

## Chapter 4

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### 'Noble Savages' and the 'Islands of Love': Trobriand Islanders in 'Popular Publications'

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Ist einmal . . . eine recht handgreifliche Abgeschmacktheit zu Papier gebracht, so rollt selbige unablässig von Buch zu Buch, und es ist das erste, wonach die Büchermacher greifen (Adalbert von Chamisso).<sup>2</sup>

#### The 'Savage' and the 'Civilized'

A closer look at the history and quality of the contact between European and non-European cultures overseas from the early days of colonialism in the fifteenth and sixteenth century till now reveals that this contact has been characterized from the very beginning by the conviction of dominant superiority of the Europeans with respect to the representatives of the overseas cultures.<sup>3</sup> This conviction manifests itself in between two extremes: overseas cultures experience(d) either intolerant damnation or pitiful recognition of their forms of civilization as being inferior with respect to European standards. The claim of European cultural supremacy was based on the military superiority of European weapons and warfare. However, it was also the ideological justification for turning the contacted cultures into colonies to be exploited commercially by the respective European power. Finally, this European position also justified activities to 'civilize' these inferior cultures.<sup>4</sup>

It is evident that this conviction of European superiority made any attempts to understand some of the characteristics of the contacted cultures extremely difficult. It is interesting, however,

to note that with the very first ethnographic reports on overseas cultures we find the picture of the 'good savage' emerging, a picture that was revitalized and made permanent for the discussion of representatives of overseas cultures by Bougainville's 1772 description of the 'noble savages' of Tahiti (Bougainville 1985; see also Kohl 1986:19). The 'civilized' European was thus not forced any more to deal with the 'savage' only: there was the 'noble savage' as well; and this other, new 'ethnocentric' construction by overseas peoples' representatives made Europeans feel somewhat uncomfortable within their own culture about projecting their ideals, longings and hopes onto these 'noble savages' and their 'exotic' cultures, which were assumed to be 'unspoilt' by all negative aspects of European civilization, its rules, repressions and moral standards.

It seems that these 'discontents' of civilization had been strongest with respect to European standards of sexual morals and behaviour – if we keep in mind how Cook's, Forster's and especially Bougainville's travelogues, with their descriptions of how the Tahitians enjoyed their sexuality in their South Seas paradise of 'La Nouvelle Cythère', were received by the contemporaries of these explorers and scientists in Europe. With the myth of the 'noble savage' Europeans combined a utopian construction of the ideal exotic person living a natural life in a society imagined to be completely free from any kind of repression. However, 'noble savages' were also imagined to have no problems in adapting to European standards of civilized behaviour when being transferred from their 'exotic paradises' to Europe.

We are easily tempted to look at the 'noble savage' myth as being a mere historical fact. However, I will show that this is not the case. On the contrary, it seems that we are far from having outgrown this 'noble savage Utopia'. We still seem to misunderstand certain patterns of public behaviour and self-presentation, especially if these behaviour patterns are perceived as being erotic or sexually arousing – as Cook and his crew and other first visitors to the South Seas did – disregarding the fact that a closer look at these patterns would reveal important differences between underlying rules or regulations and the perceived form of the respective behaviour. Marshall Sahlins (1985; see also Rensch 1991) has convincingly summarized such cultural misunderstandings. It seems that in the South Seas bare-breasted women in short grass skirts, or athletic men wearing their loincloths, joking with Western

tourists, still invoke in these foreigners the image of a sexual paradise – although we should know better by now. In what follows I will use the Trobriand case to illustrate these points.<sup>5</sup>

### **Malinowski's *Sexual Life of Savages* and Reich's *Invasion of Compulsory Sex Morality***

In 1929 Bronislaw Malinowski published his monograph *The Sexual Life of Savages in Northwestern Melanesia*. In this book the master of Trobriand ethnography describes comprehensively aspects of the Trobriand Islanders' sexuality, covering topics like sexual behaviour in children, adolescents and adults, sexual innuendoes in games and verbal interaction, sexual taboos, rules for marriage and married adults, sexual aberrations (from the Trobrianders' point of view), forms of, and variation in, sexual intercourse, and so on. Although many parts of this book present a rather dry sociological account of strict rules that regulate societal life on the Trobriands, those paragraphs that emphasize the sexual freedom and the general promiscuity of young unmarried Trobrianders immediately got a reception that distinctly reached beyond the circle of anthropologists. First, this reception remained within academic and literary circles: psychologists and literati<sup>6</sup> referred either in detail or just in passing to Malinowski's research. However, these references were soon picked up by the more popular media, especially by newspapers and periodicals, and up till now the Trobriand Islands are usually referred to in these media with the *epitheton ornans* 'the Islands of Love'. What is most striking is the fact that most writers referring to Malinowski's monograph or to the Trobrianders' sexuality seem to have not read Malinowski at all or to have read him with such a biased point of view that they completely misrepresent his insights into this part of the Trobrianders' life.<sup>7</sup>

