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Hal Scheffler Versus David Schneider and His Admirers, in the Light of What We Now Know About Trobriand Kinship

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[T]he anti-kinship views of ... David Schneider have been influential ... out of proportion to their good sense ... I have often wondered how or why it is that such logically and empirically shoddy claims got to be so widely accepted ... Many anthropological lemmings, infatuated with radical cultural constructionism ... have blindly followed [him] over a cliff. Paying no attention to or even denying the validity of a distinction between the literal and the metaphoric, they have enabled themselves to create numerous esoteric 'others' whose 'relationship systems' are for the most part nothing more than clones of Schneider's interpretation of 'American kinship' ... They would thereby open the way for virtually endless commodity differentiation unconstrained by even the most minimal standards of intellectual or social value (Scheffler 2003: 341–43).

[I]t is important to remember, as bearing upon the status of the family, that in many primitive tribes the terms used for the immediate members of the family are either distinguished from the same terms in the extended sense by the addition of some particle, or terms corresponding to 'own' are used ... Family is family, whatever the system of relationship (Goldenweiser 1937: 301).

My goal in this chapter is to further Hal Scheffler's critique of the so-called 'new kinship studies' (see my first epigraph), using a strictly ethnographic/analytical basis. Following his lead—he began this critique years earlier (Scheffler 1976)—I have argued in quite a few places (Shapiro 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011b, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016) that these studies, indebted mostly to David Schneider's publications, especially his *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Schneider 1984), are empirically and analytically badly flawed. Here I provide further evidence of these flaws. I forewarn the reader that he/she will have regularly to refer back to the presentation of Scheffler's ideas in the Introduction to this volume.

I need first to say something about the new kinship studies. As shown in the Introduction, Hal Scheffler has made a strong case that kin-reckoning throughout the world is based upon native notions of procreation. Schneider, by contrast, argued that an emphasis upon procreative kinship derives not from the ethnography itself but, rather, from the cultural background of the western ethnographer, emphasising as it does procreation in kin-reckoning: he took Hal Scheffler, among others, to task on this very matter (Schneider 1984: 113–26).¹ The new kinship studies, then, emphasise nonprocreative or *performative* means of establishing kinship connexion, like commensality (e.g. Carsten 1997); name-sharing (e.g. Sahlins 2013: 68–73), or just saying that two or more people are kin (e.g. Weston 1991). This in itself is fine, but in so doing these scholars fail to appreciate an obvious but nonetheless salient fact, noted in the Introduction but well worth repeating: whenever two people are recognised as kin to each other, by either procreative or performative means, they ipso facto are recognised as members of reciprocal kin classes. These classes, moreover, have an internal structure, to which an enormous literature is testament. If one chooses *not* to deal with this literature, which is what the performativists mostly do (see below), he or she is unable to raise (let alone answer) the question of *focality*, of the semantic relationships of the various forms of kin-reckoning within a community. To take Janet Carsten's highly celebrated example: it is misleading to imply that, among Malays, both commensality and

1 Actually, Schneider argued that the primacy of procreative notions does not hold even in American kinship, and that it was projected onto ethnographic data by anthropologists committed to a genealogical model of kinship. Hence he could argue that American kinship has two 'distinctive features' that are on a logical par with each other—'biogenetic relationship' and 'code for ... conduct'—the latter having nothing to do with procreation (Schneider 1968: 101). Scheffler (1976) has criticised this argument—and, indeed, Schneider's entire analysis of his data from Chicago and environs.

procreation are equally means of establishing kinship. For the fact is that there is overwhelming evidence, completely ignored by Carsten, that for these people commensality and other forms of performative kinship are *derived from*, are *modelled upon*, procreative ones (Shapiro 2011b)—just as Hal Scheffler would have predicted.

I offer as my first piece of evidence my second epigraph, taken from the second edition of Alexander Goldenweiser's introductory text. Now I know that Goldenweiser is not a household name, even in anthropological households.² But his anticipation some of Hal Scheffler's ideas is remarkable, and if he and Scheffler are even half right about what were once openly called *kinship terminologies*, then we need seriously to question whether Schneider and his admirers have anything resembling an argument. Could it be, rather, that the assumption of the primacy of procreative kinship was *not* an assumption, that the heads of the practitioners of (what might be dubbed by default) the old kinship studies, however influenced by their personal experience, were also influenced by what they indeed found in the field?

Goldenweiser was surely generalising from the ethnographic data available at the time he wrote. Indeed, there are examples aplenty in the early literature on both sides of The Pond (e.g. Freire-Marreco 1914; Lowie 1912; Rivers 1914; Speck 1918; Walker 1914), but they have achieved the semioblivion that attaches, however undeservingly, to Goldenweiser. For my part I would argue that anyone claiming expertise in human kinship should be aware of at least some of this scholarship, but I am prepared, for present purposes, to be lenient. My example, therefore, is drawn from what is the best-known ethnographic corpus we have, a corpus with which, it seems fair to presume, all kinship specialists are at least partly familiar. I deal mostly with data which are directly pertinent to extensionist theory. But, following Hal Scheffler's emphasis on the link between that theory and the importance of the nuclear family (again see the Introduction), I begin my analysis of each case with the ethnographers' report of domestic life.

