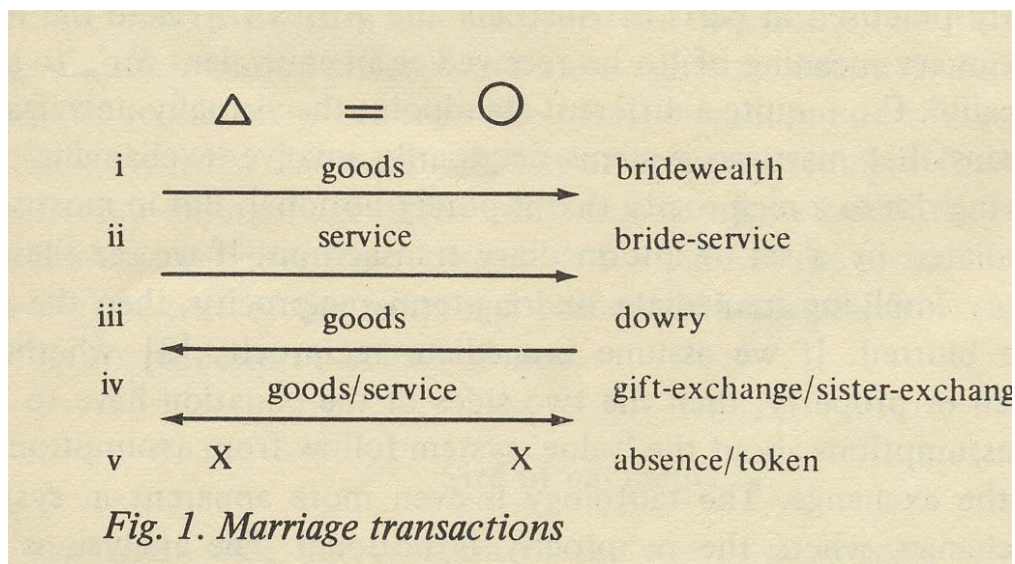


## BRIDEWEALTH AND DOWRY IN AFRICA AND EURASIA

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Both bridewealth and dowry involve the transmission of property at marriage. Whatever 'symbolic' aspects mark these transfers, they also have their economic functions, not primarily as intermediaries in a purchase, but as ways of redistributing property. Hence they must always be seen in the context of the wider movement of property and its exploitation for productive and other social purposes. Viewed in this way, these differences in marriage transaction have to be linked with other aspects of social organisation, particularly the economy.

There are three aspects of the institutions of bridewealth and dowry which I want to discuss, namely, their correlations, distribution and classification; all three are inextricably involved and logically one ought to begin with the last. The categories used by most writers (and which turn up in the *Ethnographic Atlas*) are the following: bridewealth, dowry, bride-service, gift exchange, token payments, sister exchange and absence of gifts. We may put in crude diagrammatical form what is often assumed to be the relationship between these major forms of marriage transaction as follows:



A little thought suggests that this scheme, and particularly the 'opposition' between dowry and bridewealth, is quite misleading. The first discrimination to make has to do with dowry, rather than bridewealth, for there are circumstances in which the two are confused. Dowry can be seen as a type of pre-mortem inheritance to the bride, bridewealth as a transaction between the kin of the groom and the kin of the bride. [1]

But in a good number of societies in Europe and Asia, the marriage prestations are made by the groom or his kin, and are consequently often classified as bridewealth (or brideprice). But the ultimate recipient of these gifts is the bride and not her kin. It is true that the gifts from the groom sometimes go first to the girl's father, who may indeed take a cut (in this respect there is a continuum); but the bulk goes to the bride herself and thus forms part of a joint (or sometimes separate) conjugal fund rather than a circulating societal one. Rather than employ the misleading

term bridewealth (or brideprice), which has been used for example to translate the Sanskrit word *asura*, I would refer to such transactions as 'indirect dowry'. Mayne refers to *asura* as 'marriage by purchase'; it is difficult to reconstruct the institutions that existed alongside the laws of Manu, but clearly part of the transaction went to the bride herself (1892: 80 ff.) and so was more nearly akin to dowry.

## **BRIDEWEALTH**

Even if we confine our discussion to the passage of goods or services from the kin of the bride to the kin of the groom, there are many significant differences among these prestations; the term bridewealth has been used to cover a set of transactions each of which has very different implications for social structure. However, this range of institutional variation and its economic implications have been obscured by a loose application of so-called exchange theory to marriage. That marriage in simple societies involves an 'exchange' is a somewhat vague notion that has often confused the analysis of social systems. The extreme case is the exchange of sisters', formerly practised in parts of Australia and Africa.[2] Here the term has the precise dictionary meaning of 'to be received as an equivalent for', 'to give and receive reciprocally'. From quite a different standpoint the virtually universal incest prohibition means that marriage systems necessarily involve 'exchanging' siblings for spouses, giving rise to a reciprocity that is purely notional. But in most societies marriage is mediated by a set of intermediary transactions. If we see these transactions as simply implying immediate or long-term reciprocity, then the analysis is likely to be blurred. If we assume immediate reciprocity, [3] whether with regard to women or property, then the two sides of the equation have to balance by definition: assumptions about the 'value' system follow from assumptions about the nature of the exchange. The tautology is even more apparent in systems of generalized exchange, where the reciprocity is notional. The analysis is further limited if one regards the passage of property simply as a symbol of the transfer of rights, for then the nature of the objects handed over (the *traditio*) is of little importance. What matters is that some object has been publicly transferred in order to establish the woman as a wife and the man as a husband. Neither of these approaches are wrong; both are inadequate. For they tend to lead to a neglect of the differences within those payments described as bridewealth (or indeed dowry, though here the problem is somewhat different), and consequently to a neglect of the relationship of these differences to the rest of the social system, in particular the economy. I refer not only to the problem of the indirect dowry, which accounts for much so-called bridewealth (or brideprice) in Eurasia. In addition, there are important distinctions to be made in terms of the size of the payments, their material content, the personnel involved in the giving and receiving and the use made of the objects received. We also need to consider three other factors, whether the payments are returnable at death or divorce, whether they are fixed or variable, and when they are payable. I can put the point in more concrete terms by comparing the 'marriage payments' among the LoWiili and the Gonja of northern Ghana. The Gonja payment consists of a minimal amount of 12 shillings and 12 kola; it is small by any standards, though it is supplemented by courting and greeting gifts to the future bride and to her parents; and nowadays the expenses of the wedding itself have increased considerably. Among the LoWiili, the transactions flow in the same direction; there is a small payment of 350 cowries which is said to be all that is needed to 'legalize' the union. In addition payments amounting to some 3 cows, 1 goat and 20,000 cowrie shells should be made during the lifetime of the marriage, the last of these at the time the bride joins her husband. If they are not forth coming at the right time, the bride's father (or his kin) will try to persuade her to return home until the husband meets his obligations. [4] Among the Gonja the transactions are non-returnable in the case of divorce; among the Lowiili, all are returnable.

There are two sorts of implications that arise from these differences. One has to do with the kind of rights in the bride that are acquired by the transfer; 'marriage' is not an undifferentiated concept and these rights are distinctly variable. The other concerns the relationship between the bride or groom and those who provide or receive the payments. The accumulation of property required for the transactions may well delay the marriage of the individual on whose behalf they are made. Such may be the case whether the transactions are part of the process of devolution (as with dowry) or part of the reciprocal process of bridewealth whereby the receipts for women are paid out on behalf of men.

### **Size of payments**

Let me deal first with the question of the size of payments related to rights. In Africa, the relative size of payment is in a general sense linked with the quantum of rights transferred. In systems of matrilineal descent groups, where rights in a woman's procreative powers remain in the hands of her natal lineage, the amounts are comparatively less than in other societies.[5] Indeed the actors themselves recognize the connection between a substantial bridewealth and agnatic descent; one constantly hears the comment in Nyasaland that "with us a son doesn't inherit because we don't *loola* (the local form of *lobola*) our wives". As Mair points out these statements do not mean that those who abandon high bridewealth necessarily abandon paternal filiation (1953: 73), but such a change does seem to be associated with a modification (or a difference) in the organization of kin groups. Indeed, H. Schneider sees social organization in East Africa as having been influenced in the opposite direction by the increasing accumulation of bridewealth. The number of societies in which there are matrilineal descent groups and a bridewealth consisting of livestock is 'statistically quite insignificant' (1970: 145). On the other hand, with the appearance of such a bridewealth, we find the levitate, virilocal marriage, important patrilineages and the disappearance of bride-service. 'Ultimately marriage becomes almost undissolvable' when we reach a figure of twenty head of cattle or their livestock equivalent. The Turu of Tanzania have travelled along this road, further than the Irimba and Mbugwe but not as far as the Gogo. 'That some significant long-term shifts are or were occurring in these societies is apparent. Central to the change was the tendency to accumulate livestock. It may even be that the growth of segmentary societies based on livestock is one of two major directions towards change in traditional Africa, the other occurring among relatively poor people without livestock **C** being a move in the direction of states' (1970: 146).

