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Author(s): R. H. Barnes

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MARRIAGE BY CAPTURE

R.H. BARNES

University of Oxford

The theories of John F. McLennan have long been dismissed as disproved or passé. Meanwhile, modern ethnography has produced increasingly sophisticated ethnographic accounts relevant to his ideas. This article looks at a sample of that ethnography from Indonesia, the Caribbean, Amazonia, Australia and New Guinea to see what it might have to say about McLennan's hypotheses, particularly in respect to marriage by capture and linguistic exogamy. Modern anthropological discussions are reminiscent in many ways of McLennan's, perhaps unconsciously so. McLennan would probably be quite pleased to have access to the information now available and undoubtedly would attempt to exploit it to defend his views. In the end, the new information does not support his theories, but we may still lack final answers to his questions.

Marriage by capture has a long lineage in anthropological writing and speculation and still appears frequently in modern ethnographic contexts. It was central to John F. McLennan's theory of the origin of exogamy, which linked totemism, female infanticide, exogamy, marriage by capture and polyandry into a single theory. Although his theory has generally been dismissed, it provided the starting point for a considerable body of analytic discussion. It has left its mark even on authors who may not acknowledge it, or even be unaware of it. We may wonder what McLennan would have made of the much more sophisticated ethnography of the present, if he were given the opportunity to test his views on it. Is there, indeed, any present utility in any of McLennan's views? Modern authors deploy the idea of marriage by capture to explain a variety of local or regional institutions, but as a category characterizing a widespread distribution of apparently comparable institutions, it remains strikingly unstable and difficult to elucidate.

Eastern Indonesia

While doing research in Lamalera, Lembata, eastern Indonesia, I was once told that in the past, if a young man had made up his mind that he wished to marry a certain young woman and was encountering resistance, he would wait at an appropriate hiding place and capture the woman. In doing so he would run the risk of great injury, and his friends would give him plenty of hard drink, so that he would come back to the house without feeling the damage. Relatives of the woman would chase him all the way to the house, where the men of his group would come out and fight. After the woman had been in the house long enough, a few months or a year, things would quieten down and the appropriate negoti-

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ations could be taken care of. Although bride capture is no longer acceptable, elopement is still an option. Such is the bare report. Like so many other features of culture one is told about, bride capture used to be practised, but is no longer so.

When the German ethnographer Ernst Vatter travelled through the Lamaholot-speaking region, including Lamalera, in 1928-9, he too received reports about the former indulgence in bride capture in villages around the Ilé Mandiri volcano in East Flores.

In earlier times young women would sometimes be abducted by their admirers and their friends while fetching water, or even removed by force of arms from their parents' houses. This they called *pěhěng tēmona*, that is 'grabbing' or 'capturing the bride', but they assured us that bride capture no longer takes place and that even formerly this manner of acquiring a wife was strongly disapproved of. However, among the people of Bama, west of Ilé Mandiri, such things still take place. When we later asked about this custom in Bama, they were very upset and asserted that the practice existed only around the Mandiri. Obviously, this situation is exactly like the eating of rats and mice, which also only one's lovely neighbors ever do (Vatter 1932: 80).

According to Vatter, in the town of Larantuka, Christian from ancient times, a custom exists 'which might be interpreted as a survival of former bride capture'. After the church wedding, the bride returns to her father's house and locks herself in a room. The groom follows, accompanied by the witnesses to his wedding who break open the door and extract the fiercely resisting bride.

The missionary anthropologist Arndt subsequently wrote that on Adonara, in the case where the parents of the couple have come to an agreement over the match and the accompanying marriage prestations, but the bride's parents know that she is against the marriage, they will send her on an errand to a specific place and let the boy's parents know in advance where the young woman may be found.

The parents of the youth call together some older women and one or another man from among their relatives or neighbors and give them the task of capturing the girl in the specified place and leading her home. The old women go off on the hunt, the man being supplied with a musket, or rather with rockets, since muskets are no longer permitted. They then set up an ambush near a place where the girl must pass by. As soon as she appears, they jump out and seize her, take her goods off her head, grab her arms and clothing and shout *bēra, bēra*, quick, quick. The girl cries, 'I don't want to' and defends herself with all her might, but is not strong enough to resist the superior force, and is pulled and dragged away. The man fires off his gun or sets off the rockets so that the whole neighborhood knows that once again a brave deed has been done and a girl has been forced into an unwanted marriage ... After a few days, most young women reconcile themselves to their lot and remain; some adapt themselves well and no longer want a change. Others however retain their aversion and the consequence is much quarrelling and bickering and unhappiness. For the time being usually she does not run away, because she would not be taken in again by her parents, and another boy would be wary of taking her because he would know that it would only result in squabbling, hostility and finally war (Arndt 1940: 127).

