"We Will Exchange Sisters Until the World Ends": Inequality, Marriage and Gender Relations in the Lake Murray-Middle Fly Area, Papua New Guinea

MARK BUSSE *University of Auckland*

In their 1981 essay on "Politics and Gender in Simple Societies" Jane Collier and Michelle Rosaldo argued that there are important differences between brideservice societies and bridewealth societies, and that the distinction between brideservice and bridewealth provides "a scheme of classification that unites aspects of gender, social relationships, and politics" (Collier and Rosaldo 1981:278). In her 1987 analysis of gender inequality among the Kove of New Britain, Ann Chowning expanded this focus from marriage exchange to exchange in general. She stated that "to understand how Kove women are viewed and treated, it is necessary to understand above all how the exchange system operates" (1987:131). While Chowning's initial impression was that Kove men's treatment of women was "exceptionally repressive by the standards of other societies I knew best" (1987:147), she eventually concluded:

> When [Kove] men talk of women as the business that can make them rich, they are referring to a possibility that can be realised only if men give full credit to female autonomy. Without the women, the man is nothing; with their help, if he can secure it, he may become a real man. In the stress on self-achievement, patrilineality counts for almost nothing, and successful affinal relations, only achievable if women are satisfied, for almost everything. (Chowning 1987:148)

In this paper, I draw on my own research among Boazi speaking peoples of the Lake Murray-Middle Fly area of the Southern Lowlands of New Guinea to argue that societies with sister-exchange marriage[1] differ in critical ways from Collier and Rosaldo's brideservice and bridewealth societies, and that it is useful to consider such societies as a third type in Collier and Rosaldo's scheme. I also extend Collier and Rosaldo's as well as Chowning's positions and argue that factors such as postmarital residence patterns, the position of marriage in the life cycle, the character of affinal obligations and brother-sister relations are all essential for understanding marriage as well as day-to-day marital and gender relations. As among Kove, Boazi men depend on the cooperation and compliance of women—in their case to organise sister-exchange marriages—and this dependence significantly shapes gender relations more generally.

In addition, I briefly examine both Raymond Kelly's (1993) critique of Collier and Rosaldo's model and responses to his critique, and I make two points. First, Kelly's critique is less "devastating" than D.J.J. Brown (1997:636) and others (e.g., Modjeska 1997), including Kelly himself initially, make it out to be. Second, Kelly's ethnographic case material and my own research help to refine and extend Collier and Rosaldo's general model. I show that the distinctions on which they based their typology, despite some shortcomings in their categories, remain a very productive way of examining inequality in societies which do not have a complex division of labour or a state organisation. The debate concerning gender and inequality in simple societies has not been settled. The arguments put forward by Collier and Rosaldo as well as Kelly remain highly relevant for understanding those societies, including many Papua New Guinea societies, in which marriage is still a critical aspect of political economy and remains a central focus of investigation for understanding gender relations as well as social relations more generally.

Brideservice, Bridewealth and Sister-Exchange Societies

Collier and Rosaldo began by noting that brideservice practices are found primarily in hunting and gathering societies, while bridewealth practices seem "to characterize most horticultural tribal groups" (Collier and Rosaldo 1981:278). They state, however, that the most important difference between brideservice and bridewealth is the difference in the relationship between the groom and the gifts that are given (Collier and Rosaldo 1981:278).[2] Whereas in brideservice the groom gives gifts of his own labour to his wife's father, in bridewealth systems marriage is secured by gifts of valuables which were obtained through the labour of someone other than the groom himself. In other words, in brideservice the groom gives gifts over which he has control, but in bridewealth, the gifts that are given are gifts over which the groom has no control.

It should be clear from the preceding description that Collier and Rosaldo's use of the terms *brideservice* and *bridewealth* differs from standard anthropological usage (Collier 1988:2). While most anthropologists distinguish between brideservice and bridewealth on the basis of *what* is given to the bride's family (i.e., labour or valuables), Collier and Rosaldo based their distinction on *who produces* and *who controls* what is given to the bride's family (that is, the groom in the case of brideservice and other people in the case of bridewealth).