It should also be added that with matrilineal descent groups the payments are not always low. Among the LoDagaa the opposite appeared to be the case; the greater the emphasis on matrilineal groups, the higher the payment (Goody 1970b: 451). In this context the insistence on high payments seemed to be related to a reluctance to allow women to marry out (into the groups giving less emphasis to matriliney) and a reluctance to allow women to leave the natal home.

In other words, it was a payment to discourage bride-removal; or to put it another way, to encourage initial farm-service on the part of the husband. Women are used as bait to attract the economic services of men.[6] In bilateral societies in Africa, the payments also seem to be low.[7] This is certainly true of the Lozi of Zambia, and in West Africa low payments are associated with a certain type of centralized state, of which Gonja is one.

Although this group of states, which includes the Hausa and the Mossi, emphasizes paternal succession to office and has dynasties based upon the agnatic line, the organization of descent groups is very different not only from acephalous 'tribes' like the Tallensi and the Nuer but also from centralized states like the Zulu and Ashanti. Some of these states have been influenced by

Islam and hence tend towards the dowry rather than bridewealth (e.g. Hausa and Nupe). In addition the wedding itself may involve some further expense. Weddings are also associated with the Islamic tradition; indeed these rites *de passage* tend to receive more ceremonial elaboration in dowry systems than elsewhere, for they celebrate the establishment of a conjugal fund. [8] In Nigeria the amounts involved are increasing under modern conditions and have become a substantial factor in the groom's calculations. But although the amounts have increased, the payments are of very different character from the bridewealth of East and South Africa.

### Use

I refer here to the use and destination of the transactions. Money spent on wedding expenses, like money indirectly contributed by the groom to the endowment of the bride, serves different ends from the circulating pool of resources we speak of as bridewealth. Bridewealth is not to be consumed in the course of the celebrations, nor is it handed to the wife; it goes to the bride's male kin (typically brothers) in order that they can themselves take a wife. Indeed it involves a kind of rationing system. What goes out for a bride has to come in for a sister. If the payments are small, the egalitarian distribution of spouses could be disturbed. [9] As Wagner remarks of the Luhya, the transfer of marriage cattle primarily serves as a regulator of marriages and not as a means of increasing the father's wealth.[ 10] To achieve this end an important aim is not to let the amount received fall below the effective rate. Of the Gusii, Mayer remarks, 'Every father fears being left in the lurch by finding that the bridewealth which he has accepted for his daughter will not suffice to get him a daughter-in-law; therefore he is always on the look out for any signs of a rise in the rate, and tends to raise his demands whenever he hears of other fathers doing so. This means in general terms, that individual cases of over-payment produce a general rise in the rate all round' (1950: 19).

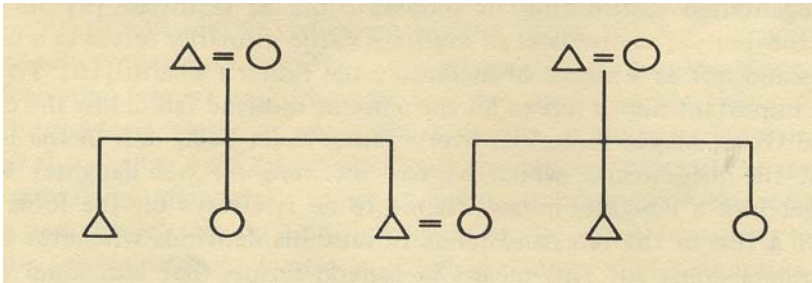
Clearly the balancing can best be achieved if the items have little exchange value outside marriage transactions. Such is the case with cattle in the savannah areas of Africa. Of the Lobedu, Krige writes that: 'cattle coming in as bride-price are not supposed to be used for any other purpose than marriage for, unlike **the Zulu who kept large herds, constantly replenished in the old days by raids against neighbours**, most Lobedu families do not possess cattle except for short periods of time' (1964: 160). In pastoral societies, such as the Zulu, livestock have of course a critical part to play in subsistence and are but rarely exchanged for other items of value (no more than is land in many agricultural societies in Africa). In farming economies, they are usually stores of wealth. While lesser objects can be exchanged into cattle (usually among kin), it is more difficult to change out, except through sacrifice. If cattle transactions are largely confined to marriage, then the dependence of the groom on a similar transaction is overwhelming. This is so even if the payments are freely exchangeable (like cowries, hoes or iron bars) but large in terms of the individual's capacity to accumulate, an index of which is their size relative to the average yearly income per head. In this case a man is again highly dependent upon 'sisters' for bringing the wealth and 'fathers' for distributing it.

The effect is to reinforce the authority of the father and emphasize the tie with the sister.

The role of the father is clear. The authority of the older generation is linked to the extent to which the young are dependent on them for marriage cattle or the equivalent. The dependence will extend in some measure to all contributing kinsfolk, which may include maternal as well as paternal kin.[ 11 ]

## The givers and receivers

This point concerning the range of contributors raises another difficulty about the assumptions behind the diagrammatical representation of marriage transactions given in Fig. 1. It turns out to have the same sort of failings as many 'models' (read 'diagrams') of cross-cousin marriage (XCM); it lets one man or woman stand for the sibling group, or, worse still, for the entire kin group. If we increase the number of roles laid out in the model (the failure to do which is a defect of much discussion about the mother's brother), we see where the problems arise.



A few more roles are now included, but even this increase would be insufficient to permit a proper examination of bridewealth transactions in some African societies; for the Nuer, we would clearly have to introduce many more roles in the same and senior generation to ego, both inside and outside the patrilineal descent groups of the bride and groom. Indeed for some societies it has been argued that marriage sets up certain kinds of debt which can only be repaid at the next generation, by means of a return of spouses (XCM), or by remitting a proportion of the bridewealth received for the daughters of the marriage, or possibly by the sister's son's seizure of the property of his mother's brother (see M. Harris 1968), though in this latter case the compensation would appear to be travelling in the wrong, or anyhow the reverse, direction. In all these cases we have to include further roles and further elements of the network of transactions, if we are to understand the pattern of marriage prestations.

In sum, transactions in the same direction may be destined for different social persons. In Africa, bridewealth does not go to the bride, but to her kin; we recognize this when, rightly or wrongly, we speak of terms of compensation or recompense (Radcliffe -Brown 1950: 50), or even bride-price; it is wealth for, not to, the bride. On the other hand, dowry, in the usual sense, does not go to her kin, but to the bride herself, sometimes to the husband (at least for safekeeping) or even to both spouses jointly. Bridewealth and dowry then are very far from being mirror opposites. Indeed, the mirror opposite of bridewealth would be groomwealth; and of bride-service, groom-service. But there is little to be put in these two boxes by way of actual cases, except perhaps the payments for the 'borrowed man' of the Menangkabau of Sumatra (or, from one point of view, the urugubu of the Trobriands of Melanesia).

However, it is also necessary to remember that in Africa the payment was usually the responsibility of much more immediate kin; of the Hehe, Brown (1932) writes that in practice a man did not look for assistance to relatives more distant than his father and his mother's brother, and the same can be said of the majority of African peoples; the range of contributors and recipients is characteristically narrow, usually limited to members of the unit of production (the

farming or herding group) but often to the unit of consumption, the children of one mother. This unit, whose existence is dependent upon polygyny (at least in its serial form), is of central importance in the fission of domestic groups (Fortes 1949; Goody 1973a) and in the establishment of new productive units, as when as in the more subtle solidarities of human life; and it also forms the focus for the distribution of male property under what Gluckman has called the 'house-property complex'. [12] In many cases the same group serves as the focus for the allocation of bridewealth between males and females. That is to say, the sister's bridewealth is used for the brother's wife. But even outside the group of uterine siblings, the mutual dependence on bridewealth may lead to the institution of 'cattle-linked siblings', as practised by the Lobedu, where the continuing debt of the brother to the sister allows her to claim his daughter as a bride for her son (MBD marriage). In this case prescriptive matrilineal cross-cousin marriage is to be seen as a continuation of the relationship between siblings at the succeeding generation rather than as an aspect of the affinal relationship between lineages.[13] Here it is clearly associated with the type of bridewealth payment and the cattle-linked sibling. The ideal is for every man to marry a daughter of the actual woman with whose cattle his father obtained a wife. The sister in question has the right to demand a son of her brother to be her daughter's husband; each is said to be 'born for' the other.

If bridewealth is both high and held within a small domestic unit, how are the inequalities of childbirth evened out? For in the family lottery a balanced combination of males and females will appear in much less than 50% of the families that have children (and there are often very high proportions that do not).

