exchange, with no consideration of the other dimensions of its indigenous conceptualization, affinity transforms categories of relationship and their entailed obligations into microvariations of a fairly simplistic theoretical assumption. Affinity entails and is entailed in considerations other than exchange, and these of course differ from one society to another. To ignore these differences is scarcely exemplary science or even acceptable scholarship.

In a recent paper concerning Kwoma death payments (1988), Ross Bowden draws upon the sense of affinity promoted as a mechanism of "alliance" by proponents of the alliance theory. The body of Bowden's argument consists of a description of what he calls an asymmetrical exchange alliance between Kwoma clans, developed along the lines of kin relationship terminology and stated exchange obligations. The rationale for this

description is that affinity provides a setting for asymmetrical transactions whose social enactment amounts to a positive achievement sufficient to the needs of intergroup alliance—compelling socialization, so to speak, by compelling people to act. There is an additional unstated assumption, by no means uncommon among students of Melanesian societies, that "women" and items of exchange may be treated as self-evidently valuable, over and above the local conceptualization of them. References to the "aggressively egalitarian" nature of Kwoma society (Bowden 1988:272), and to the war-chil-tree imagery of lineal nurturance ("feeding its offshoots with sap (*pi*, blood)" ibid.:279) as denoting primarily *affinal prestations*, bespeak an assumption that reciprocity in and of itself constitutes the most important fact of sociality for Kwoma. Bowden extends his argument by implying that two highland societies, those of the Chimbu (ibid.:284) and the Daribi (ibid.:285), might be understood to have "structures" of affinal alliance identical to the Kwoma.

There is little reason to regard these as anything more than gratuitous exemplifications, or indeed to speak of "structure" in any but a perfunctory sense, however. If lineally held and transmitted obligations stemming from a marriage are to be singled out for attention as a structure, virtually the same format could probably be adduced, with only minor variations, for most Melanesian peoples. Generalizing on the basis of similarities in diagrammatic presentation and assumed homologies in usage, Bowden suggests a widespread "but largely neglected" (Bowden 1988:288) structure underlying many lowland and highland societies of Papua New Guinea. Though it is not altogether clear what "structure" might mean in this case, and Bowden's use of evidential material raises serious problems, the term "alliance" here would seem at least ill advised.

Moreover, as Bowden uses it, "alliance" explicitly disavows the traditional sense in which it was introduced by "alliance theorists," beginning with Dumont and Lévi-Strauss, in reference to continuing intermarriage between units (Bowden 1988:272). If this sense of intermarriage is *not* intended, then, it might legitimately be asked what explanatory advantages arise from an application of the term to series of payments initiated by a single marriage. Most human conjugal unions entail series of reciprocal obligations, often enough cross-generational, whether or not we wish to call them "structures." What is explained by dignifying a single marriage as an "alliance" that the word "marriage" does not convey less pretentiously?

If, on the other hand, Bowden intends "alliance" as a diacritical usage, emphasizing "an asymmetrical exchange relationship and wider political alliance" (Bowden 1988:273), resulting from every marriage, then what needs to be explained is not the political advantageousness of marriage (it is, in any case simply assumed), but just why, exactly, a marriage needs to

take the form it does to fulfill this "function." A mere listing of "kinds" of exchanges and the persons involved, with brief glosses as to intent, such as comprises the bulk of Bowden's account (1988:273-282), avoids this issue completely in its implication of the self-evidently "political" nature of all exchanges. In fact, then, Bowden's diacritical construction of "alliance" depends for its explanatory force on the *lack* of a well-defined and coherently presented sense of the indigenous significance of the exchanges. For only in this contingency, in the absence of any rationale more compelling than that of exchange for its own sake, can the diacritical of *alliance* be seen as primary (exchange as an excuse, beyond all else, to involve men with one another).

The Kwoma Example

With respect to the Kwoma, his ethnographic type-case, Bowden's paper provokes objections on related theoretical and ethnographic grounds. The theoretical objection is that there can be no alliance in the absence of social groups consistently defined through time and in the absence of enduring, multigenerational affinal relations between such groups. But before such an objection can be conclusive the ethnographic grounds for objection must be presented: that is, we must show that the Kwoma do in fact lack such social groups and such long-term relationships between groups.

