

# **Abandoning History : Evolutionism and the Ethnological Enterprise in Australasia**

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## ***Introduction***

In a recent speech to the British Academy Colloquium on Marxist historiography, Eric Hobsbawm, after inveighing against the 'golden age for the mass invention of emotionally skewed historical untruths and myths', calls for the renewal of a historical science which 'eliminates the distinction between history and the natural sciences', arguing that 'the DNA revolution calls for a specific, historical, method of studying the evolution of the human species.' (Hobsbawm 1) History, he claims, is the continuance of the biological evolution of homo sapiens by other means. The other means to which he refers are 'the accelerating inheritance of acquired characteristics by cultural and not genetic mechanisms.'

But there is good reason to believe that the invocation of 'cultural mechanisms' will, sooner or later, lead the historian back to the emotional skewer which he had hoped to avoid. For it was in the wake of Darwin that historians and anthropologists such as Sir Edward Burnett Tylor or J.G. Frazer made a similar attempt, an attempt that failed. As Adam Kuper has argued (Kuper, *passim*), there are dangers in placing the concept of culture at the centre of our understanding of human society. In this paper, I will glance at some of those dangers.

In his account of the evolution of our species, Darwin insists on placing Man within a series that began long before he saw the African light; of the 530 pages of my edition of the book (Darwin *passim*), almost 300 of them are given over to the lower animals, from insects,

through fish and amphibians, through over a hundred pages on birds<sup>1</sup>, to mammals, ending with some 150 pages on the effects of sexual selection on man. The early anthropologists, in contrast, were, in the main, primarily interested in establishing an evolutionary series that began after the species first appeared, and that ran from primitive savages to modern civilization ; the evidence was both in the archaeological record, and in those living fossils, the savage societies of Africa, America, and, above all, Australasia.

It is in this latter aspect of the anthropological project that its weakness lay; the hunt for survivals of the past in the naming systems, in the rites and customs of the Savage, based upon the idea that Savage culture represented a lower rung upon the evolutionary ladder, was bound to fail. The first generation of systematic field-workers--Fison and Hewitt, Spencer and Gillen among them--held to the project as it had been set forth by the theoreticians such as Tylor and Frazer, but their findings opened up different pathways which the second generation, represented here by Bronislaw Malinowski--less beholden to the Founding Fathers, more intent upon making a place for themselves, and for the discipline of anthropology, within the academy--was to embrace with enthusiasm.

In the present paper, I will attempt to show how and why it was that Malinowski thrust aside the evolutionary approach which had been anthropology's entry-ticket to the university. I do so in the belief that this was an error, and that this rejection--which coincided with a similar move in the anthropology departments of the United States under the leadership of Franz Boas--has been costly to that discipline, but I do not want to give the impression that I am totally out of sympathy with Malinowski. He wrote some of the finest accounts of a non-European society that we have, and set a standard for observation that has spurred on many of his intellectual descendants to produce work of the greatest interest. There is, however, a worm within the rose, and it is that worm which I have made it my business to describe.

To do so, I will be reading some extracts from Malinowski's notorious "Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term"(Malinowski 1989), written during his field-work in New Guinea between 1914 and 1918, a document which shocked the anthropological establishment at its publication, with its dark picture field-work, its expressions of naked hatred for the Melanesian people, and its revelations of Malinowski's double-dealing with the women in his life. I will frame these readings with some quotations from one of Malinowski's immediate

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<sup>1</sup>For example, he spends some time on examining how the Argus Pheasant developed the remarkable ocelli on its wing, tracing their gradation from outer feather to inner as an illustration of how their evolution may have occurred (Darwin, 761-769)

predecessors, Frank Gillen. Gillen, like most of the earlier witnesses to ethnological diversity, was not primarily an anthropologist. He was master of the telegraph repeater station at Alice Springs, and had been employed on the line that traversed the Central Australian desert for some twenty years. He had come to know the desert-dwellers, and in particular the Arunta, and when he met the university scientist, Baldwin Spencer, while the latter was part of a research team passing through Alice Springs, he began an anthropological collaboration which was to result in the publication in the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, of a series of books and articles which were to be mined by Frazer, by Durkheim, by Freud and by Levi-Strauss.

