Cousin Marriage, Birth Order and Gender: Alliance Models Among the Beng of Ivory Coast

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This article makes four interrelated points by way of the Beng. First, the comparatively rare matrilateral parallel-cousin marriage is analysed as a legitimate basis for alliance. Secondly, co-existent with this are both forms of cross-cousin marriage, and each of these is associated with the conjugal authority of one spouse over the other. Along with certain other ‘negative’ rules, the combination of these three varieties of cross-cousin marriage seems to put the Beng marriage system in-between the categories of ‘elementary’ and ‘complex’, exhibiting a degree of contradiction of interest to alliance theory. Thirdly, the article explores a hereto unreported form of arranging marriage by both parents with systematic reference to birth order of their daughters. Finally, and bringing out points made in all the foregoing, an alternative to the classical model of men exchanging women is presented. All four of these points are, in the present instance, inextricably interrelated. The Beng marriage system cannot be reduced to any single one of these subsystems but, rather, is a combination of them. This supports the overall point of the article: that multi-levelled complexity can be found in a single system of alliance, even one that is not fully, in Lévi-Strauss’s terms, ‘complex’.

In recent years, Lévi-Strauss’s penetrating insights into comparative marriage systems (1969) have come to be refined by authors exploring single societies in depth. While the overall distinction of ‘elementary’ from ‘complex’ systems is more or less accepted, recent works have suggested that given cases may fall in-between Lévi-Strauss’s categories, or that a single society may have two or more alliance systems working side by side (e.g., Lehman 1970; Bledsoe & Murphy 1980; Héritier 1981; Muller 1980b). Moreover, factors that classical alliance studies have neglected, including the dimension of birth order, have begun to be explored for their relevance to marriage rules (Rivière 1966; Muller 1969; 1973; 1980a). Lastly, recent authors have stressed the necessity of integrating the factor of gender into kinship studies (Tsing & Yanagisako 1983; Jackson 1978: 398, n. 4), and this is clearly relevant to the data I present here.

In this article I explore the alliance system of the Beng, a little-known ethnic group living in Ivory Coast, and make four interrelated points. First, the comparatively rare matrilateral parallel-cousin marriage is analysed as a legitimate basis for alliance. Secondly, co-existent with this unusual marital form are both varieties of cross-cousin marriage, each of which is in turn considered associated with the conjugal authority of one spouse over the other. Along with certain ‘negative’ rules, the combination of these three varieties of cousin marriage seems to put the Beng marriage system, like some others (e.g. Muller
1980b; Héritier 1981), in-between the categories of 'elementary' and 'complex': as with an 'elementary' regime, the Beng system contains decidedly 'positive' rules, but this is coupled with an extensive list of prohibitions against repeated alliances that are structurally similar, unlike what is found with a 'complex' regime. Taken as a whole, the Beng system reveals a degree of contradiction that is of itself of interest to alliance theory. Thirdly, the article explores a hitherto unreported form of arranging marriage by both parents with systematic reference to the birth order of their daughters. Finally, and bringing out points made in all the foregoing, an alternative to the classical model of men exchanging women is presented. All four of these points are, in the present instance, inextricably interrelated. The Beng marriage system cannot be reduced to any single one of these subsystems but, rather, is a combination of all of them. This fact supports the overall point of the article: that multi-levelled complexity can still be found in a single system of alliance, even one that is not fully, in Lévi-Strauss's terms, 'complex'.

The Beng

The Beng are a small group in east-central Ivory Coast whose language belongs to the Mande family. They are surrounded by non-Mande speakers: Diammall and Djimmi to the north, Andi to the east, and Baule to the west and south. The economy is mixed, with both agriculture and hunting-gathering being practised traditionally. Formerly the Beng were locally famous for their kola nuts, which they sold primarily to itinerant Dyula traders and to Djimini, but coffee (and to a lesser extent rice, cocoa and cotton) have now replaced kola as the 'cash crops'.

The traditional religion focuses on worship of the Earth and, secondarily, forest spirits and ancestors. Nowadays, many Beng have become Muslims and some have become Catholics; nevertheless, the traditional forms of worship are still practised with devotion by many.

In the prefecture in which I lived the Beng divide the area into two named regions, the Forest and the Savanna; each has its own king (assisted by a queen) ruling the region. Each region contains several villages, with a male chief (assisted by a female chief) ruling each village. Relations between the two regions are characterised by a combination of joking rivalry, ritual interdependence, and an ideal of political autonomy. Each village is organised according to a combination of features. The descent system is bilineal: both matriclans and patriclans are recognised, each type having its own social functions and symbolic associations. Matriclans are localised as their own sections (tua) in the village. Within these matriclan sections, however, individual houses (which in the past were large, round structures accommodating an extended family) are constituted patrilineally, due to post-marital patrilocality.

Beng marriage

The engagement and wedding of a Beng couple are a drawn-out and elaborate affair. First, the parents of an eligible child decide on a suitable spouse. Once the parents of the prospective bride and groom inform his kin. There then follows a series of thanksgiving between the two families and their kin, of which are carried out by female media. The wedding itself lasts six days.

The great quantity and elaborate payment and marriage reflect a strong pro-natal value. Perhaps too, on the psychological attraction of the bride and groom there is a degree of mingling with the selection of the fornicator. The system of the Beng is predicated on a system of pre-colonial bride and groom have little Coast under the Civil Code of 1964 (but are nevertheless still practised by the Beng, in pre-colonial times. Although it was percentage of arranged as against non-arranged marriage was revealed; he speculated that all marriages would have been arranged, now be 80 per cent. If this informant's guess is so by very much—it does indicate the proportion of arranged marriage by Beng themselves.

The arranged marriage system catches the vast majority of individuals to be the basis for an 'elementary' system of marriage: matrilateral parallel-cousin, and forms are 'preferred' in the sense that it is a preferred marriage partner. But none of these forms, though practised by the individual. Moreover, a set of rules observes to restrict the impact of the prohibition of marriage as a significant one towards cousin marriage, though not formally.

First, I explore the preference for cousin marriage. Next I discuss the repeated alliances that works against the last section I show how the use of birth order as a significant one. Between an 'elementary' and a 'complex' marriage forms, on the one hand, alliances, on the other, to create an alliance. The factor of gender roles will appear as marriage models have been manipulated by individual.

Cousin marriage

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parents of the prospective bride and groom are agreed, the groom's parents inform his kin. There then follows a series of formal negotiations and acts of thanking between the two families and their villages. This set of actions, many of which are carried out by female mediators from both sides, lasts about a year; the wedding itself lasts six days.

The great quantity and elaborate quality of the rituals surrounding engagement and marriage reflect a strong preoccupation with alliance on a structural level. Perhaps too, on the psychological level, they serve to divert or absorb the attention of the bride and groom themselves, one or both of whom may be miserable with the selection of their fiancé(e). For the traditional marriage system of the Beng is predicated on a system of arranged marriage in which the prospective bride and groom have little to say. Technically illegal now in Ivory Coast under the Civil Code of 1964 (Levasseur 1971), arranged marriage is nevertheless still practised by the Beng, though undoubtedly not as regularly as in pre-colonial times. Although it was not possible to measure accurately the percentage of arranged as against non-arranged marriages, one informant's estimate is revealing: he speculated that traditionally, as many as 90 per cent. of all marriages would have been arranged while he guessed that the figure might now be 80 per cent. If this informant's guess is too high—and it is probably not so by very much—it does indicate the perceived emphasis on arranged as against non-arranged marriage by Beng themselves.

The arranged marriage system of the Beng, then, is an extensive structure that catches the vast majority of individuals in its net. It includes what might appear to be the basis for an 'elementary' system, as it encourages three types of cousin marriage: matrilateral parallel-cousin, and both types of cross-cousin. All three forms are 'preferred' in the sense of being positively valued and sought-after. But none of these forms, though practised often, is prescriptive for a given individual. Moreover, a set of rules barring marriage between certain affines serves to restrict the impact of the preference for cousin marriage. Yet the addition of birth order as a significant factor in alliance creates a certain 'pull' towards cousin marriage, though not for all individuals.

First, I explore the preference for cousin marriage from the perspective of the Beng themselves. Next I discuss the wide-ranging set of prohibitions against repeated alliances that works against the preference for cousin marriage. In the last section I show how the use of birth order intersects with the preferred cousin marriage forms, on the one hand, and the prohibitions against repeated alliances, on the other, to create an interesting mosaic, lying somewhere between an 'elementary' and a 'complex' structure. Throughout the discussion, the factor of gender roles will appear as integral to all these issues. As this article focuses primarily on normative models, an extended consideration of how the models have been manipulated by individuals must be left for a future work.

Cousin marriage

Matrilateral parallel-cousin marriage. Let us begin with matrilateral parallel-cousin marriage, a fairly rare form of marriage (Van Baal 1975: 95). Here, one's spouse
is obviously a member of one’s own matriclan. Without going into an extended
analysis of the structure of Beng matriclans (see Gottlieb 1983: 152–73), I note
merely those features relevant to the discussion.

