

**THE DYNAMICS OF  
CULTURE CHANGE; AN  
INQUIRY INTO RACE  
RELATIONS IN AFRICA**

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The dynamics of culture change; an inquiry into race relations in Africa by Bronislaw Malinowski & Phyllis M. Kaberry

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**BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI & PHYLLIS M. KABERRY**

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BY  
BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI  
EDITED BY PHYLLIS M. KABERRY

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## INTRODUCTION

THERE is little need for me to recapitulate here the achievements of Malinowski in the field of anthropology, the contributions which he made to it in knowledge, in methods of research, and in theory. His longest and most intensive period of field work was done in the Trobriand Islands during World War I and, although he wrote many detailed monographs on specific aspects of Trobriand culture, it was typical of the breadth of his scientific approach that he proceeded to develop the wider theoretical implications of his research in kinship, magic, religion, education, economics, and law. Moreover, in the process he formulated what has been called his functional theory of culture, and he constantly refined the techniques for its study. His seminars at the London School of Economics were unique, not only because they were attended by administrative officials, missionaries, and specialists in anthropology and allied subjects, but also because he had his own particular methods of instruction. For the exposition of his theories he devised and used a series of charts or tables which permitted of a synoptic analysis of all aspects of culture. They contained certain guiding principles and a condensed set of instructions for the fieldworker; and they compelled him to make as exhaustive a survey as possible of the community which he was sent out to study. They also constituted a scheme for the presentation and examination of data, a means by which his own theories and those of others could be tested, gaps in information revealed, and new avenues for research suggested.<sup>1</sup>

As an anthropologist who was truly international in his thinking Malinowski realized the importance of anthropology not only for the study of "primitive" peoples but also for an understanding of European and Oriental societies; and in his later years he devoted more and more of his energies to writing on war, nationalism, international coöperation, freedom, and democracy.<sup>2</sup> He addressed meetings on those subjects, and

1. For an example of his charts, the reader is referred to Malinowski's article, "The Scientific Basis of Applied Anthropology," *Reale Accademia d'Italia, Fondazione Alessandro Volta, Estratto dagli Atti dell' VIII Convegno* (Rome, 1938; published, 1940), pp. 18-19.

2. *Vide* Malinowski's articles, "The Deadly Issue," *Atlantic Monthly*, XLIII (December, 1936); "An Anthropological Analysis of War," *American Journal Sociology*, Vol. XLVI (1941); and also his book, *Freedom and Civilization* (New York, 1944).

he participated in those groups which were, and still are, attempting to formulate plans for postwar reconstruction and for some type of international federation and control. To these matters he brought not only the comparative knowledge and objectivity of a scientist but also his own humanism and European background.

As a person, keenly alive to the most urgent problems in his own particular field, Malinowski early drew attention to the need for a practical anthropology.<sup>3</sup> Later, in 1935, in his *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*, he made a specific reference to the influence of European culture on Trobriand beliefs and customs and stated: "The functional method, or at least that branch of it with which I am associated, was very largely born in the field. There I began to realize that even the reconstruction of all pre-European natives of some fifty or a hundred years ago is not the real subject-matter of field-work. The subject-matter of field-work is the changing Melanesian or African. He has already become a citizen of the world, is affected by contacts with the world-wide civilization, and his reality consists in the fact that he lives under the sway of more than one culture. The principle of studying the changing native as he really is enables us, on the one hand, to reconstruct his pre-European culture, not by guess-work or by fortuitously brushing away a piece of calico, a Christian belief, an irksome European taboo, but by studying how these things work, how they clash with his original culture, or else how they have been incorporated into it. On the other hand, the process of diffusion of culture, as it is going on under our very eyes, is one of the most important historical events in the development of mankind. To neglect its study is definitely to fail in one of the most important tasks of Anthropology."<sup>4</sup>

In 1934, Malinowski gave an address in Capetown on "Native Education and Culture Contact,"<sup>5</sup> and he then made an extensive trip through East and South Africa carrying out an anthropological survey for five months among the Babemba, Swazi, Chaga, Masai, Kikuyu, and Maragoli tribes. He continued to publish articles on culture change, to lecture in England, Europe, and the United States; to discuss and work out methods for its study in his seminars both at the London School at Economics and at Yale University. Finally, he was for many years associated with the International Institute of African Languages

3. *Vide* Malinowski, "Practical Anthropology," *Africa*, Vol. II (1929). For Malinowski's other articles on culture contact and change, the reader is referred to the bibliography at the end of this book.

4. Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* (1935), I, 480-481.

5. The substance of this address was published in the *International Review of Missions* (October, 1936).



and Cultures, an organization which has done much to further research in colonial problems and culture change in Africa.

He early recognized that new methods were necessary for the study of those communities undergoing intensive change and he elaborated what, for the sake of brevity, may be termed his "three-column approach." By this means he projected data onto a table of three columns, and thus brought out clearly the three phases of culture contact and change: the impinging culture with its institutions, intentions, and interests; the reservoir of indigenous custom, belief, and living traditions; and the processes of contact and change, where members of the two cultures cooperate, conflict, or compromise. Basic to the understanding of his approach to culture contact is his theory of the institution as the "isolate" of culture, as the smallest cultural unit—"a group of people united for the pursuit of a simple or complex activity; always in possession of a material endowment and a technical outfit; organized on a definite legal and customary charter, linguistically formulated in myth, legend, rule, and maxim; and trained or prepared for the carrying out of its task."<sup>6</sup> Hence contact becomes primarily the impact between institutions, in the process of which they are modified, assume new forms or new functions.