### **Malinowski Before the Field**

In what follows, I will be arguing that the human nexus established in the field is of paramount importance in the shaping of twentieth century anthropological endeavour, and that the peculiar circumstances in which the field-worker finds him or herself need to be taken into account in any attempt to come to grips with this endeavour. Nevertheless, it would be wilful to suggest that even the most youthful ethnologist arrives upon his terrain in complete innocence. Malinowski was quite a young man when he set up his tent in a Trobriand village, but he had a solid cultural and intellectual grounding, acquired in the universities of Poland, Germany and England, and was looked upon by his mentors as very much the coming man.

After reading philosophy in Cracow, where his doctor's degree, a 'friendly critique' of Mach, was very well received, he studied psychology under Wundt, before establishing himself in London. Although by his own account he was drawn to anthropology by his reading of 'The Golden Bough' while convalescing from an illness, he actually attached himself to Westermarck, whose work ran counter to Frazer's in many ways.

Malinowski was not to fully share Mach's extreme scepticism, but the philosopher's influence may well have made him wary of Frazer's lyrical flights. The young man's interest in psychology was to remain with him throughout his career and indeed he was to elaborate a functionalist theory of human society which was, in its essence, a psychologism. Wundt's introspective approach to psychology would have been congenial to him, for it appeared to underwrite his tendency to seek the wellsprings of all human action within his own skull. From Westermarck he took the idea – then somewhat controversial – that the fundamental

building-block of human society was the nuclear family, to which he added the conception that the most forceful element in the composition of this block was father-love, and in particular the love of father for son.

What, then, of Frazer? Malinowski was to be instrumental in forging an anthropology which would deny Frazer, which would reduce him to impotence. Yet he asked Frazer to write the Preface to his first ethnography (Malinowski 1922 vii-xiv). There was more to this than the rank opportunism of an unknown author attaching himself to the coat-tails of a writer who had produced a record-breaking best-seller--although Malinowski was by no means bereft of opportunism. Frazer had taught him a lesson that he could not forget, and that was precisely that the academic could be a cultural star, and that the scientist should also be a writer. Frazer's great work is that of a man who was primarily a literary critic, and who often ceded to his penchant for fine writing; the *Golden Bough* is shot through with the finest purple. Malinowski declared his intention to be the 'anthropological Conrad'; as Stocking has argued, it was from Frazer that he learnt to coddle such an ambition (Stocking 53).

In preparation for the great things he was to do in Australia, Malinowski carefully worked through the ethnographical material, and in his first book surveyed the extant writings on the Australian family. In this work he already felt enough confidence in himself to cast doubt upon the acknowledged stars of Australian ethnology, Spencer and Gillen, who were, he suggested, too much in thrall to erroneous theories to see clearly what was in front of their noses. Instead of seeking out evidence for the existence of group marriage, the chimera of late nineteenth century anthropological theory, they would have done better to concentrate upon the family as it actually existed, for they would then have seen that the nuclear family was solidly in place, and the relationship between father and children, despite the denial of his role in biological reproduction, was one of close tenderness and affection.

So it was that before setting foot in Australia, Malinowski had staked out his claim, lightly pushing aside those who might imagine that their own rights were prior to his. In the event, he was to suffer some frustration and disappointment, for his arrival in Australia coincided with the outbreak of the Great War, and he found himself considered an enemy alien, forbidden to work among the Aborigines. However, in the end, matters turned out for the best ; strings were pulled and, though banned from working on the mainland, he found himself setting out for New Guinea. We shall follow him there.

