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***Contrapunteo*: Intersecting Views on the Practice of Bridewealth**

Coordinators

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Session presentation

Engaging with the theme *Contrapunteo*, this panel seeks to explore the multiplicity of voices concerning the practice of bridewealth. Bridewealth remains the most common form of marriage transaction in the world and maintains cultural importance in many societies. Though many individuals value the custom as a method for linking families, as a demonstration of a potential husband's ability to provide for a woman's future and more generally as a material expression of the value of women in their societies, the practice is criticized by many.

Contrasting perspectives concerning bridewealth abound and this panel invites submissions that engage diverse viewpoints on this practice and its implications for women, families and communities. These perspectives could issue from a number of social intersections including those between genders, generations, social classes, rural and urban contexts or any number of other tensions in systems of bridewealth.

Papers

Gendered and generational perspectives on the practice of bridewealth in Honiara, Solomon Islands

Christine Jourdan, Concordia University

In the Solomon Islands, the place of bridewealth in the lives of contemporary young people, both men and women and the viewpoints of their parents and grand-parents reveal broader changes taking place in the conception of marriage, urban forms of social relations and the transformation of kinship ties. Interviews with men and women of different generations and different marital statuses allow for an exploration of countering visions of these social practices and their future role in their own lives and those of their families. This paper explores contrasting perspectives on the practice of bridewealth in Honiara, the capital city of the Solomon Islands, and its implications for women, families and communities. These gendered and intergenerational perspectives are explored in the ethnographic data collected among Malaitan people by Christine Jourdan and Nathan Bond in 2015 and 2016 in Honiara and on Malaita.

Bride-wealth as a condensed symbol in contemporary Tanzania

Martin Lindhardt, University of Southern Denmark

In Tanzania the payment of bride-wealth is a highly contested practice around which a number of contrasting, or contrapuntal, values and perspectives come into play. Based on research in the city of Iringa, my paper argues that bride-wealth has become a condensed symbol (Ortner 1973) of different tensions that characterizes contemporary urban life, for instance between a neo-liberal contractual, cost-benefit approach to human relations versus a notion of the intrinsic value of relations within and between families; tensions between generations (as seen in understandings that the progress of struggling youth is being blocked by elders) and between aspirations of social adulthood and difficulties of establishing an household. Furthermore, contrapuntal religious perspectives often need to be balanced, not least as Iringa's growing Pentecostal/charismatic population denounce excessive bride-wealth but also insist that respect for elders (and thus payment of bride-wealth) is a Biblical commandment. The paper explores how such a variety of perspectives and tensions come into play when bride-wealth is negotiated.

Intersecting past(s) and present(s): Baruya and Gebusi revisited (Papua New Guinea)

Anne-Sylvie Malbrancke – École des hautes études en sciences sociales

The present study adopts a double plan of analysis, by comparing two interior New Guinea communities, and combining recent first-hand ethnographic research with data collected by senior researchers who studied these societies in previous decades. Using the lens of longitudinal analysis linked to a synchronic approach, a fresh perspective is developed on the recent introduction of brideprice among Baruya and Gebusi, where the promise of delayed reciprocation becomes increasingly operative socially as to satisfy the cultural expectation of a balanced exchange. Though money replaces the gift of a woman in a structural sense, its value is not necessarily similar from an experiential standpoint: intersection as a methodological tool helps analyse both aspects of continuity and change within the same phenomenon in nuanced ways, showing, against other ethnographic cases documented in the region, how brideprice can foster togetherness and reduce the high rates of domestic and homicidal violence previously recorded.

Lifouan women's perspectives on bridewealth

Anna Paini – Università di Verona

Drawing from my previous (1990s) and most recent fieldwork (2017) in Lifou, Loyalty Islands, I consider how Lifouan women are engaging in and experiencing practices surrounding bridewealth as a key moment in the articulation of gender relations. While today it is not uncommon for unmarried couples to live together, a customary marriage (*faipopo*) is still a key event in becoming an effective member of the community and in taking up their social role in the broader society. Bridewealth is conceived as the opening of the path leading, within less than a year, to the wedding, thus it is still one of the key ceremonial acts necessary to sanction such a marriage, both in the village and in town. However, the bridewealth ceremony (*june hmala*) is discrete as it is celebrated late at night and involves only close family on each side. Bridewealth is not contested or resisted. Based on Kanak women's accounts, I explore how they perceive their sense of autonomy as being the possibility of choosing who to marry and being able to negotiate important aspects of their married life, rather than acquiring the category of gift which accompanies this event: money, given by the groom's kin. In meeting their obligations, what they emphasize is the responsibility they assume in reproducing social ties, thus ensuring the continuation of Kanak sociality.

Marriage Prestations, Gift Making and Identity in Urban East Timor

Kelly Silva, Universidad de Brasilia

This paper addresses the current praxis and controversies framing marriage prestations in urban East Timor. It suggests how the association of marriage transactions with different regimes of exchange – namely, gift and commodity – entails a moral narrative of modernity structured by anxieties related to: (a) fixing ontological boundaries between people and things; (b) the alliance effects people search for when carrying out their marriage; (c) the colonial history and politics of custom associated with urban spaces, considered places of civilized/assimilated people, and, finally; (d) people's historical period of migration to the city.

“We are not expensive, we are valuable”: Transforming Practices of Bridewealth in the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic

Vivian Solana, Brandeis University

One of the POLISARIO Front's earliest revolutionary measures was a socialist-inspired campaign against bridewealth (*sadaq* in Hassaniya, *mahr* in Arabic). Emplacing a Sahrawi model of female empowerment within the political field of other secular Arab nationalisms contemporaneous to it, the POLISARIO Front's leadership legitimized this measure under the grounds that it constituted a morally fraught practice of “buying” women. However, following the 1991 UN mediated cease-fire between Morocco and the POLISARIO Front, practices of bridewealth have re-emerged with a vengeance in the exiled Sahrawi Republic, albeit significantly transformed. This paper describes this re-emergence, situating it within the gendered geography and distribution of labour of today's Sahrawi Republic. Framing the bridewealth's re-emergence within the practical reason of Sahrawi women for whom fields of marriage constitute a key terrain for their empowerment / disempowerment, I describe it as an endorsement of the idea that women should be acknowledged for their unwaged regenerative labour, as well as provided with insurance within relations of marriage and divorce.

Bridewealth and the Marital Transmission of HIV in Papua New Guinea

Holly Wardlow – University of Toronto

As in much of the world, married women in Papua New Guinea are most likely to be infected with HIV through sex with their husbands. In the pre-antiretroviral period – when AIDS was thought of as a death sentence – Huli people often debated whether an infected wife's natal family could demand compensation from her husband, much as they would if he had beaten or killed her. While the arguments for and against were complex, often at the heart of these debates was bridewealth – its meaning, function, and socio-corporeal consequences. Was infecting one's wife with HIV like killing her? Or did bridewealth so encompass and incorporate a wife reproductively that harms related to sex could not be considered compensable? Perhaps not surprisingly, women and men often had different answers to these questions. In this paper I parse the gendered arguments for and against marital AIDS compensation to show how these were also arguments about the meaning of bridewealth in the postcolonial era.