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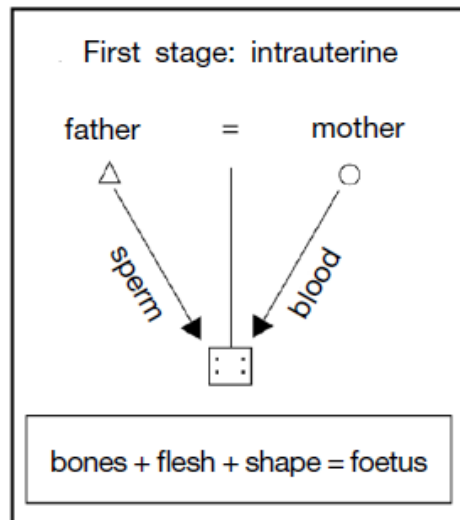


## Begetting ordinary humans\*

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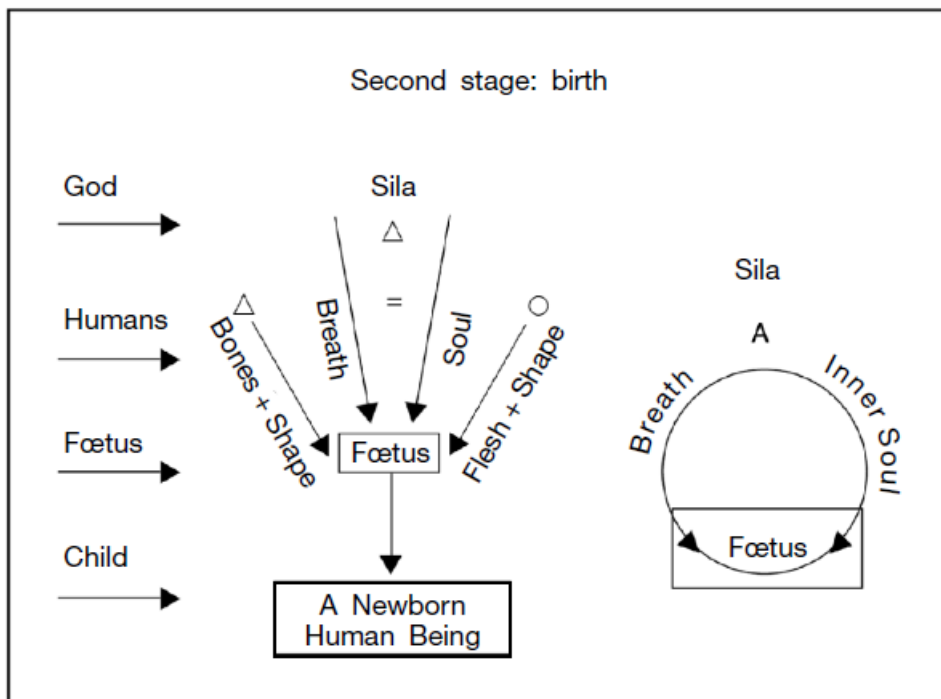
### Another look at the Inuit

Let us take again the example of the Inuit to complete it and to introduce the analysis of a few other representations of what it is to “make a baby.” For the Inuit, to make a baby, the parents must have sexual intercourse. The father makes the child’s bones, its skeleton, with his sperm. With her blood, the mother makes its flesh and its skin. The child takes shape in the mother’s womb. It will resemble its father or its mother, depending on the strength of the life force of each. Its body will be nourished by the meat from the game killed by its father and eaten by its mother. At this stage of intrauterine life, the child is a foetus with no soul.



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The foetus is still not a human being. The child becomes human on the day of its birth when Sila, the master of the universe, introduces a bubble of air into the child's body that will become its breath, its life principle. This bubble of air connects the child with the cosmic breath. It contains a soul, another gift from Sila, which will grow with the child's body and be its double, a double that will leave only at the person's death and travel to the world of the dead. This inner soul is endowed with intelligence and partakes of Sila, who is the mind of the world. A human child is born.



But the newborn baby is not yet a social being. This is something it becomes when it receives one or several names from its parents in a ceremony attended by all of the relatives together with the neighbours and the parents' friends. For the Inuit, names are not merely labels. They have a soul. They are souls themselves, since they harbour the identity and the life experience of those who have carried the same name. Unlike the inner soul that animates the body and grows with it, the child's soul-name completely envelops it and transmits the identity of all those who form the chain of its homonyms. And since an Inuit child usually receives several names over its lifetime, it will experience itself as both one and many, in so far as it knows that it is the meeting point of the reincarnation cycles of several soul-names, which live again each time they are given, in a different form and with a different human face.

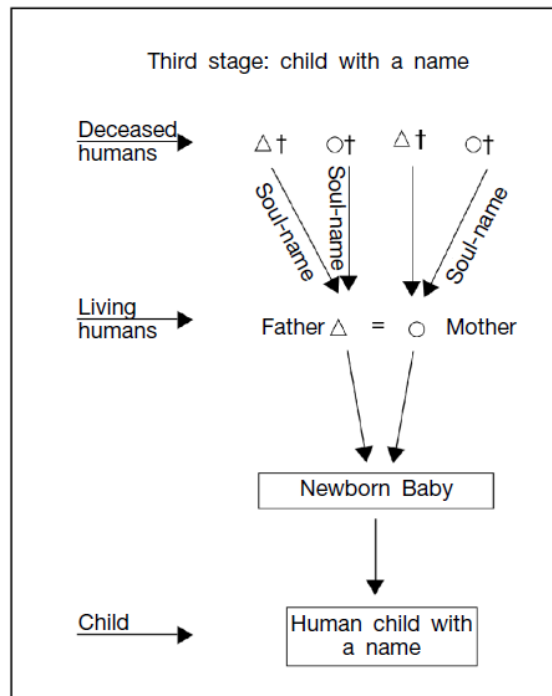
Who are these soul-names and who chooses them? They are chosen by the child's parents and are the names of relatives or close friends of the father or the mother, deceased during her pregnancy, or even before, and whom the parents want to bring back to live with them by attaching them to the body of their child.

Sometimes these are close relatives or friends who, feeling the end draw near, ask the man and/or the woman to give their name to their next child.

These (imaginary) representations of the process of begetting a child and the ingredients of its inner identity are what underpin the Inuit practice of raising a boy as a girl or a girl as a boy, depending on the sex of the person whose name was given at the child's birth. Nor should it be surprising to hear an Inuit woman address her son as though he were his own prematurely deceased father. But it is noteworthy that these practices, which separate social gender and physical sex, cease when the child reaches puberty. The son goes back to being a boy and the daughter ceases to be one. This occurs precisely at the moment when each is going to have to take part in reproducing life by assuming the role designated by his or her biological sex.

What are the theoretical assumptions inherent in the Inuit representation of begetting children?

1. For the Inuit, sexual intercourse between a man and a woman is necessary to make a foetus but is not enough to make this foetus into a child.
2. The father and the mother, as the child's genitors, take part in producing and giving form to the foetal body through distinct and complementary contributions. Each partakes in the child by giving it matter and form, but they do not give it life.
3. Life begins when Sila, the supernatural power, introduces a bit of his breath into the child's body, which connects the child to the fabric and the movement of the universe into which it has just been born and where it will grow up. But this breath is also connected to a soul that will later enable the child to understand the world around it and which will survive after the person's death. This soul is singular and sets the newborn baby apart from all other humans who have ever been born, but it is not enough to make the child a complete human being, with its place both in the cosmos and in society. The soul gives the child life and the capacity to learn from its own experience. However the child still does not have a name that will connect it to the whole chain of human beings who have carried the name since time immemorial.
4. When the newborn child receives one or several names, in the course of a public ceremony, it brings to life in itself members of its kindred and, more broadly, members of its community who have gone before. By receiving these persons into itself, the child gives both them and its community a new future. These soul-names were not thought up by the child's parents: they existed before the parents and will live on through the child. They are thus spiritual components of a child's identity, which do not depend on the matter that comprises its body or on its shape. Because of these soul-names, an individual in Inuit society is never an absolute point of departure: he or she does not face life with his or her own experience alone, but with that of all of the homonyms who have gone before and who, thanks to the parents, now accompany him or her for the rest of his or her life. Lastly, it should be noted that names have a life of their own and are not attached exclusively to a paternal or a maternal side, or even to the kindred of the child's parents, which is very different from the case in most kinship systems, especially uni- or bilineal ones.



We can thus sum up the main points of this theory. For the Inuit:

1. Sexual intercourse between a woman and a man is necessary to make a child but it is not sufficient. Other actors also play a role: gods, and deceased relatives or friends who want to live again and whose intervention is just as indispensable to completing the child and endowing it with an identity that is known and recognized in its society.
2. By mixing his sperm and her blood, the man and the woman produce the raw material that makes up the child's body and provides its shape. In this, the child is indeed "their" child, and therefore belongs to their "kindred." The contribution of sperm and blood "legitimizes," as it were, the child's appropriation by its parents. After the birth, the parents can either keep the child and raise it or give it, for instance, to one of its father's sisters who is childless or whose children have all died, or to its maternal grandmother so that it will take care of her and keep her company.
3. The parents' role is not limited to making the child's body. They also give it one or several names and, along with the soul-names, transfer to their child the experience of the deceased who have already carried the name and to whom they wish to give new life. These names are not transmitted exclusively in the paternal or maternal line and are not necessarily those of the child's relatives.

In emphasizing the parents' bilateral contribution to making their child and the undifferentiated transmission of its names, these representations of conception correspond to the Inuit kinship system, which is cognatic.

But we also observe that these representations bring into play forces that lie well outside kinship relations, reaching into the universe of the deceased and the gods. For Sila and the other supernatural powers that control the universe—the masters

of the wind, the rain and the game—do not belong to one family or band rather than another. These powers hold sway over all Inuit, and Sila places in each of their children, whoever their father and their mother may be, whatever band they may belong to, whatever camp they are about to be born into, a bit of his cosmic breath and a soul that will grow with the child and become its double.

So Inuit representations of conception not only insert a child beforehand into a network of kinship relations and a kindred, they also give it a place in the overall society and in a particular cultural universe shared by all. The society and the culture that produced these beliefs, which will be self-evident for the child, will also offer it at birth a “self-image” that will ground its own experience of itself and of others.

### **The twice-borne man of the Baruya society**

Let us leave the Inuit now and look at the representations other societies have developed of what a child is. We will begin with the Baruya. The Baruya kinship system, it will be recalled, is patrilineal; their marriage is based on the direct exchange of women between two lineages; and their society is characterized, at the political-religious level, by the existence of large-scale male (and female) initiations, whose explicit aim is to grow boys and legitimize their right to govern society and exercise various forms of power and domination over women and young men.

The Baruya too believe that, in order to make a baby, a man and a woman must have sexual intercourse. The man’s sperm (called “penis water,” *lakala alyeu*) produces the child’s bones, its skeleton, whatever endures after the body’s death, but also the child’s flesh and blood, which increase as the embryo develops. The woman makes no contribution whatsoever. Her womb contains a sort of sack or bag (*tandatta*), which the sperm enters and where the child develops. Sometimes, if some of the woman’s blood stays in her uterus, the child will look like its mother or someone in her family.

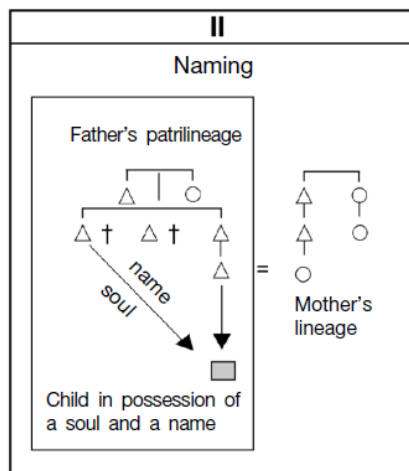
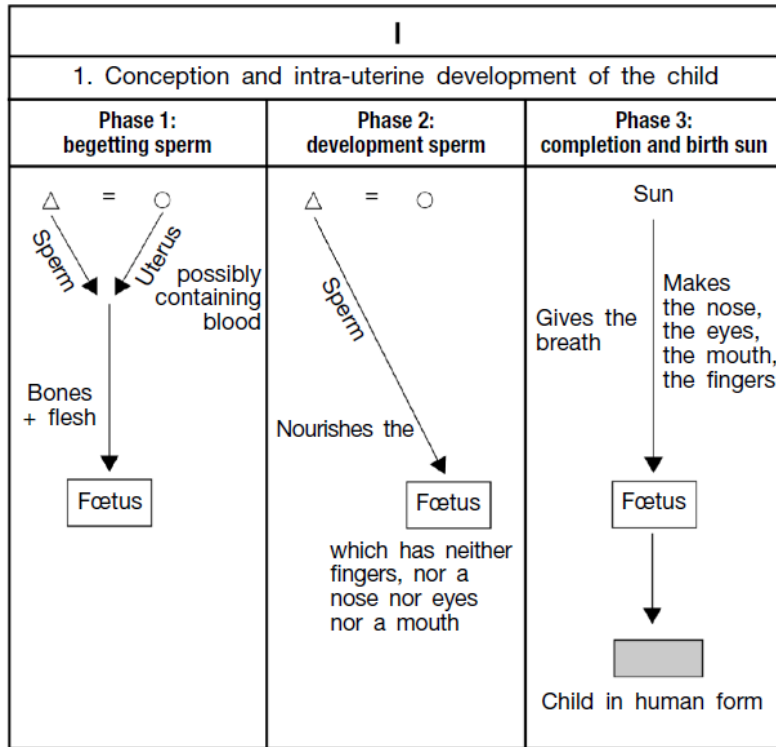
As soon as the woman ceases having periods, which tells her she is pregnant, she informs her husband, and from that day on the couple increase their sexual relations because the man’s sperm is believed to nourish the foetus the woman carries in her womb. The Baruya woman can thus scarcely be regarded as her child’s genitrix, since nothing passes from her body into that of the child, and her womb is merely a container for a body engendered and nourished by the man, who is thus both the genitor and the nurturer of the unborn child.

Yet the man and the woman are not enough to make this child, for, despite the father’s repeated contributions of sperm, the foetus still does not have a nose, eyes, a mouth, or fingers and toes. In short, this being could not see or speak or breathe or walk or hunt, etc., if the Sun did not intervene in the mother’s womb to fashion the missing organs and give this now-human body his breath.

