# *The* FAMILY

## AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

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WITH CHAPTERS IN COLLABORATION WITH
*Marion Bassett*
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*To Jessie Elinor Newcomb*

# PREFACE AND PERSONAL NOTE

This book was at first intended to be a revision of my *The Family: Its Sociology and Social Psychiatry,* published by John Wiley and Sons, Inc., in 1934. Yet so much has happened since then, to the world and to my ideology, that the present volume emerges essentially as a new treatise, with liberal quotations from its predecessor.

Dreading above all to be called "unscientific," or "wishful thinkers," we sociologists, typically, have pictured social changes as something to be ascertained and understood, but not to be approved or disapproved. If we advocated anything we carefully qualified it by saying, "If you want such and such an end, we recommend this means of attaining it." In other words, we left it to the reformer, the moralist, to the vast "Somebody Else" to determine ends and choose values.

Since 1934, we have seen a small group of determined men who knew what social changes *they* wanted plunge the whole world into bloodshed.

Some of us have been stirred to a fundamental reconsideration of the sociologist's relation to values. With Robert Lynd, we cry, *"Knowledge for What?"* Indeed values are *chosen,* not "proved" or "disproved." Yet values have their own interrelations. Perhaps sociology is eminently well fitted to judge one value in terms of another, to say whether several values are consistent or inconsistent, and to discern any historical trend or "logic" in the evolution of values. Perhaps the anthropologist or sociologist is peculiarly well fitted to discern and represent the universal needs and interests of *mankind,* as distinguished from the arbitrary goals set by man's various cultures.

We have been encouraged, perhaps, in this bolder attitude by the configurationist anthropology represented by Ruth Benedict, which shows different societies as choosing different aims and values for emphasis; by psychosomatic medicine and psychoanalytic anthropology which suggest that value-choices may be much "better" or "worse" than one another in terms of life and health, and by progressive education philosophy which holds that it is possible for the school to play a creative role in the tides and currents of social change. Indeed the philosophy of Lester Ward has come alive again with new and better implementation.



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Although I believe we should maintain even in wartime important scientific work regardless of its immediate utility, yet I personally, during these last two years of "national defense" and war, could not have held myself to this bookish task had I not felt that it played a direct role, however small, in the struggle for Democracy. I believe that reforms in the family system, in the relations between men and women, and between adults and children, are not to be postponed and awaited as by-products of other democratic changes; but that they are important keys for the release of other forces and constitute in themselves part of the very essence of Democracy.

In 1934 I showed that certain "leading" changes were irrevocable, and conceived human welfare to be promoted largely by hastening the "lagging" changes which would eventually have to follow. My ethical orientation, as far as I dared express it, was in terms largely of functionalist anthropology. "The ethical responsibility is to keep society in good repair." [1934, p. 182.] My specific recommendations for *action* were mainly in terms of "social psychiatry" or "individual adjustments," which I placed in the intellectually dramatic climax position near the end of the book.

The "climax" of the present volume is the study of the needed changes on the societal, cultural level. Individual personality adjustments are studied not as "the only thing we can do about it," but as a source of guidance as to *what social action* is needed. In the spirit of Lawrence Frank's "Society as the Patient," we are rather inclined to take human needs as revealed in case studies as our guide to social reconstruction and the creation of new cultural values.

General, sociological treatises on marriage and the family have been written chiefly by male scholars. Although these, and also the women scholars who are non-mothers, have all been participant observers of family life in the concrete, still we need more of the wisdom of the *observing participant.* Yet few are the women who have given many years to homemaking and motherhood as a full-time job and who have also written about it. The homemaker's intellectual ambitions usually succumb to drudgery, distractions, or the struggle for prestige; and when eventually she finds time to concentrate her mind, she also finds herself many years behind the men and the career women of her own level of ability.

This book is therefore unusually fortunate in having the contributions of my collaborator, Marion Bassett. She has maintained a home and raised a family while continually observing the family and group life of her community with a certain cultural objectivity characteristic

of the anthropologist. She has not only collaborated on three chapters but has contributed many valuable suggestions to the book as a whole. To her it owes a deeper insight into the task and problem of the mother in our society, and the courage to formulate more explicitly the emerging democratic values pertaining to the family and the relations of men and women. Mrs. Bassett's unfinished manuscript, "Mothers on Strike" (referring to the declining birth rate), which I have been privileged to examine, has contributed clues to sources and many valuable ideas.