One of the first, probably most influential, persons referring to Malinowski's research on the Trobrianders' sexuality was Wilhelm Reich. In his monograph *The Invasion of Compulsory Sex Morality*<sup>8</sup> Reich connects his research with Malinowski's book and claims to have used the facts the anthropologist presented to 'round up' his own research. However, it is actually the first 84 pages of Reich's book (of 202 pages) that topicalize the Trobrianders' sexuality. Although in his 1951 preface Reich expresses his hope

not to have made any bad mistakes in reporting on Malinowski's research (Reich 1972:25), the very first page of the first chapter proves that this hope was in vain. I will illustrate this with a few examples:

Although many chapters of Malinowski's monograph deal with regulations that govern the Trobrianders' sexuality, Reich denies the existence of any of these rules, to which he refers as 'moral norms'. Thus, Reich (1972:30) denies that there is voyeurism on the Trobriands – with special reference to voyeurism in childhood. I have not only experienced voyeurism in Trobriand children and adults, I also collected four terms that refer to the act of 'peeping' (Senft 1986:539); the expressions *totadoyai* and *natadoyai* explicitly refer to male or female 'peeping Toms' – regardless of their age.

Although Malinowski (1929:433–51) describes the most important taboo on the Trobriands, the 'brother–sister taboo', emphasizing that siblings must not know anything about each other's love affairs, Reich states that children are sexually instructed by their elder siblings and that their parents discuss their children's sexual affairs (Reich 1972:31ff.). Even nowadays this sounds horrendous to any Trobriander – and there is no proof for this statement in Malinowski's monograph.

Reich denies any cases of suicides in puberty on the Trobriands because of sexual frustration; however, in Malinowski's days even an adolescent having had a sexual affair with a married person was forced to commit suicide once this fact became publicly known. This obligation was a strong moral norm supporting the ideal of the monogamous life of married Trobrianders (Malinowski 1929:97ff.). Although the verbal expression that refers to this form of suicide (*-lou-*) is still known on the Trobriands, the norm is no longer valid these days. However, extramarital affairs that become public knowledge are still regarded as something shameful and are looked at as really scandalous.<sup>9</sup>

Reich (1972:42) states that Trobrianders are direct in their courting behaviour. This is sheer nonsense (if we understand that courting behaviour results in seduction). Trobrianders are quite indirect in courting – which should not be mixed up with light-hearted, direct flirting. In verbal flirting and banter Trobrianders can always recede from what they have said by labelling it as *sopa*, as something they did not really mean to say, as a joke in a not serious relationship (Senft 1991:237ff.). As to courting behaviour, Trobrianders use the assistance of a go-between for arranging first

dates. The basic motive behind this is to keep face if their proposition is turned down by the desired person. The better adolescents court (on the Trobriands and elsewhere), the better are their chances to have dates with desired partners. The most direct way to get a sexual partner is still the use of love magic; however, to get this love magic (usually transported in a betelnut) to the desired person asks for much discretion and cleverness.

Reich (1972:52) also states that there is no homosexuality on the Trobriands. This is not true. Malinowski (1929:395, 397–8) refers to cases of homosexuality, and his observation that this form of sexuality is discriminated against and marked as aberrant by the Islanders still holds.

Finally, Reich (1972:56) postulates that the Trobrianders' erotic fantasies are 'relatively slothful'; this is just ridiculous. A look at the data my wife and I have been gathering on songs, play accompanying verses, jokes, lullabies, stories, fairy tales, etc., show that the Trobrianders' erotic fantasies are far from being underdeveloped; they may be rather blunt sometimes, but they can also be extremely sophisticated (Eibl-Eibesfeldt and Senft 1986, 1992; Senft and Senft 1986).

I will stop quoting Reich's misreadings of Malinowski here; his mistakes are too obvious for anyone familiar with the Trobrianders' culture. However, I want to point out that Reich has to be blamed for being one of the first writers who took the Trobrianders as proof for his ideals with respect to a human sexuality completely free from any neurotic aspects. Reich projected his ideals into the 'Savages of Northwestern Melanesia' – thus reviving the 'noble savage' myth and the imaginary ethnography of the nineteenth century (Kramer 1981). I assume that Reich's references to the Trobrianders had at least the same results for the Trobrianders as Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) had for the Samoans: Reich's references to the Trobrianders seem to have not been recognized as pieces of fiction but have been mistaken as fact – and, unfortunately, these 'facts' have been perpetuated by many others, as we shall see now.