The baby breathes when it is born, but it still has no soul, no spirit. It seems that, for the Baruya, the spirit-soul (*kourie*) enters the child’s body and lodges in its head, near the top of the skull just under the fontanel. The nose that will be pierced during the initiations links the breath to the soul. The soul-spirit comes from an ancestor in the child’s patriline or its clan and reincarnates itself in one of his or her male or female descendants. Apparently the spirit soul takes possession of the child’s body only when its parents give the child its first name, the one it will carry until its nose is pierced and it receives its “big” name, the name carried by all

initiated men and women. The other name, the little name, will become taboo, forbidden to pronounce, cast into oblivion.

But before giving the child its first name, the parents wait a year or so to be certain that it will live and that the father has the time to make the child's maternal kin, its mother's side, a series of ritual gifts that detach the child from their lineage. During all this time the father is forbidden to even glimpse the face of his child, which the mother keeps concealed in a loosely woven net. If the child should die in the interval, it is buried without ceremony by its mother, in a remote spot (and not on land belonging to its father's lineage).



The two names given to the child—one before and the other after its initiation—are always clan names. Each clan has a pool of names proper to it. Gwataye, for instance, is a “big” (post-initiation) name that can only belong to an Andavakia man, but he could not be called “Maye,” a name reserved for the Baruya Kwarrandariar clan, which always provides the most important master of the male initiations. The Baruya carefully avoid giving the same name to two people from the same clan.

The two names given to a child are thus those of one of its male or female ancestors, on the father’s side, in the direct or collateral line, belonging to the generation of its grandparents or great-grandparents. Inasmuch as a child’s soul is believed to enter its body at pretty much the same time as its parents confer its name, and inasmuch as this name is that of one of the child’s ancestors, it can be surmised that the soul which enters the child is that of the ancestor whose name it will carry from then on. But I have never had a firm confirmation of this hypothesis. When questioned, the Baruya would answer only that it was possible or that it was likely. What seems certain is that the soul that enters a child’s body is always that of a male or a female ancestor. What is not certain (for me) is that this soul is that of the ancestor whose name the child will carry.

How can we describe the different stages involved in the process of conceiving a Baruya child? We will distinguish three moments in its intrauterine life: begetting, intrauterine development and finally, in the last weeks before the birth, the intervention of the Sun, to complete the child’s body. Later, after its birth, the child will receive a name and a soul. Summing up:

1. For the Baruya, sexual intercourse between a man and a woman is needed to make a child, but it is not enough, for this only produces an unfinished foetus. That the union of the sexes is necessary is borne out by Baruya mythology. According to one of these myths, at the dawn of time, the man and the woman both had sexual organs and an anus, which were not pierced and could therefore not be used. One day Sun took pity on them and threw a flintstone into a fire. The stone exploded and pierced the man’s and the woman’s sexual organs and anus, and humans have been able to copulate and have children ever since.<sup>1</sup>

In another version, it is Moon,<sup>2</sup> Sun’s wife, that pierces the girls when they reach puberty and causes their first menstrual flow.<sup>3</sup> Or, it is not the Sun but the

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- 1 During one of the rituals before the initiates enter the big ceremonial house, the *tsimia*, all of the fires burning in the villages were extinguished and the ‘first fire’ was lit in the *tsimia* by striking sparks from two flintstones. These flintstones are among the sacred clan objects held by the master of the initiations and the shamans, whose ancestor received them as a gift from the Sun (together with the magic to make them work). In everyday life, the Baruya make fire by friction and not by striking.
  - 2 According to certain myths known by all men and women, Moon is the wife of Sun. But in the esoteric stories the master of the shamans tells apprentice shamans, Moon is Sun’s younger brother.
  - 3 For the Baruya, menstrual blood means just the opposite of its significance for the Kavalan of Taiwan. The Kavalan are an Austronesian-speaking, matrilineal and matrilocal society. The women own the land, the family assets and the children. As shamans, they have the monopoly on access to Muzumazu, the mother goddess of all the Kavalan and source of fertility. Menstrual blood has no negative connotations and

first woman who indirectly pierced the man's penis. She stuck the wing-bone from a bat into the trunk of a banana tree at the height of a man's penis, and the man inadvertently impaled himself. Maddened by the pain and having guessed who had put the bone there, the man grabbed a bamboo knife and slashed open the woman's genitals.

2. The existence of two versions, one in which the gods act on the first humans and another in which it is the first woman who takes the initiative, correspond to the deep structure of the Baruya's view of the world and the origin of things. According to the Baruya, women were the ones who invented bows and arrows, cultivated plants and who made the flutes, etc. But they used their creativity in a way that would have reduced the universe to chaos, for instance by holding their bow backwards and killing too much game. The men were therefore obliged to intervene and, by stealing the sacred flutes, the source of life, they brought about the order that still reigns in the world and which they continue to guarantee, as it were.

The man has the preponderant role in making the foetus, as we have said. His sperm makes the child's body, its bones and its flesh, and nourishes it. The mother appears as a passive vessel. Even the milk the young mother will give her child after its birth comes from the man, since it is a transformation of his sperm. When a young man and woman get married, it is customary for the couple to refrain from making love before the walls of the house, built for them by the men of the husband's lineage, have been blackened by the smoke from the fire burning in the stone fireplace, made by the same men. For days, and sometimes weeks, the young man merely strokes his wife's breasts and gives her his sperm to drink. This sperm is believed to nourish the young woman and make her strong. Some of it is believed to build up in her breasts and change into milk when she becomes pregnant and later nurses her child. Thereafter, each time she gives birth, her husband will once more give her his sperm to drink and will nourish her with the game he has killed so as to build up her strength, which has been sapped by the birth and the loss of blood that goes with it.

3. Not only does the father play the more active of the human roles involved in making the child's body. It is also he who connects the child with his own ancestors by giving it a name and prompting a soul, a spirit, to enter the child. This name has been carried by men and women of his clan from a time so distant that its memory has been lost. But what the man does know is that his children—sons and daughters—will be made of the same sperm and the same blood as he, and that he shares with his brothers and sisters the self-same sperm and the same blood, which came from their father. But it is only the men who are capable of transmitting this blood, since women do not have sperm.

In the Baruya kinship system, the role of the father, as principal genitor of the child, nurturer of the foetus, giver of milk and of names, and transmitter of

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comes from Muzumazu. In this society, men are considered to be unstable and lazy as well as destroyers of life because they hunt game and heads. Young men can take a wife only after having brought back an enemy head, which signifies that they now have the capacity to procreate. Finally, men are regarded as human beings to be "domesticated" by women and are exchanged between matrilineal (cf. Liu Pi-chen 2004).



the soul, concords with a key component of this system: the fact that descent ties are traced exclusively through men, that their principle is strictly unilineal, patrilineal. This does not contradict the great importance the Baruya accord their maternal relatives. Mother's sisters are like mothers for them, and they can always look to their maternal uncles for help, protection and indulgence.

Living with the Baruya brought me to understand that all of the ingredients of kinship relations do not necessarily find expression in the body or in the representations of the body. Baruya kinship terminology is of the Iroquois type, which means that father's brothers are all fathers for the child, and that their children are brothers and sisters. All mother's sisters are mothers, and their children are brothers and sisters. Whereas father's sisters' children and mother's brothers' children are cross cousins.

What the Baruya theory of conception tells us is that all of a man's children share the same blood because they come from the same sperm. Therefore they cannot marry each other. And since all of this man's brothers also share the same blood, because they too come from the same sperm, which they alone (and not their sisters) can transmit, all of the children of this man and his brothers are as brothers and sisters and cannot marry each other. The Baruya's kinship terminology and their theory of conception thus correspond.

But this does not hold for the mother's side. On this side, too, Ego is faced with a group of people of both sexes whom he calls brothers or sisters. These are the children of his mother's sisters. But they do not have the same blood as his mothers and her sisters, since they come from the sperm of their own fathers, who belong to distinct lineages, since the Baruya rule is that two brothers or two sisters never marry into the same lineage and that sons do not repeat their father's marriage by taking a wife from their mother's lineage. Combining the patrilineal descent principle and these (negative) marriage rules gives the following situation. I call brothers and sisters people on my mother's side with whom I do not share the same sperm or the same blood and who, if they are the children of two sisters married to men from different patrilineages, do not even share the same sperm or the same blood with each other. I therefore call brothers and sisters people on my mother's side whom I could marry—and who can marry each other.

Three theoretical conclusions can be drawn from these facts: Once again we have confirmation that kinship terminologies are independent of the descent principles at work in a society. Next, we see that the representations of conception are linked with the principles and forms of descent at work in a society and also act to regulate marriage, if marriage is prohibited, for example, between those who share the same sperm or the same blood, etc. Lastly, we see that the representations of conception do not say everything about the nature of the kinship relations in a society. However they do express certain aspects essential for understanding the meaning of a child's social production and identity.

4. We observe with the Baruya, as in Inuit society, that whatever role the man and the woman play in the making of the child, they do not suffice in themselves. Supernatural forces—Sun and Moon—intervene to do what humans cannot. And they do this for all Baruya children, whatever their sex or their clan. That is why the Baruya say they are sons and daughters of the Sun, whom they call

Nouwme, “father,” in their invocations and their prayers. Therefore not all Baruya are children of the same sperm, of the same human father, but all are children of the same divine father, who fashioned them in their mother’s womb and gave them breath.

5. But the breath is not the spirit-soul, which comes to reside in the body and leaves it momentarily at night during sleep, or definitively at the time of death. In the latter case the soul returns to the land of the dead, which is located in two places for the Baruya. Some souls go underground, where they live in villages that can be seen through a big crevasse that cuts deep into the mountain; the others go up into the stars, far from the everyday life of humans. Every human being thus has within himself something that does not die with him and which perhaps lived before him in other bodies and at other times. Where do these souls come from? The Baruya did not tell me. They only know that they come from the primal times, from the time of the first men and women, the *wandjina*, the dream people. The souls were not made by men and women. Were they made? And by whom? At any rate not by Sun and Moon, for the first man and the first woman with their closed genitals were their contemporaries.

Let us now look at the Buruya boys’ fate. Unlike their sisters, boys are twice born, begotten first by their father and mother, and engendered a second time by the adult men of the group, those who are married and/or initiated, who give them a second birth in secret initiations apart from the women and even in opposition to them. Around the age of nine, little boys are separated from their mother and sisters. This separation is brutal: The child is torn from his mother and loaded onto the back of a young fourth-stage initiate, usually one of his maternal kin, who runs quickly a hundred or so metres through facing lines of men, who lash the two bodies with thorny branches. The blood runs down their skin. At the end of this sprint, the child is deposited on the ground, and two or three blood-covered men threaten to shoot arrows into his legs and thighs. Sometimes they even do it. The terrified child then joins the other children, huddled against their “sponsors,” who soothes their wounds by smearing them with cooling yellow mud. For years the young initiate will not be able to speak or to eat in front of this man, who, in the all-male world in which he will now live, acts as a surrogate mother to him. The maternal role, then, also deserts the women’s world to resurface in the world of men.

The initiation cycle spans more than ten years, during which time the initiate will go through four stages. In the first stage he is still dressed partly like a boy and partly like a girl, and his buttocks are deliberately left bare so that he will not dare show himself in front of women. Then begins a long process designed to rid his body of everything that still has a female content, so as to purify him of all the pollutions that women bear in and on their bodies. Some foods are forbidden and others prescribed. He is not allowed to pronounce certain words. But above all, he discovers homosexual relations. He is forced to take the penis of the third- and fourth-stage adolescents into his mouth and to swallow their semen. And if he resists and takes too long, his neck is broken and the men then tell the mother that the child fell out of a tree pursuing an animal in the branches. But these first homosexual relations rapidly become a source of pleasure, and the new initiates seek them out. Inside the “men’s houses” couples form, bringing together for a

time an older and a younger boy, the older boy having chosen the younger. A great deal of tenderness can be observed between them, as well as reserved and delicate gestures. There is room here for desire, eroticism and affection.<sup>4</sup> First- and second-stage initiates are thus regularly nourished with the older boys' sperm. These third- and fourth-stage initiates are young men who already fight alongside the married men but who have never had sexual relations with a woman, since they themselves are not yet married and still live in the *kwalanga*, the "men's house." Their sperm is therefore pure, free of the defilement entailed in sexual relations with women, since a flow of menstrual blood issues regularly from their vagina. So it is that from one generation of boys to the next, a flow of sperm free of all female pollution circulates and re-engenders them as even more masculine and stronger—and nourishes them.

These gifts of sperm circulate in one direction only. Whereas marriage rests on the exchange of sisters between two men, an exchange which involves a wife-giver and a wife-taker, in the gifts of sperm, the takers (the young initiates) will not be able to give their sperm in turn to their givers when they reach adolescence. Givers are not takers. The takers incur a life-long debt to the older boys. It should also be said that masturbation is forbidden in Baruya culture. Your sperm does not belong to you. It belongs to others, and vice versa, the sperm of others belongs to you. But precisely who can give his sperm to a young initiate? Any unmarried young man who does not belong to the initiate's lineage, for if he did, he would be committing a sort of homosexual incest. Furthermore, when a young man marries, because his penis has entered the mouth and vagina of a woman, he is forbidden to try to put it into the mouth of a boy who has just been separated from the women's world. This would be committing the worst kind of violence and humiliation.

Through these repeated ingestions of sperm, which transform his body into the body of a man, filled with purely male substances and forces, the boy is engendered a second time, no longer by his father, but by the group of young men who have been living for years apart from the women's world and have already rid the boys of every trace of their mother. It is they, and not his father, who will re-engage the boy and then bring him up. The father has practically nothing more to do with his upbringing and disappears behind the Great Men, the great warriors, the great shamans, and especially behind the masters of the rituals, in short all the men who fulfil functions in the general interest and regularly visit the men's house to teach the initiates the legendary history of their ancestors and the events that founded the world order, beginning with the famous theft of the flutes by the men.

For, as I have said, the secret name of the flutes is associated at the same time with the vagina and with the pollywogs that became the first men and which resembled foetuses (Godelier 1986: 70, 145). It was in these flutes that the women's reproductive powers were originally concealed. When the men stole the flutes, they separated the women from their powers and confiscated their use. The men now have these powers in their possession, but they know that the women still own them and that chaos would be unleashed anew if the men relaxed their control over the women, in other words, their dominion. That is why, generation after generation, boys must be initiated and men's power reaffirmed. But this power is ambiguous, because it is based on the explicit denigration of women and on the secret knowledge of the existence of female powers that men can imitate

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4 Cf. Gilbert Herdt's work on the Sambia and ritualized homosexuality in Melanesia.

and reroute but can never fully appropriate for themselves. That is why the Baruya's most sacred objects, the *kwaimatnie*, come in pairs, the more powerful, the hotter of the two being the female *kwaimatnie*, something no woman must ever learn.

