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### "To Be His Witness If That Was Ever Necessary": Rafael Brudo on Malinowski's Fieldwork and Trobriand Ideas of Conception

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Raphael Brudo

## FOOTNOTES TO THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

### **"To Be His Witness if That Was Ever Necessary": Raphael Brudo on Malinowski's Fieldwork and Trobriand ideas of conception**

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Of the many issues raised by Malinowski's Trobriand ethnography, Trobriand ideas of the father's role in conception have been among the most debated (Delaney 1986). In 1916, Malinowski asserted that the islanders believed that impregnation took place when a baloma, or spirit of the dead, rejuvenated itself in the sea to become a spirit child that entered into the vagina of a woman of its subclan, often while she bathed (1916:216-8). In this view, the mother and her kin provided a child's entire bodily substance; the father merely opened up the woman's vagina for the baloma to enter (though cf. 1929:160, 176). Rejecting the possibility that Trobriand beliefs might be the result of "superstition" displacing "knowledge based upon observation," or (in the specific Trobriand case) that the two existed "side by side," Malinowski offered the Trobrianders' "absence of knowledge" of "physiological fatherhood" and "physiological impregnation" as confirming Frazer's evolutionary assumption that such ignorance was "universal among early mankind" (1916:220, 231, 234, 271; cf. Stocking 1995:257). Later, in The Sexual Life of Savages, Malinowski removed all "conjectures" about "origins" and "primeval states," and in his "Special Foreword" to the third edition in 1931 he offered an explicit, if ambivalent, "evolutionist's recantation," withdrawing his earlier commitments to "evolutionary views, which at present I regard as irrelevant, even though unimpeachable" (1932[1929]:lix-lxi, 140-78). Yet Malinowski's revised account still emphasized the "ignorance of paternity" which set the Trobrianders apart from Europeans, placing them by implication in an evolutionary past. Indeed, this "ignorance" seemed the "most popular subject" in the book (1932[1929]:lix), and it attracted critical comment in 1931 by Alex Rentoul, the District Officer at Losuia on the Trobriand Islands--who two years before had attended Radcliffe-Brown's anthropological training course for colonial officers at Sydney (Bashkow 1995). In a brief item in Man, Rentoul suggested that, alongside their "magico-religious explanation" for conception, involving the baloma, Trobriand islanders actually did possess "practical knowledge of physiological paternity," as purportedly evidenced by fathers' anguish over losing custody of children in cases Rentoul judged in the Court for Native Matters. Because of his duties, Rentoul came "into close touch" with the natives in their times of greatest crisis and stress, and he wrote that this put him "in a more advantageous position for analysing their true feelings and relationship, than [that of] a visiting anthropologist, however gifted" (1931:153-54). Malinowski, incensed at the aspersions cast on the Ethnographer's role as well as on his findings, hit back with a caustic, lengthy, largely ad hominem attack, in which he questioned whether the "perspective of the police court" allowed one to know the "true feelings of the native," and reasserted that "white residents on the spot" could not replace the "scientific specialist" (1932:34). Even so, he asked a "man on spot" for testimony to buttress his ethnographic authority, leading to the text by Raphael Brudo, printed below.

An intelligent and cultivated if only "half-educated" bourgeois Parisian (Wayne 1995, I: 124), Brudo had been a pearl trader on the Trobriand islands throughout Malinowski's fieldwork. During Malinowski's first trip in 1915, he wrote to Seligman that the young trader "helped me a great deal more than either Bellamy or Gilmour" (Young 1984:17). However, when Malinowski returned to the islands in December 1917, he initially stayed with Brudo's competitors Billy Hancock, George Auerbach and Mick George, apparently absorbing some of their disparagement of the Parisian as a "stinking Jewish dog" and "pig" -- so that their reacquaintance in early March was like a fresh discovery of the person. Malinowski wrote, "His views are similar to mine... I find him extremely sympathetic." "He is the only

man whose company would bring me into contact with civilization" (Wayne 1995, I: 83; Malinowski 1967:142, 147, 150, 214).

