



---

The Meaning of Paternity and the Virgin Birth Debate

Author(s): Carol Delaney

Source: *Man*, New Series, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Sep., 1986), pp. 494-513

Published by: [Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2803098>

Accessed: 21/07/2011 11:05

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=rai>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



*Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Man*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## THE MEANING OF PATERNITY AND THE VIRGIN BIRTH DEBATE

CAROL DELANEY

*Harvard University*

The notion of paternity has been central to theoretical debates about the evolution and organisation of human society. These debates were intensified when it appeared that certain contemporary 'primitives' did not acknowledge paternity. Their procreative beliefs were classified, along with the Virgin Birth, as examples of a widespread theme of supernatural birth. In this article, I argue that it is the anthropologists who have not understood the *meaning* of paternity and thus have distorted the beliefs of others and obscured the implications of our own. Drawing upon fieldwork in Turkey, I show that paternity has meant begetting; it has meant the primary and creative role, while maternity has meant nurturing and bearing. This 'monogenetic' meaning of paternity is made explicit in Christianity and exemplified by the Virgin Birth but is consistent with the theological concept of monotheism. Similarly the procreative beliefs of the Trobriand Islanders and the Australian Aborigines are consistent with their cosmological beliefs. These are different systems, but both are integrated between intimate and ultimate concerns. Finally, it is asked why paternity has been of such fascination to theorists from the nineteenth century until the present.

The controversy fuelled by the publication of Edmund Leach's paper 'Virgin birth' (1967) and fanned in the pages of *Man* between 1967–75 revolved around the question of 'whether certain primitive peoples . . . were or were not ignorant of the facts of physiological paternity' (Leach 1967: 39). The question itself was not new but already part of the nineteenth-century debate on the nature of kinship and the precedence of matriarchy versus patriarchy in the evolution of social organisation.<sup>1</sup> At that time, the general consensus that ignorance of paternity was a feature of primeval human society (e.g. Bachofen 1861; Engels 1884; McLennan 1865; Morgan 1870; 1877) rendered the question speculative and therefore necessarily closed to empirical confirmation or refutation. The case was reopened with the 'discovery' that certain contemporary peoples, notably the Australian Aborigines and Trobriand Islanders, appeared not to recognise paternity. Despite numerous ethnographic studies and lengthy discussion, the question has still not been satisfactorily answered.

Instead of trying to establish or disprove the 'ignorance' of the 'primitives', I intend to stir the ashes once again by suggesting that it is the anthropologists who have been ignorant of the meaning of paternity, and because of this the question has been misconceived. By refocusing the emphasis I hope to show that the most significant aspects of this debate have not yet been glimpsed. This shift in perspective is intended not to point out specific flaws but to expose certain

assumptions that have informed the investigation of these issues to date. The issues have to do with what reproduction is all about and the relationship between procreative beliefs and the wider context (world view, cosmology, culture) in which they are found.

Paternity is a concept, the meaning of which is derived from its interrelations with other concepts and beliefs; it is not a kind of categorical entity, the presence or absence of which can be established empirically. Because paternity was envisaged as a physical rather than conceptual relation, the debate was undermined from the start. Even the question about physiological paternity presupposes a view of reproduction, typical in the West, as primarily a natural and therefore universal process. Such a conception places it outside the grasp of specific cultures, as are all natural phenomena. In this view paternity is automatically a natural fact, unlike maternity which was held to be a matter of observation. Paternity is also an inference, but an inference that, given reasonable intelligence and observation over time, most peoples presumably would make.<sup>2</sup> The question became constituted as an either/or type; either the 'primitives' made the inference or they did not, either they had knowledge or they were ignorant. Their beliefs were thought to reflect either the absence of knowledge or the denial of it (see Leach 1967: 46–7, note 1; Spiro 1968; Montagu 1974 for characterisation of the various positions). In the case of denial, the beliefs were interpreted as a kind of religious dogma, the truth of which was relevant in one context but not another (Leach 1967); alternatively, the denial was explained as an attempt to deflect Oedipal hostility away from the father (Jones 1924; Spiro 1968; 1982). In either case, however, the absence or denial of paternity allowed the beliefs to be classified as examples of a widespread theme of supernatural birth exhaustively outlined by Hartland (1894–96; 1909–10), and that is how they came to be associated with the Virgin Birth.

My argument concerns the same elements but construes them differently. Procreation is approached as a cultural construction that expresses and reflects categories and meanings of specific cultures. Paternity and maternity are concepts embedded in such a system from which they cannot be abstracted. The meaning of paternity is not, I believe, primarily physiological; instead, the bio-physical elements are utilised for expressing social meaning, for example, gender, authority and kinship. In other words, and following Schneider, I suggest that 'the biological elements have primarily symbolic significance and that their meaning is not biology at all' (Schneider 1972: 45). Paternity has not meant merely the recognition of a physiological link between a man and a child analogous to that held to exist between a woman and the child she bears. Still less is paternity an awareness of the connexion between sexual intercourse and pregnancy, often used synonymously with paternity.<sup>3</sup> What should be, but has never been, explicitly articulated is that paternity is not the semantic equivalent of maternity. Traditionally, even the physiological contribution to the child was coded differently for men and women, and therefore their connexion to the child was imagined as different. Maternity has meant giving nurture and giving birth. Paternity has meant begetting. Paternity has meant the primary, essential and creative role.

In this article, I suggest that these are the meanings exemplified by the Virgin

Birth. Even though the father is divine, the meaning of paternity is the same as for the human father; even though Mary is unique among women, the meaning of maternity is epitomised by her. The theory of procreation illuminated by this paradigm is, I believe, a de-natured or spiritualised version of the folk theory that has been dominant in the West for millennia. It is a 'monogenetic' theory implying that a child *originated* from only one source. This theory is not universal but neither is it confined to Christianity. At the symbolic level, I believe it is consistent with the theological doctrine of monotheism. This is not to say that this theory of procreation is a doctrine promulgated by these religions, rather it is inscribed in symbolic form—in attitudes, values, laws and institutions—in the cultural logic of these traditions.

The relation between physical and metaphysical realities, or between procreation and cosmology, suggests a perspective for re-viewing the beliefs of certain 'primitives'. I maintain that they have no concept of paternity at either the divine or human level, but that their beliefs about procreation are consistent with *their* cosmology. 'We need', says Geertz, 'to look for systematic relationships among diverse phenomena, not for substantive identities among similar ones' (1973: 49). We need to pursue meanings where they lead instead of stopping at the borders marking domains such as reproduction, kinship or religion.

In order to substantiate these claims, I shall draw upon my fieldwork in Turkey.<sup>4</sup> Turks are Muslims and do not believe in the dogma of the Virgin Birth, nor that Jesus was the Son of God, although they do believe he was one of the great prophets. Muslims are also opposed to the familial symbolism of Christianity. At the same time, they share much of the history and heritage of Biblical religion. In particular, they believe that Islam is a recall to the one true faith given to Abraham, to whom all three monotheisms (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) attribute their origin,<sup>5</sup> and to whom God gave the covenant: 'I shall multiply thy *seed* as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore' (Genesis 22:17, my emphasis). Among the Turks whom I studied, the correlation between the 'monogenetic' theory of procreation and the concept of monotheism was upheld. In Islam, however, the analogy may have a more metaphoric than metonymic character.