During the many rituals that take the initiates from one stage to the next, the Sun is constantly invoked and present. Called upon by the master of the shamans at the beginning of the initiations, it draws close to the humans present and floods them with its light and its force. The masters of the initiations then mutter the secret name, *kanaamakwe*, each time they brandish their *kwaimatnie* in the direction of the Sun before striking the object on the chest of the initiates so as to penetrate them with the Sun's power and light.

After having pierced the noses of the new initiates, with which the Sun endowed their face when they were still a foetus in their mother's womb, the masters of the initiations squeeze their elbows and their knees to strengthen the boys' body. Finally they jerk both of their arms upward to make them grow faster and stronger. Now, the magic bundle they brandish at the Sun and with which they strike the initiate's chest was a gift from the Sun himself to the ancestors of each clan, and the name *kwaimatnie* comes from *kwala*, "men" and *yimatnie*, which means "to make grow." For it is without the women, but once again with the help of the Sun, that the men, as a group, re-engender their sons. Moreover the Baruya make a connection between the word *yimatnie* and *nyimatnie*, which means "foetus" or "novice."

We are therefore in presence of a sort of collective begetting, which is at the same time a cosmic event, since the Sun takes an active part, as does the surrounding forest. Indeed, one of the most secret rites that follows the piercing of the boys' nose takes place deep in the forest, at the base of a tall, very straight tree whose trunk has been decorated with feathers and lengths of cowries similar to those worn by the men. The little boys are lined up facing the tree, which rises up into the sky, toward the Sun. Nearby stands another tree reputed for producing an abundance of thick white sap. The initiates' sponsors gather this sap in their mouths and come back to deposit it on the boys' lips. For the Baruya this sap is at once sperm and the milk of the tree, and by this gesture, a chain of life forces links the Sun to the tree, the tree to the young virgin men, and these to the young boys who have just been torn from their mother.

During this time, these boys' relationship with their mother and their sisters undergoes a thorough transformation. In the men's world, they had already become foetuses, nourished this time by the sperm of young men who had not yet known a woman and had been fashioned anew by the Sun's power, which entered their chest when the *kwaimatnie* struck them; now they have become older brothers for their sisters, including their older sisters. *The world of men rises definitively above that of women.* Genealogical ties are reshaped by power relations, the relations of domination that give initiated men authority over women, over all women, including the "Great Women," those who have borne many living children, those who are hard workers, who cultivate big gardens and raise many pigs, and even those who are renowned shamans. The order between the sexes is a political-religious and a cosmic order. This social and cosmic order furthermore establishes an order between the sexes, a sexual order. And in building this social and cosmic order, male homosexuality is one of the means chosen by the Baruya to establish and legitimize the relations of power and force that are supposed to

obtain between men and women, and between the generations. The Baruya's homosexuality is thus what in the West would be called a "political-religious" practice, with a cosmic dimension, before being an erotic practice (which it is as well). Men are taught to be proud of having suffered in order to be initiated into secret knowledge that the women ignore, proud of having a new body, different from women's bodies and stronger, proud of being designated to take on functions, responsibilities in the general interest of which women are incapable and from which they are excluded.<sup>5</sup>

It is this male image that is made visible to everyone - to men, to women, to the children of friendly and hostile tribes alike, with whom hostilities have been called off for the space of the ceremonies—by the *tsimia*, the big ceremonial house built for each initiation in a location somewhere between the villages. Each post of the *tsimia* stands for a new initiate. The posts are planted in the ground (all at the same time) by the initiates' fathers at a signal from the masters of the initiations and the shamans. The fathers are lined up side-by-side, grouped by village and not by lineage, facing away from the circle they form and which outlines the place where the *tsimia* walls will be erected. A war cry rises from the throats of all of the men present when the fathers sink the post that represents their son. For the Baruya, these posts are "bones," which, taken together, make the skeleton of the *tsimia* (which represents the "body" of the Baruya tribe, a body whose "skin" is provided by the women, who gather and transport the hundreds of bundles of thatch the men will use to make the roof). But women cannot enter the *tsimia*. At its centre stands a huge post that supports the edifice. It was sunk in the ground by the fourth-stage initiates. This post is the "ancestor" of the tribe and it is called "grandfather." Before the roof is made, a dangerous animal, captured earlier, is thrown down from the top of the pole and smashes to the ground. Its body is then presented to the oldest man in the tribe, who will eat it and will then be expected to die before the next cycle of initiations. Time has come full circle, the cosmic and social order has been reproduced.

At the close of these rites, which go on for days inside the *tsimia*, the old and new initiates appear outside and dance around the edifice for hours. The women applaud at the sight of them, proud to see their sons adorned with feathers, their body painted, their face discreetly concealed behind a quiver of arrows when they pass before them. The force that sustains this unequal social order, founded on the domination of one sex over the other, is not so much the violence - in all its forms, physical, social, psychological - that the men inflict on the women as it is the belief shared by both sexes that women are a constant source of danger, not only for men but for the social and cosmic order as a whole, and that this is due to their body, to the menstrual blood that flows from their vagina.

The Baruya language has two words for blood: *tawe*, the blood that circulates in the bodies of people and game; and *ganic*, menstrual blood. Baruya men have an almost hysterical reaction when they talk about or when someone else talks to them about menstrual blood. And yet they know that this blood, when it flows for the first time from the body of an adolescent girl whom Moon has pierced, is the sign that she is now a woman and able to bear children. But like all of the fluids that flow from a woman's body, this blood is a permanent threat to

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5 Note the ambiguity: incapable because they are excluded, or excluded because they are incapable? For the Baruya the second formulation is obviously the correct one.

men's strength, to their superiority. The menstrual blood produced by women's bodies is the force that destroys the men's own strength. In a sense it is the rival substance to their sperm, a kind of *anti-sperm*. The initiates are told that the man who stole the flutes had watched the women putting them away in a hut. When the women left, he went in, searched the hut and found the flutes hidden beneath a skirt soiled with menstrual blood. He took the flutes, played them and then put them back. When the women returned, one of them tried to play a flute, but no sound came out, and so she threw it down. The men picked up the flute and, ever since, the flutes have obeyed the men and sung for them.

The Baruya's fear of menstrual blood and vaginal fluids is so strong that, when they make love, the woman must not straddle the man, for the fluids from her vagina might run out onto his belly and sap his strength. She is also forbidden to step over the hearth where she cooks the family's food, for fluids from her sex or impurities from her skirt might fall into the fire and mix with the food that will go into the man's mouth. In a word, heterosexual relations are regarded as dangerous by nature, not only for men but for the reproduction of the universe and the conduct of society as well. And it is the woman who is the prime source of all these perils. Sexuality in all its forms must be brought under control if it is to aid in reproducing the social and cosmic order. And if this order is hard on women and subjects them to violence, it is in a way their own fault, due to their nature. Ultimately, inasmuch as they share these imaginary representations of men, women and life, Baruya women cannot help feeling at the same time victims of these acts of violence and responsible for their existence. Fundamentally, victims are guilty. And their only way out is to accept their fate in silence. These imaginary representations are not only mental concepts. For women the consequences are very real.

Indeed there is a social, material and conceptual gulf between the two genders. Girls, because they are women and do not have sperm, do not inherit land from their ancestors. They do not have the right to own or use weapons and are thereby excluded from hunting, making war and using armed violence, which is an attribute of power. They do not have the right to produce "salt money" (but their husband or their brother gives them salt so that they can buy what they want). They do not control the fate of their daughters, even though their opinion counts heavily when their husband and his people discuss what lineage the girls will be exchanged with. Last of all, they are obviously excluded from owning and using *kwaimatnie*, and therefore forbidden direct access to the Sun and the gods, since it was their life-giving powers that were stolen and enclosed in the *kwaimatnie* that the Sun himself gave to the male ancestors of their lineage.

At the end of this long analysis, which does not do justice to the richness of Baruya representations of conception, we would like to stress the fact that this theory describes two different processes. One concerns both girls and boys (until they reach the age of nine or ten). The other concerns only boys after this age and causes them to be re-engendered by the men in order to become men in their own right.

The idea that sperm plays a twin role in making a child, thus making the father both the genitor and the nurturer (as well as the source of the milk the mother will give her baby when it is born), corresponds to the Baruya's descent rule and legitimizes the fact that the children are appropriated by the father's lineage in accordance with the patrilineal principle. The same goes for the name the father

gives the baby and for the ancestor soul that re-embodies itself in the child. But the role played by the Sun in making a foetus into a human child expresses a distinct relationship between the descent and filiation principles, which are conveyed through the father and through the mother. It means that the child, whatever its sex and clan, belongs to the Baruya tribe and at the same time to the group of tribes that recognize the Sun as their common superhuman father and recognize the sperm of the human father as the primary origin of the child. The Sun here is simultaneously a cosmic power, a tribal god and (in so far as he is a god recognized by several tribes sharing the same origin) an “ethnic” god.

But the primacy assigned to sperm is not based uniquely on the patrilineal descent principle that governs the kinship relations. It refers at the same time to the sperm of all of the young men who inseminate the boys without this time going through a woman’s womb. For the Baruya, sperm is a substance that is overdetermined: It acts on behalf of kinship, but at the same time it serves another purpose: to construct and to legitimize the men’s claim, both collective and individual, to represent society and to govern it on their own. Sperm, in this case, is therefore not merely an “argument” for appropriating the children born of legitimate sexual unions and assigning them to a particular kin group. It is also the argument alleged by one part of society, the men, for dominating the rest of the society - the women and children. It legitimizes the general domination, namely political and religious, of one part of society by another. That is the object of the opposition between sperm and menstrual blood, of the positive overdetermination of one and the negative underdetermination of the other. The human body thereby finds itself at the intersection of kinship relations and political-religious relations, marked by all manner of everyday or ritual power, exercised in public and in private life.

Yet another remark. In Baruya society, what we would call the political-religious domain, in other words the sphere of those practices intended to affect society as a whole, encompassing and transcending the differences created between individuals by the kin group they belong to and their distinct places of residence, this almost exclusively male-dominated domain is constituted outside and beyond kinship relations. It is organized around the project to re-engender men through men, an act that at the same time denies, supersedes and imitates that which is at the heart of kinship relations: the begetting of a child by a man and a woman. Without being the same as kinship, the political-religious domain is constructed within the domain of kinship by transposing elements of kinship into another ritual sphere and then eliminating everything these relations owe to women.

### **The case of the Trobriand Islanders**

The example of the Trobrianders, who live on a chain of islands to the southwest of New Guinea, is probably the best known in all of anthropological literature. Their fame is due primarily to the nature of some of their institutions, but also to the remarkable analyses and publications of an anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, who spent several years of his life with them.<sup>6</sup> He chose to devote his

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6 Malinowski was born in a region of Poland that was at the time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He had been considered an Austrian subject during the Second World War and was placed under house arrest in Papua New Guinea, then a British colony, for the duration of the conflict.

attention to three Trobriand institutions: (1) their kinship system, which is matrilineal, and the representations of the process of begetting children associated with it; (2) their political-ritual system, which—rare for Melanesia—rested on a distinction between “chiefly” lineages (at the head of hamlets, villages or districts) occupying different functions and ranks, and the rest of the population; and, finally (3) the participation of these chiefs and other important men in the Kula, the vast network of ceremonial exchanges covering hundreds of miles and involving ten or so societies (often with different languages and cultures).<sup>7</sup>

But let us turn to what interests us here, namely, the ideas the Trobriand Islanders’ had about child conception before the arrival of missionaries and other representatives of the Western world (who immediately set about combating these ideas so out of tune with scientific knowledge and the principles of Christianity). We will base our discussion on the information gathered personally by Bronislaw Malinowski and on studies by a string of brilliant researchers who, starting in the 1960s, did their fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands and in other islands in the same part of the world. This work has both completed and corrected Malinowski’s analyses and conclusions on child conception as well as on the two other institutions he had worked on: chiefdoms and the Kula (cf. Damon 1990; Munn 1986; Weiner 1876).

The Trobriand kinship system has a matrilineal descent rule. A married couple’s children belong to the lineage of the mother and the mother’s brother. A father and a son therefore do not belong to the same clan and do not have the same totem. All of the lineages in the island are divided into four matriclans, whose ancestors emerged from their subterranean dwelling place in the form of four brother-sister couples. All Trobrianders are descendants of these four female ancestors through the women.

Residence after marriage is virilocal, though. When a woman marries, she goes to live with her husband, and their children will be raised by him and will continue to live with him, with the exception of the oldest son. At puberty, this son will go to live with his maternal uncle, who lives on the lands of his own matriline, which controls their use. This boy will be his uncle’s successor. The village headman is usually the eldest man in the matrilineage, whose ancestors are believed to have emerged from underground and been the first to occupy these lands.

How is a child conceived according to the Trobrianders? Not through sexual intercourse between a man and a woman, but by the encounter and mingling of a spirit-child (*waiwaiā*) and a woman’s menstrual blood. These spirit-children are spirits of the dead (*baloma*) that live on Tuma, a little island off Kiriwina, and who from time to time are gripped by the desire to be reborn in the body of one of

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7 These exchanges take the form of gifts and counter-gifts of valuables, armbands, shell necklaces and polished stone axes, which circulate in opposite directions. The aim is to attract, through giving, and to retain for a few years one of the finest objects in circulation on the Kula roads and to add one’s name to those who have already owned the object and whose names are henceforth attached to it. Those who are successful at this game (which held such fascination for Mauss) see their fame spread throughout the region and even to places they have never visited. And this fame achieved outside their own society is added to the prestige they already enjoy within it.

For information on the Kula, see Malinowski (1922), Mauss (1925), and Godelier (1996). Concerning chiefdoms, see Malinowski (1935).



their descendants. In effect, the dead are immortal and live a pleasant existence on their island under the authority of a god, Topileta, who is their “chief.” When they grow old, they recover their youth, as was the case for humankind before emerging from their primal subterranean dwelling place. A soul who desires to come back to life in human form thus changes into a spirit-child and floats across the water to the island of Kiriwina. There it must make its way to the body of a clanswoman and enter it either through her head or through her vagina. But the spirit-child cannot find its way alone. The spirit of the woman’s mother or that of another maternal kinsman, sometimes even that of the woman’s father, transports it and introduces it into the body of the woman, who soon finds herself pregnant. When the spirit-child enters by way of the head, the woman’s blood goes to her head and as it descends carries the spirit to her uterus. The spirit-child usually enters by way of the vagina, however, and becomes a foetus when it mingles directly with the menstrual blood that fills the womb.<sup>8</sup>

All of Malinowski’s informants agreed that (1) all spirits of the dead recover their youth periodically; (2) all children are reincarnated spirits of the dead; (3) the child has no memory of the life led by its ancestor either on earth or after death in the island of Tuma; (4) the spirits that reincarnate return to the body of a woman of their clan and their subclan; (5) and lastly, the decision to be reincarnated is made by the spirits and not by humans, it belongs to the dead and not to the living.

