

## BOOK REVIEWS

### SPECIAL REVIEW: EMPATHY AND ANTIPATHY IN THE HEART OF DARKNESS: AN ESSAY REVIEW OF MALINOWSKI'S FIELD DIARIES<sup>1</sup>

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Given the association we have become accustomed to make between anthropology and tolerance, it is more than a bit upsetting to discover that the diary which Bronislaw Malinowski kept in the course of his early field work in Melanesia is spotted with references to "niggers." True, its editor was able to dismiss this as "the colloquial term commonly used by Europeans [at that time] . . . to denote native peoples," and it has also been suggested that the word is an artifact of translation from the Polish original. However, there is still perhaps good reason to take the matter more seriously. Field work is the central experience of modern anthropology, and it is usually thought to require not only tolerance, sympathy, and empathy, but even identification with the people studied. If, in the words of Clifford Geertz,<sup>2</sup> the archetypical fieldworker was in fact a "crabbed, self-preoccupied, hypochondriacal narcissist," and perhaps a racist to boot, then the discovery is certainly disturbing, if not "shattering" for "anthropology's image of itself." Geertz suggests that we must reject the "unsophisticated conception of rapport" which would "enfold the anthropologist and informant into a single moral, emotional, and intellectual universe." He goes on to explain Malinowski's undeniable virtuosity as a fieldworker as a triumph of sheer industry over inadequate empathy. According to Geertz, the pattern of Malinowski's field work moved from sexual fantasy to overwhelming guilt to expiation in ethnographic drudgery to euphoric exultation in the tropic landscape — and back again to start the cycle over. There is no doubt that the pattern is there, but before accepting a characterization of Malinowski as a kind of nasty anthropological Edison, it might be well to look a little more closely at the data.

Of course, not all of this inheres in the word "nigger," but it may still be helpful to note that the first appearance of the term is on page 154 — i.e., that it, or its Polish equivalent, was apparently *not* part of Malinowski's diary vocabulary during his trip to Mailu in 1914 and 1915. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Malinowski also used a number of somewhat less charged terms ("natives," "blacks," "boys," "primitives," "savages," and "Negroes"), that he found "white superiority" "disgusting," that he was upon occasion capable of joyful identification with "*naturmenschen*," and that he often spoke of individual Melanesians in very positive empathetic terms. One is inclined, therefore, to look for the factors which may account for the appearance of this particular word only at a certain point in the diary and its subsequent appearance in specific contexts. On the latter point, one

<sup>1</sup>Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*, New York, Harcourt Brace & World, Inc., 1967, Pp. xxii, 315. \$6.95.

<sup>2</sup>"Under the Mosquito Net," *New York Review of Books*, 9/14/67.



notes immediately that when Malinowski referred to "niggers" it was invariably in a context of frustration, sometimes ethnographic, more often sexual. Indeed, by far the greatest number of these references occur in close association with thoughts about his Australian fiancée. All of which makes one suspect that there was something else involved than simply a crabbed and unsympathetic personality, an artifact of translation, or a widespread colloquialism.

One possibility is that this usage has something to do with Malinowski's acculturation to English or Australian norms during his residence in Australia between 1916 and 1917. The theme of his cultural marginality and his ambiguous relation to things English runs through the book, and it is only with his mother's death at the end that he seems in a sense to relinquish his Polish identity. Be this as it may, there is a marked difference in style and tone between the Mailu and the Trobriand diaries. One notes in the latter a marked heightening of Malinowski's "puritanism," and also (paradoxically) a tone of Anglo-Saxon modernity — for instance, in his reference to one of the many women he "mentally" caressed as "an attractive dish." The last phrase, too, is perhaps an artifact of translation from the Polish original, but one must consider the possibility that Malinowski picked up in Australia usages more characteristic of colonial cultures than of his native Poland.