## The 'Islands of Love' – Fact and Popular Fiction

Ever since I started my research on the Trobriands in 1982, friends have been sending me copies of articles they have found that refer

to the Trobrianders – and I also keep this collection up to date. In what follows I will present a random selection<sup>10</sup> of this collection to illustrate what some authors have to say about the Trobrianders – who for their part have (so far) hardly any means to protest against some of this propagated ‘news’.

It is to be expected that writers for the American *Playboy* company pick up rumours about the ‘sex paradise’ on the Trobriands for economic reasons – and Roger Baker has done so. In 1983 he published a book on ‘Free Love’ (in a German *Playboy* paperback series), where – in a chapter on the Trobrianders (Baker 1983:67–75) – he declares Malinowski’s monograph as being ‘the bible’ for all supporters of the free-love movement. Baker refers to the *bukumatula* as the house of unmarried girls where the Trobriand adolescents celebrate ‘wild sexual orgies’. In Malinowski’s time the *bukumatula* was a house built by the male bachelors where they had dates with their girlfriends. It was not too long after Malinowski’s stay on the Trobriands that these *bukumatula* were abolished – under the influence of the Australian patrol officers and because of strong pressure from Lutheran United Church missionaries. When I first came to the Trobriands in 1982, the *bukumatula* was already history. As soon as a young man thinks himself to be old enough these days, he just builds his own small bachelor house – generally in the vicinity of his family’s house. Baker also refers to kissing, but does not mention that the Trobrianders – at least at the time when Baker’s book was published – did not kiss as Europeans do. They then had a form of sniff-kissing. Although Malinowski pointed out that monogamy was (and is) the ideal form of married life on the Trobriands, Baker does not hesitate to proclaim general promiscuity and exchange of sex partners between married couples. According to Baker, the change of sex partners by the hour is not uncommon for Trobriand adolescents. He denounces the Islanders not only as exhibitionists, but even worse as egotists who have no feeling of any kind of responsibility for their partners. Fantasizing like this he gives his readers the impression that his ‘statements’ were based on Malinowski’s research. To sell this book in a country like America, however, where sexual explicitness is still tempered by Puritan ideas, Baker has to express – at the end of his ‘essay’ – his ‘disgust’ with respect to the described ‘sensational’ sexual practices, and to file his caveat with respect to possible demands to take over these ‘savage’ forms of sexuality in America or Europe. Thus, the author

is completely aware of the double moral standards in his own culture – but does not care at all whether or not his writings about another ethnic group may insult members of this society.<sup>11</sup>

The publications by Reich and Baker were written by authors who never set foot on the Trobriands. However, people who visit the Islands and then write in the popular media about their impressions rather rarely surpass the 'quality' of accounts like those quoted above.

In 1985 Marianne Oertl reports on a visit of the Trobriand Islands in a German semi-scientific magazine under the heading 'The Trobrianders' natural eroticism: What will become of the "Islands of Love"' – and here we hit upon this *epitheton ornans* which is to be found as a part of the title of many articles on the Trobriand Islands in the popular press (therefore, I also used it in the title of this chapter). Oertl not only gets some of the basic facts about canoes, kinship and status wrong, she also perpetuates the myth of the Trobrianders' being unaware of the role of the father as 'genitor' and states that the famous *kula* exchange is endangered. Some of the things she reports must be based on hearsay only – like her reference to the *Melanesian Explorer* – a tourist ship that visited the Trobriands regularly on its cruises in Milne Bay Province. This ship, like the *Melanesian Discoverer* replacing it in 1989, could not carry more than 32 tourists; Oertl reports that, whenever the *Explorer* dropped anchor, hundreds of tourists were invading the Trobriand villages. She gives the impression that this kind of tourism is as responsible for destroying and perverting basic characteristics of Trobriand culture as the sex tourism of the worst kind that we also find there. However, the owners of these ships, Jane and Peter Barter, have been extremely careful not to disturb the villages and the people they visit with tourist groups in Papua New Guinea. I think the Barters have established an exemplary way to run a tourist business in a developing country.<sup>12</sup> What upsets the reader is Oertl's patronizing attitude with which she looks down on the Trobrianders from an arrogant and a presumed superior European point of view. In her article she speaks of some features of a minority complex she observed in some Trobrianders (a feature that neither Annette Weiner nor I – not to speak of Malinowski (1967) – have ever had the opportunity to observe with the Massim), and tries to protect the Trobrianders from civilization – opting for careful European support for the Islanders on their 'long and winding road' to civilization. Oertl's