It is clear that in no case is a family with an odd number of children going to be in balance. Of those families with children, over 50% will fall in this category. With regard to families that are balanced in terms of numbers, one half of all two child families will be in sexual balance and 6/16 of the four child ones. In other words, not a large proportion of families are going to display the balance desiderated by many town-dwellers in western Europe and equally by those requiring a balance for the purpose of bridewealth or sister-exchange.[14] What strategy does one adopt when one has daughters but no sons? One answer is that in polygynous societies, a man continues to hope. And in extremity a man may some times use the daughter's bridewealth to marry a wife in order to bear a son.[15]

The influence of marriage payments on family composition is made quite explicit in Elechi Amadi's novel, *The Concubine*.

Wolu, Madume's only wife, bore him four daughters - a most annoying thing, despite the dowries (i.e. bridewealth) he knew he would collect when they got married. But who would bear his name when he died? The thought of his elder brother's sons inheriting his houses and lands filled him with dismay. But there was enough time to marry another wife and the problem did not bother him unduly. Moreover, his daughters' marriages would provide him with the money for another wife.

Here we have illustrated an inheritance system that excludes close women in favour of distant males, which as we shall see, is connected with the payment of bridewealth. On the other hand, the position of women under such a system is in some ways better than under one of dowry; for the disabilities of daughters in terms of the patrilineal transmission of property and office are mitigated by what they bring to the family at their marriage. Their bridewealth can be used to obtain a wife for a brother, and in some societies even their father can employ that property to marry himself another wife, as in Madume's case. Such a strategy is based upon polygyny, and

the example illustrates clearly the situation in which a man may seek another wife in order to supplement his holding of children. As a result of polygyny, the problem of imbalance is always a temporary one for any male. Nevertheless the present composition of the family (the existential family) must bear upon people's decisions about marriage. The second of two brothers may have to delay his marriage while waiting for bridewealth cattle. This delay may make him more likely to enter into a 'consensual' or 'alternative' union, where these exist; or in more recent times, it may make him more likely to leave as a migrant labourer. In other words the lack of a bridewealth payment could lead to similar kinds of action to those found under Eurasian conditions and dictated by the shortage of land, that is, the second son entering into a fili-centric union or leaving the countryside to swell the growing population of the towns.[16] Equally the father of several daughters, while traditionally in Africa he would have found difficulty in utilizing his assets to hire labour, could use them to help pay for farming parties; alternatively he can afford to be generous towards a kinsman who wished to marry his daughter, e.g. in a mother's brother's daughter marriage, and who might possibly come to live with him. The surplus of wealth is not difficult to deal with; it helps compensate a couple for the deficit in males who would have provided some insurance in old age. The surplus of sons is less easy. Here, a man may have to borrow bridewealth from near agnates more fortunately placed. He may secure such a loan by mortgaging the bridewealth of his future daughters, as when a Lobedu who had no sister would go to a maternal or affinal relative, or to a friend or even a stranger who had cattle, saying 'Ge no khuru - I have a knee', in reference to his procreative powers, thus pledging himself to send an as yet unborn daughter in marriage (Kriger 1964: 162). Or he may have to save out of current earnings, which means increasing production or lowering consumption. There is rarely any difficulty in Africa, even today in many places, in finding extra land to bring under cultivation. With a stable population the surplus of sons may itself lead to a redistribution of existing land within the lineage, the additional sons in one family being balanced by a deficit in others. But one could also proceed by cutting down expenditure, especially on sacrifices. An alternative at the present day is for a man to engage in wage labour in order to acquire the necessary capital; just as women in an urban situation may acquire capital through selling sex in order to free themselves from the marriage bond.[ 17]

But the relationship between high bridewealth and labour migration goes beyond the problem of the disadvantaged son. In Northern Ghana it is peoples with a high bridewealth payment that have the highest rates of labour migration (Table 1).[18] Among the Konkomba, wealth gained in wage labour is used for marriage payments (Tait 1961: 31). But the Konkomba are a particular case, having mortgaged their own women by a tight system of infant betrothal for girls; if they want to marry young, they have to import wives from outside. This propensity of bridewealth systems to lead to male migration into the towns has an interesting corollary in dowry systems. Where considerations of status and honour dictate that a woman has to acquire a certain measure of property before she can get married, the opposite kind of migration may result. In many parts of Europe, young women moved into the households of other people in order to become domestic servants until the time for their marriage came along.

Once again girls from households with surplus females were likely to move into households with a corresponding deficit; servants, Berkner has argued, were to some extent children substitutes (1972). But women also moved into towns, in order to accumulate property for their dowry. In this connection, the intriguing suggestion has been made that the late marriage age of European women, combined with the necessity of accumulating property for their marriage, may have been a significant factor in both the supply and the demand for goods in the early stages of industrialization in western Europe (Hajnal 1965).[19]

Table 1. Marriage transactions and migration in Northern Ghana (from 1960 census)

<i>People</i>	<i>Total pop. in Ghana</i>	<i>Enumerated in non-natal regions</i>	<i>% Migrants</i>	<i>Marriage payments</i>
<i>A. Acephalous</i>				
Konkomba	110,150	13,860	13	High(7)
Frafra(1)	242,880	26,580	11	High
Kusasi	121,610	13,870	11	High
Builsa	62,620	7,260	12	High
Kasena(2)	78,210	16,860	21	High
LoDagaa(3)	239,230	30,460	13	High
<i>B. Centralized</i>				
Gonja	62,700	4,880	8.0	Low
Dagomba	217,640	23,960	11.0(5)	Low
Mamprusi	58,710	3,300	6.0	Low
Wala	47,200	5,850	12.0(6)	Low
Vagala(4)	2,230	20	0.9	Low
Degha(4)	8,830	390	4.5	Low

(1) Includes Tallensi, Nankanse, Namnam.

(2) Includes Isala, Awuna.

(3) Includes LoWiili, LoBirifor, LoDagaba, Dagaba.

(4) Commoner groups within centralized states.

(5) Of the 'Dagomba' population, nearly half live in the towns of Yendi and Tamale (including Tamale rural).

(6) The bulk from Wa town.

(7) Marriage was sometimes by exchange, though more usually by child betrothal.

The balancing out has an interesting link with the age of marriage. It has been argued that dowry delays marriage. When the daughter takes her portion, the familial enterprise has to be partly dismembered, whereas the marriage of men affects the fund in a similar way only if the property has to be handed on to the next generation at the time of the marriage.[20] Friedl describes one situation of the 'delayed daughter' in rural Greece in the following terms: 'Besides the property costs of the dowry, a farmer loses the labour of his daughter both on the farm and in the household. If he has no farming son who can bring in a wife, or has only a young son who will not be ready to marry for several years, and a single daughter, this cost may be considered great enough to delay the marriage of the girl. If a man has one daughter left at home and a wife who is ill, this may again delay the girl's marriage, for the cost of losing her services is too great. Finally there is a psychic cost to the parents, particularly to a mother, at the marriage of a daughter. She loses the companionship of a friend, confidante, and working partner. Since, among the more prosperous farmers, girls marry increasingly late i.e. between twenty-five and thirty, mothers have many years of continuing co-operation in the house and fields with grown daughters, and the wrench of parting is seriously felt. They commonly speak longingly of how much they miss their absent daughters' (1963: 122).

Where substantial bridewealth changes hands, the opposite effect occurs. As Mair points out, 'When cattle payments are made, the marriage of girls tends to be early for the same reason that that of men is late - that a girl's marriage increases her father's herd while that of a young man



diminishes it' (1963: 56). Among the Chagga and Luhya, men chafe at the delay, girls at the speed.

Just as with dowry, there are other factors affecting age at marriage that operate in a contrary direction. In dowry systems, a man may want to confirm an advantageous match as soon as possible, and hence a girl, and possibly the boy, may be betrothed while they are still children. The Brahman rule of pre-puberty marriage has been attributed to the concern to fix the partners of the woman permanently in a hierarchy of castes (Yalman 1963); the same argument would apply to other considerations of status. In bridewealth systems, a man may be in a hurry to see his sons beget descendants, while a girl's marriage may be delayed if the mother is still bearing children. Nevertheless, there is an interesting link between economic calculation and the prevalence of plural marriage. Polygyny, which is so widespread a feature of African marriage, is made possible largely by the differential marriage age, early for girls, later for men.[21] Bridewealth and polygyny play into each other's hands. Though there are high rates of polygyny in Africa even where marriage payments are low, the two institutions appear to reinforce one another. It should also be noted that in Burundi, where marriage payments are low and the age of marriage roughly equal for both sexes, polygyny is rare (van de Walle 1968: 206).

I have examined certain variables involved in marriage payments made by the groom and his kin to the kin of the bride, especially the relative size of the payments, the personnel involved and the use to which the goods are put. There are three other outstanding factors to consider, namely content, returnability and variability.