2 Goldenweiser is not a voice in the wilderness. Comparable statements on focality and extension can be found in Kroeber (1917: 73), Firth (1936: 261), Keesing (1990: 163–64), and, most recently, Goodenough (2001: 217). The last named makes the vital point that procreative kinship provides a *model* for other forms of kin-reckoning (ibid.: 210–11) and thus anticipates one of my arguments here. Goodenough's essay should be required reading for anyone who believes that Schneider had anything resembling an argument. In the present context, the following remark is especially significant: 'I agree with Harold Scheffler that all systems of social relationship recognized by anthropologists cross-culturally as kin relationships are rooted in parturition' (ibid.: 217).

Trobriand kinship

Early in *The Sexual Life of Savages* Bronisław Malinowski calls our attention to ‘the groups of people sitting in front of their dwellings’, informing us that ‘each group consists of one family only – man, wife, and children’ (1929: 17). Other ethnographers of the Trobriands echo him. Thus Harry A. Powell notes that ‘[a] man and a woman united by the marriage contract are responsible for one or more dependent children, whom they bring up as members of a single household’ (1956: 137). Susan P. Montague tells us that ‘people prefer to live in nuclear family units, one to a house’ (1974: 33). Mark Mosko observes that during certain ceremonies men ‘sleep and socialize’ in a special edifice because these rituals ‘forbid cohabitation with wives and children’ (2013: 493). And elsewhere Mosko, citing information from Katherine Lepani, another scholar who has recently worked in the Trobriands, tells us:

that it is only when a couple agree to create a publicly affirmed domestic relationship that they initiate sexual relations with one another and also lie and sleep together, sit and eat as a couple ... and so on (2005: 58).

To turn to wider circles of sociality: Malinowski tells us that *only* people of one’s own local matrilineal³ group are lexically marked as ‘real kinsmen’ (*veyola mokita*), in contradistinction to *kakaveyola*, which he translates as ‘pseudokindred’ and ‘spurious kinsmen’, that is members of a more inclusive matrilineal category but not of one’s own local group (Malinowski 1929: 495–96, 513, 527; see also Powell 1956: 191). ‘Real kinsmen’, by contrast, may also be rendered simply as *veyola*—that is, without the lexical marker (see also Malinowski 1926: 113; Powell 1969b: 602–03; Weiner 1976: 53–54, 1983: 695)—much as when I refer to *my mother* I virtually never say *my real mother*: I assume that the expression *my mother* is taken by my listener to mean the focal member of her kin class and not, say, my Cub Scout *denmother* when I was a boy. This example apparently has Trobriand counterparts. Thus Bernard Baldwin reports an expression

3 I use the label ‘matrilineal’ here because it has become standard in kinship studies. In truth there is only scant evidence that Trobrianders make much of extended genealogical chains. Malinowski (1929: 498, 527) and Powell (1956: 97 et seq.) are quite explicit on this point (see also Sider 1967: 96). It is probably more accurate to render these groupings as *matrifilial*, insofar as membership is dependent upon that of one’s mother and is identical with it. Compare Keen (1994), who, to my mind rightly, refers to Yuulngu groupings as *patrifilial* rather than ‘patrilineal’. This is a more appropriate label in most of Aboriginal Australia, as well as in both halves of Native America (Murphy 1979; Tooker 1971; see also Shapiro 1979: 13–14).

that he translates as ‘she who begot me’ and ‘the real one’, ‘which is used sometimes in speech to specify the actual mother as apart from the crowd of maternal aunts and foster mothers’ (1945: 228). Montague even notes that nonfocal members of the Trobriand ‘mother’ (*ina*) class can be said to be ‘not *ina*’ (2001: 175–76)—in other words, not the focus of the *ina* class, though still, apparently, called *ina*. But she maintains that focal *ina* status is based on nurturance rather than procreation—specifically on who feeds (especially, apparently, *breast-feeds*) the individual in question (*ibid.*; see also Baldwin 1945: 224; Crain, Darrah and Digm’Rina 2003: 12; Powell, cited in Sider 1967: 96; Powell 1969a: 192–94, 1969b: 603). But Annette B. Weiner tells us that in cases of adoption ‘everyone knows the child’s true genealogy’, and that ‘adoption does not effect a severance between the child and its true parents’ (1976: 124). Still, I found Montague’s statement curious, so I ran it by Gunter Senft, an anthropological linguist who has worked in the Trobriands and written extensively on their ideology and sociality (Senft 1985, 1991, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2009, 2011). In an email communication Senft tells me that small children single out the people who nurture them as ‘real’ members of both the ‘mother’ and the ‘father’ classes but then, where pertinent, they are corrected by their elders, who nominate their procreative parents (8 October 2013). We ought certainly to attend to children’s models of the world, here and elsewhere, but for comparative purposes we need to rely on adult models (Scheffler and Lounsbury 1971: 9). I conclude, therefore, that despite Trobriand lack of concern with extended genealogies (see footnote 3), the procreative mother is the focal member of her kin class; and, moreover, that close maternal kin provide one focus for general Trobriand ideas about kinship. But this latter conclusion, though true *de facto*, needs to be modified, for the pertinent criterion is locality rather than genealogy; and, this being so, it provides some support for the performative position.⁴

