

Introduction

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This is a book about marriage. Its ethnographic concentration is on lowland South America, and its topical focus is on the bending and breaking of the rules regarding marriage. Marriage rules, and questions of compliance with them, are a venerable topic in social anthropology. We know that marriage universally is buttressed by rules and norms that may be seen as constraining people's choices. But at the same time, there are sociopolitical forces and ecological and demographic conditions that, together with people's desires and preferences, influence their marital decisions. It is that play between structure and agency, between how things ought to be and how they are, that is the subject of this book. This topic has not been studied in a comparative way before in lowland South America. Because it is addressed here in terms of the resolution of the conflict between the socially constraining forces of structure and the individual choices of agency, we aspire to invigorate the topic of marriage in lowland South America and also to contribute to the ongoing debate in anthropology on the relationship between norms and practice.

As both Mansutti Rodríguez and Picon point out in their contributions, the exceptional marriages, the ones that do not fit the norms, have too long been ignored or labeled deviant or "pathological" because they did not confirm to our generalizations or our structural models. However, if our theories are to have any validity, they must account for the full range of marriage phenomena, both rules and practice.

Parallel with the issue of structure vs. agency in lowland South American societies, there is another theme running through this book: the way in which globalization is subverting traditional hierarchies, altering identities, and eroding ancestral marital norms and values—how the forces of modernization alter both structure and practice. In following this theme

we see how the global forces of modernization, expressed in their impact on the Third World, come to work upon so-called Fourth World societies, the indigenous societies that still remain on the planet. It is a vision at once fascinating and more than a little chilling.

There is also an intellectual genealogy behind this book. A generation ago Kenneth Kensinger (1984) published his *Marriage Practices in Lowland South America*, a volume containing 11 essays by well-known South American ethnographers (all but one of them American). With its detailed ethnography and sophisticated analysis, the book was influential among kinship theorists and South Americanists. It broached such subjects as the relations between kin terminology and marriage rules, the distinction between systems having prescribed vs. preferred marriage rules, whether affinal relationships are created by a marriage or are presupposed (and ratified) by a marriage, and so forth. All the authors were aware of the disparity between ideal marriage rules (whether articulated by informants or inferred by anthropologists) and actual marriage practice. Nevertheless, the general thrust of most of the essays was in the direction of elucidating the rules and the way in which they were understood by the people in question.

The present work, like the Kensinger volume, is based on papers originally presented at a symposium. The chapters in this collection were to a considerable extent inspired by Kensinger's compilation, although in their totality they tend to redirect the investigation of marriage in the South American lowlands toward issues less traditional in social anthropology. The thrust here is how individual motives and individual opportunities result in marriage choices that manipulate, circumvent, or outright violate marriage rules. Indeed, some of these essays come close to suggesting that marriage rules themselves are epiphenomenal.

In this introduction, following a description of the themes and theories employed by the contributors, is an appreciation of the levels at which people strategize and sometimes deviate from or ignore marital norms to acquire a spouse. There follows a brief outline of the book's organization.

Theory: Structure and Agency

Identifying common themes in the book is straightforward. All the contributors address the same set of issues. Further, all the kinship and marriage systems described, except for the Canela, have or used to have

elementary kinship systems. Moreover, all the contributors agree that besides taking into consideration the “normative” kinship and marriage systems *sensu stricto*, other social spaces are equally relevant, if not more so, to an understanding of why marriage rules are sometimes ignored or manipulated. Sociopolitical, economic, and demographic forces and personal desires may all influence people’s choice of marriage partner. Crocker, Erickson and colleagues, Chernela, and Valentine and Sims also explicitly include the forces of globalization in their analyses.

One of the most interesting findings is that irrespective of the theoretical orientation of the anthropologists, all the contributors, with the exception of Erickson and colleagues in their study of the Waorani, work toward the same goal and arrive at similar conclusions. They direct their attention to differentiating and exploring the relationship between the kinship and marriage structures as they ought to be and as they are. Significantly, their conclusions converge: in all the cases considered, there are or were mechanisms to impart flexibility to what appear to be rigid and intractable consanguinal and affinal structures.

Rosengren, for instance, sets out to critique Lévi-Strauss’s (1969) formalized analytical models by targeting the way his structural model of reciprocal exchange does not correspond to Matsigenka palpable reality. His is a clarion call to move on from Lévi-Strauss’s grand design and describe “people as intentional subjects situated in the everyday world of their own experience.” He concludes that Matsigenka rules are less a normative system that governs people’s behavior and more a discursive convention. For instance, people who are mutually attracted define each other as cross-cousins. It is true that sometimes Matsigenka marry their cross-cousins, but that is more a consequence of coming into contact with them more frequently than with other single people of their own age than a case of obedience to the rule that the Matsigenka marry their cross-cousins.

Chernela’s subtle and probing analysis describes the consequences of globalization on Kotiria (also known as Wanano) kinship and marriage. Drawing on the insights of Robert Murphy (1972), she examines a number of the major themes that recur throughout this book, such as the dialectic between rules and practice, the relationship between structural intransigence and agency fueled by needs and desires, and the emergence of innovation and practical considerations. If one looks at the formal model of Kotiria kinship and marriage, one might predict that it allows for no flexibility; that the Kotiria are constrained by a narrow range of alterna-

tives when they choose a spouse. Chernela carefully selects case studies that illustrate the range of possibilities actually open to the Kotiria. They must marry cross-cousins, but there are different kinds of cross-cousin.