## **The Heart of Darkness**

The young man was, in the end, to renege upon his vow to become a Conrad to the academy. Although he was in New Guinea while the indigenous peoples were undergoing a radical, and painful overturning of their ways of living, little, if any, of this appears in the anthropologist's printed works. The Trobriand monographs are set in that timeless place created by the ethnographic present, and although we learn on occasion that some of the young men have been off to work on the plantations, or that one or another of their number has been sent to prison for some offence against an alien code, there is no systematic attempt to describe or analyse a society in transition, a people subjected to the weighty oppressions of colonization.

Malinowski, like other ethnographers before and since, silently drew profit from the situation. Among the first informants that he questioned on arriving in New Guinea were the prisoners at Samirai. Most of the men, condemned to hard labour, were being punished for deserting their European employer (Young 43). Other informants--often described as useful--were drawn from the ranks of the native policemen. It is as well to bear in mind that anthropology was an integral part of the colonialist enterprise, and that the ethnologist was as much an agent of the state as were the District Officers or the local white traders.

Not that the Trobrianders were to suffer to the same extent as the Australians. New Guinea was colonized at a later date, Papuan and Melanesian groups were organized along more hierarchical lines than were the Australian Aborigines, and their relationship to the land, which they cultivated, made more sense to the European. Their territories were recognized, their right to some small degree of self-determination agreed upon. However, savages they remained, and Malinowski used the term in the titles of his books. Whether there was any intentional irony in this usage, it is difficult to say; he seems to have held the belief that all humans were much the same, whatever their cultural background, and that any society, if it were to function, had to cater to the basic psychological needs of the human individual. In this view, there was little fundamental difference to be discovered between the Trobriand savage and the Polish aristocrat that he felt himself to be. And yet in his diary, he used another term--the Trobriander became a nigger, a term he used as an epithet of virulent contempt, contrasting with Gillen's constant employment of the word in a way that was almost neutral.

This difference between the two men seems to me to be of some importance. It is not

simply a matter of character or of education. Frank Gillen's relationship with his informants was completely different from the one that Malinowski struck up with his. Gillen the magistrate was a person of some considerable power. He was able to make his observations because he commanded considerable resources with which to bribe the Arunta captains, and because he exercised his power in such a way that they were able to build up some degree of trust in him. Malinowski, on the other hand, had little power or authority other than that afforded him by his white skin and his obscure but patent relationship to the local colonial authorities. Gillen met with his frustrations; time and again he refers to the obtuseness of his informants, and we may suspect that on some matters they led him a merry dance; one of them told a later worker that he and his colleagues had furnished Spencer with *tsuringa* that had been specially made for the occasion, and decorated with fancy designs simply to 'flash them up a bit' (Marcus 120). Nevertheless, the telegraphist was firmly embedded in a colonial hierarchy which gave him a great deal of social weight. Moreover, he had a clear function, as master of the Alice Springs telegraph repeater station. The young Pole, however, was in the field neither to convert nor to exploit, nor to administer. Malinowski credited himself with the invention of fieldwork; this was a gross exaggeration. But he may well have been the first European visitor to the Savages to have so little obvious or comprehensible reason for being there.

Malinowski was a firm believer in the rightness of social hierarchy, placing himself at or near its pinnacle. In the Trobrianders he recognized--or projected--a system of relationships which was quite close to the one in which he had been brought up. There was no question of his hob-nobbing with hoi poloi; he planted his tent firmly next to the chief's hut, and spent much of his time with this dignitary and with his family, from whom he recruited many of his preferred informants. They seem to have accepted him, although why they did is not altogether clear. Perhaps they found him amusing. But he was not always welcome, and the limits to which he was confined were sometimes made starkly clear; when the boats left for the Kula, the anthropologist remained on the shore, and had to fill in through questioning and imagination one of the key moments in the social cycle his description and analysis of which was to form the basis of his best-known book.