Such longing for civilization was perhaps intensified between and after kula trips to the rugged Amphlett Islands that March and April, when Malinowski began to dine almost nightly on "Mme Raff.'s French cuisine" ("food perfect") and to enjoy conversation in French about "politics and the war," about the Germans—"are they ahead in science?"— about the "origin of man and totemism in Trobriands," about "niggers, whites and Govt. officials; missionaries of course, a lot; religion; immortality of soul; atomic theory; origin of stone implements, origin of kula" (Malinowski 1967: 214, 244, 249, 264; Wayne 1995, I: 124, 129). Turning talk to "origins" was something Malinowski himself was clearly prone to do; but he saw as it problematic nonetheless, and complained in a letter that, "In spite of my exposition, why it is futile to ask about 'Origins' at every turn, Raffael always does it" (125). Yet despite "differences in our outlook—his ideas which I don't accept, which is ein überwundener Standpunkt [a point of view I have left behind]," Brudo quickly became, Malinowski wrote, "a factor in my 'orientation'." Feeling "very much at home" in Brudo's house, Malinowski stayed there for stretches of a couple of weeks to over a month (Malinowski 1967: 244, 248, 267). Talking, reading together from Hugo and Racine, the Brudos helped "a great deal," to relieve his "desperate longing"—in which nostalgia for "civilization" and longing for his fiancée were of a piece (190, 246). In fact, however, they shared more than nostalgia. Brudo spoke Kiriwinan "relatively well," and he worked intensively with Malinowski on Kiriwinan grammar (262-65, Wayne 1995, I: 124, 146). Moreover, with his "very sound instincts of real and independent thinking," the Parisian was "capable of constructing native problems (like the kula) in a manner far beyond what anyone else here could do" (124).

Nevertheless, to Malinowski their "familiarity" sometimes seemed "excessive," and diary entries reporting poetic "moment[s] of heightened sympathy" alternate with assertions of Malinowski's impulses toward seclusion and ascetic self-denial (Malinowski 1967: 237, 243-50, 263-69). At bottom, Brudo was a "distraction," their rapport was "too passionate," their "communion of souls" was "unnecessary" (264). Their intense conversations ("I remember all my conversations with Raffael") too much engaged Malinowski's thoughts, which became "no longer characteristic in themselves": "they take on value *qua* conversation with Raf." (244, 262). The intercourse impeded his writing in the diary, he wrote (244). It dissipated his "brillian[ce]" (264). Growing "fidgety," Malinowski resolved, to "eliminate Capuan days" with Brudo and other Trobriands traders (259, 265).

As in his relationships to the other traders, but perhaps more acutely, Malinowski wrestled in his friendship with the Brudos with the ambivalences of his own attraction to "civilization" and comfort, and his complex attachment to "longing" itself, as an authentic, profound yet expansive, self-defining feeling. Staying with the Brudos near the end of his fieldwork, Malinowski wrote to his fiancée, "I just talk and joke and forget my sorrow and my real life" (Wayne 1995, I: 171). If he still liked Brudo and his country French wife "as much as I did before," he saw "more clearly" that "much of their glamour is due to the fact that they are people with European tastes and European culture out here, where noone except us three longs after music, theatre, boulevards, cathedrals, cafés etc." (170). Paying a farewell call before leaving the islands, he felt "there was little romance now in the 'civilized' atmosphere of villa Raphael" (174). He was soon to cross to longing's other side.

Once away from the Trobriands, Malinowski had intermittent contact with Brudo, who returned to Paris in the 1920s for several years. When they met in Paris (probably for the third time) in late 1931, Rentoul's critique had only recently appeared, and Malinowski asked his friend to support him by writing a testimonial response (Wayne 1995, II; BMP)

[The text below is reproduced from the F.E. Williams Papers at the National Archives in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (FEWP: Box 2989, Item 22). The translation was probably by Leo Austen (see below). A few trivial corrections have been made and the paragraphing has been slightly restructured. Otherwise the text is as originally preserved.]

