



**HISTORY OF  
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# HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY NEWSLETTER

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## Observing “Man” *in Situ*: Edward Burnett Tylor’s Travels through Mexico

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In the spring of 1856, I met Mr. Christy accidentally in an omnibus at Havana. He had been in Cuba for some months, leading an adventurous life... and visiting all sorts of people from whom information was to be had.<sup>1</sup>

—Edward Burnett Tylor, 1861

### Introduction: The Canonization of “Tylor’s Science” and Field Studies *Avant la Lettre*

Anthropologists have traditionally canonized Edward Burnett Tylor as the father of modern anthropology, referring to the discipline in the second half of the nineteenth century as “Tylor’s science.” Some have claimed that his contributions form the basis of many of the cultural theories still used by researchers today.<sup>2</sup> Tylor has been positioned as the great teacher of “civilization”; a term that was once interchangeable with “culture”. He has been credited as the first practitioner to define the word, an innovator in sending his students into the field, as well as an occupational pioneer, devoting his career strictly to the study of human variation. His impact was already being recognized throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. For instance, in 1907, his close friend and fellow anthropologist Andrew Lang (1844-1912) argued that, “he who would vary from Mr. Tylor’s ideas must do so in fear and trembling (as the present writer knows from experience).”<sup>3</sup> However, Tylor’s often forgotten observational practices, incorporated into his methodological repertoire, were developed during his travels through Mexico, where he observed the indigenous populations of the region *in situ*. This is significant because it demonstrates an early attempt by an anthropological researcher to improve the quality of his ethnographic observations by engaging directly with his “object of study.” Taking these travel experiences as its focus, the aim of this paper is to show how Tylor’s journey through Mexico shaped his later anthropological writings. As we will see in due course, Tylor’s training in anthropology was different to that of many of the leading ethnological and anthropological figures of the first half of the nineteenth century. Unlike his predecessors, he did not have a formal education in medicine or natural history. Instead, Tylor learnt about human variation on the spot through a chance encounter in 1856 with the ethnologist Henry Christy (1810-1865) whilst travelling through Cuba.

### Learning to Observe: Tylor and his Journey through Mexico

Before Tylor became a dominant figure in the enterprise of anthropology, he followed a slightly different training regime from other researchers from the earlier part of the nineteenth century. Unlike ethnologists such as James Cowles Prichard (1786-1848),

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<sup>1</sup> Tylor, Edward Burnett, *Anahuac: or Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern*, Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861, 1

<sup>2</sup> For example see Stocking, George, *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology 1888-1951*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1995, 3-4

<sup>3</sup> Lang, Andrew, “Edward Burnett Tylor” from Balfour, Henry (ed.), *Anthropological Essays Presented to Edward Tylor in Honour of his 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, AMS Press, 1978, 1

Robert Gordon Latham (1812-1888) and William Lawrence (1783-1867), or anthropologists such as James Hunt (1833-1869) and Charles Carter Blake (1840?-1887), Tylor did not formally study medicine or natural history at university.<sup>4</sup> He was born into a middling-sort Quaker family and received most of his education from the Grove House School in Tottenham, which was operated by the Society of Friends. Many prominent ethnologists in the first half of the nineteenth century were Quakers—including Prichard and Thomas Hodgkin (1798-1866)—and their religious beliefs influenced many of the discipline's theories. In particular, the Quaker doctrine of the “inner light” was associated with the axiom that all humans are equal, a doctrine consistent with monogenism, or the theory of a single human ancestral origin.<sup>5</sup> For example, there are discernible religious undertones in the opening pages of Prichard's *Researches* in the 1813 edition, and subsequent editions were sustained by his early views.<sup>6</sup> Thus, early on, Tylor was immersed in a culture in which issues relating to racial parity were at the forefront of communal discussions.

However, it was Tylor's travel experiences in the 1850s that principally shaped the foundation of his ethnological and anthropological writings. His initial interest in ethnology and natural history came from his older brother Alfred Tylor (1824-1884) who was an archaeologist, geologist and brass founder. Alfred had visited the United States and took up an interest in archaeology and geology. In 1846 he was elected a fellow of the Geological Society and was close friends with some influential naturalists such as Edward Forbes (1815-1854).<sup>7</sup> According to George Stocking, it was Alfred who introduced Tylor to ethnological topics and persuaded him to go abroad. After the death of his parents in 1852, Tylor began working in his family's foundry and within a few years developed tuberculosis forcing him to change careers. Alfred encouraged his younger brother to visit North America to clear his lungs, and in 1856, Tylor set out on a two-year trip.<sup>8</sup>

In the introduction of his travelogue entitled *Anahuac: or Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern* (1861), Tylor wrote that he spent “the best part of a year” travelling the Mississippi River and observing the Native Americans and African slaves he encountered along the way. In addition, he lived for a short time on a sugar plantation in Louisiana before deciding to visit Cuba for a new adventure.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, it was a chance encounter with the ethnologist Henry Christy in Havana which brought Tylor's interests in human variation to the fore. There was much in common between Christy and Tylor. For instance, both were Quakers, grew up in London and came from

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<sup>4</sup> For more about the influence of medicine and natural history on Victorian anthropology see: Sera-Shriar, Efram, *Beyond the armchair: Early Observational Practices and the Making of British anthropology 1813-1871*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds, 2011

<sup>5</sup> Isichei, Elizabeth, *Victorian Quakers*, Oxford University Press, 1970, 7 and Cantor, Geoffrey, *Quakers, Jews and Science: Religious Responses to Modernity and the Sciences in Britain 1650-1900*, Oxford University Press, 2005, 234-235

<sup>6</sup> Prichard, James Cowles, *Researches into the Physical History of Man*, John and Arthur Arch, 1813, 3-4

<sup>7</sup> George, W. H., “Tylor, Alfred (1824–1884),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, 1

<sup>8</sup> Stocking, George, *Victorian Anthropology*, The Free Press, 1987, 157