weird attitude culminates in the unwittingly revealing statement 'But the Trobrianders are human beings'! A few paragraphs before this statement, Oertl had no problem with denouncing some of the Trobriand women as prostitutes who could not resist the temptations of the white men's money and who – with their bare breasts, sexy grass skirts, and free attitude with respect to sexuality – are themselves responsible for attracting sex tourism. It does not seem to occur to Oertl – in a kind of European naïvety? – to ask who has been establishing, housing and fostering prostitution on Kiriwina Island. Moreover, it does not seem to occur to her, either, that it is exactly publications like her own article – with glossy pictures of Trobriand girls, innuendoes about the 'Sexual Life of Savages', and with headings like 'Why Tourists Call the Trobriands the Islands of Love' or 'Trobriand: a Market even for Love' – that help unscrupulous tourist agents to foster a tourism that promises the experience of the 'Sexual Life of Savages' on the 'Islands of Love'.<sup>13</sup>

That this image of the Trobriand Islands is indeed something tourist magazines use for their clientele is documented by Harald Ludwig's contribution to the German *abenteuer & reisen – Das Erlebnis Magazin* in 1987. The title of Ludwig's article together with the label 'South Seas' is also mentioned on the cover of the magazine – and by now we may not be too surprised to learn that it runs: 'The Trobriands – Islands of Free Love'. The author urges the interested tourist to rush as soon as possible to this paradise before it is lost. The article is full of mistakes: Ludwig gives Denis de Trobriand, D'Entrecasteaux's second officer who had the honour to have his commander give his name to the group, the credit for the discovery of the islands. Ludwig turns 'good old Malinowski' (as he refers to the ethnographer) into a German, states that there are no betel-nuts on the islands, and ignores, apart from Malinowski's 'standard publication' with the title 'Sex Life of Savages', the existence of any other literature on the Trobriands. Ludwig celebrates the Islands as presenting tourists with all the romantic feelings that they may have dreamed of ever since they had read *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Bounty Mutiny*, and praises the Trobriand girls as having 'the most beautiful breasts in the world'. According to him Trobriand girls 'seek to sleep with as many men as possible' and (therefore?) most often walk around topless without wearing anything below their mini grass skirts. The group this article aims at is not difficult to define: whoever dreams of

some wild sexual romance on a South Sea island – with beautiful young half-naked women taking over the active part in these hoped-for affairs – will try to follow Ludwig's advice and visit these islands as soon as possible (and it is here that one may be thankful for the fact that this trip is extremely expensive).

If we may hope to find a different portrait of the Trobrianders and their inhabitants in more serious publications than those mentioned so far, we are often disappointed. In 1989 Jean-Michel Cousteau and Mose Richards published the book *Cousteau's Papua New Guinea Journey*, in which we find a chapter on the Trobrianders. Although the style in which this book is written cannot be compared at all with publications mentioned above, it is frustrating to stumble over many misnomers, clichés and mistakes. I list some of them. The authors cannot refrain from quoting the 'Islands of Love' cliché (Cousteau and Richards 1989:65) and they mention 'stories of sexual permissiveness' where girls 'scheme together, waylaying certain men and gang-raping them'. The authors allude to the *yausa* habit (Malinowski 1929:231ff.) to be found in a few inland villages at the time when the yams are harvested and brought from the gardens into the villages. For the majority of the Trobrianders this habit is abhorrent and abominable. What Cousteau and Richards refer to as 'gang-raping' are actually some horrible forms of sexual abuse. As Malinowski (1929:231ff.) had already reported, during the *yausa* a band of women may assault their victim, undress him, defecate and micturate all over his body, try to masturbate him and, if he fails to have an erection, torture his genitals. One of my consultants on Kiriwina Island told me about a case where women had one of their victims bound naked to a pole, with strings around his testicles and penis. They carried him into their village like a pig to be slaughtered for a festival. All the time they threatened to castrate him, wildly tearing at the strings strung around his genitals. It is no wonder, I assume, that this kind of sexual abuse hardly results in the women actually having sexual intercourse with their victim (if he is not a masochist, of course). However, this habit is something extremely exotic – even for the majority of the Trobrianders, but especially for some men, I presume – and thus, it seems, it has to be reported as a form of 'gang-raping', even in an overall serious publication like Cousteau and Richard's book.