Bride capture did not, of course, always occur with the connivance of the girl's parents. Sometimes it was occasioned by the resistance of the bride, her parents, or both. When the woman was abducted from her home, some would stay behind and exchange blows with her family. Having successfully brought the girl to their home, the man's group would then force her to step over an elephant tusk to ensure that she would not flee. While the young woman was confined in

the house, her captors would dance a victory dance. Four nights in a row they would return to dance and celebrate. Finally, they would finish with a feast. Her parents and other relatives might revenge themselves by entering the village of the thief and killing a few animals, but unless they were prepared to start a war this was the limit of their response; the girl, in any case, was never taken back, although occasionally a woman's continued resistance did eventuate in a separation. In a few days the parents of the young man would visit the girl's former home, where they would inquire of her parents how much bridewealth was to be demanded in order to close the affair. Bridewealth paid after a theft of this sort was always much higher than usual; often it was doubled and in Flores it may have amounted to as much as fifteen elephant tusks. According to Arndt only the rich and prominent could afford to indulge in bride capture, because only they could afford the costs and because no one would resist them (Arndt 1940: 134-5, 185-7; Barnes 1996: 90-2). Similar descriptions of marriage by capture can be extracted from the ethnography of other eastern Indonesian peoples. Arndt, for example, gives precisely the same sort of account for the Ngadha of central Flores (Arndt 1954: 30-1). Indeed, much the same has been reported from most parts of the world. Lubbock (1870: 69-87), Robertson Smith (1885: 89-99), Wake (1889: 402-4), Westermarck (1921: 240-51), Crawley (1902: 350-70) and Briffault (1927: 230-44) give early worldwide surveys (see also Giraud-Telon 1884: 102-29, especially 116-22).

Assessment

Bride capture appears in the published Lamaholot ethnography as something which belongs to the past. It is not available for ethnographers to witness, and it certainly would not be possible for one and the same ethnographer to witness and make a comparative study of several cases. On the other hand, it might just be that it still takes place among the neighbours of whomever the ethnographer happens to be interviewing. It belongs, therefore, either to a different time in the past or to a different place in the present. The various examples given indicate different reactions to it by the parties involved. The woman's parents and relatives may violently resist, they may acquiesce reluctantly, they may connive in the activity, or they may even take the leading role in arranging it. Opposition to the marriage may come from the bride, her parents, the bride and her parents, or perhaps even both the bride and the groom. The active parties may be the groom and his friends and relatives, the bride's friends and relatives, both sets of relatives, and even apparently in some cases the bride herself joins in. In fact, in at least some cases the actual desires of the woman appear to be highly ambiguous and hard to determine, reminiscent perhaps of the issue of consent in alleged rape. Furthermore, bride capture occurs within an organized set of expectations about social structure and marriage within it and sets in train the procedures these expectations entail. Indeed, the normal working out of marriage by capture in Lamaholot society would be a lifelong alliance in which the captors assumed an inferior position to wife's relatives and were obliged to make substantial gifts to them. To this extent, therefore, it stands apart from rape, pillage, slave raiding, or the actual selling of wives and daughters. On the other hand, it is an activity which strongly brings these negative activities to mind, and there is historical evidence that these other activities also occurred within the Lamaholot region,

carried out by either local or foreign perpetrators.

McLennan

Briefly, McLennan's argument is that ceremonial marriage capture is a symbol of a previous stage of society when tribes were exogamous but hostile to each other. Under these circumstances, capturing women from a hostile tribe was the only means available to find a wife. The presence of capture implies exogamy, and the presence of exogamy implies capture, either in the present or the past. The exogamous tribes were all matrilineal. The origin of exogamy and marriage by capture lies in female infanticide¹. The accepted position on McLennan is that although he coined the terms 'endogamy' and 'exogamy', he did not understand them, leaving it to Morgan to point out that 'exogamy' pertains to clans and not to tribes, although as Lowie (1937: 45) commented, 'McLennan's error is less crass than it at first sight appears', since in certain passages McLennan did associate the exogamous tribes with family groups or clans. Furthermore, the argument from female infanticide was refuted by Wilken (1880: 614-15) and Spencer (1882: 1:648) on the grounds that 'there are naturally more women than men in a population, that more boys than girls die in infancy, and that men are exposed to far more dangers to life than women' (Needham 1967: xxxiii; Rivière 1970: xxii-xxiv, xxxix). Generally speaking, then, McLennan's theory is understood to be dead, like that other institution he invented but did not understand, totemism, and like his Scottish law career became when it was learned that he had been dabbling in anthropology (see Rivière 1970: xi).

Rivière remarks that, 'It is not McLennan's evolutionary schema, soon totally rejected, that matters but the sociological method he used that is important' (Rivière 1995: 301). Rivière also states that McLennan had a new and an original thought and, in defending Robertson Smith for having taken over McLennan's evolutionary schema, points out that at the time Robertson Smith wrote, 'there were few, if any, other theoretical ideas for ordering the material available' (Rivière 1995: 300). What, it may be asked, is left over if *Primitive marriage* is shorn of its evolutionary argument? Well, there are a few useful ideas. Lowie wrote of McLennan's theory that, 'As a purely logical construct that scheme inspires respect' (Lowie 1937: 44), to which Evans-Pritchard (1981: 67) responded by preferring to emphasize its internal flaws. Nevertheless, there is a passage in which McLennan advances a speculative scheme of logical transformations, quite independent of any immediate argument for historical sequence in a manner that we now are more likely to associate with Lévi-Strauss. He ranges a series of types of tribal systems on a scale from pure exogamy at one extreme to the endogamy of Indian castes at the other (McLennan 1865: 59-60).

