Chapter 20

Kiriwina

The government officer's Trobriands

The missionary schooner *Saragigi* – the Dobu name commemorated William Bromilow's astonishing trick of removing his teeth – brought Malinowski finally to Losuia, the government station on the placid lagoon of western Kiriwina. On 27 June 1915, the anthropologist was set down with all his gear on the timbered landing stage of a broad coral jetty, completed by prison labour only the year before. Prison labour, too, carried his sixty boxes and cases to the house of the resident magistrate. With its sweeping verandahs and vaulted corrugated iron roof freshly painted in red oxide, this was the largest, most imposing building in the Trobriands.[1] It overlooked pearl-oyster beds, the focus of European commercial interest in the islands. Beyond the reefs were the dark outlines, like cardboard cutouts, of the mountains of the D'Entrecasteaux islands – the fabled Koya – home of cannibals and witches. In the months to come a homesick Malinowski would sometimes walk along the jetty feeling 'so empty, so unhappy, looking to the south'.[2]

He now found himself in a grassy compound of twenty-six acres, enclosed by a massive coral wall. Besides the magistrate's house, where he stowed his luggage, there were police barracks, a gaol and prison warder's quarters, a hospital with male and female wards, a dispensary and several food storehouses. Tidy rows of coconut palms marched across half the compound. There was an orchard of citrus trees as well as several vegetable gardens. Crotons, hibiscus and other ornamental shrubs pleased the eye.

The jack of all trades who had created this tropical settlement was ten years older than Malinowski. A fair-haired, blue-eyed Englishman of sound Staffordshire stock, Raynor Bellamy was likeably boyish and 'absolutely imperturbable'. He had studied medicine at Cambridge and Edinburgh

New Zealand to try his luck at goldmining. When that failed he came to British New Guinea and travelled throughout the colony, scratching unsuccessfully for gold, treating sick miners and penning whimsical despatches for *The Grey River Argus*. Seligman met him in Samarai and was impressed. In 1905, Administrator Captain Barton offered Bellamy the joint post of assistant resident magistrate and medical officer in the Trobriands, where a special hospital was being built to combat the alarming spread of venereal diseases. They had been introduced in the previous century, it was supposed, by American whalers and by Malays and Manilamen fishing for bêche-de-mer. Bellamy postponed his plan to return to England and sailed for Losuia to become a pioneer of public health. By the time Malinowski arrived, Kiriwina was one of the most efficiently governed and healthiest places in all Papua.

'I fancy my district shall show its heels to the rest,' Bellamy claimed, and it was with extraordinary energy and determination that he transformed the new government station into a well-regulated, fortified settlement.[3] His magisterial authority, and the prison labour at his disposal, gave him the powers of a satrap, though one with an English passion for landscaping. This was done on an impressive scale. He ordered a wall of coral debris, six feet high and wide at its base, to be constructed around the station. Its ostensible purpose was to keep out maurauding pigs, but the villagers were mystified.

Bellamy was two-finger typing his annual report when Malinowski entered his domain. It would be the last of his despatches from the Trobriands. Drought, he wrote, had been 'the most important event of the year from the native standpoint'. It had lasted from June 1914 to mid-December, so the crops had been planted much later than usual. Sixty miles of 'track improvement' were accomplished that year. The pearling industry was 'practically dead' owing to a fall in prices in Paris because of the war. Low prices meant low wages and reluctant divers, and there were now only eight licensed buyers; but Bellamy saw some benefit to the depleted oyster beds which would have a chance to recover. Bêche-de-mer fishing was taking up some of the slack. One hundred and eighty-six prisoners had passed through the gaol in 1914–15 – down from 346 the previous year – and Bellamy had used them to extend the wharf, level the coral frontage of the station and plant several more acres of coconuts. There were thirteen Europeans in the Trobriands. In addition to the nine traders, there were four white missionaries: the Rev. Johns and his wife, and two teaching sisters. teachers were in charge of other village schools. Nicholas Minster, an infamous Greek trader, had died during the year (though tales of his legendary exploits and insatiable whoring were still fresh), and the Rev. Andrew Ballantyne (brother-in-law of the anthropologist Diamond Jenness) succumbed to blackwater fever while on a visit from Goodenough Island. Bellamy judged his native population to have remained steady at 8,500, despite a dysentery epidemic.[4]