Bowden states that Kwoma marriage is a matter of alliances between patrilines, and that patrilines make up exogamous "clans" which comprise "tribes" (Bowden 1988:273). We find this minimal description of social organization insufficient, if only because none of these terms is defined adequately. Moreover, it differs significantly from our own understanding of Kwoma social organization. To correct the deficiency we propose a brief but, we hope, more useful description based on Williamson's fieldwork.[1]

The Kwoma are a Middle Sepik group numbering about 2000, distributed among some eight or nine villages and hamlets in the Waskuk Hills area near Ambunti. The dietary staple is sago, usually complemented by fish obtained in a sago-fish trade with river women. Kwoma also cultivate a variety of garden crops including sweet potatoes, corn, beans, pumpkins, bananas, sugarcane and yams, the last being the focus of ceremonial activity. Indeed, participation in yam fertility ceremonies (*yena*, *minja* and *nogwi*) forms the only consistent basis for identifying themselves as a social group distinct from culturally similar neighbours. "Kwoma," even if enemies in other contexts, regularly attend each other's yam ceremonies; others, however friendly, do not.

More significant to the present discussion is that Kwoma divide themselves into named units, recruitment to which is patrilineal, in the sense that

each of them traces descent to a male ancestor or to ancestral brothers. These units are important because of their mythological totemic association with a number of cultural or natural items (plants, animals, celestial phenomena, household utensils, etc.). Individuals are named on the basis of totemic relationships or after the characters in myths, recounting of which is largely restricted to members of the descent unit. Thus these most inclusive descent units have metaphysical significance. But they have little immediate social significance. The weak internal sanctions against homicide, for example, are more honoured in the breach than in the observance. These units own no land in common; they have no common or exclusive rights to perform rituals; and (most significant for this argument) they do not regulate marriage. They are neither exogamous nor endogamous.

The units are subdivided, but the principles that govern division vary considerably from one unit to another. At least one of them comprises clearly named sub-groups ranked according to seniority; these are exogamous, but the larger descent unit is not. In other cases, the subdivisions have proper names, but they are not ranked and they are not exogamous. Some of the smaller groupings are further subdivided, and these minor divisions sometimes have proper names; but informants are shaky about the names, which seem in fact to refer to former hamlets and not to descent groups per se (cf. Watson 1983:244ff.). In such cases the patrilineage of four or five generations tends to be the exogamous unit. But even this is not consistent throughout Kwoma society. Informants may voice objections to a marriage on the ground that the spouses were raised in adjacent houses. The houses are adjacent because the families belong to the same larger descent unit, but there is no close genealogical tie between them. Similarly related people who have not been raised in adjacent houses incur no such censure if they marry.

In short, the choice of a suitable spouse is not predictably related to membership in a patrilineal descent unit or in any of its subdivisions. Such indeterminacy may bother the anthropologist, but clearly the Kwoma find no difficulty with it. Each person knows the limits within which sex and marriage are forbidden for himself or herself; how other people define themselves is their business. How they are defined varies from group to group, and co-residence may be as important as common descent in that definition.

The definition of the exogamous group may vary within one unit from time to time also. In other words, a given exogamous unit may for various reasons change its own way of defining itself, and thus include lines and persons previously excluded or exclude those previously included. There are several means to accomplish this, including separation by migration and establishing consanguinity by fictive descent; but the most common is the practice of recognizing a distant "brother" in the distribution of wealth fol-

lowing a bride payment or the like. If the "brother" reciprocates in due course, the two distinct groups become one (exogamous) unit. The sons of these men may decide to ignore the connection and its rationale later on. Given these variations we must conclude that in Kwoma society there is no generic or temporally consistent rule defining exogamous units. The only permissible generalization is that all Kwoma do define exogamous units.