Although these tribal systems may be arranged as above so as to *seem* to form a progression, of which the extremes are pure exogamy on the one hand and endogamy – transmuted into caste of the Mantchu and Hindu types – on the other, we have at present no right to say that these systems were developed in anything like this order in tribal history. They may represent a progression from exogamy to endogamy, or from endogamy to exogamy; or the middle terms, so to speak, may have been produced by the combination of groups severally organised on the one and the other of these principles.

Furthermore, something like Lévi-Strauss's idea of a structural contradiction may be seen in his argument that tribal exogamy coupled with matrilineality

would lead to more than one matrilineal group within the tribal group, thus removing the need for marriage by capture and leading to a different form of organization, namely that described by Morgan: a (potentially endogamous) tribe divided into exogamous and inter-marrying descent groups (McLennan 1865: 61). The practice of two matrilineal tribes taking wives from each other leads to the mixing of the two groups, since there would be B matriline in tribe A and A matriline in tribe B, and eventually A and B matriline would be spread throughout the extent of mutually intermarrying tribes (McLennan 1865: 49-50). This observation perhaps anticipates later comments about the effects of exogamous marriage on gene flow (Tindale 1953: 185; Owen 1965: 686). Although he drew examples from many distant simple societies, McLennan did not think of his theory as applying only to exotic peoples. He explicitly drew on available European examples and tried to attribute bride capture to the Welsh, Irish, Picts and Danes and exogamy to the Picts (McLennan 1865: 29-30, 36, 53, 116-17). He also commented that, 'A *really* primitive people in fact exists nowhere' (McLennan 1865: 28).

Caribs

One place in which McLennan showed that he was aware that a 'tribe' might be little more than a family occurs in a summary of Alexander von Humboldt on the Caribs.

The Caribbees fall into small tribes or family groups, often not numbering more than from 40 to 50 persons; Humboldt, indeed, takes frequent occasion to say that an Indian tribe is no more than a family. Where groups break up into sections, as they tend to do, and live apart from one another, the sections are found, though of one blood, and originally of one language, soon to speak dialects so different that they cannot understand one another. Become strangers, they are enemies except when forced to unite to make common cause against some powerful tribe which has proved a scourge to them all; enemies, and being at least at the time when Humboldt wrote, cannibals, not only disposed to slay but to eat one another. In their wars, we may imagine, that while their male captives furnished means of subsistence, the women were preserved to be wives and luxuries. To such an extent, indeed, did all the tribes of the Caribbean nation practise the capture of women – depend on aggression for their wives – that the women of any tribe were found to belong to different tribes, and to tribes of other nations, and that to such an extent, that nowhere were the men and women of the Caribbean race found to speak in one tongue (McLennan 1865: 27-8).

McLennan carefully lists ten page references in three volumes of von Humboldt's work, in none of which, however, is a claim made that the Caribs practice linguistic exogamy. According to Lasch (1907: 96), all sources for different languages for the sexes rely on a comment made by the missionary Raymond Breton in his *Carib-French dictionary* of 1665 without adding anything new. 'The Carib chief exterminated all the natives of the country except for the women, who have always kept something of their language'.² From Breton's comment developed the interpretation that the Caribs, having exterminated the Arawak on some of the islands, lived with the Arawak women, who retained Arawak. Even this situation is not quite the picture of linguistic exogamy proposed by McLennan. However,

contrary to von Humboldt's assumption, the difference between the languages of the men and women among the Caribs is not as great as initially thought on the basis of the older sources. Among the 2,000 to 3,000 words in the language, there are only 400 that have

duplicates, other than a double row of prenominal suffixes and a twofold negative verb (Lasch 1907: 97; see also Adam 1879: 2; Rat 1898: 311-12; Sapper 1897: 56-7; Stoll 1884: 34; and Westermarck 1921: 2: 275-6).

Basically, both Carib sexes spoke the same language apart from a few expressions limited to specific activities and kinship relationships. In any case, there was a women's language on the islands before the Caribs killed the Arawak men and stole their wives (Lasch 1907: 97-8). According to Taylor and Hoff (1980), what was supposed to be the women's language was actually the language of both sexes, an ordinary Arawak language. The men's language was actually a Carib pidgin, learned in adolescence and used by the Island-Carib to deal with Caribs on the South American mainland (see also Hulme & Whitehead 1992: 3). In other words, there is no justification in the ethnography of the Caribs for McLennan's interpretation 'that the women of any tribe were found to belong to different tribes, and to tribes of other nations, and that to such an extent ... nowhere were the men and women of the Caribbean race found to speak in one tongue'. Clearly too in this passage McLennan is confusing *tribe*, in the sense of von Humboldt's small family, with *tribe* in the sense of a larger grouping identified by common language.³