Frustrations such as these, along with the frustrations attendant upon his age and condition, came out fully in his diary which, on its publication in the early 60s, caused something of a scandal within the community of anthropologists. Today there are still ripples

from the arguments that it occasioned, with some feeling themselves called upon to defend it, while others point to it as the very type of ethnographical bad faith. My own interest in this document is not so much in what it reveals of Malinowski's racism or sexism--and both are certainly present in those pages--nor even in the extent to which it undermines the myth of the lone anthropologist steeping himself in the native culture twenty-four hours a day--although it does do so. It is more precisely in the view it gives us of the situation of the ethnologist, the ongoing, day-to-day relationships which he must necessarily enter into and negotiate, and out of which the work arises.

### **An Innocent Lunatic**

Gillen's Diaries and the letters he wrote to Spencer are not directly comparable to Malinowski's Diaries. Gillen uses both his diaries and the letters to record episodes and observations that would later be written into the major books. They are public or interpersonal records. Malinowski's diaries, on the other hand, are private in nature and his stated aim in writing them was to come to terms with himself; if Gillen's para-ethnological writings contain much face-work, to use Goffman's term, Malinowski's are given over to Self-work, an auto-analysis--he refers to Freud several times--aimed at ameliorating and healing his soul. This is, in itself, interesting; as Wengle has argued, one of the primary concerns of the ethnological fieldworker is the maintenance of his or her identity. Earlier ethnologists, such as Gillen or Howitt, would not have had to face up to such problems, for their identity was quite firmly established through their status as specified agents of the colonial endeavour. Malinowski did not have this advantage.

But even though their texts cannot be directly compared, both Gillen and Malinowski offer us glimpses of the conditions under which they worked, and it is illuminating to set them side by side. Let us first look at one of the letters Gillen wrote to Spencer :

My Dear Spencer

Once again I am addressing you from the old familiar den which reeks more than ever of things anthropological. In addition to the old smell an odour peculiar to my Royal brother, the Alaartunja of Udnirringeeta, pervades the place, he and a few of his Chosen disciples have visited and colloqued with me here daily much to the disgust of my wife who declares that I am courting an attack of typhoid (Mulvaney et al. 83).

The person here described is one of the prominent elders among the group of Arunta dwelling

around Alice Springs. His relationship with Gillen developed over some years; there is good evidence in the letters that the two men liked and trusted each other, despite the enormous divide between colonized and coloniser. The King was instrumental in making it possible for Gillen and Spencer to witness and—partially--decode the ceremonies of multiplication and of initiation around which life in the Central Desert revolved, and also in ensuring that the two ethnographers would be welcomed by other groups with similar openness. He accompanied Gillen on at least one of his fact-finding tours, and advised him on how to enter into contact with more remote respondents. It is interesting to speculate as to how far Gillen's and Unchalka's understandings of their relationship coincide; Gillen's den is on land which, by custom, is under Unchalka's control. When the latter squats upon the floor of the den, he may do so in the intimate conviction of enjoying a fundamental right. This, however, does not trouble Gillen's own sentiment of ownership; to his mind, Unchalka is very much a visitor—albeit one he is happy to entertain, for he finds his conversation, by and large, both profitable and agreeable. Let us now turn to a passage from Malinowski's diary:

To'uluwa came ... We greet each other as friends. He spoke about me and praised me. Despite everything, there is a certain residue of sympathy. He stood over me with a half ironical, half-indulgent smile, telling about my exploits. Joke about our kula (Malinowski 1989 153).

To'uluwa was the highest chief in Kiriwina and a central character in the ethnological writings (Young 60). Malinowski had met him and had stayed in his village during his first visit to the Trobriands. In the present scene, recorded at the start of his second sojourn, the chief has come to greet the anthropologist on his return, and his speech is a ritualistic recital of the visitor's past heroic deeds, which both legitimates and accounts for his presence. Malinowski, however, suspects that the mode is, in fact, mock heroic, for in a letter to his wife-to-be, he elaborates:

He (To'uluwa) had a long harangue to the audience, recording scenes from our acquaintance and explaining them my work, aims and habits. It was meant quite benevolently and in general it was the silhouette of an innocent lunatic that emerged from his descriptions ...(Young 60)

Malinowski suspects--probably with good reason--that the inhabitants of Kiriwina see his mission as absurd and futile. This is as true of the Europeans as of the Melanesian; the ethnologist's best friend on the island, Billy Hancock, a pearl trader, accompanies him on some of his investigative forays, and takes a number of photographs for him, but Malinowski confides to his diary:



Billy called me. We set out ... The camera felt too heavy. I reproached myself for not having mastered the ethnographic situation and Bill's presence hindered me a little. After all, he is not as interested as I am, in fact he thinks all this is rather silly (Malinowski 1989 48).