This difference in usage can be seen most clearly in Collier and Rosaldo's argument that the things which anthropologists have called bridewealth in hunting and gathering societies are "more aptly viewed as bride-

service, because the meat or trade items a young man gives his parent-in-law are things he can obtain on his own, without having to borrow from an elder" (Collier and Rosaldo 1981:286). The logical implication of this is that societies in which young men earn money which they then use to make marriage exchanges would be classified as brideservice, rather than bridewealth, societies.

Collier and Rosaldo argued that differences in who produces and controls what a man must give in order to obtain a wife led to different structures of inequality in brideservice and bridewealth societies as they define these. Young men in bridewealth societies are obligated to those who finance their marriages—most often their senior kinsmen—and the road to power and full adult status for all men lies in investing in the marriages of others. Bridewealth represents, or contains the seeds of, the internally hierarchical organisation of kin groups. As a result, disputes in bridewealth societies often have to do with establishing dominance within kin groups (Collier and Rosaldo 1981:279, cf. Meillassoux 1981).

In contrast, a young man in brideservice societies is not obligated to his older kinsmen but rather to his affines and particularly his wife's parents. Collier and Rosaldo (1981:279, 287) argued that brideservice obligations are also different from bridewealth payments, because brideservice is a set of general responsibilities that a man will have for as long as he is married and his wife's parents are alive. There is no way, in a brideservice society, that a man can obligate others to himself other than by raising daughters whose husbands will in turn have brideservice obligations to him. Collier and Rosaldo (1981) noted that while affinal relations are relations of obligation in brideservice societies, relations among kinsmen in such societies are markedly egalitarian and atomistic. Disputes are not about dominance as much as they are about achieving parity (Fried 1967:79) and at the centre of most disputes in brideservice societies are claims over women (Collier and Rosaldo 1981:290).

Sister-Exchange Marriage

Collier and Rosaldo subsumed under their brideservice model those societies in which sister exchange is the primary, if not only, way of marrying. In her book, Collier (1988:18-19) included giving a sister for a wife as one of the ways in which men can acquire wives in what she called brideservice societies. She argued that sister exchange is similar to brideservice because sister exchange does not require a bachelor to borrow goods from his senior kinsmen (Collier 1988:19). In other words, sister exchange is like brideservice because sister exchange is not like bridewealth.

But sister exchange differs from brideservice in precisely the same features that Collier used to distinguish brideservice from bridewealth: the production and control of what a man must give in order to obtain a wife. Sister exchange is different from bridewealth because the woman who is given in exchange for a wife cannot be independently produced or completely controlled by the senior kinsmen of the groom. But sister exchange is also different from brideservice because the woman who is given in exchange for a wife is neither produced by, nor under the control of, the groom.

The fact that women are created through sexual reproduction, or procreation, rather than production places men (as grooms and brothers) in sister-exchange societies in an uncertain and dependant position vis-à-vis the women they must give in order to get wives. Also, men cannot control women in the same way that they can control their own labour and the disposition of its products. Men (as grooms, brothers and elders involved in negotiating marriages) in sister-exchange societies, to a greater degree than men in societies with other types of marriage exchange, are faced with the problem of gaining women's compliance. In addition, women in sister-exchange societies create claims on their brothers by agreeing to be exchanged (van Baal 1975:75-77).

The point that I want to make, however, is not only that sister exchange structures claims and debts between persons differently from brideservice and bridewealth. I also want to question the primacy that Collier and Rosaldo attribute to marriage exchange in the structuring of inequality (both among men and between men and women) and the shaping of gender relations.

Anthropologists have generally looked at marriage exchanges from the viewpoint of men making exchanges. In the analysis of sister exchange, however, "a model of active subjects exchanging passive objects", to use Marilyn Strathern's (1984:42) phrase, is clearly inadequate. This inadequacy leads us away from assumptions that marriage exchanges are exchanges of rights in women's labour, reproductive capacities, or other values. It also leads us away from assumptions about the motivations of either the men arranging sister-exchange marriages or the women who allow themselves to be exchanged. The inadequacy of the "active subjects-passive objects model" for the analysis of sister-exchange marriage leads us to an investigation of meanings and motivations in marriage (Strathern 1984:49).