Vaupés

The ethnographic literature available to us today does describe exogamous patterns elsewhere in the world which more closely resemble in one respect or another McLennan's speculations. Among them are the Tukanoan peoples of the Vaupés territory of Colombia. So far, I have not found any examples of the modern writers on the Tukanoans actually citing the parallel in McLennan's writings, although it is hard to believe that they are not aware of it. In this Northwest Amazonian region there are some twenty-five linguistic groups. Almost every Tukanoan speaks between three and four or more languages (Sorensen 1967: 670). According to Sorensen and other authors, this is a culturally homogeneous area. However, there are some relevant variations in social structure. At the northern extreme, the Cubeo have a convention of local exogamy, but although marriage does take place with other tribes (language groups), marriage with other Cubeo in other phratries is permitted and is common (Goldman 1963: 43, 136). In the south the Makuna acknowledge the ideal of linguistic exogamy, although in fact they often marry fellow Makuna in different patrilineages (Århem 1981a: 114, 139). The same is true for the Barasana and Taiwano (S. Hugh-Jones 1979: 24). In between the Cubeo and the Makuna, among the sixteen language groups of the Tukanoan, there is a very strict adherence to the principle that men take wives from groups speaking languages other than that spoken by their own patrilineal descent group. Of the thousand marriages Jackson recorded in this region, there was only one union between persons of the same language group, and this exception was both highly disapproved of and explained away as not being a real marriage or excused on the grounds that there really was a difference of origin involved (C. Hugh-Jones 1979: 14-15; S. Hugh-Jones 1979: 23-4; Jackson 1983: 84-5, 136; 1984: 170-6). The Tukanoans criticize the Cubeo for intermarrying among themselves and have legends for explaining why they do so (Jackson 1984: 170). Tukanoans living near the Makuna criticize them for marrying other Makuna because 'people

should not speak like their cross-cousins' (C. Hugh-Jones in Jackson 1983: 85). Hill has recently argued that:

Language group exogamy can be understood as an eastern Tukanoan strategy of resisting the migratory waves of northern Arawakan phratries by inverting the latter's practice of dividing the language group into several ranked, exogamous phratries. By creating a mirror image of these sociolinguistic patterns, or the building of ranked phratries through language group exogamy, the eastern Tukanoan constructed a regional boundary that clearly distanced them from the Wakuénai and that also allowed for a zone of interpenetration along the northern and eastern borders of the Vaupés Basin (1996: 159-60).

All of these peoples share in common the features of patrilineal descent groups resident in longhouses, an ideal of sister exchange, a preference for bilateral cross-cousin marriage or at least marriage with a woman who comes from the same group as ego's mother, residence group exogamy and low population densities. Symbolic or ceremonial bride capture, which on McLennan's theory we would expect to accompany this combination, could be said to be prescriptive among the Cubeo. 'An orthodox marriage must ceremonialize the stealing away of a woman from her own community' (Goldman 1963: 44). Goldman speaks of this 'rite of abduction' as constituting formal marriage.

The groom seizes his bride and runs with her to the canoe. She cries out for help and her male kin rush out and beat her 'abductor' with stocks or with their bare hands. His own companions aid him and, if the girl is willing, they get to the canoe landing with no serious damage. This display of ceremonial violence satisfies two Cubeo doctrines, one that affinal sibs are 'hostile' and the other that a woman will not leave her sib by her own volition but must be torn from it by brute force. There is also a third notion, namely that a man be strong enough to capture a bride (Goldman 1963: 142-3).

Goldman cites Giacone (1949: 21) to the effect that Tucano also practise bride capture, but that it is the father of the groom with companions who do so, rather than the groom himself. 'Cubeo notions of manhood would be offended at the notion that the father should bring a bride home for his son'. Apparently, Cubeo women are free to run away from their husbands at any time. Such flights home seem to be commonplace in the early stages of Cubeo marriage, to the extent that Goldman regards them as quasi-ritual and as a counterpoint to the initial ceremonial abduction (Goldman 1963: 143-4). For the Makuna, Århem describes three forms of marriage: direct exchange, gift marriage and bride capture. Bride capture may be violent and unreciprocated seizure or a pre-arranged ritual. In practice, there appears to be a scale from ritual to violent bride capture among the Makuna (Århem 1981a: 147-8). Århem relates this scale to affinal distance, which among the Makuna in turn is coterminous with spatial distance. Gift marriage takes place among close and frequently intermarrying allies (sometimes also distant allies) with whom there are strong and solidary relationships. Direct exchange takes place with distant and unrelated affines rather than with close allies, and between local and territorial groups, rather than within the local group. Bride capture takes place between unrelated or distant affines and between territorial groups (Århem 1981a: 147-9; 1981b: 53-6). Between 55 and 65 per cent. of Makuna marriages are of the kind that Århem classes as gift marriages. However, the Makuna state that direct exchange is the norm. They also say that the violent abduction of women from afar is the correct form of marriage. While they state a preference for genealogical cross-cousin marriage and actual sister exchange, they also say that a man should marry a

woman from far away.⁴ Århem writes that bride capture defines and expresses political relations between groups and may be the cause as well as the result of conflicts. It can be prompted by social and demographic problems of the group of raiders. It regularly leads to retaliatory capture or negotiations, effecting a delayed marriage exchange. Ritualized capture, he says, expresses and reinforces the stereotype of affinal hostility and distrust (Århem 1987: 165-6).

When Makuna men talk about marriage in general, they convey the impression that bride capture is an ideal form of marriage, a highly prestigious way of acquiring a wife. The importance of the bride capture as an ideal form of marriage is related to the value of male aggressiveness in Makuna culture (Århem 1981a: 152).