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Translation of a treatise by Raphael Brudo, late of the Trobriand Islands, now of Paris, in support of certain contention[s] of Dr. Malinowski, author of "The Argonauts of the Western Pacific," respecting the peculiar beliefs of the natives of those islands in regard to conception:

Doctor Malinowski speaks in his book of the physiological ignorance of conception of beings which is still to be observed among the natives of the Trobriand Islands. That the intelligence of these human beings is incapable of establishing a correlation between the sexual act and the phenomenon of procreation, and that these men live in the present day will surprise many readers. Their astonishment will certainly not be greater than mine when my mind revolted against an assertion which appeared ridiculous at the time it was made to me by Dr. Malinowski.

We are proud of the progress we have made in civilisation, but to properly appreciate the value of that progress it is only necessary to take a voyage of two months to land in Papua and there plunge right into the life lived by our prehistoric ancestors. There, in those islands of savagery, intact in the centre of progress which soon will submerge their inhabitants, and who knows? perhaps overwhelm them, man is still naked and without means to procure other than a precarious living from the soil. His arms and his tools are made of stone and wood. His fire, if it goes out, cannot be relit [except] by the prolonged rubbing of two pieces of wood until the precious sparks appear, and by taking a thousand precautions, makes a flame—the flame which warms, cooks and burns, without which life would be impossible. This primitive humanity has a confused memory of a time, and epoch of terror, when man knew not how to make a fire. There, in short, are parts where man, forced by hunger, by superstition, or by a war spirit innate in him, went out not only to fight, but sometimes to devour each other.

It was in such a place that I lived eight years of my life, and the memory of it is ever present. My home was surrounded by tall coconut trees whose fronds were rustled by the breezes from the sea nearby, and from my verandah could be traced the sombre line of the coast between the changing lights of the sky and the clear waters of the sea. Around me in the villages went a daily train of those primitive beings of whom many had become my friends. I interested myself in the little events of the village, which were often idle gossipings much like the happenings in our own small country villages. Thus mixed up in their life and speaking their language, which had become my tongue during those years, I thought I knew these natives perfectly.

However, many things and many details of their habits, customs, and thoughts were revealed to be by Dr. Malinowski during his all too short stay as my guest. What that meeting meant to me the reader can well understand. To be isolated during many months from the civilised world, dealing only with savages from day to day, then suddenly to meet a friend capable of charming you, of improving your mind on subjects which make the value and the beauty of civilised life, a friend who found interest in several good books which I possessed. Can you imagine our evenings? After having each finished our daily tasks, he preparing his notes, and I carrying on my work as trader, we were together at the meal table. At that time my dwelling was a construction of corrugated iron and rough wood hewn from the neighbouring forest. It was perched on the top of high piles as is usual in tropical countries. On my small verandah, set in a frame of which no one will dispute the strange originality, I read aloud verses of poetry

or a chapter of a good author on whose work we commented. On other evenings the fancy for music gripped us, and we hummed passages of Wagner or a sonata of Beethoven under the gaping regard of my native boys. And [there was] that time when we attacked the solution of a little problem in astronomy.

It was at that time that Dr Malinowski had assembled and completed his notes for what was to become his book "The Argonauts of the Western Pacific." Often during the day when my occupation permitted me the leisure, I followed him in his work, assisted in his talks and enquiries with the natives, and it is thus I acquired the conviction of the fact I have cited.

One can live through years with Papuans without them revealing their souls. Nevertheless, an intimate knowledge of their morals and customs is of the first importance to white men called upon [to] treat with them daily. Yet, between us and them is erected an invisible barrier, which, to pass through or beat down, is a task of such difficulty that I marvel at the manner in which Dr Malinowski knew how to solve the difficulties amongst which old residents would have been stranded or have passed by blindly. The difficulty arises perhaps from the tendency which the natives have of never replying directly to questions one puts to them. It seems that they try above all to please, and with the white man to avoid contradicting.