In her book *Marriage and Inequality in Classless Societies*, Collier (1988) examined the meanings of, and motivations for, marriage in brideservice and bridewealth societies. She argued that in brideservice societies men are more interested in marriage than women are. Collier attributed this to what she called "the sexual division of obligations" (Collier 1988:17) in brideservice societies. In particular, she asserted that men are obligated to distribute their meat widely, and therefore a woman does not need a husband to gain access to male produce. At the same time she noted that because women are only obligated to feed their husbands and children, "a man must have a wife if he hopes to eat regularly and without having to demean himself" (Collier 1988:17). In other words, a man needs a wife in order to get what women

produce, but a woman does not need a husband in order to get what men produce. As a result, the most visible inequality in otherwise egalitarian brideservice societies is the inequality between married and unmarried men. Collier (1988:22) stated that unmarried men

> tend to eat irregularly and sleep uncomfortably, because no woman is obliged to feed or shelter them. Bachelors have a particularly difficult time. Young, frequently handsome, and free, they are usually forced to live on the outskirts of camps by married men who reportedly fear seduction of their wives.

Collier used the phrase "the brideservice model" to refer to this characterisation of brideservice societies.

According to Collier, marriage has an amazing, transformative effect on men in brideservice societies. She states:

> The acquisition of a wife transforms unwelcome wandering youths into settled, responsible adults. Once a man has a wife to provide food, shelter, and sex, he need no longer live outside the camp. Other married men no longer fear his presence. (Collier 1988:22)

Also, according to Collier, married men in brideservice societies are independent because they do not have long-term debts to kinsmen who financed their marriages as do men in bridewealth societies (Collier 1988:22). As I will show, and as Kelly (1993) and others also criticised, this view of motivation in marriage is extremely limited. Before I discuss this point, though, I address the very illuminating perspective on sister exchange that their typology offers, even though I disagree with the way that they subsume sister exchange under brideservice.

Sister Exchange in the Lake Murray-Middle Fly Area

Collier and Rosaldo's failure to see the logical differences between brideservice and sister exchange, and problems with Collier's analysis of the origins of the meanings and motivations surrounding marriage in brideservice societies, became apparent to me when I attempted to apply their theory to my research on sister exchange among Boazi speakers in the Lake Murray and Middle Fly Census Divisions of the Western Province of Papua New Guinea in the 1980s.

Linguists classify Boazi as one of six languages in the Marind Language Stock (Voorhoeve 1970a; 1975:355-62). At the time of my research, approximately 2500 Boazi speakers lived in ten autonomous villages scattered around the shores of Lake Murray (the largest lake in Papua New Guinea) and along the edges of the back swamps of the flood plain along the middle reaches of the Fly River. This area (some 5000 square kilometres in extent) is a transitional zone between wetter, more dissected and rainforest covered areas to the north, and the drier and flatter areas to the south which are covered with open forest, grassland and savannah. Boazi speakers identified themselves as belonging to one of eight territorial groups, each of which believed itself to be autochthonous. Each traced its origin to the activities of the culture hero Nggiwe who, they say, gave them their physical form, their land and significant aspects of their culture (see Busse 2005).[3]

In many regards, Boazi were a good example of the kind of society that Collier and Rosaldo referred to as brideservice societies.[4] Indeed, many of Collier and Rosaldo's generalisations concerning life in brideservice societies were strikingly accurate for the people of the Lake Murray-Middle Fly area. For example, at the time of my research Boazi people were primarily hunters, fisherfolk and sago makers, and they had a loosely defined sexual division of labour. There were no specialist positions in Boazi sociality, and for the most part adults could perform all activities involved in reproducing a household. The exceptions to this were recognised healers and, in the past, fight leaders. The nuclear family was the maximum unit of production. Men sometimes hunted together or cooperated to build a house or make a large canoe, and women often went in groups to make sago, but such partnerships were short lived. Relations among Boazi men were markedly egalitarian, and leaders lacked the power to give orders. Men's public demeanour clearly suggested that conflicts had the potential to escalate quickly into physical violence—Collier and Rosaldo's "don't fool with me" stance—and most serious conflicts were handled by moving away (Collier 1988:20-21). As a result, Boazi lived in "unstable groups" (Collier 1988:18) as people oscillated between villages and camps in response to changes in their relationships with others. Also, like the members of Collier's ideal-typic brideservice society, Boazi people showed little concern for property (Collier 1988:18).