#### *Procreation beliefs from a Turkish village*

In the village where I worked, gender definitions, that is, cultural notions of male and female, derive from the symbolically interpreted perception of their role in procreation. The theory of procreation can be stated very simply. The male is said to plant the seed and the woman is said to be like a field. Occasionally villagers refer to the Koran to support their view: 'Women are given to you as fields, go therein and sow your seed' (Sura 2: 233). Note that God speaks to men as subjects; women are objectified. In any case, seed and field are the terms in which villagers imagine and discuss procreation.

These images have been noted in a number of ethnographies of Turkey (Engelbrektsson 1978; Erdentuğ 1959; Magnarella 1974; Meeker 1970) but not

elaborated. This neglect may be partly attributed to conventional sociologically-oriented anthropology in which figurative language has been viewed as the decorative veil that conceals the naked, 'true' reality. Unfortunately, this view ignores the way in which metaphor and imagery condense conception and mould perception. On the other hand, these particular images may have been dismissed or ignored because they were all too familiar. These were the images used to explain procreation to me when I was growing up in America in the 1940's. I am neither unique nor an anachronism for I still hear them being used today. Since they have a long history in Judaeo-Christian culture, their particular relevance for Turkey was not perceived; at the same time their wider implications were ignored. The images of seed and soil are so deeply inscribed in our culture that we have been unable to read the message; the perspective of another culture helps to illuminate our own.

*Tohum'dan çocuk gelir*—the child comes from the seed; *erkek'ten çocuk gelir*—the child comes from the man. When I suggested to villagers that one could not have a child without a woman, it was clear to them I had missed the point. Men give the seed which encapsulates the potential child. A woman's body, like soil, provides the nurturant context for the foetus. This was graphically stated by another Turkish villager:

If you plant wheat, you get wheat. If you plant barley, you get barley. It is the seed which determines the kind of plant which will grow, while the field nourishes the plant but does not determine the kind. The man gives the seed, and the woman is like the field (Meeker 1970: 157).

The nurture that women provide—blood in the womb and milk at the breast—can be supplied by any woman. This nourishment swells the being of the seed-child and while it affects the growth and development of the child, it does not affect its essential identity; that comes from the father. Women's nurturant capacity is valued, but it must also be remarked that the substance they provide ultimately derives from men since men are thought to engender both males and females.<sup>6</sup> The substance women contribute pertains only to this world—it is temporal and perishable and does not carry the eternal identity of a person. The child *originates* with the father, from his seed. This is the basis for what I call a 'monogenetic' theory of procreation. This is borne out by the verb used to describe the male role in the process. The word *döllenmenek* means 'to inseminate' and incorporates the word *döl*, which means seed, foetus, child. (*Tohum* is the more common word for seed.) *Döllenmek* is, thus, almost the exact equivalent of the English 'to inseminate,' literally 'to put the seed in'. The *döl* is inserted by way of the *dölyolu* (seedpath or vagina) into the *dölyatağı* (seedbed or womb). Villagers give encouragement to a pregnant woman by saying, 'May it come out as easily as it went in', which also confirms the 'monogenetic' theory. That is, *döllenmek* does not mean to fertilise the ovum or to provide half the genetic constitution of the child, it means the essential thing. A contemporary Muslim scholar elaborates on this:

The flesh, the bones, the muscles, the blood, the brain and indeed all the faculties and the whole complicated and yet wonderfully coordinated machinery of the human body constituting a complete microcosm is all potentially contained in less than a millionth part of a drop of fluid (Khan 1962: 186–7).

The seed carries the spark of life which is theoretically eternal but demands that men produce sons to carry it down the generations. In Turkey women continue to bear children until a son is born. The son is the incarnation of the father and the one who can continue the patriline. *Sülale*, the Turkish word for patriline, is derived from the Arabic and means something like reproductive semen (Rahman 1980: 17 and personal communication). There is a saying, 'A boy is the flame of the line, a girl the embers of a house'. In other words, seed is imagined as a kind of living torch passed from father to son, *ad infinitum*, while women are the fuel consumed in the process. If a man has no sons, it is said: *ocağı sonmuş*, his hearth has been extinguished. The flame and the name of the line have died out.

In this symbolic construction of procreation, female bodies are relatively undifferentiated, like soil. This view of women's bodies is illuminated by village notions of foetal development derived from the 'evidence' of miscarriage. If the foetal material is just a mass of stuff, like a piece of meat, i.e. undifferentiated, it is presumed to be female. If, on the other hand, it is well defined and has all its parts, it is assumed to be male. Moreover, female bodies are distinguished primarily by whether they are fertile or barren, a distinction that further displays the identification of women with soil. A man is either potent or impotent, notions that imply agency and power rather than a passive but intrinsic quality. Since female bodies and the nurture they provide is something any fertile woman can provide, what becomes critical in this theory is a guarantee that a man's child is from his own seed.

Villagers' more common use of the word 'field' (*tarla*) rather than 'soil' (*toprak*) to describe women's role and function helps to shed light on what is significant in that role. A field is a field not only because it has been cultivated; it is still a field whether it has just been turned, lying fallow or about to be harvested. In other words, although a field is composed of soil, its defining feature is that it is enclosed or 'covered' by ownership. Analogously, the female soil must be enclosed and covered by a man if he is to know without doubt that the seed-child is his own.

The enclosure or covering of women is inextricably involved with notions of honour and shame, and neither, I have argued elsewhere (Delaney in press *a*) can be understood without an appreciation of the theory of procreation. Briefly summarised, I suggested that the various methods of female enclosure (infibulation and clitoridectomy, veiling and seclusion, harem and eunuch guards, early marriage and psychological conditioning) are methods to enclose the human fields, like earthly ones, in order to provide such assurance. The practice of marriage within the group (endogamy) can also be viewed as a method of providing such assurance; I think it is also related to the association of women with land. It is not so much that women inherit land (which they rarely do despite stipulations in the Koran) but that in the symbolic sense, women *are* land. The land and its fruits are for the benefit of the group; to give away a daughter would be like giving away a field. It would diminish both the honour and the livelihood of the group. All the marriages that took place while I was in the village were endogamous.<sup>7</sup>

The folk theory of procreation entails profound ideas about male and female

personhood (gender). The gender definitions are not so different from those that have prevailed in the West. They are similar, I believe, because they are both related to the same theory of procreation. In the Turkish village men are imagined to have creative power within them, which gives them a core of identity, self-motivation or autonomy. Women lack the power to create and therefore to project themselves. Men's bodies are viewed as self-contained while women's bodily boundaries oscillate and shift, for example, in developing of breasts and the swelling of pregnancy; they leak in menstruation and lactation, and are permeable in intercourse and birth. Physical attributes, filtered through this logic, take on moral qualities. The notion that a woman's intelligence is not as sharp as a man's suggests that she lacks the proper equipment to penetrate the ambiguities of life, she does not have a core of principles to determine the line between right and wrong but oscillates and shifts according to the influences brought upon her. In the West, women's emotional lability is considered a liability and is thought to relate to the tides of the menstrual cycle. Villagers, both male and female, believed that menstruation was given to women as a punishment for Eve's act of disobedience against God and her vulnerability to the temptations of Satan which was used as a rationale for male 'protection' of women. The Biblical version is not dissimilar: to Eve, God said, 'I shall multiply thy sorrow and thy conception, in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee' (Genesis 3:16). While there is no concept of the Fall in Islam, Eve's acts brought *pislik* into existence. *Pislik* means dirtiness, but in this case refers to the metabolic processes, especially defecation, urination and sweating that indicate the mutability, corruption and decay of earthly existence. In addition, women were given menstruation to indicate their deeper immersion in carnal life.