<sup>9</sup> Tylor, Edward Burnett, *Anahuac: or Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern*, Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861, 1

middling-sort families. Moreover, they had similar educational backgrounds, having studied at schools operated by the Society of Friends. As such, they had a strong rapport when their relationship began. Christy would become Tylor's mentor over the course of the next ten years until his death in 1865. He would teach Tylor how to observe ethnological specimens *in situ*, as well as explain the major tenets of Prichardian ethnological monogenism. When the two first met in 1856, Christy invited Tylor to accompany him on a four-month horseback journey through Mexico.<sup>10</sup>

The aim of Christy and Tylor's excursion through Mexico was to collect as much ethnographic information as possible on the indigenous peoples. Once collected, this material could be organized, analyzed and reworked into ethnological studies on Mexicans. In the opening pages of his travelogue *Anahuac*, Tylor wrote,

The journey and excursions in Mexico which have originated the narrative and remarks contained in this volume were made in the months of March, April, May, and June of 1856, for the most part on horseback. The author and his fellow-traveler enjoyed many advantageous opportunities of studying the country, the people, and the antiquities of Mexico, owing to the friendly assistance and hospitality which they received there. With this aid they were enabled to accomplish much more than usually falls to the lot of travelers in so limited a period; and they had the great advantage too, of being able to substantiate or correct their own observations by the local knowledge and experience of their friends and entertainers.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, Tylor emphasized how he and Christy immersed themselves in the Mexican culture, basing their analytical understanding of the society on "local knowledge and experience." In many ways this can be interpreted as a form of participant-observation *avant la lettre* because they were trying to see the world through the eyes of the natives. Moreover, Tylor began to develop his observational program by engaging directly with his object of study *in situ*.

In the early pages of his travelogue Tylor noted that Mexico was a remarkable place to conduct ethnological research. He argued that the substantial amount of archaeological evidence available throughout the countryside made it possible to trace the history of the indigenous peoples. Moreover, because many available ethnographic materials had been left untouched for centuries, they were valuable resources for ethnological museums in Britain. For instance, when visiting an Aztec site on one occasion, Tylor wrote that, "Everywhere the ground was full of unglazed pottery and obsidian; and we even found arrows and clay figures good enough for a museum."<sup>12</sup>

Tylor recognized that his primary experience travelling through Mexico and seeing the landscape through his own eyes reshaped his understanding of the region's history. For example, he stated that many British ethnologists were wrong in disputing the credibility of the Spanish reports from the sixteenth-century. In fact, Tylor believed that the

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<sup>10</sup> Stocking, George, *Victorian Anthropology*, The Free Press, 1987, 157

<sup>11</sup> Tylor, Edward Burnett, *Anahuac: or Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern*, Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861, iii

<sup>12</sup> Ibid: 147

Spanish chroniclers, if anything, underemphasized the affluence of the Aztec society. He wrote,

When we left England, we both doubted the accounts of historians of the Conquest, believing that they had exaggerated the numbers of the population, and the size of the cities, from a natural desire to make the most of their victories...But our examination of Mexican remains soon induced us to withdraw this accusation, and even made us include to blame the chroniclers for having had no eyes for the wonderful things that surrounded them.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, Tylor did not just look at materials from his saddle as he passed through an archaeological site; he would dismount from his horse and engage directly with material objects. For instance, when he visited the pyramids near Micaotli, he wrote that he “sat cross-legged on the ground” while members of the local community “brought many curious articles in clay and obsidian” to examine.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to writing about the history of the Mexican people, Tylor also discussed at length their contemporary state. He was surprisingly reflexive in his narrative and noted on several occasions that the Spanish colonists had had a detrimental impact on the indigenous communities. Tylor routinely highlighted instances in which the indigenous Mexican people were being subjugated and exploited by Europeans. For example, he wrote,

At the city-gate [of Vera Cruz] stands a sentry – the strangest think I ever saw in the guise of a soldier – a brown Indian of the coast, dressed in some rags that were a uniform once, shoeless, filthy in the extreme, and armed with an amazing old flint-lock. He is bad enough to look at, in all conscience, and really worse than he looks, for no doubt – he has been pressed into the service against his will, and hates white men and their ways with all his heart. Of course he will run away when he gets a chance; and, though he will be no great loss to service, he will add his mite to the feeling of hatred that has been growing up for these so many years among the brown Indians against the whites and the half-cast Mexicans.<sup>15</sup>

Tylor’s reflexive description of this soldier at the city-gate of Vera Cruz demonstrates his empathetic feelings for non-Europeans. It suggests that his upbringing by Quakers—with their humanistic views of indigenous populations—influenced his later ethnographic reflections.

### **Conclusion: Tylor’s Lasting Influence**

The point of this paper was to show how Tylor’s travel experiences had a significant affect on his ethnological writing for several reasons. First, by travelling abroad and seeing indigenous peoples *in situ*, Tylor could claim an authoritative understanding of ethnological subjects and collect substantive data on which to base his research claims

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid: 147

<sup>14</sup> Ibid: 148

<sup>15</sup> Ibid: 23

upon. Second, because he did not study medicine or natural history at a university, as many of his ethnological and anthropological counterparts had, his time in Mexico under the guidance of his mentor Christy can be seen as an intensive practical training course in ethnography. Third, Tylor came to recognize the importance of first-hand observation because it meant that researchers were not solely reliant on secondary accounts, which potentially misrepresented or underemphasized aspects of a culture.

