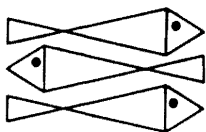


The
INVASION
OF COMPULSORY
SEX - MORALITY

by
Wilhelm Reich



FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX
NEW YORK

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Preface to Third
(*first English language*) *Edition*

The clinical and ethnologic material for this book was compiled between 1920 and 1930. It was rounded out by the extraordinary material Bronislaw Malinowski presented in 1930 in his comprehensive book *The Sexual Life of Savages*. My study of the origin of human sexual morality was written in September 1931, in the midst of the social storm that rocked the German republic before Hitler's ascendancy to power; and the strong political slant of this book stems from the experiences of that period. Nothing of what shook our social existence at that time (1930-45), in the *political* sense, has survived. However, the facts about the history of human character development have not only survived the last twenty years but have gained in consistency and social influence, which is, in the long run, the true social power.

The sharp discrepancy between the screaming of a cruel political vagrant and the calm efficiency of a study

of basic problems of human nature may well serve as a warning today when a differently colored but basically similar political noise is disturbing our peaceful endeavors to learn and to do ever better in determining the path humanity has been traveling toward new forms of existence over the past few decades. In a few years the big noise will have died out again, and humanity will continue on its journey with less anguish, or so we hope.

Not a single term in sociology, once of such great significance, can today be used without creating confusion. This is due to the *prostitutes in politics*, the “*freedom peddlers*” who have succeeded in destroying every vestige of clear, honest thinking for the sake of mere fact-finding. To them, every term has become a tool of political cheating. In these decades we have begun to turn our attention to an understanding of man’s compulsion toward subservience and fuehrer idolatry. Quite unaware of what they are doing, the fuehrers misuse the helpless mass individual’s sexual and mystical longings for happiness. Accordingly, since the early 1920’s *social sex-economy* has devoted itself to a study of this social phenomenon, which is entirely new and has never before been dealt with in sociology. Yet, quite naturally, the new type of mass-psychological thinking grew within the old frameworks of social inquiry and terminology. Nothing can better show the gradual dissolution of the old views and the emergence of the new mass-psychological aspect of social upheaval within the last thirty years than the invalidation of every term pertaining to the old terminology and the affirmation of the new mass-psychological (sex-economic) way of thinking. Thus, most of the terms that have become obsolete during the past twenty years could be eliminated without in the least changing the sex-economic context of this book. The economic movements,

which derive from Karl Marx's influence on sociology, have lost their base of operation with the emergence of a completely new type of human and social problem. Further, the great difficulties these movements have encountered after coming to power, in whatever country, reflect their helplessness in matters human and sexual. The scope of human and social problems is far deeper and broader than Marxian economics encompasses. Time marches on, and political movements remain sitting on one spot. New human strivings emerge and correct the trends in public awareness of social processes.

The problem today is no longer that there is oppression and slavery and the need for liberation from every kind of suppression. This is self-evident to everybody, conservative, liberal, and socialist alike. The problem is how people can take it all and why they irrationally follow the politicians who add to their oppression and who manage totally to exclude the crucial human problems from public debate. *What is going on in people that they follow so much political nonsense* is the problem of the midcentury and it will remain as the major worry in the years to come.

This book was the first step in approaching the answer to this problem. It was followed by *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933) and *The Sexual Revolution* (1929-35). *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* applied the principles of individual and social sex-economy to the new movement of irrationalism among masses of average people. *The Sexual Revolution* investigated the processes in the first half of the twentieth century that were related to sexual and mental mass hygiene. This new social trend has been firmly rooted and is flourishing in the widespread awareness in the United States of the problem of human nature.

These two major works dealing with contemporary social sex-economy could not have remained valid for two decades—as they in fact have, up to and beyond the midcentury—had they not been preceded by a careful study of the history of social sex-economy and mass psychology, beginning in the early twenties. The historical investigation, which was supported by work in clinics with people suffering from the plague of emotional diseases (*Character Analysis*, 1st ed., 1933), introduced several crucial viewpoints into the theory of mental hygiene and the formation of human character structure: *the dynamics and effects of sex-affirmative regulation of human sex-economy*, the first such attempt in the history of science; *the clear distinction between primary, bioenergetically determined, and secondary, culture-made drives*, never drawn before; *the principle of sex-economic self-regulation*, as distinct from the “idea” of self-regulation without any bioenergetic principle (the *bioenergetic law* of sex-economy provided psychosociology with some natural scientific principles upon which investigations could be based); *clear-cut affirmation and support of infantile and adolescent genitality*; *the function of the armoring of the character structure in man* as fostered in patriarchal, authoritarian civilizations (cf. *Character Analysis*, 3rd ed., 1949).

These new principles in the theory of human character formation, simultaneously supported by and based on *ethnologic*, *clinical*, and *sociological* material, have begun to turn the tide in the knowledge of human nature—heretofore swamped by lack of scientific principles, mysticism, moralistic prejudice, and educational brutality toward children and adolescents—into the channels of a more rational procedure in biosocial thinking which

began to emerge slowly and cautiously in midcentury, particularly in the United States.

Although early organomic (sex-economic) pioneer work had broken the trail toward a *life-affirmative, sex-positive attitude* in matters of mental hygiene in the twenties and early thirties of this century, the general stream of works in this field is still paralyzed by fear of touching the hot potato I took from the fire of an over-aged, prejudiced moralism in psychiatry and sociology and had to carry alone for two full decades. But the result was worth the strenuous effort. The turn in matters of mental hygiene is here to stay and will develop into great accomplishments. The life-affirmative, non-moralistic, rational trend in biopsychiatry and sociology quietly and determinedly bypasses what is left over from the old, over-aged, prejudiced thinking in matters of "human nature."

The discovery of the *Life Energy (Orgone Energy)* in the late thirties added further strength to the general efforts finally to get at the *emotional plague* that has ravaged human life and civilization for such a very long time. To have laid some of the basic foundations for this structure in medicine, education, and sociology is in itself a great reward.

