**THE TROBRIANDERS OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

***Chapter 3: Fathers and Matrilineality***

Interrupted Sleep

Linda Weiner gets message about Naseluma’s last days of her pregnancy. She hurries to Naseluma’s house to witness the birth; but, she had come too late. She realizes how private the birth of baby is because most Trobriand events are so public. She notices that there is no village response to the infant’s first cries when compared to death in the village. “A birth never brings people together in the way that a death does.”

In the Trobriander’s culture, most marriages take place between young people who live in the same village. At marriage, a woman goes to live with her husband; but a few days before she gives birth, she returns to her mother’s home for a several months after the birth. During the time Naseluma is at her mother’s house, the husband and his kin is responsible to provide her with food; but, her own matrilineal kin is responsible to cook for her and attend to her needs. The food taboos are even more inclusive during her two months.

The restrictions for new mothers are similar to the prohibitions that a Trobriand widow or widower must observe.

Example: nursing mothers, like mourners, also must give up eating yams and pork (two most favored foods). There are differences as well: For Naseluma a low fire burns under the bed, whereas for mourners there is no fire. Mourners blacken their bodies in an attempt to cover their social identity. The newly mother covers her body with a light banana-leaf fiber cape.

The similarities of seclusion for birth and mourning, with their important oppositions between warmth and cold and light and dark, suggest that death and birth.

Birth and Ancestors

*Baloma* – spirit

*Waiwaia* – spirit child or fetus or infant

*Sibububula* – ancestral spirit

Trobriandors believe that at death, the baloma of the deceased becomes youth again and continues its existence not far away on the island of Tuma. A spirit’s life does not replicate itself without interruption. The spirit child is thought to belong to the matrilineage of its own birth; it is not recognizable by any personal name. The spirit child cannot stay on the island but must return to Kiriwana, where it enters a woman’s body and causes her to become pregnant. It is believed to enter a woman who is member of the same matrilineage.

**How the *Baloma* actually creates a spirit child**

•They became pregnant only after a particular baloma came to them in a dream and told them that a waiwaia was being sent.

•Their pregnancy was induced by magic spells. To fore fill the spell, water is brought from a cave or from the springs by the beach; where it is poured into an empty coconut bowl. The owner of the magic spell chants the words into the bowl and the women then drinks the liquid.

•The waiwaia child was carried back to Kiriwina by a baloma, who placed the child in a woman’s vagina while she was asleep. If women wanted to become pregnant she bathed in the sea, where waiwaia spirits often might be floating back to Kiriwina from Tuma.

In any society, women sometimes have a hard time becoming pregnant. A few Trobrianders have had to primary and secondary education and now, villagers are aware of biological facts of procreation. Not all reject completely such traditional beliefs, which is used to their advantage.

Example (1): great consternation erupted among some Kwaibwage people when a woman received a letter from her husband, who has been working for a year. When he returned home, she was 6 months pregnant. He had made claims that he would report her to the government officers for adultery. The local judge dismissed the case because her mother testified that she used black magic to help her daughter to become pregnant.

Example (2): a young unmarried woman found herself pregnant. Even though, most villagers gossiped about who her lover had been, there were no claims.

Each dead person ultimately becomes the means for new life via the physical connection between women and the spirits of their matrilineal ancestors. Each living generation is linked to matrilineal ancestors, who are perceived to play a continuing, active role directed toward future generations. Western ideas about conception become biologically accurate. Aristolte’s theory of conception was very similar to the Trobriander view. Except he believed all contributions came from the male and women were served only as the receptacle for the growing fetus.

The Other Matrilineage

Buyai – blood

Kopi – used when villagers sit and care for a dead person before burial; to feed; to nurse an infant

A woman nurses her baby for about 1.5 years. Fathers play roles of long-lasting importance in nurturing their babies.Men contribute to the growth and development of their children in a way that compliments rather than replicates what a woman bestows, and their contributions are directed toward enhancing the child’s potential power. The fundamental principle revolves around the belief that conception occurs through women and their ancestral spirits.Each infant born is both physically and socially identified with a particular matrilineage to which its mother and not the father’s belongs. As a right of birth, each child will have certain privileges and interests in the property of its matrilineage. The infant’s given ancestral name marks its importance of claiming these rights and is the first public recognition of the infant’s matrilineal identity.