When he returned to England in the late 1850s, Tylor's status quickly rose within the ethnological community. By the early 1860s he was becoming a leader of the Ethnological Society of London, developing close ties both with Thomas Huxley's younger circle of scientific naturalists, and with Hodgkin and Christy's older group of Prichardian monogenists.<sup>16</sup> Tylor even had connections with Hunt and the Anthropological Society of London, serving as the society's foreign secretary between 1863-1864 before—according to Stocking—he was enraged by Hunt's "pugnacious racism" which "offended his humanitarian Quaker beliefs."<sup>17</sup> In 1865, Tylor also published his first major ethnological work, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilisation*, a title chosen in order to indicate that it built upon Prichard's earlier work.<sup>18</sup>

It is significant that Tylor did not join Huxley and John Lubbock (1834-1913) in their attack on anthropology in the 1860s; because he distanced himself from these debates, Tylor was not a target of Hunt's staunch criticisms of the ethnological community. His conduct might explain why during the aftermath of the schism in the early 1870s Tylor was able to continue to build upon his first-rate reputation; he was not directly associated with either camp. At the beginning of the 1870s when the newly amalgamated anthropological community was looking for fresh leadership, he was able to acquire a leading role within the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. In addition, because his family owned a successful brass foundry, Tylor was able to devote himself entirely to the study of human diversity. This enabled him to produce many anthropological works throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and he was even appointed the first Reader in Anthropology at Oxford in 1884.

As the 1880s progressed Tylor's cultural approach to studying human diversity increasingly dominated the research field. He continued to develop new types of instructive literature for researchers and informants, as well as more sophisticated analytical techniques for making sense of data. For instance, in 1881 Tylor wrote the first anthropological textbook, which provided novice anthropologists with material designed to teach new researchers how to observe human diversity in a specialized

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<sup>16</sup> Stocking, George, "What's in a Name? The Origins of the Royal Anthropological Institute (1837-71)," *Man*, 6, (1971), 369-390 and Kenny, Robert, "From the Curse of Ham to the Curse of Nature: The Influence of Natural Selection on the Debate on Human Unity before the Publication of the Descent of Man," *BJHS*, 40 (2007), 367-388

<sup>17</sup> Stocking, George, *Victorian Anthropology*, The Free Press, 1987, 159

<sup>18</sup> Stocking, George, *Delimiting Anthropology: Occasional Essays and Reflections*, University of Wisconsin Press, 2001, 108



way.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, in 1888, he also published an article “On a Method of Investigating the Development of Institutions, Applied to Laws of Marriage and Descent,” which explicated an observational technique that permitted interpretation of variation in social organization among different societies.<sup>20</sup> Other researchers built upon Tylor’s cultural model, and from the 1870s onwards figures such as Edward Clodd (1840-1930) published significant folklore studies such as *The Childhood of Religions* (1887), which was grounded in Tylorian methodologies. During the same period, the anthropologist James Frazer (1854-1941) also recognized his debt to Tylor’s writings; for example, Frazer based his theories of “totems,” expounded in *Totemism* (1887) and *The Golden Bough* (1890), on principles Tylor outlined in *Primitive Culture* (1871).<sup>21</sup> Thus, the younger generation of cultural anthropologists were greatly influenced by Tylorian anthropology.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Tylor, Edward Burnett, *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilisation*, Macmillan, 1881 and Stocking, George, *Delimiting Anthropology: Occasional Essays and Reflections*, University of Wisconsin Press, 2001, 3

<sup>20</sup> Tylor, Edward Burnett, “On a Method of Investigating the Development of Institutions; Applied to Laws of Marriage and Descent,” *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* 18 (1888), 245-272

<sup>21</sup> Tylor, Edward Burnett, *Primitive Culture, Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*, vols. 1-2, John Murray, 1871; Clodd, Edward, *The Birth and Growth of Myth, and its Survival in Folk-lore, Legend and Dogma*, Sunday Lecture Society, 1875; Clodd, Edward, *The Childhood of Religions: Embracing a Simple Account of the Birth and Growth of Myths and Legends*, Henry S. King and Co., 1876; Frazer, James, *Totemism*, University of Edinburgh Press, 1887 and Frazer, James, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*, Macmillan, 1890

<sup>22</sup> For more on Tylor’s impact on anthropology see: Stocking, George, *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology 1888-1951*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1995

## **Old Light on a New Controversy: Alex Rentoul's Account of the Trobriand Women's *Sagali***

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Of the many critical reactions to Bronislaw Malinowski's classic work on the Trobriand Islands, one of the most ethnographically productive has been Annette Weiner's critique that Malinowski neglected the role of women in exchange. In her celebrated restudy, *Women of Value, Men of Renown* (1976), Weiner tells of how, within a day of her arrival in a Trobriand village on the island of Kiriwina, she was brought to see a five hour long exchange ceremony that was conducted entirely by and for women. As several hundred people watched in a hamlet clearing, women came up singly and in groups to donate beautifully decorated leaf-fiber skirts along with bundles of the raw material used to fashion them, strips of dried banana leaves, piling them up in different sized heaps, which were soon carried off by their intended recipients. Hundreds of these women's wealth items might change hands in a single transaction. The ceremony ended the main mourning period observed for a deceased individual, and the atmosphere was festive, with raucous laughter, shouting, and spirited argument. Weiner would later show that, in addition to recognizing the work done by numerous people in connection with the mourning and burial, the presentations of skirts and leaf bundles reciprocated the social debts that the deceased owed to his father's people and affines, separating him from his former relationships in order to reclaim his name and body substance for the matrilineal group into which he was born.

But on that first day, when Weiner witnessed the ceremony (she was to witness nine more like it during her fieldwork), she was surprised to discover no account of anything like it in Malinowski's thick volumes, nor mention of the items transacted. The entire complex of women's exchange activity and forms of wealth "apparently had escaped Malinowski's observations" (1976, 8). Nor was the complex addressed substantially in the work of subsequent Trobriand ethnographers (e.g. Powell 1960). Why were women's roles and wealth items invisible to these male ethnographers who so ably described men's roles and *kula* shells? On her first day in the field, a novice female could see the importance of what the discipline's most acclaimed male observers, after extensive study, had treated as unworthy of mention. Surely this was a most dramatic instance of male bias, a tendency for male observers to treat women's business as "essentially uninteresting and irrelevant" (Rosaldo 1974, 17). Aiming to counter what she saw as an androcentric tendency deeply rooted in the history of anthropology, Weiner introduced her monograph with the ringing declaration that "unlike the earlier Trobriand ethnographers, this ethnographer is a woman. A critical difference between myself and my male predecessors is that I took seemingly insignificant bundles of banana leaves as seriously as any kind of male wealth" (op.cit., 11).