The Beng term for what I am translating as ‘matriclan’ is *ula*, a word that
appears to have been borrowed from Baule (*awu*) and in other contexts means
‘house’. All Beng matriclans contain two or more lineages: one lineage whose
female ancestors were all ‘pure’ Beng, called *ula nó* (literally, ‘stomach of
the house [matriclan]’); and one or more lineages that were founded by
non-Beng slaves (called *ula ghadit*, meaning ‘side [of the] house [matriclan]’).
As we shall see below, marriage within a lineage may ‘count’ differently
from marriage *between* two lineages of a single clan. Either way, marriage
within the matriclan is referred to as *ula leg plan* (literally, ‘two children [of the]
house [matriclan]’) or as *a zyá (na) a ula leg lo* (‘her [his] husband [wife] [is a]
child [of the] house [matriclan]’). Interestingly, the first-degree matrilateral
parallel-cousin is not approved as a spouse, while the second- and third-degree
matrilateral parallel-cousins are approved. (Should first cousins in the uterine
line marry, they must ritually split a goat; in any case, it is said the marriage will
be barren and examples of barren marriages of this sort are cited in discouraging
such matches.) I will have occasion in the concluding section to discuss
further this seeming paradox.

Leaving these considerations aside for the moment, let us enquire into the
motivations for matrilateral parallel-cousin marriage (cf. Van Baal 1975: 94–6,
who sees only disadvantages to this variety of marriage). There is one reason
that most Beng advance for conducting a matriclan-endogamous marriage
(whether or not it be within the matriclan). If the young couple argues, it is
said their matriclan members will be distressed and will hold a formal trial to
save the marriage. In contrast, it is said that if spouses belong to different
matriclans, their matriclan members will be indifferent to their disputes and will
not take the trouble to hold a trial, making a greater likelihood of divorce. In
fact, my statistics (Gottlieb 1983: appendix V) suggest that the divorce rate is
lower among couples who are in the same matriclan than among spouses who
are not clanmates: 42.86 per cent. of all divorces, where the matriclan affiliation
of both spouses was known to me, were for couples who were matriclan-mates,
while 57.14 per cent. of all such divorces were for couples from different
matriclans.

This indigenous justification for matriclan endogamy in terms of greater clan
involvement during marital conflict reflects a more general theme: matrixin are
viewed as exceptionally ‘close’ and ‘caring’. Overall, we might term matrinship a ‘positive’ relationship (while patrikinship is more a ‘negative’ relationship) (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1963b: 40–9). The Beng way of phrasing this is to say
that matrinship are mutually involved: *go za jeje* (‘their affairs are intertwined’).
Put differently, the primary principle that structures relationships between
matrinship is what I have termed elsewhere ‘identity’ (while patrikin relationships
are characterised by what I term ‘separation’) (Gottlieb 1983). That is, on one
level, all matriclan members (and *a fortiori* all matrilalineage members) are seen as
structurally identical. When asked to characterise matrinship, Beng typically
explain, ‘*á se do*’ (‘we are all one’). Not surprisingly, then, matrinship share
symbolic ‘substance’ (Schneider 1968) in inherited from the mother. Matrinship rely
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the eldest sister’s eldest son). This was parti-
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Cross-cousin marriage and conjugal authority
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symbolic ‘substance’ (Schneider 1968) in the form of the soul (ninitj), which is inherited from the mother. Matrikin rely on one another for both emotional and material support. Correspondingly, inheritance of land operates within the matrilineage to the next youngest full or uterine half-brother and eventually to the eldest sister’s eldest son). This was particularly significant when it came to kola plantations, which were extensive in traditional times. (Nowadays coffee plantations, which have more or less replaced the kola trees, are being split up between uterine and agnatic heirs.) The matriline is also deeply involved in the domain of religion: worship of the Earth, the pre-eminent Beng deity, is conducted by matriline elders. Moreover, it is in relation to the matriline that many, perhaps most, Beng marriages are arranged (see below).

Now witchcraft is an act of destruction, hence one might expect it to be removed from the sphere of the matriline; but in the Beng view it is a ‘positive’ involvement, in Lévi-Strauss’s sense, as only people who are ‘close’ may bewitch each other. Thus witchcraft may only be aimed at matriline, and, correspondingly, when the propensity for witchcraft is inherited, it is from the mother (see Gottlieb in press b). In contrast, ‘friends’ (ewe) may never be matrikin, since friendship implies a structural distance to be bridged, and in the case of matrikin, there is no distance (while patrikin may be counted among one’s ‘friends’). In sum there is a kind of potential emotional intensity beneath uterine relationships that does not seem to exist with agnatic ones. For this reason, Beng feel comfortable situating marriage, potentially an emotionally intense relationship, within the framework of the matriline.

Cross-cousin marriage and conjugal authority

When it comes to cross-cousin marriage, both of whose varieties the Beng practise, each of the two forms carries with it an ideology that some Beng invoke in explaining why it is a preferred marital form. The Beng theory has to do with differential patterns of authority in the conjugal relationship characterising each type of cross-cousin marriage.

A few brief background remarks on the normative conjugal relationship will be helpful. All other things being equal—that is, cross-cousin marriage notwithstanding—the general ideology is that husbands have authority over their wives. For instance, if someone wishes to ask a married woman to go on an errand, s/he must first ask permission of the husband, and a woman herself must request her husband’s approval to sleep overnight in another village or in the fields, but the reverse is not applicable in either of these situations. Furthermore, the ‘double sexual standard’ exists (as elsewhere in Africa) which permits a man to have extra-marital affairs while granting him the right to punish his wife for doing so.

The ideology of a wife’s submission to her husband is, however, by no means reflective of the entire picture of conjugal relations for non-cross-cousin marriages. Spouses should have mutual respect (jatele) for one another, as is revealed in several symmetrical taboos (Gottlieb in press a). For instance, when angry with friends and many categories of kin, one is permitted to use insults
that are highly sexually explicit (Gottlieb 1983: Appendix I), but these are expressbly forbidden in the presence of, much less against, one's spouse. In summer 1985, a husband, plainly intoxicated, publicly insulted his wife's genitals in her presence for an imagined wrong, and he was publicly rebuked by all present. The next day he took to bed with a fever and chills, complaining that his father's ghost was troubling him; but it was generally acknowledged that his shame over his previous day's misbehaviour was responsible for his illness, which lasted several days. More serious than this kind of verbal offence is a behavioural one: the ultimate conjugal insult is to throw a chicken at one's spouse. If, in the heat of an argument, this is done, it is said that no later speech or action can undo the insult to the wronged spouse. The marriage is 'ruined' (zozos), and the couple may no longer sleep together. The gender symmetry of both these taboos is insisted upon by informants. Furthermore, both men and women readily point out that all women, due to a perceived difference in their makeup, have a serious advantage over their husbands: women's 'hearts' are said to be 'hard' (a brunej gre) in contrast to men's hearts, which are seen as 'soft' (a brunej beré). This distinction means that women are quicker than men to anger, and after an argument, women remain bitter but men forget quickly. Because of this constellation of perceived gender-linked differences, in the case of any conjugal dispute, it is the duty of the husband to apologise to his wife, regardless of whether he thought himself in the wrong.

Thus the issue of which spouse dominates the other is multilayered. It becomes even more so where cousin marriages are concerned. In brief, which spouse in a cousin marriage has authority over the other is determined not by gender per se but by kinship status with respect to the matriline. Specifically, the Beng say that with a father's sister's daughter-mother's brother's son marriage (FZD-MBS), it is the wife who has authority over (kla) her husband. This is due to ideas that Beng hold concerning the matriline in general.

As indicated above, the matriline overshadows the patriline in many spheres of social life. Although, due to patriarchy, the household is constituted patrilineally, most social relationships are viewed through the lens of the matriline. Within the matriline, there is a certain emphasis on the unity of the sibling group, which is a component of the principle that I term 'identity' between matrin. If one sibling is not available, for example, any of his or her male or female full- or maternal half-siblings may serve as a substitute at weddings, sick visits, funeral visits and trials—in short, almost any official occasion. This principle operates in the sphere of religion as well. If one has violated a taboo relating to the Earth, and the violator neglects to atone for the sin with the proper sacrifice, any one of his or her siblings is likely to be punished by the Earth, with sickness or even death resulting. (Both these actions may pertain, though less often, to more distantly related matrin, as well.) Moreover, although the Beng prohibit the levirate (see below, p. 708), nevertheless the unity of the male sibling group is implied in kin term usage: a woman calls her husband's elder brother, 'elder husband' (zyá kala) and his younger brother, 'little husband' (zyá kro).

Because of this sociological unity, even though the eldest brother of a sibling group is in the literal sense the sole potential economic and sociological heir to his mother's brother (MB), Beng say that group are interchangeably 'replacements' of siblings applies cross-generationally, up to the maternal uncles, on the other side. Any sister's daughter (ZD) or sister's son (MB) may be the potential replacements to their MBD when the man de jure have authority over their own children who may, in turn, consider them to be 'his'.