In this context, one thinks inevitably of another Pole whose life bears certain resemblances to Malinowski's. Indeed, Joseph Conrad's name crops up on several occasions in Malinowski's diaries. Conrad knew only too well what happened to Europeans who ventured into *The Heart of Darkness*. Without his being fully aware of it, it is clear that Malinowski felt in himself something of the psychology of Mistah Kurtz. He spoke disparagingly of Europeans who "have such fabulous opportunities — the sea, the ships, the *jungle*, power over the natives — and don't do a thing!" He imagined the plot of a novel in which a European "fights against the blacks, becomes absolute master" and then a benevolent despot. He enjoyed the "delightful feeling that now I alone am the master of this village with my 'boys'." And at one point he even spoke of his feelings toward the natives as "decidedly tending to 'Exterminate the brutes' " — which was of course exactly the end to which Kurtz' benevolent despotism led, and almost exactly a quotation of Kurtz' barbaric footnote.

Malinowski was far from being Kurtz. But there are certain analogies of situation and perhaps of psychological dynamic in his experience in the Trobriands. During his earlier trip to Mailu, his ethnographic style was clearly still part of an older anthropological tradition. He lived among Europeans and went into the native village during the day to collect data from informants, apparently following the schedule in the 4th edition of *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*. It was only in the course of his later work in the Trobriands that the ethnographic principles he formalized in the introduction to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* were developed in practice. There his physical and psychological situation was quite different. For long periods, he was in fact alone among the natives, almost without any contact with European culture, during a period when his personal life was undergoing an extended crisis. Like Kurtz, he was alone with his instincts in the heart of darkness.

For Malinowski, these instincts had to do with sex rather than with power. A man of strong sexual drives, he was in love with a woman whose attraction was clearly somewhat more ethereal than that of others mentioned in the diary. In this

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context, it is worth noting some of the sexual associations which are sprinkled throughout Malinowski's text. On the one hand, he identified woman and physical nature (which may have something to do with the euphoria of Geertz' pattern). But he also associated *white* women and European civilization, speaking of his "longing for civilization, for a white woman" and of the moments of "almost unbearable longing for E. R. M. — or is it for civilization?" Native women, on the other hand, were often physically attractive, and potentially available — "At moments I was sorry I was not a savage and could not possess this pretty girl." Upon occasion, he even "pawed" them, although with immediate feelings of guilt projected as aggression — "Resolve: absolutely never to touch any Kiriwina whore." Emotionally involved with a white woman far away in Australia for whom he felt "personal attraction without strong physical magnetism," he was surrounded by women for whom he felt "physical attraction and personal aversion." The result was often "sexual hysteria," which Malinowski, in a measure of the distance between his self-consciousness and ours, attributed to "lack of exercise." These themes are indeed so pervasive that his diary might well have been subtitled "Sex and Repression in Savage Society."

It is this body of sexual attitudes — attitudes perhaps especially characteristic of a particular historical context, but by no means specific to it — which provides the crucial context of Malinowski's references to primitives as "niggers." The first of these appears in the diary of his second Trobriand expedition (unfortunately there is only one brief entry for the trip of 1915-16), after a number of entries in which his sense of isolation and his longing for "culture" and "civilization" — and for E.R.M. — have been growing sensibly stronger. More interestingly, it occurs when he is virtually alone in a Trobriand village, on the page preceding this methodological aside: "Maret's comparison: *early ethnographers as prospectors*." Malinowski was quite consciously carrying ethnographic work to a level far beyond causal prospecting, to a level which in fact involved sustained immersion in the strata of native daily life, and this not in the context of a fairly large scale anthropological expedition such as Torres Straits, but as a solitary digger into the heart of darkness. And he did this in the context of an extended personal psychological crisis whose aura pervades the diaries.

Both in terms of generic situation and of the state of his own psyche, the psychological demands imposed by the new ethnographic style were very great, and it is hardly surprising that Malinowski's attitude toward natives was ambivalent and often aggressive. The darkness he penetrated, like that of Mistah Kurtz, was in large part the darkness of his own soul. But even in the context of his account of his actual physical assault on one of his informants, it may still be a mistake to assume that Malinowski was lacking in empathy. As Geertz in fact suggests, empathy may be a much more subtle psychological phenomenon than we commonly think it. It may involve passion as well as passivity; it may express itself in ambiguity and ambivalence as well as identification. Malinowski brought to the field a considerable intellectual humanism. He also brought not only his own unique personality, but much of the psychic and cultural baggage of a 19th century European. And in this repressive context he struggled with his own instinctuality.