The appearance of a new human being is thus the outcome of a process that takes place entirely between the spirit world and the woman’s body. Two kinds of spirits play an active role: the spirit of a deceased ancestor and the spirit of someone living, both from the same clan and who collaborate to get a clanswoman with child. The woman is entirely passive throughout the process. No man is involved, and the woman’s husband, though he contributes to making the child, does not do so as a genitor. The woman is the sole genetrix of her child.

Malinowski of course questioned the Trobrianders on many occasions about what they saw as the role of sperm; this is all the more interesting since, in the Trobriand Islands, people have sexual relations at an early age and lead an intense premarital sex life. Invariably the answer was that it is not enough to make love to make a child. It is the spirits who bring the children during the night (Malinowski 1927a: 62). Sperm and vaginal fluids come from the kidneys. Testicles are an “ornament” of the male sex. The penis and the vulva have two functions: pleasure and excretion.

It should be added that for the Trobriand Islanders, a woman should not have a baby before getting married. A baby needs to have a *tama*, a “father.” What then, for the baby, is the man who has married the mother and has sexual relations with her? Malinowski’s answer came as a bombshell. This man, the mother’s husband, is obviously the child’s father (*tama*), but he is a “purely social” father. Whereas the child is of the same substance, the same blood (*dala*) as its mother, “between the father and the child, there is no bond of union whatever” (Ibid., 12). Malinowski stresses that the word *tama* “must take its definition, not from the English dictionary, but from the facts of native life described in these page” (Ibid.15-16), For the child and its clan, the father is a *tama kava*, an “outsider.” But

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8 Malinowski notes that, in the Trobriand Islands, there are several very different representations of these spirit-children. For some they resemble a sort of little mouse, for others a tiny child, an homunculus.

this “outsider” behaves like the most affectionate of fathers. Malinowski and the observers who followed him all stress the tender care and the affection fathers lavish on their children. The man children fear is not their father but their *kadagu*, their mother’s brother (ibid.: 17). In fact the father tries to retain his sons by giving them land and the means to participate in exchanges, including the Kula.

In short, in a society where kinship relations are governed by a matrilineal descent rule, the fact that children are not engendered by the father but by the mother alone, the fact that they do not share any substantial or spiritual link with their father but are of the same blood as their mother and her brother, and the fact that they re-embodiment one of their maternal ancestors, all correspond perfectly to the logic of their kinship system. Ignorance of the father’s biological role is not a sign of inferior intellectual development, mental deficiency or lack of knowledge. It is part of the beliefs that play a positive active role in organizing a society and reproducing its structures. In 1929 Malinowski writes that,

In 1916 [he] was still interested in the question “Is this state of ignorance primitive, is it simply the absence of knowledge due to insufficient observation and inference or is it a secondary phenomenon, due to an obscuring of the primitive knowledge by superimposed animistic ideas? Now this problem and problems of this type have become meaningless to me. (Malinowski 1929: xxiii).

And elsewhere he warns: “in future we should have neither affirmations nor denials, in an empty wholesale verbal fashion of native ‘ignorance’ or ‘knowledge,’ but instead, full concrete descriptions of what they know, how they interpret it, and how it is all connected with their conduct and their institutions” (ibid.: xxviii).

The example of the Trobriand Islanders convinced Malinowski that humans did not need to know or recognize the role of sperm in making children in order to develop kinship relations and forms of family in which men fulfil their role as “fathers,” protecting and loving their children, caring for and cherishing them. He saw the invention of the father as the consequence of the invention of marriage, which attached to a married man the children his wife brought into the world (cf. Malinowski 1927b: 253-80; 1932: xix-xliv).

Here Malinowski was taking a stand in a debate that had been raging since the last third of the nineteenth century, when Spencer and Gillen discovered that Australian Aboriginal peoples attributed the birth of children to a spirit-child, which lived in the vicinity of the sacred sites belonging to the husband’s kin group and which entered a woman’s body. For these societies, too, sperm did not ‘make’ the baby. It must be said that, at the time, Australian Aborigines were regarded as specimens of the most primitive state of humanity, still living in the first stages of savagery, in which humans had just emerged from their animal-like condition. For Victorian evolutionism, humanity emerged from its animal state when it put an end to the sexual promiscuity that had formerly prevailed and invented kinship. From this perspective, since, at this stage of ignorance, the only thing that was certain was that children came out of the woman’s womb, the first form of kinship could follow no other rule than to trace descent uniquely through women. Matrilineal systems were therefore the first to develop, and with them, *Mutterrecht* (Bachofen: 1861). But men still had no status. This came with the invention of the father. But then other systems came into being, patrilineal this time, leaving behind them on

the path of progress the matrilineal systems, now mere attestations and relics of a bygone stage of evolution.

Thirty years later, Leach revived the debate with his famous essay on *Virgin Birth* (1969; 1968). Leach had two criticisms of Malinowski. First, he reproached everyone who, from Frazer to Malinowski, took their informants' claims at face value, for not thinking that they could know more or something else than what they chose to tell the anthropologist. In other words, they could not not know what they claimed not to know or what they denied. But, in a certain sense, that was not the problem. It was, according to Leach, the fact that anthropologists had not seen that the informants' statements corresponded to the ideological position they were obliged to hold regarding the "structural place" occupied by a child in their society. In short, despite the grand declarations that deliberately exaggerated his differences with Malinowski, Leach entertained more or less the same opinions, but he couched them in the language of his time. Instead of "culture," he used the word "ideology," and instead of ties between the culture and the institutions, he spoke of "dogmas" connected with the position of individuals and groups in the social structure.

Whether or not Leach's theses were new, they had a very positive theoretical impact and sparked the publication of numerous articles and books as well as new fieldwork. Fairly rapidly, thanks especially to Annette Weiner, who revisited the same places Malinowski had worked in, but also thanks to Suzan Montague (1993; 1971), who worked in Kaduwina, an island near Kiriwina, Malinowski's picture of the representations of conception in the Trobriand Islands was to be completed, but also amended.

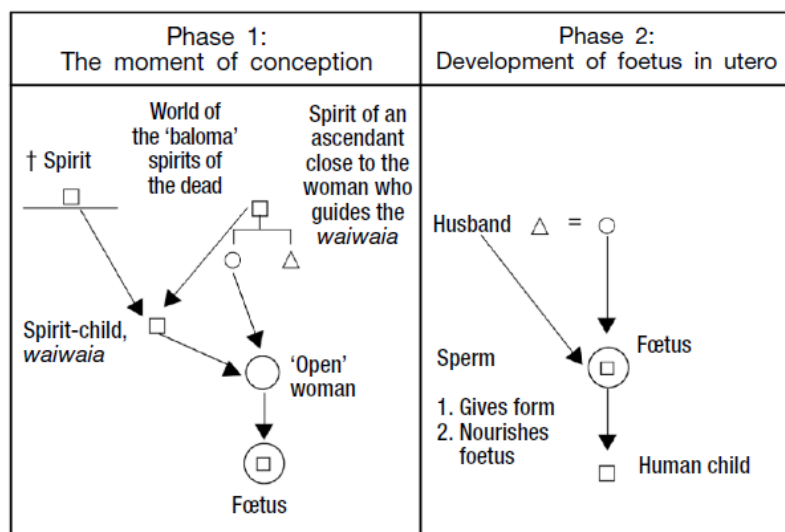
For Malinowski, two of the Trobrianders' assertions posed a problem. The fact that a young woman had to be no longer a virgin in order to have children, and the fact that—they stressed—children could look only like their father, never their mother, whereas they had no substance in common with their father. To say that a child looks like its mother is a serious insult for the mother and for the child, for it is impossible. To say that a boy looks like his sisters is to insinuate that they have made love, that they committed incest. People explained to Malinowski that the father "coagulates" the foetus, gives it a form (*kuli*). They also told him that if a woman's sexual organ was not open, the "spirits realized this and did not give her children" (Malinowski 1927: 47ff). Of course it was not her husband's penis that opened her vagina, since girls begin having sexual relations well before they marry. But it was indeed the penis of a man.

In short, barring unusual circumstances,<sup>9</sup> there is need of a man's penis for a woman to become a mother. But she does not become a mother through the sperm the man deposits in her womb. She becomes a mother through the intervention of spirits, which discover that she has been opened and send her a spirit-child. But this spirit-child, mingled with the woman's menstrual blood, is not yet a human child. It is only a foetus, a runny blob. How does it acquire, inside its mother's womb, the form it presents at birth and a face that makes it look like its father?

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9 There is a myth which tells that Bolutukwa, mother of the legendary hero Tudara, became pregnant when she shut herself up in a cave on the seashore under a stalactite that dripped water drop after drop, and thus pierced her hymen.

The answer was supplied years later by Annette Weiner (1978; 1979; 1988). What Malinowski omitted to say—either because he had not been told or because he had been told but had not really understood—was that, as soon as the woman tells her husband she is pregnant, he multiplies his sexual relations with her. His penis strikes, hammers on, the shapeless foetal mass and shapes it, giving it a form that makes it resemble its father. The ejaculate participates in this undertaking and further serves to nourish the foetus. In a word, the picture was changing. Although the man's sperm had no role in the child's "conception," it was indispensable if the woman was to give birth to a child endowed with a human form and not to a shapeless foetus, and to a child that looked like its "father" as well. The following diagram shows the different phases of conception and intrauterine development.



Sexual relations and male sperm, which in Malinowski's understanding were believed to have no role in making a child, were, in fact, in the eyes of the Trobriand Islanders, necessary if the foetus conceived by the woman and her ancestral spirits was to become a human child, a child whose facial features would resemble those of a man, its father.<sup>10</sup>

In short, in the Trobriand Islands, too, it is necessary to make love in order to have children. But what happens next has nothing in common with what Europeans think, having derived their ideas from Christian tradition or the study of biology. Malinowski was therefore right to say that, in the Trobriand Islands, sexual relations and sperm have nothing to do with *conceiving* a child, but he was wrong to claim that for the Trobrianders sexual relations had nothing to do with making a

10 It would be interesting to compare the Trobrianders' representations with those of the Baruya. We see that, in each case, the man nourishes the foetus in the woman's womb. In both societies, the foetus needs to be given a human form. For the Baruya this is done by the Sun, for the Trobriand Islanders it is the husband who does this by repeated intercourse during the pregnancy. In Trobriand culture, the flesh, the bones and the skin of the foetus are made from the woman's blood, while for the Baruya these are made from the man's sperm. And in both societies the spirit that imparts life to this matter is that of an ancestor.

child.<sup>11</sup> For, while they do not contribute to *making* the foetus, they are indispensable for fashioning the foetus to look like a human child. In the final analysis, a child is always a gift from the spirits; in other parts of the world, in Polynesia for instance, it would be a gift from the gods, or in the West, a gift from God.

So we see that, in the Trobriand Islands, the woman and the man, the mother and the father, each make a distinct but complementary contribution to their children's identity. The mother gives them her blood and her flesh, their inner identity. And, through the blood received from its mother, each child is connected to the uninterrupted flow of blood that comes from the ancestral woman who emerged from the underworld and, together with her brother, founded the child's clan. The father gives the child its external identity, according to Annette Weiner's expression (1978: 182). He gives it a face, a name, body ornaments and, if the child is a boy, the right to use part of his lands. But the father also nourishes the child, first in its mother's womb and then by working hard in his yam gardens to feed his wife and his children—but also his sisters, who have married out of his clan. Later on the sons will make gardens for their father, and he himself will make a garden for each of his daughters when she marries. Finally, he will encourage his sons, who belong to their mother's clan, to take a wife in his own clan.

The blood of women and the ancestors reincarnated in their bodies thus defines the relationship between the people belonging to the different lineages of the same clan, while all of the gifts and the acts by which fathers “nourish” (*kipai*), shape and mould (*kuli*) their children form ties between people belonging to different clans. The father nourishes his wife and children by placing at their disposal his labour and all of the magic inherited from his ancestors, which give him plentiful yam crops and success in his expeditions to distant islands, etc. For, while men do not store up menstrual blood in their bodies, they do store up knowledge and magical powers (*meguwa*) in their bellies. Using this knowledge, they communicate with the spirits (*baloma*) of their ancestors and in turn receive the power to nourish others—or on the contrary to kill them with sorcery or drive them to starvation by casting a spell on their gardens. Interestingly, it is through their father, who is not from the same clan as they, more than through their mother's brother, that men gain access to the world of political relations and the Kula. If we want to understand the connections between the body, kinship and powers in the Trobriand Islands, we must therefore explore their political-ritual universe.

This universe is a hierarchical world: hierarchy between the chiefly lineages with their hereditary ranks (*guyau*) and commoner lineages; hierarchy among the chiefs between those who wield power and influence over a hamlet (*tumila*), over a village (*rati*) made up of several hamlets, or over a district formed of several villages. Each hamlet, village and district is under the authority of the eldest man of the clan, whose mythical ancestors are supposed to have emerged from or settled in this place. Sometimes another brother and the oldest son of his sister—who will succeed him—live nearby. All of his other brothers live with their father, and his married sisters live with their husbands. Alternatively, he is surrounded by men

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11 Cf. Malinowski (1927: 12): “The idea that it is solely and exclusively the mother who builds up the child's body, while the man does not in any way contribute to its production, is the most important factor of the social organization of the Trobrianders'.

from other lineages to whom he has granted the right to use part of his lineage lands and who are therefore indebted to him. He is all the more influential because it is he who invokes his ancestors when performing, for himself and for those living on his lands, the rites to ensure successful crops of the yams and other solid foods with which they nourish their families.