Weiner's primary argument was that because gender interactions, gender role complementarity, and gender symbolism are such a crucial and irreducible part of the social order, women's activities and perspectives should be given explicit and focused attention in ethnographic analysis. This argument remains important and valid. But in the historical period when Weiner's book was published, the gendering of scientific observation and theorizing was the focus of wide debate in anthropology and other

fields, and it was as a demonstration of the “thesis of women’s invisibility to male observers” that her work received the greatest attention (Jolly 1992, 43; Sykes 2005, Godelier 2004, Keller 1985, Strathern 1981). Indeed, it is no overstatement to claim that Malinowski’s non-mention of the banana leaf bundles in his Trobriand ethnography has now come to stand as anthropology’s most famous example of “male bias” in fieldwork—an emblem of the phenomenon as well as an engrossing case study that is widely discussed in anthropology textbooks and classrooms (see, e.g., Haviland, et al. 2011, 64; Ferraro and Andreatta 2010, 84; Miller 2010, 32; Murchison 2010, 10). How much of the predominance of male perspectives in published ethnography reflect men’s prominence in the societies studied, such that men are commonly the anthropologist’s main informants? How much of it is perceptual, a matter of selectivity in what male anthropologists notice, and how much is representational, realized in the focus or interpretive slant of their analyses and writings? (see, e.g., Moore 1988, Tiffany 1985). But Weiner’s claim that “a host of other male observers had failed to see women’s central place in Trobriand exchange” also raises the difficult question of how to disentangle the effects of observer’s bias from the effects of cultural change in the half century that intervened between Malinowski’s and Weiner’s observations (Jolly 1992, 38; Burawoy 2003; Lindenbaum 1977).

Many years ago, while doing research in the Papua New Guinea National Archives in Port Moresby, I chanced upon a document that sheds light on this case. The document, presented below, offers a vivid description of the same Trobriand women’s exchange ceremony that Weiner witnessed at the start of her fieldwork. But it was written shortly after Malinowski’s fieldwork, and it represents the perspective of a male observer. Its author was Alex Rentoul, an Australian career officer in the Papua colonial service who had begun working in Papua in 1913, serving in the Western, Gulf, Central, and Northern Divisions before being posted to the South-Eastern Division (in today’s Milne Bay Province) where, in 1928, he was appointed Assistant Resident Magistrate in Losuia, on the Trobriand Islands. Rentoul is known to anthropology for his dispute with Malinowski over Trobriand ideas of impregnation and paternity (Rentoul 1931, 1932; Bashkow 1996; see, e.g., Pulman 2004; Clifford 1988, 26). After Rentoul published a refutation of Malinowski’s account of these ideas in *Man*, Malinowski scornfully characterized him as “an amateur entirely inexperienced in methods of research” (Malinowski 1932a, 38).<sup>1</sup>

But Rentoul had quite a different profile in Papua, where he was widely admired for his personal qualities of bravery, sound judgment, and leadership. In recognition of his steadfast friendship and mentorship, the explorer Jack Hides named a tributary of the Strickland “the Rentoul River” after him (Schieffelin and Crittenden 1991, 56; Ruhen 1963, 145, 148). Rentoul’s patrol reports and administrative correspondence reveal a character inclined to find the good in Papuan customs and able to take pleasure in new knowledge and experiences, and his relatively “relaxed” and even “hands-off” style of

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<sup>1</sup>Rentoul had received encouragement to publish his criticisms from the anthropologist Jack Driberg, with the knowledge of E.E. Evans-Pritchard, and this correspondence, which Malinowski complained was “behind my back,” became a sore point in his relationship with them (Malinowski/Driberg, July 12, 1931, in Malinowski Papers at London School of Economics, provided by Michael Young, personal communication, January 1, 2012; see also Goody 1995, 23; Abrahams 2010).

governance stands out in sharp contrast to the more untempered interventionism of many of his colleagues (Connelly 2007, 71). Rentoul particularly liked the Trobriand Islanders, regarding them with a “special fondness” (ibid., 74). The Papuan administration during this period encouraged officers to submit special reports on “native customs” and other anthropological matters, and in 1929 Rentoul filed “an account of a Trobriand Island ‘LISALADABU SAGALI’ – a ceremony conducted solely by women for the acknowledgment and award of all those who have assisted in mortuary ceremonies,” adding that “I can find no record of it having been previously described” (FEWP: Rentoul/Govt. Secretary, Oct. 12, 1929). The account was forwarded to F.E. Williams, the Papua Government Anthropologist, and kept with his files (FEWP).

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#### DESCRIPTION OF A TROBRIAND ISLAND “LISALADABU SAGALI”

At OKOBOBO Village a crowd, estimated at over 800, women and girls had assembled. Barely a handful of men remained in the village, these including Village Councillors and ancient men. It is considered bad form for a male to remain in a village, where a congress of the other sex is about to be held. However on being invited, I sat at the ringside around which perhaps 300 girls and women were congregated.

The main idea of the ceremony (LISALADABU SAGALI) is, that all those women apart from actual blood relations, who have assisted in various ways at mortuary ceremonies during the past twelve months, will now receive the acknowledgments and awards of relatives.

A strange point is that a widow is not looked upon as a blood relative of a dead man, and for her mourning efforts &c will be rewarded by the blood relatives (usually mother or sister) of the dead man, just as any outsider would be.

The other recipients will comprise those who have assisted in death ceremonies in more indirect ways, such as by cooking, loaning pots and supplying food &c for the associated feasts.