While menstruation signals the possibility of life in this world, it is simultaneously a sign of mortality (see Delaney in press *b*). It is no wonder that women's blood is considered polluting in sacred contexts devoted to eternal verities. Menstruating women are kept from touching the Koran, going to the Mosque and from performing the rituals of the Hac.

Menstruation receives scanty notice in anthropological literature generally, but when one turns to the Middle East it is practically non-existent because of the taboo nature of the subject. No doubt there are local variations and restrictions, but the few sources in which menstruation is noted at all (Dwyer 1978; El-Saadawi 1980; Mernissi 1975) confirm the observations made here. I do not believe that menstruation is universally regarded as polluting, but even where it is, it must be analysed with reference to specific cultures.

In the village where I worked, and throughout rural and much of urban Turkey, as well as among large numbers of Turks living abroad, girls are 'covered' at menarche. To be covered (*kapalı*) means that from this point forward women's heads must be covered so that no hair shows, for showing of hair is shameful. Although it is not possible here to enter into a discussion of the symbolic significance of hair for both men and women, it is important to note the association of menstruation and head covering. In other words, attention is drawn away from the female genitals which are the seat of shame and transferred to the head. Pubic hair is removed and head hair is covered. The head scarf is

symbolically both a sign of shame and the means of covering it. The woman whose head is covered also indicates that she is under the mantle of protection of some man.

In contrast, male genitals become the focus of attention and pride. Between the ages of seven and twelve, *sünnet* (circumcision) is performed on Turkish boys. A boy gains a sense of pride in undergoing this ordeal, but conversely, pride is focused on the penis. The removal of a covering symbolises manhood, but it is also a sign of membership in the brotherhood of Islam. The relationship between the male generative organ and religion, maintained by moral lessons, jokes and allusions, and aspects of the wedding, raises the question of whether women can ever belong as fully as men.<sup>8</sup>

The creative life-giving ability of men is felt to be god-like. The husband-father is considered the second god after Allah. A well-known Muslim scholar reiterates this:

The Muslim family is the miniature of the whole Muslim society . . . the father and his authority symbolizes that of God in the world (Hossein Nasr in Smith 1980: 13).

Men's procreative ability is the rationale given, in the village, for their power and authority. Men are considered to be the authors/creators of children as God is thought to be the Author/Creator of the world. Because of this, children belong to their father; they are his seed. In the case of divorce, the children stay with him; in the case of death, they stay with his relatives. If his ex-wife or widow remarries, the children remain behind. The woman has internalised this idea and says that the new husband could not care for another *man's* child. The child does not belong to her in the same way. In Islam, the human male in procreation is metaphorically analogous to God;<sup>9</sup> in Christianity, God the Father is substituted for the human male in an extraordinary act of procreation. The difference in emphasis may be important for doctrinal differences, but for the purpose of understanding the concept of paternity, it is negligible.

### *Virgin birth*

The concept of paternity as discussed in the foregoing section is exemplified by the Virgin Birth. What is almost transparent was not seen. For regardless of whether conception occurs by seminal word or physical seed, the notion of paternity is the same. It reveals that the origin and identity of a child comes only from one source,<sup>10</sup> it reveals a 'monogenetic' theory of procreation. This does not mean that women contribute nothing, as was made clear with regard to Turkish women. Instead it reveals that there is one who creates and transmits (father) and one who receives and nurtures (mother);<sup>11</sup> in this case it is God who creates and transmits, Mary is the medium for the manifestation of this creation—she is the one through whom the word became flesh. Her contribution is what makes Jesus human, a person of flesh and blood. This contribution could theoretically have been provided by any woman; what distinguished Mary was her purity. In order to be worthy of her role as the bearer of divinity, she herself had to be pure. Her immaculate condition gave



birth to a number of theological dilemmas<sup>12</sup> which are beyond the scope of this article and do not affect the point I wish to stress, which is that the origin, essence and identity of Jesus was given by the Father. The Father and Son are One. Mary is not imagined as co-creator or partner in this endeavour; indeed if that had been the case, she would have been equivalent to God, but she is not. If that had been the case, Mother and Child would have been One, but they are not. Mary's role is secondary, supportive and nurturant, and this is the view of the role of women in the church and in the folk theory of procreation. This is not to deny that Mary is worshipped, but she is revered precisely for those qualities that are an integral part of this view of procreation.

Paternity means that the male role in the production of a child is understood as *the* generative and creative one. Leach missed this because his sights were focused on other themes. For him, as for many others, the Virgin Birth is one variant of the theme of supernatural birth, a 'common structural theme, the metaphysical topography of the relationship between gods and men' (Leach 1967: 39). In fact, the Virgin Birth displays a relation between the one God who is male and an earthly female, a significant difference to be discussed below. In any case, in the Trobriands, the gods have nothing to do with a woman becoming pregnant; instead a *baloma* (matrilineal ancestor of the woman) decides to reenter the substantial world.<sup>13</sup> The construction of the problem as an example of a type is a way of assimilating another culture to our own, a way of saying it is not so different from ours. The motive may be admirable, but the method is not; it glosses over significant differences and blinds us to the peculiarities of our own beliefs. In the Trobriands, virgins neither conceive nor give birth. The so-called supernatural birth among Trobriand or Aboriginal women is in fact, the normal everyday, dare I say 'natural' way of doing things, whereas the Virgin Birth is felt to be a unique event in world history.

Since the dogma of the Virgin Birth disavows *physical* paternity, Leach thinks it is comparable with the beliefs of the Trobrianders which also disavow such a connexion. At the same time, Leach points out that 'the myth of the Virgin Birth does not imply ignorance of physiological paternity. On the contrary, it serves to reinforce the dogma that the Virgin's child is the Son of God' (1967: 42). At the conceptual level, the dogma of the Virgin Birth is not inconsistent with notions of physical paternity. From this he deduces that the Trobriand cosmological beliefs do not necessarily exclude the knowledge of physiological paternity. That may be true, but what he fails to consider is the possibility that it is not primarily a matter of the difference between physical and metaphysical paternity, but about the concept of paternity itself.

I do not contest Leach's distinction between physical and metaphysical levels or realities, but I do believe there is consistency between them. I am also not convinced that his distinction is the important one. The anthropologist's task is not the same as the theologian's. The latter needs to stress the distinction between divine and mundane procreation precisely to emphasise that God is Father and that Jesus is extraordinary—that Father and the Son are One. The anthropologist's task is to try to understand what the concept of paternity is. This is just what they did not do. Had they done so, they would have realised that paternity has meant begetting, maternity bearing. It is true that the maternal

relation establishes a physiological link with a child, and women have been defined by and often confined to this role. The paternal link is also, at the human level, physiological, but it is much more.