After this excursus we now return to the popular press again, and this time we deal with an article published in a journal that

claims to support feminism: in 1990 Ursula Pittroff and Regine Körner published their article 'Eine Insel für die Liebe' in the German edition of the *Cosmopolitan* magazine. A brief summary of this contribution offers especially the female reader information about 'secret sex cults'. The article has its first culmination in stating that 'this island is completely oversexed'. The authors claim that during the yams festival all Trobriand women indulge in free love and general promiscuity. By now it should be clear that the Trobrianders grant this sexual freedom – which seems to fascinate all these male and female European authors – to unmarried (or divorced and single) men and women only, but not to married persons – not even during the period of the harvest festivals (Senft 1996). Pittroff and Körner also refer to the *yausa*, presenting Malinowski as their source. Unfortunately, they must have read Malinowski extremely superficially – they spell his name 'Malinowsky', have him live on the Trobriands during the First World War as a banned German anthropologist who was 'bookkeeping' the Islanders' sexual practices. The *Cosmopolitan* authors also make Malinowski responsible for the fact that the Trobriands are called 'the Islands of Love' these days. They finish their 'adventure report' with the somewhat cryptic remark that the Trobriands represented for them a 'dream' with permanent shades of 'nightmares'. They are probably alluding to the briefly touched-on danger of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) in this rather promiscuous society of adolescents. This may be at least something to praise the authors for, if their allusion results in keeping sex tourists away from the islands.

That even novelists publish a lot of nonsense about the Trobrianders is sadly documented by the American Paul Theroux. In 1992 he published the article 'Under the Spell of the Trobriand Islands' in the highly respectable *National Geographic* magazine – probably as an advertisement for his book *The Happy Isles of Oceania*, which he published the same year and which contains two chapters on, and many references to, the Trobriands (Theroux 1992a, b).

In his *National Geographic* article the American author states: 'the islands were little changed . . . Not even missionaries . . . have altered the Trobrianders' view that their islands are a paradise, full of magic and sensuality . . . Most islanders claim to be Protestant or Catholic, but Christian theology does not impinge very much on their traditional beliefs . . .' (Theroux 1992a:119f.).

In the same article Theroux also states that the Trobrianders eat yams only at feasts (p. 123), that the birth rate on the islands is low (p. 123) and that during the yams festival spouses are given licence for sexual adventures (p. 128). All these statements are absolutely unfounded. For the last 12 years I have been observing the tremendous changes that are affecting Trobriand culture and society (Weiner 1976, 1988; Senft 1992, 1994). Theroux's mistakes with respect to what he reports about Trobriand sexuality should be evident by now. And the birth rate has exploded in the last years – certainly also because of the (Catholic) missionaries' opposition to (almost) all forms of birth control.

In his article Theroux does not use the phrase 'the Islands of Love' – but we hit upon it in the first paragraph in the first chapter on the Trobrianders in his book, together with the reference to Malinowski's 1929 monograph. Malinowski and the Trobrianders are first referred to on page 9 of this book, and then Theroux mentions them – like leitmotifs – over and over again (Theroux 1992b:13, 43, 48, 98, 129–95, 197, 221, 255, 277, 330, 337, 346, 350, 352–3, 402, 404, 573, 585, 631, 672). Given this observation one might infer that the author was positively impressed by the Trobrianders; however, this is far from being the case. On the Trobrianders Theroux feels threatened by the islanders' jokes about him. It is evident that the writer does not like the Trobrianders<sup>14</sup> and that he does not care to learn anything about them, either. His book presents many mistakes; I list just a few of them:

- 1 Theroux states that every Trobriander speaks English and he lets them speak Tok Pisin (pp. 182–4).
- 2 He mixes up the *kosi* (Theroux writes *khosa*) – the evil spirits that survive a deceased if s/he is not bewailed properly – with the *baloma*, the actual 'spirit of the dead' (Malinowski 1948; Senft 1985).
- 3 He introduces the Polynesian concept of *mana* to the Trobrianders (p. 156).
- 4 He refers to the severest insults to be found in Kilivila as 'jokes' (p. 173).
- 5 He describes a meeting with the paramount chief Pulayasa (pp. 188ff.), although the description of the person Theroux is talking about does not match at all with this impressive and powerful Trobriand chief.

Moreover, Theroux refers to the 'Yam Festival' (p. 140). He reports that during this time some tug-of-war games between boys and girls end up in public mass 'fornication' (p. 151); but this is nothing special for the Trobrianders – at least according to Theroux.

Given all these mistakes, rumours and blunt lies, I cannot but agree with Theroux's statement that at the end of his stay – which lasted for a few days only – he could 'see the utter impossibility of [his] ever understanding the place'. It would have been better for him, for the Trobrianders and for Theroux's readers if he had not visited the islands at all.