It is possible that by "clan" Bowden means the collectively, currently recognized, exogamous descent group. This would, we feel, be an unusual, but not necessarily unacceptable, use of the word. Since he says (Bowden 1988:273) that 24 clans lived in the Honggwama area he worked in (the site, also, of Williamson's research), this interpretation seems probable, since 12 major subdivisions, representing altogether six of the largest descent units, live there. Nonetheless, given the unusual usage, its application should be defined for the sake of clarity. Furthermore, if this is the case, it is hard to see what distinguishes a patriline from a clan in many cases.

Even granting a temporizing use of terminology, however, Bowden's alliance argument cannot be accepted. It is circular. Alliance assumes the presence of social groups consistently defined through time, regardless of the actual number making up the group at any given time; furthermore, it assumes that marriages between such groups establish specific and enduring relationships. If Bowden is using "clan" in the way we suggest, he is saying that the groups related by alliance are created by those alliances. In other words, the clan is defined in terms of a marriage "alliance," but the alliance is also, he argues, defined in terms of clans. Obviously this cannot be.

The most serious concern is Bowden's perception of the relationship of women to patrilines in Kwoma society. In support of his "alliance" model, he states that women contribute to their own bridewealth (Bowden 1988:274-275), that bridewealth recruits the children of a marriage to the father's line but not the wife to the husband's line (ibid.:287), and that "rights in married sisters and their children are ultimately vested not in individuals but in clans as wholes" (ibid.:285). Each of these statements is, however, open to dispute.

First, our understanding of the organization of Kwoma bridewealth prestations is that neither the husband nor his wife contributes to it: a man's father and his older, married brothers collect and present the wealth on his behalf. Williamson's Kwoma informants made it clear that this must be the case because only upon his being truly married does a man assume the responsibilities of exchange with his mother's and his wife's brothers and their heirs (cf. Burridge 1969:95ff.). A couple is truly married only after the wife's brother has accepted the bridewealth. Prior to that time their status as a couple is deliberately ambiguous. They have been cohabiting, but the husband cannot punish the wife for adultery during this time. They have

also been gardening together, but the wife cultivates crops not only on her husband's land but also on her father's.

This liminal period usually lasts three or four years, during which the couple (unless infertile) begin their family. The children are, as Bowden correctly states (Bowden 1988:287), technically the wife's brother's until the bridewealth has been accepted: Kwoma say that should a separation occur during this period the wife could take her children back to her brother's family and he could raise them as his own. But in fact no one reported this ever happening, and so it remains a technicality.

Bowden's statement that women help their husbands amass shell valuables for prestations (Bowden 1988:274) is true in a sense. But he fails to note an important distinction between prestations a man gives his WB and those he gives his MB. What women really do is amass shell valuables to be presented to their brothers, or to their brothers' heirs (BS, BSS); even an elderly widowed woman makes gifts of this kind to her brother's son or to his son's son. Thus any man has a number of sources of shell valuables: his wife, his sister, his FZ, his FFZ, "brothers" who have received valuables themselves and include him in the distribution, etc. But according to Kwoma ideas, that part of a couple's joint wealth that is produced by the wife alone is therefore at her sole disposition and not her husband's. Consequently we argue that shell prestations between a man and his WB are really gifts from a woman to her brother.

This point would seem to bear out Bowden's argument that bridewealth does not recruit a wife to the husband's line, though it does recruit the children. But in fact it does not bear it out. The bridewealth, and subsequent similar prestations, do ensure that the children become a part of the husband's or father's lineage. Like the Daribi, Kwoma are "matrilineal" at heart, but they say that the payment of bridewealth establishes patriliny. Prestations of shell valuables, however, also recruit the woman who links the two lines, being sister to one and wife to the other. Bowden's mistake here, we suggest, is in interpreting all prestations as means to "alliance." We regard these prestations of inedible shells, which counter a brother's reciprocating gifts of food to his sister, as alienating and distancing. They repudiate the sibling link, for social purposes, in favor of the affinal or spousal link (Williamson 1985). We note here, too, in connection with the previous point, that it is the sister herself, and not her husband, who establishes the distance between her natal and marital patrilines.