W. R.

Orgonon, Rangeley, Maine, U.S.A.
July 1951

Preface to Second Edition

The time that has elapsed since the publication of the first edition has brought two important confirmations of the views presented here: first, the family-political measures of National Socialism in Germany, which completely fit in with the patriarchal ideology of fascism and its way of reproducing itself socially (I have dealt with this in a more recent publication, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*); second, the results of Roheim's expedition, which place the theory of the invasion of sexual morality into primitive culture on a broader empirical basis than was possible until now—as a matter of fact, they do so without Roheim's intent, even against his own basic theoretical position. This is shown in the Appendix.

As for the rest, the book appears with minor changes only.

WILHELM REICH

November 1934

Preface to First Edition

The purpose of this investigation into a period of the history of sex-economy is to provide part of the foundation for a systematic social sex-economy. It is necessary to give an introductory survey explaining the development of the approach to the problems dealt with in this book.

Having proceeded from natural science to psychiatry and psychoanalysis, I was very impressed by the possibilities of causal, i.e., theoretically well-founded, psychoanalytic therapy of psychic illnesses. This therapy showed up very favorably against the purely intuitive or, even more so, the superficial persuasion methods of the old school. Although psychoanalytic therapy was far behind the theory of neuroses, a wealth of possibilities for unifying psychological theory and psychotherapeutic practice appeared from a first acquaintance with the subject matter. One knew, after all, that a neurosis had to be understood to be cured, and one could rely on this knowledge, even

if very often overwhelmed by failures in everyday practice. The greater the interest aroused by therapeutic problems, the more apparent it became that there was no better avenue of approach to the understanding of the still largely unsolved problems of the origin of neuroses than the consistent pursuit of the question: How can the sick psychic apparatus be made healthy? As we observed the process of transformation of the psychic mechanisms in the course of treatment, we were ever-conscious of the question: What differentiates the psychically healthy individual from the psychically sick? Thus, a deeper insight into the dynamics of the psychic apparatus was made possible.

Freud's original formula—neurosis is a product of an unsuccessful sexual repression; therefore, the first prerequisite for its cure is the elimination of sexual repression and the liberation of the repressed sexual drives—leads to the question: What happens to the liberated drives? In psychoanalytic literature there were two answers: (1) The sexual desires, having become conscious, can be controlled or condemned. (2) The drives may be sublimated—an important therapeutic way out. The necessity for direct sexual gratification was nowhere mentioned. In the course of many years' experience I have found that the overwhelming majority of sick people do not have the capacity for sublimation necessary for the cure of a psychic illness. The control and condemnation of liberated infantile instinctual drives always proves to be merely a pious hope if the individual's sex life has not been put right; that is, when treatment has not given the patient the capacity for satisfactory and regular sexual intercourse. It quickly became clear that neurosis does not exist without genital disturbances and gross signs of sexual stasis. Psychic illness, through the fixation of infantile sexual atti-

tudes, prevents the development of a normal genital organization and therefore of an ordered sexual economy. Furthermore, the establishment of full genital organization and *genital gratification* proved to be the essential and indispensable factor for a cure. Only genital gratification, as distinct from non-genital sexual drives, is capable of dispelling sexual stasis, thus withdrawing the source of energy from neurotic symptoms. When one had gotten this far and realized that here was the key to sex-economy and thus to the therapy of neuroses, experience showed that genital organization could be established even in serious cases but that the convalescent's environment thwarted the cure. That happens in the most varied situations. The chastity of an unmarried seventeen- or eighteen-year-old girl from a middle-class home is strictly guarded. In the case of a girl from the lower classes, social conditions (housing problems, contraception problems, the severely moralistic attitude of the parents) are so wretched that the patient, who in treatment tried very hard to shed her neurosis, is forced by the social barriers against sexuality to retreat into neurosis. As a child she had been destroyed by the denial of her sexuality and now she could get well only with great difficulty, if at all, because of the external denial of her genitality. It is very much the same for the unhappily married woman who is economically dependent on her husband or who has to consider her children. It also became clear how difficult it was for a neurotic person who was on the way to recovery to find a suitable partner. The disturbances of potency and the acts of sexual ruthlessness of the men, as well as the sexual disturbances and character deformities of the women, who as sexual partners were to complete the cure, were an additional problem. The very social conditions that in childhood had trig-

gered the neurosis now thwarted the adult's cure, even though in a different form. To this was added the criticism of my colleagues, arising from my contention that no cure of a neurosis was possible without the establishment of a satisfactory genital love life, a criticism that at first seemed rather curious. They opposed my view and insisted that sublimation or the renunciation of sexual happiness was essential. It made me feel more and more strongly that the social barrier was operative here. In view of the clear-cut clinical data, the neglect of these problems in the existing literature must have the same origin: *in the overwhelming majority of cases, the consistent causal therapy of neuroses demanded that the patient should overcome the established social moralism.* One shrank from that. And the repeated checking of the therapeutic formula over a period of years, again and again, produced the same result: neurosis was a product of sexual repression and of the stasis of sexual energy; its cure presupposed the elimination of repression and the establishment of a healthy genital life. Yet everything in social life conflicted with the practical application of this formula.

In addition, there was the difficulty that the vast majority of people in our culture were infected with sexual and neurotic disturbances; and since the only causal therapy, psychoanalysis, required treatment over a long period of time, the problem of the prophylaxis of neuroses naturally arose. There was little point in concentrating on individual therapy. One could only marvel at the fact that the prophylaxis of neuroses had not even been mentioned, or if it had been occasionally, the only answer had been vague phrases. The question, then, was: How are neuroses to be prevented? Official psychopathology, despite Freud, still clung to the primary importance of he-

reditary etiology. That this erroneous and fruitless concept has its sociological basis in the need of reactionary research to distract attention from the conditions of the outside world became quite clear later through the study of Marxian sociology.