In this light it is perhaps worth considering certain latent functions of Malinowski's diary, some of which may in fact skew its picture of his interaction with



the Trobrianders. In addition to being vain, hypochondriacal and narcissistic, Malinowski was clearly a man of great passion and considerable inner honesty. His diary was explicitly an attempt to lay bare the inner dynamism of his psyche, and he quite consciously grappled with what he regarded as the darker aspects of his own being. But his diary perhaps also served functions of which he may not have been fully aware. At one point he noted that "intercourse with whites" made it impossible for him "to write the diary." If one of its functions was to create a kind of internal enclave of European culture, it may be that contact with whites made the diary less necessary. Beyond this, the diary may also have had a purgative function as an outlet for all kinds of feelings that he could not express in the day to day life of his field work. In doing so, it may on the one hand have been a precondition of his own psychic survival in the heart of darkness. On the other hand, it may have directly facilitated his ethnographic work. When he suggested that "the Vakuta people irritate me with their insolence and cheekiness, although they are fairly helpful to my work," this effective working ethnographic relation may have depended on his having some other outlet for his irritation. Indeed, his diary may well have helped to make empathy possible even in the process of conveying the impression of its non-existence. The comments of several working anthropologists on their own field experience in fact support this interpretation.

Another bit of anecdotal data may cast further light on the whole problem. One anthropologist who studied under him assured me that Malinowski was an aggressive, authoritarian, and often rather obnoxious person. But this same individual also testified to Malinowski's unusual personal charm, which could at times endow one's relationship to him with a uniquely positive value. The interactive psychodynamics of observer and observed is a problem which bears investigation. One may assume that it varies from culture to culture, and there is evidence to suggest that it has changed over time as native populations have become more sophisticated in their understanding of the "role" of the anthropologist, and of the culture he represents. But there is no *a priori* reason to assume that the combination of charm and aggressive egocentricity which men of European background later found in Malinowski could not have provided the basis for an empathetic ethnographic relationship, particularly if its negative aspects were self-consciously, and at some psychic expense, modified by ethnographic purpose.

Involved in all this is a point of considerable methodological significance to the history of anthropology. As this study proceeds beyond formal published statements of the results of anthropological inquiry to sources such as Malinowski's diary, it will be very tempting to assume that now, at last, we are getting the "real" story. But a diary is only one more perspective on an individual's life. It may in fact reveal a great deal; but one cannot assume that it tells the whole story, any more than an anthropologist can assume that the study of a people's mythology will reveal all of their culture. A diary is rather a particular form of communication, and like all forms of communication, it must be interpreted in terms of its function as well as its content. In the case of a diary "in the strict sense" — as opposed, say, to the letter diaries of Franz Boas — it is in fact a unique form of communication, in that it assumes no immediate audience save its author. Even as such a diary facilitates introspection, it may distort interpersonal relations. It must therefore be interpreted in the context of what is communicated by other modes—

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perhaps most importantly, in this case, by the body of Malinowski's ethnography. The amount and character of ethnographic detail which Malinowski was able to elicit and record are strong presumptive evidence for a generally positive personal interaction with the Trobrianders. It is of course possible that at certain points in the history of ethnography a good deal of data may have been elicited, as it were, under the gun of the European presence. But in view of Malinowski's isolated situation there is reason to presume at least a certain minimum of tolerance and respect for him on the part of the Trobrianders. And in the overall context of both his diary and his ethnography, one is perhaps justified in assuming that Malinowski's admittedly ambivalent and sometimes antipathetic feelings toward the Trobrianders were the basis for an interaction which, however emotionally complex, involved, in varying degrees, tolerance, sympathy, empathy and even identification.

From a broader point of view, Malinowski's diary is interesting in suggesting that the tolerance and empathy which we associate with anthropological field work is an historical phenomenon. The modern anthropological point of view was not always inherent in the study of anthropology. It was in fact quite hard-won at a particular moment in the history of Western European culture by men who carried with them many residual manifestations of the belief in Western European superiority and much of the repressive psychic structure of their culture, and who struggled, often in very trying situations, with cultural, instinctual, or idiosyncratic personality characteristics which in the past had generally produced a very different outlook. One virtue of Malinowski's diary is that it suggests, in terms of the specific psychological dynamism of a rather unique individual, something of the process by which the modern anthropological viewpoint was achieved.