4 With the exception of this last conclusion my remarks will be seen to jibe with Lounsbury’s well-known analysis of Trobriand kin classification (Lounsbury 1965), but is less tied to extended genealogies and more to native distinctions. Many of these distinctions appeared in the ethnographic record after he wrote but Malinowski was far from oblivious to them (see main text). This being so, I can only wonder why Lounsbury failed to take account of them. Dwight Read and I consider this matter in the Introduction.

In his initial publication on the Trobriands, Malinowski tells us:

the state of knowledge ... is just at the point where there is a vague idea as to some *nexus* between sexual connection and pregnancy, whereas there is no idea whatever concerning the man's contribution towards the new life which is being formed in the mother's body (1916: 407).

Trobriand Islanders, Malinowski would have us believe, are, according to the established expression, 'ignorant of physiological paternity': conception occurs, in native theory, when a spirit-child (*baloma*) enters a woman, her husband only 'opening the way' through repeated copulations (ibid.: 412–13; see also Malinowski 1927a: 89)—this presumably is the 'vague idea' to which Malinowski alludes. It would extend this essay very considerably if I were to consider the intellectual background to this 'finding', as well as its influence on subsequent scholarship.⁵ Suffice it to say, for present purposes, and regarding the latter concern only, that Marshall Sahlins accepts the 'finding' uncritically, as part of his argument that human kinship is or can be independent of biological considerations (1976: 37–39); and that, more recently, Sarah Franklin in a supposedly comprehensive view of human conception ideologies inspired by David Schneider, does much the same (1997: 33–43), as does Janet Carsten (2000: 8).

In point of fact, there is contrary evidence even in Malinowski's initial presentation. Thus he describes a ritual bath undergone by a woman, which occurs 'four to five months after the first symptoms of pregnancy' (1916: 404). The ceremony, he tells us, 'is connected with incarnation of the spirit children' (ibid.: 405), and he further notes:

The view taken by one of my informants was that during the first stage of pregnancy the [spirit-child] has not really entered the woman's body ... Then, during the ceremonial bathing, the spirit-child enters the body of the woman (ibid.).

Other informants, Malinowski continues, disagreed. In *The Sexual Life of Savages*, these data are repeated (1929: 225), but we also learn that:

5 It is well worth noting here that Hal Scheffler pointed this out some time ago, citing also remarkably similar findings for Aboriginal people, the other locus classicus for claims of 'ignorance of physiological paternity' (Scheffler 1973: 749–51, 1978: 5–13; see also Shapiro 1996, 2014: 25–33). I deal with these matters more comprehensively in an essay on Trobriand kinship currently in preparation.

Pregnancy is first diagnosed by the swelling of the breasts and the darkening of the nipples. At *this* time a woman may dream that the spirit of one of her kinsmen brings her the child from the outer world to be reincarnated [emphasis added] (ibid.: 211).

This is to say that the woman is already pregnant when entered by the spirit-child. This is made plainer by Carveth Read (1918): writing only two years after Malinowski's initial formulation, he states expressly that spirit-entry occurs at *foetal quickening*. Subsequently, Leo Austen reported this as well (1934: 103). Thus he tells us that a woman encounters the spirit-child in a dream *when she is already pregnant*, which state is held to result from 'the blood filling up the uterus ... intermix[ing] with some water-like fluid from the woman's body. Where the fluid comes from is unknown' (ibid.: 108; see also Mosko 2005: 58). We shall see in a moment that there is reason to believe that it is anything but unknown. The thing to note now is that what we are dealing with is *not* a *conception* ideology at all: *it is a doctrine about the generation of the spiritual aspect of the person*, and, as such, is comparable to baptism in Christianity, as well as to other metaphysical ideas to which Göran Aijmer (1992) has given the label *animation*.