Gender and age are irrelevant: all fathers have the right to request assistance of their mother's brother are expected to help the former regardles singe, divorced or widowed FZD may not or his fields, and the MBS should not refuse. If she once helped her MBS carry yams back from a good nature: he would not have had the luxury of the MBD who lived next to her FZD came out of a foutou, but the reverse was never done. Badly, the FZCh is expected to rebuke his wife for too much to drink at a funeral, and her slight of apologisted to him, and at the next funeral, she rebuked her patrilateral cross-cousin. This same pattern is another of her matrilateral cross-cousins. Biological father was dead, tells her often to do something bad, you must let me know for a meal every festival; sends her new year family every morning and evening, before people view their FZCh as a substitute for them.

In a marriage between FZD and MBS, normatively have authority over her HF. In a matrilateral cross-cousin is marrying the men's uncle holds authority over his own son. The potential replacement, hold authority over these children, the authority that should change, and she retains authority over her cousin that such a woman is 'like a father to a replacement of her HF.

There is a related reason why a man's authority over her; this has to do with law. Normally, any Beng man feels sham law, as manifested by the prohibition on by word or deed, his own matric line who marries his FZD, however, his mother-in-law the Beng say, makes for a far more proper woman as mother-in-law.

There are three reasons for this. First, if a female elder, the FZ has authority over
his mother’s brother (MB). Beng say that on another level, all those in a sibling group are interchangeably ‘replacements’ to their MB(s). This substitutability of siblings applies cross-generationally, uniting nieces and nephews, on the one hand, to maternal uncles, on the other: on occasions such as those mentioned, any sister’s daughter (ZD) or sister’s son (ZS) may stand in for a MB. Moreover, as the potential replacements to their MB, all uterine nieces and nephews of a man de jure have authority over their own mother’s brother’s children (MBCh), who may, in turn, consider them to be ‘like their father’.9

Gender and age are irrelevant: all father’s sister’s children (FZCh) have the right to request assistance of their mother’s brother’s children (MBCh), and the latter are expected to help the former regularly without asking. For instance, a single, divorced or widowed FZD may ask her MBS to perform male tasks in her fields, and the MBS should not refuse. On the other hand, a woman told me she once helped her MBS carry yams back to the fields, but only because of her good nature: he would not have had the right to ask such a service of her. A MBD who lived next to her FZD came over regularly to help the latter pound fowtou, but the reverse was never done. On another level, if a MBCh behaves badly, the FZCh is expected to rebuke him or her. In one case, a MBD had too much to drink at a funeral, and her slightly older FZD criticised her. The MBD apologised, and at the next funeral, she refused palm wine in the presence of her patrilateral cross-cousin. This same patrilateral cross-cousin related to me that another of her patrilateral cross-cousins, a man many years her senior whose biological father was dead, tells her often: ‘You’re my father, if you ever see me do something bad, you must let me know’. This man sends over to his MBD a meal for every festival; sends her new yams after harvest; and comes to greet her family every morning and evening, before and after going to the fields. In sum, people view their FZCh as substitute fathers, and feel obliged to help them and obey them.

In a marriage between FZD and MBS, then, we can see why the wife would normatively have authority over her husband. A woman who marries her patrilateral cross-cousin is marrying the child of her MB. Just as her maternal uncle holds authority over her own son, so does the woman, as her MB’s potential replacement, hold authority over her uncle’s children. In marrying one of these children, the authority that she holds over him as his FZD does not change, and she retains authority over her husband. Beng explain this by saying that such a woman is ‘like a father to her husband’, since she is a potential replacement of her HF.

There is a related reason why a man who marries his FZD does not have authority over her; this has to do with his own relationship to his mother-in-law. Normally, any Beng man feels shame (yeegère) towards his mother-in-law, as manifested by the prohibition on his eating near her. Should he insult her by word or deed, his own matriclans would try and then fine him. If a man marries his FZD, however, his mother-in-law would also be his FZ, and this, the Beng say, makes for a far more problematic relationship than with another woman as mother-in-law.

There are three reasons for this. First, from her position in ego’s matriclan as a female elder, the FZ has authority over her BCh (Radcliffe-Brown 1952: 65;
Ottenheimer 1984: 35), and, from the woman’s perspective, a BS who is also her DH would be no exception. The shame he exhibits towards her as his mother-in-law would be combined with the submission due to her as his paternal aunt, making her a formidable figure.

Secondly, the paternal aunt would know that her daughter should hold authority over the latter’s husband, due to the daughter’s genealogical position, as just outlined; it is therefore likely that she would back her daughter in conjugal disputes. Moreover, a FZ who is widowed or divorced might be living with her brother and would then be co-resident with her brother’s son. Given the rule of patrilocality her daughter would now be part of her brother’s household, and if she herself moved in with her brother, she could observe any mistreatment by her BS (=DH) of her daughter, and might rebuke her son-in-law frequently. For these reasons, many women prefer to marry their MBS, because they know they will legitimately hold authority over their husbands. In contrast, men might not relish such a marriage for, as one informant put it, ‘If his wife complains to her mother that her husband has been mistreating her, he knows that his WM [=FZ] can legitimately yell and yell and yell at him’.

Despite the kinship structure that operates in favour of the wife in this type of marriage, there is another factor that may serve to offset this advantage at least partially. We have seen how a woman in this kind of cousin marriage theoretically holds authority over her husband as she is a potential replacement to her MB. This would indicate a certain structural identity between her and her efforts at wielding authority over her husband. The MB is also, however, a quintessential authority figure to his ZCh as well. In fact, many informants told me they were more afraid of their MBs than of their Fs (though a F would hold authority over his children as a patrilineal elder). As we have seen, the primary principle that structures relationships between matriline is what I term ‘identity’. Yet the principle of gerontocracy, and more generally that seniors rule juniors, which is strongly adhered to in Beng society, serves to mitigate the ‘identity’ of matriline. While in some circumstances, nieces and nephews are seen as structurally identical to, and may substitute for, their maternal uncle, in other situations they are subject to his absolute authority over them, due to the gerontocratic rule. Hence if a MB judged that his ZD were abusing her structural position of authority over her husband, he might well rebuke or even thrash her. Moreover, informants pointed out that a MB might feel a conflict of interest by supporting his ZD’s claim to authority over her husband, who would be his own son. Hence the system contains a certain degree of structural contradiction that may well balance out the effects that parts of the system otherwise indicate. That is, though the purely social-structural aspects of cross-cousin marriage may favour the authority of one spouse over the other, the tendency towards gerontocracy may outweigh that proclivity.

The opposite configuration is in most respects found with the other type of cross-cousin marriage, that between the mother’s brother’s daughter and the father’s sister’s son. Here, it is the husband who normatively holds authority over his wife. Again, this derives from ideas about the matriline, specifically the mother’s brother-sister’s son (MB-ZS) relationship. A ZS, as a potential heir and replacement to his MB, de jure has authority over his ZD, but he is ‘like a father’. This does not change. Moreover, a woman who marries her FZ becomes her FZ, who always holds authority over her son might marry. Hence a young woman’s mother-in-law: not only must she display she would towards any woman who become a marriage of ‘ shame’, ‘respect’ and ‘submit’ relationship.

While a man married to his MB had ‘substitute father’ to her, nevertheless he was who happens to be his MB. And the combination, from the perspective of the Beng MB is a strong authority figure to his ZS wields authority over the latter’s wife, both ‘flowing though’ the MB, to his ZS wielded over his ZS.

Now in a marriage where a man’s W is towards his father-in-law is not so problem may complain to her father, but the son-in-law directly since, as an unrelated his son-in-law (with whom he is, rather than a son-in-law also exhibits ‘shame’ in-law must appoint a disinterested party over his son-in-law’s treatment of a reluctant to do this, because of the both of whom a such a mediator should always play a re- delinquent husband would rarely be heard.

But when a man’s father-in-law is also, though his WF does not hold authority over him as his MB. If the case him, she complains to her father who, legitimately reprimand or even beat her coming from an appointed mediator to do this, because of the both of whom a such a mediator should always play a re- delinquent husband would rarely be heard.

This dilution of the conjugal authority parallel to that noted for the other type of and his FZD. However, there is another symmetrical as it appears. As post-natal household is constituted as a portion attached (Gotlieb 1983: 104–11). This a should have differential effects upon each
and replacement to his MB, *de jure* has authority over all his MBCh, for whom he is 'like a father'. This does not change when he marries one of these MBCh. Moreover, a woman who marries her FZS knows that her mother-in-law will be her FZ, who always holds authority over her BCh, including a BD whom her son might marry. Hence a young woman might dread having a paternal aunt as mother-in-law: not only must she display towards her the normal 'shame' that she would towards any woman who became her mother-in-law, but she must also retain an attitude of 'respect' and 'submission' due a FZ, and this combination of 'shame', 'respect' and 'submission' might well make this a difficult relationship.

While a man married to his MBD has authority over her because he is a 'substitute father' to her, nevertheless he still has to contend with a father-in-law who happens to be his MB. And the Beng say that this is not a happy combination, from the perspective of the ZS/DH. As we have just seen, the Beng MB is a strong authority figure to his ZCh. Yet it is because of him that his ZS wields authority over the latter's wife. So as with the ZD, we find authority both 'flowing through' the MB, to his ZS, and also emanating from him to be wielded *over* his ZS.