My book owes much more than one might suppose to the painstaking and tireless accuracy of my secretary, Jean Shostak.

Ruth Mallay, my co-editor of the *Bulletin of Family Research and Education,* has written many of the book reviews which are here quoted. The *Bulletin* and other materials of the National Council of Parent Education have been of great service.

Vassar College has in many ways provided helpful facilities, surroundings and encouragement for the years of study of family life which have culminated in this book. Several studies related to old age welfare, assisted by the Class of 1880 Fiftieth Anniversary Fund of Vassar College, find part of their fruition in the attention here given to the needs of the older woman.

Many other persons, men and women, old and young, have had a part in this work. My colleagues, my students at Vassar College, my fellow-members of the National Council of Parent Education, my fellow-sociologists, the members of my family, and my friends—all have contributed data and ideas, or have helped by kindly forbearance from pressing their rightful claims upon me while I was preoccupied with this work.

My wife, Jean Rodgers Folsom, who is a mother, a social worker, and a natural scientist, has rendered invaluable service on this book and its predecessor. She has read manuscript and proof with a keen eye and a healthy use of common sense, has clarified ambiguities, protected the King's English, and at the same time encouraged me to "hew to the line and let the chips fall where they may."

Not only from other books and printed ideas, but directly out of life itself, has this book grown. Its fabric is one of the joys, the toil, and the suffering of human beings. One of these is my former wife, to whom with deep appreciation this book is dedicated.

JOSEPH K. FOLSOM

*Poughkeepsie, New York*
*December, 1942*

# CONTENTS

*Chapter I*

# FAMILY REALITIES AND SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT WAYS

## A. FAMILY PHENOMENA IN TWO CONTRASTING SOCIETIES

In the insular realm known as Melanesia are the Trobriand Islands, just northeast of Australia. The people of these islands live in a system of family relationships strikingly different from our own. This family system has been described in interesting detail by Malinowski in his *Sexual Life of Savages*. The title may be somewhat misleading, since the physical sex relations are only a small part of the total picture. Because this description is so much more adequate than most descriptions of primitive family life, it is chosen for our present study.

The Trobriand Islanders are a primitive, that is, a *pre-literate* people. Their culture is not, however, of the lowest order. They practice agriculture and keep pigs, and are placed upon the second or middle agriculture level in the classification of Hobhouse, Wheeler, and Ginsberg. They are a black-skinned, woolly-haired people, classified physically under the Oceanic branch of the negroid race (geographically remote and somewhat different anatomically from African negroes). Considering the smallness of this population and the probability that it will sooner or later die off or be absorbed into the white man's society, what can be the significance of studying its family system?

The size and the geographic and historic importance of a primitive tribe are no indication of the sociological significance of their ways of life. Strange as it may seem, this study of primitives is one of the most valuable avenues to an understanding of society in general. In recent years sociology and cultural anthropology (ethnology) have come closer together and are now essentially one and the same science. In zoology we do not demand that attention be apportioned to the various animals according to their abundance and the frequency with which we have to deal with them. Such a "practical" zoology might confine itself largely to horses, dogs, and other domestic animals. But



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he who would really understand animal life can learn more in the zoological garden than in the barnyard, because of the much wider variety of species exhibited. *Primitive tribes are the "zoo" of sociology.*

Let us compare the family system of the Trobrianders with that of our own society. The description of our own society will have a certain naivete. It is the description which we might imagine would be given to it by a Trobriand sociologist, if such a person existed.

| TROBRIAND ISLANDS | AMERICA |
|---|---|
| I. SPATIAL AND MATERIAL PATTERNS | |
| 1. *Arrangement of dwellings and settlements* | |
| Practically all the people live in small villages. These are circular, with two concentric rings of buildings. The inner ring consists of storehouses and the outer of dwellings. Both face toward the center. Between the two rings is the "street," where everyday living goes on. Within the inner ring of storehouses is a circular space which contains the chief's hut, sometimes his storehouse, a burial ground, and a dancing ground. This is the area of public and festive life. Houses, except the chief's, are rather similar in size and quality. The storehouses, which are used mostly to store yams between harvest, are built more elaborately and decoratively than the dwelling houses. The gardens are outside the village. | About a fourth of the people live on separate farms, about a fourth in villages, a half in cities. Farms have their own barns and outbuildings near the dwelling. Houses vary tremendously in size and equipment, but the majority far surpass anything in primitive society. The better houses are concentrated in certain areas of cities; their inhabitants do "mental" rather than "manual" work. A large area of suburbs with urban modes of work and play but lesser density of buildings and population surrounds the typical city. |
| 2. *Relation of geographic to social patterns* | |
| One continuous arc of the village circle of dwellings is inhabited by the chief's wives and their children, another by his maternal kinsmen, and the remaining arc by commoners not related to the chief as kinsmen or children. | Proximity of dwelling has little or no relation to kinship or to friendship; it merely classifies people as to economic status and indicates mere chance in the availability of dwellings. People often become friends because they are neighbors, but contacts based upon neighborhood alone |
| New dwellings are commonly | |

erected in the village by newly married couples.