Paternity has not meant merely the awareness that the male has a role in the production of a child, for which there can be several explanations.<sup>14</sup> Paternity has meant the primary and creative role. By means of the Virgin Birth, Christianity makes explicit the 'monogenetic theory' of procreation that is, I believe, consistent with the theological concept of monotheism. We are speaking of genesis at two levels.

### *Monogenesis/monotheism*

The theory of procreation has implications for far more than the relation between the sexes, for it entails notions of coming-into-being at a wider, more encompassing level. As the villagers of Turkey indicated, thinking about procreation teaches the order and meaning of Creation.

Genesis and the Koran inscribe the revelation that there is only one principle of creation manifested at the divine and human levels and only one God. This is the central core of faith from which all three monotheisms have sprung. Without a partner, God created the world. He also created the first man, Adam.<sup>15</sup> God gave Adam the power to continue creation, by means of his 'seed'; and Genesis is the record of the genealogical procession of seed: who begat whom. The first woman, Eve, was created differently. In one of the two accounts in Genesis she was taken from Adam's body, certainly a reversal of the 'facts' open to observation! Henceforth men create females as well as males, that is, create the means through which to project themselves, the means through which their creativity can become manifest.

The male role in procreation reflects on the finite level God's power in creating the world. Put another way, the doctrine of monotheism is the fullest expression—the apotheosis—of the folk monogenetic theory of procreation. I am not trying to argue for a cause and effect relation,<sup>16</sup> but to point out that monogenesis and monotheism are two aspects of the same system, in triune form.

While there are great differences between Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the common and fundamental belief is that there is only one God who is Creator. In Islam, this belief is the defining feature of the 'Peoples of the Book' which distinguishes them from all others. Whatever one believes about the origins of monotheism, it stands in direct contrast to the polytheistic religions of the ancient Near East in which a god and goddess in their sacred conjunction engendered the world. The transformation is not merely a reduction in numbers (a matter of degree) but a radical difference in kind, and a difference Leach did not fully appreciate. Not only is there only one God, but divinity *is* creativity and potency—a principle animating the universe—and in these systems it is implicitly or explicitly masculine.

Despite some attempts to dismiss the sexist language and imagery in these religious systems as merely accidental, the resistance mounted against women's

demands for changes in the language and institutional structure supports the view that they are intrinsic.<sup>17</sup> Some communities concerned with the negative feminine imagery in monotheistic religions have sought more positive identifications. The Church, as the community of Christians, has often been symbolised as feminine. Similarly, there 'is the Muslim notion of the community of faith, in Arabic *al-umma*, a word closely related to the word *umm* meaning mother. Thus the Muslim community is seen in its relationship with God, as essentially receptive, open to receive the deposition of the Divine Word' (Austin 1983: 43–4). In my view, these are not positive associations and convey the opposite of what they were intended to do. Transparent in these associations is the notion that the seminal word (like seed) is whole, transcendent, and comes only from one source, while the feminine symbolism is associated with the temporal and physical aspects of existence. These images only illuminate further the procreative theory (seed-soil) I have been discussing. They glorify the receptivity of the female but deprive her of creativity.

Procreation cannot be confined only to the physiological process of reproduction or to the relation between the sexes, for in symbolic form it is felt to be an expression of a fundamental aspect of the universe. It might be objected here that the terms seed and soil are used in other parts of the world to describe the process of procreation. While that is true, we cannot assume identical meaning *a priori*. One needs to know what the associations are and how they are articulated with a whole system of beliefs about the world. What is significant in this context is that the notion of seed has been utilised symbolically to portray a 'monogenetic' theory of procreation. The projection of creative power onto God renders it omnipresent but invisible. Because of the structural and symbolic alliance between God and men, men partake of this power so that their dominance seems natural and in the order of things. At the same time, a symbolic and structural association between women and the earth is established. Both are created material, both are fields from which not only are the products abstracted and appropriated, but fields to be explored, perfected and controlled socially. Rather than creative beings, women are the ever-renewable soil utilised for the creations of men. This system of relations can be rendered: Woman is to Man as the created, natural world is to God. Men's creative power becomes generalised—objectified in values and institutions—men become allied with the projects and products of culture. Meanwhile, the *manifest* aspects of reproduction—pregnancy, birth and lactation come to be viewed as merely re-productive and part of nature.<sup>18</sup>

When God is removed from the system as began to happen with the general collapse of the religious world view in the nineteenth century, one must ask, as Ortner (1974) did: 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?' This is another subject and far too broad to be pursued here; I wish only to raise the question of whether the supposed universal dichotomy Nature/Culture, so much an axiom of anthropology, can have the same meaning in cultures in which Nature has a different status and meaning from that to be found in those influenced by monotheistic religions. In those traditions, nature is not only created material, but it was created for the service of humankind. Indeed, God commands: 'Fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over

the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth' (Genesis 1: 26).

In cultures influenced by monotheism a whole world is symbolically constructed and systematically integrated between notions of conception and the conception of the deity. Abraham, the person through whom the concept of monotheism allegedly enters history,<sup>19</sup> means something like 'the father is exalted' and the glorification of the father is, to me, what patriarchy is all about. These systems, spanned between monogenesis and monotheism, are systems not merely of male dominance, but of the dominance, objectification and institutionalisation of the idea that the male as father is creator of human life, as God is thought to be of life in general.

### *The ignorance of the 'primitives'*

Malinowski, though much maligned in these debates, seems to have been much closer to that understanding. He states:

The whole Christian morality . . . is strongly associated with the institution of a patrilineal and patriarchal family, with the father as *progenitor* and master of the household (1932: 159, my emphasis).

Furthermore,

a religion whose dogmatic essence is based on the sacredness of the father to son relationship, and whose morals stand or fall by a strong patriarchal family, must obviously proceed by confirming the paternal relation, by showing that it has a natural foundation (1932: 159).

He goes on to say that, 'We cannot then wonder that Paternity must be among the principal truths to be inculcated by the proselytising Christians' (1932: 159) and affirms that this was, in fact, one of the chief points made by the missionaries. It was a laying of the ground, so to speak, for the acceptance of the *logos spermatikos* and the values and structures entailed. He concludes that such a dogma would misfire in a matrilineal society.

It would misfire not because there was no place for the male in relation to children, but because there was no concept of paternity. Malinowski was aware of this and saw the danger of imposing a term such as 'father' onto 'family' configurations of other cultures and gave the following caveat: 'The term "father", as I use it here, must be taken not as having the various legal, moral and biological implications that it holds for us, but in a sense entirely specific to the society with which we are dealing' (1932: 4). Although the substitution of the word 'father' for the native term was meant to facilitate understanding, it had just the opposite effect. More than a problem of translation is involved, yet even the rules of translation were not followed, as Hocart pointed out:

The person most commonly called *tama* in Melanesia, the one most in evidence, is a man's father. He is the man who will be named, if you asked 'who is your *tama*?' It was soon noticed however, that other men besides the father are called *tama*. By all rules the first translation should have been dropped, and a new one found to cover all the different *tamas*, and thus express the essence of *tama*-ship (1952: 173).