A straight path led to Marx, once one had recognized that the sexual conditions of man's childhood were the cause of neuroses and later the factors thwarting a cure. The problem resolved itself into several separate questions. Freud had recognized the child's conflict with the parents, especially its sexual component, the Oedipus complex, as the central element in the etiology of neuroses. Why did the family have this function? Neurosis originates in the conflict between sexuality and the denying outside world. Sexual repression comes, then, from society. The family and education as a whole exercise sexual suppression with all the means at their disposal. Why? *What social function have family upbringing and the sexual repression effected by it?*

Freud maintained that sexual repression was the most important prerequisite of cultural development; culture was built on repressed sexuality. For a time one could accept this, but eventually it could not be overlooked that the sexually ill, neurotic person was, culturally, by no means the equal of the sexually healthy, gratified person. The class problem was nowhere near being tackled yet, but the treatment of workers and employees at psychoanalytic clinics brought closer the world of the poorer classes, a sexual and material world strangely in contrast with that which one had come to know in the treatment of private patients who paid well: different sexual views, yet, simultaneously, the same as were found among the middle class. Particularly astonishing was the family upbringing that, sexually and otherwise, ruined all classes

alike. Psychoanalysis had criticized this upbringing so little, and when it had, it had done so most insufficiently and mildly. Everyday experience indicated that psychoanalysis was the sharpest instrument for the criticism of sexual upbringing. Why wasn't it used? This upbringing, this destroying of the sexuality of infants, this misery of puberty, genital suppression in marriage—in short, all the social phenomena imposing sexual repression on the individual and creating a mass plague—could not be the prerequisite of cultural development. At psychoanalytic and psychiatric clinics, psychic disturbances were seen on a mass scale. Had we been rendered one-sided by our profession? I began studying my immediate environment and more distant environments as well. Everywhere, with rare exceptions, I found the same deformity of sexual life, the same neurotic plague in the most varied forms, here as an inhibition of the activity of a talented person, there as a marital quarrel, elsewhere as a character deformity; and everywhere there were genital disturbances, symptom and character neuroses, even in people one would never have suspected of being affected. Freud was right in asserting that the whole of mankind was his patient. He had come to understand neuroses clinically, but he had not drawn the obvious conclusions. What, then, was the social reason why man was turned into a neurotic? Had it always been so?

After I had rejected Freud's assertion that sexual repression was an essential part of the cultural development of society, considerable time passed before the realization that sexual repression stems from society evolved into the further question: *What interest has society in sexual repression?*⁹ Sociology did not provide any answer except the stereotype statement: "Culture requires morality." Finally I came across Marx and Engels, who enabled me

to understand much of the mechanism of our material existence, and I was amazed that I had attended secondary school and university without ever having heard of them. Later I understood why.

According to Marx and Engels, class interest and class conflict determine our present-day existence, also our philosophy and our research; behind their objectivity, class interest is operative. Morality is a social product that rises and then passes away, and in the class state it is in the service of the ruling class. Engels's *The Origin of the Family* leads into ethnology. Thus, morality has developed from something else, and the family did not exist at the onset of civilization as has been maintained. Morgan's historical discoveries were very gratifying to me. But his findings and the basic interpretation of the social process by Marx and Engels were at variance with Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. Marx maintained that material conditions of existence determine moral concepts, and this was clearly confirmed by everyday experience. Freud derived morality from a single event, the murder of the primeval father. According to him, this event brought guilt feelings into the world and was the origin of sexual repression. Thus, it is true that he offered a social event as explanation of the origin of sex repression, but he derived this event not from the conditions of existence but merely from man's jealousy toward the primeval father. This proved to be the cardinal point of the whole complex of problems. And it was closely linked with the practical interest in the prophylaxis of neuroses. If Freud was right, if sexual suppression and instinctual restriction were an integral part of the development of civilization and culture, and if further, as was beyond doubt, sexual suppression created neuroses en masse, the case for the prophylaxis of neuroses was hopeless.

But if Morgan's and Engels's accounts of the history of the family were correct, morality was bound to change again sometime, and, thus, the problem of the prophylaxis of neuroses, and, further, of sexual misery, could be solved. Could, but not necessarily would, for it was not certain that the further transformation of morality would meet the requirements of sex-economy.

To learn about the sociology of sexual disturbances, of perversions, of sexual antisociality, one had to investigate the sexual experience of primitive peoples. Sexologic and ethnologic literature provided an over-abundance of reports. It was an established fact that many primitive peoples lived differently, but others were said to hold the same moral concepts as our civilized world, above all with regard to marriage morality. No solution presented itself, for the reports were at variance. They were distorted by moral evaluations or they showed the eagerness of the authors to justify our moral laws, either by attempting to prove that the family and marriage order had always existed, as for instance, Westermarck tried to show, or by praising our "progress" from the stage of "savagery" and "licentiousness" (Ploss and others). But, simultaneously, there were lyrical reports on the sexual paradise of the primitives, alongside lamentations by scientific and ethical literature over the decline of present-day morality. The first impressions were merely confusing. The only certainty was that the bulk of ethnologic literature was moralistically biased. Primitive peoples, at least many of them, had different conceptions and experienced sexuality differently; and the lower classes also produced their own sexual morality, which differed from that of the middle class.

It was natural, then, to want to learn the facts concerning the revolution in sexual ideology in the workers' and

farmers' state of Soviet Russia. The reactionary press was raving about the downfall of culture and morality brought about by the social revolution. But the wording of Soviet sexual legislation was startlingly simple and matter-of-fact. It was totally different from reactionary sexual legislation, and it showed a complete lack of respect for the "achievements of culture," hitherto so vehemently defended, and for the "ethical nature" of man. Abortion permitted, even legalized; public assistance in matters of birth control; sexual enlightenment of the young; abolition of the term "illegitimate"; virtual elimination of compulsive marriage; abolition of punishment for incest; elimination of prostitution; real equality for women, etc.—all these clearly showed that *morality was transformed in a sex-affirmative sense*, reversing completely hitherto existing conditions. But the reactionary press and reactionary scholarship went on raving about the "decline of culture." Was Freud right, after all?