Direct exchange marriage amounted to less than 30 per cent. of his sample and bride capture less than 15 per cent. (Århem 1981a: 147-54). Makuna speak of bride capture as theft or as a hunt. Makuna men will wait until the men in the woman's village have gone hunting or fishing and then rush to the house to capture the woman in the absence of the men, or they will capture her in a field and drag her off. In either case they avoid a fight. Her kinsmen will later either counter-attack or negotiate. Århem sees a scale from unreciprocated capture, to capture eventuating in an exchange or return of the woman, to ritual capture. His case material shows that most instances of bride capture do not lead to stable marriages. However, Makuna marriage rules mean that a man who has no kinswoman to exchange for a wife or cannot claim an affinal woman within the local alliance network has no other choice than to attempt a capture (Århem 1981a: 160-1).

Unlike the Makuna, the Tukanoans do not regard marriage at a distance as a favoured form of marriage, although they do have the advantage of increasing the pool of affines. Although raids to capture women figure in Tukanoan stories and myths, they no longer occur. Ceremonial capture may still occur, but apparently rarely. When it is planned, the groom and kinsmen sneak up on the woman's longhouse at night and escape with her through the side doors used only for elopements and by women during Yuruparí rites. Jackson thinks that the degree to which the bride's family are aware in advance of what is to happen varies from case to case. A mock battle, leading to little damage, ensues at the canoe landing. Feigned or real displays of displeasure on the part of the woman's family gives them leverage later when they visit the groom's village to see if the woman is happy to stay there and to arrange an exchange marriage. Since no woman today can be taken from her home completely against her will, the bride must have consented to some degree, though she should not appear to do so. Jackson says the ceremony demonstrates 'her proper ambivalence and hesitation' (Jackson 1983: 133-4; 1992: 9; see also Sorensen 1984). Jackson sees in real bride capture 'a model emphasizing agnatic solidarity and gender antagonism, while an alliance model is expressed in the exchange of sisters between true cross-cousins' (Jackson 1992: 8).

Ceremonial bride capture can be seen as a response to and a communication about structural ambivalence: ambivalence about a specific marriage and about affinal relations in general. It is symbolic action that affirms several things, most of them contradictory. It is a betwixt-and-between marriage – neither an exchange of classificatory sisters between close cross-cousins who have known one another all their lives and who have arranged this marriage slowly and with everyone's consent, nor, at the other extreme, a real capture of a woman from a

settlement with which the groom and his kinsmen have had virtually no contact (Jackson 1992: 9).

Christine Hugh-Jones never witnessed mock capture among the Pirá-paraná Tukanoans. In her interpretation, capture does involve a degree of force, intended to change a relationship.

It is appropriate to seize a woman if a rightful claim has been turned down by the girl's agnates, and also if there is no prior claim to the girl ... It is also appropriate to seize women from moderately distant or very distant communities, but use of force is incompatible with close neighbourliness (C. Hugh-Jones 1979: 96).

What happens on raids appears to vary considerably, and the degree of violence may range from aggressive negotiation to killing. She does not know how frequent killing was in the past, but thinks extreme cases of denying a rightful woman or raids on distant and unknown groups could have led to deaths. Christine Hugh-Jones also relates the alternatives between exchange marriage and wife raiding to social distance (C. Hugh-Jones 1979: 93-8). An analogy also exists between game-killing and wife-raiding (C. Hugh-Jones 1979: 223-4). Her interpretation is perhaps closest to Lévi-Strauss's comment that among the Nambikwara of western Brazil 'Exchanges are peacefully resolved wars, and wars are the result of unsuccessful transactions' and that 'the system of prestations results in marriage' (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 67; 1943a: 127-8; 1948: 90-1).

McLennan would not have had much difficulty fitting the Vaupés into his theory of exogamy. The fact that the groups involved were patrilineal would have been sufficient indication that they had evolved away from the primordial state, but not far enough to have removed bride capture from the environment. Jackson actually provides the needed bit of speculative history, although not quite enough of it to get back to matrilineality. 'At an earlier period in Vaupés history, it is probable that both polygyny and unstable marriages were much more frequent and were directly connected to feuding, because many more marriages were made by coercion' (Jackson 1983: 194). The points the modern authors make about affinal or social distance paralleling a transition between types of marriage have their counterpart in McLennan.⁵

We find capture *de facto* coexistent with capture as a form [i.e. ceremonial capture] and not unfrequent, among most of the rude tribes observing the form; its frequency depending partly on the degree of friendliness established between the tribes, and partly on the degree of fixity given by usage to the price to be paid for a bride (McLennan 1865: 31).

Owen (1965) has suggested that for people with simple exogamous patrilocal bands and very low population densities multilingualism is common, it being the women who bring the strange languages into the group. He says that in Baja California a proportion of married women are native speakers of languages other than that of the band in which they live, but he does not give any figures.