### **Content**

One main division here is between perishable and non-perishable goods. Clearly the former are less likely to form the basis for the on-going series of transactions we regard as intrinsic to 'bridewealth proper'; they are more likely to be found as contributions to wedding expenses, to be consumed in the course of the ceremony itself (e.g. Forde 1951). They may of course be stored in the form of debts, but it is a debt specific to the bride's kin and therefore implies the particularized kind of exchange of spouses found in those forms of marriage that prescribe continuing transactions between a pair of 'groups'. If we set aside the exchange systems of certain acephalous societies in West Africa, it seems doubtful if these types of marriage, which include prescriptive bilateral cross-cousin marriage, as well as the probably non-existent patrilineal form, are ever found in Africa, at least as 'elementary' structures.

Non-perishable goods that occur widely in African marriage payments are livestock, shells (cowries) and metal objects (especially hoes). All these are objects of fairly generalized exchange, though large livestock has certain inherent limitations, especially when it comes to 'exchanging down' (Steiner 1954). But bridewealth transactions are above all typified by the very substantial cattle payments made by the patrilineal peoples of the savannah country in Eastern and Southern Africa, as well as in the sub-Saharan region of West Africa. Here the transfer of cattle in marriage is linked to the acquisition of a wife but above all to the production of children; hence the strength of those commonly quoted sayings, 'bridewealth is childwealth', or 'the cattle are where the children are not'.

In this area, cattle are not only a store of value; among pastoral peoples they constitute the basic means of production. As a result, cattle in bridewealth play a similar role to land in dowry (e.g. in Ceylon) except that being mobile and more easily divisible, the possession of livestock does not lead to quite the same pressure for status preservation and endogamy as occurs in systems of

intensive farming. 'Fields on the hoof' are also a less steady source of livelihood than the soil. Moreover, the dependence on others for defence against raiders, for the protection of pastures and for the replenishment of herds struck by disease, tends to lead to a greater reliance on the insurance offered by kinship ties and hence a greater 'corporateness'. 'A spring blizzard', writes Ekvall of Tibet, 'can leave the pastoralist with no herds at all - making him a virtual pauper without "fields"' (1968: 31). His survival depends upon his ties with others.

### **Returnability**

The returnability of payments in the event of the dissolution of the marriage is clearly linked to their use (and hence their size and content). Payments involving the transfer of rights in the fertility of the woman (rights in genetricem) are likely to be spread over a period of years and to be completed only after the birth of children. Similarly, the premature dissolution of the marriage means that payments usually have to be repaid; since repayment would disrupt the economy of the woman's natal household, she will be persuaded to rejoin her husband or enter into a new marriage. High returnable payments of this kind lead to a pressure on a woman to remain a wife rather than return to live as a sister. Consequently they tend to be associated with the situation whereby a widow remains 'married' to her husband's kin, either as a leviratic spouse or as an inherited widow. [22] Whereas the kind of 'terminal separation' described for the Gonja (E.N. Goody 1962; 1973) is to be associated with the low, non-returnable payments, where the residence of a wife is of no 'material' concern to her kin. [23]

### **Variability**

Bridewealth payments are often fixed amounts; this is so for the Kipsigis and Gush of East Africa, and it is the case for many West African peoples. On the other hand the Luo vary the standard rate and the Nuer permit haggling in the byre. But in both cases there is a close connection between the marriages of men and women. For standard payments seem to fluctuate in relation to the cattle population, so that an increase in the herds does not lead to cheap marriages. While the bargaining process usually works out in such a way that only one marriage can be made from one herd at one time (Mair 1953: 6).[24]

Standard bridewealth has an effect quite opposite to dowry, which is intrinsically variable. For it means that, other things being equal, a cat or a commoner may look at a king. In terms of property, one man or woman is as good as another. Hence the system permits heterogamy (for which out-marriage is a prerequisite), while the dowry on the other hand inhibits such dispersion of marriage partners, even though property may be used to compensate for the absence of other attributes.

But bridewealth is not always fixed; there are some variations that depend on status. LoDagaa chiefs who emerged as the result of the white man's government, built up large holdings of wives, though they certainly did not send to their in-laws the full amount of the bridewealth; they delayed payments after the first, and their in-laws were afraid or unable to press them for the remainder (Goody 1969a). As far as the daughters of high-status men are concerned, they tend to get marked up rather than down, as was the case with the daughters of Ashanti royals (Rattray 1927). In both ways the upper status groups gained (on the swings as well as on the roundabouts, as givers as well as receivers). Such tendencies are no doubt universal concomitants of status differentiation, but they played relatively little part in traditional Africa. In acephalous societies like the LoDagaa, such differentiation as existed arose with the advent of chiefs; among the Ashanti, the mark-up was small and the royal daughters even took slaves as husbands. On the

other hand selection is certainly playing an increasing part under modern conditions, especially as traditional payments and services (where such things persist) tend to get transmuted into cash which is usually derived directly from the groom's earnings. In this process of computation, there is plenty of room for bargaining, and hence for the introduction of inequalities. In present-day Africa, the fact that like does tend to marry like (and to demand that like be reproduced in their offspring) tends to reinforce a new type of stratification, a system that one may be tempted to designate as class. But this is undoubtedly a new development. [25] And whereas bridewealth transactions seem formerly to have varied (if at all) with the status of the girl, nowadays it is the status of both partners (a 'match') that is involved.

Finally, in view of the later argument, it is essential to stress that in economic terms bridewealth has a leveling function. An extreme case is that of the Lobedu, of whom Krige writes, 'The society is remarkably egalitarian and there is no concentration of wealth in the hands of the ruling group. Nor would this be easy in a tribe in which the limited resources in property (in cattle) are used primarily for, and are constantly being converted into, marriage alliances' (1964: 157). By entering into marriage alliances, bridewealth achieves a double dispersal of property. Not only do cattle pass in the opposite direction to brides, they also bring in additional children who will divide whatever remains. Even where differentiation occurs, polygyny dissipates. It is 'an extraordinary fact', writes Polly Hill of a Hausa economy already differentiated by plough farming,

'that the average acreage of manured farmland per working-son actually shows little variation as between Groups 1, 2 and 3. . . It is certainly clear from these figures that many sons of rich farmers are bound to inherit relatively small acreages' (1972: 181). Thus, despite the existence of 'a fair degree of economic inequality', there is no 'peasant aristocracy', no differentiation one can call 'class'. While the poor, on the other hand, are 'not institutionally trapped by their poverty' (1972: 188).

We are reminded here that one important aspect of bridewealth is its relationship with plural marriage. It has been argued that polygyny is found where women make a substantial contribution to productive activity, especially to cultivation. And that a measure of their contribution is the bridewealth that is paid for them at marriage. The argument is over simple. Women's domestic roles are more complex than the theory allows and in any case polygyny occurs throughout Africa, even where marriage transactions are 'token' in quantity. However, diverging devolution, especially when it involves dowry, is strongly linked with monogamous (and polyandrous) marriage, which leads to the formation of a kind of conjugal estate (by limiting the number of marriages) and militates against its dissolution (by limiting the number of heirs). Such funds have an individualizing character. It is difficult to make more than one match of this kind, though subsidiary nonproperty unions are always feasible, with hand-maidens, concubines and the like.

### **The absence of bridewealth**

I have mainly discussed bridewealth in the African context. But there are a number of societies in that continent where bridewealth is absent, or anyhow low. Large bridewealth is primarily significant in cattle-keeping societies of the savannahs. It is of less importance (or absent) in matrilineal societies (which tend not to be cattle-keeping, see Aberle 1961), in Muslim areas (where more is invested in wedding expenses and in dowry) and in some state systems such as the Barotse kingdom of Zambia, the Hausa of Northern Nigeria, and the Gonja and Mossi states of the Voltaic region.

Moreover, in some societies which have bridewealth payments, provision is also made for marriages without bridewealth. So before we examine bridewealth as a variable between societies, let us look at the effects of variation within one social system. And before we discuss these institutionalized alternatives, let us look at the problem in a wider context.

While I was working among the LoWiili in 1950, a near-neighbour of mine was the headman of Nayiili. His daughter was a good-looking girl who had reached the age at which girls usually get married. One day I asked a distant agnate why she had not yet done so. I was told that the headman wanted her to bear a child before she got married so that it belonged to him. If an unmarried girl (that is, a girl for whom the critical bridewealth payment has not been made) bears a child, that child 'belongs' to the mother's father and is a member of the latter's patrilineal lineage. Such a child is known as a 'housechild' (yirbie) and is not, I think, looked down upon. Indeed, I knew 'housechildren' who had achieved very important positions in their lineages. In due course (as I have illustrated elsewhere), the sister's son, or rather his children, would be completely assimilated since he would call his mother's father 'father' and his children would therefore call him 'grandfather'. I do not know if this difference in manner of recruitment continued to be recognized after the first generation for any social purpose, but I believe not; the recollection disappeared. The unmarried sister's son, recruited by the maternal tie, became part of the agnatic structure of her patrilineal descent group. In these cases no bridewealth was paid and the daughter's child was affiliated to her father and incorporated in his patrilineage. Pre-marital 'illegitimacy' therefore presented no great problem for the LoWiili. There was no illegitimacy in the strict sense, since the offspring became members of their mother's patrilineage. Indeed, a few heavily incapacitated women might stay all their lives in their father's compound, never having been sought as marriage partners, and they would breed children which would be attached to their natal lineage.