Let me cite an anecdote which is [a] striking example. – My brother [Samuel Brudo, the author's elder brother and partner trader on the Trobriand Islands], believing that I had committed a grave fault regarding our business, one day sent me a letter in which he expressed his anger. The knowledge of the matter with which he reproached me was arrived at by his hearing many rumours which [had] run amongst the natives with surprising rapidity. The accusation was sufficiently important to justify me in chartering a canoe and making the voyage of about 12 miles to see my brother. Arriving there, he recounted his accusation explaining how or by whom the news was carried to him. My brother has the habit of speaking in an authoritative manner to the "boys," and regards them in a way which terrorises them and paralyses their replies.

"No," I said to him, "No one could have told you that. It is simply that you have suggested it to the boy." Then immediately a native nearest to me, I fixed him with a look akin to one often used by my brother when angry, and pointing to the white tablecloth, I said in a brutal tone "That calico is black, is it not?" The disconcerted Papuan thinking perhaps that I had a sudden fit of insanity, hesitated a moment, and then replied as I had foreseen, "Yes, Taubada, that calico is black." But I, following the experience a little further, said in a mocking tone, "Idiot, why do you say it is black? Do you not see it is white?" This time with evident relief the Papuan replied "Surely it is white." Then with the same look and in the same tone as employed with the first question: "Then you do not seem to understand properly what I say. Again, is the calico black or white?" Not knowing what to say to please me the Papuan had recourse to a word of multiple sense, perhaps peculiar to primitive languages: "ISEKI YOKO," which can be translated by "I know nothing about it" or perhaps "As it please you." After that experience, my brother, now less sure, was convinced that perhaps, in effect, his manner of interrogation had helped to suggest to the "boy" the facts which he had thought to reproach me with.

Naturally, I must here say that each white man sees only one side of the character of the native. According to the point of view which occupies him as trader, planter, functionary or missionary, he has preconceived ideas, and a very long residence often these causes ideas to take deeper root.

The trader is the one who lives closest to the life of the native. Obligated by his work to speak the language of the neighbouring villages, often married to a woman of the district either to avoid solitude

or perhaps to increase his influence in his commercial dealings, he would be without doubt in the best position to undertake their ethnography. If by chance there exists an exceptional trader who has thought of attempting it, he will perceive quickly that he is lacking in many things to be able to carry to advantage a work of any importance and that to execute such work he cannot extemporise, that long study, a knowledge of similar work in other countries, and a special training is necessary. Then this trader would have his own affairs to attend to, and if, in his leisure moments, he did interrogate his Papuan friends, he would know only how to make a few notes which would soon be neglected.

The planter living as he does on a plantation far from all villages, sees only the "boys" in his service. These "boys" are usually recruited from different parts of the country and speak different dialects. The planter rarely knows a native language and his only means of talking to his "boys" is by using the picturesque and amusing "Pigeon English," a means too crude for exchanging ideas. Indeed, if the conditions were favorable for him to carry on ethnographical work, I can say that in most cases, like the trader, he would not think of it.

The functionary represents the authority which inflicts fines and terms of imprisonment, and in his case, more than any other, it would be difficult for him to know the native because the latter must always humble himself before him.

As for the missionary, his work is to teach. He teaches the new truths in an effort to replace, what is for the native, truths handed down from their ancestors which are naturally firmly established. The native is either too polite or too timorous to contradict the affirmation of a white man and in the presence of the missionary he either believes or gives the impression of believing. I have seen native converts who are village preachers return to the village where they were born to take part in native ritualistic ceremonies the belief in which is inborn — such as the farewell to the BOLUMAS returning to TUMA after the fetes of MILAMILA which Dr Malinowski describes in one of his books. The missionary believes he has convinced the native because he is never contradicted.

And then, above all, is the difficulty of overcoming after several years, or even months, of sojourn, the feeling of lassitude in tropical climates. One arrives with lively feeling from Europe or Australia, promises himself to be energetic, and rebels against the slow methods of others. For instance, on debarking from the steamer I saw that to construct a wharf two or three hundred "boys" were sent in Indian file to a place half a mile away to each carry one stone and throw it in the water where the wharf was to be thereby slowly formed, and then to return to continue that process. (Whitten's wharf at Samarai was built by this method.) One smiles at this lack of initiative, and tells himself that if he had such work to do he would at least use wheelbarrows to simplify and hasten the task; but a few months afterwards, after his first attack of fever, he does as they do. How many of us arrived there with great ideas of studying and of doing much work, which was quickly abandoned because we were soon gripped by the habitual lassitude which left us only sufficient energy to do essential work.