This is why the representative of the hamlet's founding lineage is entitled to a share of all of the resources that the other lineages grow on his lands—yams, betel nuts, pigs, etc. These resources he places in his storehouses and periodically redistributes them on the occasion of events involving the whole community (rituals and dances that accompany harvests, building houses or yam silos, making canoes, preparing a trading or war expedition, etc.). And since it is the chief's privilege to take several wives, four times a year he is presented with a share of the produce from the gardens of his affines—fathers-in-law, brothers-in-law, maternal uncles and other members of each wife's lineage. The chief is thus, as Sahlins (1963) wrote about Trobriand chiefs, the glorious brother-in-law, glorified by a whole community. But he is also, as Leach suggested, like a father who gathers in, feeds and grants the protection of his magical powers to the lineages to which his clan gave the right to live and to reproduce on its lands. Leach's suggestion was adopted by Mark Mosko, who, in an important article (1995), attempted to rethink chieftainship in the Trobriand Islands as the co-creation by a chief and those who follow and serve him of a relationship analogous to that between a father and his children, whom he nourishes and shapes in his image. The author's demonstration is almost convincing, but he carried it too far and ultimately neglected the interplay of authority relations within the clans subject to the matrilineal principle and the interplay of the brother-sister relationship as placed in the service of each clan's alliance policy.

In the end, it is in the body that the reason for each person's place (men and women) in the process of begetting children and in the political-ritual relations that organize the reproduction of the clans and of society as a whole can be found. According to the Trobrianders, women's bodies are soft and runny on the inside. Men's bodies are hard and solid (*kasai*) on the outside. Through their work and their magic, men produce solid food (*kasai*) that keeps their bodies alive and hardens those of the women. But men's bodies are too hard to carry children, and women's bodies are too soft to shape them. Only the man's penis, when it is hard, can, by repeated acts of intercourse, give the shapeless foetal mass a form (Montague 1993).

But women, who are passive when the spirit of an ancestor desiring to live again enters their body, assume the most active role in ensuring the afterlife of deceased members of their lineage. It is the women who organize the large-scale funeral rituals (*sagali*) that will allow their dead brother or sister, or son or daughter, to leave the human world and take their place in Tuma alongside the ancestors of their lineage.

In order to do this, the women must redistribute to everyone (individuals and lineages) who was connected with the deceased during his or her life an enormous amount of female wealth—skirts made of red leaves and bundles of banana fronds (*doba*: skirts; *manuga*: banana leaves)—which the women amass over their adult life, either through their own production or purchased with the yams their fathers, husbands and brothers give them. It is thus women, acting in their capacity as sisters, mothers or daughters, who, by distributing their own valuables, enable the

deceased of their lineage to live once more in Tuma and allow the living, whose ties were interrupted by death, to renew them through these exchanges. Women are the only ones able to “de-conceive” and to ensure those they conceived a new life. And since for Trobrianders death draws all mourners into a sort of “living death,” it is the women who restart the wheels of social life. In so doing, they exercise a real power in society,<sup>12</sup> one that Malinowski had already underscored heavily and which Annette Weiner described in detail (Weiner 1988):

In the Trobriand Islands, we find a matrilineal society, where descent, kinship, and all social relations are reckoned by the mother only, and where women have a considerable share in tribal life, in which they take the leading part in certain economic, ceremonial, and magical activities. This influences very deeply the erotic life as well as the institution of marriage. (Malinowski 1927: 11-12).

We will end the analysis of this case by a comparison with our two earlier analyses of what a child is for a society, that of the Inuit and that of the Baruya. In all three cases, the scenario of child conception entails:

The presence—active (Inuit, Baruya) or passive (Trobriand)—of a supernatural power that lives far removed from human society but has placed humanity under its protection.

1. The intervention of ancestors, of the deceased who are close and known (Inuit) or remote (Baruya, Trobriand), who want to come back to life (Baruya, Trobriand, Inuit) or whom humans want to bring back to life in a child (Inuit). The child has (Inuit) or does not have (Baruya, Trobriand) a memory of the deeds and gestures of the person reincarnated in him or her.
2. The roles of the woman and the man in the conception process are, in all events, in accord with the descent principle, and ground the children’s appropriation by one or the other of the two sides of the family - the father’s (Baruya), the mother’s (Trobriand), or both in the case of a cognatic system (Inuit). In the latter case, the man’s sperm mingles with the woman’s menstrual blood to produce the body of the foetus and in the end that of the child that issues from its mother’s womb. In the case of the patrilineal system, it is the sperm that makes the foetal skeleton and flesh and nothing is said about the mother’s blood, especially not about her menstrual blood, regarded as destroying men’s strength, like an anti- sperm. In the case of the matrilineal system, nothing is said about the man’s sperm, and the woman’s menstrual blood moves to the fore.
3. In two out of three cases, sperm also nourishes the foetus, and the father, even if he is not the child’s genitor (Trobriand), is a nurturing father who begins

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<sup>12</sup> Weiner: “Nothing is so dramatic as a woman standing at a Sagali surrounded by thousands of bundles. Nor can anything be more impressive than watching the department of women as they attend to the distribution. When women walk onto the center to throw down their wealth, they carry themselves with a pride characteristic as that of any Melanesian Big Man” (Weiner 1976: 118).

nourishing the foetus before its birth as a child. In all three cases, the husband nourishes the mother and the child with strong foods—game for the Inuit, game and tubers for the Baruya, yams and other ‘solid’ foods for the Trobrianders.

4. In all of these cases, human labour is not enough to make a child, which is always the result of cooperation between the invisible world of the gods and the ancestors, and the visible world of men and women.
5. All three societies recognize the possibility of births stemming from the intervention of gods or other supernatural entities, without the help of humans.

The fact that, for the Trobrianders and for Australian Aboriginal peoples, children exist even before they are begotten by their parents makes us wonder whether this vision of life might exist outside of Oceania. In fact, one can actually find a great number of examples, especially in Africa. We have chosen to present the case of the Nzema as an example.

### **The Nzema of Southern Ghana**

The Nzema of southern Ghana are a section of the greater Akan people (Grottanelli 1961). Nzema society is divided into seven matrilineal clans (*abusua*), but residence is patrilocal, two principles we already encountered in the Trobriand Islands. Villages and small towns are under the authority of ranked chiefs.

For the Nzema, children are deceased persons who wanted to live a new life in the body of a child. The dead live underground in a place called Ebolo, which lies on the other side of a subterranean river that the dead cross by paying a few coins to a boatman, who ferries them to the other shore. There they are welcomed by all of their deceased fellow clansmen, who take them to their chief, to whom the dead must render a detailed account of the life they led on earth. Afterwards begins a life very similar to the previous one, but more pleasant. The deceased eat, drink, go walking. They enjoy their death.

The dead exist in the form of a soul (*ngomenle*) but also have a body of sorts (*fumlh*), which is not the body (*ngonane*) they had when they were alive. Some of the dead decide to return to earth to live another life, but far from their relatives and friends for fear of being recognized. In this case, their body once more dons its previous form. Others want to be reincarnated in a child. In this case, the spirit of the deceased changes into a sort of “grub,” which is the body of a spirit-child. The spirit-child then takes up residence in the uterus of a woman, usually but not always a fellow clan member. The human child that will be born will belong to this woman’s clan and not to that of her husband.

Once inside the woman’s womb, the spirit-child turns into a foetus as a result of the sexual relations between the father and the mother. With her menstrual blood, the woman will produce the child’s flesh and bones. With his sperm, the man will produce the child’s blood. The man’s blood carries a life force (*mora*), which, if it is “accepted” by the life force contained in the woman’s blood, will give the gestating child the ability to move and later to breathe. Without this “acceptance” by the woman’s blood, the child will not be conceived.

At birth, the child receives two names: one given by the father and the other a soul-name (*ekela*) which indicates the day of the week the child was born and connects it to the gods, in particular the great god Nyamenle. This name will not survive the person, just as the life force carried in his or her blood will disappear at



death. This name will return to the gods, while the soul will set out on the journey to Ebolo, taking with it the *funli* body. The deceased's bones are then returned by the paternal kin to the maternal clan. This clan organizes the funeral rites, performs the rituals that dispatch the deceased to the land of the dead and settles the problems entailed in the inheritance of the deceased's goods, the transfer of his functions, his titles, and so on.

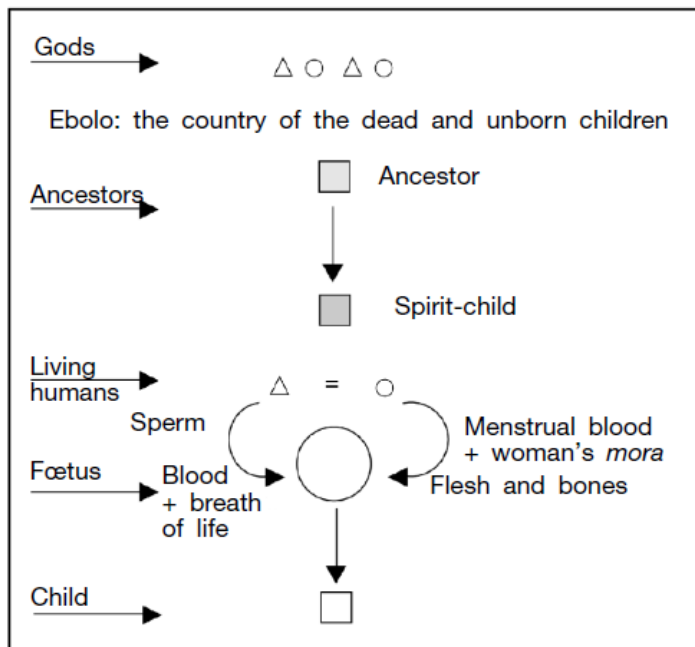
As we see, in this matrilineal society, the father's role in kinship relations, in the definition of the children's identity, in the phases of their life, and so forth, is very important and is expressed in the theories of child conception in a number of ways. The blood that flows through the child's body and the life-giving breath also come from the father's sperm. The name carried by the child was chosen by the father. The qualities identified in the child also come from the father, from the *mora* carried in his blood. The father surrounds the child with his care and his spirit, and protects it so that, it is said, if a child is separated from its father, it will not grow. In effect, the child nourished by its father must observe all of the father's food taboos and seek the protection of the gods worshipped by the father as he respects these taboos.

The example of the Nzema, who are matrilineal but whose residence is patrilocal and where the father's social role is extremely important, concords with the Trobriander example. In both cases, the fathers give their children a name, assets, and protection and affection. In the case of the Trobrianders, the father's role is to shape the foetus and to nourish it with his sperm, but not to make its substance. In the case of the Nzema, the man's sperm makes the child's blood and its breath. Here, too, sexual intercourse between a man and a woman is necessary for there to be a child, but it is not enough. Other actors come into the picture, and once again these are ancestors and gods.

The Nzema case presents two specific features which must be stressed. The spirit-child that lives in the land of the dead is not safe from malevolent aggressions and influences on the part of the gods and evil spirits (*asongtu*). This will manifest itself after the child is born (it has no memory of these events) by various symptoms, including diarrhoea and vomiting, which will be treated by prayers, potions and magical charms. But sometimes that is not enough. For example, in the case where the children in a family die one after the other, a diviner is asked to discover which ancestor or deceased clansman was reincarnated in these children who died or fell seriously ill and what he or she wants. When the diviner has found the identity of the reincarnated soul and the reasons for his or her anger, he tells the parents and offers a sacrifice to the angry spirit. Finally, he gives the parents a series of prescriptions and—of course—expects a reward for his services.<sup>13</sup>

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13 In many West African societies one finds the idea that the birth of a child means 'the return of an ancestor', and that the identity of this ancestor is initially unknown by the child's parents (and of course by the child itself, who has no memory of its life in the land of the dead). But, as among the Nzema, the successive deaths of infants, miscarriages, etc., lead people to try to identify the ancestor and offer him or her propitiatory sacrifices. Among the Mossi, the process by which an ancestor "comes back" to one of his or her descendants is called *segre*. What the deceased transmits to the child is a breath, a life principle (*sigra*), which leaves the nostrils at the person's death and wanders in the bush before returning to live anew in the body of one of his or her descendants. The soul of the deceased (*kilima*) is believed to depart and go to live in



Next is a final example of a society in which the descent rule is also matrilineal, as among the Trobrianders and the Nzema, but where the father's social importance is even greater than in these two societies, and where the *mother no longer shares any bodily substance* with the child she bears, which belongs to her matrilineage.

### The Maenge of New Britain

The society of the Maenge, who live in the eastern part of the South Pacific island of New Britain (cf. Panoff 1976), is divided into two exogamous moieties each of which is divided into exogamous clans and subclans. The clans and subclans are geographically dispersed, and their members live in places where their ancestors emerged. Neither the moieties nor the clans function as true social groups. They do not have chiefs or leaders to represent them and they operate merely as classification categories. The true political, economic and ceremonial units are the subclans, whose members live in the same village or in one of the hamlets that compose a village. These descent groups share rights in the lands adjoining the

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the ancestors' village, in a place called Pilimpiku. When a child is born, the father - or the man in the lineage who is qualified to make sacrifices on the ancestors' altar - goes to a sorcerer and asks him to identify the ancestor who has come back to life in the child. The diviner identifies the ancestor, whose lineage name the child will carry thereafter. The child then receives another, personal name (*yure*). The many childhood illnesses or deaths are explained, according to the Mossi, by the fact that two ancestors are fighting to come back in the same child. Doris Bonnet's list of the ancestors who can come back in a newborn child concords with the patrilineal character and the Omaha nomenclature of their kinship system. The most frequent incarnations are the child's father's father and the father's brother, who is also regarded as Ego's father, and so on. Finally, it is interesting to note that, among the Mossi, what is reincarnated in a child is not the ancestor's soul but his or her breath, which imparts life to one of his or her descendants (cf. Bonnet 1981).

village. They possess a common treasure of valuables, shell money, stone axe blades, etc., whose management is entrusted to one of their Big Men. And they act as a whole in various circumstances: planting ceremonial gardens, performing rites concerning the land, and especially going to war.

Each village or hamlet is under the authority of a Big Man, who in principle belongs to the founding matrilineage or one of its subclans. This man is called *maga tamana* (“village father”). Among the Maenge, polygamy is widespread, so that the children of a man who has several wives belong to different matrilineages. Unlike the Trobriand residence rule, here residence after marriage is not necessarily virilocal. A third of new couples live with the wife’s people, a third with the husband’s family, and the rest live in the couple’s natal village.

Within matrilineages and villages, there is vigorous competition among male members of the same descent group for recognition both as the representative of their group and as the “village father.” The village father is not necessarily the oldest man in his lineage. And it is not necessarily the nephew who succeeds his maternal uncle. This is because the “village father” usually does everything in his power to ensure that it is his eldest son, or at least one of his sons, and therefore someone from another matrilineage, who succeeds him. Of the twenty-nine successions analyzed by Michel Panoff, fifteen featured a nephew who had succeeded his maternal uncle, and fourteen a son who had succeeded his father.