What might Trobriand society have looked like then? What might the term 'father' look like filtered through the lens of *tama*? Although forewarned, Malinowski did not follow his own advice. Instead of unravelling the threads of *tama* to find out how they were woven into the fabric of Trobriand society, he concentrated on finding a place for the male. Abandoning the quest for the physiological link, he formulated his notion of social and psychological paternity. While this was an important point to be made at the time, it also implied that there exists 'out there' something that can be called 'father' rather like a Platonic form into which a variety of meaning-contents can be poured. He did not make the reflexive move and turn the question back on his own culture.

Although Malinowski was aware that Christian theological beliefs and the theory of procreation are consistent and mutually reinforcing, and although his material clearly indicates the consistency between Trobriand procreation beliefs and their cosmology, he does not push this insight further.

The dependence of social organization in a given society upon the ideas, beliefs and sentiments current there, is a fact of which we should never lose sight. In particular the views held about the function of sex and procreation, about the relative share of the father and mother in the procreation of a child, play a considerable part in the formation of kinship ideas (1927: 7).

His own material abundantly shows that it is not just to kinship that these ideas are relevant. We can only wonder what prevented him from pursuing his original insights. Had he done so, anthropology might also have taken a different path. The channelling of procreation beliefs into kinship may partly be explained by the privileged place that kinship has had in anthropology. Procreation was felt to be a fact of nature or biology, and kinship was felt to be the social recognition and structuring of these 'real' true biological relations as they were known or knowable.<sup>20</sup> Although kinship terminology systems were, among some anthropologists, considered to reflect a knowledge of these relations, among others, it was a conventional system of address that was, to a great extent, severed from its biological umbilical cord. Malinowski's discovery of social fatherhood was an advance for kinship theory but it did not go far enough; not only was it modelled upon biological paternity, as in the West, but procreation beliefs were still tied to kinship. Had anthropologists focused on procreation beliefs rather than on kinship they might have realised earlier that both are embedded in and integrated with an entire system of beliefs about the world. Montagu appears to recognise this when he speaks of the beliefs of the Australian Aborigines:

It is clear that the procreative beliefs of the Aborigines constitute the foundation stones of their cosmogony, kinship system, religion, and social organization and possess a significance the ramifications of which far exceed in importance any question of whether or not the Aborigines are in some cases ignorant of the fact of procreation (1974: 230).

His entire book is a testament to the way procreation beliefs of the Aborigines make sense within their society and how an understanding of these beliefs also helps us to understand their society. He shows the way these beliefs are inextricably entwined in an entire system of meaning. Yet he subverts this awareness when, towards the end of the book, he speculates about the origin of

these beliefs. His speculations immediately project a model of the nuclear family as known in the West, and he reverts to an essentialist position: 'it is possible that the primitive conceptions of fatherhood and motherhood were already in existence prior to the development of any doctrines concerning their origin and meaning' (1974: 343).

In contrast, I have been arguing that notions of procreation and the roles of the male and female (and others) in the process are not separate from the cultures in which they are found and the meanings that are given to them. Procreation, as I have constructed it, has to do with the symbols, meanings and beliefs by which life is thought to come into being. It provides a view of what life is, how and by what or whom it comes into being and for what purpose, what the person is (both male and female), how persons are related to each other, the non-human world and the cosmos.

It is not necessary to enter into a long discussion of Trobriand (or Australian Aboriginal) beliefs since they have been dealt with at length elsewhere. Brief mention of a few points, however, may help to clarify some of the issues under discussion. Among the Trobriand Islanders, every person is believed to be a reincarnation of a matrilineal ancestor. These ancestors, *baloma*, live on an island, Tuma, not far away. Alternatively they are thought to live underground from where they originally emerged, thus connecting each *dala* group with specific areas of land. *Dala* was translated by Malinowski and others as lineage or subsection of a clan. Weiner, on the other hand, says that '*dala* is created and maintained by the blood which unites the reincarnation of *baloma*, the woman and child. In this sense, a person's "blood" remains pure and uncontaminated' (1976: 39). This substance, transmitted via the matriline, provides the inalienable identity of a child, a notion very similar to that of 'seed' in the Turkish village, except that there it was created and transmitted by men, in the Trobriands by women.

When a *baloma* tires of existence on Tuma, s/he decides to re-enter the substantial world to live again among the people of his or her *dala*. In order to do that, the *baloma*-spirit must first regress from its aged spirit-body to that of a tiny spirit-foetus, small and light enough to float on the foam of the waves or driftwood to arrive at the shores of Kiriwina where it will: 1) directly enter a woman who is bathing in the sea; 2) be carried in a bucket of water to the home of the woman it will enter; or 3) be carried by another *baloma* spirit and deposited with the woman. Sometimes the *baloma* enter vaginally, but more often via the head where they descend on a tide of blood into the womb. The rising of the blood is what makes the woman dizzy and nauseous and is a sign that she is 'pregnant'. Although *baloma* do not enter virgins, intercourse is not the cause of pregnancy. In the Trobriands, people 'begin their sexual life young, lead it indefatigably and mix their lovers freely' (Malinowski 1932: 168), and yet rarely does an unmarried girl become pregnant.<sup>21</sup> This was one reason the natives did not understand the white men's insistence on the relation between intercourse and pregnancy. Malinowski recalls that he was 'directly challenged to account for the discrepancy why the cause which was repeated daily, or almost so, produced effects so rarely!' (1954: 236).

How was one to make sense of the Trobriand theory? At first, Malinowski

thought the natives were making fun of him by concealing obvious information. He later recanted that view and confirmed their belief that intercourse is normally a necessary condition, but it serves mainly to open the birth canal. Although normally achieved by means of intercourse, this procedure could be accomplished without sex, either by digital manipulation or, in the case of an important ancestress, by water dripping from a stalactite.

Children must, however, be born to married women, and they belong to her *dala*. Children are related to their 'fathers' in other ways. The man's role is to 'open the way' for the spirit child as well as to shape and mould and nourish it, both *in utero* by repeated intercourse, and after birth by holding it and feeding it mashed yams. Through this shaping the child comes to resemble the man. There is nothing very strange in all this since theories of resemblance in the West, before the development of modern genetic theory, have had a curious history. In any case, resemblance is in the eye of the beholder.<sup>22</sup>

To say that the male has a formative role is not to say that there is a concept of paternity. Even if the Trobrianders were to assert that the male made a physical contribution to the formation of a child, this does not imply paternity. For, as we have seen in the Turkish village, women are certainly considered to contribute physiologically to the child, but in no way are they thought to engender it. Men and women are differently related to a child, as they are in the Trobriands. Such beliefs are complicated and cannot be solved by a single simple piece of evidence, as Malinowski recognised. 'Trobrianders do not suffer from a specific complaint, an *ignorantia paternitatis*' (1932: xxi), rather their ideas of coming-into-being are interrelated with a whole array of other beliefs and institutions.

One must seriously question, as Malinowski did, why anthropologists (and missionaries) focused so narrowly on the question of paternity. Why did they pursue this with a doggedness not demonstrated in other areas in order to ferret out any scrap of evidence to confirm their views one way or another? Malinowski asked why the absence of knowledge about 'the processes of nutrition, or metabolism, the causes of disease and health . . . their knowledge of astronomy and physics is limited, their beliefs concerning anatomy and physiology crude. On botany and geology we would not expect them to give us any scientifically valid observations. Why, then, do we demand full and precise ideas on embryology?' (1932: xxvii) It would have been unusual, if the Trobriand Islanders did have knowledge of the 'truer physiological doctrine of procreation' (1932: 158).