**Ancestral Naming**

•Very few villagers, except for chiefs, are called by their “true” ancestral names

•In practice, a child is usually called by this name that it receives from its father

•Only women give ancestral names to their children, which their daughters in time may pass on to their children

•The names women give to their brother’s children are regarded as their matrilineal property, which must be returned

•The circulation of a man’s matrilineal property that a man’s gifts to his children establish intimate bonds with them is so important.

**Trobriand Kinship**

Example (1):

Concept (1): defines matrilineal descent as an identity that is unalterable through time; it is illustrated by the belief that in the first stage of pregnancy a woman conceives exclusively by an ancestral spirit from her own matrilineage.

Concept (2): involves necessity to use property from another matrilineage, thereby making connections with members of that matrilineage, which can have important potential for the future.

In this way, a child’s father’s matrilineal kin add to what the child already gains from its own matrilineage, strengthening what the child is and will become. The woman is responsible for the co-mingling of her blood with a spirit child, thus making the infant a “true” member of the matrilineage. Her husband builds up and nurtures the fetus through intercourse without compromising its “true” matrilineal identity. In addition, the man supplies the fetus with his contribution does not anyway alter the basic physiological connection between a women’s blood and a spirit child. The man is not a member of his child’s matrilineage. His help in the growth of the fetus implicates his matrilineage in his child’s future rights and obligations.

Example (2): when Sara, an unmarried young woman, became pregnant, the role that her lover played in her pregnancy was not given public acknowledgement because reorganization of her lover’s role would make it necessary for him to meet certain obligations to his child. They also involve the property of his matrilineage and of Sara’s matrilineage.

This has become socially unrecognizable or unacceptable man’s procreative role in the pregnancy of his lover must be ignored. Her kin felt “deeply ashamed”.

When a married couple has baby, the claim to the father’s contribution is so important that it is not only expressed as necessary to the growth of the fetus. This also represents at birth by noting the physical similarities between infant and father.

A Father’s Care

* Trobriander children are shown lots of affection physically, from everyone including fathers.
  + The moment a woman stops breastfeeding, the father begins to care for the child instead.
    - The child then sleeps with the father as well
* While there is nothing forcing people to work, but a man’s ability to provide for his children has many political consequences. (Almost all men work very hard for their children)
* The father is also responsible for the child’s beauty
  + When the child is only a few months old, the father will begin to socially beautify them with shells. (not physical beauty)
  + This is the first political step in the child’s life.
* The necklaces (*kuwa*) are made with red *Chama* shells, (the lighter the colour, the more valued.)
* The necklaces are made from the same shells that men from different islands exchange. If a man owns “a few” of these necklaces, then he will restring them to make necklaces for his children.
* The necklaces given to the children mark the wealth and political power of the father, and the potential of the child
* First, the father must present the child with tortoise shell earrings, these differ depending on the sex of the child, (girls have a red kaloma shell dics on them) and boys usually only wear them on special occasions, today.
* Pierced ears are an important status symbol. A child without pierced ears is considered fatherless, and one with pierced ears but no earrings are considered poor.
* All this beautification stands to establish a social and political wealth early on in a child’s life, and is incredibly important to the child’s status.

“Hard Words”

* Example: Sara’s daughter has no father. if someone gets angry at her, they will announce the truth to everyone. The shame is not in Sara getting pregnant out of wedlock, but in the child having no father. These are called “hard words.”
  + Hard words create an animosity that can only be resolved by fighting, suicide, or magic.
* Two men, Michael and Vincent, nearly killed each other over Michael saying that Vincent’s maternal niece had no father. Had there not been so much intermarriage, they may have very well killed each other.
* The beauty of a child is one of their most important assets, it denotes their political power, social status, affect how they interact with everyone they know. Social beauty of a child is the responsibility of the father. Even physical beauty can be achieved with magic.