Not all societies are so accommodating. Among the patrilineal Sumburu and matrilineal Ashanti, a girl could not bear acceptable children before marriage (or before the puberty rite). In earlier times, such children are said to have been destroyed, irrespective of sex. But given the early age in marriage, pre-marital illegitimacy could not have presented much of a problem. Most girls married around the age of puberty. In both these cases it seems to have been the premature opening of fertility rather than the absence of a father that constituted the offence.

In other cases, a man could legitimize such offspring (as with mantle-children in medieval England) by subsequent marriage to the mother. The children would then be legitimate offspring and members of the paternally recruited kin group to which the father belonged. In few, if any, cases in Africa was there any major problem of illegitimacy and even in the contemporary situation in towns, we do not find the great mass of unwanted children that filled the foundling hospitals of Western Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Finally, in this continuum of affiliation, are the offspring of women who have been married in the fully acceptable manner. In patrilineal societies, they belong by definition to the unilineal descent group of their fathers. Nevertheless, they have some rights in the mother's patrilin which in certain instances could lead to residence with maternal kin. If this shift became permanent, it could lead to the formation of an 'attached' lineage (as among the Tallensi), or to the gradual incorporation of the kind we have earlier described for the children of unmarried mothers, or (at the other end of the spectrum) to residence, without attachment or incorporation, as we find among the LoDagaa. The obvious result of this last alternative, with its fixed attachment to natal clanship, is multi-clan communities rather than the mono-clan settlements of the Konkomba or

the Tallensi. Among the LoDagaa, such continued attachment to one's clan is seen as directly related to bridewealth payments.

In matrilineal and bilateral societies, where payments are generally lower, affiliation does not present the same problem. In the first case, and often in the second, marriage transactions have less effect upon the affiliation of the children, or at least upon their membership of the major descent groups. In bilateral societies paternal affiliation is often determined by physiological paternity (the assumed genitor is the legal father) and the children are linked to paternal and maternal sets of kin, though the ways in which they are linked may vary widely. In matrilineal societies, the conjugal relationship is irrelevant for matrilineal purposes, though the husband/father is often important from the personal and even from the interlineage standpoint.

Let us now try and gain some insight into the function of bridewealth generally by looking at those societies which have legitimate forms of marriage with and without bridewealth, namely, the Nyamwezi of Tanzania and the Ijaw of Nigeria. Abrahams has recently summarized information on the Nyamwezi in his volume in the *Ethnographic Survey of Africa* (1967). To marry with bridewealth is known as *kukwa*, and this form of union involves the allocation of both uxorial and genitricial rights to the husband. He is entitled to compensation in the case of adultery and he both receives and pays the bridewealth for his sons and daughters. To marry without bridewealth is described by various terms (e.g. *kubola*), and such marriages were traditionally initiated by elopement. In such instances, the husband has no genitricial rights and only limited uxorial ones. The children may be taken by right to live with their mother's people at about eight years of age, and it is the maternal kin who have the rights and obligations regarding their bridewealth. A husband may bring a case against an adulterer, but he is not himself entitled to compensation. Note that the children of such a marriage have a somewhat inferior status to those born of bridewealth unions; they have no right to inherit from their father and only take a major share of their mother's brother's property if he has no 'bridewealth' children of his own (1967: 44-5). However, it is possible to convert the inferior marriage into a superior one by a subsequent payment, which includes a sum for 'rearing'. In both types of marriage it was formerly common for the groom to spend the first part of his married life at the home of the bride's father.

A similar situation is reported for the Ijaw, but bridewealth marriage appears to be less common and more equal in status. Writing of the Okrika section, which includes Bonny and the Kalabari, Williamson describes the two important types of marriage, '*ya*', which is usually translated as "big dowry", though of course it refers not to a dowry but to bride-price and '*igwa*', "small dowry", (1962: 55). The essential difference associated with these payments is that in the first case the children belong to the husband, i.e. are counted as members of his family and his 'house', and inherit from him, whereas in 'small marriage', the children belong to the mother's house and inherit within it. The wife may also continue to live with her natal family even after the marriage, which is considered to be much less stable than the rather rare 'big' variety. A third form of marriage is to an Ibo woman, for whom a smaller payment will bring full genitricial and uxorial rights.

What light does this throw on the role of bridewealth? Clearly in these societies bridewealth has the function, firstly, of securing the affiliation of a child to its father's kin group. This kin group need not necessarily be a unilineal descent group such as a clan or lineage. The Kalabari House recruits mainly through women and does not attempt to change this link into an agnatic one (as we found among the LoWiili). Alternative forms of recruitment do indeed imply a modification of the unilineal structure, though such deviations may be regularized by the system of classification, that is, by the kinship terminology.

Secondly, the question of affiliation is tied in with that of inheritance and responsibility for bridewealth payments.

Thirdly, non-bridewealth marriage means less conjugal, more consanguineal control over the bride, and is hence associated with less enduring marriage (higher divorce rates) and with less compensation in the case of adultery.

Given these differences within societies, it is to be expected that matrilineal and bilateral (or alineal) societies will tend to have lower (even token) payments as compared with those where patrilineal descent groups play an important role. Among the 'bilateral' societies with token payments are those centralized states that have been influenced by Islam, and others that have included a number of disparate groups within a single polity. In these polyethnic states, marriage transactions (which occur between all elements in the population where marriage is heterogamous) tend to be reduced to the lowest level of any of the groups participating in the regular exchange.

### **DOWRY**

Having considered bridewealth and the variables involved in such transactions, we now return to examine the contrast with dowry. We have seen that bridewealth passes from the kin of the groom to those of the bride; it forms a societal fund, a circulating pool of resources, the movement of which correspond to the movement of rights over spouses, usually women. But dowry is part of a familial or conjugal fund, which passes down from holder to heir, and usually from the parents to the daughter. It is thus part and parcel of the transfer of familial property, but a process of transfer that includes women as well as men; that is, male property is transmitted to women as full heirs, semi-heirs or residual heirs. Consequently dowry belongs to a type of transmission I have called 'diverging devolution'(or 'the woman's property complex').

While recognizing that 'female inheritance' and dowry 'sometimes shade into each other', Yalman tends to stress the 'extremely important' differences between the two. For example, he writes: 'These differences arise because female inheritance and dowry have two different purposes. The former is merely a reflection of the general descent ideology of the Kandyans that sons and daughters both inherit in the same fashion. Dowry, on the other hand, is the result of a bargain and has a specific intention: that of linking the daughter - hence her family - with a particularly desirable son-in-law' (1967: 175, my italics). The difference exists, but it is one of timing and flexibility. Yalman's interpretation of diverging devolution shifts the frame of reference from ideology to manipulation, the former being applicable to inheritance, the latter to marriage. My own interpretation involves both levels; female inheritance is clearly associated with a 'bilateral ideology', but I would argue that it also reflects a general interest in preserving the status of offspring of both sexes; dowry too carries both these implications.

We have seen that bridewealth is not simply an item in an exchange system (everything is this); it entails the dispersal of wealth in exchange for conjugal rights and duties, at least where polygyny is allowed. The more women you receive, the more wealth you give. Nor is this loss made up in the receipts from marriage transactions in the next generation, since the offspring will tend to be equally divided between males and females, which will lead to a balanced series of transactions within the generation. If the wealth employed consists in a distinct set of objects which circulate in their own cycle, the distribution of wives will be very closely related to the distribution of 'sisters' (or daughters, if generational transfer is allowed); in this case, and especially when

generational transfer is forbidden, bridewealth acts in favour of the equal distribution of women; it is a substitute for sister exchange, a form of sexual rationing.

If, on the other hand, the objects involved in bridewealth can be acquired by other means (e.g. by productive as well as reproductive activity), then the system will not be entirely closed. Nevertheless, the higher the bridewealth the more closed it will be, and in any case a premium will be placed on non-variability in payments (see Ardener 1962).