Despite these and other similarities to Collier and Rosaldo's brideservice model, the meanings and motivations surrounding Boazi marriage differed significantly from Collier and Rosaldo's stated characteristics of brideservice societies. Some of these differences were the result of how central sister exchange was in the lives of Boazi people. Others stemmed from factors such as patterns of post-marital residence, the position of marriage in the life cycle and ideas about affinal obligations.

Throughout the Lake Murray-Middle Fly area, marriage exchange was structured by exogamous patrilineal moiety, clan and lineage organisation. A marriage involved two men exchanging either their uterine or classificatory sisters. There was a very high degree of conformity to this ideal (in 1985, seventy percent of all marriages in Bosset village where I was based).[5] When such a sister exchange had not been

made, a man and his immediate male kinsmen were considered to owe a woman to the lineage from which they had obtained a wife (such claims were not made directly to women). With the exception of abducting women from neighbouring groups, a practice which ended with pacification in the 1940s, direct reciprocal exchange of women was said by Boazi men and women to be the only acceptable form of marriage. Women as brides acted in this system of exchange without authority or responsibility for exchanges, but they had their own interests—either self-interests or interests corresponding with those of their male kinsmen—and they pursued these with greater or lesser success.

Gendered Positioning and Marriage

The different positions of marriage in the life cycles of men and women are critical for understanding the gendered meaning of marriage among Boazi. Childhood was a time of great freedom for both boys and girls. Children were encouraged to be independent and physically competent, and they spent their days swimming, playing or fishing from small canoes with hooks and bamboo fishing poles. For boys, the freedom of childhood continued with only slight restrictions until they married.

Girls, however, were steadily encouraged to accept responsibility and to be productive from about the age of nine or ten. By that age, a girl was expected to help with caring for her younger siblings and to do some of the cooking and housework. She was also encouraged to accompany her mother on trips to make sago. By the time a girl was thirteen or fourteen, she was usually making some contributions to her family's supply of sago and was performing many of the household chores.

At the same time, boys were sometimes asked to fetch things or to carry messages, but they were not expected to be productive. When a boy's beard began to grow, he took up residence in the bachelors' house where he lived until he married, an event which usually took place when a man was in his early or mid-twenties.

Life in the bachelors' house was said by men of all ages to be the best time in a man's life. Single boys had few responsibilities, and they were free to spend their days as they saw fit. Much of their time was spent hunting for their own consumption, lounging with their age mates or listening to the stories and arguments of the older, married men who gathered at the bachelors' house everyday in the late afternoon. In the evening, groups of bachelors paraded through the village, laughing at jokes which only they seem to understand. If they were hungry, they could visit their mothers or married sisters who always fed them. Bachelors were generally viewed as the pride of the village, and they took full advantage of their position.

Marriage marked a major discontinuity in the lives of Boazi men. In the past, a Boazi man was expected to be the passive partner in homosexual relations with his future father-in-law during the period between the young man's engagement and marriage. After marriage, a man was expected to move into his father-in-law's household, and in 1985, about sixty percent of men in Bosset whose fathers-in-law were alive had done so.[6] A son-in-law was expected to help his father-in-law with all heavy labour. He was also expected to hunt for his father-in-law and to give all the game that he killed to his father-in-law. Indeed, I was told that a son-in-law should give his father-in-law anything that the older man asked for.[7] From being the pride of the community and living a life with few responsibilities, a newly married man became a marginal person in the household of his father-in-law.

Among Boazi a man could not obtain a wife simply by performing brideservice for his father-in-law. Boazi insisted that a woman had to be given in order to obtain a wife. Thus, although the Boazi practice presents a mixed case in terms of the distinction that I drew earlier between brideservice and sister exchange, the problem of obtaining women's compliance was a critical aspect of their system of marriage exchanges.