Nevertheless, Bowden is right to state (Bowden 1988:275) that a woman's ties with her brother's line continue throughout her lifetime. Indeed, women rarely marry men who live too far away for frequent contact to occur. Married women depend on their brothers for moral support; they are said to flee to them if ill treated, and to ask them to arrange the death by

sorcery of a tiresome husband. A woman usually carries a name belonging to her natal line and she does not change it when she marries. In her old age she is expected to bestow it on a newborn daughter of her brother's line.

Ties with a lineage, however, are not necessarily equivalent to inclusion in the lineage; a point we return to in the section on Daribi. We have mentioned the fact that women define themselves, by means of their prestations, as wives, not sisters. Other facts indicate that a married woman is more firmly incorporated in her husband's line than she is retained in her brother's. As mentioned above, women may not work their fathers' or brothers' garden lands after bridewealth has been paid. A man plants a few nut trees for his daughter on his land, and she has the right to their fruit; but she may not collect it herself. (A married woman's brother's gifts of food may recognize some residual rights that she has in the land, as in the Trobriand *urigubu*, but this is not clear.) A widow is married again (if at all) as if she were a sister of her *husband's* brothers, not of her own brother. Her brothers-in-law, or their sons, will receive a modest gift of shells from her new husband and these two lines will recognize a modified affinal relationship. When she dies, she is buried on her husband's land, not her brothers'.

Bowden asserts, finally, that "rights in married sisters and their children are ultimately vested not in individuals but in clans as wholes" (Bowden 1988:285) and that, because this is so, the fact (which he notes; ibid.:284) that women are at liberty to choose their own brothers does not invalidate his alliance model. This assertion is, of course, subject to the same objections that we made to his application of "alliance" to the Kwoma situation, namely, that Kwoma clans, however one might define them, are not "wholes" in the corporate sense that Bowden implies. Just as women may, and do, choose their brothers,[2] so also do men. When bridewealth is collected or distributed, the brothers of the groom and bride, respectively, contribute or receive (cf. Bowden 1988:274-275). Inclusion in this process means that one is a brother, but the fraternal relationship may be based on consanguinity (but it still needs ratification by such sharing), or it may be mutually recognized by two men who have included each other in such distributions in the past. Undeniably such fabricated brotherhood involves men who share totems, but it does not necessarily implicate their own full brothers at all. Thus the circle of kinship that one recognizes both defines and is defined by the movement of marriage shells. The definition is ad hoc, applicable to that union only, and—as we have said—is not properly identified as alliance.

At a funeral payment that Williamson attended in the early seventies an argument occurred that is instructive in the present instance. The substance of the argument concerned which of two mother's brothers of the deceased was the proper recipient of the bulk of the prestation. (The mother and the

brothers were full siblings.) The donors were giving it to the younger of the brothers, but the elder claimed it was his by right, on the ground that a payment goes to the eldest, who is then responsible for distributing it among his juniors. (This is, in fact, the nominal rule.) The donors, however, countered that they had had little to do with the senior brother or he with them, but that the younger brother had been close to the family. The consensus was that the younger brother was indeed entitled by virtue of his previous attentions to the family, and the elder was shut out. Such a decision presupposes that the "rights" to a person for whom such a payment is made are "vested" in an individual, not a group represented by its senior man.

We agree with Bowden that these prestations of food and shell valuables represent affinal relations of an asymmetric kind, and similar exchanges are found elsewhere in the Sepik region (cf. Forge 1971). Kwoma informants stress verbally the inferiority of the ZH as against the WB, a hierarchy that the exchanges themselves, and the disapproval of sister-exchange marriage or marriage with the true FZD, express as well. But, as we stated in the introduction, Kwoma prestations between affines are not simply either the cause of, or the result of, an asymmetric relationship. Elsewhere Williamson (1985) has argued that these exchanges, besides expressing the asymmetric nature of this relationship, also express the tension inherent in the relations between brothers-in-law and the ambiguity of the woman's status as both wife and sister. The food that the WB presents to the couple is intended to incorporate, to insist on the woman's continuing status as sister; the shells given in return deny the social entitlement of that relationship and establish her status as wife.