There is considerable evidence that water, either in ritual bathing or swimming in the sea, is in native ideology a semen surrogate. I shall present only some of this evidence here. As noted, Malinowski reports that a woman's husband is supposed to 'open the way' for the spirit-child by repeated sexual intercourse. In Trobriand mythology a comparable 'opening' is caused by rain—or, especially noteworthy, this—by stalactites, whose dripping 'water' does the 'opening' (Malinowski 1916: 411–13; 1927a: 89; 1927b: 50–51; 1929: 182–83, 426; 1960: 89). In case there is any doubt about the entailed symbolism, we have the direct statement from Alex C. Rentoul (1932: 275) that the stalactite in question 'is looked upon as a phallic symbol' (see also Barton 1917: 109; Malinowski 1929: 182–83; Senft 2011: 18). Malinowski (1916: 404) also notes that a woman swimming in the sea announces her pregnancy by saying 'A fish has bitten me!'—erotic biting, he elsewhere notes, being a common practice in coitus (1929: 333–34). There is, in this connection, considerable evidence that fish represent spirit-children in Trobriand symbolism and, less certainly, the 'water'—that is, semen-surrounded phalluses from which the spirit-children are implicitly held to emanate (see especially Crain, Darrah and Digm'Rina 2003: 15; Glass 1986: 54, 58; Malinowski 1929: 172–76; Senft 2011: 31). Patrick Glass's research based on Malinowski's

unpublished fieldnotes as well as his publications, and his—Glass's—own examination of Trobriand art in various museums, echoes and expands upon this (Glass 1986, 1988). Glass notes that a particular shoreline in the Trobriand area is called *momola*—an expression which, following Malinowski (1929: 167, 339), he translates as both 'semen' and 'female sexual discharge'. '[I]t was generally by bathing in the *momola*', Glass tells us, 'that women announced that they had become pregnant' (1988: 63–64). Malinowski insists that that '[t]he spermatic fluid ... serves merely the purposes of pleasure and lubrication' (1916: 408–09; see also Malinowski 1929: 167). But this conclusion is gainsaid by Glass's 1986 analysis of the artwork on Trobriand war shields. These shields contain more or less explicit images of phalluses, the female reproductive tract, coitus, semen and human embryos. Thus Glass is led to the following conclusion: 'What is overtly negated on land (male fertility) takes place on the seashore, *momala* (semen ...), through water and fish ... which [are] linked to the phallus' (1986: 58). Glass even has an explanation for the covert nature of this symbolism: 'The Trobrianders,' he tells us, 'were very guarded about articulating their knowledge of paternity *for fear of offending "the ears of the spirits"* [emphasis added]' (ibid.: 60; see also Glass 1988: 60–61; Senft 1996: 386–87, 2011: 29–30). In other words, one does not talk about sex, or talks about it only circumspectly, in connection with the sacred—something which is hardly confined to the Trobrianders.

Now Malinowski seems to have worked almost exclusively with *men* (Malinowski 1916: 362; Senft 2009: 221), but Alex Rentoul, a resident colonial magistrate, was less limited. Not long after Malinowski's report, Rentoul noted a decided concern among Trobriand women with native measures '*to expel the male seed* [emphasis in original]' after coitus in an attempt to abort pregnancy (Rentoul 1931: 153; see also Powell 1980: 701; Senft 2009: 221–22, 2011: 33–34).⁶ Some of Rentoul's further remarks are worth pursuing:

[T]ogether with this practical knowledge of physiological paternity, there has always existed the magico-religious explanation ... [T]his is the Story of Birth, as it is believed by intelligent Trobrianders as thoroughly as a modern [western religious] congregation would believe the curate's shy announcement that during the night the angels had brought him a little son ... Presently the [spirit-child] will visit the woman and place

6 Malinowski, by contrast, says that he 'can say with complete confidence [that] no preventive means of any description are known, nor the slightest idea of them entertained' (1929: 197; see also Malinowski 1927b: 75–76). It seems fair to suggest that his assuredness on the matter was grossly misplaced.

upon her forehead a miniature babe ... The babe descending the body of the mother will visit each breast for nourishment, then descending further will enter the womb, where it will remain until the day of its birth. In this process the father's part is simply 'to keep open the way' by sexual intercourse (1931: 153).

Note the apt comparison with western religious notions connected with conception, presaging Sir Edmund Leach's well-known conclusion (Leach 1966). Note, too, that the spirit-child is held to enter the mother nonvaginally—through the forehead—suggesting that it is seen as antithetical to carnal generation (see footnote 10). Thus Malinowski tells us that the heads of chiefs are sacred (1926: 92; 1929: 34), but in an email communication to me Mark Mosko notes that the heads of everyone are 'regarded as in some sense *bomaboma* ("sacred")' (1 May 2014). Moreover, according to Rentoul, entrance occurs 'presently'—that is *after* conception: we now know that this is at (or, probably, deemed to be the cause of) foetal quickening. A final consideration in Rentoul's remarks is that the 'physiological theory' was most plainly held by Trobriand *women*: this is in fact a recurrent theme in subsequent ethnographic and theoretical literature on the area (Austen 1934: 104, 113; Hocart 1954: 99; Mosko 1985: 211; Powell, cited in Montague 1971: 359; Senft 2011: 33–34; Sider 1967: 95–96, 105; Young 2004: 431). Why, then, should Trobriand *men* be so concerned with the spiritual contribution to the fetus?