Newly married men chafed under their new responsibilities and complained about the change in their status. This resentment often spilled over into their relationships with their wives. New marriages were particularly brittle among Boazi speakers as young men tried to adjust to the new and unfamiliar restrictions on their activities, restrictions that they frequently blamed on their wives. With time, as their own families grew, men established their own households near those of their father-in-law. In 1985, forty percent of the married men in Bosset who had been married for more than ten years and whose fathers-in-law were still alive continued to live within fifty meters of their fathers-in-laws' houses. Over time, the obligations that men had toward their fathers-in-law lessened, but they never completely ended. The scars left by early marital discord also continued to shape marital relations in later life.

In contrast to the discontinuity between bachelorhood and marriage for men, marriage did not mark a discontinuity in the lives of women. They continued to be part of their fathers' households, and marriage introduced far fewer new responsibilities for women than it did for men. A woman was expected to cook for her husband, but in her father's household, a woman's husband was only one of many people for whom she was expected to cook. The arrival of children marked greater responsibilities for a woman, but this burden was partially offset by the child care provided by a woman's younger, unmarried sisters and the obvious pleasure that women took in their children.

In contrast to affinal relations, relations between brothers and sisters were, in many ways, the closest relations among Boazi people. Unmarried men often visited the hearths of their married sisters where they were always welcome and usually fed. When a man's wife was

unable to make or cook sago for him, because she was sick or menstruating, a man turned to his sisters for food. Brothers reciprocated their sisters' help by giving them meat. Also, at the end of mourning, it was a woman's brother who cut off and burned her mourning garments, thereby ending the official period of mourning. Prior to pacification, men gave the heads of their victims to their sisters who would dance with them in the celebrations that followed a head-hunting raid.

Harriet Whitehead, in her comprehensive discussion of ritual and exchange in New Guinea, observed:

> …two of the principal political-economic dimensions of the brideservice model developed by Collier and Rosaldo—men's and women's unequal political interest in marriage, and ability of young men to forge marriage bonds largely through their own efforts—are for the most part poorly exemplified in New Guinea. (Whitehead 1987:255-56)

These dimensions of the brideservice model were also not true in the case of Boazi. To begin with, in Boazi society there was not the same unequal "sexual distribution of obligations" that Collier outlined for brideservice societies. Unmarried men had ready access to women's produce primarily through their sisters and mothers. Men were, if anything, less interested in marriage than women, because marriage marked the end of their freedom and the beginning of their responsibilities. Also, because of the requirement that a man had to give a woman to obtain a wife, men were faced with the problem of obtaining the compliance of women—active subjects in their own right—in their negotiations of marriage exchanges.

In their model of brideservice societies, Collier and Rosaldo failed to consider both the special circumstances of societies in which marriage involves the reciprocal exchange of women and the vital roles which brother-sister relations, postmarital residence and the position of marriage in the life cycle play in shaping men's and women's motivation for marriage in such societies.

The Origins of Inequality

Kelly's book *Constructing Inequality* (1993) is an extended critique of Collier and Rosaldo's position. Kelly began by asking "What is the principal locus for the production of inequality in human society?", and he noted (1993:1) that investigations of "comparatively egalitarian premodern tribal societies" have been central to debates over the answer to this question.

The project of tracing inequality to its source has its origin in the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who, together with their intellectual heirs, argued that social inequalities are based on particular modes of production. In turn, Collier and Rosaldo's (1981) distinction between brideservice and bridewealth societies stemmed from the insight that kinship and especially marriage organise relations of production in what they called "simple societies". While Kelly (1993:511) acknowledged that Collier and Rosaldo provided "the most comprehensive extant model" of social inequality, he argued that their model was inadequate "due to misplaced causality".