The ethnographer is never sure which foot to dance on. Dependent upon colonial officials, missionaries and traders in any number of ways, he must continually negotiate and draw up strategies for dealing with them, and the diary is full of ruminations as to how best to do so. As to the subjects of his inquiry, he finds that his relationship with them swings--sometimes within the space of an instant--from cordial collaboration to outright hostility.

Nor can he ever quite be sure as to what he should attribute these swings. Here he is writing at a later date, from the Amphletts:

Monday, 3.25. That day Gumasila and Nu'agasi men left for *kula* at Boyowa. Whether because of *secretiveness* or superstition, they always conceal their departures from me (Mailu, Omarkana, here). Got up at 9, as usual. Did not notice anything (the day before, Kipela had been washing and cleaning himself up--was this for a last visit to his fiancée or part of the *kula* program?). Went to Gumawana (peevish but not discouraged). The women hidden, as usual. I saw a few from a distance. Not too much confusion. I went to the *bwayamas* and observed packing of pottery! Only pots, sago and *nuya*. I couldn't persuade them to get out *bogana sago*. Took a few pictures. Saw Gumawana in the morning for the first time. No trace of magic ceremonies or farewells. Boys go, including even 2- and 3-year-old children. The boats are punted to the promontory where the sails are unfurled (I didn't see this). Came back at 12:30--the Nu'agasi were just leaving--I could not even photograph them. Fatigue. Lay down--closed my mind, and at this moment revelations: spiritual purity. (233-234)

Malinowski is continually reminded that he is present on sufferance and by the good will of those he calls 'the natives'. In the present instance, he is excluded from the *kula*, which was one of the main focal points of his work in New Guinea. He does not know whether to take this personally or not; the reference to 'superstition' harks back to an earlier occasion when he managed to persuade To'uluwa to take him on one of their expeditions ('our *kula*'). Half way through the voyage, the weather changed, and they were forced to turn back, and from that time on, the anthropologist suspected that he was seen by the islanders as a Jonah-figure, who would put their sea-going enterprises at risk. But on other occasions he is confronted with the fact that his project and his person are of peripheral interest to even his most useful informants.

Went to the village hoping to photograph a few stages of the *bara*. I handed out half-sticks of tobacco, then watched a few dances; then took pictures--but results very poor. Not enough light for snapshots; and they would not pose long enough for time exposures. --At moments I was furious with them, particularly because after I gave them their portions of tobacco, they all went away. On the whole my feelings toward the natives are decidedly tending to "*Exterminate the brutes*."<sup>2</sup> In many instances I

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<sup>2</sup>The italics are the editor's and indicate that the words indicated were written in English by Malinowski. Pace Leach, he really did use the term 'nigger' – see the following quotation.

have acted unfairly and stupidly--about the trip to Domara, for example. I should have given £2 and they would have done it. (69)

Malinowski's unfairness and stupidity stem, on nearly all those occasions on which he draws attention to it, from his expectation that he should be treated with the deference that he feels to be due to his person. Time and again, he works himself up into a rage when he feels he has been slighted by one of the men, or that he has been teased by one of the women:

At 10 I went to Teyava, where I took pictures of a house, a group of girls, and the *wasi*, and studied the construction of a new house. On this occasion I made one or two coarse jokes, and one *bloody nigger* made a disapproving remark, whereupon I cursed him and was highly irritated. I managed to control myself *on the spot*, but I was terribly vexed by the fact that this *nigger* had dared to speak to me in such a manner. (272)