Malinowski rarely used the word "acculturation," and in one of his more recent writings he advocated the adoption of a term coined by Don Fernando Ortiz, namely, "transculturation," since in this there were "no implications of one standard dominating all the phases (of culture change), but a transition in which both sides are active, each contributing its quota, each merging into a new reality of civilization."<sup>7</sup> The phrase generally used by him was "culture contact and change," and the definition which I have selected has been taken from a typescript entitled *The Forces and Factors of Culture Change*, written for a lecture in Copenhagen in 1938. It appeared in the published abstract as follows:

"Culture change is the process by which the existing order of society—its organization, beliefs and knowledge, tools and consumers' goods—is more or less rapidly transformed. Change may be induced either by factors and forces of spontaneous initiative and growth, or by the contact of two different cultures. The result in the first instance

6. *Infra*, p. 50.

7. Malinowski, "Introduccion" to *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y el Azucar*, by Fernando Ortiz (Havana, 1940), pp. xvi-xvii. Malinowski also employed this term in his article, "The Pan-African Problem of Culture Contact," *American Journal of Sociology*, XLVIII, No. 6 (1943), 650.

is a process of independent evolution; in the second, that which is usually called diffusion."<sup>8</sup>

It will be obvious to anyone familiar with his works and to readers of this book that diffusion had for him a connotation different from that attributed to it by many American, British, and German anthropologists. The significance attached to the term by him here derived necessarily from his own theory of culture, and implied a rejection of that concept which regards culture as a pattern of traits or trait-complexes. For him, the units of transformation are institutions, and in the process of change these assume new functions or new forms in response to the new needs engendered in the situation of contact. Hence, diffusion is a process of "reorganization on entirely new and specific lines." It is not "a mixture of cultural elements" which can be disentangled from their cultural matrix and traced back to their provenance in parent cultures.

For many years Malinowski had contemplated writing a book on culture contact and change, and since I had received a fellowship from Yale University to carry out research in Race Relations during the academic year 1942-43, he did me the honor of suggesting that I collaborate with him. His unexpected death shortly afterward made the realization of that project impossible, but Mrs. Malinowska handed over his manuscripts on culture change to me to edit, and, with the consent of Professor Maurice Davie, Chairman of the Department of Sociology at Yale, I undertook the task of arranging the papers for publication. Unfortunately, Malinowski had left no plans for the book,

8. *Vide* Malinowski, "The Dynamics of Contemporary Diffusion," a résumé published in *International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences* (Copenhagen, 1939).

About the same time, Professors Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits formulated a definition of acculturation and culture change, which I include here for purposes of comparison:

"Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups. . . .

"Under this definition, acculturation is to be distinguished from *Culture-change*, of which it is but one aspect, and *assimilation*, which is at times a phase of acculturation. It is also to be differentiated from *diffusion*, which, while occurring in all instances of acculturation, is not only a phenomenon which frequently takes place without the occurrence of the types of contact between peoples specified in the definition above, but also constitutes only one aspect of the process of acculturation. . . . Diffusion can be thought of as that aspect of cultural change which includes the transmission of techniques, attitudes, concepts, and points of view from one people to another; whether it be through the medium of a single individual or of a group, or whether the contact is brief or sustained" (*vide* M. J. Herskovits, *Acculturation: A Study of Culture Contact* [New York, J. J. Augustin, 1938], pp. 10, 14).

nor had we discussed them since we had decided to do nothing until the following October. As a former student of his I was, however, familiar with his theories and had attended his seminars on culture change at the London School of Economics during the period 1936-38.

Among his manuscripts there were fifteen folders containing a miscellaneous collection of notes dealing with culture contact and change, and written mostly between 1936 and 1938. These included typescripts of articles published in *Africa* and by the Reale Accademia D'Italia, together with alternative versions and additional material which had not been printed. There were abstracts and notes of lectures given at Oxford, Copenhagen, and Rome; typescripts of anything from two to twenty pages containing marginal notes and dealing with specific aspects such as witchcraft, nutrition, war, and so on; résumés of seminar discussions, synopses, preliminary drafts, charts, and penciled notes.

Since some of the material had already been published, two possibilities presented themselves for the arrangement of the text: either to collate the unpublished material as a long essay and include it in a monograph containing all his published articles on culture change; or to utilize as much as possible of all the material available and edit it as a complete book. Since there was much that was new, including a detailed exposition of the methods to be employed in field work, I chose the second alternative. The scope and framework of the book was based on some of his articles and his handling of the subject in the seminars which he held at Yale University in 1941. Part I incorporates much of the material in his "Introductory Essay" to *Methods of Study of Culture Contact in Africa* (1938),<sup>9</sup> which recorded some of the results of the research program carried out by the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures from 1931 on. Part II represents the application of his theory of culture contact and change to specific institutions.

For some chapters I had at my disposal fairly complete manuscripts which required only minor corrections and the insertion of additional notes or sections. This applied in particular to the second part of Chapter I, to Chapters II and the first part of III, to IV, VII, VIII, X, and XIII. Among the remainder, with the exception of XI and XII, I was dealing principally with typescript; but there was much rearrangement to be done, and they can be said to represent a mosaic of all materials available bearing on the subjects concerned. Chapters XI

9. *Africa*; and Memorandum XV, The International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (1938).

I should like to take the opportunity here to thank the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures for permission to reproduce the greater part of this article.