On the basis of his own analysis of inequality among the Etoro of the Great Papuan Plateau, a culturally distinct area which lies to the northeast of Lake Murray and the Middle Fly, Kelly argued that inequalities which Collier and Rosaldo attributed to marital obligations are in fact due to other factors—such as division of labour, prestige, conflict management and, above all, to "cosmological systems" as they relate to social differentiation. According to Kelly, Etoro cosmology subsumed reproduction, the spiritual constitution of persons, and life-cycle transformations:

> …the cosmologically derived system of moral evaluation—of which the prestige system is one component—is central to the organization of production, distribution (including exchange), and consumption. The cosmological system not only constitutes the source of morally evaluated social differentiation, but also shapes the relations of production, modes of distribution, and terms of exchange that generate further social inequalities pertaining to these socially differentiated categories. (Kelly 1993:514)

Beyond this, Kelly (1993:516) asserted, "the cosmologically derived system of moral evaluation… also shapes the self-image and motivation of social actors". Like Collier and Rosaldo, Kelly sought a primary cause of social inequality, but he located that cause in Etoro cosmology rather than in the social and material circumstances of Etoro life. Nicholas Modjeska (1997:129) rightly noted: "On the face of it, Kelly's argument is an idealist response to the materialist approaches he opposes" (see also Brown 1997).

Among Etoro—a society which Collier (1988:258) identified as one which might fruitfully be analysed in terms of the brideservice model—bachelors are not disadvantaged *vis-à-vis* married men, because bachelors have access to the products of widows and unmarried sisters. This is also the case in the Middle Fly, although among Boazi speakers it is mothers and sisters (both married and unmarried) who provide bachelors with food and other things produced by women. These two cases call into question Collier's characterisation of brideservice societies as societies in which the most apparent inequality is between married and unmarried men, in which young men are more enthusiastic about marriage than young women and in which marriage has a positive, transformative effect on young men.

While these two cases suggest that Collier's argument about the position of bachelors in brideservice societies (Collier's "brideservice model") needs to be rethought, Strathern (1997:149) perceptively noted that Kelly's analysis "reinvents… something like the old division between brideservice and bridewealth regimes, even if the focus on marriage and wealth is proved misplaced". She wrote:

> …he [Kelly] reiterates over and again that the basis for inequality lies in the moral hierarchy of virtue. What is this moral hierarchy based on? It is based… on a notion of vitality, translated as life force (*hame*), which is the cause of bodily growth and energy, and which men transmit to others. Those who attain high evaluations are those who show their generosity through giving away such force. (Strathern 1997:147)

Elsewhere she observed: "This virtue is nothing other than the ability to deploy the effects of one's own energy. Energy is concretized in the notion of life force, its production, distribution, and consumption among persons" (Strathern 1997:148).

As Strathern rightly argues, *hame* or 'life force' thus plays a role in Kelly's description of Etoro that is similar to *work* or *labour* in Collier and Rosaldo's formulations in the sense that *hame* is a concrete basis for men's needs for women and junior men (i.e., as receptacles for semen—the embodiment of men's life force—rather than as sources of work). In his analysis of inequality Kelly divorced the concept of labour from the moral overtones that it had in Collier and Rosaldo's model.[8] For Collier and Rosaldo, labour was more than simply energy expenditure or bodily effort, and more than something to be deployed or appropriated. Labour also included essential ideas about the relationships between work and cultural conceptualisations of persons and selves (Strathern 1997:148-49).

This critique points to some general insights concerning personhood, two of which I want to mention. First, brides and grooms are not simply objects of others' interests and desires but rather persons with memories who can turn their willing or coerced participation in marriage exchanges into future claims toward their kin (for example, on behalf of their children). Second, among Boazi speakers, standing and power for both men and women were achieved through labour. Independence, power, and respect were achieved by young men through productive and reproductive labour in the households of their fathers-in-law. The same holds for a young woman who worked in her father's household until years into her marriage when she and her husband and children formed their own household.