Now in a marriage where a man's WF is unrelated to him, the relationship towards his father-in-law is not so problematic. Should he mistreat his wife, she may complain to her father, but the father is powerless to confront his son-in-law directly since, as an unrelated man, he does not hold authority over his son-in-law (with whom he is, rather, in a mutual 'respect' relationship, though his son-in-law also exhibits 'shame' towards him). Instead, the father-in-law must appoint a disinterested party as mediator to lodge any complaints he has over his son-in-law's treatment of his daughter. He might, however, be reluctant to do this, because of the bother and expense involved. In any case, such a mediator should always play a moderate, and moderating, role, and a delinquent husband would rarely be harassed by such a figure.

But when a man's father-in-law is also his MB, the situation is more complex. Though his WF does not hold authority as his father-in-law, he *does* hold authority over him as his MB. If the man's wife feels she is being mistreated by him, she complains to her father who, as MB to his son-in-law, may himself legitimately reprimand or even beat his nephew. In contrast, a reprimand coming from an appointed mediator representing an unrelated father-in-law would be much less severe, and a mediator would not be permitted to beat the son-in-law. Thus despite having some legitimate authority over his wife because of his potential heirship to his MB's position, a man is nevertheless subject to his maternal uncle's authority, which might make him unpleasant as a father-in-law.

This dilution of the conjugal authority rule in a MBD-FZS marriage seems parallel to that noted for the other type of cross-cousin marriage between a MBS and his FZD. However, there is another factor revealing that the system is not as symmetrical as it appears. As post-marital residence is patrilocal, a given household is constituted as a portion of a patriclan, with in-married wives attached (Gottlieb 1983: 104–11). This asymmetrical residence rule, so to speak, should have differential effects upon each of the types of cross-cousin marriage.
To explain this takes us to the role of the paternal aunt (cf. Ottenheimer 1984).

My informant commented that a man would anticipate having a FZ as his mother-in-law with even less enthusiasm than he would having a MB as a father-in-law, and that the former relationship would be more 'difficult' (grègré) than the latter. A man would have a FZ as his mother-in-law when he married his FZD. It is in such a marriage that a woman, in moving in with her husband, would also be living with her MB (now her HF). We recall that it is in this type of marriage as well that the wife is said to hold authority over her husband, as a potential replacement to her MB. So her maternal uncle who is transmitting authority to her, allowing her in turn to hold authority over her husband, would in this case be co-resident with her. Because she would be living with her uncle, one might surmise that a niece should be able to garner his support in claims of authority over her husband, so long as they were reasonable.

The situation is structurally different with the other form of cross-cousin marriage, that between the MBD and the FZS. In moving in with her husband, such a woman moves in with her FZ. This form of marriage, when combined with patrilocal residence, produces amitilocality, a form of residence analysed only recently (Ottenheim 1984). We know that the FZ, as an elder in the woman's patriclan, normatively holds authority over her BD. The paternal aunt, however, herself living patrilocal with her husband's agnates and their wives, might well find it difficult to exercise such authority, since she would be essentially living amongst 'strangers', without the back-up of her own matriclan members who might live far away (perhaps in another village). The young wife might thus not find this arrangement too difficult, since, due to the residential situation, her FZ might not be as strong an authority figure as one might expect.

Conversely, a young husband might not find it convenient to exercise undue authority over his MBD-wife. Theoretically he holds formal authority over his wife as her patrilateral cross-cousin. But since he does not move on marriage, and since the Beng normatively do not practise avunculocality, the man would not be living with his MB. Thus the authority he should hold over his wife by virtue of his relationship to his maternal uncle might not be supported by those with whom he lives—his agnates—and his MB might well be living too far away to support his nephew's claims of authority over the latter's wife.

Because of these factors, we see that the structural advantage that a woman enjoys in marrying her MBS should in theory be supported by patrilocality, while the structural advantage that a man enjoys in marrying his MBD should not in theory be supported by patrilocality. Hence residence, we see, is a significant factor in either reinforcing or moderating the constellation of the two conjugal authority types that have been laid out.10

Thus far we have considered the advantage of each type of cross-cousin marriage from the narrow perspective of the individual actors. But the Beng recognise another advantage that concerns the group as a whole. Informants explained that once one cross-cousin match of either form is effected between two families, the reciprocal match should be completed at a later date, thereby creating an exchange in classical Lévi-Straussian fashion. I will have occasion to interpret this group-oriented advantage below.

In Beng eyes, the best possible marriage of each of the two alliance types so far are simultaneously a cross-cousin and a member of one matriclan-endogamous marriage has the advantage that, whose uterine relatives, being the same, extend to a wife and are concerned that the marriage last. Either variety has the advantage of initiating two 'families' (see below). Combining the two by completing an exchange between two far-flung emotional stakes in seeing the marriage last, be accomplished if the parents of one's cross-cousin of the same matriclan. As an example (fig. 1) of which, one who had married to be a clan member (and was herself related by marriage to a matriclanswoman). Despite the reasons adduced by the Beng for preferring cross-cousin marriage, as well as in

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**Figure 1.** Matriclan-endogamous marriage

- **members of one matrilineage**
- **deceased**
- **putative tie**
A GOTTlieb

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occasion to interpret this group-oriented aspect of cross-cousin marriage below.

In Beng eyes, the best possible marriage would be to combine the advantages of each of the two alliance types so far outlined by marrying someone who is simultaneously a cross-cousin and a member of one's matriclan. (For an analogous case among the Bobo of Burkina Faso, see Saul 1984). As we have seen, matriclan-endogamous marriage has the advantage of marrying two people whose uterine relatives, being the same, presumably 'care about' them equally and are concerned that the marriage last. In contrast, cross-cousin marriage of either variety has the advantage of initiating or completing an exchange between two 'families' (see below). Combining these forms would mean initiating or completing an exchange between two families within a matriclan, who have an emotional stake in seeing the marriage last. Such a 'combination marriage' could be accomplished if the parents of one's cross-cousin were themselves members of the same matriclan. As an example (fig. 1), Kwame married his FZD, Akissi, who happened to be a clan member (and a classificatory sister), since his F, Yao, had married a matriclanswoman.

Despite the reasons adduced by the Beng for preferring one or the other form of cross-cousin marriage, as well as matrilateral parallel-cousin marriage,

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**Figure 1.** Matriclan-endogamous marriage between cross-cousins.
neither of these three forms is practised with any regularity by a given family. Thus one does not achieve a true extended form of ‘restricted’ or ‘generalised’ exchange for a group of interconnected lineages. This is because it is forbidden for people to marry many of those who are counted as affines. We come now to the second Beng model of marriage, which I view as partaking of a ‘complex’ model.

Prohibitions against repeated alliances

In Lévi-Strauss’s terms, what defines a ‘complex’ system is that the choice of spouse is governed by a set of negative rules (prohibitions) but not by positive rules (preferences/prescriptions). The Beng marriage system has four negative types of rules. The first forbids the usual set of close consanguines (parents, siblings, etc.) (see Gottlieb 1983: 196–8). The second negative marriage rule concerns patriclans: no member of a given patriclan may marry a fellow clan member. If this rule is violated, it is said the marriage will be childless. (Nowadays the rule against patriclans exogamy is not followed rigorously and one encounters an occasional patriclan-endogamous marriage.) Thirdly, it is forbidden for all Beng to have sexual relations with, much less marry, people of certain ethnicity and/or certain craft specialities (Gottlieb 1983: 204–6). None of these three rules is exceptional; the first two are compatible with an ‘elementary’ system while the third lies outside its scope.

There is a fourth rule, however, that contradicts the logic of an ‘elementary’ system. This rule concerns affines and is fairly wide-ranging: once two people have married, a large proportion of their same-sex relatives may not marry each other from their own and future generations. If such a repeat alliance occurs, the result is disastrous: the individuals would fall ill and, unless they sought a diviner and healer for extensive medico-ritual treatment disease, would die.

The Beng rules concerning which affines may not marry may be stated as follows (see fig. 2).

1. Neither a married male ego nor any of the living or future male members of his matrilineage may marry any of the living or future female members of that man’s wife’s matrilineage, so long as the potential couples in question are not themselves cross-cousins.
2. Neither a married male ego nor any of the living or future male members of his matrilineage may marry any of the female cross-cousins, or daughters of any cross-cousins, of that man’s wife.
3. The male cross-cousins of a married male ego may not marry any of the female cross-cousins, or daughters of any cross-cousins, of that man’s wife.\(^\text{11}\)

It will be noticed that the first rule effectively precludes the levirate and the sororate, as well as sororal polygyny.

A marriage between any of the prohibited affines is called *dale ceq mā* (lit., ‘to reach each other’). This term also applies to the above-mentioned affines having non-conjugal sexual relations as well. Indeed, a man should never even sleep with a prostitute (who would invariably be non-Beng) with whom a (real or classificatory) brother, father or son has slept. Transgression of any of these rules is said to result in death.\(^\text{12}\)

The net result of this set of rules prohibiting repeated marriages between
acted with any regularity by a given family. The extended form of 'restricted' or 'generalised' metalled lineages. This is because it is forbidden who are counted as affines. We come now to the 'complex' system is that the choice of negative rules (prohibitions) but not by positive.