A visit to the Soviet Union quickly revealed not only that there was no decline of culture, but strangely enough, the moral atmosphere seemed, at first, ascetic: no sexual importuning in the street; reserve and seriousness everywhere; prostitution still in existence, true, but not seriously affecting the character of the towns; lovers here and there, but not nearly as many as in Vienna or Berlin; at social gatherings an absence of the sexual allusions and smutty conversation characteristic of our circles. In addition, one heard curious anecdotes: If a man dared slap a woman's backside or pinch her cheek, as sometimes happens in our part of the world, he might well be prosecuted before the party tribunal if he was a party member. But the question whether one wanted to become a sexual partner was being asked more and more openly and unhesitatingly: sexual companionship without any under-

handedness, women's genitality a matter of course. An acquaintance was in the eighth month of pregnancy, but nobody had asked who the child's father was. A family offered to put up a visitor but didn't have enough room, so the sixteen-year-old daughter said openly to her parents: "I'll go sleep with X [her boyfriend]." Two members of a youth commune asked to be bound for support of a girl, as both had slept with her and either might be the father of her child. In obstetric clinics, pregnancies were legally aborted. In the Kulturpark, a public establishment and accessible to any adolescent, charts and illustrations on procreation, birth, contraception, and venereal disease were available. At the same time, among the old doctors there was the same shyness about sexual matters as there is among us, for in many instances sexology is still the domain of moralizing and sex-psychologically untrained urologists and physiologists. There were contradictions of course, but there was an overall sex-affirmative change, with a new matter-of-fact attitude toward these problems. The old ways, including clerical marriage morality, persisted only in circles of academics and old civil servants. It was a clear change, not in any way final yet, but showing the economic outlines of a future sex hygiene of the masses in the impressive efforts to raise all members of society to a high cultural level through higher wages and shorter working hours as well as cultural mass education and a stand against religion.*

* [1934] This process has since met with serious obstacles and has partly given way to a regression to attempts at regulation. Soviet sex-economy will be dealt with in a special detailed publication.

[1951] In this interval, the U.S.S.R. regressed to complete reaction in sexual matters, in full agreement with its development of a rampant imperialism, imperiling the world under the dogma of "progress." This book, together with many other sex-economic writings, has been suppressed in and banned from countries dominated by red fascism.

Notwithstanding this change in objective sexual existence, there was a noticeable absence of a corresponding sexual theory. Psychoanalysis had declined, owing to its false excursions into sociology and to several reactionary publications by analysts; also, it had completely ignored the major revolutions then in progress. Moreover, in the last few years a clear retreat from the strict and revolutionary libido-theory had been taking place within psychoanalysis. With Freud's first publications on the ego and the death instincts, there was a flood of attempts to desexualize the theory of neuroses and restate it in terms of the theory of the death instinct. Theories were proposed that sought the origin of suffering in a biological "will to suffer," in the need for punishment and in the death instinct, instead of in the external circumstances of existence. As a psychoanalytic clinician, I could not follow this change. Clinical experience clearly contradicted it, and Marxian sociology made it possible to understand it. Psychoanalysis, originally a revolutionary theory of sex and of the psychology of the unconscious, began to adapt itself, insofar as the theory of sex was concerned, to the authoritarian conditions of existence, thus becoming acceptable to a reactionary society.

It could not be said that in Soviet Russia the revolutionary character of the psychoanalytic theory of sex had been recognized or that it had been rejected because it had turned reactionary, but the latter fact nevertheless made its acknowledgment more difficult. The various Marxist critics of psychoanalysis, in addition to not being sufficiently acquainted with the subject matter, overlooked the change in psychoanalytic theory that turned it from a branch of knowledge that aroused antagonism in reactionaries to one that aroused their enthusiasm. As the opponents of Marxism rejected the sociological excursions

of psychoanalysis, and thus its clinical psychology, so the friends of Marxism supported psychoanalytic sociology because clinical psychology made sense to them. Since there is no satisfactory theory of sexuality except the psychoanalytic, which is denied, the change in sexual life in the Soviet Union is taking place far more subconsciously, influenced far less by subjective guidance than is the change in outlook concerning other problems of cultural existence.* On the basis of clinical experience, it was evident that the sexual upbringing of children and adolescents would be endangered unless backed by analytically established facts. On the other hand, the sexually freer atmosphere had enabled persons in positions of authority to see many of the facts psychoanalysis had uncovered; for example, the conversion of sexual energy into work interest (sublimation—“*Pereklutschenie*”). The fact of infantile sexuality was also known here and there; but psychoanalysis was rejected. In the discussion after a lecture at the Neuropsychological Institute in Moscow, a high official of the Board of Public Health said they were waiting for a workable theory of the prophylaxis of neuroses. I was sorry to have to say that none yet existed. But, both from the medical and from the sociological points of view, such a theory must be worked out.

Returning from the Soviet Union with encouraging and stimulating impressions, I got down to the task of ascertaining the present-day political meaning of sexual suppression in reactionary society, through practical work in close touch with the working-class movement. The institution of marriage and family soon emerged as the fixed point around which the struggle in the sexual

* How clearly and systematically religion is being eliminated through the enlightenment of the masses by the natural sciences and the workers' development of technology!

field revolved, although at that time still subterraneously. It was wrecking sex research and sex reform. An outline of this problem and its solution was given in my book *Geschlechtsreife, Enthalttsamkeit, Ehemoral. Eine Kritik der bürgerlichen Sexual reform.** Perhaps the most important result of my political work for future sex-sociological investigations was the discovery that sexual suppression is one of the cardinal ideological means by which the ruling class subjugates the working population. *The problem of the sexual misery of the population can only be solved by a movement toward freedom from any kind of oppression. Less pleasant was the thought that the final elimination of the effects of thousands of years of sexual suppression and the establishment of a satisfactory love life for the people, thus eliminating the plague of neuroses, will be possible only when work-democracy has been established and consolidated in the world and the economic security of the population is guaranteed.*

Once the framework for further study had been created, I had to prepare for difficult theoretical work on the foundations of sex-economy. It could never be allowed to lose touch with clinical facts or it would risk bogging down in empty theorizing. Also, I had to reckon with the fact that sexual suppression is rooted in the suppressed masses themselves, and not much was known of the way the different strata of the population would react to having the question brought up, since the core of the problem was undoubtedly marriage and the family and the genital life of children and adolescents. Many years' experience in the sex-political field and particularly in clinics for sexual consultation convinced me that peo-

* Translated into English as "The Fiasco of Sexual Moralism," Part I of *The Sexual Revolution*.

ple were waiting for an answer to these problems just as eagerly as they awaited an answer to the problem of their immediate economic existence. At the moment a young but resolute sex-political movement, under revolutionary leadership, is spreading throughout Germany.