are weak, even in suburbs. With the help of the automobile and telephone people have their main contacts at some distance. The community population divides itself into groups based upon recreational interests, cultural similarities, and personal congenialities having little relation to geography, except that each such group is likely to consist of people having similar economic status and living in the same type of social-ecological area.

In cities and suburbs, change of residence is frequent (average every two years in some). The sentiment surrounding a specific "home" location is less than in the country.

### 3. *Relation of kinship to geography*

Each village community is owned by one sub-clan. It has its head man, commonly the oldest. If the sub-clan is of high rank, this head man also has power over a whole district and is called a chief.

There is no relation between kinship groups and possession of any village or locality. Small, isolated rural communities tend to intramarry and to have their social relationships somewhat associated with kin relationship.

### 4. *Composition of the household group*

In monogamous families, husband, wife, and their younger children live together in a hut. Other relatives sometimes live with them.

Husband, wife, and their children (until maturity) live in the same home. Other relatives may live with them but this is regarded as less preferable.

### 5. *The housing of adolescents and unmarried*

At puberty children leave their parents' home, especially the boys. Boys go to live in bachelors' quarters, girls to live with older maternal female relatives except when living with boys in the bachelors' quarters.

Adolescents tend to be segregated

Both boys and girls remain in the parental home till marriage or occupation takes them elsewhere. In the business classes boys leave sooner because their occupations more often take them away from home. In conservative groups it is regarded as de-

in special quarters, the bachelors' houses, of which there may be several in a village. These are located in the inner circle of the village with the storehouses, apart from the huts of married couples. In these, unmarried youths, with some widowers and divorced men, live with their mistresses, whom they possess in temporary exclusiveness and do not share. These bachelors' houses are owned by groups of boys, the eldest being the titular owner. When liaisons break up, it is usually the girl who moves, to another bachelors' hut or to a home of her parents or maternal relatives.

sirable for the girl not to take an occupation which requires her leaving home, but to remain at home helping in housework and engaging in courtship with possible husbands under parental supervision.

There are bachelors' quarters for unmarried young people, but these everywhere involve rigid segregation of the sexes. They are normally used only by persons working or studying in communities away from their parental homes.

### 6. *Home ownership*

The houses, garden land, livestock, and trees are owned almost exclusively by the men, who inhabit or use them, and not by women or families as such.

In rural areas, villages, and smaller cities, a majority of houses are owned by their inhabitants. This ownership, however, often involves carrying a debt. It is also common to rent houses, more especially in cities.

### 7. *Pattern of the dwelling house*

The typical dwelling house has a symmetrical, steep roof of thatched material which may extend to the ground, giving the entire structure the form of a triangular prism resting on its narrowest side, with the two elevated sides slightly convex. The ground plan is thus a rectangle, with entrance at one end under a gable. The dwelling is built directly on the ground, with a floor of beaten earth; it is one-storied and, except for a small antechamber, consists of one room.

Most dwellings are single-family houses, but there are some large apartment houses, especially in large cities. The typical house is of box form, has two or three stories, no interior courtyard, and is divided into rooms. In most localities, porches are attached. Except near centers of cities, each house is surrounded by more or less ground used as a lawn, garden, playground, and space to dry clothes. The more elaborate and esthetic houses emphasize the decorative functions of their yards, but many of the poorer houses, especially in cities, have mainly "back

yards" and conspicuous clothes-drying.

### 8. *Technology and furnishing of the home*

Along one side wall of the house is the fireplace, which is a ring of stones; along the opposite side wall and one end of the house are wooden sleeping bunks in two or more tiers. At the other end is the door, with shelves above and alongside of it for the storage of property. Water is carried in vessels from a distance. Bathing is done out of doors.