The Beng marriage system has four negative the usual set of close consanguines (parents, 196–8). The second negative marriage rule of a given patriclans may marry a fellow clan, it is said the marriage will be childless. clan exogamy is not followed rigorously and clan-endogamous marriage.) Thirdly, it is ill relations with, much less marry, people of specialities (Gottlieb 1983: 204–6). None of first two are compatible with an 'elementary' its scope.

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Affines may not marry may not be stated as

of the living or future male members of his matrilineage male members of that man's wife's matrilineage, so long as themselves cross-cousins;

of the living or future male members of his matrilineage as, or daughters of any cross-cousins, of that man's wife;

male ego may not marry any of the female cross-cousins, man's wife. 11

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Fig. 2. Prohibited affinal alliances.
certain affines is the casting of a wide net of alliances. Any real sort of 'elementary' system, in which the same set of kin repeatedly marry each other from a finite number of groups, is precluded. The potential impact of the first marriage model, then, in which three kinds of cross- and parallel-cousins are seen as ideal spouses, is effectively blunted by this second model.

Indeed, one might well enquire how any form of cousin marriage might take place at all, given the above rules prohibiting repeated alliances between affines. The answer is that the Beng only prohibit such repeated alliances so long as the relationship connecting them is remembered by the living. Once the connexion has been forgotten, such marriages would be permitted, as they would no longer, in effect, be forbidden. Significantly, the typical and collective Beng genealogical memory is only three to five generations long. After three to four generations, distantly related affines are no longer recognised as such and might now be allowed to marry. As Lehman writes (1983: 380) on analogous 'semi-complex' regimes of marriage (see below, p. 716): 'An alliance, once formed, may not be renewed for an amount of time, generally specifiable in numbers of generations' (see also Kittel 1975).

It is now understandable how the Beng may in theory forbid repeated alliances that are structurally similar, yet conduct 'exchange' marriages such as were mentioned briefly above. The stated advantage of marrying a cross-cousin is often to 'pay off an alliance debt' (g'ā, pędó, 'they paid'). That is, at some time in the past (often in a previous generation), a man in male ego's matrilateral cross-cousin's 'family' married a woman in his own 'family', and it is now time to 'even the score'. Thus his marriage to his matrilateral cross-cousin would be a loose form of what we might term a 'one-time brother/sister exchange' (though it might be delayed for up to several generations). On the other hand, a marriage of a man to his matrilateral cross-cousin might be viewed as the first between the two 'families' (if it is the first in several generations) and will serve to initiate a later match. Once again, according to one level of Beng alliance theory, such a brother/sister exchange should be one-time only, for a repetition would violate the rules stated earlier proscribing structurally identical alliances for same-sex kin. As we have seen, in effect the Beng keep conducting such cousin marriages (be they with parallel- or cross-cousins) by attenuating their genealogical memory, to an average span of about three to four generations.

Despite this, the Beng do recognise a marriage form that approximates an 'elementary' system. The initiation of such an alliance is termed lamoya popole, 'to beseech friendship', and should institute a perpetual exchange between two matrilineals. Yet a true 'elementary' structure, implied in this form, is precluded by the extensive set of rules prohibiting affinal alliance. Thus the reciprocation of exchange in two alliance-linked matrilineals must either wait several generations to take place, or must link at least third or, more likely, fourth cousins — that is, between affines who can no longer trace the route of their affinal connexion. The Beng system in this way manages to retain in effect the structure of an elementary model without, as it were, admitting to it.

As an example, let us consider the following case (fig. 3). In this example we see that there appears to be a regular exchange of spouses between two clans. P. matriclan has given two wives to men of Q. matriclan, while Q. matriclan has given four wives to men of P. matriclan, so that the four women of Q. matriclan would be the links connecting them are no long. In any event, membership is acknowledged. Example: P. matriclan system can accommodate the paradox of marriage that is at another level denied.

The above-described patterns of arranged marriage form another parameter of birth order. Having established the preference for cousin marriage, then, we weave with the birth order system, to clarify the extent to which it arranges marriage.

Birth order
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The above-described patterns of arranged marriage are cut across by the parameter of birth order. Having presented the basic structure of the Beng preferences for cousin marriage, then, let us now see how this system inter-weaves with the birth order system, to create a structure that is quite thorough in the extent to which it arranges marriages for any given woman.

*Birth order*

As Needham noted twenty-five years ago (1961: 250), 'It is one of the commonest features of descent terminologies that brothers and sisters are disting-
ished by relative age . . .). It is puzzling, then, that relative age has not been systematically analysed in the literature on alliance systems. In a recent collection of essays on 'Age and anthropological theory' (Kertzer & Keith 1984), for example, no mention is made of this potentially significant association. Needham himself addressed the issue of birth order in his article reanalysing Wikmunkan (Australian) marriage. He pointed out that a Wikmunkan male may only marry a woman who is the daughter of his parent's younger, never older, sibling (1961: 230–31), thereby dividing a sibling group in two (older and younger) for the purpose of assigning spouses. Needham turned his attention to other more relevant features, however, while admitting that the issue of relative age remains a 'great puzzle' in the Wikmunkan system (1961: 250). (For a recent article treating relative age in Kuranko mythology, see Jackson 1978; for a Kabiye case of the first two children being sent to live with grandparents, see Piot 1985.)

Muller has taken up at some length the issue of birth order in alliance systems. Among the Rukuba of Nigeria, all women enter into a prescribed 'premarital relationship' and a primary and a secondary marriage, with the complex rules for choosing these partners dependent on birth order: an eldest daughter should marry a given preferred individual; the second and third daughters should also marry into this category of men; while the foregoing is merely optional for any remaining daughters (Muller 1973: 1569).

Another set of data is provided by the Balinese kinship system, as analysed by Geertz (1973). Here, there is a set of four birth-order slots into which all children are placed successively, forming 'an endless four stage replication of an imperishable form' (Geertz 1973: 371). The system is essentially, however, a terminological and categorical one only, since 'there is no conceptual or social reality whatsoever to the class of all [first-born or second-born] in a community', nor do the terms 'express any concrete [psychological or spiritual] characteristics of the individuals to whom they are applied' (1973: 371).

The Beng case contrasts to all the examples cited. Unlike the Balinese, the Beng system places all women (but not men) in a non-finite grid, and precisely for the purpose of regulating their social position by assigning them a marriage partner. And unlike the other cases cited, the Beng system uses a more specific criterion than the simple contrast of 'elder/younger' (Wikmunkan, Kuranko) or the distinction between a given number of children and all successive children (Rukuba, Kabiye). For the Beng system is thoroughgoing in its assignment of every daughter in a sibling group to her unique place for the purpose of alliance. In this section I explore the birth-order system with reference to marriage and, following Jackson's urging (1978: 358, n. 4), I consider gender as a crucial dimension intersecting with that of birth order.

In the Beng case, the birth-order rule is simple in principle, though often difficult to carry out: a couple's odd-numbered daughters belong to (pöë) their father to betroth as he deems fit, and the even-numbered daughters belong to their mother to be married as she deems fit (see fig. 4 for a sample family of four daughters).

Of importance is the fact that a girl's place in the birth order is determined at puberty, making the system effectively take into account only daughters who reach marriageable age. If, for example, then the third daughter would now be accordingly belong to her mother. Of household, the daughters of each co-wife their birth order. Likewise, a divorced or accounting anew for each group of daughters.

Generally, the parent who 'owns' the other 'side'. The complex way that these 'sides' that makes the Beng marriage system un cognatic dimension, admitting both cross may not belong to the relevant parent's own are three possible cousin types who are cousins, or either form of cross-cousin.

in intersect with birth order to create various which side a daughter marries into is a matter. As we shall see further on, though, the choices and thereby de facto redefine the side.

Let us suppose it is time for the first daughter, her father, he will normally marry her into have married her matrilateral parallel-cousins with patrilineal exogamy. Thus if she is the daughter might traditionally marry only to any degree.

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reach marriageable age. If, for example, a second daughter dies in childhood,
then the third daughter would now be considered the second and would
accordingly belong to her mother. Of note, too, is that in a polygynous
household, the daughters of each co-wife are counted separately in determining
their birth order. Likewise, a divorced or widowed woman or man would begin
counting anew for each group of daughters she or he had with each spouse.

Generally, the parent who 'owns' the daughter marries that child into his or
her 'side'. The complex way that these 'sides' get defined is one of the features
that makes the Beng marriage system of interest. For this single rubric contains a
cognatic dimension, admitting both cross- and parallel-cousins who may or
may not belong to the relevant parent's own matriline. As analysed above, there
are three possible cousin types who are marriageable: matrilateral parallel-
cousins, or either form of cross-cousin. We will now see how these cousins
intersect with birth order to create various alliance possibilities. Generally,
which side a daughter marries into is a matter of cousin type (cross- or parallel-).
As we shall see further on, though, demographic conditions may limit the
choices and thereby de facto redefine the system.

Let us suppose it is time for the first daughter to marry. Since she belongs to
her father, he will normally marry her into his side. Traditionally, she would not
have married her patrilateral parallel-cousin (FBS) of any degree, in keeping
with patrilineal exogamy. Thus if she married into her father's side, a first
daughter might traditionally marry only her patrilateral cross-cousin (FZS) of
any degree.