Fortunately, Malinowski, unlike the contenders in the Virgin Birth debate, was explicit both to the natives and in his writing about what this meant to him. The 'facts' of procreation could be represented by the 'simile of a seed being planted in the soil and the plant growing out of the seed' (1954: 223). In other words, his view of the 'true facts' of procreation were the same as the folk theory we have been discussing. The natives were, understandably, curious and 'asked whether this was the white man's manner of doing it!' (1954: 223).

*The ignorance of the anthropologists*

Malinowski's explicit statement of the Western folk view, astutely referred to by the Trobrianders as 'missionary talk', should have been a clue to those involved in the Virgin Birth debate, but no one picked it up. This is unfortunate for it showed that, from the perspective of modern scientific theory, Malinowski's and the missionaries' theory, which is the same as the folk theory, is just as erroneous as that of the people they were trying to enlighten! This oversight may have been a blind spot similar to that of the ethnographers of Turkey noted earlier. The simile is ignored because it is too familiar and also because figurative language is often considered to be inappropriate in scientific writing. Because of this lack of attention, however, the anthropologists lost an opportunity to see that procreative beliefs in Western culture are as much a cultural construction as those of the Trobrianders.

Barnes, critical of the contenders in the debate, was partially aware of this. In his article, 'Genetrix: genitor:: nature:culture?' he states: 'physiological paternity is a fact that, until recently no one can have known scientifically (1973: 69). He goes on to say that 'what calls for explanation is why in the pre-scientific West the dominant folk theory happened to be . . . more or less in accord with the evidence from nature later to be disclosed' (1973: 69). That evidence was the union of a sperm and egg witnessed under the microscope. Nevertheless, Barnes glimpsed only one side of the issue. He, as well as others, still focused on paternity and therefore felt that the important discovery was the confirmation that a man was physiologically connected to a child.

In contrast, I believe that the discovery not of what men contribute to the formation of a child, but the discovery of what women contribute has made all the difference. Although the ovum was discovered in 1826 by Von Baer, the nature of its contents and function was hotly debated in medical and scientific circles throughout the century, partly, I suspect because of the implications of its meaning. In general, it was still held to be primarily nurturant material. With the re-discovery of Mendel's genetics in the twentieth century, the knowledge of what it contained (half the genetic constitution of a child) could be established, and thus also the knowledge that both men and women contribute essentially and creatively to a child. This theory was not widely assimilated in the West until the mid-twentieth century.

Science by itself cannot give meaning, but it is a resource that can be drawn upon. Our notions of gender are so deeply involved with notions of procreation and biology (however understood and regardless of whether one ever becomes a father or mother) that changes in ideas about biology and procreation are bound to affect notions of gender. This is, of course, what has been happening. Some women, at least, have been learning that they are not merely vessels for the male seed, not merely nurturers and supporters of life, but co-creators and (perhaps more than) equal partners in this endeavour. Yet the discrepancy between scientific knowledge, or belief since it is something taken on faith (Monberg 1975: 34), and the folk theory persists. It persists not only in the 'soft' explanations to children about procreation, not only in theological language, but also in the language of academia and in everyday speech. It is disturbing



when this ideology is unconsciously repeated in feminist writing,<sup>23</sup> but serves to substantiate the point that it is deeply ingrained in our own society.

Once one becomes sensitised to these images and the use made of them, one can hear them almost daily. When I was beginning to think about this article, I happened to turn on the BBC (January 26, 1985, 10:00 p.m. GMT). A British professor was talking about creativity. In artistic creation (the subject of the programme) he said, we are collaborating with God. That is not too troublesome, but he went on to say: 'Speaking as a *man*, the act of procreation takes on a divine dimension'. In Europe and America, the knowledge that women are co-engenderers, co-creators, providing half the 'seed' so to speak, half the genetic constitution of a child in addition to pregnancy, birth and suckling, has not yet been encompassed symbolically. Symbols change very slowly and the two levels of discourse are hardly ever brought into conjunction.

The conjunction might have taken place in the Virgin Birth debate. Malinowski may have been ignorant of genetic theory in 1916 but there is no question of ignorance on that score among the anthropologists who entered the debate in the 1960's and 1970's. Indeed, their writings indicate a notion of paternity more in accord with scientific theory which is a duo-genetic model. Their problem was the reverse—they ignored the fact that this knowledge has come about in their own lifetimes and is known to a small percentage of the world's peoples. Their fault lies in never bringing the two conflicting theories into conjunction to throw into relief the cultural meaning of paternity (and maternity). In other words, they ignored material from their own culture on two accounts. The anthropologists' ignorance of (or lack of attention to) the meaning of paternity in their own culture has made opaque what should have been transparent and created confusion with regard to other people's beliefs about procreation. Perhaps we must concur with Hallowell who suggested that 'the most fundamental assumptions of any religious system are those usually least transparent' (cited in Montagu 1974: 387). Although the Virgin Birth provided an exemplary opportunity to speculate on the concepts of paternity and maternity indigenous in the West, that opportunity was lost. One must speculate about the reasons. It seems most likely that the concepts are so axiomatic that it never occurred to the anthropologists to question them.

It is also possible, but less likely, that the anthropologists did not want to look too closely. Perhaps they perceived a threat to the basic assumptions of Western culture; perhaps the focus on ignorance of paternity among certain 'primitives' was a way to deflect attention away from the knowledge that paternity is not a natural fact, but a cultural construction of a powerful kind. Perhaps some of them glimpsed, however dimly, that a change in the meanings of paternity and maternity (a curtailment of male power and an assertion of female creativity) would present a challenge to complacent gender definitions and entail changes in the entire socio-cultural system that has supported and legitimated them. For whatever reason the anthropologists ignored the *meaning* of paternity, there can be no doubt that paternity had great meaning for them. The extraordinary preoccupation with paternity from the nineteenth century until the present says far more about Western society and culture than it does about that of the few people who live on the Trobriand Islands or in the deserts of Australia.

### Conclusion

I began with the question of whether certain 'primitive' peoples did or did not know of physiological paternity. That question has not been answered, but I think I have shown that the question was misconceived. I have argued that paternity is embedded in an entire matrix of beliefs about the world and the way it is constructed. More specifically, I tried to show that the dominant folk theory of procreation in the West has been 'monogenetic', that is, allowing only one principle of creation. The power to create and engender life has been viewed as masculine and furthermore, the concept of paternity is the same whether it is God the Father-Creator or the human male. From the most intimate to ultimate contexts, from physical to metaphysical realities, an entire world is constructed and systematically interrelated. The same, I believe, is true for the Trobrianders, but it is a *different* system.

### NOTES

This article is dedicated with great appreciation to David Schneider who first introduced me to the 'Virgin Birth debate', encouraged me to get my thoughts on paper, and who did not think me foolish for tackling a subject where angels might fear to tread.