### **Raging at Ginger**

Why would the man not dare to speak to Malinowski in this way? In fact, Malinowski's psychology is a fairly simple, day-to-day one, shaped by his own experience growing up as the son of a university professor at a time when this afforded some status, and as a minor member of the Polish aristocracy. He appears to have believed that a man carried the stamp of his character upon his face--throughout his work he is prone to giving snap judgements on the character of those he meets, referring to one of the chiefs as an out-and-out rogue, for example, or to one of his respondents as 'a very intelligent native'--and that his own inner worth would be clearly visible to all who met him. He seems to have projected himself into the Melanesian upper strata, and To'uluwa and his family occupy a central role in the ethnologies, while he himself is seen in his photographs handling the accoutrements of high rank. He believed he recognized chiefly bearing in To'uluwa--and certainly expected that it should be recognized in himself. He made of the younger male members of the chiefly line his best informants. That a mere commoner should make a disapproving remark was terribly galling.

But in the end, Malinowski knew himself to be vulnerable. Let us again compare Gillen with his posthumous rival. Here he is writing to Spencer about an episode in which he was able to demonstrate his authority over the Alice Springs Arunta, thus, by his own account, astonishing the other local agents of the state:

About a fortnight ago I discovered that four of the Erleara, Blind George, Young Sambo, Tom (the Kings Son) and Tom Crib, had made a raid on Gunters goats, this happened on race day and when I made the discovery the offenders were all away. I at once stopped down rations and as Kelly did not move on the matter I called up the old men and told them that until the offenders were brot in to

me there would be no supplies of baccy etc. Yesty they came in and without tying them up I sent them to Kelly for punishment, no one here, except myself, believed that they would go the Camp knowing as they did that they were to have a hiding--The fact of them yielding themselves up for a hiding staggered Kelly and has given him an exaggerated opinion of my power over the darkies--Field, Besley and Squire pooh poohed the idea of the boys going to the camp of their own free will--you can imagine how I have been chortling to myself while preserving an outward appearance of unconcern ... (Mulvaney et al. 149)

There is much in this that we do not have the time to look at; the complexities of the relationship between character and status, between history, biography and personality, the way in which physical violence is normalized and the way in which a subject people is implicated in its own subjection will have to be left to one side. We will note, nevertheless, that Gillen's power in this instance, although he and (to his mind) his colleagues see a personal element in it, in the end derives from his position as magistrate and Sub-Protector of the Aborigines--from his officialized and formal function within the colonialist state. Malinowski has little of this form of power, as he realizes most acutely when he finally reaches the end of his tether in the long drawn out saga of his relationship with Ginger, his servant. Ginger is a Melanesian, the head of a shadowy group whom Malinowski refers to as 'the boys'. Malinowski offers us a series of glimpses of his dealings with Ginger--teaching him how to cook a European breakfast, sending him out to round up informants, or to find a boat--in which the ethnologist surfaces as that familiar figure, a man with servant problems. On occasion he shows himself raging at Ginger, and his irritation grows until, towards the end of the diary (and immediately following yet another refusal to take him on the kula), we find the following entry:

(unpleasant clash with Ginger à propos of termites; I was enraged and punched him in the jaw once or twice, but all the time I was scared, afraid this might degenerate into a brawl) (Malinowski 1989 250).

It may be that the diarist had in mind at this moment an incident that he reported from his first visit to New Guinea. Tired out by his labours, he delivers himself into the hands of his favourite servant :

Igua massaged me and told stories in delightful Motu, about murders of white men, as well as his fears about what he would do if I died in that way! I fell asleep feeling poorly (73)

Malinowski knows that he is exposed in a way that Gillen would not have been--at least not at that stage in his career<sup>3</sup>. His power depends on little more than the colour of the thin layer of skin that stretches across his skull. As he lays into his *bête noire*, he senses that he is coming close to being no more than one animal confronting another.