For a second daughter, for whom the system is reversed, a mother has two
alternatives. Either she may marry her daughter to a man in her matrilocal
(generally, to her daughter’s matrilateral parallel-cousin of at least the second

Figure 4. Birth order and parental 'ownership' of daughters.
degree, or occasionally to the latter’s S or even DS); or she may marry her to her ‘BS’ (her daughter’s matrilateral cross-cousin) of any degree. If the mother chooses to marry her into her matriline, then the daughter will of course be marrying a matriclansman. On the other hand, if a mother decides to marry her daughter to her BS, then the young woman’s fiancé (her MBS) may or may not be a member of her matriline, depending on whether his parents themselves had married matrilaterally. Thus when a woman marries into her mother’s side, she is not necessarily marrying into her own matriline, though this is a possibility. For the moment, let us suppose that the second daughter marries a MBS who is not a matriclansman.

When we come to the third daughter, the choices will be few, as she may not make a similar match to her odd-numbered predecessor, who married a FZS. The third daughter might also marry a patrilateral cross-cousin if he were only distantly related to the first daughter’s husband. Such would be the case if the two men were members of different matrilines within the same matriline, or if, despite being lineage-mates, they were only remotely related, the exact connexion having been forgotten.

The fourth daughter, who belongs to her mother, will have more choices than the third. If the second daughter married a MBS, then the fourth sister might marry a classificatory matrilateral parallel-cousin.

With the fifth daughter, the system for odd-numbered daughters has exhausted itself. Both her odd-numbered predecessors (daughters numbers one and three) have married FZSs who are only distantly related, and it is unlikely that a third FZS of the right age could be found who would be in a different matriline from the previous two, or who would be only distantly related to them while a member of the same matriline. The father of a fifth daughter might therefore decide to marry her into a matriline with which his own matriline has previously had alliances. In initiating such an alliance, he would expect a ‘return marriage’ to be effected at a later date. Or, if possible demographically, he might marry the fifth daughter into a matriline with which his own matriline already has a relationship of perpetual alliance, as explained above.

The same situation would prevail for a sixth daughter as for a third daughter. Her even-numbered predecessors (daughters numbers two and four) have already married a MBS and a classificatory MZS, respectively, so she might now marry another MBS or MZS only if he were in a different matriline from his brothers-in-law, or if the link connecting the two, though lineage-mates, were now forgotten.

Should there be a seventh daughter, her father will have no new structurally defined choices open, and he will most likely leave the daughter to find her own husband. Assuming she already has a boyfriend, the seventh daughter will probably be delighted. A ninth daughter’s situation would be parallel.

With the eighth daughter, we may still have one possibility left: if the sixth daughter had married a MBS only distantly related to the second daughter’s husband, then the eighth daughter might now marry a classificatory MZS only distantly related to the fourth daughter’s husband, or from a different lineage but within the same matriline.

A tenth daughter would be in a structurally different situation. That is, it is unlikely that any choice can be made without duplicating the marriages of her sisters. Consequently, she might be married to someone later exchange marriage; or she might be married to a matrilaterally parallel cousin with which there had already been an alliance.

A twelfth daughter’s situation would be similar. She would probably be left to choose her own husband.

Clearly it is unlikely that a given cohort of Beng daughters who all live to marriageable age will all marry adult-age daughters, one can see that they may accommodate them all amply. They may throw a wrench into the above-described system if there is a relatively small population involved in the community. It is not common that there is no one available with the right age for it. For it is expected that within the next generation or two, their husbands. Hence finding a marriage partner in their age group is not a significant problem. In fact, the parents may realise that, if they marry a FZS older than she, but within the same matrilineage, to the cousin in question, and in the mean time find her own husband.

Elsewhere I have presented several cases of parallel-cousin marriages, and have come to some conclusions based on the ideal system (Gottlieb 1983: 23). I would underline the extendiveness of the birthright to accommodate virtually all a couple’s descendants. In the Beng society, the largest family is that of four siblings. The parents may be old enough to marry a second FZS, if they have already married a MBS or MZS. They may marry the seventh daughter into a matriline with which their own matriline already has a relationship of perpetual alliance, as explained above.

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Conclusions

The Beng means of choosing spouses is by negotiation. Here I sum up the significance of those factors to the theory of the relationship of kinship and marriage in Beng society.

Looking at the system of cousin marriage within the parallel component of the Beng marriage system, we can see that it is a marriage system that accommodates virtually all a couple’s descendants. In the Beng society, the largest family is that of four siblings. The parents may be old enough to marry a second FZS, if they have already married a MBS or MZS. They may marry the seventh daughter into a matriline with which their own matriline already has a relationship of perpetual alliance, as explained above.

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Should there be a seventh daughter, her father will have no new structurally defined choices open, and he will most likely leave the daughter to find her own husband. Assuming she already has a boyfriend, the seventh daughter will probably be delighted. A ninth daughter’s situation would be parallel.

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S or even DS); or she may marry her to her cross-cousin) of any degree. If the mother triclan, then the daughter will of course be other hand, if a mother decides to marry her woman's fiancé (her MBS) may or may not ending on whether his parents themselves had. Thus when a woman marries into her marrying into her own matriclan, though ent, let us suppose that the second daughter an brother.

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A tenth daughter would be in a structurally similar position to that of a fifth daughter. That is, it is unlikely that any cousin marriages would be open to her without duplicating the marriages of her even-numbered predecessors. Consequently, she might be married to someone in an unrelated matriclan to initiate a later exchange marriage; or she might be given a 'return' marriage to a matriclan with which there had already been an exchange.

A twelfth daughter's situation would be that of a seventh daughter, and she would probably be left to choose her own husband.

Clearly it is unlikely that a given couple will produce twelve or more daughters who all live to marriageable age. If a typical couple has three to four adult-age daughters, one can see that the arranged marriage system should be able to accommodate them all amply. The vagaries of demography might well throw a wrench into the above-described works, however. Indeed, given the relatively small population involved in this system (app. 10,000), it is in fact fairly common that there is no one available of both the correct kinship relation and the right age. For it is expected that wives be of the same age as, or younger than, their husbands. Hence finding a man not only of the right genealogical category but also of the correct age might well nigh be impossible in a given case, and a daughter would be left to find her own spouse. Alternatively, in a large family, the parents may realise that, say, a second daughter has no hope of marrying a FZS older than she, but there may be a fourth daughter waiting in the wings, as it were; the parents can then plan to marry this girl, when she comes of age, to the cousin in question, and in the meanwhile leave the second daughter to find her own husband.

Elsewhere I have presented several case studies of the ways families have coped with all these variables to produce a close approximation as they could to the ideal system (Gottlieb 1983: 235–44). Here, my main concern is to underline the extensiveness of the birth-order system as a model seeking to accommodate virtually all a couple's daughters. One may imagine how individuals may feel trapped by the marital spider web spun around them, and rebellions against it are not unheard-of (Gottlieb n.d.). Yet for the most part, the system works. It is a construction that is both elegant and almost all-encompassing.

Conclusions
The Beng means of choosing spouses is a complicated amalgam of features. Here I sum up the significance of those features both for a theory of alliance and for a theory of the relationship of kinship to gender.

Looking at the system of cousin marriage alone, undoubtedly the most surprising component of the Beng marriage system is the practice of matrilateral parallel-cousin marriage. From the perspective of alliance theory, marrying within the matriclan and, especially, within the matrilineage is a flagrant violation of the Lévi-Straussian premiss that the purpose of marriage is to unite two distinct groups, even two enemy groups. Like FBD marriage as practised in much of the Muslim world, MZD marriage among the Beng plays the opposite.
role from that advanced in the Lévi-Straussian model: it unites people who are already united and between whom there is, in a structural sense, no sociological difference. Orthodox alliance theory might well put this kind of union into the category of incest. For if the goal of MZD marriage is to marry 'close', what prevents Beng from marrying their true siblings? Indeed, terminologically there is no difference between full siblings and any degree of matrilateral parallel-cousins, including those who become spouses: all females in both those categories are called dre leg (eZ) or zu leg (yZ), and all males, dr5 gən (eB) or zu gən (yB). In marrying a MZD or MZS, then, one would be wedding someone whom we might gloss as 'sister' or 'brother'; Beng who speak French refer to such spouses as soeurs or frères.

In this regard, I have stated that the Beng system of alliance lies somewhere between Lévi-Strauss's categories of elementary and complex. That remark must now be explained in view of the foregoing. Seen in its totality, the Beng alliance structure reveals a noticeable oscillation between marrying close and marrying afar. This is seen with the very preference for matrilateral parallel-cousin marriage. For although this is stated as a decided preference, nevertheless the Beng distinguish between degrees of matrilateral parallel-cousin: a first-degree MZCh is forbidden as a spouse, while a second- (or higher) degree MZCh is preferred as a spouse. Structurally, both these sets of people are identical: both are referred to by the same set of sibling terms given above; both are members of a single matrilineage; and surely second-degree MZCh, like first-degree MZCh, are seen as 'close', being members of one's matrilineage, with all that that entails (see above). Yet the Beng have bifurcated the two degrees of cousin to the extreme degree, making one of them a preferred spouse and the other, prohibited. In a sense, this bifurcation embodies the Beng view of alliance as a whole, here writ small: the predilection for marrying close, yet not too close.