The attempt to explain sexual disturbances and neuroses historically nearly failed because the existing ethnologic literature had not considered inner experiences, the character of genital gratification, and the problem of neuroses. One could not rely on such books as R. Schmidt's *Indischen Liebeskunst*, for they gave recommendations but no description of the sex life of foreign peoples. They also failed to consider the relation between sex life and economy. The remaining literature, which attempted a description of this relationship—for instance, the work of Cunow, Müller-Lyer, and others—restricted itself to a discussion of the external forms of marriage and family and did not go into the genital function or actual sexual experience. Only the Morgan-Engels theory was reliable. In view of all this, the investigations of Malinowski attracted my attention because they established the connection between sexual forms and economy in the sex life of matriarchal primitive peoples. Also, they supplied material on actual sexual experience, including the problem of neuroses, which we had long been waiting for. His discoveries exceeded all expectations.

On the basis of this new material, which was a direct continuation of the investigations of Morgan and Engels, one could risk tackling the ethnologic side of the problem of sex-economy. The results are given in this book. I hope that, in the details given here, I have not made any gross ethnologic blunders. If that should nevertheless be the case, I can only ask the reader to consider that I had to work with existing ethnologic literature. The possibility

of personal ethnologic research has not been granted, at least until now; I would welcome such an opportunity. However, let me add that, provided my basic historical concept of sex-economy is correct, a few mistakes in details should not be taken too seriously. The study of ethnologic literature has convinced me that even expert knowledge does not shield one from making gross errors in matters concerning sex life.

WILHELM REICH

Berlin, September 1931

I

THE ORIGIN OF SEXUAL REPRESSION

ONE

Sex-Economy in Matriarchal Society

In 1929 a detailed report appeared on the sexual life of the Trobrianders by the anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski. He had spent several years on the Trobriand Islands of northwest Melanesia, studying the matriarchal organization of these primitive people.* We are indebted to Malinowski for a description, not only the first of its kind but the most thorough, of sexual relationships in connection with economic and social foundations, which we will quote in Chapter 2. Where Malinowski is not expressly quoted, the reader will find analytic results of my own, based on his investigations. They enable us to give ethnologic proof for some of the laws of sex-economy.

The sexual misery in authoritarian, patriarchal society

* *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*. Quotations and page numbers refer to the Harcourt, Brace & World edition. Also quoted in this book are Malinowski's *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (1927) and *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (1926). Page numbers for these books refer to the editions published by Routledge & Kegan Paul, London. Used by permission.

is a result of its intrinsic sexual negation and suppression, which create sexual stasis, which in turn begets neuroses, perversions, and sexual crime. For that reason a society that has no interest in sexual suppression must be free from sexual misery. Historically speaking, so long as, and to the extent that, there is no such interest, it will remain free from sexual misery. We can then say that the members of such a society live *sex-economically*, by which we only mean that they have a *naturally regulated energy economy*.

We then must inquire how sexual life is regulated, and we anticipate that it is by means of *the gratification of the sex instinct* and not by moral standards. We are prepared to find in the sex life of the Trobrianders almost exactly the opposite of what is found in the sex life of the members of our society: undisturbed sex life of children and adolescents and full capacity for gratification in the genitally mature—i.e., orgasmic potency of the mass individual.

THE SEX LIFE OF CHILDREN AMONG THE TROBRIANDERS

Let us begin with childhood and examine what Malinowski says. The natives have their first sexual experiences at a very early age. "The unregulated and, as it were, capricious intercourse of these early years becomes systematized in adolescence into more or less stable intrigues, which, later on, develop into permanent liaisons" (p. 51).

The child's freedom and independence extend also to sexual matters. To begin with, children hear of and witness much in the sexual life of their elders. Within the house,

where the parents have no possibility of finding privacy, a child has opportunities of acquiring practical information concerning the sexual act. I was told that no special precautions are taken to prevent children from witnessing their parents' sexual enjoyment. The child would merely be scolded and told to cover its head with a mat. (p. 54)

This admonition has nothing at all to do with sex-negation. It is merely a measure to prevent those having coitus from being disturbed. The children can examine each other and otherwise play sexually as much as they like. It must be emphasized that in spite of, or rather because of, sexual liberty in childhood, voyeurism as a perversion does not occur. From this, all those who are afraid of its implications can learn—if psychoanalytic investigation into the origin of perversions has not already convinced them—that freedom for the partial sex instinct in childhood does not of itself lead to perversions unless there are conditions of otherwise suppressed sex life. Further:

There are plenty of opportunities for both boys and girls to receive instruction in erotic matters from their companions. The children initiate each other into the mysteries of sexual life in a directly practical manner at a very early age. A premature amorous existence begins among them long before they are able really to carry out the act of sex. They indulge in plays and pastimes in which they satisfy their curiosity concerning the appearance and function of the organs of generation, and incidentally receive, it would seem, a certain amount of positive pleasure. Genital manipulation and such minor perversions as oral stimulation of the organs are typical forms of this amusement. Small boys and girls are said to be frequently initiated by their somewhat older companions, who allow them to witness their own amorous dalliance. As they are untrammelled by the authority of their elders and

unrestrained by any moral code, except that of specific tribal taboo, there is nothing but their degree of curiosity, of ripeness, and of "temperament" or sensuality, to determine how much or how little they shall indulge in sexual pastimes.