As for Bellamy's view of the Trobriander:

> A keen trader, kindly and affectionate in his domestic relations, an indulgent parent, accustomed by tradition to recognize the authority of his village chief, he accepts the overlordship of the Government pretty much as a matter of course, and obeys its orders. . . . His mentality is vigorous, but undeveloped. He can be taught quickly. Latterly he has shown an appreciation of some of the minor comforts, such as kerosine and hurricane lamps, corrugated iron for roofing purposes, billy-cans etc.[5]

A paragon of administrative virtue, Bellamy had served ten years at Losuia and was pleased with the changes he had brought about: 'cleaner villages, greater freedom from disease, better houses, cleaner habits, [and] a growing recognition that behind the white man's gaol lies the white man's justice.' This, then, was the Trobriands District at the time of Malinowski's arrival.

In a modest way, Kiriwina was the breadbasket of the Massim. In addition to the main staple of taitu (or lesser yam), it yielded an abundance of yams, taro, sugar cane, bananas and sweet potatoes. In good years it exported the surplus: up to 300 tons a year were bought by the government, the mission and by traders for sale to other islands. Bellamy's station was itself a miniature breadbasket, and during the severe drought of 1911 he boasted of gardens that yielded enough to feed the eighty-five occupants of the station and hospital for a period of six weeks.

Without being fully aware of it, perhaps, Bellamy acted in the manner of a Trobriand chief – as a banker of food wealth which he could use to pay for services or dole out as charity in times of need. However he dispensed them, such donations enhanced his prestige. The difference was in the manner of accumulation, for the polygynous Trobriand chief derived his food surpluses from numerous in-laws in the form of annual 'tribute', whereas Bellamy derived his from the work of his prisoners. The economy of the government station turned upon his statutory powers to incarcerate

labour. Nevertheless, Doctor Bellamy was no Kurtz, and the principled *raison d'être* of his labour force was public works – however eccentrically construed. He exercised 'indirect rule' through seventeen village constables who reported to him weekly. These men he hired or fired at his own discretion. A detachment of two armed constables, appointed and trained in Port Moresby, provided the only physical sanction at his disposal. Losuia's minuscule police force was illustrative of Murray's 'government by bluff'.

Bellamy was fanatical about village cleanliness. He ordered people to devote one day a week to tidying their hamlets. 'A moderate amount of compulsion', he admitted, was needed to get them to comply, and fully half of the convictions in some years were for breaches of the Village Cleaning Regulation. Another civilizing project was road-building, and Bellamy got villagers to create tracks for non-existent horse-drawn buggies. His greatest enterprise, however, was coconut-planting. Access to coconuts was traditionally a prerogative of chiefly rank – a privilege that Bellamy abrogated. In 1912, he set a blanket taboo on the consumption of coconuts; he then initiated competitive planting, within and between villages, and awarded prizes of trade tobacco to those who excelled. Those who did no plantings were gaoled – two hundred in 1913–14. By this carrot-and-stick method Bellamy oversaw the planting of 120,694 coconut trees along 241 miles of track throughout the several inhabited islands. Bellamy's well-executed scheme for local 'development' was far ahead of its time. Coconuts ceased to be a scarce resource monopolized by chiefs and became a cash crop. An unintended consequence of this project was its contribution to the democratization of Trobriand society.[6]

Bellamy's other signal achievement was to bring venereal diseases under control. In 1906 Colonel Mackay, chairman of the Royal Commission on Papua, called at Losuia and found Bellamy 'pink as a new chum just landed'. The medico was doing 'great work' as one of the two most 'practically useful men in Papua' – the other being the doctor at Samarai. They were 'the natives' best friends and possible saviours'. Mackay was referring to the 'festering plague' of VD.[7] Estimates put the infection rate at between 6 and 10 percent of the population.