The preference for cross-cousin marriage also embodies in its own ways this ambivalence about marrying close, yet not too close. Here, we see the ideal for marrying close applied in a manner that would seem suitable for producing an orthodox elementary system of regular marital exchange between two groups. And indeed, in a sense the Beng strive for such an exchange, in initiating a lamoya popole match that should result in future exchange matches between two matrilineages. Yet at the same time they deny the possibility of a regular exchange by forbidding repeated alliances between certain sets of affines whose links are still remembered. It is as if they are simultaneously striving for alliance with 'foreigners', and avoiding such alliance. There seems to be an effort towards achieving a balance between sociological distance and proximity.

Such an effort at sociological balance is also found on the level of gender relations, particularly when viewed through the lens of the birth-order system, which operates to regulate marital alliances. Although this article is very much grounded in a Lévi-Straussian approach to marriage, it differs from it in at least one important respect. As is well known, Lévi-Strauss views the exchange of women by men as fundamental to alliance systems. Recently, Tsing and Yanagisako (1983) have reported a new interest in exploring the domain of kinship from a feminist perspective. Nevertheless, contemporary efforts at integrating feminist approaches into alliance theory have accepted the Lévi-Straussian premiss of the male monopoly (1975; Strathern 1984; Van Baal 1975). A Hamilton (1970), which documents Goa's practice of arranging infant and child bestowals in rata (1977; Nash 1978; Schlegel in press). Sing has offered a similar perspective by regulating marital exchange. The following have emerged in the foregoing consideration.

Viewed from one perspective, the Beng system is advantageous to men over women. They weigh on women more heavily than on men, as a punishment; they refuse their chosen husbands and may, in the case of women, be permitted to refuse their chosen wives. The social consequences of being viewed as close are to be kept in mind. Yet the Beng have bifurcated the two degrees of cousin to the extreme degree, making one of them a preferred spouse and the other, prohibited. In a sense, this bifurcation embodies the Beng view of alliance as a whole, here writ small: the predilection for marrying close, yet not too close.

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Straussian premiss of the male monopoly over exchange of females (e.g. Rubin 1975; Strathern 1984; Van Baal 1975). A notable exception is a short work by Hamilton (1970), which documents Gidjingali (Australian Aborigine) women arranging infant and child bestowals in marriage. (For related cases, see Leacock 1977; Nash 1978; Schlegel in press; Singer 1973; Wolf 1974: 165). The present article has offered a similar perspective by highlighting the possibility of women regulating marital exchange. The following points concerning gender relations have emerged in the foregoing consideration of Beng alliance.

Viewed from one perspective, the Beng marriage system may appear more advantageous to men than to women. The arranged-marriage system seems to weigh on women more heavily than on men: women are in theory forbidden to refuse their chosen husbands and may be forced to sleep with them (but see Gottlieb n.d. for examples of women who have rebelled). In contrast, men are permitted to refuse their chosen wives, though in fact they almost never do, indicating on the one hand their general contentment with the system and on the other hand the subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle pressure that their families exert on them to accept their appointed wives.

But other aspects of the alliance system exhibit a striking emphasis on balancing the roles of men and women. This emerges most clearly in the birth-order system. Here, we have seen how both parents (with their siblings) are allotted separately the right to dispose of their daughters in marriage, depending on the latter’s places in their order of birth, with the result that half the daughters are assigned to one parent and half to the other. One may conclude that structurally, neither gender is in control of the arranging of marriages: the Beng system allows both genders structurally equivalent access to this role. While one may legitimately infer that women as a gender are still, in classical Lévi-Straussian fashion, being exchanged in this system, one must also admit that men are not exclusively doing the exchanging.

Concomitantly, the preference for both forms of cross-cousin marriage permits both genders access to conjugal authority. For the Beng an explicit theory that associates each type of cross-cousin marriage with the authority of one spouse over the other, depending on gender. Despite a general norm supporting a husband’s authority over his wife, the opposite model of conjugal relations is also possible. The Beng appear to be manipulating multiple models of social relations, in an attempt at achieving a kind of sociological balance between the sexes.

Such a co-existence of multiple models is found on the level of marital forms itself. Lévi-Strauss notwithstanding, it has hardly gone unnoticed in the anthropological literature that societies may have two or more varieties of marriage. Vellenga (1983), for example, has recently outlined twenty-one forms of traditional marriage among the Asante, detailing the problems that contemporary Ghanian family law has faced in trying to ascertain which of these is the ‘real’ form of marriage. (For other examples of multiple marriage forms, see Evans-Pritchard 1930; Fardon 1984.) There has, however, been no systematic analysis of the existence of multiple marriage models from a purely alliance-theory perspective. The current work is offered as a step in that direction. Lévi-Strauss’s work on alliance has served as a fertile stimulus to over a
generation of scholars working on comparative marriage patterns. The present article has attempted to demonstrate how his oeuvre can stimulate further work that expands the specific parameters envisaged by Lévi-Strauss into new dimensions of analysis. Hence I have considered the possibility of parallel-cousin marriage as one means of enacting a response to the paradoxes embodied in marital alliance; birth order as a significant element in alliance; and the issue of gender authority and/or complementarity both in arranging marriages, and in participating as spouses in cross-cousin marriages. Such a seemingly disparate host of factors, it is hoped, has been shown in the Beng case to be both relevant and intricately interrelated, demonstrating how rich a single 'system' of alliance can be.

NOTES

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1. The Beng have been known in the literature as the Ngen, the Gani, or variations thereof, but I refer to them by their own name for themselves (spelt phonetically, Beng [see Gottlieb 1981: 45–6, n. 1]); for recent published data on the Beng, see Gottlieb 1982; 1986. Beng live in the prefecture of M'Bahiakro and the sub-prefecture of Prikro. There are approximately 10,000 Beng in M'Bahiakro (Ivory Coast 1981) and a smaller number in Prikro. I have worked exclusively among the Beng of M'Bahiakro. The first village in which I was based (in 1979–80 for 14 months) had a Beng population of approximately 250, which serves as the source of my demographic statistics; in 1985 I lived in a village of approximately 1,100.

2. In fact, Article 1 of the Civil Code of 1964 adopted by the Ivory Coast government refers only to marriages that are registered officially with the government; technically, the vast majority of marriages that the Beng arrange (but do not register) would not be considered illegal, in so far as they are not recognised as marriages at all (cf. Launay 1982: 140) for a similar point as regards the Dyula of northern Ivory Coast).

3. A woman is given an arranged-marriage husband only once in her life (though theoretically she does not have the right to refuse him, in practice this does happen from time to time, in which case she may or may not be offered another choice——see Gottlieb n.d.). If she divorces or is widowed by her first husband, a woman is free to choose any subsequent partners. In contrast, a man may be given two or, rarely, even three arranged-marriage wives (though theoretically he has the right to refuse an arranged-marriage wife, a man rarely exercises this option). There are a few situations in which marriages would not be arranged: especially, a child with a severe physical or psychological incapacity, and the last children in a large family (they might not be offered arranged-marriage spouses).

4. Though Lévi-Strauss (1966) contests the utility of the 'prescription', I find it to be of some use in explaining things up between husband and wife, only then would matrilineage within a marriage unite those two perspectives. The difference between these two kinds of Asante, the intricacies of the relationship of slavery (but see note 16); future work in Africa on this too. Communication).

5. In theory if a couple agrees, it is elders of their community who decide whether a marriage will take place. The author of this text was raised by her mother's maiden name. A dying man may, however, allocate to his wife who is a clanswoman. This, however, is a temporary arrangement, especially, a kola plantation. Patrilineal descent is important for work in funeral arrangements.

6. Cf. Heritier (1969) for the opposite causal view. In considering the way this, the Beng appear in the literature as a single ethnic group. The patrilineal term system (see note 11), however, Poewe's discussion is analogous to that presented here for the Benin termological cases, see Brain (1973: 128) on the Asante.

7. The Beng view of cross-cousin marriage has been offered by Lévi-Strauss (1966) and more recently by Lévi-Strauss, Schneider (1957) and Schneider (1981). His view is that the marriage is found only rarely with MBD-FZS marriage is found only rarely. In that system, the FZS is not in the Beng group. MBD-FZS marriage is found only rarely with MBD. In that system, the FZS is not in the Beng group. MBD-FZS marriage is found only rarely. In that system, the FZS is not in the Beng group. MBD-FZS marriage is found only rarely.
incapacity, and the last children in a large family (for demographic reasons which emerge below) might not be offered arranged-marriage spouses.

4 Though Lévi-Strauss (1966) contests the utility of a distinction between 'preference' and 'prescription', I find it to be of some use in explaining the Beng system of marriage (cf. Muller 1973; see Rossi 1982: 52-6 for a review of this controversy). I take a 'preferred' rule to be an ideal sought by many but not all individuals of a given society, and a 'prescribed' rule to be one that is technically obligatory for all.