All these reasons explain why so many details have escaped observation in the Trobriand Islands until Dr Malinowski came along. Likewise one can explain the reasons for the sincere opposition raised against his theories. But however sincere these objections may be, they can be no more convincing than those I made myself to Dr Malinowski.

I [had already been] living in the country for eight years. My brother was already there for twelve years, and neither he nor I had ever heard the like. We had never thought to enquire on the subject. It seemed so evident that men, wherever they may be, know the consequences of the sexual act, that any

hypothesis to the contrary appeared senseless. For some little time I held a similar opinion to the natives regarding Dr. M. Yes, our natives thought his manner of doing things rather strange. Here is a man who comes from a country far away to fulfil an aim that they thought futile. Neither missionary nor magistrate, neither buying nor selling, always asking questions and giving tobacco in exchange for words. It was very astonishing. And then at regular hours, towards the fall of night, he went to the beach and performed certain movements similar to mysterious incantations (these were physical exercises). All this was suspicious to them, and I had often to reply to their anxious enquiries about this man whom they thought strange (perhaps certain whites also thought the same). In a word, he appeared to them not to be overburdened with sense.

Dr M. did not alter his views when he heard my exclamations. I hear him say again that he expected after his return to Europe, that doubts similar to mine would arise, and that he foresaw coming from New Guinea many contradictions (they have come if I remember aright, and from important personages who have had a long residence in Papua). I hear him asking me to join him in his enquiries in order to be convinced so that I could support him in his assertions—to be his witness if that was ever necessary.

In the study of their mythical beliefs one sees quickly that man has never intervened in the conception of the enfant. Thus the first inhabitants of the Trobriand Islands had for ancestors three women who sprang up miraculously from a deep hole one day — no one knows why — changing by turns into a dog and an iguana. If one is anxious to know how in course of time these women conceived without the intervention of man one gets as reply only an astonished stare. That last question was put by me long before the arrival of Dr M. I should have from that moment become aware of their strange ignorance. The fact that three women could emerge from a hole is sufficiently extraordinary. That they then give birth to children seemed to be only adding one miracle to another. Other religions have shown to us similar facts, and in principle, I respect the beliefs of the natives. I thought that this case of the three women must be considered an exceptional fact as well as those examples of other religions. For the native it was a normal belief.

In their other legends one finds numerous Eves but never an Adam. In what passes for, or rather, what is their religion, souls run through a cycle in which after a stay for an indeterminate period at TUMA, the isle of the dead, they are carried back by the waves to fecundate the women on the isles of the living. In this beautiful myth which helps them so well to carry on life, and to die with a calmness I have often admired (are they not certain to be re-born after a happy stay at TUMA?) the role of the male is rendered quite useless for the perpetuation of the species. In reflecting on this, and establishing a correlation between the facts stated by Dr M. which were checked by me, and their myths, one finds in them a certain logic, and if one adopts for an instant their beliefs, their faith, one is obliged to admit that they have good reason.

There is the amusing case of a native who, having left his village to go to work on a far-off plantation for two years, found on his return a young infant conceived and born during his absence. The father (?) did not show surprise. To have a child is the natural function of a woman. That fact, in his eyes, did not prove in any way that he had suffered by conjugal infidelity. He accepted the infant because he is the father of every child born of his wife, and not by what, in our eyes, would be extreme kindness, or want of morality. The same man if he knew he had been deceived would be very angry. I may add that the title of father has not the same value in this Papuan social state as in ours, since the infant receives the totem maternal.