Bellamy's treatment was at first punitive. He had to overcome 'native prejudice and superstition'. Patients were rounded up and incarcerated in the hospital until they were either cured or dead. Eventually, having learned the language and the exercise of 'tact and perseverance', he induced patients to incredulous islanders that venereal diseases were transmitted by sexual contact. He had discovered what Malinowski was later to confirm: that Trobrianders denied any link between male insemination and female conception. Bellamy diagnosed at least five clinical varieties of venereal disease, though he probably exaggerated the incidence of syphilis, so easily confused with yaws. His treatment by injection was commemorated by Trobrianders in a burlesque song-and-dance routine.

Bellamy had begun regular medical patrolling in 1908, his aim being to examine every man, woman and child in each of the 156 named villages, not once, but every year until venereal disease had been vanquished. It was a task verging on the heroic, and by 1915 he had brought the rate of infection down to 1 percent. As he registered the name of every person he examined, his records took the form of a census. In 1913 he ordered village constables to record all births and deaths in their districts and, collating these, began to compile a central register. For many years Bellamy's were the only reliable census figures from anywhere in the Territory, and his were the first calculations of birth and death rates. He also recorded the incidence of epidemic diseases such as dysentery, and endemic diseases such as malaria. (Up to half the population suffered malaria attacks during prolonged wet seasons.) While making his census, Bellamy recorded people's totemic affliations and a good deal of additional ethnographic information, much of which was published by Seligman. He also wrote an article on Trobriand 'customs'.[8]

Anthropology, then, joined demography and epidemiology in the spectrum of Bellamy's scientific purview, and within a month of their first meeting Malinowski had invited him to co-author a book on the 'sociology' of the Trobrianders. Although this was probably an impulsive, ingratiating offer (recalling similar suggestions made by Malinowski to Seligman and Strong and to the missionaries Newton and Copland King), Bellamy took it seriously enough to tell his sister: 'I suppose I know more about [Trobrianders] than any other living white man, but compared to the war sociology seems very small "beer" and I'm turning the offer down.'[9]

Trouble with magistrates

'He is a Pole from Cracow originally but quite a nice chap. Very clever and all that,' Bellamy wrote to his sister soon after Malinowski's arrival. When

pologist following Bellamy around with a notebook and pencil, jotting down Kiriwinian words. Malinowski slept in Bellamy's room, Cameron on the verandah and Bellamy under the table.[10] During these early days Malinowski also took notes from Cameron and Sam Brudo – another trader who lived at Kavataria – and Corporal Bunuwagola, one of the armed constables. He prevailed upon the two missionary sisters, Ethel Prisk and Margaret Jamieson, to translate some vernacular texts for him, hoping that 'there was nothing obscene in them'.[11] He even invited Cameron and Bellamy to write directly into his notebook. Cameron – a young Scotsman who was reputed to keep a veritable harem on his plantation – discoursed on Kitavan theories of reincarnation. He duly provided Malinowski with an eighteen-page account of the 'origin of *Milamala*', the annual harvest festival that was the main inspiration for Malinowski's essay on *baloma* that he completed the following year. There he acknowledged Cameron in a curiously defensive fashion, as one who 'has in no way lost the "caste" and dignity of the white man, in fact he is an extremely kind, hospitable gentleman; nevertheless he has assumed certain native peculiarities and habits such as the chewing of areca nut, a habit seldom adopted by white men.' He was also 'married to a Kiriwinian' and regularly hired the local garden magician to bespell his gardens: which was the reason, Malinowski's informants told him, that Cameron's gardens were better than those of other white men.[12]

Bellamy obligingly wrote several pages about the chief's authority, which extended 'as far as he would send pigs to', and added notes on chiefly polygamy. At some later date Malinowski jotted in purple pencil in the margin of these pages: 'R. L. Bellamy does not know much!'[13] He told Seligman so in his first letter from the Trobriands.

> I came here first to sound the terrain – I was told as a matter of fact that Bellamy is a cash [sic] of information only to be tapped and I thought it would be a pity to let him get killed by the bloody Germans (he's going to the front) before draining him. He knows more than the average R[esident] M[agistrate] but nothing amazing. . . . I found again that it is quite futile to reckon on anyone but oneself, though there is a trader here, a Turkish Jew, who helped me a great deal.[14]

The 'Turkish Jew' was Sam Brudo from Paris, and Trobrianders immediately perceived an affinity between them: 'People wonder whether I and Brudo belong to the same *dala*, as we both talk the same language [French] the principal unit of social identity in the Trobriands.) On his next field trip to the Trobriands Malinowski would discover an even greater affinity for Sam's younger brother Raphael. Another trader companion was Billy Hancock, who leased an acre of land at Gusaweta. It was in Hancock's 'compound' that Malinowski sought refuge when suffering from a 'surfeit of native'. Although they became close friends, Hancock never lost the habit of addressing Malinowski as 'Doctor'.