The author also published a shortened, but not corrected, version of his *National Geographic* article in the German magazine *GEO* (Theroux 1993). With this article we find a brief contribution of an author whom we already mentioned above: Oertl (1993) comments in her article 'Von den Trobriandern lernen' on the Trobrianders and gives a rather idiosyncratic evaluation of Malinowski.<sup>15</sup> She also mentions that Tomalala, one of the inhabitants of the village Tauwema on Kaile'una Island, where I myself am doing my field research, lived for three months in Andechs in Bavaria. Invited by the Research Unit for Human Ethology within the Max Planck Society,<sup>16</sup> Tomalala helped his host Wulf Schiefenhövel to translate film-accompanying soundtracks. He did this by translating Kilivila into Motu, a lingua franca of Papua New Guinea with which his host, who does not speak Kilivila, is familiar. Then the human ethologist translated these Motu versions of the Kilivila utterances into German. Tomalala's visit to Germany and his cooperation with Schiefenhövel are praised by Oertl as 'another culmination of participant observation'. In what follows I will discuss this visit and some reports about it in the press.

### **Aotourou, Omai, Tomalala – Islanders from the South Seas Visiting Europe**

Ever since Europeans had been in contact with so-called 'savages', we observe in them a rather strange urge to bring some of the representatives of these newly 'discovered' cultures back to their own European cultures. Thus, in 1441, the first ten Africans were brought to Portugal as a special present for Henry the Seafarer (Bitterli 1991:97); and Hans Plischke (1960:94) observes that ever

since then some unfortunate human beings have been kidnapped to serve the Europeans as 'specimens' in a gradually growing 'collection' of foreign and 'exotic' races! However, it was the first visits of islanders from the South Seas that got 'the real publicity'. After his visit to Tahiti in 1768 Bougainville took with him – on a voluntary basis – one of the islanders, whom the French called 'Aotourou'. Aotourou stayed in Paris for eleven months, but died on his way back to Tahiti in 1770. The commander of the second ship in James Cook's second expedition to the South Seas, Captain Furneaux, succeeded in bringing the Tahitian 'commoner' Omai back home in 1775. After two years in England Omai returned to Tahiti, where he died three years later without getting any kind of special acknowledgement from his fellow countrymen for his sojourn in Britain. Aotourou and Omai, however, were both extremely interesting objects for scientists in France and in England, and it was also partly because of their visits that a new scientific discipline called 'anthropology' was born (see Plischke 1960:100f., 103).

However, the visits of Omai and Aotourou also stimulated a lot of criticism in intellectual circles (see Bitterli 1991:186ff). It is interesting to realize that this criticism is not too different from the criticism I express myself in the final section of this chapter and with which I have been confronted (as a researcher who incidentally happens to do his field research in the same village as Tomalala's host) by critical intellectuals in connection with Tomalala's visit to Bavaria. But before I come up with this criticism, I will briefly outline how German newspapers reported Tomalala's visit.

In October 1992 Sabine Bader reports in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on Tomalala's 'excursion in a land without sun and moon'. This romantic title is explained by the fact that Tomalala's 'Stammesbrüder' warned him that if he accompanied Schiefenhövel to Germany he would come to such a country. This is a really nice bit of fiction. On my first visit to the Trobriands in 1982 I had a number of books on Germany with me to give to the Islanders, showing them something about the country I came from; ever since then, I have had many discussions with my friends and consultants about life, climate, agriculture, etc. in Germany. But back to Bader's article. After a brief outline of Schiefenhövel's research on the Trobriands, Tomalala's visit is explained in this newspaper article as a necessary further step in the cooperation between

Schiefenhövel and his 'logical partner'. Tomalala is said to be the only person in his village who speaks Motu, and, because Schiefenhövel is familiar with this language, but does not speak the 'island language', his research depends on Tomalala: he is the only person Schiefenhövel can communicate with in this Papua New Guinean lingua franca.<sup>17</sup> Tomalala is claimed to have developed into a researcher himself during his work as translator of film accompanying soundtracks at the Human Ethology Research Unit. I do not want to comment on some blunt mistakes reported in this article about Tomalala and aspects of Trobriand culture. What I want to point out here is the fact that Bader emphasizes that it is not too difficult for a South Sea islander said to be a farmer (not a yams gardener) and fisherman to become a scientific researcher who enjoys his new role during his visit in Germany.

In April 1993, Tomalala's story is taken up by another Munich newspaper. Gerhard Merk comments in the *Abendzeitung* on 'Tom in High-Tech-Land' and emphasizes that the 'Naturkind' – a man of 50 years of age – astonished scientists. It is emphasized in this article that Tomalala was not very impressed by the German way of life. The article also points out that according to Schiefenhövel Tomalala's visit was not at all problematic for visitor and host – with the exception, however, that the host had to keep an eye on Tomalala's love of beer.