Dowry does not involve any similar kind of rationing of women; indeed from the standpoint of our initial diagram, women and property appear to be transferred in the same direction, so that the more, the wealthier. The reason why the system does not in fact work like this is revealing. Dowry transactions place a premium on the matching contributions of the spouses. What women and men bring, either in concrete dowry or in inheritance chances, varies, although among conjugal pairs these tend to match. The actual working of the type of marriage depends upon the social strata of the bride and groom; the higher the strata, the more elaborate the match. There are many accounts of this process, but to bring out the features of such an arrangement among the nobility, I refer to the great Irish epic of *The Tain* and to the way in which the legendary wars began with the pillow-talk of King Ailill and Queen Medb, comparing their respective endowments. The matching of Ailill and Medb, object by object, beast by beast, quality by quality, is simply an exaggeration of a general characteristic of dowry, its tendency to vary with the status of the bride and groom. [26] As we have seen, in bridewealth systems, standard payments are more common; their role in a societal exchange puts pressure towards similarity.

The role of the dowry in European society in more recent times is delicately portrayed in Giuseppe di Lampadusa's great novel, *The Leopard*. The future of an impoverished aristocratic family is assured by the engagement of the Sicilian Prince of Falconeri with the daughter of Don Calogero, a representative of the rising bourgeoisie, to whom the Prince became attracted both by 'the physical stimulus of a beautiful woman... and also by the (as-it-were) numerical excitement aroused by a rich girl in the mind of a man ambitious and poor'. By this match the Houses of the Saline and Falconeri were saved and yet changed, as on a political level they had been by the success of Garibaldi and his militants: 'The major interests of the Kingdom [of the Two Sicilies] and of his own class, his personal privileges had come through all these events battered but still lively'. Parallel to the main theme there runs the story of a peasant wedding, where a dispute over an almond orchard is settled by the enforced marriage between the grandchildren of the siblings who had quarrelled. In the latter case the marriage (FZD) involved the retention rather than the acquisition of property, in other words, a close rather than a distant union. As such, it contravened the prohibited degrees of the Catholic Church, and special dispensation had to be sought, a not uncommon event for we are told of 'the frequent marriages between cousins in recent years due to sexual lethargy and territorial calculations'. In both cases property was the key to the affinal transactions, though other factors such as the bride's beauty and the bridegroom's grace 'managed to veil in poetry the crudeness of the contract'.

One point we need to recognize, at least for stratified systems, lies in the differences that may occur between the marriage transactions of rich and poor. This is especially clear in India, where dowry is often associated with high status. It is this that Yalman means when he associates different patterns of 'descent' (filiation) and inheritance with differences in 'concepts regarding the position of women' (1967: 130). For the rich 'actively controlled the property rights of the daughters', while the labourers did not. The daughters of the rich take their 'portions' of the estate at marriage (and therefore do not 'inherit', leaving the remainder to the sons), while the poor have 'too little to make dowry settlements possible' (p. 136) but let daughters take their share when the

property is redistributed at the parents' death. It is this difference that gives rise to what Yalman sees as a leaning towards patrilineal 'descent' in the former case and bilateral 'descent' in the latter. Hence also the equation rich = dowry = arranged marriage.

The relationship between diverging devolution and stratification is not confined to rural societies. In discussing the accumulation of wealth by English merchants in the late seventeenth century, Grassby notes that while trade and thrift were important, many business fortunes were made through marriage. Between 1600 and 1624, 8 per cent of London Aldermen rose through marrying their masters' widows or daughters and there are no signs that this practice declined after the Restoration (1970: 102). 'Merchants, like landowners, sought profitable marriages for themselves and for their sons; birth and death rates played a major part in extending or dissolving family estates. Frequent remarriage and premature deaths benefitted some families and left considerable sums in the hands of widows and daughters' (pp. 102-3). Defoe defended commercial marriages, attacked by some as a form of prostitution, because a dowry could be used as a means of raising credit. However, 'most marriages took place between families of corresponding status and wealth, and therefore tended to widen the gap between rich and poor'.

In countries around the Mediterranean, wealth was even more closely retained within the existing status groups. In Spain men and women found it less easy to raise their socio-economic status by marriage, since legal rules existed preventing marriage outside the status group; until 1783 legislation also existed regulating the offices and trades deemed to be fit for the different estates (Martinez-Alier 1972: 100). This division was embodied in marriage because like married like; class endogamy was 'the manifestation of a hierarchical view of society' (p. 117). Lineage, legitimacy, honour, were all involved, but property remained central to the marriage system, which depended upon parental control and the emphasis on the pre-marital virginity of girls; the only escape was by institutionalized elopement.

While property is the major factor in the affinal situation, it is clearly not the only consideration, since pedigree, beauty and circumstance also enter into the calculation. For example, in the quarter of San Carlo in Bologna, Tentori reports how a rich girl who had an illegitimate child might get married, despite the emphasis given to pre-marital virginity: *'la cosa si accomodava con la dote'*. If she were poor, the problem was more difficult. [27]

As in the case of bridewealth, there are a number of important variables to be taken into account when discussing dowry. In the first place, there is the origin of the dowry i.e. whether it comes from a girl's parents (or her siblings if the parents are dead), or from her husband and his kin. The second alternative I have spoken of is 'indirect dowry'. An example of what I mean by indirect dowry is given in Lewis' account of marriage in the North Indian village of Rampur. He notes that it is customary to spend large sums of money on weddings; even at the risk of going deeply into debt. The main outlay of the groom's father however is not for the expenses of the actual festivities but for 'ornaments for his daughter-in-law'; one individual had bought three pounds of silver and eleven ornaments for her. In addition to this, 'the father of the bride spends more money than does the groom's father' (1958: 162); he too provides money for the dowry, the main recipient at marriage being the bride, who also receives dresses from her father's sisters and her father's brother's wives, as well as gifts from her mother's brother.

What I have called indirect dowry is more common in North India than in South, where dowry proper, in some parts a landed dowry, prevails. This system of marriage transaction carries certain different implications for social organisation. Just as inheritance, as distinct from dowry, delays the break up of the estate of the bride's natal family, so indirect dowry can leave that estate intact



(though it doesn't prevent a dowry transaction) while requiring a major contribution from the family of the groom, a contribution which again represents an early call on inheritance prospects.

Secondly, there is the question of the control of the dowry, whether it remains entirely under the control of the woman, or under the jurisdiction of the husband, or forms part of a community of property on which both partners can draw. Clearly it is likely to be returnable in the case of divorce, since it is an endowment upon the woman; whatever managerial functions the husband may carry out, the destination of the dowry is the bride herself. For example, among the Tibetan nomads, 'in divorce a woman is entitled to the dowry by head count, together with a share in any increment to the joint flock' (Ekvall 1968: 28).

Thirdly, there is the content of the dowry. Bridewealth consists essentially of movables, though in the case of pastoral tribes these may constitute the basic means of production, namely, livestock. Dowry may consist of any property whatsoever. Land is often excluded, but by no means always. Indeed, this is a critical difference between South India and Ceylon on the one hand and North India. on the other, just as it was in classical times between Sparta and Athens. And still today, land plays a prominent part in the dowry of Greece (e.g. Friedl 1962), Ireland and Italy. It must be clear that the question of whether or not land was included in a woman's portion, either as dowry or as inheritance, is of fundamental importance for other aspects of the social system. The splitting up of a holding can be prevented only by a complex exchange or by close marriage, and it is therefore not surprising to find close conubium prevails where land devolves on women, as is particularly in evidence in the contrast between South and North India.

Returning to the major contrast between dowry and bridewealth, the major variables we have discussed are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Variables in bridewealth and dowry payments

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Bridewealth</i>	<i>Dowry</i>
Content	Movable property	All property
Recipients	Kin of bride	Bride
Givers	Kin of groom	Kin of bride (or groom in indirect dowry)
Returnability	Usually	Always
Variability	Sometimes	Always
Payable	Over time	At marriage
Use	Societal fund	Familial fund

### Distribution

In considering the wider context of these differences in marriage transactions, I begin with their distribution, since this holds the key to their understanding. In the course of pointing to certain similarities with early English marriage, Radcliffe-Brown made a crucial observation about marriage transactions when he noted that the dowry or dower did not exist in Africa (1950: 46). He does not develop the implications of this fact any further. What follows is an attempt to pursue this point but in relation to another important difference, namely that inheritance in Africa is

usually, if not always, 'homoparental' to use Barton's term - homogeneous to use my own; that is, males inherit from males, females from females (Goody 1969b). [28]

It is apparent from the earlier discussion of bridewealth and dowry that the former is found mainly in Africa, the latter in Eurasia. But the matter of distribution can be treated more systematically by means of the *Ethnographic Atlas* (1967).[29] I realize, firstly, that the categories could be improved and, secondly, that a certain amount of the information given there will either be in the wrong form or else plain wrong. But as Kobben (1967) has recently pointed out, this fact should increase the significance of any positive results we do find.