Mansutti Rodríguez adopts Needham's (1972) scheme of distinguishing three analytical levels: (1) the *jural rules*, referring to ideals held by the studied people themselves—for instance, statements of marriage preference belong in this level; (2) the *statistical-behavioral*, referring to aggregate consequences of individual behavior—for instance, demographic, residential, and marital patterns; and (3) the *categorical*, made up of modes of classification and systems of nomenclature—the relationship terminology is perhaps the archetypical example. Moreover, Mansutti Rodríguez includes a computer simulation to gain time depth in his model, which provides the opportunity to view irregular behavior not as something residual and inexplicable (as could well have been the case when viewing kinship only in terms of structural models) but as necessary to the preservation of the marriage system. He employs Bourdieu's (2005) distinction between official and private kinship and illustrates his approach with apposite case studies.

Silva had the insight that a significant number of Ye'kwana marriages were incestuous, providing the opportunity to hypothesize why this is so (Valentine, this volume). Based on her extensive field data and Sawyer's (2005) and Sims's (2012) theoretical insights, it emerges that although the Ye'kwana have a kinship terminology that articulates unambiguously a set of norms, nevertheless, because each community wishes to retain its population, "wrong marriages" with the parallel cousin are a way of avoiding villagers leaving the village. On their marriage, parallel cousins are immediately reclassified as cross-cousins.

Alès, in a *tour de force*, examines the way Yanomami manipulate the kinship and marriage system. She argues it would be mistaken to use only genealogical relationships for the categorization of marriage practices. There is no exclusive rule. Rather, people select one of several strategies that they apply to a set of structural variations to obtain the outcome they desire. Furthermore, her analysis confirms Silva's observation of the frequency of Ye'kwana "incest"; among the Yanomami nearly one third of marriages are between classificatory brothers and sisters if the appropriate genealogical paths are taken, and not between classificatory husbands and wives.

A significant conclusion can be drawn from these cases. People are nearly always prepared to employ strategies that bend or break the rules to maintain their own ideal conceptual model of the kinship and marriage structure. These strategies reconfigure the elements of the kinship and marriage structure so that their own conceptual model of the structure still has weight. There are many examples of such strategies in this volume. Mansutti Rodríguez's illustration of the link between demography and alterations in the Piaroa kinship nomenclature is one of the most significant. Alès's description of parents deciding the relationship terms of the possible spouses for their children is another. She comments, "It is not about an affinity that would be totally determined mechanically from birth, but rather, one might say, an 'elective affinity.'" The ideal conceptual model is honored even when there is a wide gulf between people's thought world and the "real world" of people manipulating their kinship and marriage system to advance their own ambitions and desires.

However, there is a proviso here. If the intent of the manipulation of the rules is in fact to *change* the rules, rather than simply rearrange the structural elements on which the rules operate, then the consequences can be transformative. This change of strategies occurred when some Curripaco (also known as Baniwa or Wakwénai) women migrated to the town of San Carlos de Río Negro, abbreviated to San Carlos in this volume, and married non-Curripaco men. At that point the women's kinship and marriage system changed fundamentally (Valentine and Sims, this volume).

However, we cannot assume that this shortage of women will irrevocably undermine the ideal conceptual model of those Curripaco living *outside* San Carlos, because as other case studies in this book illustrate, the people of lowland South America may go to enormous lengths to maintain their ideal. Among the Kotiria, when there was a shortage of women, people adopted girls for their sons to marry (Chernela, this volume). Among the Waorani a shortage of men is resolved by polygamy and accepting wide disparities in the ages of the spouses (Erickson et al., this volume). The ideal has survived in the face of enormous outside pressures and constraints.

Valentine and Sims's study of the Baré is different from the other essays in exploring the factors that can account for the transition from an elementary to a complex kinship structure. There is considerable historical material on the village of San Carlos; together with fieldwork on the Baré,

who have lived there for at least two hundred years, the work provides a continuous history of the village from the latter part of the nineteenth century. Lévi-Strauss predicted (1969, 477) that an elementary structure would collapse and a complex one would take its place when certain characteristics were in place. One of these, “the emancipation from relatives and the individualization of the contract,” is remarkably to the point in this case. But as Valentine and Sims demonstrate in their study, there are other significant factors he failed to include.

In the cases of the Canela and the Waorani, Crocker and Erickson and colleagues describe how the forces of globalization, and its effects on the social forms of kinship, have particularly undermined the elders’ control of the sexual practices of the young and reduced their influence over choice of marriage partners. As elders’ authority has diminished, there have been more extra-marital pregnancies, more marriages for love, and fewer alliances between families.

The next section provides a description of the strategies used to manipulate the norms of marriage, starting with individual strategies and moving to more collective efforts.

Strategies

Individual Efforts

Frequently the genealogical relationships between two people in small-scale societies can be “read” along different routes. The ways they are interpreted, individually or collectively, are signs of the locus of political control. For example, Mansutti Rodríguez describes the case of a Piaroa man who entered a secret adulterous relationship, which along one route was between cross-cousins, whereas along another it was incestuous. The circumstances of his love affair, carried on in his wife’s village, decided that their relationship was judged harshly and considered incestuous.

Alès’s penetrating analysis of Yanomami strategies and manipulations through the genealogical route-ways, activating some while blocking others, illustrates the marital options a person faces throughout life. Agreeing with Chernela, Mansutti Rodríguez, and Picon, she cogently argues that “marriage practices should not be interpreted as the application of an exclusive rule but as a set of structural variations as evidenced by the diversified strategies of the social actors.” For instance, she describes