Tom's story then spreads further north-east. In June 1993, the former official paper of the German Democratic Republic, the *Neues Deutschland*, published an article by Dieter Hannes on 'The Fisherman from the Trobriand Islands'. Tomalala, the 'guest from a different age', is introduced as his host's research partner who did not experience a 'culture shock' in Germany. The article sheds some strange light on the quality of archaeologists: Tomalala, visiting some excavations, is reported to have been the only one to identify a presumed stone axe as a whetstone. Thus, as the article phrases it, he helped these archaeologists with his 'prehistoric' knowledge and expertise.

These examples should suffice for the purposes pursued here. They illustrate that Tomalala's visit is met and reported with a certain form of arrogance with which representatives of a presumed superior culture look down on members of a so-called 'prehistoric' or 'primitive' culture. Although all articles mention that Tomalala astonished even the researchers who acted as his

hosts, it is always implied that the encounter between 'the visitor from a different age' and the Europeans is clearly dominated by the latter because of cultural, and not out of economic, reasons (the hosts paid for their guest's expenses and provided him with a fellowship). Moreover, a critical reader easily gets the impression that the reported astonishment is only feigned. Do not readers as well as reporters of such a visit – and even the hosts of the visitor themselves – tacitly assume that a 'native' will have no problems in acquiring European skills and forms of behaviour during his stay away from home, and is it not exactly this process that is keenly documented in minute notes on how fast the visitor makes progress in his process of cultural adaptation? That such a visit and the reports about it also provoke a discussion about the ethics of field researchers is to be expected. In the final section of my chapter I want to discuss such questions.

### **The Savage and the Civilized – and Field Researchers' Ethics**

One of the first and probably most important questions that have to be asked in connection with a visit like that of Tomalala's is what kind of consequences it may have for the visitor in his host country and back home. I will stick to the Trobriand example and briefly outline what I think one has to take into consideration when one invites a Trobriand consultant to Europe. First of all it is well known that the Trobriand society is highly hierarchically stratified. Thus, the first factor one has to consider is whether an invitation either clashes with the social status of the invited person or upsets, or causes feelings of envy in other persons with a higher social standing than that of the invited. In the Trobriand society a person who has more goods than someone else is forced to generously distribute this surplus to maintain status and to keep face as a good member of the community. Thus, before someone is invited, the host-to-be has to check whether he can ensure that the guest – after returning from his journey to the scientist's country – can fulfil these obligations. It goes without saying that such an invitation asks for extremely good relations between host and guest. Researchers who plan to invite consultants for a visit in their countries should always act on the basis of the general principle of professional responsibility that asks them to 'clarify the potential

conflicts between doing science, and protecting and promoting the physical, social, and emotional safety and welfare of the people with whom [they] work' (Skomal 1994:4). I would not dare to invite one of my consultants to visit me in Nijmegen, because I think my yearly one- to two-month visits would not suffice to guarantee his/her 'physical, social, and emotional safety and welfare' after returning to Tauwema.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, I would have difficulties to justify such an invitation, because I cannot see the difference in kind and quality between the information I could get from my consultants in Nijmegen and the information I can get by organizing and doing my field research properly on the Trobriand Islands. However, this is of course a decision every researcher has to come up with on the basis of his or her own field site, field research experience and personal principles of ethics.

Another question field researchers have to ask themselves is what kind of influence they have on reports in the media like those referred to in this chapter, namely reports that deal with the people with whom they do their field research. One should always keep in mind that one may never know what will happen if newspapers get hold of what some journalists may think to be a good story. To attempt to correct at least some of the worst misrepresentations in the media sometimes resembles Sisyphus' task. However, I think we all have to try to see our field sites and the people we do our research with not wrongly represented there. Thus, I am afraid we have to continue to write letters to the editors or papers like the present one in the hope that we can change at least something by pointing out the problems and by creating a forum for discussing them. I believe this to be part of our responsibility for our field sites and the people whose language, culture and behaviour we research. To act and try to do something if we see that the image of the people we are studying and working with is tarnished by tabloid treatment and that they are defamed, slandered and libelled are part of our professional ethics.

## Notes

1. This chapter is an abridged and updated version of my contribution to Bert Voorhoeve's *Festschrift* (Baak *et al.* 1995:480–510). I would like to thank the editors for their kind

permission to reprint this version here. The chapter is based on 25 months of field research on the Trobriand Islands in 1982, 1983, 1989, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995 and 1996. I thank John Haviland, Ingerd Hoëm, Steve Levinson, Barbara Senft and Wolfgang Wickler for comments and critical remarks. I thank the National and Provincial Governments of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Milne Bay Province for their assistance with, and permission for, my research projects. I also thank the Institute for Papua New Guinea Studies and the Council of Chiefs of the Trobriand Islands for their support of my research. My deepest gratitude goes to the people of the Trobriand Islands, especially the inhabitants of Tauwema, for their hospitality, friendship and patient cooperation.