All of these details together with the words ‘village father’ point to the existence, in Maenge society, of a second kinship principle that this time classifies people on the basis of their shared descent from a common male ancestor, or from several brothers by the same father, even though, through their mother, they belonged to different matrilineages. These kin groups have a name, and the term for them, *malo tumana*, translates as “that which is wrapped in the bark strip that encircles a man’s loins,” a metaphor for the man’s penis. Michel Panoff translates this by an Old French legal expression “relative by the rod,” as opposed to “relative by the belly,” in other words uterine kinship.

*Malo tumana* is an institution that encompasses:

1. Children of the same father but different mothers.
2. Children of two or several full brothers, but not half-brothers.
3. Children of men from the two preceding groups. Beyond these groups it is considered that the blood of these men’s children is too mixed.

It is worth noting that children of the same father and the same mother, full-blooded siblings, are not included in the *malo tumana*, nor are half-siblings of the same mother, which clearly distinguishes the *malo tumana* from a matrilineage. It is expected that all persons belonging to the same *malo tumana* will demonstrate solidarity in all sorts of contexts, such as trading expeditions, war, etc. This solidarity is called *pîu*, which means “to bind or tie.” It is not based on a shared interest of which it would be the sublimated face, as in rights in the same piece of land. It is founded on individuals sharing the same male blood, which forbids them marrying each other, even if the fact of belonging to two different moieties would make it possible. It is therefore founded on shared descent through men, in other words on the implementation of a principle of patrilineage. What is interesting here is that the coexistence of the two principles—patrilineage and

matrilineal descent reckoning—is expressed in the way the Maenge represent the conception of a child.

For the Maenge, it is the father's sperm, and it alone, that makes the child's body, that turns into its blood, its flesh and its bones, and endows it with the ability to move and breathe. The woman shares no substance with her child, but she holds it in her uterus and gives it an inner "soul" (*kamu e pei*), which will take up residence in the blood transmitted by the father. The Maenge believe that every person has two souls, an inner soul and an outer double (*kamu e soali*). The inner soul permeates the body's substance and gives it its strength and beauty. The outer soul is a sort of double self, normally invisible, which completely envelops the human body, hugging its curves and features. Both souls can leave the body in various circumstances—at night during sleep, or during the strenuous physical ordeals undergone by boys and girls during their initiations and, of course, after death, when both abandon the cadaver that has begun to decompose. At this time, the two souls, still conjoined, change into a "ghost" (*soare*), which, after several days and diverse rites, leaves its village where it still mingled with the living and sets out for the submarine village of the dead from which the clan ancestors originally emerged.<sup>14</sup> With them, the deceased take the souls of the taros and other cultivated plants that the members of their lineage gave as an offering to appease any evil spirits that might attack.

Whereas for the matrilineal virilocal Trobrianders, male sperm had no part in making the child but shaped it, whereas for the matrilineal patrilocal Nzema, sperm makes the foetus' blood and imparts breath, for the Maenge, sperm makes the child's whole body; but it is the mother who provides an inner soul and (probably) its outer form, which leaves the body of the deceased and, still attached to the inner soul, sets out for the land of the dead.

But a father's relations with his children are not limited to providing them with a body. He also gives them his affection and protection. He gives them shell money and, to his sons, tracts of his lands (which are lands of his own matrilineage, to which his children do not belong). He also transmits to them pieces of his ritual knowledge. And he makes a heavy contribution to the expenses involved in organizing their initiations. His brother-in-law, the children's maternal uncle, also contributes, but less. The father brings the greatest share when it comes time to

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14 Cf. M. Panoff, "The notion of double self among the Maenge," *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, vol. 77, no. 3 (1968), pp. 275-95. The "land of the dead" lies on the other side of a first river, called "Sorrow," and is guarded by a hideous supernatural being, Kavavaleka, who forces the dead souls to lick an infected, oozing sore that covers one of his legs if they wish to cross to the other side. Those souls that refuse are sent away and become the "bad/evil dead" doomed for all eternity to wander the earth, where they take pleasure in assaulting the living. Those souls that cross the river are welcomed by a god, Notu, who washes them and rids them of whatever dirty malodorous remnants of their outer double may still cling to their inner self. The deceased thus becomes 'like a beautiful light', and it is then that the god Noti takes him or her across a second river, called "Oblivion" - as in Lethe, the river of the ancient Greeks. There, on the other side, he or she is welcomed by the deceased members of the matridan. The soul is now rid of all earthly ties, and ready to begin a blissful life free of labour or suffering of any kind. The human being once again becomes what he was in the beginning: immortal.

assemble the payment each of his sons will have to make in order to get married. As in the Trobriand Islands, a man usually encourages his sons (or at least his eldest son) to marry in his own matrilineage, to choose one of his 'sister's' daughters. Here, too, the mother's brother makes a contribution, but again it is less. Yet a man is not allowed to train his own son for war, for he might hurt him or be hurt, and for all concerned this would be tantamount to attacking their own blood. It is therefore the men of the child's matrilineage who will teach him to use weapons and to kill. It is with them that the son will work the big gardens cultivated for the religious ceremonies, and with them that he will manage the lands held in common. This institution, which groups people on the basis of their maternal ties, is called *galiou*, "shield"; it is the opposite and the complement of *malo tumana*.

Bearing in mind this dual social organization, we can now understand both the fathers' attitudes toward their children but also the fact that the leader of each village is called the "village father" (*maga tumana*), a term borrowed from the universe of kinship and used to designate a political-ritual relationship. In effect, the "father" of a village is much more than the leader of a local clan segment. He wields his authority over all of the other lineages living on his lands and which he feeds and protects through the rites he performs on behalf of everyone. A man does not become a Big Man until in the first place he has managed to organize and finance, from his own resources and those of the fellow members of his matrilineage willing to help, the initiation rites designed for his own children. Another challenge he must face if he wants to show his influence and his wealth (for every ceremony demands the sacrifice of pigs and the distribution of shares of the meat together with shell money and other valuables) is the building and the upkeep of a men's house. He usually names this house after his eldest son. Furthermore, the *maga tumana* has the privilege of organizing for his (male or female) firstborn a complicated cycle of costly ceremonies (*alangapaga*) that begins with the birth of the child and ends with his or her marriage. These ceremonies are designed to 'lift up' the person of this child, to raise his or her name higher than that of all the other children born in the village at the same time.

With the Menge we are looking at a matrilineal society that made the principle of patrification the basis of a whole series of practices necessary to the society's reproduction. The coexistence of these two principles, which in part pull in opposite directions—sons succeeding their father and/or nephews succeeding their maternal uncle—creates a permanent tension, but one that does not abolish the ultimate pre-eminence of the matrilineal principle. The predominant role of sperm, which corresponds to the social patrification principle, is complementary to the mother's contribution of the inner soul and the child's outer form. Last of all, it is to the land of the mother's ancestors that a soul returns after death, to live a life without suffering or labour: the maternal paradise.

A final remark. The Maenge once again provide a good example of recourse to the vocabulary and representations of kinship relations—in the present case the figure of the "father"—to designate a person exercising political-ritual functions that go far beyond the strict domain of kinship. The relations of affection, protection and sharing connected with kinship in the context of the family and the household are thus projected onto other social relations, which are conceived in their image, transformed by and wrapped in the vocabulary of kinship. But here too, political relations are neither the extension of kinship relations nor analogous to them. Here as elsewhere, kinship is not the ultimate basis of society.

### The Khumbo of Nepal

Up to this point we have assumed that, in a given society, there is only one system for representing the process of child conception and only one dogma. In reality, many societies have several coexisting systems, which do not necessarily concur or which agree on some points and disagree on others. In still other societies, we discover systems that have combined several traditions stemming from periods and historical facts located at a greater or lesser distance in the past. These systems imprint themselves in the body unbeknown to the child (and often unbeknown to the child's parents, who have no memory of these facts). We will begin the discussion of these historical syncretisms by citing the case of the Khumbo, a Tibetan-speaking group of pastoral agriculturalists living in the heart of the Nepalese Himalayas, in the "hidden valley" of Arun at the foot of mount Makalu (Diemberger 1993, 1998). This society emerged from the encounter and association of several clans that came from Tibet at different epochs. While the clans still exist, their social role has disappeared behind the now-more-important fact of belonging to the same territorial community, which lives in Sepa under the protection of their mountain deities and of the mountains which are themselves gods, sacred beings.

For centuries the Khumbo have lived at the periphery of the space administered by the Tibetan state as well as on the fringes of the zones of influence of the large Buddhist monasteries. Their society has thus retained certain pre-Buddhist religious beliefs characteristic of the time of the first Tibetan kings. Two kinds of priests preside over worship: *lhaven*, married priests who serve the clan gods and the territorial deities; and *lamas*, who belong to the Nyimmapa Buddhist tradition and who also are married. They are the Khumbo's 'great men'. Their ritual functions and their knowledge raise them above the other men who head the big households. A few women, known as *lhakama*, "she who allows the gods to speak," also play a large role. These women undergo possession by the gods and the spirits of the dead, and are subjected to terrifying experiences when they confront devils from the impure part of the universe. They act as oracles and give voice to that which everyone would like to hide, hence their power.<sup>15</sup>

The notion of impurity plays an important role in Khumbo society. The birth of a child is an impure event, which harks back to the primordial incest between the son of the Earth mother who, upon being born, immediately tried to return to his mother's womb. And therefore humans, who were supposed to be immortal, are now mortal. For the Khumbo, the father is the one who rids the mother and child of the birth impurity by giving the child a name, which makes it a member of his clan, and then by presenting it to the mountain gods as being their child as well.<sup>16</sup> Khumbo kinship relations are governed by a patrilineal descent rule. People belong to their father's clan, which is exogamous. Residence after marriage is usually, but does not have to be, patrivirilocal. Sons are forbidden to marry a

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15 These women's functions associate them with a Tantric tradition founded in the twelfth century by a Tibetan woman, certain components of which can be found in Khumbo culture.

16 On the birth of their first child, girl or boy, its parents are no longer called by their name but by the name of the child.

woman from their mother's clan. Every generation is obliged to marry into new families.

How is making a child seen in this universe?

The child's conception begins with sexual intercourse between a man and a woman, who will become its father and its mother. The woman's vagina is regarded as a red flower that blooms every month and closes once again if no sperm has entered her in the ten to twelve days following her menses. When sperm enters this flower, it closes and, as soon as the woman's blood mixes with the sperm, an embryo begins to develop in her womb.

The man's sperm makes the child's bones and brain, and that is why the child belongs to its father's clan. In fact, the word for "clan" is the same as that for "bones."<sup>17</sup> The bones are the hard part of the human body, transmitted from one generation to the next by the men (and not by the women), since the bones make the sperm and the sperm makes the bones. The child is attached by its bones to a "bone line," which connects it to the male clan deity (which is thus present in the child). This god is attached to the clan and is worshiped by all members of this clan. The deity's name is associated with a sacred mountain in Tibet, which was the home of the clan ancestors before they migrated. But today these ancestral clan gods all live together in the mountains of Beyul Khenbalung, their new abode. They have become the gods and ancestors of the new community formed at the conclusion of the various migrations.

The woman's blood gives the child its flesh and its own blood. Through its blood the child is connected to its mother and to its mother's mother, etc. Whereas bones distinguish and separate the clans, the women's blood circulates among the clans and brings them together. For the Khumbo, women's blood is positive, since it is the source of the flesh, the blood and the shape of the body of everyone. But their menstrual blood also bars women from approaching the sacred weapons, which are kept in every house, near the altar facing the mountains and dedicated to Dabla, the god of war and defender of the territory.

During the woman's pregnancy, the couple does not stop having sexual relations, quite the contrary, for sperm is believed to nourish the foetus and add to the food eaten by the mother. Later the woman will feed her baby with the milk from her breasts, considered to be full of grain, which changes into milk. But the man's sperm and the woman's blood are not enough to make a child. It is still lacking a soul—or rather two souls. Here is where we will see the bodily mark of the historical encounter between a pre-Buddhist religion and a branch of Buddhism.

The first soul (*la*) is a life force that connects the child to all of nature and to the surrounding mountains. If this principle leaves the body and departs, or if it is stolen by devils, it can be brought back to the body by means of specific rituals. It is this soul that gives the person his or her energy and breath. When the person dies, this soul leaves the body for good and takes up residence in the sacred

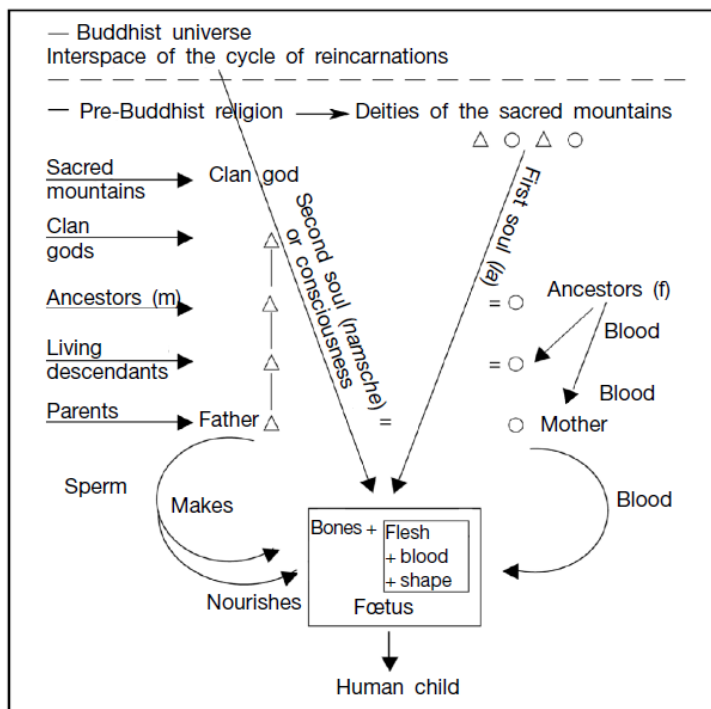
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17 The term meaning "clan" is *rus* (bone), a widely spread word in central Asia. In his *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Claude Levi-Strauss alluded to the existence of "relatives by the bone" and "relatives by the blood" in these societies. More recently, "bone" relatives and the concept of *rū* have been the object of new research, among which the particularly enlightening study by Nancy E. Levine on the Nyinba of Nepal (1981).

mountains of Khenbalung. Priests' souls dwell near the summits; the other souls at the base. These mountains are the "owners of the land," the "masters of the territory." For they have a soul (*la-ri*) which provides the land and the Khumbo community with their energy.