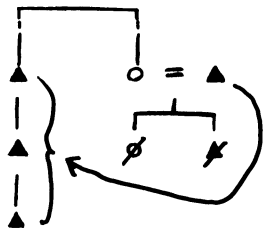
The asymmetric relationship persists, as Bowden says, into the next generation. It differs from the conventional "alliance" relationship, however, in that marriage between the two lines is not allowed until the sister's son's son makes his father's funeral payment to the son's son of the brother (see Fig. 1b); this prestation is said to "finish" the relationship initiated with the marriage, and make possible (though not mandatory) another marriage between the lineages. Furthermore, the relationship between the lineages grows progressively weaker with the generations until that between MMB (or his heir) and ZSS is hardly recognized except by the funeral prestation. Again, we must ask whether any useful purpose is served by calling this increasingly tenuous relationship "alliance."

An Interim Conclusion

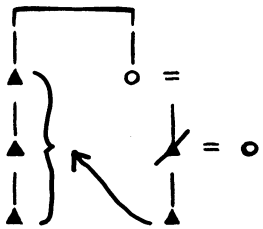
Bowden's answer includes the argument that only by assuming that these exchanges represent affinal alliances can one explain the seemingly anomalous fact that although the mother's brother receives funeral prestations in

all other cases, the brother receives them for a deceased married woman (see Fig. 1). Thus he argues that a woman's marriage effects a transfer of "rights" in her from one lineage to another. But if the exchanges are primarily between individual men (or, as we prefer, between a married couple and the wife's brother), and only secondarily (and nominally) between groups, then it is misleading to speak of transfers of rights in women from MB line to ZD line.

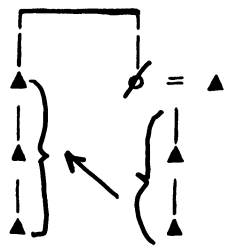
Figure 1
Kwoma Funeral Prestations



a. Scheme of funeral prestations for the death of an unmarried person.



b. Scheme of funeral prestations for the death of a married man.



c. Scheme of funeral prestations for a married woman.

Note: While several donors and recipients are represented in each case, formally only the senior generations participate in prestations.

In fact, an alliance model is not necessary to explain these facts. Instead, we argue that the reason that prestations, whether for marriage or for death, go to a woman's brother and not her mother's brother is that a woman cannot replace her own mother, whereas a man can, and does, replace his own father. That is, one of a man's sons—usually the eldest—takes up his relationships with the sons of his trading partners (*narimboi*; Tokpisin *poroman*), his WB, his MB, and his FMB. Women represent discontinuities in descent: this is, after all, a patrilineal regime.[3] When ego makes a prestation to his FMBSS on the death of his own father he is in effect replicating, for the last time, the original prestation to the wife's brother from the groom and his family, both men in this final prestation replacing their grandfathers. Women, however, do not replace their mothers; therefore they do not give gifts to their mother's brothers. The fact that the payment for an unmarried girl is made to her mother's brother does not contradict this conclusion. Unmarried persons, whether sons or daughters, make no prestations to their mother's brother; their father reciprocates the MB's gifts of food to them with shells at a later time. A son, as mentioned above, assumes this responsibility on his marriage.

A daughter, on the contrary, assumes the responsibility of providing shells for her own brother, whether he is married or not. Because sons can replace fathers, a woman continues to give shells to her brother's son and—should she live long enough—grandson. To the extent that women of younger generations take over roles from senior women, then, a woman becomes her father's sister: the FZ provides shells for her B and BS; the Z provides shells for her B and BS; etc. (cf. the custom cited above, of a woman bestowing her lineage name on her brother's daughter). What emerges from these facts is that the crucial kin-relationship in Kwoma is not that between brothers-in-law, or between spouses, but between siblings of opposite sex (cf. Williamson 1985).

Whatever the interests, strategies or dispositions of the persons involved, the foregoing makes the issue of how the Kwoma (or the ethnographer) might choose to delineate groups as immaterial to the subject of the exchanges as the issue of the need to ally such groups. It is not, then, a matter of how Bowden or anyone else might wish to construe exchanges for theoretical or explanatory advantage, but of how the indigenous people themselves conceptualize and undertake them. In this regard we can perceive a point of analogy between Kwoma and Daribi usage, though it is not that of a "common structure of alliance" in Bowden's terms, but rather the opposite.