The attitude of the grown-ups and even of the parents toward such infantile indulgence is either that of complete indifference or of complacency—they find it natural, and do not see why they should scold or interfere. Usually they show a kind of tolerant and amused interest, and discuss the love affairs of their children with easy jocularity. I often heard some such benevolent gossip as this: "So-and-so (a little girl) had already had intercourse with So-and-so (a little boy)." And if such were the case, it would be added that it was her first experience. An exchange of lovers, or some small love drama in the little world would be half-seriously, half-jokingly discussed. The infantile sexual act, or its substitute, is regarded as an innocent amusement. "It is their play to *kayta* (to have intercourse). They give each other a coconut, a small piece of betel-nut, a few beads or some fruits from the bush, and then they go and hide, and *kayta*." But it is not considered proper for the children to carry on their affairs in the house. It has always to be done in the bush. (pp. 55–56)

All sorts of [dancing] games, which are played by the children of both sexes on the central place of the village, have a more or less strongly marked flavor of sex. (p. 57)

The fact that Trobriand children play sexually is not the vital point for our study. The great majority of children in our cultural spheres do too, especially those of the lower classes (with the exception of those who are already seriously inhibited neurotically). But, just as in the case of the sexual embrace, the decisive factor is not that it is done but with what inner attitude and in what social surroundings. It is important, then, what attitude educators and parents take toward children, toward their sexual play and their natural motility, generally. It is this,

after all, that determines the sex-economic value of these sexual activities. We stress the point because this view is not given any space in sexologic literature, which merely registers the fact that such play occurs, or overlooks it altogether. It was the examination of the economy of the genital function that taught us to consider the act itself less important than the conscious and unconscious psychic attitudes that accompany it.* From the beginning of a child's life it has a positive attitude toward sexuality, through the pleasure mechanism. The social surroundings alone determine whether this originally positive attitude can survive or whether it must give way to guilt feelings and genital anxiety, brought to sex life by society in various ways.

Now it has been shown that among the Trobrianders the parents' attitude not only is not disturbing but is rather benevolent and friendly. We can say, therefore, that, with the exception of the incest taboo, there is *no sex-negating morality*. On the contrary, a clearly *affirmative ego* develops and, as we shall see later, a *sex-affirmative ego ideal*.† As sexuality is free, the incest taboo can-

* See my interpretation of orgasmic potency in *The Function of the Orgasm*.

† [1934] However slight the difference may appear to be between mere toleration and the affirmation of infantile and pubertal sex life, it is decisive for the psychic structure formation of the child. The tolerant attitude of educators that is found today in certain small circles must be looked upon as complete sex-negation. Not only does the child experience the toleration as the non-punishment of something actually prohibited, but the mere toleration or "permission" of sexual play does not constitute a counterweight to the overwhelming pressure of the social atmosphere. The explicit and unmistakable affirmation of infantile love life on the part of educators, however, can become the basis of sex-affirmative elements of the ego structure, even when it cannot palliate the social influences. This view is intended as a criticism of the attitude of those psychoanalysts who dare not take the important step from toleration to affirmation. Replying that this has to be left to the children is

not be considered a sexual restriction, since abundant possibilities for gratification of a sex-economic nature remain. One cannot speak of restriction of gratification of the food instinct if the eating of mutton and green peas is banned but the person can eat as much of any other vegetable or meat as he pleases. We stress this in opposition to the many assertions that instinctual life among primitive peoples is restricted. These restrictions have no economic-dynamic importance. An economically and dynamically excessive incest wish is found where there is too great an interest in the incestuous object because of a *general* restriction of instinctual life. This is true of all other excessive instinctual impulses and explains the fact that the primitive is quite conscious of the incest *prohibition* but it need not be repressed because the incest *wish* does not particularly stand out from other desires as long as the other desires are gratified.

Every Trobriand boy knows that he must not look upon his sister as a sexual being. The conscious avoidance of any intimate contact shows the consciousness of sexual feelings toward the sister. If sexual life were otherwise forbidden, the incest desire would, because of the local and familial contact with the sister, immediately increase to such an extent that a profound repression of the desire would become necessary. This desire would then have to seek an unhealthy outlet. These facts are essential for the understanding of the *intensity* of the incest wish among

nothing but a shifting of responsibility. If, in the analysis of children, adolescents, or adults, no counterweight to social influences is offered, the removal of sexual repression remains theoretical. Just as wrong as it would be to force on a person something not organically desired, is it necessary to support in the child or in sick people such tendencies as work in the direction of sex-economy. Between the toleration of sexuality and its affirmation, the social sexual barrier is operative. Affirming sexuality means stepping beyond the sexual barrier.

our own children. Apart from the natural ties to parents and brothers and sisters, it is to a large extent the result of the complete denial of other sexual relationships; and not least among the causes are the sexual ties of the parents to the children, which in turn are conditioned by the sex-starvation of the adults.

It is typical of the Trobriand upbringing that in other respects too the parents' attitude toward the children lacks any of the authoritarian features inherent in our educational measures. We come to a full understanding of the intimate relationship of sexual denial and sexual suppression, on the one hand, and other characteristics of patriarchal upbringing, on the other, when we hear their opposite among the Trobrianders, described as follows:

Children in the Trobriand Islands enjoy considerable freedom and independence. They soon become emancipated from a parental tutelage which has never been very strict. Some of them obey their parents willingly, but this is entirely a matter of the personal character of both parties: there is no idea of a regular discipline, no system of domestic coercion. Often as I sat among them, observing some family incident or listening to a quarrel between parent and child, I would hear a youngster told to do this or that, and generally the thing, whatever it was, would be asked as a favour, though sometimes the request might be backed up by a threat of violence. The parents would either coax or scold or ask as from one equal to another. *A simple command, implying the expectation of natural obedience, is never heard from parent to child in the Trobriands.*

People will sometimes grow angry with their children and beat them in an outburst of rage; but I have quite as often seen a child rush furiously at his parent and strike him. This attack might be angrily returned; but the idea of definite retribution, or of coercive punishment, is not only foreign, but

distinctly repugnant to the native. Several times, when I suggested, after some flagrant infantile misdeed, that it would mend matters for the future if the child were beaten or otherwise punished in cold blood, the idea appeared *unnatural* and *immoral* to my friends, and was *rejected with some resentment*.