In addition to this first soul, which connects each Khumbo to the sacred mountains, there is the *namsche*, the "consciousness," which in the Buddhist tradition is the organ of the (illusory) perception every person has of the world and of the self. It is the organ of the actions that will keep the individual a prisoner of the cycle of reincarnations, of the *samsara* in which, from one reincarnation to the next, all living beings have already been the fathers and mothers of each other. This "consciousness-soul" detaches itself from the inter-space of the reincarnation cycles (*bardo*) and enters the woman's vagina when she makes love. If the *namsche* is drawn to the mother, the new being will be a boy; if it is drawn to the father, it will be a girl. When a person dies, the *namsche* leaves the body and, propelled by the nature of its past actions (*karma*), is soon reincarnated in another living being.<sup>18</sup> In short, sperm and blood connect the child with the clan of its fathers and with those of its mother, its mother's mother, etc. One of these two souls is connected with the deities and the ancestors that protect its community; the other is linked to the universe of Buddhism, to which the Khumbo also belong. This double affiliation explains the two kinds of priests who preside over worship and stand on either side of the altars: the *lhaven*, whose name is reminiscent of the *lha-bon*, the priests of pre-Buddhist Tibet, and the *lama*.

Below is a diagram of the process of conception as seen by the Khumbo.



18 According to the famous Book of the Dead, which the Khumbo, like all other Tibetans, read at funerals (cf. Fremantle and Trungpa 1975: 84).



Once again we are confronted with the same fundamental fact. *The parents of a Khumbo child do not suffice to produce the whole child, to make a human child.* More powerful spiritual agents must intervene: ancestors, deities and, permeating the whole configuration, the invisible world of the Buddhist cycle of reincarnations. The child is not only included in a network of kin relations and groups (its paternal clan, etc.), but it is also closely connected with realities that transcend the boundaries of these relations and of the division of the society into clans and so forth, which address each person as a member of the same territorial community that protects them and which all must reproduce. At the same time, all members of this community belong to a religion that does not recognize boundaries between clans and communities, but instead is addressed to all human beings who desire to free themselves of the world of illusion in which they live and, through enlightenment, like the Buddha, end the cycle of reincarnations and enter nirvana.

To the north, in another valley that was a part of Tibet for centuries, live the Kharta, a group with whom the Khumbo trade and occasionally marry. We learn a great deal from a comparison between the Kharta and the Khumbo. The Kharta kin system and terminology are roughly the same as those of the Khumbo. But there are some deep-seated differences between them. The Kharta no longer have named clans. People define themselves with respect to their family and their village. The terms “bone” and “flesh” designate the person’s paternal lineage and their maternal ties. The Khumbo clan deity (*pholha*) has become a family god, and the mountain gods have been “Buddhified”<sup>19</sup> For the Khumbo, who have been living on the edge of the Tibetan state for centuries, the changes never reached this magnitude, and this is attested to once again by the bodies and souls of their children.

But Buddhism did not try to drive out the old gods, as other religions did and continue to do in their endeavour to convert the whole of humanity to their faith,

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19 The contrast between the Khumbo and the Kharta harks back to a process that began in central Tibet well before the thirteenth century. The formation of the old kingdom of Tibet had already weakened the clan confederations and replaced them with a new military and civil administration, dividing the society into 4 *rü* (horns), each of which was split into 8 districts. But the clans continued to exist, even if their functions had been redefined by the new social structures that served as a power base and an instrument of a new hereditary aristocracy and the royalty. By the twelfth century, with the recognition of Buddhism as the official religion and the decline of the royal family, a new social order was created, featuring the emergence of large religious centres and monasteries, which became the new sites of political and religious power. The clans and clan names began to disappear. People were increasingly defined by their place of birth and residence, and by their affiliation with one or another form of Buddhism and a given religious centre. The patrilineal descent rule and genealogical memory became the marks of priestly or aristocratic families. As Diemberger writes: “With the 13th century, the idea of the reincarnation of a conscious principle independent of kinship became the conceptual basis for thinking the reincarnation of political-religious figures, the *tulku*, lines of hierophants the most famous of which is the Dalai Lama. This transpired at the time when Buddhism came to structure society. Then, generally speaking, clan names yielded to place names and names of religious communities of belonging as indicators of identity” (Diemberger 1993: 281).

to their “true” god.<sup>20</sup> For Buddhism, the gods are part of the illusion that humans entertain about the world and themselves. Buddhism does not try to expel them because they are among the illusions that are dispelled as the person advances along the path of “illumination.”

We now come to the second type of situation, that in which two or more models of the process of child conception exist side by side in the same society and are more or less incompatible with each other. The different models do not appear, as in the case of the Khumbo, as a native model plus another one imported into or imposed on the local society from outside. In the two cases discussed below, we are dealing with distinct models which developed in the same society and which express, by their very existence and differences, the views of two social groups standing in an unequal relationship with each other, one being dominant and the other subordinate, in a word: engaged in power relations that express and imprint themselves in the bodies of the children.

### The Telefolmin of New Guinea

The first case is that of the Telefolmin (Jorgensen 1988) a group of intensive horticulturalists and hunters living in the New Guinea Highlands near the headwaters of the Sepik river. The Telefolmin have two models of conception: an “official” model shared by both the men and the women, and a “secret” model known to the women and which partially contradicts the “official” version. Their gardening and hunting activities disperse the families around the villages, which serve as a home base. These villages are strongly endogamous and are organized around a big men’s house, which is at the same time the place where the relics are kept—these are the bones of male ancestors that only the men are allowed to venerate. The ancestor cult is marked by a series of initiations for the boys, who are split into two moieties that act as two ritual spheres: the “Taro” moiety and the “Arrow” moiety. The Taro moiety rites concern life-giving powers: the powers to grow good crops in the gardens, to raise pigs, to feed people; its colour is white. The rites of the Arrow moiety concern death-dealing powers: the powers to kill, and to be a successful hunter and warrior; its colour is red.

Dan Jorgensen, who worked among the Telefolmin, stressed the difficulties he had collecting information on the way children are made there. The men considered it a disgusting and unworthy topic of conversation, something to ask women about because it is their affair, whereas men’s business is the domain of

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20 In various passages of his work, Malinowski mentions the Trobrianders' exasperation with the preaching of the Protestant and Catholic missionaries, who criticized their sexual practices and their beliefs about the way babies are made. Here is what he says: “The whole Christian morality is strongly associated with the institution of a patrilineal and patriarchal family with the father as progenitor and master of the household. In short the religion, whose dogmatic essence is based on the sacredness of the Father to son relationships and where the moral stand or fall with a strong patriarchal family, most obviously proceeds by making the paternal relation strong and firm, by first showing that it has a natural foundation. Thus I discovered that the natives had been somewhat exasperated by having preached at them what seems to them an absurdity, and by finding me, so 'unmissionary' as a rule, engaged in the same futile argument” (Malinowski 1927: 59).

religion and esoteric rituals, and the governance of society. At long last, the men agreed, for friendship's sake, to give him the following account.

Children are made by combining "penis water" and "vaginal fluids," which meet and mingle in the woman's womb when a man and a woman make love. The men did not make a difference between the man's and the woman's contribution. The sperm mixes with the vaginal fluids and the mixture makes the baby's body. But the foetus is not made at one go. One must make love often so as to accumulate sperm and the woman's fluids. Once the woman realizes she is pregnant, the couple must stop making love in order not to make twins.

But the foetus is not yet a child. It still needs a soul and a mind, and a shape that will distinguish it from other people. All of that is tied to the presence in the body of *sinik*, a component of the human being, the origin of which the Telefolmin admitted ignorance. They said that, as a baby grows, it becomes capable of understanding and talking. That is because the *sinik* is growing inside him. As for a child looking like its father or its mother or someone else, no one really had an explanation.

This male version of procreation fits their kinship system, which is fundamentally cognatic and makes no reference to the existence of clans, lineages, etc. People belong to different kindreds, but there is no visible inclination toward ties with the father's or the mother's side. The Telefolmin stress the care given a child, in the form of feeding, raising and protecting it, rather than the circumstances surrounding its birth. The great hunters are like "fathers" to their village because they feed everyone with the game they bring home.

But none of this explained why women retired to a hut, either to wait out their menstrual periods or to give birth, and why the men regarded menstrual blood as a great danger for themselves. And so Dan Jorgensen decided to ask the women and, to his great surprise, they showed no repugnance or reluctance to talk about these matters. Indeed the women knew the version the men had given Dan. They agreed with the idea that the foetus is formed from the mixture of sperm and their vaginal fluids. But they diverged from the men on one point: the role of menstrual blood, of uterine blood (*nok ipak*), a subject on which the men had remained silent. For the women, it is this blood that makes the child's bones. The sperm and the vaginal fluids have an equal part in making the child's blood, but not its bones. As we see, this representation is in total opposition to that of the Khumbo, and it is very unusual for New Guinea. While the men's representations, for whom the man's and the woman's contributions are equivalent and complementary, fit the thoroughly undifferentiated character of the kinship system, where did the women's representations come from? What was at stake?

To understand better, we need to look at the men's world and the rituals they are responsible for and which are closed to women. One of the aims of these rituals is to slow the gradual drift of the universe toward nothingness. And the rites that permit this entail the manipulation of the bones of the most prominent male ancestors of each village, which are kept as relics inside the spirit houses. Here we in fact discover that, according to the women, the sacred relics that lie at the heart of the male rituals—from which, I repeat, they are systematically excluded—come from the very substance that the men abhor most: menstrual blood. The women's theory thus overflows the sphere of kinship relations and the domestic world. It asserts that women are present at the very heart of the *political-ritual sphere*. Once again, as we saw in the case of the Baruya, the men's powers appear as powers they

appropriated from the women, who are their primal and permanent source, thus sentencing them to be passive onlookers of the actions performed by the men in order to act on the cosmos and reproduce their society. Whereas the men do not claim any priority in the conception of children and accept the idea that the women play a role equal to theirs, the women, on the other hand, claim a priority that gives them virtually, mentally, a central position in the secret rites performed by the men. In so doing they reject the disjunction between the spheres of kinship and politics, and contest their relegation to the sphere of domestic life.

Jorgensen was later to learn from the men that menstrual blood, which in public prompts their disgust and their fear of women, is secretly used to “re-engerder,” without the help of women, the boys whom they have separated from their mother in order to initiate them. The boys’ faces are smeared with yellow clay, whose secret name is ‘menstrual blood’, and which contains some blood from a woman who was menstruating at the time the rituals were about to begin. This is also the blood of Afek, the Old Woman, the primordial woman who made her brother the first man. She cut down his penis, which was too long, tried it out in her own vagina to see if it was the right length for copulating, and after this founding act of incest, told her brother the secrets of the initiations, of hunting and of growing taro, and then taught him to decorate his body for his initiation. Ultimately it is thanks to Old Woman, then, that men dominate women, for, in the beginning Afek gave them her bones, which they keep secretly in a cult house located in the centre of the country in the village of Telefolip,<sup>21</sup> the most sacred place of all. Knowing this, it will come as less of a surprise that it was women who, in Telefolmin in 1978 and 1979, played such an important role in the destruction of the relics and the abolition of the male cults encouraged by some Protestant preachers announcing Christ’s return and the revival of humankind.

It should be quite clear that the men’s model is no more “true” than the women’s—or vice versa. Each of these models expresses the different and unequal position of the two sexes in the society; each is simultaneously the expression of this inequality and a means of imposing it (for the men) or of mentally refusing it while submitting in practice (for the women).

The second example of a society with two coexisting models of procreation is that of the Kingdom of Tonga. The kingdom is composed of sixty-nine islands and, together with Hawaii and Tahiti, was one of the most stratified societies in Polynesia (cf. Douaire-Marsaudon 1988). There was an absolute separation between the masses of *tua*, commoners, and the *eiki*, those endowed with titles and ranks. A distinction was made among the *eiki* between the *toa*, the “little chiefs,” or plebian chiefs, and the *eiki sii*, whose ancestors had received their title from the *Tu’i Tonga*, the representative of the royal line or high-ranking nobles. *Toa* means “brave” and goes back to the time when warfare was endemic and feats on the battlefield and physical strength raised a commoner above the masses and earned him a title - but a title that could be taken away from him or his descendants. It was his *mana* that had distinguished him, and his *mana* could leave him. True nobles, on the other hand, the *sindi eiki*, those who are “chiefs in their body,” who derived their rank from their proximity to the royal lines, possessed inborn *mana*; it was consubstantial to them and attested to their divine essence. Everyone with a title

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21 Concerning Afek, see Godelier (1996), and Craig and Hyndman (1990).

had authority over a portion of the territory and its inhabitants. But this authority was always delegated, and emanated ultimately from the person of the paramount chief, the Tu'i Tonga. In the past, a title was transmitted either adelphically, from older to younger brother, with the title returning to the eldest son of the eldest line, or patrilineally, from father to son, as has become the case in the line of the Tu'i Tonga.

A chief was therefore the head of a *kainga*, a group composed of kin but also of clients and protégés residing on the same land. The term *kainga* has several meanings. It designates first of all a person's kindred, all relatives on both the father's and the mother's sides. It also designates the territorial group made up of people who are related or have been allowed to live on the land ruled by a chief and are under his authority. Sexual relations—and even more, marriage—between members of the same *kainga* were strictly forbidden. The group was therefore exogamous. Members of a *kainga* shared the same bodily substances if they were related, and all, related or not, ate the same products of the land baked in the same oven. Now, for Tongans, the land was *fonua*, a word that also designates the womb, the place where the child receives its blood. The fact of sharing the same food as the other members of a *kainga* meant that those who were not originally related became kin.<sup>22</sup> All members of a *kainga* owed tribute to their chief in the form of products and services, the *fatongia*.

When the Europeans arrived, the term *kainga* designated a sort of “seigniorial domain,” on which the *kainga* of the commoners were gathered around those of the noble families. Their chiefs were called *tamai*, “fathers,” and had almost absolute power over the possessions and the life of all members of their *kainga*. Every year, all of these chiefs presented the Tu'i Tonga with the first fruits of all of the crops of the kingdom in the course of a huge cosmic-political ritual called *inasi*. For the Tu'i Tonga, the whole kingdom was his *kainga*, of which he was the paramount chief and the nurturing father. Finally, the Tu'i Tonga himself presented his sister, the Tu'i Tonga Fafine, with a share of these first fruits, made up of the finest specimens, thereby recognizing her superior status, since she was even closer to the gods than he was.