North-East Arnhem Land

Although Tindale (1953: 186) concluded that 15 per cent. of Australian Aboriginal marriages are intertribal, there are groups which practise something like total linguistic exogamy (Jackson 1983: 176; Warner 1937: 30). One such group in North-East Arnhem Land has been known in the ethnographic

literature as the Murngin, people who speak a language called Thuwal-Thuwala, named after two separate groups, whose speech is marked by a distinction governed by the presence or absence of a vowel deletion rule. Geographically distributed dialect differences exist in this language, but they are unrelated to Thuwal-Thuwala social dichotomy. This dichotomy consists of exogamous moieties. Each moiety is said to have a separate language, and each clan within a moiety distinguishes itself from other clans on the basis of language.

Although the vowel deletion distinction between Thuwal-Thuwala fits the moiety division exactly, there are no other linguistic differences between the two moieties. Children are expected to start by learning to speak the version appropriate to their mother's moiety, but to switch to that of their father by the time they are adults. One consequence is that everyone eventually attains fluency in both versions. Although the application of or failure to apply the rule leads to very different sounding sentences, the rule itself is simple and easy to apply, although speakers may not be able to formulate the rule. Although Morphy speaks of Thuwal and Thuwala as being dialects, her real position is that the difference is not dialectical but sociolectal. Thus, it turns out that the linguistic exogamy, while fully effective exogamy, is not truly language exogamy, since in fact Thuwal and Thuwala are both one and the same language. Even their names are only distinguished by the operations of the vowel deletion rule (Morphy 1977). Morphy confirms in fact Warner's contention that while the moieties are supposed to speak separate languages, vocabularies he collected showed that there were no differences (other than the vowel deletion rule).

According to Warner (1937: 35), tribes in northeastern Arnhem Land are very weak social units and clans may have uncertain or changing tribal membership. The effective exogamous units are the patrilineal clans and the moieties. However, unlike the theory that you marry people with whom you maintain hostilities, in this region warfare with other clans within the same moiety is far more common than with clans of the opposite moiety. The motive is competition for women. When men of Warumeri clan married women who were related as mother's brother's daughters to men of Wangurri clan and should have become their wives, the Wangurri raided the Warumeri, killing many of the men and taking their wives for themselves. Whereas in the Vaupés raiding was for the daughters and sisters of men in unrelated or distant affinal groups, here the raid was against men in non-affinal groups who had already taken such women as wives (Warner 1937: 27-8, 32). In such cases, women are given to men who stand in the proper marriageable relationship to them.⁶ Raiding is among several means of obtaining a wife, which the people of this region regard as illegal and condemn, but which Warner says is practised to a considerable degree (Warner 1937: 77,82).

New Guinea

Foley points out that in New Guinea language is a trade item like other cultural artefacts and that villages on the border between two language groups may shift their linguistic allegiance if there are cultural and economic advantages in doing so. He also says that given the small size of New Guinea societies, exogamous marriage may be an important instrument of language change and suggests that a study of the question be undertaken, instancing the connexion between

exogamous marriages and multilingualism among the Siane (Foley 1986: 24-5). However, Salisbury comments that his statistics show a random pattern of marriages as between Siane and non-Siane and says that language does not appear to be a consideration in Siane wife-selection (Salisbury 1962: 1, 8). I have been unable to uncover any other evidence for language exogamy in New Guinea, although bride capture certainly does exist there. The Siane conform to the eastern highlands pattern in Papua New Guinea, where groups are very isolated, marriage is either endogamous or with hostile clans, marriage into another clan does not lead to alliance, and a woman may never or rarely see her natal group again. The Enga slogan is 'we marry the people we fight' (Meggitt 1965: 101), although they fight and marry into clans living near them and their ability to mount a force for hostilities is restricted by heavy exchange obligations to affines (Feil 1987: 79).

Further west, intermarriage takes place among friendly groups and marriage with enemies is not practised (Feil 1987: 75-8). Here the Vaupés transition between exchange marriage with friends and capture from distant enemies is paralleled by a geographical passage between friendly ties to allied affines at one end and restricted, hostile relationships with wife providers at the other. The distribution in the New Guinea highlands is reminiscent of Tylor's claim that when small isolated tribes begin to press on one another a choice must be made between marrying in and marrying out. Endogamy is a policy of isolation, while intermarriage offers itself as a means of keeping up permanent alliance. Such alliances through exogamy strengthen the group's ability to resist weaker endogamous tribes. Hence the famous line, 'Again and again in the world's history, savage tribes must have had plainly before their minds the simple practical alternative between marrying-out and being killed out' (Tylor 1889: 267).⁷

Why ceremonial bride capture?

McLennan (1865: 11-12) rejected the view of Max Müller that bride capture is to be explained by the prudery of the woman and advanced his own theory, which of course has come in for much criticism. There are many alternative explanations. Lubbock (1870: 70, 72) reversed McLennan's sequence and saw exogamy as resulting from marriage by capture, although Starcke (1889: 215) claims that Lubbock here misunderstood McLennan's distinction between genuine capture and symbolic capture. For Lubbock, 'marriage was an act for which some compensation was due to those whose rights were invaded' (Lubbock 1870: 86). Spencer saw the origin of capture as lying in genuine resistance to marriage by the woman and her female and male relatives. Ceremonial capture replaced real capture reserved to certain privileged classes and as a ceremony was imitated by other classes (Spencer 1882: 654-7). For Starcke, the capture ceremony 'symbolizes the sorrow of the bride on leaving her former home; her close dependence on her family is expressed by her lamentation' (Starcke 1889: 218). Rivière interprets a comment made by Wake concerning the Dravidians as meaning that the ceremony serves to symbolize the transfer of jural authority (Rivière 1970: xxxviii; Wake 1889: 431). In his sample of 130 societies, only six of whom were matrilineal, Tylor found hostile, connubial and formal (ceremonial) capture only among the patrilineal peoples and those whom he interpreted as representing the transition from matrilineality to patrilineality.