The Daribi Example

Over 5000 Daribi speakers occupy the volcanic plateau of Mount Karimui and adjacent limestone country in the southern portion of the Simbu Province of Papua New Guinea.[4] They occupy longhouses, and cultivate sweet-potato as a staple in a regime of bush-fallowing (''slash and burn'') agriculture. Considerations of sharing wealth and meat were traditionally used to demarcate local units and communities[5] in a social regime distinctive for its emphasis on matrilateral payments.

In the Daribi concept of the *pagebidi* (Wagner 1972:49-54) the links of consanguineal substance that extend between a woman and her brothers, and between her offspring through the woman to her brothers, are already present through the fact of exchanging. They are not ''created'' by an act of affinal prestation, but rather pre-exist and motivate the exchanges themselves. Any links of sociality or commonality arising through exchanging are predicated on the pre-existence of these consanguineal ties as a ground condition. Male continuity, substituting a man for his father, a ''given'' in the model of continuing alliance, becomes, like social boundaries, a contingency for continual achievement, and it is ''alliance'' that is given.

Although he cites (and misreads as ''affinity'') an interesting Kwoma parallel, the notion of the ''mother *warchil* tree'' sending out runners (Bowden 1988:278-279), Bowden makes no mention whatever of the *pagebidi* concept. This is hardly surprising, given the fact that this concept condenses and serves to articulate the essentially consanguineal nature of Daribi alliance. Bowden's extensive use of purely theoretical abstractions like ''wife-givers'' (the Daribi idiom is ''sister-giving people'') to replace ''mere local knowledge'' of this sort makes his abstract reconstruction of the Daribi diagrammatically comparable (Bowden 1988:283). But whether his ignorance of the concept is intentional or not, it causes him to gloss over a number of logical steps in the Daribi understanding of social relationships, and then to attribute these steps to failures, inconsistencies and misunderstandings in Wagner's description of the Daribi (cf. Bowden 1988:286-287).

The salience of the term *pagebidi* is that it provides ties of analogic equatability that make it unnecessary for a woman to retain jural membership in her natal clan during her absence in marriage, while at the same time assuring her consanguineal relation. Upon marriage, a Daribi woman's status in her natal clan is assumed by her *pagebidi* (person or persons ''at the base'') by proxy, and it is for this reason that they may come to her assistance or support. Her membership in the husband's clan, secured by bridal payments, severs her personal claim to jural status in her natal clan, but can only do so through the consanguineal ties that allow the *pagebidi* to stand as proxy for her. In effect, the *pagebidi* replace her with respect to the natal

clan. But they can only do this by replacing her original, maternal *pagebidi* with respect to her. Thus they displace the maternal uncle, and do so by virtue of the *pagehaie* (literally "buying the base") payments.

The change of status is marked by turning over a portion of the bridewealth received for her to her maternal kin. Thereafter recruitment payments made on behalf of the children she bears go to those representing her status in her natal clan, by virtue of the consanguineal link with them. It is only because that link is consanguineal (and not affinal, she is not *married* to her *pagebidi*) that her *pagebidi* can stand as proxy for her, and only because her jural membership has been transferred to her husband's clan that it is necessary for them to do so. When, upon her death, the necessity of representing her jural status in her natal clan is abrogated, the role of *pagebidi* reverts to her maternal kin. The fact that her brother receives the death payment tendered at this time, but then relays it to her maternal line, is not an inconsistency as suggested by Bowden (Bowden 1988:289, n. 8), but rather the performative transferral of wealth that marks this transition. Bowden's failure to understand or accept the ongoing consanguineal relationship between a married woman and her brothers also explains his puzzlement (ibid.:289, n. 9) at the Daribi practice of making continual recruitment payments following a marriage.