Analysis - Themes

***Individuals, groups and society***

* Status and role: the jewelry provided to child is HUGELY important to how they are viewed within the community. It defines their social status and their (potential) political sway. Merely having a father creates status.
* Group and Social Identity: Because of that, it dictates their identity within the group, how they are perceived by others. Not having a father is hugely detrimental, and should it be spoken, creates terrible, complex tensions.
* Family and Household: The father’s role in giving this to his child is a familial affair which is integral to their relationship.

***Political organization***

* Globalization: It’s fairly common today for the Chama shells to be imitation plastic, brought in from other places across the world.
* Inequality: The quality and quantity of the jewelry owned by a child defines their status, creating classes.
* Conflict and resistance: The conflicts created by speaking the truth (or accusing) about a child’s father or lack thereof, can be fatal, and incredibly complicated. Usually, parties involved are incredibly interconnected, which complicated relations for anyone involved. There are very strict ways to resolve the conflict, and those ways are high stakes. The political and personal ramifications of such an accusation make this much more than a spat between two people.

***Kinship as an organizing principle***

* Family and household: At marriage, a woman goes to live with her husband; but a few days before she gives birth, she returns to her mother’s home for a several months after the birth. During the time Naseluma is at her mother’s house, the husband and his kin is responsible to provide her with food; but, her own matrilineal kin is responsible to cook for her and attend to her needs. These shows there are specific roles that must be done by each family member.
* • Globalization: A few Trobrianders have had to primary and secondary education and now, villagers are aware of biological facts of procreation. Therefore, it shows that knowledge of birth was communicated to them, thus expanding Trobriander’s knowledge.
* Rights and property: *“As a right of birth, each child will have certain privileges and interests in the property of its matrilineage.”* This shows that Trobriander kin is mainly dependent on the new generation.

Analysis - Terms

* Cultural relativism: “*a methodological principle that emphasizes the importance of searching for meaning within the local context.\**” Missionaries came to a Trobriander village and saw the effect the earrings had on the people’s ears, and considered it unhealthy. They attempted to put a stop to this practice; however, they failed to consider the political and social ramifications. The earrings and necklaces play such an important role in defining status and power that they are integral to the trobriander way of life.
* Meaning: *“attribution of particular significance to persons, relations, objects, places and events*.*”*  The jewelry mentioned above has particular meaning to the Trobriand people, which has been outlined extensively, but more broadly, fathers are given much meaning in this society. Fathers are responsible for providing that jewelry, and they, in a way are a status symbol in and of themselves: a child without one is a shameful thing.
* Society: “*Society refers to the way in which humans organize themselves in groups and networks*” As outlined above, the social and political ramifications of the presence and actions of a father are incredibly important for the function of the Trobriand society.
* Social reproduction: *“the concept that, over time, groups of people reproduce their social structure and patterns of behaviour”* This is particularly applicable to this aspect of Trobriand culture, because of how young the children are when they are brought into this system. At only a few months old a child is given their first necklaces and earrings. Their youth when these gifts are given mean that they are surrounded by it and grow up with this custom, assuring that they pass it on.
* Process: *“Social process is what humans actually do, including human action that may work against social structure.”* As you see, when Sara, an unmarried young woman, became pregnant, the role that her lover played in her pregnancy was not given public acknowledgement. Therefore, she has gone against the social structure of the Trobrianders.
* Culture: *“Culture refers to organized systems of symbols, ideas, explanations, beliefs and material production that humans create and manipulate in the course of their daily lives.”* In particular, the whole concept of death and birth being compared to dark and light. In addition, a death can bring the village together rather a birth because it is done privately.
* Agency: *“Agency is the capacity of human beings to act in meaningful ways that affect their own lives and those of others. Agency may be constrained by class, gender, religion and other social and cultural factors.”* For instance, most marriages take place between young people who live in the same village. As the woman of the marriage goes to live with her husband; but a few days before she gives birth, she returns to her mother’s home for a several months after the birth.
* Community: *“Traditionally, it referred to a geographically bounded group of people in face-to-face contact, with a shared system of beliefs and norms operating as a socially functioning whole.”* For example, how the Trobrianders have the same belief of spirit child and it is way from them to have hope to have children.

\* Definitions taken from IBO course guide.