Table 3 shows that bridewealth is the dominant type of transaction in three continental areas, Africa, the Circum-Mediterranean and East Eurasia (the last two I have grouped together as Eurasia for the purpose of contrast with the first). [30]

**Table 3. Marriage transactions and continent**

	<i>Bride-wealth</i>	<i>Bride-service</i>	<i>Dowry</i>	<i>Gift exchange</i>	<i>Sister exchange</i>	<i>Transactions absent or token</i>
Circum-Med.	65 (68%)	1 (1%)	13 (14%)	3 (3%)	0	14 (15%)
East Eurasia	53 (56%)	5 (5%)	8 (9%)	2 (2%)	0	26 (28%)
Africa	195 (82%)	19 (8%)	0	1	10 (4%)	13 (5%)
Insular Pacific	47 (38%)	6 (4%)	2 (1%)	20 (16%)	15 (12%)	37 (29%)
North America	40 (18%)	28 (13%)	0	28 (13%)	0	122 (56%)
South America	7 (8%)	36 (42%)	0	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	41 (48%)
Total	407	95	23	55	27	253

N.B. Codes: horizontal, col. 1 = Continent  
vertical, col. 12 = Mode of marriage

The dowry is virtually confined to Europe and Asia. It is absent from Africa, except where that continent has been penetrated by Islam or other universalistic world religions, though the words dot and dowry are often used for bridewealth in francophone and anglophone areas. Even in Europe and Asia, it is not very common. But it would certainly appear much more common in the *Ethnographic Atlas* if we make the adjustment implied in my earlier discussion of marriage transactions, that is, if we include 'indirect dowry' which is often described as bridewealth. Were we to include this category in our figures, not to mention the other forms of diverging devolution, such as the post mortem as well as pre-mortem transmission of property to women, then the contrast between continents would be certainly much greater than it seems from the tables above. Indeed the contrast becomes even stronger when we separate off the major Eurasian societies.

In other words these major Eurasian states are characterized by dowry, or by diverging inheritance, while Africa is characterized by bridewealth, or rather by the absence of dowry;

though some state systems there have token transactions, none have dowry, except where Islamic law prevails.

In trying to explain this situation, I would start with a comment of E.J. Krige upon Leach's analysis of her material on matrilineal cross-cousin marriage among the Lobedu of South Africa. There is no evidence, she suggests, for his suggestion that the Lobedu have a 'kind of Kachin structure in reverse', with a 'strong tendency for the wife-receiving group to rank the higher'. For, she explains, 'In endogamous unions in one Lobedu royal group both husband and wife may be members of the same lineage. Lobedu society is, moreover, not a stratified society though the royal lineage enjoys great prestige' (1964: 164). While I would want to dissent from the denial of stratification, certainly the hierarchies of African states have a different base, and hence a different character, from most Eurasian ones.

The different base I refer to is an economic one, though it has political and social implications. If we limit the discussion to the states of Africa and Eurasia, we find major differences in the systems of agricultural production. In precolonial Africa, and indeed in much of Africa today, agriculture is carried on by means of the hoe, the axe/adze and even the digging stick. Until recently, nowhere did we find farming carried out by means of the plough, nor yet with the aid of the techniques of large-scale irrigation which played such an important part in the early empires of the Asian continent, and whose 'hydraulic civilizations' have been seen by some writers as the basis of a particular type of political system, Oriental despotism (Wittfogel 1957).

The kind of differentiation that advanced agriculture allowed was clearly much greater than that permitted by the hoe, even when -farming was supplemented by income from trade and the control of trade, and by the kind of booty production that marked the internal and external slave trade in many parts of Africa. Since population densities were low and since the acreage any individual could cultivate by hand was strictly limited, land was not usually in short supply. Men were not differentiated to any great extent in terms of their holdings of land, that is of the basic means of production in an agricultural society. The situation is now beginning to change with the expansion of crops for sale and the introduction of the plough. In a Hausa village, Polly Hill recently recorded variations of an average of 19.5 acres for 17 better-off farming units (Group 1), 8.4 acres for 45 units of Group 2, 4.2 acres for 68 units of Group 3 and 2.8 for 41 units of Group 4, though the average acreage per working-man was more nearly comparable, ranging from 5.3 acres (Group 1) to 1.5 acres in Group 4 (1972: 62). The traditional picture is one of relatively equal holdings, at least in acephalous (tribal) societies. Among the LoDagaba of Northern Ghana, the average size example, the case of the Russian *primak*, a son-in-law who is taken into the house as an heir' when there are no sons (see Dunn 1967: 74). Finally, I examined the relationship of diverging devolution to political and economic factors, finding it strongly linked with large states, with complex forms of stratification, and with 'plough and intensive agriculture, all at the  $P < 0.001$  level.

The contrast between dowry and bridewealth systems, if I can use these terms to point to sets of interrelated variables, now appears to expand. From the stand-point of inheritance, dowry systems are inherently bilateral, since they distribute relatively exclusive rights in a manner that does not link property or patrimony to sex; it descends in a diverging way. If property diverges between the members of both sexes, then it can never be wholly contained within the boundaries of the unilineal descent group, or even within the group of siblings. Let me first deal with UDGs. In Africa, land is often inherited within a lineage or clan. When this happens we can specify a certain tract of land as 'belonging' to a particular group whose members have access to the uncultivated sections of that territory. The land passes by inheritance between members of the

group, whether it is defined by matrilineal or by patrilineal descent. The same applies to other property, when the system of inheritance is 'harmonic' with the system of descent. Using an ambiguous term in a very restricted way, we may speak of such descent groups as 'corporate' when inheritance takes place within them, though clearly greater importance is to be attached to this designation if the property so transferred is the basic means of production, that is, land in an agricultural economy, livestock in a pastoral one.

In using the word 'corporate' to describe a group I do not even imply that its members hold equal rights in common property, though this may be the case with ritual possessions. I only mean that productive property normally devolves within the group. In other words the mode of inheritance and eligibility to group membership (e.g. 'descent') are 'harmonic', and are recognized as such by the actors. As a consequence of this recognition, members of the group will constitute a chain of potential heirs. A true corporation, the members of which hold equal rights (or contemporaneous ones rather than the sequential rights involved in an inheritance chain), seems comparatively rare, unless we are thinking of a domestic group of a strictly limited size. Maine's attempt to apply the concept of the corporation to larger groups (e.g. clans and lineages), while valuable from a moral, jurial and political standpoint in understanding collective responsibility, presents some problems on the economic front, even when we are dealing with the forms of ownership found with shifting cultivation. But such groups are at least 'corporate' in the sense that reserves of land are often held jointly and the devolution of property takes place within its boundaries.

On the other hand, the transmission of property by diverging devolution means its passage outside the unilineal descent group. The group cannot be 'corporate' in respect of the property so transmitted, since it passes to children of both sexes. Or rather, the estate can remain intact only if all marriages take place within the group. In other words, the group can be corporate and closed (endogamous) or non-corporate and open. But even in the first of these cases, the sibling group is still split as far as property is concerned, since marriage within is rarely permitted and never enforced. Under diverging devolution the 'incest taboo' on brother-sister marriage effectively prohibits the continuing cohesion of the estate attached to an elementary family, the nearest alternative to dispersal being (in a patrilineal system) the attempt to bring back what has been divided by inheritance or dowry by means of marriage to the father's brother's daughter or another close cousin. I do not mean to suggest that all close marriage has an economic function; such a proposition would be quite untenable. In the case of 'institutions' as widespread as 'the marriage of cousins', no one explanation, or category of explanations, can possibly be expected to satisfy all conditions. This is especially true of cross-cousin marriage which, as has often been pointed out, may specify categories rather than genealogically related individuals. Nevertheless, actors often describe certain forms of cross-cousin marriage in terms of conserving property and status, or simply the ties between siblings. This feature is given prominence in Yalman's analysis of prescriptive cross-cousin marriage in South India. 'Brother and sister must be separated, but their offspring must be united' (1967: 374). It is also critical to our discussion of cross-cousin marriage in Northern Ghana, where 'the unification of the split siblings' may or may not be a matter of inheritance (J. and E. Goody 1966: 349).

Marriage within the sibling group does occasionally occur, and under interesting conditions. It is often assumed that such marriages take place only within certain royal families, of which the Egyptian is the best known example. But Middleton's recent summary of the evidence on close marriage in ancient Egypt shows that such unions were not in fact confined to royalty but were found in other strata within the population. Certainly during the period of Roman rule there is strong evidence that brother-sister marriages occurred with some frequency among commoners. Why? His explanation runs as follows: 'These consanguine marriages among commoners were

probably used as a means of maintaining the property of the family intact and preventing the splintering of the estate through the operation of the laws of inheritance' (1962: 603). And these laws of inheritance, as in other societies of the ancient Near East, explicitly transferred to women, either in inheritance or in dowry, part of the estate of their parents.[33] In other words, in-marriage was specifically related to the existence of diverging devolution, a type of transmission which transferred property both to sons and daughters and hence diffused that property outside the 'exogamic' unit, or rather outside the range of kin with whom marriage was forbidden.

