

## BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

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### **A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term**

Bronislaw Malinowski

Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1989. xxxiv + 315 pp. \$42.50 (cloth), \$14.95 (paper)

*Reviewer:* John Barker

University of British Columbia

This is a reissue of the 1967 text with a new introduction by Raymond Firth. The *Diary* has, of course, been extensively appraised since it was first published (and Firth makes several cogent comments on the critical literature). This leaves the current reviewer little to do but to restate the book's contents and offer some opinion as to who might find it worth reading.

Malinowski never intended this personal document to be published—indeed, none of his colleagues knew of its existence until it was discovered following his death. Written mostly in Polish in several small notebooks, the surviving diary covers two periods: September 1914 to August 1915, when Malinowski conducted his initial fieldwork on Mailu Island in southern Papua, and October 1917 to July 1918, during his second and last expedition to the Trobriand Islands.

Except for a few retrospective passages, Malinowski wrote about his passing moods and interactions as he immediately experienced them. He noted, usually briefly, his movements around coastal Papua, his informants and the ethnographic subjects on which he was working. But he used his diary mostly as a place to reveal, and perhaps relieve, his anxieties and frustrations with his mother, fiancée, lovers, teachers, the various Europeans he met in Papua and native informants. This makes for a very egocentric, even egotistic, document that sheds little light on Malinowski's published work. Unless the reader is familiar with the intimate details of Malinowski's private life, much of the text will make little sense and hold little interest.

As noted by earlier reviewers, the *Diary* thus contains surprisingly little information about either Mailu or the Trobriand Islands, or even about Malinowski's fieldwork methods. Several readers, including Valetta Malinowski who arranged for its translation, have justified its publication in terms of what it reveals about Malinowski's personality. Malinowski's loneliness, obsession with distant relations back home and attraction to "trashy novels" are traits familiar to most experienced fieldworkers, as are his expressions of impatience with informants who missed interviews or gave weak testimonies. These revelations, especially the evidence that the master of fieldwork penned the occasional racist slur against the "natives," caused quite a stir in the anthropological world two decades ago. Today, when autobiographical accounts of fieldwork have become commonplace, Malinowski's private expressions of frustration seem neither surprising nor very revealing. More importantly, Malinowski wrote so little about his relations with individual Papuans in the *Diary* that we are not easily able to assess his intimate feelings about or interactions with informants and thus determine how these might

have affected his ethnographic insights. As a field autobiography, the *Diary* is simply inadequate.

To my mind, the *Diary* is more valuable for occasional tidbits of contextual information: comments on missionaries in lonely outposts, descriptions of the tastes and prejudices of colonial officers and European traders, clues about the adjustments of Papuans to colonial domination. The *Diary* is an archive. Like any archive, it contains gems of information—extended descriptions of natural scenes or decisive character sketches of figures who flit in and out of other historical accounts. And like any archive these gems are hidden in long and inconsequential or obscure passages. To dig out the gems, one has to know what one is looking for and one has to be patient.

Since it was first published, the *Diary* has been read primarily by Malinowski's biographers, interested in rounding out their study of the man, and by those who wish to challenge the Malinowski myth or to create their own version of that myth. I expect that this very individual and personal document will continue to appeal mostly to these limited audiences.

### **Societies at Peace: Anthropological Perspectives**

Signe Howell and Roy Willis, eds.

London, England: Routledge, 1989. ix + 250 pp. \$14.95 (paper)

*Reviewer:* Elliott Leyton

Memorial University of Newfoundland

Curiously, although most human beings yearn, perhaps above all else, for peace (both internal and societal), social scientists have granted it scant attention. Might this tell us something we would prefer not to know about social scientists as human beings? In any case, there is only a tiny anthropological literature on peaceable societies. Indeed, *Societies At Peace* is the first major collection on the subject since Montagu's landmark *Learning Non-Aggression* (Oxford University Press, 1978)—and that earlier book, while first-rate anthropology, drew heavily upon psychological analysis and insufficiently emphasized the role of structural and cultural forces in the eradication of violence.

This important and timely book tries to fill that gaping hole in our understanding. Its editors and publisher are to be congratulated for bringing to light this provocative manuscript, which was originally the product of a 1986 conference at the University of Edinburgh on "Peace, Action, and the Concept of Self." The editors deploy the book's central argument in their "Introduction," proposing an alternative to the conventional view of aggression as "an innate human drive," and arguing that there is now enough evidence to treat *sociality* as an innate human quality. Indeed, they suggest that Western prejudices concerning the alleged primacy of aggressiveness "tell us more about Western society than about human nature" (p. 2).

The meat of the book lies in its dozen theoretical and ethnographic essays. The papers are somewhat uneven, and space considerations compel me to refer only to the most successful. Clayton Robarchek goes beyond Dentan's work to show how a particular blend of apparently contradictory qualities (dependence on the group and emphasis on individual autonomy) creates a non-violent milieu among the