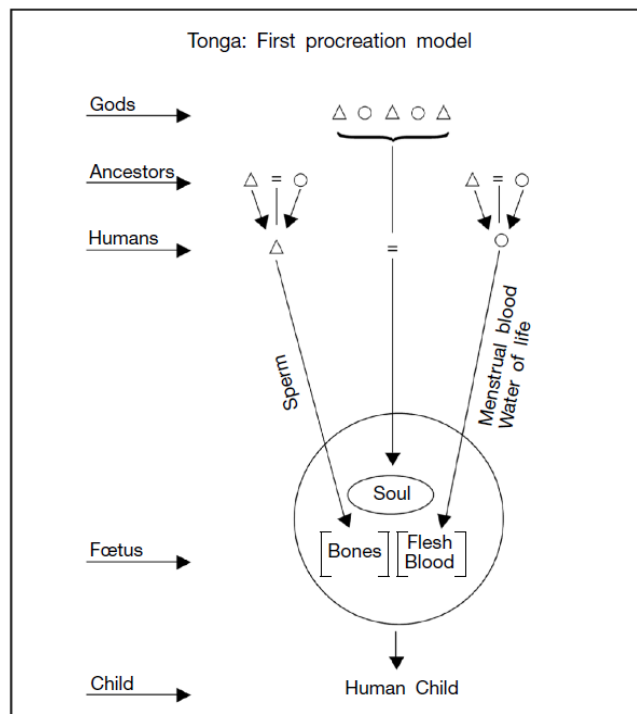
In effect, in Tonga, as in Samoa and other parts of Polynesia, the sister outranks the brother, regardless of their respective ages, and elder outranks

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22 Food and feeding others played an important role in constructing Tongan social identity. It must also be remembered that in Tonga, women did not traditionally work the land and did not usually do the cooking. These were male tasks. The women devoted a large part of their time to the production of big mats made of beaten bark, *tapas*, which were distributed or exchanged on all ceremonial occasions. The men thus had a very important nurturing role. It was they who grew the yams and prepared the ground for the cuttings. But it was the earth that made the cutting into a tuber. The earth thus acted like the women. In the Tongan language, womb, land and grave are all the same word, *fonua*. And it is on the maternal relatives' land that the newborn child's umbilical cord is buried. It is in this sense that non-relatives who live together and regularly eat the products of the same land end up sharing the same substances and becoming quasi-relatives, between whom marriage is forbidden. In Tonga, the fact of sharing or not sharing the same substances made people relatives or subjects (cf. Douaire-Marsaudon 1995).

younger.<sup>23</sup> As a consequence, lines descending from sisters outrank lines descending from brothers, and lines descending from older siblings outrank lines descending from younger siblings. A person belongs to a local group, a *kainga*, either by their father or by their mother, and membership of this group gives them the right to the use of its land and its resources. However, the strongly virilocal residence pattern gives local groups a strongly patrilineal bias, whereas the kinship system as reflected in its terminology and its structure is cognatic. With these sociological indications in mind, we will now look at the two theories of procreation found in Tonga before the Europeans arrived and introduced Christianity.

According to the first, and probably oldest, theory, the father makes the child's bones with his sperm, which mixes with the woman's menstrual blood to form a clot. The woman's blood makes the child's flesh and its blood. And the clot becomes a foetus. Then a soul, which is a gift from the ancestors or the gods to the living, takes possession of the foetus. In this model, the father and the mother are the genitors, but their action alone is not enough to make the child.

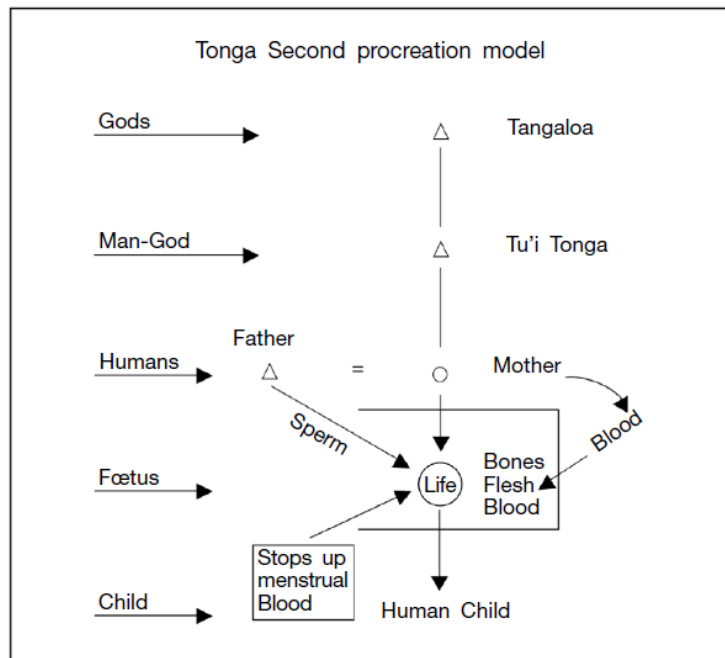


A child is always a gift from the ancestors and the gods. At the beginning of the twentieth century (despite a century of Christianization) the hair of the newborn child was still called “the hair of the god.” And when a person dies, their bones

23 In a *kainga*, the “father,” *tamai*, wielded and transmitted authority over the land and the people on it. The father's sister, *mehakitonga*, played a crucial role in the rites of passage. She was believed to control the fertility of her brother's wife, whom she could make barren at a whim. She also controlled all transactions concerning her ancestral lands and the marriages of her brother's children.

retain something of the deceased’s essence. It should be added that the female substances—saliva, blood and the mysterious “water of life,” *vaiola*<sup>24</sup>—are believed to be endowed with procreative capacities capable of giving (or restoring) life. Many myths feature women who have become pregnant after having been penetrated by the sun’s rays or by the wind, or by water, all natural elements suffused with divine power, *mana*.

But a second model existed in the former culture of Tonga, according to which the child’s substance, its flesh, blood, bones, skin, hair, etc., came from the mother.<sup>25</sup> The man’s sperm had only one role: to stop up the menstrual blood in the woman’s uterus. To this end, a clot forms which turns into an embryo through the intervention of the *mana* of the gods or of the Tu’i Tonga.<sup>26</sup> In this version, the father disappears as genitor. He is merely the mother’s sexual partner. His role is to prime the woman to be fecundated by a god or by a man-god, the Tu’i Tonga. Like the gods, the Tu’i Tonga impregnates the woman with his desubstantified seed, a fecundating breath, a sperm *pneumatikos*, as Françoise Douaire-Marsaudon termed it (1998: 142)



This second model is clearly a transformation of the first, by virtue of combining two complementary operations. The woman’s role in procreation, already important in the first model, is even greater here, while the man’s role disappears

24 Perhaps the amniotic fluid. The chiefs used to bathe in ponds also called *vaiola*. Today this is the name of the hospital in the kingdom's capital city.  
 25 This version was collected and discussed by the Tongan historian and philosopher Futa Helu-Aite (1975: 63; 1978: 195-208) and by F. Douaire-Marsaudon (1998: 140; cf. Rogers 1977: 157-82).  
 26 The ancestor of the Tu’i Tonga, the god Tangaloa, is also called Eitumatupua. *Aita* = god, *tupua* = ancestorhood. The god Tangaloa is thus the ancestor *par excellence*, *Aitu*.

and is replaced by the fecundating power of the Tu'i Tonga. The woman's blood now makes the child's entire substance. However, in Tonga, a woman transmits not only her blood, but her rank as well. Thus in the old kingdom of Tonga the quality of being a noble, of being a "chief in the body," was transmitted only by women. The child of a high-ranking noble man and a female commoner was a commoner. The child of a commoner and an aristocratic woman was considered to be an aristocrat.

This model is thus a reworking of the first, but while it uses the traditional representations of the woman's role in conception, it is not, as one might think, in order to exalt the woman's procreative powers, but to *completely exclude ordinary men* from the process and to exalt even more the power of the *mana* of the paramount *eiki* and the members of the royal lines. The origin of the second model seems to be linked to the profound social and ideological changes that occurred in the Tongan political system in the wake of attempts—semi-successful and always challenged—on the part of one chiefly line, the one that would take the name-title of Tu'i Tonga, to raise itself definitively above the other royal lines. It was in this royal line moreover that the transmission of the paramount title would cease to be adelphic and pass in direct line from father to eldest son. At the same time, too, the gap between the social standing of nobles and that of commoners widened. At the outset, commoners, who were members of younger branches of kainga that had lost track of their old genealogical ties with the chiefly families, became less and less relatives and more and more subjects, over whom the nobles and the Tu'i Tonga had right of life and death. Closer to the ancestors and therefore closer to the gods, the chiefly families claimed to have a different origin and a different destiny than the common people.

By identifying himself as the one who impregnates all of the women in the kingdom (without actually having sexual intercourse with them) and as the one who fertilizes all of the lands (without actually working them), the Tu'i Tonga became the 'father' of all Tongans, their common ancestor, who were connected to the gods through him. Deprived of their own ancestors, the commoners were thus also deprived of survival in human form after death. Their spirit left their corpse and turned into an insect in danger of being swallowed by an animal or a god.<sup>27</sup> For in Tonga, the gods ate people. By this reasoning, it was the exclusive privilege of the chiefs (and sometimes the bravest warriors) to eat human flesh, for to eat another human was considered to be the way to prevent them surviving and becoming an ancestor. It was to annihilate them completely. To eat another person was the surest sign of power. Already having the gods as ancestors, having the right to have several wives, and to eat human beings, Tongan aristocrats had, after this life and such an exceptional destiny, the perspective of being the only ones to have access after death to Puloṭu, the Tongan "paradise."

In short, the presence of two models of conception in Tonga reflects transformations of the (mental) universe of representations, ideological transformations, that were part of the process of the emergence of a dominant "class" or "caste," which concentrated in its membership all of the major political and religious functions, controlled access of the rest of the population to both the land and the gods, and claimed right of life and death over all who were not noble.

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27 Certain accounts collected by Europeans at the start of the nineteenth century show that not all commoners shared this aristocratic representation.



As the functions and ranks of the eldest lines progressively separated them from the younger lines, the kinship relations between the chiefly families and the rest of the population gave way to relations between masters and subjects. As this tribal aristocracy concentrated rights in the land, the labour, the services and finally the life of the rest of the population, these powers separated it definitively from other human beings and raised its members higher, bringing them closer to the gods so that they ultimately came to claim them as their direct ancestors. This is why the Tu'i Tonga Fafine, the sister of the Tu'i Tonga, had to marry her brother and unite with him as the gods do among themselves, for there was no blood in her own society that was equal to hers; the only alternative was to marry the paramount chief of another society, far away, in the Fiji Islands.

The example of Tonga shows us once again that political-ritual relations go far beyond the sphere of kinship, while at the same time using the images and values connected with this domain for their own representation. After all, is not the paramount chief, the Tu'i Tonga, at the same time both the chief and the "father" of all Tongans, the *tamai*, just as the chief of a small Maenge village is also called "father" (*tamai*)? In Tonga, as in New Britain, thousands of kilometres away, we see societies with Austronesian languages and cultures where, following very ancient patterns, the notions of father and chief are conjoined. This was not the case for the New Guinea Highland societies with non-Austronesian languages and cultures that belong to a much older population stock than the Austronesian-speaking groups. The Baruya do not have chiefs, they have Great Men, and the "fathers" are no one's subjects.

To conclude, we will now leave the societies of Africa and Oceania and pay a visit to two great civilizations: Europe, fashioned by Christianity, and China, where ancestor worship has been an essential aspect of the both religious and state workings for centuries. In Europe, Christian theologians have represented the sexual union of a man and a woman united by the sacrament of marriage as forming one flesh, *una caro*, which they transmit to their children. But here too, the union of a man and a woman are not enough to make a child. What they make is a foetus, which needs a soul in order to become a child. It is God who introduces this soul while the child is in the womb. Apparently we are not so far from the Tu'i Tonga man-god, whose spermatocytic breath fecundates all of the women of his kingdom. And yet, as we will see when we visit China, the difference is radical.

From Chinese Antiquity up to the twenty-first century, one of the fundamental institutions of society and the state has been ancestor worship. Even the onslaught of the Red Guards was unable to eradicate it. The rites are celebrated in the family and the lineage on the house altar, which holds the tablets of the male ancestors, each accompanied by his wife's tablets, going back four generations. These rites reflect the way the Chinese represent the individual, his birth and his death, the central idea being that the ancestors are reborn in their descendants every five generations.

For the Chinese, a person has two souls, a body-soul, whose presence is indicated by the breathing that shows a person is alive; and a breath-soul, which, unlike the body-soul, does not disappear at the time of death but subsists for several generations before being born again. At the time of death, while the body-soul disappears into the ground, the breath-soul takes up residence in the tablet that will henceforth represent the deceased and will be placed, in accordance with

his rank, on the home altar. This tablet, on which are marked the deceased's name and a few salient details of his life, accompanies the body to the grave side and is then brought back to the family altar, now containing the disembodied soul of the deceased. Four generations later, this tablet will be either buried or burned, and the soul of the deceased will be reincarnated in one of his descendants, ideally the son of his great-great grandson (Granet 1993: 86-7).<sup>28</sup>

Here the incompatibility between the Christian and Chinese religions becomes evident. For Christians, each soul is unique and is a gift from God. But the soul that was introduced into the body before birth will be immediately defiled by the original sin committed by Adam and Eve, the ancestors of humanity, and this sin is transmitted from one generation to the next by the carnal union of a man and a woman. It is therefore the Christian's duty to live in such a way that he will be able to erase the sin that marked his birth and which he will confront after death when he is called before the throne of God. The idea that a person's soul could be the reincarnation of another person, of an ancestor, is for Christian theologians a heretical idea in so far as it denies God's systematic intervention in the "animation" of bodies. This allows us to understand why Christianity, wherever it has been present, has always fought with all its might against ancestral religions that entailed the idea of reincarnation (from Roman Antiquity, with the veneration of the *manes*, the ancestors and the house gods, *Iares*, to the ancestor cults encountered in Africa, Asia or Oceania).

But to attack the veneration of ancestors was at the same time to attack the existence of the social forms that organized kinship, such as lineages, clans, etc. Such an assault was particularly unacceptable to the Chinese, since it challenged not only the universe of kinship relations, but also one of the basic pillars of the state (filial duty). This explains why, when (after an initial period in which the Jesuits tolerated ancestor worship) the Dominican missionaries demanded that their flock renounce veneration of the ancestors and destroy the home altars, not only did the people resist, but the Emperor immediately ordered the European missionaries to be expelled.

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<sup>28</sup> Granet is referring to aristocratic traditions dating to the so-called "feudal" period, i.e. before the first Chinese Empire (221 BC).

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