In order to obviate any element of jealousy or undue favouritism from the ceremony it is arranged that the gifts shall consist of the perforated banana leaf bundles, all dried and ready for dying, which form the basis of the picturesque ramies (petticoats) worn by the women of the Trobriands. Such a present is always useful and appreciated, as they will keep for a long time, and may be used as required. The name of these small bundles is NUNUEGA.

The presentations were initiated by a woman stepping into the centre of the ring, placing a small mat on the ground, and on this depositing two of the NUNUEGA. Standing over these the woman announced the name of the person she wished to recommend for an award, the offering on the ground representing her own heading of the subscription list. At once a dozen or so girls from various points of the circle pushed forward and piled their offerings of NUNUEGA on top of the original subscription. The recipient then stepped forward and amid a buzz of congratulatory sounds picked up her presents and disappeared in the crowd.

[There] followed a similar ceremony, repeated again and again, the popularity or perhaps the varying services of the recipients being indicated by the amount of NUNUEGA given. In one instance a girl had to pay two visits to the ringside to collect all her possessions.

During all this time there was a buzz of excitement, and outside the ring the chatter and laughter of several hundreds of females made up a sum total of noise not easily to be forgotten. Further

away a line of some fifty women tended the cooking pots laden with taitu [yams] for the feast that was to follow.

There is an element of gambling about the whole thing. Almost every woman present will receive one or more rewards, but as each in her turn will have to contribute to subscriptions for which they have a personal sympathy, no woman can tell exactly how she will profit by the end of the day. Not to subscribe to a testimonial, when interested, would be in the worst form, and almost unthinkable.

A few minutes before my departure several elderly women, who appeared to have some authority, whispered together glancing in my direction, and presently a mat was placed before me, and with much laughter a number of girls and women came piling their small offerings of NUNUEGA at my feet. I gathered that as it was a day of general settlement for favours, they had considered it a fitting thing to settle with the Government for not interfering with their ceremony. Of course I also carried out my settlement in kind, or rather in tobacco, and took my leave.

Most pleasing was the entire good humour with which the proceedings were carried out. Absent apparently were those expressions of avarice and selfishness not always dissociated with Women's Congresses in supposedly more enlightened countries. Happiness seemed to be the order of the day. Later I was to learn that all those present, who were wearing the depressing pot black of mourning, would wash their bodies, bedeck themselves in their gayest ramies, and feast until sundown. Thus with the exception of those worn by close relatives, would all signs of mourning disappear from the Kiriwinan villages, until yet another soul received its summons to the Spirit Grottoes of TUMA.

. . .

Rentoul's description bears in several important ways on Weiner's critique of Malinowski and the literature surrounding it. Most dramatically, the account contradicts Weiner's contention that Trobriand women's wealth had been completely unrecognized by outsiders until Weiner herself wrote about it: if outsiders "ever understood (or ever noticed) anything about women's wealth, they never recorded anything" (Weiner 1980, 277). The village of Okobobo where Rentoul witnessed the ceremony was geographically close to Omarakana and Kwaibwaga, the villages where Malinowski and Weiner based their respective researches (Young 2004, 395 [Malinowski's hand-drawn map]; Weiner 1976, 25 [map]); this implies that the gap between Rentoul and Weiner's descriptions is not an artifact of regional differences. Furthermore, the date of Rentoul's observation, some mere dozen years after Malinowski's fieldwork, rules out an explanation in terms of historical change. This latter possibility has been a much discussed one in the literature on Trobriand ethnography.

Margaret Jolly suspected that Weiner's "contrast between an andocentric male observer and a gynocentric female observer" may have been "amplified by the history between the periods of their observations." (1992, 39, 41; see also Burawoy 2003; Lindenbaum 1977) In the years since Malinowski's fieldwork, Jolly reasoned, the exchange of banana leaves may have taken on "expanded and novel salience." Features of Weiner's own account make this hypothesis plausible. Weiner was impressed by the apparent invisibility of Trobriand women's wealth to foreign traders, missionaries, and colonial administrators, which led her to believe that it served as a protected reservoir of stability for the traditional Trobriand exchange system, allowing the system to continue in the

face of external pressure. According to Weiner (1980, 276-277, 283), women's wealth was "a buffer, absorbing and adjusting changes in the economic activities of men" due to the intensification of cash use, wage work, and so on.<sup>2</sup> Trobriand culture could find special "stability in banana leaves" because, in Weiner's interpretation, Trobriand women control a temporal domain that encompasses and transcends the death of individuals. It is only women that have the ability to restore to a deceased person's matrilineal kinship group, called the *dala*, the pure substance (or *baloma*) which, according to Trobriand theories of procreation, is critical for the reproduction of new persons by mothers within the *dala*. This process thus secures the "ahistorical (i.e., cosmic) cycling of *dala* through unmarked time, 'as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be'" (1976, 39, 230-236). Women's cyclical time contrasts with the ordinary historical time that is the domain of men, whose influence is individually differentiated and limited by mortality. The key to women's regenerative power is precisely this exchange ceremony in which women distribute skirts (symbolizing female sexuality and reproductive capacity) and whitened leaf bundles ("the symbol of milk and nurturance") in order to pay back the contributions that people of other *dala* have made to the life of the deceased, freeing or "untying" the deceased from all relationships developed during his or her lifetime, and in so doing restoring at death what the *dala* had initially contributed at the person's conception (ibid., 20-22, 92, 119-120). By undoing and overcoming the vagaries of historical change in order to reclaim the substance of individuals, Weiner suggested, "the mortuary distribution of bundles of banana leaves and skirts, organized, produced, and controlled by women," allowed for the regeneration of *dala*, promoting the continuity of Trobriand culture's own traditional organizing forms (1980, 274, 276).