Such freedom gives scope for the *formation of the children's own little community*, an independent group, into which they drop naturally from the age of four or five and continue till puberty. As the mood prompts them, they remain with their parents during the day, or else join their playmates for a time in their small republic. And this community within a community acts very much as its own members determine, standing often in a *sort of collective opposition* to its elders. If the children make up their minds to do a certain thing, to go for a day's expedition, for instance, the grown-ups and even the chief himself, as I often observed, will not be able to stop them. In my ethnographic work I was able and was indeed forced to collect my information about children and their concerns directly from them. Their *spiritual ownership in games and childish activities was acknowledged*, and they were also quite capable of instructing me and explaining the intricacies of their play or enterprise. (pp. 52-53; Reich's italics)

Under dictatorial regimes the authoritarian suppression of the child serves to produce an expediently submissive structure in conformity with the organization of society in general, which constantly reproduces itself in the child. Just as here the parents are the executive instruments of the ruling order, and the family its ideological factory, similarly, matriarchal society, insofar as it is still distinct, reproduces itself ideologically by allowing the psychic structure of the child to develop freely. In this way the social ideologies of this society are fully developed in the children's community. And, just as in authoritarian so-

ciety sexual suppression becomes the basis for psychic inhibitions, in matriarchal society sexual freedom becomes the basis of characterological freedom, thereby guaranteeing libidinally well-founded social ties between the members of the society. These facts prove that self-regulation of the sexual life of the community is possible through instinctual gratification (in contrast to moral regulation).

THE SEX LIFE OF ADOLESCENTS

Let us now turn to the sex life of Trobriand adolescents. We see sexual conflicts, it is true, and a certain amount of psychic suffering springing from the difficulties of many love relationships, but we note the absence of external restriction. We see no "pubertal neuroses," no suicides, no asceticism "for culture's sake."

As the boy or girl enters upon adolescence the nature of his or her sexual activity becomes more serious. It ceases to be mere child's play and assumes a prominent place among life's interests. What was before an unstable relation culminating in an exchange of erotic manipulation or an immature sexual act becomes now an absorbing passion, and a matter for serious endeavour. An adolescent gets definitely attached to a given person, wishes to possess her, works purposefully towards this goal, plans to reach the fulfilment of his desires by magical and other means, and finally rejoices in achievement. I have seen young people of this age grow positively miserable through ill-success in love. This stage, in fact, differs from the one before in that personal preference has now come into play and with it a tendency towards a greater permanence in intrigue. The boy *develops a desire to retain the fidelity and exclusive affection* of the loved one, at least for a time. But this tendency is not associated *so far with any idea of settling*

down to one exclusive relationship, nor do adolescents yet begin to think of marriage. A boy or girl *wishes to pass through many more experiences*; he or she still enjoys the prospect of complete freedom and has no desire to accept obligations. Though pleased to imagine that his partner is faithful, the youthful lover does not feel obliged to reciprocate this fidelity . . .

This group lead a happy, free, Arcadian existence, devoted to amusement and the pursuit of pleasure . . .

Many of the taboos are not yet quite binding on them, the burden of magic has not yet fallen on their shoulders . . .

. . . Young people of this age, besides conducting their love affairs more seriously and intensely, widen and give a greater variety to the setting of their amours. Both sexes arrange picnics and excursions and thus their indulgence in intercourse becomes associated with an enjoyment of novel experiences and fine scenery. They also form sexual connections outside the village community to which they belong. Whenever there occurs in some other locality one of the ceremonial occasions on which custom permits of licence, thither they repair, usually in bands either of boys or of girls, since on such occasions opportunity of indulgence offers for one sex alone. (pp. 63–65; Reich's italics)

Psychoanalytic ethnologists have tried to derive from the puberty rites of many primitive organizations the thesis that among these, too, pubertal activities are punished, just as they are with us, with the one difference that the punishment precedes the person's entrance into genital love life. But a study of ethnologic literature makes one suspicious of interpretations that all too clearly show a tendency to justify our circumstances ethnologically and lightly apply to other social organizations interpretations that apply only to phenomena originating in our own circumstances. In saying this, it is not my wish to question the truth of these theories. When we are able

to determine the economic interests which influence and transform sexual life, then the theories will be important to us. If one considers sex-economy historically, it seems quite improbable that punishments for adolescent genitality have their roots in the instinctual structure of man (ambivalence, hatred, jealousy, etc.). There are organizations, as for instance the Trobrianders', in which not only is there no sign of punishment but on the contrary there is outright public support (the *bukumatula*, the adolescent consecrations and festivals, etc.). The representatives and supporters of the punitive view, which is so one-sidedly biopsychological, would first have to explain why in this organization the desire for sexual power and other negating qualities are absent. We maintain that these punitive attitudes toward pubertal sexuality are a result of the influence of economic interests on purely natural genital gratification, and we are about to prove this.

Let us return to our subject. The sex-affirmation goes as far as social assistance:

To meet this need, tribal custom and etiquette offer accommodation and privacy in the form of the *bukumatula*, the bachelors' and unmarried girls' house of which mention has already been made. In this a limited number of couples, some two, three, or four, live for longer or shorter periods together in a temporary community. It also and incidentally offers shelter for younger couples if they want amorous privacy for an hour or two . . . At present there are five bachelors' establishments in Omarakana, and four in the adjoining village of Kasana'i. Their number has greatly diminished owing to missionary influence. Indeed, for fear of being singled out, admonished and preached at, the owners of some *bukumatula* now erect them in the outer ring, where they are less conspicuous. Some ten years ago my informants could count as many as fifteen bachelors' homes in both villages, and my oldest ac-

quaintances remember the time when there were some thirty. This dwindling in number is due, of course, partly to the enormous decrease of population, and only partly to the fact that nowadays some bachelors live with their parents, some in widowers' houses, and some in the missionary compounds. But whatever the reason, it is needless to say that this state of affairs does not enhance true sex morality . . . I was told that sometimes a man would build a house as a *bukumatula* for his daughter, and that in olden days there used to be unmarried people's houses owned and tenanted by girls. I never met, however, any actual instance of such an arrangement. (pp. 70-72)

The *ulatile* (adolescent) has either a couch of his own in a bachelors' house, or the use of a hut belonging to one of his unmarried relatives. In a certain type of yam-house, too, there is an empty closed-in space in which boys sometimes arrange little "cosy-corners," affording room for two. In these, they make a bed of dry leaves and mats, and thus obtain a comfortable *garçonnière*, where they can meet and spend a happy hour or two with their loves. Such arrangements are, of course, necessary now that amorous intercourse has become a passion instead of a game.