It was equally interesting to learn if that ignorance we are here studying extends also to animals. In that domain the enquiry was much simpler. These men whom we call savages reveal great modesty and reserve and are exceedingly bashful when one interrogates them on the bearing between the sexes. On that point it may be said that two people betrothed or married will avoid keeping close or speaking to each other in company, and their politeness makes it necessary to shun all allusion to their communal life. A white person ignorant of these customs could easily make a serious faux pas which would do him serious harm in his relations with the natives and give them the impression that he is a man of very bad manners. The pig is the animal which lives nearest to them and is the most valuable. There can be no feast without pig; to own pigs is the most certain sign of wealth and power, and only chiefs have the right to possess many of them. When it is small it lives with the family and is surrounded by much kindness, to the point that I have seen women suckling the young porkers. However, that will not prevent them when the times comes, from eating it, and killing it in the most cruel manner. The feet of the animal are tied, and a long pole is passed between the tied feet and it is suspended over live coals until it is cooked. I have put an end to this horrible spectacle by stopping the sufferings of the unhappy beast with a bullet between the eyes each time I have seen it. This intervention was always resented by the natives with hostile looks. To do that would be dangerous in some places, or even in others for a white man not well known to the natives. I remember when once going through a village I heard heart-rending shrieks sounding almost human, and approaching, I saw roasting a pig very much alive whose ear already cooked had been cut and was being eaten by a native. I gave the order to take the beast off the fire. I will never forget the look of gratitude that pig gave me, and I put an end to its misery with a bullet.

These beasts are more like the wild boar and are very abundant. They have black hair, a long snout, and pointed ears. Some pigs of the same breed as those of European countries were imported by white men. When the Papuans saw those beasts with long hanging ears, white bristles, and flat snouts, their grand desire was to possess some of them. I imported several to sell, and to my surprise, the females were alone sought, whilst I was offered very little in exchange for the males. In the villages all the pigs are castrated, none being reserved to reproduce, so that the sows can be fecundated only by the wild boars they meet in the bush. I tried to make the natives understand that it would be better to obtain a pig from me, and by leaving it entire, that the breed of all the village pigs would be improved. Never have I been able to make them understand that, and each time they have obtained one of our pigs they soon castrated it. Thus when their sows can unite only with the wild boars, they have only young ones which degenerate the breed very quickly, to the great surprise of the owner. Although the great desire of the natives was to own animals of a race new to them, I have never been able to make them understand that it is absolutely necessary to reserve a couple to perpetuate the breed. These Papuans believe only that a female suffices, and that belief seemed to me well established as much in regard to animals as to men. Therefore the inhabitants of the Trobriand Islands, not understanding that the consequences of the sexual act is the infant, believe that the male is useless in the mystery of fecundation.

Thus here comes the day when we are both back in civilisation and I can offer the testimony that Dr M. had asked of me over there. In these few lines I have tried to do my best, only too happy to offer my little contribution to that great work which was prepared in that far-off country during the long years under hard conditions and with a courage I can appreciate because I was a witness of it.

In spite of all the hardships one meets with, one regrets to have left that country so attractive in all its savagery. Whilst I write, through my window comes noises, rumblings, and every indication that I live in a large city — Paris. As in a dream the past years come bounding into my memory, and the thought of them almost effaces all recollections of the present. I again see the coral rocks with the sea breaking over them in foam-crested waves, the long coasts bordered by the tall coconut trees. I there see



passing my good Papuans, wild and cruel children, but withal charming and gentle, and I hear their songs humming through the village. I again see Dr M and myself in our dress of that period — old shirt and khaki trousers—speaking of Europe which then seemed to us so far away, and supposing that one day we would meet there, dressed perhaps like everyone else—with a stiff collar.