In the face of these ambitious claims that the women's exchange ceremony both symbolized and produced women's power to supersede history, Jolly questioned Weiner's interpretative edifice as hinging on an improbability: the historical stability of the ceremony. Rentoul's account swiftly undermines this line of critique. The ceremony (*sagali*) is identified by same name (*lisaladabu*) by both Rentoul and Weiner (Weiner 1976, 62, 109), who also recognize the same term for the banana leaf bundles (*nunuega*; Weiner, following Malinowski, transcribes it as *nununiga*). The gatherings depicted are both of similar scale, involve a similar sequence of events and atmosphere, and similarly discourage participation by men. By the time of Weiner's fieldwork in the 1970s the ritual may well have acquired "a novel significance, a new value" as an emblem of "tradition and the centrality of women to such tradition" (Jolly 1992, 42), but this is not necessarily inconsistent with the ritual's substantial cultural continuity. As Weiner makes clear, the ceremony was by no means elective at the time of her

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<sup>2</sup>In terming the banana leaf bundles "women's wealth," Weiner makes much of the fact that were exchangeable for cash in the 1970s, but the notion of "wealth" in this context should not be conceived of as solely economic. The bundles also played a role in reciprocating the substantial *urigubu* gifts that Trobriand men made annually to or on behalf of their sisters, suggesting that they should be viewed not just as a form of currency but as a "total social phenomenon" in which the exchange of economically valuable items is bound up with kinship, sociality, ritual, and politics, just as Malinowski famously argued for men's kula transactions (Weiner 1976, 140; 1980; Malinowski 1984[1922]; 1935; Mosko 2000, 388; Mauss 1990[1925]).

fieldwork, but was being performed because the social work it accomplished was felt to be necessary.

We now also have compelling evidence from Malinowski's notebooks, correspondence, and photographs that the *lisaladabu* ceremony Weiner described was historically continuous with that documented by Rentoul. Malinowski noted that several deaths in his environs had provided him with "opportunities for the exhaustive investigation of mortuary matters"; he also recorded a visit to the mission sisters where native women's method of manufacturing banana leaf fiber skirts was demonstrated for him (Young 2004, pp. 399, 407, 513). In July 1915 alone, he took fieldnotes on four different distributions by women of "petticoats" or "ramis" (i.e., skirts) and the "small bundles presently to be worked into skirts," and he gives the name of this type of *sagali* as "*Lisala dabu*," which he glosses as "cleaning off the ceremonial dirt" of mourning. At one such feast, he drew a diagram of the village plaza showing where each women's group sat, and he quoted the formulaic phrases women called out when presenting their batches of skirts (or skirt materials) to other women (Malinowski field notebook pp. 805-809, 822, 825-826, 963-965, provided by Michael Young, personal communication, January 1, 2012).

These fieldnotes are enriched by Malinowski's published and unpublished photographs. Some of the latter have been brought to light by Michael Young and explicated with the help of Linus Digim'Rina. In his label for one unpublished photo, Malinowski observes that the "bundles (Nununiga)... in this form play an important part in the mortuary distributions (Sagali)" (1998, 173-184). Malinowski's *Argonauts* (1984 [1922], Plate IV) includes a photograph uninformatively captioned "Scene in Youratotu" that shows Trobriand women ceremonially presenting one another with skirts and bundles. In *The Sexual Life of Savages* (1987 [1932b]), Plate 9 depicts two women making skirts (caption: "A Stage in Skirt Making"); Plate 10 is "Drying Skirt Fibre"; and Plate 12 shows a "Distribution of Skirts in Mortuary Ritual" (cf. Weiner 1980, p. 275, referring apparently to Plate 4). Malinowski took additional photographs illustrating the steps women took to create the bundles (scraping, drying, and tying the banana leaves), the making and decorating of skirts, and the different types of skirts worn by women who were in mourning or pregnant, young or old (Young 1998, 175). Clearly, Malinowski attended to this important aspect of women's cultural lives.

In short, when taken together with Malinowski's notebooks and photographs, Rentoul's account suggests that Weiner was right in attributing to the women's wealth exchange complex a high degree of historical continuity. But we now know that in another sense Weiner was wrong: even in the colonial era, outsiders had been aware of the value Trobriand women placed on banana leaf wealth. Secrecy was evidently not necessary to fortify this women's sphere of exchange against colonial influence.<sup>3</sup> Malinowski did not lack for opportunities to observe women's leaf-bundle making, skirt-making, or the exchange of these goods in mortuary ceremonies. Nor did he "ignore" these activities,

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<sup>3</sup> In some ways, colonial intrusion may have been a boon to women's wealth since a 1906 law regulating Papuan native dress made it illegal for Trobriand islanders to wear imported cloth (Connelly 2007, 70-71). This presumably would have supported the value of women's banana leaf bundles, ensuring that they had not only symbolic value but also use value as the raw material for making leaf fiber skirts.

as is often suggested (see, e.g., Weiner 1992, 12; Linnekin 1997, 110). He treated them as of sufficient importance to photograph, ask about, and take notes on, even if (as in the case of the photograph caption) they would not find a place in the main text of his books.

Which brings us back to the matter of male bias. Looking back upon this case with all the evidence we now have, Trobriand women's exchange seems to reveal not so much a general sex-linked interpretative tendency as it does the particularities of individual observers and their intellectual contexts: What kinds of observations did they think were important? Malinowski did pay attention to women's banana leaf bundles, but he classified them under the rubric of "technology of... skirt manufacture"; perhaps this is why he did not integrate them into his published analyses of gardening, kula, and kinship (Young 1998, 298 n.7). Weiner, intending to study Kiriwina men's wood carving at a time when the study of women was of growing interest in anthropology, seized upon the lack of attention to women's activities in the writings of her predecessors and made it her research focus (Reiter 1975; O'Brien and Tiffany 1984).