This transition he deemed to depend on residence. Capture is incompatible with matrilineal residence, 'it being plain that the warrior who has carried a wife captive from a hostile tribe does not take up his abode in her family' (Tylor 1889: 258, 266) and therefore serves to break up matrilineality. However, he felt that the number of societies in which capture and exogamy coexist, while appreciable, was insufficient to demonstrate cause and effect (Tylor 1889: 258-60, 265). 'If capture leads to any form of exogamy, this must, I think, be a paternal form, and if it be admitted that the maternal form is earlier, then it follows that capture is inadmissible as the primary cause of exogamy' (Tylor 1889: 266). For Letourneau (1891: 103-4), marriage by capture symbolized the subjection of the woman sold or ceded by her parents. According to Crawley (1902: 333, 336) connubial and formal (ceremonial) capture are not survivals of real capture and are the counterparts of each other. Both are real, but one is material while the other is ideal (ceremonial). Van Gennep (1909: 170-1) identifies ceremonial capture as a rite of passage and assimilates it particularly to rites of separation, with which Parsons (1916: 41, 44) emphatically concurs. Not to be overlooked is Raglan's theory that marriage by capture derived from menstrual taboo and mother-in-law avoidance coupled with a transition from matrilineal to patrilineal residence (Raglan 1932: 98-9). Raglan concluded rather irrelevantly that 'If we believe that customs come into existence and survive only because they are the best possible, we ought hastily to reimpose the mother-in-law taboo upon ourselves'. For Briffault, the purpose of the pretence to resistance was in order to obtain a satisfactory bride-price (Briffault 1927: 243-4). Thurnwald (1932: 104-5) essentially adopts the same position as van Gennep, seeing ceremonial capture as marking a stage of development.⁸ Among other authors, Parsons (1916: 44-5) and Thurnwald (1932: 106-7) cite instances of ceremonial groom capture. From these examples Lowie (1937: 49) concluded that 'To concentrate on bride-kidnapping as *the* phenomenon to be studied was to emphasize unduly one extreme variant of the natural context requiring interpretation'. Briffault (1927: 240) also notes that there are instances in which women capture the bride, as in the example given above, so the range of agents extends from males only through mixed-sex captors through women exclusively or primarily.

Generally speaking, the tradition of anthropological speculation has been to situate bride capture within the range of marriage types and strategies in the given society and, indeed, what other option is there, if anthropology abjures evolutionary theories of social institutions and the doctrine of survivals?⁹ Following McLennan, anthropologists today seem to prefer to see the alternative forms of obtaining a wife as distributed along a continuum between friendliness and hostility corresponding to a parallel scale of social distance. Such ideas could easily be applied to the Lamaholot examples with which I began. However, I do not think we really know enough about the relevant Lamaholot ethnography to do so effectively. While there is documented evidence of slave raiding, head hunting, piracy and debt bondage in this part of eastern Indonesia, there is little evidence, whether written or remembered, of raiding distant people for the purpose of procuring brides. The examples given above seem to imply that all parties were quite well acquainted. There is no doubt that Lamaholot bride capture of whatever degree of reality was governed by the standard Lamaholot marriage regulations.

McLennan gave us a theory and a set of institutions about which to argue. If

anthropology has had to destroy some of these institutions, twice in the case of totemism, it has been enriched in the process of doing so. The example of totemism suggests that we may be led astray by the tendency to see marriage by capture as a unitary institution (despite the repeated attempts to break it down into its varieties) and therefore to expect for the 'problem of marriage capture' a single answer. Given the number of people involved or affected and the mixture of motives, it is unlikely that a single explanation would ever be sufficient. Ceremonial capture of either women or men is certainly a rite of passage, but then the question remains why this particular form to mark the passage? We can assimilate it to other disruptions of standard decorum, such as at funerals, at the completion of house or boat building, and see them all as eruptions of disorder within an ordered structure. We can emphasize the uncertainty whether any given attempt at bride capture will pass off peacefully or violently, to question the absolute separation between ceremonial capture and violent capture. We can also refer to the general vulnerability to assault and plunder to which many were subject in pre-colonial times as the true situation of which ceremonial capture is the symbol. Often, however, we are little better positioned than McLennan to say why this or another institution is present, if for no other reason than we rarely have any better access to the longer-term history of the peoples with whom we are dealing.