2. Chamisso is quoted according to Kramer (1981:74).
3. For detailed information see Bitterli (1991), Kohl (1986) and Kramer (1981).
4. It goes without saying that all attempts to 'civilize' the 'savages' involved Christian missionaries (Senft 1992, 1994).
5. For discussions of the 'noble savage' myth see Stein (1984a-c), Theye (1984) and Borsboom (1988).
6. Aldous Huxley refers to the Trobriand Islands in his novel *Brave New World* (1972:41). This novel was first published in 1932. Like many before and after him, Huxley quotes one of the few mistakes of Malinowski's. The field researcher mistook myth for fact, reporting that the Trobriand Islanders are ignorant of a man's role of 'pater' as 'genitor' (Malinowski 1929:3, 69, 148ff.); the fact that Trobriand women have been using traditional contraceptives – some of which they just use(d) before having sexual intercourse, being completely aware of why and for what biological ends they did, and still do, this – proves Malinowski wrong. For another reference to the Trobrianders see also Gore Vidal's (1969:7) novel *Myra Breckenridge*.
7. One could discuss the question whether Malinowski was not playing the same game as all the recipients of his monograph and that he actually 'started the whole thing'. One could ask whether Malinowski used 'science' as an excuse for talking openly about sex. This was not taken for granted in those days. A year before Malinowski's monograph D.H. Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was published (in a limited edition in Florence). It was immediately banned as obscene in several countries; it was first published in Great Britain in an

expurgated version in 1932, and the full text was only published as late as 1959 in New York. If one wants to argue like this, then Malinowski could be made responsible for having started a discussion that, once it took off, could not be stopped any more.

8. This German version, published 1932, saw a first revision in 1935; in 1951 Reich published a second enlarged version with a completely new preface in English with Farrar, Straus and Giroux. All references here refer to the German edition of this 1951 version.
9. This norm also holds for white married persons on the Trobriands.
10. There seems to be hardly any topic where you do not find hints as to the Trobrianders' sexuality. Even a well-researched sexual history, first published in 1974, of Christianity refers to some such 'facts' (Deschner 1984:386). I want to note that the label 'Islands of Love' is used in articles published within PNG, too – with the aim to attract tourists (see, for example, Croft 1978; Halstead 1978; Stocks 1984; Anonymous 1988, 1989).
11. Baker's book was published before discussions about 'political correctness' started in the USA.
12. The Barters cannot be made responsible for ideas their customers may utter about Melanesia in general and PNG in particular; such ideas are very ironically documented in Dennis O'Rourke's film *Cannibal Tours* (1987).
13. It is depressing to state that this *epitheton ornans* has only negative effects for the Trobrianders, who are completely aware of these negative aspects of tourism (Senft 1987:192).
14. Theroux's book documents that he generally does not like the people of the Pacific – with one exception: he feels at home and happy with his fellow Americans on the islands of Hawaii.
15. Among other things Oertl accuses Malinowski of not being a sociobiologist (one wonders how he could have been one, given the fact that sociobiology is a rather recent subdiscipline of biology) and of having had no feminist approach (again, Malinowski certainly did not live at a time when feminism was in vogue).
16. I feel forced to note that at the time of Tomalala's visit in Andechs I was no longer affiliated with the Human Ethology Research Unit. I was actually consulted about my views with

respect to a possible visit of a Trobriander in Bavaria. I argued strongly against the realization of such an idea. Given that in the last years I have been facing a number of situations where people asked me whether I was responsible for what they had heard of, and/or read about, Tomalala's visit in Germany, I am glad to be able to deny any kind of responsibility for, and involvement in, this visit.

17. I just want to note that I know many persons in Tauwema that know the lingua franca 'Hiri Motu' (or 'Police Motu'); this lingua franca should not be mixed up with the language 'Motu' spoken by the Motu people in the vicinity of Port Moresby (see Dutton and Voorhoeve 1974). For a grammatical description of Kilivila and a Kilivila/English dictionary see Senft (1986).
18. To come back to Tomalala: Tomalala always had a rather peculiar status in Tauwema (Senft 1987). Ever since coming back from his trip to Germany at the end of 1992 he has been having even more problems to (re)integrate himself into his own community and culture in Tauwema. In 1995 Tomalala divorced his wife and married a young woman from Kaduwaga. In May 1996 I learned that in 1995 the inhabitants of Tauwema exiled Tomalala together with his young wife and their newborn child. Moreover, they destroyed the couple's house as well as Schiefenhövel's house. For the social impact of such a ban (*yoba*) see Malinowski (1929:11ff.). Tomalala, *persona non grata* in Tauwema, is now living in Kaduwaga, the village of his second wife.

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