According to his biographer, Bellamy 'developed a profound dislike for Malinowski . . . based on a fundamental difference in their attitude towards sexual matters'. In 1926, indeed, Bellamy told a colleague 'that Malinowski had undone much of the work he had done during the ten years he spent in the Trobriand Islands'.[15] This astonishing charge probably referred not to the increased incidence of venereal disease Bellamy discovered when he returned to the islands, but to the anthropologist's subversive views on matters such as village burial and the exhumation of bodies for divination, the practice of sorcery, the traditional powers of the chiefs and their polygamy – all 'customs' that Bellamy had tried to suppress or modify. Malinowski took the liberal view that government intervention was unwarranted and essentially destructive of native institutions. As in Mailu, he could not fail to notice that people tried to conceal from him certain practices, and he correctly deduced that fear of the government was the reason. He would have quickly learned, too, how the power of the chiefs had been curtailed by Bellamy in a series of administrative measures, and how he had flagrantly undermined the paramount chief's prestige when, in 1912, he imprisoned Chief Touluwa on a sorcery charge and forbade the other prisoners to observe customary obesiance. For Bellamy it was a matter of opposing intimidation and 'the malevolent power of the chiefs based on sorcery and fear'; for Malinowski it was arrogant colonial interference, 'short-sighted' in that it undermined 'native tribal law' and introduced 'a spirit of anarchy'.[16]

If Malinowski reciprocated the 'profound dislike' Bellamy conceived for him, it might explain why he never acknowledged the magistrate's help and hospitality, why he never cited Bellamy's article on Trobriand customs, and most importantly why he never mentioned Bellamy's role in creating the largely favourable conditions – administrative and medical – under which he conducted his fieldwork. Almost certainly, Kiriwina would have been a less accommodating place if, instead of this energetic and exacting man with the patience of an accountant, it had been under the desultory control of

nowski did formally acknowledge at least some of Bellamy's virtues in a letter to Hubert Murray: 'I regard him as one of the finest officials I met during my stay – a lover of natives and of native culture, and a man of the highest intelligence.'[17] Bellamy joined the war in October, survived the front line in France, and went on to Edinburgh to complete his medical degree. Fully qualified, he resigned his commission and returned to Papua in November 1918 – missing Malinowski by a matter of weeks. Thereafter he returned only intermittently to the Trobriands. Called to a higher station, he served as William Strong's deputy in Port Moresby, eventually succeeding him as chief medical officer of the Territory in 1929.

John Norman Douglas Campbell, Bellamy's successor at Losuia, was less dedicated, less diligent and less affectionately remembered. He had come to Port Moresby as a clerk in 1907. The war gave such men the opportunity for promotion. Taking the measure of Campbell's mediocrity, Malinowski and Billy Hancock nicknamed him 'Thirty Percent'. Malinowski's relations with him were initially cordial. On taking up his post Campbell wrote politely to Omarakana to tell Malinowski that his personal documents could remain in the Losuia office safe, and that he could continue to use as an informant the prisoner who had accompanied him.[18] On his second trip to the Trobriands, however, Malinowski wrote of 'that odious official' Campbell in the most uncomplimentary terms. 'He is a low brute,' he told Elsie Masson in 1918, 'but apparently his bark is worse than his bite and so far he has not given me any trouble, so I am keeping aloof.'[19] Malinowski was probably unaware that Campbell had already given him 'trouble' by reporting to Murray some of his unguarded statements concerning the war.