Reviewing *Constructing Inequality*, D.J.J. Brown (1997:636) stated that "his [Kelly's] critique of the brideservice model is devastating".[9] But this is only true with regard to Collier's (1988) characterisation of the motivations for, and effects of, marriage in bride-service societies. Kelly's analysis of Etoro inequality (and my own discussion of marriage among Boazi speakers above) contradict Collier's statements about such motivations and effects, but Kelly's analysis does not challenge Collier and Rosaldo's distinction between brideservice and bridewealth societies. Indeed, Kelly agreed with Strathern about "the continued utility of drawing a fundamental distinction between two types of societies analogous to Collier and Rosaldo's distinction between 'brideservice' and 'bridewealth' societies". He also agreed with Collier and Rosaldo's general project to develop "contrastive models of social inequality applicable to comparatively unstratified societies (without classes or estates) cross-culturally" (Kelly 1997:153). Where Kelly disagreed with Collier and Rosaldo was with regard to the primary locus of inequality. He argued that inequality results from "the engagement" (1997:153) between ideological systems—through which prestige (and stigma) are accorded to particular persons—and economic systems (including division of labour), rather than from the appropriation and control of labour and products of labour or from obligations entailed in marriage, as argued by Collier and Rosaldo.

Also underlying Kelly's disagreement with Collier and Rosaldo is a question of how anthropological comparison should proceed. Kelly argued that "the question of the central locus for the production of inequality" (1997:154) is an empirical question that should be approached through an examination of ethnographic data "rather than by generating types directly from theoretical models" (1997:154). He urged "a systematic, case by case, empirically based ethnographic comparison of the prestige-stigma systems of Melanesia to determine what types emerge, to identify their distinctive features, and to chart the distribution of cases along a continuum of variations" (1997:155). Kelly's advocacy of this approach to anthropological comparison is fundamental to his differences with both Collier and Rosaldo as well as Strathern (1991). A full discussion of approaches to anthropological comparison is beyond the scope of this essay, but I explore issues of comparison in Busse (2005). Here I simply wish to note that Kelly overstates the abstract differences between "empirically based ethnographic comparison" and approaches which generate types "directly from theoretical models" and exaggerates the actual comparative practices of Collier, Rosaldo and Strathern.

Conclusions

In her response to Kelly's critique of Collier and Rosaldo, Strathern (1997:149) wrote: "An intriguing question… is how much of a model has to disappear before it really is laid to rest". A significant part of Collier and Rosaldo's model indeed remains and does not disappear, despite Kelly's critique—in particular,

their argument that different types of marriage exchange lead to different types of inequality in simple or egalitarian societies. While Kelly drew our attention to the ideological dimensions of inequality in one such society, Collier and Rosaldo's argument holds that there are significant differences in the structuring of agnatic and affinal inequality between those societies in which young men produce and control what they must give in order to obtain wives and those in which they do not.[10]

My disagreement with their model is that sister exchange differs from both bridewealth and brideservice with regard to what a man must give in order to obtain a wife, and should therefore usefully be considered as a third type (or fourth type, see n.2). As in bridewealth societies, a groom does not produce or control what is given in marriage exchange. Also, while a groom may be obligated to senior men who help to arrange his marriage exchange, he also has significant obligations to his sister who agrees with those arrangements. Sister exchange thus results in more egalitarian social relations—both between men and between men and women—than either bridewealth or brideservice.

Both Kelly's analysis of Etoro inequality and my discussion of sister-exchange marriage among Boazi speakers demonstrate the need to broaden the factors which contribute to what Collier (1988) called the "meanings of and motivations for" marriage in simple, generally egalitarian, societies. Kelly specifically pointed to division of labour, ideas underlying systems of prestige and stigma, conflict management and cosmology. My own analysis of marriage relations among Boazi speakers shows the significance of postmarital residence, the different gendered positioning of men and women with regard to marriage and the different processes and social relations marriage entails in their respective life-cycles.

Strathern (1984) has argued that students of marriage exchange can no more assume that the women in marriage exchanges have some intrinsic value than they can assume that wealth items in bridewealth or dowry have intrinsic value. I would add that one cannot assume that either grooms' labours in brideservice societies or women exchanged in societies with sister-exchange marriage have such inherent values. A full understanding of sister exchange in a given society entails an examination of how women—and particularly sisters and wives—are conceptualised and represented in that society and how women realise these aspects of their personhood. That presupposes an examination of conceptualisations of personhood and gender. To paraphrase Ann Chowning (1987), who echoed Marilyn Strathern (1984): "To understand how women are exchanged, it is necessary to understand above all what they are". In the case of Boazi sister exchange, that examination must also involve an examination of the social personhood of young husbands and brothers.