<sup>1</sup> The opposing sides could be imagined as the symbolic parents of the discipline, for anthropology was surely born in the throes of that debate. For an excellent critical review of that debate and what was ignored in it, see Coward 1983.

<sup>2</sup> This assumption implies a unilinear and universal mode of development and is similar to the characterisation of certain societies as 'pre-literate'.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Leach (1967: 39). Just as certain 'primitives' are learning to make the connexion, it is becoming quite tenuous today in Western society. There is a growing distinction between recreational and procreational sex, the separation of which is attributed to the development and use of contraceptives which have supposedly freed sex from its biological constraints. But is it not just as true and logical to say that the current distinction depends on their prior connexion? With the increasing scientific appropriation of reproduction, the connexion between sex and pregnancy is already attenuated, for example with artificial insemination, test tube conceptions and embryo transplants. It is no longer difficult to imagine a time when the connexion will be severed, when the production of a child will take place without either sex or pregnancy. Why was it so difficult to imagine that in the misty past or among some isolated groups the connexion was never made? It is ironic, and maybe not so coincidental, that much of the technologies separating sexual intercourse and pregnancy are being developed and experimented with in the very place where the connexion was, among certain peoples, never made, namely in Australia!

<sup>4</sup> My research was conducted between 9/79-7/82, twenty months of which were spent in a central Anatolian village (see Delaney 1984).

<sup>5</sup> While each of these religions attributes its special revelation to the figure through whom it was revealed, that is, to Moses, Jesus and Mohammed respectively, the theology of monotheism and the line of descent are traced to Abraham.

<sup>6</sup> Although women are necessary for the process of procreation, the production of a female is felt, in the village, as a sign of divine punishment. The seed that becomes female is felt to be degenerate. For the 'scientific' basis of this theory see Aristotle's *Generation of animals*, from which it passed to the early Church Fathers, and Aquinas until it reached its modern rendition in Freud's view that women are castrated males.

<sup>7</sup> The focus on patrilineal parallel cousin marriages in the Middle East has, in my opinion, obscured the more widespread custom of endogamy of which the former is the most perfect example. It is an attempt to alienate neither the seed nor the soil. Of forty-one marriages observed, half were with relatives and half of these with first cousins equally distributed; the rest were with fellow villagers. In no case was a girl given to an outsider.

<sup>8</sup> I do not agree, for instance, with the Ferneas who assert that 'women are an equal but different

half of the Islamic universe' (1972: 385), for I believe that universe is hierarchically ordered, as is the Christian one. Nor do I agree that women's exclusion from certain religious practices can be attributed to the 'special circumstances of womanhood'. These circumstances are made 'special' by the evaluation given them by the religious tradition. For example, it is not menstruation itself that automatically keeps women away from praying in the mosque, etc. but the meaning attributed to menstruation. There was surely no special circumstance of womanhood that literally and graphically excluded women from the closed circle of men during a blessing in the village square for those villagers about to go on the pilgrimage to Mecca. There were several women among the pilgrims but they were excluded, outside the circle, and the imam only turned to them after his prayer was over and the circle broken. These comments in no way single out Islam for special opprobrium, for I think women are stigmatised and excluded in comparable ways in Christianity.

<sup>9</sup> This is not the official doctrine, nevertheless it faithfully captures villagers' views as well as those of a number of scholars, for example Nasr (in Smith 1980) and Khan (1962). I am not unaware of the medieval debates among Muslim jurists regarding Aristotelian and Galenic theories of procreation (which supposedly can be imagined as 'monogenetic' *v.* 'duo-genetic'). For a review of these issues, see Musallam 1983. I find myself in disagreement with his conclusion that Islam favours a 'duo-genetic' view, because this view is contradicted not only by evidence from the Koran and Hadith but also by the images in popular Muslim imagination. It must also be pointed out that one must be extremely careful when one comes across terms such as 'male seed' and 'female seed', for closer inspection reveals that 'female seed' usually means a distillate of menstrual blood (matter), not generative, formative and creative material. 'Female seed does not have life in it,' said the villagers. In any case, Musallam's thesis does not negate my point about the relationship between monogenesis and monotheism, since the latter predated by millennia medieval scholars' meditations. Similarly, I would argue that the jurists' views have not been encompassed either symbolically nor by the majority of Muslims and, finally, both views can be held simultaneously, as evidence from our own culture demonstrates.

<sup>10</sup> Recently, a conversation between a man and a Catholic woman was reported to me. The man was curious to know her thoughts about the current controversy about surrogate mothers and how that squared with her religious beliefs. She replied, "Well, the Virgin Mary was the first surrogate mother!" At the conceptual level this continues the notion that the male is the primary parent while the mother is merely the vessel. Indeed, I think some of these ideas are behind the use of surrogate mothers, for the male to have a child of his 'own', where 'own' implies seed.

<sup>11</sup> 'The integrity of the mission was to be safeguarded in transmission, the purity of the contents protected by the quality of the container' (Speiser 1964). Although this statement refers to the covenant in Genesis between God and His Chosen People, it illustrates the continuity not only of the message but of the symbolism. In this case, Mary is chosen to be the bearer of the divine word, Jesus.

<sup>12</sup> For example, it posed the following problems: 1) that of infinite regress—if Mary was pure, what about her parents and their parents, 2) if she was born without the taint of original sin which is what makes people human, how then can Jesus be human, and 3) since Jesus was sent to redeem humanity from sin, it was superfluous in the case of Mary. Despite the problems, her Immaculate Conception was made dogma in 1854.

<sup>13</sup> I am indebted to Susan Montague (1983) for this way of characterising the Trobriand world, that is the distinction between the substantial and the non-substantial worlds.

<sup>14</sup> To say that the male has a role in the production of a child is to say nothing more than that; how that role is interpreted is what is important. Sexual intercourse may be considered irrelevant to the production of a child but even when it is relevant there can be several interpretations: 1) the male opens the path for a foetus that may come by other means, 2) intercourse stops menstruation which allows for (1), 3) the product of ejaculation may feed the foetus, 4) the product of ejaculation may contribute to the formation of the foetus. As a corollary to these one must also ask whether one act or several are necessary to accomplish the purpose. None of these, however, is the same as 'paternity' which has meant the formative, primary and creative role.

<sup>15</sup> God created things, Adam named them, and men give identity to persons in these systems. In Europe and America, as well as in Turkey, children are given their fathers' names. It is interesting to point out that an 'illegitimate' child, besides being born out of wedlock, is stigmatised precisely because s/he has no father to name and claim him or her. It is the child and mother who are stigmatised, never the father. It is also important to note that the creation of Adam and therefore

humanity's origination from one source, has been considered, at least by one anthropologist (Stocking 1983), as the root of the anthropological paradigm of monogenesis vs. polygenesis also debated in the nineteenth century. At the same time there was no recognition that the monogenetic theory of human origins implied a monogenetic theory of procreation.

<sup>16</sup> That is, whether the concept of monotheism influenced notions of conception or vice versa; nevertheless, I do believe that the drama of birth has served as a focus for profound contemplation among all peoples.