The capital of Kiriwina

Within days of his arrival Malinowski was drawn as by a magnet to Omarakana, home of the highest-ranking sub-clan and of Touluwa, the paramount chief. All the early European visitors to the Trobriands remarked on the Omarakana chieftainship which appeared to be unique in Papua (though by Polynesian standards Touluwa was a petty chief indeed). The protocols and privileges of the various local chiefs formed part of a complex system of hereditary rank. Their authority was backed by henchmen and coercive sorcery, but the power of the Omarakana chief was sanctioned ulti-

and famine. Touluwa had sixteen wives in 1915 – down from twenty-four at the beginning of his 'reign' – and his wealth derived both from the customary harvest gifts of yams provided by their relatives and from his pivotal position in the ceremonial exchange system of Kula. Despite the attrition of his authority, Touluwa's 'name, prestige, and renown' was 'carried far and wide over the Archipelagoes', though his political power did not extend beyond the district of northern Kiriwina.[20] Before the advent of the white man, it was claimed, the supreme chief had more than sixty wives, one from each of the 'tributary communities'.[21]

With his aristocratic pretensions, Malinowski felt a natural affinity for the chiefly sub-clan of Tabalu, the highest-ranking Trobrianders and 'owners of the soil', so it is understandable that he was immediately attracted to Omarakana, centre of the richest and most fertile district in the islands. It would have been perversely egalitarian of him to camp anywhere else, and Touluwa himself would have been mightily offended had he done so. Tabalu families occupied more than half the village of some three hundred people, and there can be little doubt that the anthropologist's long sojourn among them coloured his perspective of Trobriand society. His rhetorical choice of terms to describe the polity of Omarakana ('aristocrat', 'commoner', 'vassal', 'court', 'tribute', 'insignia') was more appropriate for feudal Europe than for Melanesia. But if he tended by the use of such words to exaggerate the rank and glorify the power of the so-called paramount chief (a designation applied with some reservation by Seligman), it was not for lack of detailed concrete evidence on Trobriand chieftainship, of which Malinowski recorded a good deal more than he actually published.

Even local white traders paid their dues to Touluwa, though not with the deference he would have wished. The scornful manner in which Billy Hancock wrote to Malinowski about him says it all:

> Old Touluwa called one day . . . he anchored his stern on the verandah & grunted twice. I was busy at the time & took no notice of him; after about two minutes he grunted some more & when I looked at him he calmly remarked TAPWAK BUA [tobacco, betel nut], so I gave him one stick & some bua & he got up saying 'Bili Kaione' [goodbye] and I haven't see his royal highness since.[22]

As a guest in his village, Malinowski was obliged to render Chief Touluwa more demonstrative respect. Their relationship did not always run smoothly

expeditions), but Malinowski generally referred to him with affection as well as esteem. This tall but stooped and aging man was shrewd and dignified. 'He was a conspicuous presence in the village, sometimes squatting on the ground in front of his hut or storehouse, sometimes perched high on his *kubudoga* (raised platform) . . . so as to allow his subjects to move freely about', for his rank obliged him always to be in a physically higher position.[23] Since his imprisonment by Bellamy, however, 'his pride had been broken . . . and he had retired from most of his offices'. The most important of these was the supervision of an elaborate system of garden magic which he had delegated to his sister's son and heir apparent, Bagidou.

Another of Malinowski's favourites, Bagidou was 'a man of outstanding ability and intelligence' who suffered from 'some internal wasting disease, probably tuberculosis' which kept him more or less housebound, and hence an easy prey for the resident ethnographer. With 'one of the best minds in the Trobriands' and an excellent memory, Bagidou was a repository of tradition. He was certainly one of Malinowski's most fruitful sources of information on magic:

> For he not only allowed me to be present at every rite in the garden, but usually advised me some days beforehand, explained the rationale of most of his arrangements, invited me to his own house while he was reciting spells in the solemnity of actual performance, dictated them to me with unusual patience and capability, and helped me to translate them – by no means an easy task for him or me.[24]

Bagidou's wife had left him for a younger man. 'The comic side of this otherwise sad story was that Bagidou had the reputation of being the greatest expert in the magic of love.'[25] His younger brothers, Towesei and Mitakata, were his acolytes, and the latter would eventually succeed Touluwa as chief, a position he held until his death in the 1950s, long after Malinowski had predicted the demise of the office.