### **The Naked Self**

Throughout the diary, Malinowski grapples with the question of his identity. Doubly a stranger--a Pole in Anglo-Australia, and a European among the Melanesians--he finds his self-conceptions continually put to the test. Wengle reports that this is a regular feature of anthropological fieldwork--and that on occasion it may lead to nervous breakdown. What protects the investigator in these circumstances is, claims Wengle, a strong professional identity, which in itself is founded upon the recognition of one's peers, or upon the strong belief that such recognition will be achieved.

Malinowski came to the field with great expectations – both his own and those of his mentors. Bringing his trained, scientific vision to bear upon the Melanesian Savage, he was to settle some of the great questions posed by Tylor, by Frazer or by Andrew Lang. Had there been a period of group marriage in our early history, or was the nuclear family always and everywhere the basic building-block of human society? To what extent was primitive economy a forerunner of modern systems of exchange? Was magical thinking a precursor of the scientific attitude?

For a Frank Gillen or an A.W. Howitt, the distance between the observer and the observed, maintained by the relatively clear lines of colonial distinction, based on race, conquest and class, was sufficiently well-maintained to permit an objectification of Aboriginal peoples and of their practices, and to see them as veritable living fossils. For Malinowski and for his successors, however, the Anthropological Other had become, in the very nature of the project for which he had himself laid down the lines, in which the ethnologist was to plunge into the very life-stuff of his chosen people, a mirror to the self. To'uluwa's amused condescension or the glint of a threat of violence in Ginger's eye--and we will never, of course, know to what extent they were Malinowski's projections of his own

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<sup>3</sup>On one occasion during his early days on the line, Gillen had had to use the wire to transmit a message back to Adelaide recounting an Aborigine attack on another of the repeater stations in which two of his colleagues had been killed.

fears and feelings--pursued him every step of his way. That is perhaps why the diary reads so often as a kind of mental dustbin into which the ethnologist tips his most purulent rubbish. From the early days, in which he castigated the missionaries for their lack of understanding of the natives, and criticized the colonists for their brutality, he slides relatively quickly into his invocations of Kurtz ('exterminate the brutes'), until finally, he is able to write:

The natives still irritate me, particularly Ginger, whom I could willingly beat to death. I understand all the German and Belgian colonial atrocities (279)

This virulence is defensive in nature; he constantly attempts to protect his self image from the assaults--both negative (the criticisms of his behaviour, the dismissals of his project) and positive (the physical attractions which the Melanesians (male and female) exercise over him)--alternating in the space of a single entry between rage at those whose judgements he would deny and his own self-lacerations. The last words in the published version of the diary, written in the wake of his receiving news of his mother's death, are:

All the tender feelings of my childhood come back: I feel as when I had left Mother for a few days, returning from Zwierzyniec with Father. --I go back in my thoughts to Anna Br. --how utterly everything has vanished from my life! --Stas's betrayal, and N.S. Truly I lack real character (298).

It is my impression that Malinowski's self-searching and self-con/destruction, although always present, deepen as we move from the first part of the diary, which records his time in Mali, to the second, which records his second trip to the Trobriands. At the same time, there is another, and, to my mind, related progression; in the early records, we find him looking for the primitive. In a fairly conventional fashion, he dismisses the missionary natives, worthless fellows who have surrendered their own culture without properly assimilating a new one, and searches for the true Savage:

The light of the lantern transformed the palm grove into strange, fantastic, vaulted interiors. On the shore, uprooted mangrove stumps. Big dark houses standing in a row. Dances ... My artistic and scientific curiosity were both gratified. Despite everything there is a great deal of primitive man in this, going back to the age of polished stone (37).

This leads him to the question of how far such activities truly do provide a glimpse of origins:

I also thought about the extreme rigidity of habit. These people cling to certain specific forms of dance and melody--a certain rigid combination of buffoonery and poetry. I have the impression that changes occur only slowly and gradually. Doubtless the contact between two cultural spheres must have had a

great deal to do with the change in customs (37).