As for Rentoul, while he might well have been "an amateur" as Malinowski claimed, this gave him a certain freedom to treat ethnographic description as an end in its own right, at a time when this had become unfashionable in professional anthropology. When he attended Radcliffe-Brown's anthropological training course for colonial officers at Sydney in 1930, Rentoul was disappointed by the overriding functionalist orientation of the academic anthropologists he encountered there: "The description of a native ceremony such as a marriage or funeral, no matter how beautifully done, will fail to interest them unless one is also able to demonstrate to them the effect of such crises upon the social group" (Rentoul/[Murray] 11/28/1930, quoted in Bashkow 1995, 6). Like most other colonial observers, Rentoul was an evolutionist who was professionally committed to upholding the cultural, racial, and political lines that separated him from the natives he administered. But he also professed that "to know and understand these natives is to realise that they are, after all, just people like ourselves" (Rentoul 1938). His unpublished memoirs in the National Library of Australia, and his correspondence spread among various archives, deserve study for their potential to further complicate the relationship between colonial and professional anthropology, as well as for their additional ethnographic and historical insights (Rentoul n.d.).

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## CONFERENCE REPORTS

### **Development and Empire, 1929–1962**

July 1-2, 2011, University of York

*Anna Bocking-Welch, University of York, abw502@york.ac.uk*

Supported by the Economic History Society, the Wellcome Trust, and the British Society of for the History of Science, this conference worked to extend literatures on colonialism and development by drawing together scholars working on the construction, meaning, and implementation of British aid policy. As well as acknowledging the multiple forms that aid could take—from technical assistance and education to health, welfare, and finance—participants were sensitive to geographical specificity, frequently pointing to the need to acknowledge the diverse contexts of different colonies. Although some colonies received more attention than others, the geographical range discussed was impressive. Papers grappled with actors and factors across the British Empire, weighing the importance of individual agency against the influence of overarching structures, attending to such factors as the Great Depression, Britain's post-war economic recovery, the pressures of the Cold War, and the developing interests of the United States.

### **Indigenous Visions: Rediscovering the World of Franz Boas**

September 15–17, 2011, Yale University

*Isaiah Wilner, Yale University, isaiahwilner@gmail.com*

This conference was organized to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the publication of Boas's *The Mind of Primitive Man*, a landmark treatise that drew upon Boas' studies of American Indians and immigrants to reject the idea that race determines ability and present a new theory of culture for a global age. Co-sponsored by the Howard R. Lamar Center for the Study of Frontiers and Borders, the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition and a dozen Yale departments and organizations, its speakers also included: Elizabeth Alexander, the inaugural poet for Barack Obama, who examined Boas's relationship with Zora Neale Hurston; Berkeley historian David Hollinger, who gave a talk entitled, "Print the Legend Not the Fact? Anthropologists, Missionaries, and the Man Who Shot Liberty Valance"; and Michael Silverstein, University of Chicago language theorist, who discussed 1911 as an "annus mirabilis" in thought. The keynote address was delivered by political philosopher James Tully, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Law, Indigenous Governance and Philosophy at the University of Victoria. Other participants were: Jay Giltin, Yale University; Lee D. Baker, Duke University; Matthew Frye Jacobson, Yale University; Regna Darnell, University of Western Ontario; Kathryn Marie Dudley, Yale University; Audra Simpson, Columbia University; Ryan Nicolson, University of Victoria; Maria Eugenia Cotera, University of Michigan; Michael Warner, Yale University; John Stauffer, Harvard University; Kerwin Lee Klein, University of California, Berkeley; David W. Blight, Yale University; Martha Hodes, New York University; Harry Liebersohn, University of Illinois; Elijah Anderson, Yale University; and Isaiah Wilner, Yale University.

## NEWS FROM THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

### History of Anthropology at the Meeting

*Andrew and Harriet Lyons, University of Waterloo, andrewpaullyons@gmail.com*

Two sessions were arranged under the group's auspices of the General anthropology Division's History of Anthropology Interest Group.

The annual Stocking Symposium in the History of Anthropology examined aspects of American and Canadian anthropology from the perspectives of social anthropology, museology and physical anthropology. David Dinwoodie, New Mexico, noted the role of missionaries such as those of the Oblate Order of Mary Immaculate in the creolization of cultures in the Northwest. Two papers by Nancy Parezo, Arizona, and Sam Cook, Virginia Tech, discussed the activities of James Mooney as an "advocacy" anthropologist in late nineteenth century Virginia, and as a relativist who rejected evolutionary dogma in favor of cultural contextualization (Cook) and in organizing major exhibits such as the Kiowa Camp Circle (Parezo). Catherine Nichols, Arizona State, examined the techniques and ideologies involved in the accumulation of artefacts as items of cultural capital and as duplicates for exchange, beginning with the early days of the Smithsonian. Treating a different subdiscipline and a much more recent period (1968-1974), Joanna Radin, Penn, discussed the techniques, ideologies and ethical issues involved in the collection and preservation of blood samples from indigenous populations, which might serve as exemplars of genetic similarity and diversity, during the days of the International Biological Program. Co-operation between anthropologists and their subjects was discussed in several papers. Isaiah Wilner, Yale, emphasized the significance of the relationship between Franz Boas and George Hunt as an early model for such collaborations. Sandra Faiman-Silva, Bridgewater State, identified the important roles of gay anthropologists, First Nations anthropologists, and gay First Nations activists in the recent re-creation/elaboration of the category, "Two-Spirit Peoples." In one way or another, it will be noted, the intersections of the personal, the political and the anthropological were examined in many papers at this year's symposium. Such issues were explicit in the discussion by Sergei Kan, Dartmouth, of the naiveté of Morgan's biographer, Bernhard J. Stern, in the face of Stalinism. Two more papers discussed scholars who may justly be regarded as paragons of interdisciplinarity. Frank Salamone, Iona College, saw Zora Neale Hurston as the precursor of today's engaged, reflexive anthropology. Marilyn Merritt, Penn, re-examined the significant insights of Erving Goffman. Lastly, Anne Zeller, Waterloo, traced the rise and fall of paradigms in primatology, and endeavoured to relate them to changing theoretical foci in sociocultural anthropology.