Others besides Malinowski were involved in this process, and it would be illuminating to compare his field experience with that of Franz Boas. But the point I would emphasize is rather that once won — by whatever ambivalent and ambiguous processes — the anthropological viewpoint of men like Boas and Malinowski became a crucial factor in conditioning the way in which their students, and indeed modern intellectuals generally, encountered the primitive world. Despite the many differences between Boas and Malinowski, both sought to "grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world," as Malinowski put it in the introduction to *Argonauts*. The ethnographic realization of this goal will doubtless always be accompanied by considerable psychic strain. Laura Bohannan's fictionalized account of her life among the Tiv is ample evidence that psychological ambiguities analogous to Malinowski's have not disappeared from the field work experience. More specifically, several anthropologists have indicated to me in conversation that their own sexuality had been a gnawing problem for them in the field. From this point of view, Malinowski's diary casts valuable light on certain universal aspects of the field work situation. But in terms of the argument I have been developing here, the point is rather that this generic situation is now perceived by its anthropological actors within a cognitive framework which I have called "the modern anthropological point of view," and that we owe this way of seeing the primitive world at least in part to Malinowski's own voyage into the heart of darkness.

It need hardly be said that I recommend this book highly to anthropologists, and to all who are interested in the history of anthropology, or of the modern intel-



lectual sensibility of cultural difference. My only complaint is in regard to the editorial deletions. The omission of "a few extremely intimate observations," while understandable from a certain point of view, has probably deprived us of data which would bear on some of the interpretations I have advanced. The decision to omit "the early Polish diary" because it antedated his anthropological career may have been justifiable in terms of the aesthetic unity of this volume, but one suspects that this material might cast light on that career nonetheless. Finally, the "notes on sociological theory" omitted from the retrospective portion of the Trobriand diary might have illuminated the development of the functionalist viewpoint. But despite these omissions, the book is fascinating reading, and it is an historical document whose significance these remarks have only begun to explore.

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CARL M. GROSSMAN, M.D. and SYLVIA GROSSMAN. *The Wild Analyst. The Life and Work of George Groddeck*. New York. George Braziller. 1965. pp. 222. \$5.00.

George Groddeck (1866-1934) was called the "father of psychosomatic medicine." Primarily a physician who treated chronic and incurable diseases at his private sanitarium at Baden-Baden, he influenced psychoanalytic ideas and technique by the force of his imaginative mind and his therapeutic zeal. He called himself "The Wild Analyst." He was also a novelist and an activist in the cooperative movement.

The Grossmans have written a tenderly sympathetic biography of this unusual man. It is easy to read and worth reading. As a contribution to the history of psychoanalytic ideas the book is probably not of primary importance, since it is questionable that Groddeck's concepts were of much importance. True, Freud acknowledges his debt to Groddeck for his concept of the "id." But Freud meant one thing, the reservoir of instinctual drives and Groddeck meant an almost mystical powerful Unconscious, the source of activity and consciousness, an Es in which soma and psyche are one. Freud also acknowledged Groddeck's suggestion that "the ego was essentially passive, and that, . . . we are 'lived' by unknown and uncontrollable forces." While it is granted that parts of the ego are unconscious, present-day psychoanalysis is much more concerned with the ego as an executive function and not the passive organ to which Groddeck referred.

Groddeck's application of psychoanalytic concepts was indeed wild. He bulldozed through resistances with implacable conviction. To most of official psychoanalysts he was an object to be considered with caution. Freud and others supported and even sponsored him. Freud never permitted the irreconcilable differences in theory to make a schism between him and Groddeck. Freud argued patiently and paternalistically; Groddeck argued persistently, zealously, and with deferential admiration and love; and so they got along.

Groddeck was trained in large measure in his early years by Ernst Schweninger, who used his powerful hands to treat patients and laid the foundation for Groddeck's faith in physical therapy. But Groddeck was essentially an artist and his treatment was a combined physical and mental combination, which suited the organic and psychic components of himself. That he saw what he did as one effort and not as two was a necessity for him in order to maintain the concept of unitary man, as it