Among these peoples locked away by distance from the mainstreams of human history, there was conceivably no reason to believe that customs had changed to any great extent since the beginnings of time.

But as his diary progresses, Malinowski increasingly becomes aware of the extent to which Melanesian society and culture had been changed by contact. At first, he played with the idea that it might be possible to abstract these influences, and to sift out the true Primitive Gold, but in the end he turned away from History, inventing, he claimed, the doctrine of functionalism in which it was the sociologist's task to show how the social institutions of this or that society satisfied the basic human physical and psychological needs. These, he seemed to believe, were very much the same everywhere, and very much like those of the Polish peasant and the Polish aristocrat. Or of Ginger and his angry master.

## **Conclusion**

The Darwinian project is of Spartan simplicity and asceticism; it is to place man firmly among the animals, subject to the same laws of development, of variation, of struggle and survival. The anthropologist is but one specialist among others, all contributing to the writing of one overall Natural History which would take us from the world's beginnings to its present--and perhaps foreshadowing its end. Our species--like all species--has its specificities, and among them is the capacity to symbolize, to create those things, both concrete and abstract, which we refer to as Culture. But this does not lift it up and beyond the reach of science; culture is to be explained using the same approach, the same intellectual tools as we bring to bear upon the Argus pheasant. The different forms of human life, one may fancifully imagine, are much like the different feathers upon the male bird's wing.

Yet it is arguable that the human sciences have honoured Darwin as much in the breach as in the observance of his strictures. The idea that humankind is a special creation affects even those, such as Daniel Dennett or Richard Dawkins, who sing Darwin's praises most loudly, and they introduce one last skyhook with which to swing clear of the swamps, oceans, forests and deserts in which other creatures struggle for existence, animated robots vehiculing their genes. That hook is Culture with a big C. Anthropology, even in the moment of its birth as an academic discipline, traced out the line that separated man from his fellow animals;

Taylor took care in the Preface to the second edition of his “The Origins of Culture” to push both Darwin and Spencer out to arm's length, accounting for the absence of citation of their works by the fact that his book came 'scarcely into contact of detail with the previous works of these eminent philosophers' (Tylor xvi).

Nevertheless, the first ethnologists did try to map the evolutionary pathways that had taken us from Savagery to Civilization. Their successors, as we have seen, largely abandoned the attempt. Partly their reasons for rejecting the approaches and findings of their forerunners were legitimate; it was indeed an error to imagine that the hunter-gatherers of Australia or America could offer a direct window into the deep past of our species, and much of the theorizing was wild speculation, little disciplined by systematic observation. But these difficulties might have led to a rethinking of methodology, to a recalibration of the questions and of the data to be sought. Instead, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, and the American culturalist school under the impulsion of Boas, turned their backs upon the whole question.

I have attempted to show here that one of the reasons for this turnabout was the development of the modern fieldwork approach. Caught up in the day-to-day struggle to maintain the threatened boundaries of the self, the university-trained ethnologist, lacking the social, economic and cultural anchorage that retained the colonial administrator, missionary, or merchant, was ill-equipped to preserve the distance that would allow him to place both the Savage and himself within the animal domain. Under these circumstances, the temptation to turn to a Romantic and Sentimental vision of the Other and of one's own relationship to him might be overwhelming.

Malinowski provided the key texts from which this approach was derived. The opening pages of 'Argonauts' can be read as a manifesto for the academic, professional, ethnologist. Malinowski's recommendations were to launch generations of fieldworkers, many of them younger than he had been, carrying less intellectual and psychological ballast into the strange and unexpected places and times in which they came to adulthood. That is why the publication of the Diary caused such anguish within the anthropological establishment--and perhaps why that establishment remains in denial as to the full import of those pages even today. In them we may read a premonition of how fieldwork rapidly degenerated from an attempt to check, verify and discover the realities which govern our existence to become the Vision Quest in which the youthful seeker sets out upon the path that will take him or her to

true self-knowledge. To'uluwa leads us directly to Castenada's Don Juan.

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