Although there is enormous variation, a typical American standard of living includes piped water in the home, electric light, central heating, a bath tub and frequent bathing, three cooked meals a day with a great variety of food (including animal and vegetable), elevated tables, seats, and sleeping surfaces, table and bed linen, eating utensils, frequent laundering and pressing of clothes.

There are four main forms of furniture: table, seat, bed, and storage box with drawers or shelves.

Numerous machines are possessed and used.

### 9. *Occupations*

There is little or no lifelong specialization of labor for any individual except that between the sexes. On any one day a person may be engaged principally in agriculture, fishing, construction, manufacture, or trading.

On the farms people produce food, most of it being sold to the rest of the population. Village and city people are engaged in trade, transportation, manufacture, planning, and paper work. Adult males and about 40 per cent of the adult females give full time to these occupations, which are broken down into thousands of specialties. About 60 per cent of the adult females give most of their time to homemaking and care of children.

### 10. *Work in the home*

Most work of both sexes is performed out of doors near the dwelling or yam house, or in the gardens, although there are occasional distant expeditions, especially of men in canoes or on foot to other villages.

Typically, cooking and serving of meals, minor clothing repair, laundering, and the care of young children still remain as work within the home, and occupy practically the full time of the homemaker. These tasks

Family groups work in close proximity much of the time. Men perform much of the care of children. In transporting food and other large tasks, helpers are commonly used; they are chosen largely according to customary kinship obligations with reciprocity according to custom.

are sometimes shared by other members of the household group, but the great bulk usually falls upon one woman. If there are more than two adults in the group, the extra adult usually does outside work and earns money.

About a fourth of the families have part-time or full-time hired servants who participate in the work, but only to a minor degree in the consumption processes of the home. They retire for limited periods of time to their own homes, of lower standards, elsewhere.

11. *Relation of home to consumption and gratification*

Meals are usually eaten on the ground outside the dwellings. The home serves to store the scanty personal possessions, the yam houses food. Only in cold or rainy weather, at night, or for intimate purposes do people remain inside the dwellings. On a cold or wet night people often sit on the floor or bunks within dwellings in an atmosphere of dense smoke, talking with animation. Visiting from dwelling to dwelling is common.

Ordinary dress, worn most of the time, consists of a pubic leaf for men and a grass petticoat for women. On festive occasions men add skirts and both sexes have more elaborate and decorative costumes. Feet are bare at all times.

Most people eat most of their meals in the home, but there is considerable eating in hotels and restaurants and other large-group establishments. People also like to vary their place of eating within the home or grounds, or by way of picnics.

The home serves as a place to store personal clothing and other possessions and gives privacy required by this culture for dressing, undressing, and sleeping. The great majority of these activities take place within the home. Typically, a married couple has a single bedroom, and among the unmarried above seven or eight years of age the sexes have separate bedrooms.

Dress is based upon the trouser pattern for men and the skirt pattern for women, with numerous variations. "Old" or "working" clothes are worn by the working-class men and farmers in the daytime; business-class people wear clothes approaching the "dressed up" standard most of the time, and all people do

so during leisure spent socially or in public.

Except in a few sports the body is mostly covered and footgear is worn. There are numerous variations of costumes for different activities and occasions.

Love-making or sexual intercourse takes place largely, among children, in the bush; among the married couples, in their dwellings. Privacy is always valued, but no special precautions are taken to prevent observation of the act by children.

Most sexual intercourse takes place in homes. The culture requires strict privacy, yet the taboo upon recognition or discussion of the sex relation is so great that there is no orderly method of insuring the degree of privacy needed for its best development. This puts a premium upon the life of the young married couple alone in their single-family house.

Many forms of recreation take place in the home or on its grounds, but many of these are individual hobbies or activities of age or sex groups rather than of whole families.

### 12. *Esthetics of the home*

The chief's home is more ornamented than others, and the yam houses more than dwellings. Carved boards and shell ornaments are used largely by higher ranks. Costume, especially the skirts of women and the festive dress of both sexes, dancing, and rituals play important esthetic roles.

Most classes of objects embody the esthetic motive in some degree. Paint, colored papers, artistic forms in external construction and furniture, color schemes and interior decoration are much used. Among the more wealthy, artistic aims are achieved more through basic construction and arrangement as distinguished from separate *objets d'art*. Yet pictures, decorative dishes, and other art objects play a role in all classes. Musical instruments and/or music through radio broadcast are found in most homes.

The esthetics of the household interior are important as symbols and also as sources of prestige.

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