Trautmann reminds us that McLennan was one of the first 'to develop an ethnographic method resting upon a conception of the field of study that was postphilological, and to embrace a chronology that, if of unstated duration, was in any case much longer than the traditional chronology of Archbishop Ussher' and therefore to participate in that revolution of ethnographic time which so marked the nineteenth century (Trautmann 1987: 194; 1992). Tylor (1889: 265) commented, 'For myself I hardly know whether I feel more glad or sorry that my old friend McLennan to the day of his death never knew that Morgan and he, who believed themselves adversaries, were all the while allies pushing forward the same doctrine from different sides'. Tylor had in mind their controversies about exogamy and about classificatory relationship terminologies. Tylor wished to link the two to each other and to an original system of cross-cousin marriage, and there have been many since who would be happy to agree with Tylor, although Lévi-Strauss (1969: 72, 99, 119, 123) criticized him for not seeing the three as manifestations of a single basic structure of which cross-cousin marriage was the most important. I am not sure that I agree with Trautmann that more than a century after its publication *Primitive marriage* 'seems hopelessly distant from the real life of the savages of whom he speaks but of whom he knows only through books' (Trautmann 1987: 197-8). In fact, I think McLennan would be delighted to have access to modern ethnography, and would happily do his best to fit it into his scheme and no doubt would do so with conviction. However, I must also say that I do not think that he would have any more chance of proving his theory with that ethnography than he had with what was available to him when he wrote.

NOTES

This article was written at the request of the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh, for a conference to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Department in 1996. In the event, it did not prove possible for me to attend the conference. Dr

Alan Barnard and Dr M.C. Jedrej subsequently asked me if they could include it in a volume they hoped to publish of papers deriving from the conference and devoted to Scotland and the history of anthropology. In the end they were unable to secure a publisher for that volume. I should like to thank Alan Barnard, M.C. Jedrej, Peter Rivière, Frances Morphy and Howard Morphy for their assistance and advice on this article.

¹ McLennan commented that sons were a source of strength, daughters a source of weakness. Rivière (n.d.) has pointed out that Marvin Harris's recent theory of warfare and infanticide is virtually, and unconsciously, identical to that of McLennan (Divale & Harris 1976; Harris 1984: 111).

² The dictionary lacks page numbers. I have this quotation from Lasch (1907: 96).

³ A situation closer to McLennan's notion of exogamy coupled with language difference between the intermarrying groups was found by Lévi-Strauss among the Nambikuara. He encountered a merged group of seventeen people speaking the northern dialect and thirty-four using the central dialect. 'These groups now travelled and lived together although two separate but contiguous camps were maintained in which the families formed distinct circles, each around its own fire. The most amazing feature of this curious organization was that the two groups did not speak the same language and were able to understand one another only through interpreters; fortunately, one or two individuals belonging to each group had sufficient knowledge of the other dialect to act as intermediaries. Even the two chiefs could not communicate directly'. They arranged their relationship terminology so that the men of one group became the brothers-in-law of the others and all children of one group became potential spouses of the children of the other, effectively melding them into a pair of exogamous moieties marked by difference of language and intermarriage (Lévi-Strauss 1943a: 137-8; 1943b: 401-3).

⁴ Århem (1987: 142-57) gives an extended example of an unsuccessful attempt at bride capture.

⁵ Recently, Henley (1996: 46) has related alternative marriage preferences to population densities. Sparsely settled peoples of the headwaters tend to prefer marriages that renew alliances, while in the more populous communities downstream there is a tendency to prohibit marriage with close relatives.

⁶ Howitt (1880: 343-7) emphasized that women obtained by capture were allotted to men according to the same rules that regulated all other forms of marriage.

⁷ For what it is worth, Kang (1982: 121) in a survey was unable to discover any functional relationship between exogamy and either peace within the group or peace between groups within a society.

⁸ Volprecht considers fighting in connexion with weddings to be a mimetic enactment as a rite of separation and insists that it cannot be interpreted as a survival. Marriage by capture, in his interpretation, is a break with marriage norms, but with the full agreement of both bride and groom (1985: 102, 105).

⁹ Herzfeld assimilates bride capture on Crete to other forms of agonistic display, especially sheep theft. Raiding of flocks eventually leads to third-party intervention and the establishment of ritual friendship (1985a: 25, 175, 180). Not surprisingly, we find Herzfeld deploying the familiar arguments that successful bride theft leads to the transformation of relationships, converting hostility into alliance (1985b: 28, 43).

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Mariage par capture

Résumé

Il y a longtemps que les théories de John F. McLennan, maintenant considérées démodées, ont été réfutées. L'ethnologie moderne a produit depuis des analyses de plus en plus sophistiquées qu'il est pertinent de rapporter aux idées de cet auteur. Un échantillonnage d'exemples ethnographiques provenant d'Indonésie, des Caraïbes, d'Amazonie, Australie et Nouvelle Guinée est examiné au cours de cet article, et confronté aux hypothèses formulées par McLennan, en particulier celles concernant le mariage par capture et l'exogamie linguistique. Il est montré que les discussions anthropologiques actuelles ne sont pas sans rappeler celles qu'avait conduites McLennan en son temps. McLennan serait à n'en pas douter ravi de l'information ethnographique dont nous disposons à l'heure actuelle, information qu'il utiliserait probablement pour appuyer ses vues. Mais, comme l'article se propose de démontrer, cette information ethnographique n'apporte en fait aucun appui aux théories de cet auteur. Il n'en reste pas moins que les questions qu'il a posées sont restées toujours sans réponse concluante.

ISCA, 51 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PF. Robert.Barnes@anthro.ox.ac.uk