Here, I think, we need to recall that the local matrilineal group is construed to be part of one of the four clans that, in native theory, have always existed, and that emerged from the Underworld at the Beginning of Things (Eyde 1983: 67–68; Malinowski 1926: 113; 1929: 494; Montague 1971: 354). It is thus much like Aboriginal Australian patrilineal groups, which William E.H. Stanner aptly calls 'sacramental corporations of a perennial order' (1960: 253). Malinowski himself noted that the 'ignorance' theory 'gives a good theoretical foundation for matriliney: for the whole process of introducing new life into a community lies between the spirit world and the female' (1929: 179). This 'new life', he further tells us, is held to be a reincarnation of an old one, which merely housed its spirit, and that this spirit has always existed and will continue to do so, going to yet another individual after the demise of its present host. He notes further that the spirit is specific to a particular local matrilineal group, from which it cannot be alienated (Malinowski 1926: 113; 1929: 182; but see

Malinowski 1916: 406). From this perspective, then, *each local matrilineal group is self-generating through a process in which sexual intercourse has no place*, given the incest barrier within each such group (see Moore 1964).

Moreover, the ongoing social and spiritual life of each such group seems to be a *male* concern. Men of the group own its gardens and have a virtual monopoly on garden and other magic, as well as local political leadership and *kula* trading (Brindley 1984: 93–94; Glass 1986: 50; Malinowski 1929: 41, 43; Montague 1971: 362; Mosko 1995: 774 et seq., 2013: 493; Weiner 1977: 67). By contrast, Montague (1983: 38–39) tells us that in Trobriand theory women are construed as animal-like, as not quite the real human beings that men are held to be (see also Crain, Darrah and Digm'Rina 2003: 9). This is especially remarkable in view of the fact that even those Trobriand men who insisted on the 'magico-religious explanation' with Malinowski were entirely explicit on the 'physiological explanation' in accounting for animal reproduction (Malinowski 1916: 411, 413; see also Rentoul 1931: 153; but see Malinowski 1927b: 64–67).⁷ So it makes sense that men, being human beings par excellence, and, as such, leaders of enduring corporations, should wish to sustain the fiction that *their* reproduction is noncarnal, especially in public encounters with anthropologist and other foreigners (see Austen 1934: 103–04, 113; Montague 1971: 359; Mosko 1985: 211, 226, 2013: 492–96; Powell 1969b: 652; Rentoul 1932: 275; Senft 1995: 216; Sider 1967: 95–96, 105; Weiner 1976: 122).⁸

From this perspective we can understand the unkind reception Malinowski got when he expressly raised the 'physiological theory' with informants. Thus he tells us that 'as a means of testing the firmness of their belief [in spirit-entry], I sometimes made myself ... aggressively an advocate of the ... physiological doctrine of procreation' (1929: 185). When he did this, he goes on, 'I was sometimes astonished at *the fierce opposition evoked by my advocacy of physiological paternity* [emphasis added]' (ibid.: 186).

7 Later Malinowski claimed that this conclusion is incorrect (1927b: 62–67, 1929: 192). But he appears not to have inquired deeply into Trobriand theories of animal reproduction. Moreover, he concludes that 'animals are not subject ... to the same causal relationships as man' (ibid.).

8 Senft deals with several modes of speech recognised by Trobrianders (1985, 1991). He notes that although sexual talk is normally prohibited, in one of these modes it can occur: it is said to be 'only playing' (1991: 238–39; see also Weiner 1983). Malinowski (1929: 467, 486, 1960: 87) was aware of 'bad talk', but it seems never to have occurred to him that the avoidance of such discourse was one of the factors that led him to conclude that Trobrianders are 'ignorant of physiological paternity'. Senft speculates that Malinowski 'became the victim of the Trobriand Islanders' love to make fun of people – with their ... lying or joking or indirect language ... and they really took him for a ride' (2011: 35).

Further evidence of such a ‘fierce opposition’ is provided in Reo Fortune’s account of the neighboring Dobuans (Fortune 1934). Since there is considerable mixing between the two peoples:

The Dobuans know the Trobriand belief that procreation is from the reincarnation of spirits of the dead, not from the biological father. They say bluntly that the Trobrianders lie. The subject is not brought up between Trobrianders and Dobuans as it has been the subject of anger and quarrel too often in the past. My Dobuan friends warned me not to mention the matter in the Trobriands before I went there. Once I was there I deliberately made the experiment. The Trobrianders asserted the spiritual belief, just as Dr. Malinowski had published it. But the head of every Dobuan in the room immediately was turned away from me towards the wall. They affected not to hear the conversation; but afterwards when they had me alone they were furious with me (ibid.: 239).