Epistemological shifts in anthropology were also the focus of an Invited Session organized by Robert Ulin, Rochester Institute of Technology, and Andrew Lass, Mt. Holyoke. Lass's papers stressed the significance of Bourbaki Group mathematics as a model for the early structural analysis of Lévi-Strauss. Ulin examined the turn toward hermeneutics in the later work of Evans-Pritchard and the post-1970 Geertz. Michael Herzfeld, Harvard, discussed the sometimes-destructive effects of the persistence of evolutionary survivals in models of social process in the Southern Mediterranean (e.g.

Greece), whether constructed by anthropologists, political analysts or indigenes of those countries. Andrew and Harriet Lyons, Waterloo, examined the “new anthropology” of Needham, Leach, Douglas and Edwin Ardener as a self-conscious attempt to construct a paradigm in the Kuhnian sense, but they also questioned whether or not such paradigms exist in anthropology.

### **New Convenor of the History of Anthropology Group**

David Dinwoodie, University of New Mexico, has taken over the role of Convenor of the History of Anthropology Group, which is an interest group within the General Anthropology Division of the American Anthropological Association. He succeeds Andrew and Harriet Lyons, University of Waterloo, who have been co-convenors since 2006. Dinwoodie will serve a two-year term. He will be assisted by a committee consisting of the following members: Sergei Kan, Dartmouth,, Deputy Convenor, and Convenor-Elect (2014, 2015); Ira Bashkow, Virginia; Ann Bunzel Cowan, Independent Scholar; Regna Darnell, University of Western Ontario; Andrew Lyons, University of Waterloo; Harriet Lyons, University of Waterloo; Marilyn Merritt, University of Pennsylvania; and Isaiah Wilner, Yale University, student member). Committee members will serve three-year terms.

### **Plans for History of Anthropology at the San Francisco AAA**

The History of Anthropology Interest Group seeks papers for 2012 AAA Meetings, San Francisco, 2012. The 2012 meeting theme is Borders and Crossings. The deadline for consideration for executive sessions is January 31. The deadline for consideration for invited sessions is March 1. We will assemble sessions as early as possible to submit them for invited standing.

Panel ideas currently include:

#### **1. *Crossings from Present to Past: History of Anthropology in Anthropological Practice***

For this panel we are looking for papers that develop a rich sense for the debates driving previous anthropological research in order to broaden perspectives on present day anthropological problems. Exploring relations between present and past in this way would not necessarily conform to Stocking’s historicism vs. presentism dichotomy. Aspiring to the ideal of putting these perspectives into a productive relationship that Regna Darnell identified in her 1977 Annual Review article, such papers could be presentist in taking contemporary debates as a frame of reference, and historicist in exploring the past not for charters for the present, but for conceptual resources for reflecting on the terms of the present. David Dinwoodie, [ddinwood@unm.edu](mailto:ddinwood@unm.edu), is organizing this session.

#### **2. *Histories and Legacies of Berkeley Anthropology***

Joanna Radin, [jradin@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:jradin@sas.upenn.edu), and Sergei Kan, [sergei.a.kan@dartmouth.edu](mailto:sergei.a.kan@dartmouth.edu), are organizing this session.

#### **3. *Stocking Symposium***

May keep this thematically open depending on overall interest.

Please send paper proposals, ideas, and comments to [ddinwood@unm.edu](mailto:ddinwood@unm.edu).

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AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples: <http://alternative.ac.nz/>

Online access to the American Indian Film Gallery. Some films date to the 1930s. Organized by J. Fred MacDonald, Professor of History Emeritus at Northeastern Illinois University. <http://jfredmacdonald.com/aifg/>

<http://metrodigital.cdmhost.com/cdm4/browse.php?CISOROOT=%2Fp133001coll2>

Those who want to delve right in to some primary documents from the Burke and Hare trial, including many examples of popular responses, will find much of interest at the New York Academy of Medicine's online collection "The Resurrectionists: Burke and Hare in Song and Story." NYAM's online catalog gives this description of the collection: "Digitized volume of materials dated 1828-1829 related to the Edinburgh body snatchers and murderers Burke and Hare, their accomplices, and their victims. Consists of an autograph letter signed by Burke, broadsides, ballads, catchpenny prints, pamphlets, and the book *West Port Murders*, which includes an unofficial transcript of the trial of Burke and his paramour M'Dougal." <http://metrodigital.cdmhost.com/cdm/search/collection/p133001coll2>

A photo essay on the Manchester School of Social Anthropology: [http://shikanda.net/ethnicity/illustrations\\_manch/manchest.htm](http://shikanda.net/ethnicity/illustrations_manch/manchest.htm)

*Sociologica*, the Italian Journal of Sociology online, occasionally has articles of interest to historians of anthropology. For example, a recent issue was devoted to consideration of the work of Everett C. Hughes (1897-1983), a central figure in the Chicago School of sociology; sociology and anthropology were joined at the University of Chicago until 1927, and anthropologists such as Edward Sapir published in the Chicago-based *American Journal of Sociology*. <http://www.sociologica.mulino.it/>

This website has information about the first forty years of anthropology at the London School of Economics: [http://www2.lse.ac.uk/library/archive/online\\_resources/anthropology\\_at\\_lse/](http://www2.lse.ac.uk/library/archive/online_resources/anthropology_at_lse/)

This blog is devoted to endangered languages and cultures: <http://www.paradisec.org.au/blog/>

Archival holdings of the Royal Anthropological Institute: <http://therai.org.uk/archives-and-manuscripts/archive-contents/>

To make arrangements to visit them, contact Sarah Walpole, RAI archivist, 50 Fitzroy Street, London, W1T 5BT, UK, [archives@therai.org.uk](mailto:archives@therai.org.uk)

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