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Readers will note that certain portions of Brudo's document have been marked with a bar in the margin. These passages were not in fact part of the original text Brudo wrote in response to Malinowski's request for support in his dispute with Rentoul. Perhaps because Brudo's arguments were similar to those of his own published response, Malinowski made no use of the 1931 version (which is preserved in Malinowski's his papers at Yale) However, Brudo's correspondence suggests that around that time he began to receive encouragement towards literary/ethnographic production from other sources, and (apparently after another visit from Malinowski in late March or April 1932) he revised the text. Deleting ten paragraphs of criticism and ethnographic example that explicitly addressed the debate with Rentoul, he added the passages marked here in the margin. Brudo must have taken this new text with him when he returned in 1935 to the Trobriand Islands. There he became friendly with Leo Austen, the new administrative official (Assistant Resident Magistrate), who like Rentoul was a graduate of Radcliffe-Brown's course. Newly posted to the Trobriands, Austen undertook research on "whether the natives had any ideas concerning the fertilizing influence of semen," first using interpreters, then speaking and transcribing Kiriwinan himself. In 1934, he published an ethnographically rich essay in Oceania supporting Malinowski's position (1934:102), and in correspondence with Malinowski reassured him that "of course Rentoul is quite hopelessly wrong" (BMP: LA/BM 9/22/33). When Brudo returned to the Trobriands Malinowski encouraged Austen to get to know him, sending the two one copy of the proofs of Coral Gardens to share. With their wives, Austen and Brudo often met for bridge and ethnographic discussion. Brudo would certainly have showed his text to Austen, who seems to have translated and sent a copy to the Government Anthropologist, F.E. Williams, in whose file it stayed (BMP; FEWP).

One remarkable thing about this text is the difference in tone between the unmarked and marked portions. The former deal with essentially the same issues raised in prior and subsequent debate on the question—the evidence of myth, the related case of animals, the authority of research in the vernacular language, other problems of the distortion of testimony, and the analogy (here an implication) to Christian concepts of the virgin birth. By contrast, the first of the two long marked sections that were added later attempts a more conventionally literary wind-in-the-palms reminiscence about the atmospherics of island life and the good companionship, the raconteurship, and the longing for "civilization" the trader had shared with the Ethnographer in those burnished bygone days. These memories were framed by a romantically primitivist view of human evolution consonant with that "recant[ed]" but not repudiated by Malinowski. Back on the island, "plunged right into the life lived by our prehistoric ancestors," the two men had indulged a mutual longing for a "civilised life" that "then seemed... so far away"; but having returned to Europe—and to dress in "a stiff collar"—it was now the other "far-off country" where "primitive beings" had been their "friends" that seemed to Brudo "so attractive in its savagery." Nostalgia was thus reciprocal, spanning a chasm in time. On either side, longing and evolutionary assumption were of a piece. Spatial and temporal distance were commutative terms (cf. 1967: 230).

Although not addressed as such by Brudo, evolutionary assumption was also implicated, in a somewhat paradoxical way, in the issue treated in his second extended addition: the relative ethnographic authority of various types of observers. Although in certain contexts Malinowski was inclined to present the Trobrianders as highly pragmatic, when it came to paternity he persisted in representing their beliefs in supernatural terms which suggested the evolutionary distance separating them from civilized common

sense (this despite doubts that had been raised by Billy Hancock, another Trobriand man on the spot [Stocking 1977]). By contrast, his administrative antagonist, Rentoul (as well as F.E. Williams, to whom Austen had sent Brudo's comments) preferred, in treating the issue of paternity, to insist that the Trobrianders had a pragmatic, common sense level of reproductive knowledge. Williams, who elsewhere was himself inclined to argue in evolutionary terms (Stocking 1995:389), was willing to grant that the Trobrianders might in certain contexts hold an elaborate "magico-religious theory" of conception. But in a letter to Austen (in which he mentioned Brudo), Williams insisted that they they also had "a common sense theory." Both views could in fact be "held, despite their inconsistency, by the same individuals," who diplomatically cited one or the other depending on context (cuckolds sought to save face even when they knew better by citing actions of baloma)—an interpretation that "fell into line" with cases elsewhere in Papua:

The thing that I find hard to credit, in spite of the researches of experts, is that a common sense Trobriander in a common sense frame of mind, with the baloma completely beyond his range of attention (if it ever is) should really believe that the father has no share in making the child. I have found no such ignorance in other parts of the Territory where I have enquired, and it is this particularly that makes it hard for me to believe that a comparatively advanced people like the Trobrianders should have been so slow in picking up the idea. Is it possible that both you and Malinowski have been so interested in the baloma etc that your informants have naturally tended to take up that line to the exclusion of a more common sense one when discussing conception with you? (FEWP: Box 2989, Item 4: Williams/Austen 4/24/35).

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