In other words, Trobriand *men*—it is *men* who deal with outsiders (Brindley 1984: 94)—*pretend* that coitus and procreation are unrelated, while Dobuan men *pretend* that they are unaware of the ‘fierce opposition’ of Trobriand men to the ‘physiological theory’. I cannot explain why Trobrianders and Dobuans, who share much the same ideology and sociality, differ so starkly in what they are willing to talk about in public, but it is surely clear that, on the Trobriand side, something more is at stake than a knowledge of the real facts of life—something Edmund Leach recognised in his famous article on ‘Virgin Birth’ (Leach 1966). Jerry Leach seems to have hit the nail on the head:

Trobrianders believe in spirits of the dead who reincarnate themselves [within] their ... matrilineal group[s]. The formal belief seems to deny males any role in reproduction, and the Trobrianders convinced Malinowski that their religious belief was a true statement of their actual knowledge ... [H]owever, males are recognized as part of the reproductive process ... *The public denial of this seems intended for the ears of the spirits[,] who jealously guard their pre-eminent role in the formation of new human beings*, but it has led the world to believe that the Trobrianders do not associate intercourse with [conception] [emphasis added] (quoted in Glass 1986: 47).⁹

9 This is part of a more general denigration of sexual reproduction in the Trobriands, a subject that is beyond the scope of the present essay (for details see Mosko 2013: 495, 500). A subsequent essay by Mosko (2014) provides a remarkable statement of Trobriand pseudoprocreative thought (see also Brindley 1984: 17 et seq.; Tambiah 1968: 197). There are two ironies in all this. One is that, thanks mostly to Malinowski, these people have been portrayed, both in anthropological and popular circles, as inhabitants of ‘islands of love’ (Senft 1998). The other, with the same indebtedness, is that alleged ‘ignorance of physiological paternity’ in the Trobriands is part of this thought: it has absolutely nothing to do with real-world knowledge.

Indeed, as Gunter Senft put it in an email communication to me, ‘all the discussions about virgin birth in the Trobriands were simply void from the very beginning’ (8 May 2015).

It is also plain, it is worth noting, that in Trobriand thought spiritual generation is *modelled on* carnal generation, just as it is in baptism (see especially Gudeman 1972) and many other rituals which, following Hiatt (1971), are aptly dubbed *pseudoprocreative*.¹⁰

The same phenomenon is reflected in Malinowski’s report that the father is said to be ‘a stranger’ or an ‘outsider’ (*tomakava*) (1927a: 39; 1927b: 14, 1929: 5, 1960: 39). Once again Sahlins sees in this evidence of a radical disconnect between the facts of biology and native representations of these facts, and once again he is wrong (1976: 38). Weiner’s rendition of *tomakava* as referring to ‘nonclanspeople’ (1976: 53–54) is probably closer to the truth. But the term is also applied to people in mourning regardless of matrilineal group affiliation (Seligman 1910: 720), so, whatever its focal significance, its widest application would seem to be something like ‘anyone who is outside the sphere of normal social relations in the situation at hand’ (see also Montague 2001: 181–82). Comparable considerations apply to the Trobriand father. Here is Weiner on the matter:

Malinowski ... placed great emphasis on the classification of [one’s] father as *tomakava* ... ‘stranger,’ rather than own kinsman (*veyola tatola*). My informants [however] said that no one would ever call their father

10 Schneider (1989) has objected to my use of this label (Shapiro 1988), presumably on the grounds that it assumes the logical priority of (what he takes to be) only western ideas about kinship. This is not so. In all the Aboriginal ceremonies mentioned in Hiatt’s classic analysis, there is abundant evidence that ritual generation is *modelled on* native appreciations of the processes of carnal reproduction. This is also true of those rituals, like Easter celebrations, that commemorate an *antithesis* between (what we might call) women’s ability to give life and men’s ability to give death, regarding the latter as ontologically superior to the former. On this see Jay (1985, 1992) and Rosaldo and Atkinson (1975). Thus Jesus is said never to have participated in carnal generation, to have been born of a woman who was similarly a nonparticipant, and who was impregnated nonvaginally—through the ear. Compare the Trobriand doctrine that spirit entry occurs in the mother’s head (Malinowski 1927b: 34–35, 47, 61, 1929: 175, 188; Mosko 2005: 58; Rentoul 1931: 153), remarkably similar notions in Aboriginal Australia (Shapiro 2014: 25–33), and the propositions that the Buddha was born through his mother’s sexual *abstinence* and entered her in prefoetal form through her *side*. Malinowski also mentions spirit entry through the vagina and the abdomen for the Trobriands, but he says that the former proposition is ‘decidedly less authoritative’ than the one that ascribes entry via the head (1929: 176, 181). I suspect this means that he was told this by younger male informants. In any case, Senft’s male informants mentioned vaginal entry as well as entry through the head (Senft 2011: 31–32), but the former mode, apparently, only occurs if the woman ‘swims somewhat carelessly’ (ibid.: 31). Jay Crain, Allan Darrah and Linus Digm’Rina note that, to avoid another pregnancy during lactation, a Trobriand woman covers her loins with a skirt and then covers her head—the latter to prevent spirit-entry, ‘which would spoil her milk’ (2003: 16). We are, alas, not told what prevents her husband from lifting the skirt.