The results of this are clearly brought out in E.L. Peters' examination of the reasons for the failure of the Bedouin of Cyrenaica to apply the Islamic law of inheritance, which allocates male property to daughters though not in equal proportions to sons. In this case, the most significant property is livestock, though land plays a significant role in the economy.

'Males acquire their proprietary rights to mobile property and land by transmission through males. Women are not permitted to inherit. Bedouin are aware that in dispossessing women of inheritance they are contravening the law, but to do otherwise would result in an uncontrolled alienation of property from the corporations in which ownership is vested. Bridewealth sees the transfer of property from one corporation to another, but the transfer is controlled. Since women are free to be married by men outside their natal corporations -- and nearly half their marriages are of this sort -- then if they inherited as wives and daughters, an uncontrolled run on corporate resources would ensue. This would be serious enough if only mobile property were involved, but if land was threatened in this way also, the entire basis of corporate life would collapse. Therefore, the lack of legal status of women as heirs to property is, among the Bedouin, to be related not only to the status of individuals as heirs, but to the nature of the property owning group. This group is a corporation of males clustered together on the basis of what is conceived of as agnation (forthcoming).

The difficulty the Bedouin have in applying the Islamic law of inheritance also crops up with dowry, which is part of the same process of intergenerational transmission. When land or cattle are involved, the property of the group is split at each generation. Even where the basic means of production are not transmitted, each marriage will entail some reorganization of the family estate. The raising of a dowry in money or other movables may require sacrifices on the part of the parents or the brothers; the-family fund will suffer some diminution.

This feature of dowry relates to a point made by Leach, Yalman and others, especially in the context of Ceylon, that in Asia the boundaries between patrilineal, matrilineal and bilateral systems are often shaded. Of course to some extent this is true within Africa. Not only do differences exist between nearby and generally similar societies like the Tallensi and LoDagaa, as well as, more obviously, between the kind of UDG found in segmentary societies (like the Tallensi) and in many centralized societies in the same general area (e.g. in Ashanti). But in a number of centralized societies such as the Gonja and Hausa of West Africa we find groups with more limited functions, which has led us to refer to them as dynastic descent groups. While in societies like the Ijaw, which provide for alternative modes of entry to kin groups by means of a big and small marriage payment, a considerable degree of flexibility enters into the question of recruitment. [34] Nevertheless, there tends to be more flexibility (to use a value laden word) in many Eurasian systems, a flexibility which is associated with specific features of the social organization and is not random.

Unilineal descent groups in Africa are more corporate not only because inheritance takes place within them. They are also less differentiated in an absolute sense because of the system of

agriculture and of land holding. We have already seen the range of holdings that may be found in a plough village as compared with the relatively homogeneous conditions under hoe cultivation. This differentiation may occur within as well as between descent groups. In China gentry and commoners could belong to the same local lineage. According to Hu Hsien Chin, the *tsu*, or common descent group, was descended from one ancestor who settled in a certain locality (1948: 18). Since it included all the families descended from the common ancestor, 'it comprises various social strata: the wealthy and the prominent as well as the poor and the lowly, for the fortunes of individual families vary' (p. 10). This inclusiveness led to groups of enormous size which included landowners as well as gentry and officials. One writer remarks that 'The intraclan differentiation of gentry and commoners and the domination of the latter by the former are well-established facts' (Kung-Chuan Hsiao 1960: 330). He goes on to describe how those members of a certain Shantung clan who had no wealth or eminence did not attend the semi-annual rites and the ensuing feasts, nor did they have charge of the ritual land. As well as providing leadership the rich also extended charity to their fellow lineage members, so that the wealth of the group depended upon the prosperity of its most successful individuals. The solidarity that arose from these ties of clanship, cross-cutting social and economic differentiation, made them particularly useful to the imperial government as a means of rural control.

The lineages Barth describes among the Swat Pathans are differentiated in a less radical way, and the children of brothers are often held together over the generations by the marriage of their children (FBD marriage), a system which destroys the 'corporate' character of the lineage in respect to its marriage arrangements. Genealogical ties remain w focus for local groupings much larger than the stem family or local line. While the genealogies of such groups may have a formal resemblance to those that are used as reference systems by many African societies, the groups or 'lineages' to which they refer differ in a major respect.[35] In most of traditional Africa, the elementary families or sibling groups that constituted the basic units of production were little differentiated in terms of the ownership of the means of production, land. For it was rarely a scarce resource (one could usually shift), rarely subject to exchange, and in any case, the holding of uncultivated land was frequently under the control of a community or kin group.

Differential land holding did not mean a great deal when there were not the techniques for an individual to exploit more than a hoe would allow. Und might be reallocated among kith or kin according to need rather than ownership. In addition the absence of the plough or irrigation meant that systems of advanced farming, providing a significant and utilizable surplus, were rarely found. As a result, differentiation within the kin group in terms of land-holding and status was relatively slight, though in centralized states political office brought its own rewards.

African lineages, then, were relatively 'homogeneous' in contrast to comparable groupings among plough or other intensive agriculturists of Asia (though intensity of production is again a relative concept). The pyramidal, ramifying model of the lineage, frequently an actor model, indicates not only span but often a broad equality of socio-economic status.

Under the extensive farming systems of Africa one found, of course, poorer and richer farmers, the gap between whom is increasing under modern conditions, as Hill has emphasized for Hausaland (1972).[36] But the difference between the two, where this was not to be attributed to exogenous factors, depended upon labour, including that of dependents, kin or slaves. The conditions for landlordism rarely if ever existed; land did not differentiate the population, either within or between clans, into gentry, kulaks, poor peasants and serfs. Consequently the strategy of not letting one's daughter marry 'beneath her' in terms of landed property was hardly at issue. Nor was it necessary to endow a daughter with land or other major goods (though she was often given

household gifts) in order to maintain her position. Bridewealth passed between males, and was sometimes differentiated by the status of a bride or bridegroom. But by and large marriage payments were part of a pool of circulating resources, enabling brothers (real or classificatory) to take brides with the wealth brought in by their sisters.

Finally there is a third and related way in which diverging devolution tends to make UDGs less 'corporate'. Diverging devolution places great stress on the downwards transmission of property, upon the preference for children as against siblings. Indeed, dowry seems to divide the siblings from one another as far as property is concerned; even among brothers marriage often means an allocation of resources which carries the further implication that the divided property will continue to go downwards rather than sideways. Again there are important differences between Africa and Eurasia in this respect, although many African societies (especially those with the house-property complex) also stress downwards rather than lateral transmission. 137] Even the so-called 'joint family' of Hindu law was subject to constant division as the result of downwards transmission. While undivided joint property may sometimes have passed down in the manner of universal succession described by Maine in *Ancient Law*, the usual Hindu system of inheritance excluded brothers, precisely because the property had already been 'divided'. Hence inheritance was filial and not fraternal. Though the 'divided' brothers still belonged to the same kin group and sometimes to the same labour group, they were not now entitled to inherit their brother's property-, and it is this lack of 'corporateness' of the joint family, kin group or village community that accounts for the great frequency of 'fictitious' heirs, through adoption or through filiacentric unions, that characterizes Indian society.

The point I am making here goes back to earlier suggestions. For example, Leach argues that we may have two categories of society in which 'the principle of unilineal descent is all important, but it plays an entirely different structural role in the two cases'. He distinguishes between the category into which most of the African lineage systems seem to fall (as well as the non-exogamous lineages of Islamic Western Asia). 'In this case the on-going structure is defined by descent alone and marriage serves merely to create "a complex scheme of individuation" within that structure. In contrast, there is the category of those societies in which unilineal descent is linked with a strongly defined rule of preferred marriage". In this latter case "complementary filiation" may come to form part of the permanent on-going structure, but to understand how this comes about we need to consider economic and political factors as well as the kin ship structure in isolation' (1961[1957]: 123). Looked at from one standpoint, Levi-Strauss was making a similar point when he distinguished between the elementary and complex forms of kinship, the former including the systems of preferential marriage of Asia and the Pacific, the latter the bridewealth systems of Africa (1949: 577), a complex form of generalized exchange based upon the credits obtained by circulating women. The point is also touched upon by Yalman when he calls attention to the danger of transferring (West) African notions of unilineal descent groups to the Indian sub-continent (1967: 367) and again by Buchler and Selby when they point out the importance of distinguishing between the analytic tools required for the study of societies of the 'African' and 'Asian' type (1968: 135). But none of these authors attempt to explain these regional differences. For we need to look further than differences in 'descent' and 'affinity' if we are to arrive at a satisfactory understanding; we need to examine the nature of the economy itself.