<sup>17</sup> By this I mean that the symbolism of gender has effects on women (and men), but I also believe women's exclusion from ordination, presiding at the Eucharist, blessing and absolving, has more to do with the gender definition derived from the symbolic construction of procreation than merely sexuality. Those who possess rather than receive 'seed' are also those who can transmit the Word and become part of the apostolic succession, that is, be admitted to the sacred line of descent.

<sup>18</sup> And, as part of nature, reproduction is therefore also perfectible and is being appropriated by and becoming an aspect of production, controlled primarily by men. It is here that I find myself in disagreement with many feminists who hold to the classic de Beauvoir position that women's devaluation is a result of her involvement with reproduction. In contrast, I would argue that it was this particular symbolic construction of procreation and women's symbolically understood role in it, that is at the root of women's devaluation.

<sup>19</sup> The story of Abraham represents a pivotal point in Genesis marking the primeval history applicable to humankind and that of one branch of it (see also Speiser 1964: liii); it marks the beginning of the history of the patriarchs (the beginning of patriarchal history!) In my opinion (Delaney 1977) the story represents not only a change in the concept of the deity but also in notions of conception.

<sup>20</sup> For clarification of the complicated issues entailed in the study of kinship, see Schneider, especially 1972 and 1984.

<sup>21</sup> This puzzling fact had been noted by a number of missionaries and ethnographers. For a discussion of the issues see Montagu 1974: 231–296.

<sup>22</sup> What is at stake here are theories of perception, simplistically characterised as those that maintain that resemblance exists in nature or 'reality', and those that assert, following Boas, that 'perception is the organ of tradition'.

<sup>23</sup> For example, in Dinnerstein's *The mermaid and the minotaur* (1977). Her work is concerned with the psychological implications of female-centred mothering, talking about the father's role, however, she says, 'prenatal fathering . . . includes not only the *initial planting of the seed*, but a long period of protective, expectant, imaginative waiting' (1977: 149). Again, 'the fragility of his tie to the *seed* that he *buries* for so many months in the dark center of another, independent body balances the fragility of her claim on him to help take responsibility for the child she *carries*' (1977: 151, my emphasis.)

#### REFERENCES

- Austen, Leo 1934. Procreation among the Trobriand Islanders. *Oceania* 5, 102–13.
- Austin, R. W. J. 1983. Islam and the feminine. In *Islam and the modern world* (eds) Denis MacEoin & Ahmed Al-Shah. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Bachofen, J. J. 1861. *Das Mutterrecht*. First published in Stuttgart. Selections in *Myth, religion and mother right*. Princeton: Press (1967).
- Barnes, J. A. 1977. Genetrix:genitor::nature:culture? In *The character of kinship* (ed.) Jack Goody. Cambridge: Univ. Press.
- Coward, Rosalind 1983. *Patriarchal precedents*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Delaney, Carol. 1977. The legacy of Abraham. In *Beyond androcentrism: new essays on women and religion* (ed.) Rita Gros. Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press for the American Academy of Religion.
- 1984. Seed and soil: symbols of procreation—creation of a world (an example from Turkey). Thesis, Univ. of Chicago,
- in press a. Seeds of honor, fields of shame. (Paper presented at AAA Meeting, Chicago 1983). In *Honor and shame and the concept of Mediterranean unity* (ed.) David Gilmore.

- in press *b*. Mortal flow: menstruation in Turkish village society. In *Blood magic: new anthropological approaches to the study of menstruation* (eds) Alma Gottlieb & Thomas Buckley.
- Dinnerstein, Dorothy 1977. *The mermaid and the minotaur*. New York: Harper Colophon Books.
- Dwyer, D. H. 1978. *Images and self images: men and women in Morocco*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press.
- El-Saadwi, N. 1980. *The hidden face of Eve*. London: Zed Press.
- Engelbrektsson, U-B. 1978. *The force of tradition: Turkish migrants at home and abroad*. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.
- Engels, Frederick 1884. *Origin of the family, private property and the state*. First published in Zurich, reprinted New York: Pathfinder Press (1972).
- Erdentuğ, N. 1959. *A study on the social structure of a Turkish village*. Ankara: Ayyıldız Matbaası.
- Ferneu, Robert A. & E. Ferneu 1972. Variation in religious observation among Islamic women. In *Scholars, saints and sufis* (ed.) N. Keddie. Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press.
- Geertz, C. 1973. The impact of the concept of culture on the concept of man. In *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hartland, E. S. 1894–96. *The legend of Perseus* (3 vols). London: David Nutt.
- 1909–10. *Primitive paternity* (2 vols). London: Folk Lore Society.
- Hocart, A. M. 1952. Kinship systems. In *The life-giving myth*. London: Methuen.
- Jones, E. [1924] 1951. Mother-right and the sexual ignorance of savages. In *Essays in applied psycho-analysis*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Khan, M. 1962. *Islam: its meaning for modern man*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Leach, Edmund 1967. Virgin birth. *Proc. R. anthrop. Inst.*, 1967, 39–49.
- Magnarella, P. 1974. *Tradition and change in a Turkish town*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw [1916] 1954. Baloma: spirits of the dead in the Trobriand Islands. In *Magic science and religion*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.
- 1927. *The father in primitive psychology*. London: Kegan, Paul, Trench and Trubner.
- [1929] 1932. *The sexual life of savages in north-western Melanesia*. London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd.
- McLennan, J. F. 1865. *Primitive marriage*. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black. Later editions published as *Studies in Ancient History*.
- Meeker, Michael. 1970. *The Black Sea Turks: a study of honor, descent and marriage*. Thesis, University of Chicago.
- Mernissi, F. 1975. *Beyond the veil: male-female dynamics in a modern muslim society*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Co.
- Monberg, T. 1975. Fathers were not genitors. *Man* (N.S.) 10, 1, 34–40.
- Montagu, M. F. Ashley (1937) 1974. *Coming into being among the Australian Aborigines*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Montague, Susan 1983. Trobriand gender identity. *Mankind* 14, 33–45.
- Morgan, Lewis H. 1870. *Systems of consanguinity and affinity in the human family*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.
- 1877. *Ancient society*. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr.
- Musallam, Basim F. 1983. *Sex and society in Islam: birth control before the nineteenth century*. Cambridge: Univ. Press.
- Ortner, S. 1974. Is female to male as nature is to culture? In *Women, culture and society* (eds.) M. Rosaldo & L. Lamphere. Stanford: Univ. Press.
- Rahman, Fazlur 1980. *Major themes of the Qur'an*. Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica.
- Schneider, D. M. 1972. What is kinship all about? In *Kinship studies in the Morgan Centennial Year* (ed.) P. Reining, Anthropological Society, Washington, D.C.
- 1984. *A critique of the study of kinship*. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press.
- Smith, Jane I. 1980. *Women in contemporary Muslim society*. Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press.
- Speiser, E. A. 1964. *Genesis*. New York: Doubleday.
- Spiro, Melford. 1968. Virgin birth, parthenogenesis and physiological paternity: an essay in cultural interpretation. *Man* (N.S.) 3, 242–61.
- 1982. *Oedipus in the Trobriands*. Chicago: Univ. Press.
- Stocking, George. 1983. The genesis of anthropology: the discipline's first paradigm. Kenote address, Central States Anthropological Meetings, Cleveland.
- Weiner, A. 1976. *Women of value, men of renown*. Austin: Univ. of Texas Press.