tomakava. They said [instead] that he was the most important kinsman (*veyola*) they had. *It was only in conversations or debates concerning ... rights of a [local matrilineal group] where a man as father would be referred to as tomakava* [emphasis added] (1976: 124; see also Powell 1969a: 178; Sider 1967: 103–06).

In an email communication Gunter Senft confirms Weiner on this last matter, but he points out that none of his informants held that the father was *veyola* to his children (13 September 2012). Apparently, the term is reserved for maternal kin (see also Lepani 2012: 70). Nevertheless, I think it reasonable to conclude that Trobriand notions of fatherhood are based on native appreciations of the reproductive process—as is probably the case everywhere else. Even Malinowski would eventually hedge on his initial formulation (Pulman 2004–05). A key point in this regard is the conceptual unity of husband and wife, quite apart from matrilineal group affiliation. Thus in an email communication Kathy Lepani informs me of a word—*kalitouna*—‘meaning the man and woman who gave life to you’ (8 June 2012).¹¹ She adds—apropos Montague’s analysis of Trobriand kin terms (see above)—that the word ‘generally isn’t used to refer to adoptive parents, although children might well choose to refer to their adoptive parents’ in this manner ‘as an expression of endearment, respect, and gratitude’ (ibid.). In a later email Dr Lepani notes that the word *tounai*, apparently cognate to *kalitouna*, means ‘true parent’, as does *toula unai’I*, ‘where *toula* means “true” or “genuine”’ (23 September 2012). In the same vein, Mark Mosko, in an email communication to me notes a Trobriand expression *toil una’I*, which can be used to refer to one’s mother *and* one’s father as a couple. He further notes that *una’I* means ‘to conceive’! (13 August 2012).

We have already seen that *ina*, the Trobriand ‘mother’ term, has the primary significance of ‘genetrix’. Is there evidence, therefore, that *tama*, the ‘father’ term, *primarily* denotes one’s genitor? Trobrianders have a Crow-type kinship terminology: all members of one’s father’s matriline are designated by a single term, or two terms depending on sex. Even this rendition of Crow-type logic suggests that one’s father is the focal member of his kin class, for he provides the conceptual focus for its terminological isolation: the class is defined in the first place by reference to him (see Introduction). Moreover, Malinowski expressly notes that ‘[t]he primary

11 This is apparently the same word that Weiner (1976: 123) renders as *kalitonai* and that she translates as ‘true father’.

meaning of *tabu* [the term for females of the father's matriline] is "father's sister",¹² and that both this term and the 'father' term (*tama*) are applied more widely, to any local matrilineal group other than one's own (1929: 502, 515). Presumably this means that the father's sister is rendered as *tabu makita*; in any case, as noted in the Introduction, we know from other Crow-type systems that this relative is separated by subclassification from other members of her kin class, who are lexically unmarked or else rendered by a lexical marker meaning 'false' or some such. In any case, reverting to the Trobriands, what we seem to have here is a native extension rule that says, in effect, 'Let any female member of *any* local matrilineal group *other than my own* be terminologically equated with my father's sister'.

It would be most unusual if analogous considerations did not apply to the 'father' term: indeed, I know of no ethnographic instance in which this is the case. So we should not be surprised to find, in a recent essay by Mark Mosko (2014) on Trobriand magic, that a magical spell that a man utters is said to be 'his child'—that is something that *emanates from him*.¹³ The entailed notion—that a man can give birth—or otherwise create—through his head or mouth—has numerous ethnographic parallels. In the Old Testament, God creates by *naming*; in the New Testament, Jesus is regularly referred to as The Word: hence the Holy Spirit's entry into Mary's *ear*. Aboriginal fathers 'find' the spirits of their children *in utero in dreams*, which occur, as in the Trobriands, at foetal quickening (Malinowski 1929: 197, 1927b: 75–76). A Piaroa man in the Venezuelan rainforests may refer to his child as 'my thought' (Overing 1985: 167). In Greek mythology Athena springs from the head of Zeus, just as this

12 Elsewhere, in *The Sexual Life of Savages*, Malinowski says that the father's sister's daughter is the 'true' member of her kin class (1929: 101). It may be that both are subclassified in this way.