But a couple will not yet regularly cohabit in a bachelors' house (*bukumatula*), living together and sharing the same bed night after night. Both boy and girl prefer to adopt more furtive and less conventionally binding methods, to avoid lapsing into a permanent relationship which might put unnecessary restraint upon their liberty by becoming generally known. That is why they usually prefer a small nest in the *sokwaypa* (covered yam-house), or the temporary hospitality of a bachelors' house. (p. 66)

This social assistance in providing a place for the embrace is the best expression of a social sex-affirmation, going far beyond mere toleration. Similarly, the indifference to and active hindering of adolescents in authoritar-

ian society, which manifests itself in its failure to provide a place for the embrace, is in harmony with its sex-negative attitude. Whereas social assistance has a decisive positive influence on the sexual health of adolescents among the primitives, its hindrance in authoritarian society results in a crippling and debasing of love life. It does not prevent the embrace from taking place. But the embrace is carried out in haste and anxiety in corridors and corners of fences and hedges, instead of in tranquillity in hygienic places.

And what about "culture," to which the timid continuously refer? The brothel life of our own youth should be compared with the following facts:

To call this institution "Group Concubinage" would lead to misunderstanding; for it must be remembered that we have to deal with a number of couples who sleep in a common house, each in an exclusive liaison, and not with a group of people all living promiscuously together; there is never an exchange of partners, nor any poaching nor "complaisance." In fact, a special code of honor is observed within the *bukumatula*, which makes an inmate much more careful to respect sexual rights within the house than outside it. The word *kaylasi*, indicating sexual trespass, would be used of one who offended against this code; and I was told that "a man should not do it, because it is very bad, like adultery with a friend's wife." (p. 73)

Within the *bukumatula* a strict decorum obtains. The inmates never indulge in orgiastic pastimes, and it is considered bad form to watch another couple during their love-making. I was told by my young friends that the rule is either to wait till all the others are asleep, or else for all the pairs of a house to undertake to pay no attention to the rest. I could find no trace of any "voyeur" interest taken by the average boy, nor any tendency to exhibitionism. Indeed, when I was discussing the positions and technique of the sexual act, the

statement was volunteered that there are specially unobtrusive ways of doing it "so as not to wake up the other people in the *bukumatula*." (p. 73)

The adolescent couple are not tied to each other by any law or custom; they are kept together by personal attachment and sexual passion and can separate at will. We understand that this relationship does not include any right of possession. Either partner is free to embrace other partners, especially on the occasion of the harvest and moon festivals. Expressions of jealousy do occur, but on certain occasions even this is immoral, as for example when after a death the young girls comfort the mourning men with sexual embrace. In spite of all this—or, from the point of view of sex-economy, precisely because of it—the relationships (without external or internal compulsion) are frequently more lasting, more intimate, and more satisfying than those achieved by our sexually crippled youth.

The common interests of the couple are purely sexual. For instance, they never have their meals together. We shall learn later that common meals are the symbol of marriage.

We see how inadequate the bombastically learned categories of "monogamy," "polygamy," "promiscuity," are to describe these sexual relationships, which are directed and regulated solely by the satisfaction of *genital* needs. These couples are monogamous, occasionally polygamous, and at festivals even promiscuous; but these classifications themselves have no meaning in this society and only come to mean something and have importance as moral evaluations in a society such as ours which tries to subject life to moralistic regulation. With us, too, they do not correspond to the facts. Our sexual relationships are

also highly varied. The difference between us and primitive peoples—this must be stressed, as it separates our sex-economic views from all others in every respect—does not lie in the fact that they live polygamously or promiscuously and we monogamously; nor can a claim for monogamy be postulated from the monogamous lives of primitive peoples, as many sexologists and ethnologists have tried to maintain. It depends exclusively on the manner in which sex life is regulated by society and in the *different way of experiencing* the embrace that results. The genital apparatus itself has the same nature everywhere, notwithstanding race differences and the phylogenetic influence of thousands of years of sex suppression (weakening of the somatic sexual apparatus?). And what causes our sexologists to rack their brains is that the genital apparatus does not know their categories, their “-gamies,” but only the goal of instinctual gratification. The question, then, is whether the particular social order is willing to recognize this function, and whether or not it can do so. That, however, is a sociological problem.

As adolescents grow older, their relationships become more firm and enduring—which, as we have shown elsewhere * must be ascribed to the gradual satiation of the sensual needs after puberty. This, in turn, causes tender attachments to arise. If there were no institution of marriage, these relationships would not last forever either but would give way to others in the course of time. However, under prevailing circumstances, the firmer relationships turn into marriage. First, though, there is a probationary period during which the young couple test their attachment and constancy and the parents take necessary steps, i.e., make economic preparations. *At this*

* See Part I of *The Sexual Revolution*.

point, sexual needs encounter specific economic interests.

SEXUAL FESTIVITIES

The advanced sexual culture of the Trobrianders finds expression primarily in various celebrations having no goal but sexual play and subsequent gratification. These differ from similar celebrations of youth in our society, first in that their real purpose is not hidden; second in that there is no denial of, inner resistance to, or outer inhibition of final gratification; and third in the absence of genital anxiety and guilt feelings, such as corrode the genital gratification of our adolescents if they allow themselves the final gratification. "He has not to stumble upon the final fulfilment of erotic desire, he immediately anticipates it. All the customs, arrangements, and codes of behavior dictate simple, direct approach" (p. 311).

Another essential difference is the absence of any kind of sentimentality in sexual relationships; yet the sex life of the Trobrianders is not devoid of a certain romanticism. This shows up the nature of the sexual sentimentality artificially nurtured by reactionary fiction and exploited by publishers: it presupposes the inhibition of final gratification, being itself an inadequate substitute for it, and it means there is continuous orgasmic longing that is never fulfilled.

Thus there is nothing roundabout in a Trobriand wooing; nor do they seek full personal relation, with sexual possession only as a consequence. Simply and directly a meeting is asked for with the avowed intention of sexual gratification. If the invitation is accepted, the satisfaction of the boy's desire eliminates the romantic frame of mind, the craving for the un-