Here, as in the previous instances, it is the indigenous concept of *pagebidi* that makes abundantly clear just exactly where lineal responsibilities lie, and when and how they may be transferred. Without the cultural and meaningful sense of relationship provided by such indigenous conceptions, the relations involved revert to the bare bones of genealogical description and mechanical modelling, and any sort of fanciful construction may be placed upon them.

We may ask, then, whether Bowden's ostensible "structural similarity" among Kwoma, Chimbu and Daribi does not in fact conceal more than it reveals. For the format of *masiik*, *sobatakep* and *akakep* among the Kwoma has no parallel either among the Chimbu or Daribi. Unlike Tokpisin, idiomatic Daribi never uses the term "head" (*toburu*) for these payments, but draws its imagery from the opposite end of the anatomy, *page*, or "base" (Tokpisin *as bilongen*). The Daribi transitive verb *pagehaie*, to "pay for" or "buy" the "base," is a coherent term, applicable throughout a person's life cycle. It makes explicit reference not to the opportunity afforded for a consociational exchange of wealth, an "alliance" in affinal terms, but to that which is "paid for" or "bought," and it is only in this idiomatic sense of an exchange of wealth for consanguineal substance that "alliance" has any cogency at all in the Daribi context.

Conclusion

The idea of "alliance" as a specifically social function or need is a direct consequence of imagining social segments, units, or groups as autonomous agents in free and open competition (see Wagner 1988:40). If the criteria by which such segments are defined or isolated, however artificially, by the ethnographer, are those of "descent," the implicated necessity of alliance becomes, rather automatically and unreflectively, one of affinity. This is clearly the strategy Bowden has adopted in imputing a "structural similarity" among Kwoma, Daribi and Chimbu alliances. But since the unequivocal definition of social segments by criteria of descent alone is well-nigh impossible, for Kwoma and Daribi at least, and notoriously difficult for many other Melanesian peoples, the setting up of an "alliance" scenario demands a great deal of overlooking and fabrication. Local conceptions must be overridden, and human "personnels" (cf. Watson 1983) broken free of other complex consanguineal associations and relationships.

But if the fabrication of "unilineal descent groups" requires a substantial amount of repression of material, the argument for an ostensibly affinal structuring of alliance necessitates even more. If, as we have shown in both the Daribi and Kwoma cases, a powerfully affective and consanguineally founded relationship between brother and sister underlies, dominates and motivates marital exchanges, virtually the whole indigenous rationale for relationship must be abstracted away in order to "launder" the situation into something that will look like affinity.

If "alliance" is to be retained as a useful concept, in other words, it must be profoundly altered in the direction of indigenous conceptions of gender, identity and relationship. Patriliny, inasmuch as the norm implies replacement of men by other men, is achieved by both Kwoma and Daribi through the displacement of women, and their replacement by proxy. To nullify, ignore or explain away the subtleties of alliance in these indigenous terms is not to explain patriliny, but to ignore it.

Notes

1. Margaret Holmes Williamson conducted fieldwork among the Kwoma from October 1973 to August 1974 and during two months in the summer of 1981. Bowden collaborated during the earlier period of research. Williamson is grateful to the American Council of Learned Societies for a grant that made the 1981 trip possible.
2. For example, one of Williamson's informants mentioned, in a discussion about her family, that she counted as her brother a very distantly related male agnate of her own age in Bangwis Village (into which she had married), because, although her mother had had sons, their father belonged to a different descent group from her own and she could not consider them "real" brothers. But she added that if she had no agnates at all in Bangwis she would turn to her half-brothers.

3. This is the attitude Kwoma explicitly express regarding daughters. Furthermore, Kwoma kinship terms include the equivalences MB = MBS = MBSS (what is conventionally called an Omaha terminology) and ZS = ZSS; which indicate that Kwoma do formally regard a son as the father's replacement (cf. Williamson 1980, which Bowden does not cite). On the other hand, FZ = FZD = FZDD, Z = ZD = ZDD, BD = BDD.
4. Roy Wagner carried out fieldwork among the Daribi in 1963-65 and in 1968-1969.
5. The most comprehensive statements on Daribi kin relationships and social organization (neither cited by Bowden) are Wagner 1977 and Wagner 1988.

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