13 I must note that this analysis is my own. I have for some time maintained an email correspondence with Professor Mosko, and after reading his latest article I wrote to him about my conclusions. In the main, he seems *not* to agree with them. Thus, in a communication dated 15 March 2015, he maintains that 'everything anyone produces from their labors of all kinds, including the production of magical spells, is a *gwadi*, i.e. a child' with respect to the producer, and that he finds no reason to grant 'privileged' status to the procreative father/child relationship. Yet in the article just cited he says that magical spells are '*modeled on* ... the ordinary reproduction of offspring [emphasis added]' (2014: 33). And elsewhere he suggests, with regard to the gardening of yams, a series of metaphorical equations, to wit:

The gardener is the yams' father (*tama*) and his wife their mother (*ina*). And like their human children, their yams are gendered. Capable of reproducing, yam seeds are like daughters. As agents of exchange and feeding other humans, subsistence yams are likened to human sons ... Even the manner of sowing yam seeds is suggestive of these parental relations. During ... planting, the gardener turns the soil with his digging stick ... Nearby he inserts a vertical yam stick. My interlocutor ... likened the soil to a womb and the stick to an erect penis (Mosko 2009: 686).

essay is my *brainchild*. In the working-class Brooklyn precincts in which I was raised, an older man might say to a younger one, 'I knew you when you were just a gleam in your father's eye'. The 'gleam' carries at least two connotations—lust (which could never be expressed more directly in regard to one's mother) and illumination—both connected with semen. Thus a *seminar* is a gathering in which *illumination* is supposed to take place. Alas, the symbolism of light in the Judaeo-Christian tradition is far too complex a matter to be considered here. Finally, among Janet Carsten's very many errors of omission in her analyses of Malay sociality is the absence of a detailed account of the male role in reproduction—something that, happily, Carol Laderman has corrected. Consider this doozy:

before conception takes place in the mother's womb, the father has been pregnant for forty days. Indeed, people remember *ex post facto* male food cravings preceding the wife's pregnancy. The baby begins life not as a creation within the mother's belly, but in a more elevated sphere: his father's brain (Laderman 1982; see also Laderman 1983: 75).

More prosaic evidence for the Trobriand father being considered kin to his children comes from the classification of patrilineal parallel cousins with siblings and matrilineal parallel cousins (Sider 1967: 105). Since the last two are unquestionably one's kin, it would be most unusual if someone of the same kin class *and* the same degree of genealogical proximity were not so regarded: certainly I know of no such case in the ethnographic record.

In sum, Trobriand kinship, like kinship probably everywhere else, is founded on local appreciations of the reproductive process within the nuclear family, from which it is *extended to* other people and things.¹⁴ The performative interpretation of it is quite mistaken. The focal members of kin classes are close procreative kin, and there are *native* extension rules. Finally, *pace* Sahlins, there is indeed a 'third party' posited in Trobriand generative ideology, but it has nothing to do, in native theory, with conception: not only is it *not* posited to occur at conception, but, as well, it is seen as *antithetical to* it (Shapiro 2013).

14 This is *not* the same as Malinowski's conclusions about extension (Malinowski 1962: 138), which deal with the ontogenic processes whereby children acquire and employ kinship terms, although the correlation between the two senses of 'extension' is probably very high (Scheffler and Lounsbury 1971: 61–62).

Conclusion

All of these conclusions are part of Hal Scheffler's legacy. In the Introduction Dwight Read and I referred to his pointing out the near-ubiquity of the nuclear family. His concern with kinship terminologies is what he is best known for, but his demonstration that performative kinship notions are derived from procreative ones runs a close second. A concern with cross-cultural regularities is entailed by these conclusions.

All this being so, I conclude that Hal Scheffler was very nearly right on the mark when it comes to discerning what human kinship is primarily about. By contrast, although performative criteria clearly have a role in kin-reckoning, it is a logically and empirically subordinate one, and so Schneider and his admirers are well off that mark. Hence the conclusion seems reasonable that Hal Scheffler was the single most important figure in the history of kinship studies.

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preferred, in treating the issue of [Trobriand] paternity, to insist that the Trobrianders had a pragmatic, common sense level of reproductive knowledge. Williams ... was willing to grant that the Trobrianders might in certain contexts hold an elaborate 'magico-religious theory' of conception. But [he] insisted that they also had 'a common sense theory' (1996: 11).

Both views could in fact be 'held ... by the same individuals, who diplomatically cited one or the other depending on context'. He is quoting from an unpublished letter from Williams to Leo Austen. Although Williams is well known among Melanesianists for his fieldwork elsewhere in Papua New Guinea (e.g. Williams 1936), both Bashkow and I incline to the view that he never visited the Trobriands.

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