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Notes

1. Both Robin Fox (1967:180) and Donald Tuzin (1991:121) have questioned the appropriateness of the term *sister exchange* on the grounds that it is more often the fathers (or other senior men), rather than the grooms, who arrange marriages. While their point is well taken, in this paper I follow anthropological convention in referring to the custom in which a man and his sister marry a woman and her brother as *sister exchange*. This also reflects the way in which people of the Lake Murray-Middle Fly area talk about their own marriage customs which they describe as *seki towam* ('to exchange women').
2. In her book on *Marriage and Inequality in Classless Societies*, Collier (1988:1) used the terms *brideservice* and *bridewealth* to refer to "ideal-typic models for analyzing social inequality in kin-based, nonstratified societies". Collier actually proposed three ideal types: brideservice, equal bridewealth and unequal bridewealth. Due to limitations of space and because Collier's distinction between equal bridewealth and unequal bridewealth is not relevant to this paper, my discussion of Collier's ideas will therefore focus on the distinction she draws between brideservice and the general features of bridewealth.
3. These Boazi territorial groups are culturally and socially similar to Zimakani territorial groups for whom the account that follows would also hold (see Busse 1987, 2005). Strictly speaking, Boazi is the name of the language spoken by eight of the territorial groups in the Lake Murray-Middle Fly area; there is no all-encompassing name for the people of all those groups.
4. I write in the past tense, because, in the main, the events on which this paper is based took place in the 1980s, but not to indicate that the practices I describe and analyse are no longer part of Boazi social life, let alone that the ideas are no longer held. To my knowledge, Boazi people still practice sister exchange at present. As Valentinus of Bosset

told me in 1984, "We will exchange sisters until the world ends", and I have no reason to doubt him. For an extended discussion of sister exchange in the Lake Murray-Middle Fly area see Busse (1987).

5. Bosset village, which has been the base for my research, is in the Middle Fly Census Division, between the Fly River and the Indonesia-Papua New Guinea border. During my main period of research in the 1980s, it had a population of about 600.
6. Those men who did not move into their wives' fathers' households were often youngest sons of prominent men who continued to live with or near their fathers.
7. In addition to these obligations, there was a set of symbolic behaviours that linked sons-in-law and fathers-in-law and which revealed the ambivalence of this relationship. Having been homosexual partners before they were actually linked by marriage, they were prohibited from touching one another after the marriage. If a father-in-law handed something to his son-in-law, or vice versa, they were careful that they only each touch the object and not each other. The only acceptable time that a father-in-law and a son-in-law could touch one another was in a greeting, which was performed by extending their arms and touching the ends of their index fingers together. Also, sons-in-law and fathers-in-law were prohibited from saying one another's names. While there was a general name avoidance among Boazi speakers (see Busse 1987:305-11), and a somewhat stronger taboo on saying the names of affines in general, name avoidance was, or was said to be, absolute in the case of fathers-in-law and sons-in-law. I have seen men fighting because their sons-in-law spoke their names. In addition to this name avoidance, fathers-in-law and sons-in-law always referred to themselves in the first person plural when in each other's presence, and they addressed one another in the second person plural. I was told that this is because a man and his son-in-law are "like one person", so when either one referred to himself, it was as if he were referring to both of them together. Similarly, I was told that when one addresses one's father-in-law, one is also addressing oneself. Finally, a son-in-law was required to show is respect for his father-in-law by repeating any mistakes that his father-in-law made. This included errors of speech or action.
8. Strathern (1997:147) saw this as "part of a much wider move in recent anthropological writings to dislodge morality from social relations".
9. Elsewhere Brown, who has done research among Polopa in Southern Highlands Province, has compared Etoro marriage from a comparative perspective (Brown 1992).
10. Here, I agree with Brown (1997:636), who argued that the ultimate cause should not be sought in either prestige or material benefit, and with Modjeska (1997) who emphasised Kelly's analysis of who benefits from the ideologies which underpin the valuing of certain types of products and exchanges.

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