5 In discussing matrilineal endogamy, Beng did not emphasise to me any difference between marrying within or outside one's own matrilineage. Yet we can see that there is a significant qualitative difference between matrilineages within a single clan: one is composed of 'free' Beng and the other(s) is (are) composed of dependants of a slave. Marriage between two lineages within a clan, then, would entail uniting two groups between whom there are no 'real' uterine ties, while marriage *within* a matrilineage would unite those with 'real' uterine ties. From the Lévi-Straussian perspective, the difference between these two kinds of marriage should be crucial (see Conclusions).

6 As yet, the intricacies of the relationship of slavery to alliance theory have not been fully explored (but see note 16); future work in Africa on this topic may prove central (Mona Etienne, personal communication).

7 In theory if a couple argues, it is elders of their *patriline* who should first judge the case. This is because it is patrilineary elders who mediate in the actual mechanics of effecting an alliance (though they play no role in deciding on the alliance itself—see Gottlieb 1983: 111-12). If these elders fail to patch things up between husband and wife, only then should the elders of the couple's *matriline* intervene to hold a second trial. In cases of arguments between spouses who belong to the *same* matriline, however, it is most often their matrilineary elders who hold the initial trial, with the couple's patrilineary elders ceding them this role.

8 Another advantage to matrilineary endogamy—this one for women only—was suggested by a male elder: if a woman who married outside her matriline was widowed, she would inherit nothing from her husband. A dying man may, however, allocate one or two cash-crop fields (especially coffee) to a wife who is a clanswoman. This, however, is a modern innovation, as inheritance of cash-crop fields (especially, kola plantations) was inapplicable traditionally (Gottlieb 1983: ch. 3).

9 Patrilineary play other roles in Beng society, but these are not relevant to the issues at hand: especially, they are involved in funeral arrangements and rituals, and they transmit food taboos.


11 In conceiving of it this way, the Beng appear to be considering relationships through both the matrilineary and the patrilineary: ego has authority through the MB, who holds authority over his own children through the *patriline*. My informants did not see any contradiction in this, indicating how complex and flexible a system of double descent may be.

12 This has some analogy to Poewe's discussion of the Luapula, where descent is reckoned matrilineally and the kin term system is of the Crow type (1980: 339). Poewe attributes the terminological equations, MBS = S and MB = D, to the fact that a man is the heir to his MB and thus in a structural sense like a father to his MBCh. Likewise, he would be the children to his FZs and FZD, whom he calls 'F' and 'FZ', respectively. The Beng do not have a strict Crow type of kin term system (see note 13), but Poewe's discussion of the relationship between Luapula cross-cousins is analogous to that presented here for the Beng as far as marriage is concerned. For similar terminological cases, see Brain (1973: 128) on the Lugurul of Tanzania, and Fortes (1950: 271) on the Asante.

13 The Beng view of cross-cousin marriage has some affinity to a theory proposed by Homans and Schneider (1953) and later refined by Lévi-Strauss (1963: 122) and others. Homans and Schneider suggested that FZD-MBS marriage is found only rarely with patrilineal descent because in that system, the FZ is too stern an authority figure to be a man's mother-in-law. Similarly, MBD-FZS marriage is found only rarely with matrilineal descent, because with that system, the MB is too stern an authority figure to be a man's father-in-law. While this argument has been extensively critiqued (see Schlegel 1972: 107-12), the Homans and Schneider theory and the Beng perspective share a major feature. Both explanations emphasise a correlation between certain normative affective relationships and social structural features. But whereas Homans and Schneider suggest that positive affective relationships are incompatible with authoritarian ones, the Beng merely note that when marriage involves having a parent-in-law who has prior authority over one
due to the descent structure, the situation is 'difficult'. Yet much of Beng alliance structure is based on such 'difficult' situations, since Beng value both forms of cross-cousin marriage, and since, due to double descent, both MB and FZ have authority over ego (the first as a matrilineal elder, the second as a patrilineal elder). Homans and Schneider's explanation is thus only secondarily relevant in the Beng case.

11 For all three of these rules, informants were divided as to how far, laterally, this prohibition extends—in other words, whether just first cousins, or second and third cousins of the married male ego, are prohibited from contracting the stated affinal alliances. This uncertainty may reflect a recognition that second and third cousins, though structurally identical to first cousins in relation to ego, are in personal terms less 'close' to ego, the more so as the intervening links get forgotten. The issue revolves around the question 'How close is close?' which is a pertinent one to most Beng, and which has no single universally accepted answer for them; see Conclusions below.

12 A certain ritual may be performed to save the guilty parties, in particular, two sisters who have had sexual relations with the same man (generally, one of their husbands). (A similar ritual is done by the neighbouring Baule [see P. Etienne & M. Etienne 1971: 179, n. 2], for the same infraction [Mona Etienne, personal communication].) To conduct the Beng ritual, the two sisters must go to the King's village, bringing with them a chicken or (preferably) a goat of either sex. They kill the animal and split it in half. Each sister takes a half and runs around the village, holding half of the animal carcass, until the two meet: they then begin hitting each other with the two carcass halves. This done, other women of the village come to cook the animal, and all present come to eat the meat.

13 Those familiar with the long-standing 'Crow-Omaha' debate might have already suspected that the Beng employ Crow-Omaha type kin terms, since this system of kin terms has been associated with an intermediary, or 'semi-complex' form of marital alliance (Lévi-Strauss 1966; Héritier 1981), and as we have seen, the Beng alliance system as I have described it might well be classified as 'semi-complex'. In fact, the Beng kinship terminology system is a peculiar hybrid form which does not fit neatly into a single classical typology, instead combining aspects of Iroquois-Dravidian, Hawaiian-generational and Crow-Omaha. The Beng system of kin terms does, however, accord with the general principle that a prescriptive alliance rule is not associated with separate affinal terms, and vice versa (Needham 1961: 24). This topic must be left for a future article.

14 In fact, in this case, my informant Kouadio did not consider the set of marriages a true case of 'change' because those involving women of P. matrilineal were not arranged marriages, and hence did not 'count' (see Gottlieb 1983: 231–3). But the formal principles that should in theory define these repeated marriages between two clans remain relevant.

15 While Beng speak of the individual mother or father having rights to the child, in practice, the parent's entire sibling set must agree to the proposed match. Nevertheless, I think the Beng spoken emphasis on the mother or father as single actors is significant in the present context.

16 A similar theme has been noted among the Wan, who, of all the Southern Mande groups, may be linguistically the most closely related to the Beng (Philip Ravenhill, personal communication). Ravenhill (1976) also discusses an oscillation among the Wan between consolidation and extension of marital ties, though the Wan use different methods. In contrast, the Baule, who neighbour the Beng to the south and west, do not have any type of elementary alliance system. They do not practise cross-cousin marriage (unlike the Asante, to whom they are historically related); they forbid marriage with all first cousins and, in principle, with all uterine kin (P. Etienne & M. Etienne 1971: 179–80) (indeed, there are no distinct kin terms for cross- and parallel-cousins—P. Etienne & M. Etienne 1967: 50); and they prohibit the duplication of matrimonial ties between kin groups. Nevertheless, there are two forms of Baule marriage that contradict the intent of these rules. First, individuals may marry their own slaves and, since the slave status was transmitted matrilocally, slaves might marry close patrilateral relatives who would normally be forbidden (M. Etienne 1976: 6; n.d.: 254–5, n. 1). Secondly, when it comes to remarriage of widows, the Baule again contradict their own rules and seek remarriage of the widow with a kinsman—but not too close a kinsman—of the deceased man, thereby revealing, as with the Beng and the Wan, as ambivalence for marrying 'close' (M. Etienne 1986). It is possible that such an ambivalence between marrying close and marrying afar, which we find in varying forms among the Beng, the Wan, and the Baule, may be more widespread than has thus far been reported (Mona Etienne, personal communication).
MA GOTTLIB

is ‘difficult’. Yet much of Beng alliance structure is based on the both forms of cross-cousin marriage, and since, due to autonomy over ego (the first as a matrilineal elder, the second as a relative’s explanation is thus only secondarily relevant in the

the exclusion of both the eunuchs, or second and third cousins of the married male is stated affinal alliances. This uncertainty may reflect a thorough structural identity to first cousins in relation to the marriage, the more so as the intervening links get forgotten. The affinal does not belong to which is a pertinent one to most Beng, and answer for them; see Conclusions below.

save the guilty parties, in particular, two sisters who have been, generally, one of their husbands). (A similar ritual is done & M. Etiene 1971: 179, n. 2), for the same infraction.

). To observe the Beng ritual, the two sisters must go to chicken or (preferably) a goat of each sex. They kill the goats, half and runs around the village, holding half of the goat in his hand and each other with the two carcass halves.

one to cook the animal, and all present come to eat the

'crow-Omaha' debate might have already suspected the 'kin' terms, since this system of kin terms has been complex form of marital alliance (Lévi-Strauss 1966; en-glish alliance system as I have described it might well be kinship terminology is a peculiar hybrid form

ical typology, instead combining aspects of Iroquois-

Omaha. The Beng system of kin terms does, and that a prescriptive alliance rule is not associated with

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REFERENCES


Great Men
ong the New Guinea Baruya

Norms in a ilineal Society
ince among the Toka of Zambia

Colonial Power
the Former Belgian Congo

he Pacific
, Customs and Human Biology

Contents
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