No fewer than eighteen of Touluwa's sons by various wives lived in Omarakana. His five sons by his first and favourite wife were particularly useful as informants. The eldest, Namwana Guyau, taught Malinowski sorcery spells. Gilayviyaka, the secondborn, was 'a fine and intelligent native' who died in 1916. He achieved local notoriety by being discovered by his wife *in flagrante delicto* with one of his father's wives, and after 'a dreadful public scandal' he was banished by his father for a time. The third son was isfactory fellows of my acquaintance – who was conducting an affair with Ilakaise, a 'model of a Melanesian beauty' and the youngest of his father's wives.[26] There were also Kalogusa and Dipapa, 'pleasant and clever, attractive and enterprising'. All these young men, in fact, delighted Malinowski with their 'aristocratic' dignity and good manners. Another name that crops up frequently in his earliest Kiriwina notebooks is Tomeda, 'a handsome man from Kasanai, famous for his strength, his efficiency in gardening and his skill in dancing'.[27]

It was among such people, then, that Malinowski spent most of his first field trip to the Trobriands. After introductory diplomatic overtures to the chief (if the date on a sketch plan of the village can be trusted he was there on 29 June, just two days afer his arrival in the Trobriands), he returned in mid-July with, one may imagine, a line of carriers from the Losuia gaol. Although Omarakana is situated near the eastern coast, there are no anchorages, so he was obliged to walk the ten level miles across the central plain, through 'monotonous stretches' of low scrub, past several small villages and the occasional yam garden with its staked vines, looking 'like an exuberant hop-yard'.

Omarakana itself, surrounded by groves of fruit trees, is built according to a pleasingly symmetrical plan. An outer ring of dwelling huts and an inner ring of more solidly constructed yam storehouses encircle a broad central plaza, the *baku*, which serves as meeting place, dancing ground and cemetery (at least it did so until Bellamy outlawed burials within the confines of the village). The chief's enormous yam house, the largest in the islands, is situated in the middle of the *baku* and takes pride of place in this civic arrangement, while his decorated dwelling hut, with its pitched gothic façade, is slightly to one side.[28] His wives and children had their own houses in a segment of the outer ring. The street that encircles the village between the two rows of houses Malinowski described as 'the theatre of domestic life and everyday occurrence'. If the central place was largely associated with men's activities, the street was the domain of women.

The ethnographer was directed to pitch his tent in alignment with the outer ring of dwelling houses, just a few yards behind Touluwa's large dwelling. Bagidou was another close neighbour, so there could be no mistaking the honorary rank accorded to the visitor. Like all dwellings in the village, the door of his tent was oriented towards the central plaza. The tent – a 'fragile canvas artifact of civilized Europe' that would become not only

a hoax – was in fact borrowed from Bellamy's store in Losuia, Malinowski having decided that the one he had bought in London was too small.[29] This site in Omarakana would be his home for the next six months, and he would return to it for several weeks in 1918. Today the exact spot is marked by a phallic stalactite, broken from the roof of a coral cave, by which the villagers suggestively commemorate the author of *The Sexual Life of Savages*.

Enter the Ethnographer

In the romanticized 'arrival scene' that introduces *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Malinowski asks the reader to imagine 'making your first entry into the village'.[30] In this 'first engagement', an audience gathers around the visitor, who hands out tobacco, inducing 'an atmosphere of mutual amiability'. Proceeding to business, the ethnographer begins 'with subjects which might arouse no suspicion' such as technology. In this case, the inadequacy of pidgin English in early inquiries soon gave rise to the 'uncomfortable feeling that free communication in it will never be attained'. But until Malinowski could converse with them in their own language, 'I knew well that the best remedy for this was to collect concrete data, and accordingly I took a village census, wrote down genealogies, drew up plans and collected the terms of kinship.' Such documents remained 'dead material', however, and 'their real comprehension can be gained only from the knowledge of real life'.[31] 'As to obtaining their ideas about religion, and magic, nothing was forthcoming except a few superficial items of folk-lore, mangled by being forced into pidgin English.'[32] Yet Malinowski's earliest Trobriand fieldnotes indicate that he went in active pursuit of such material, superficial though he knew it to be, and the 'mangled' cadences of pidgin are evident on every page ('There seems to be a belief in reincarnation. When a male or female has been for a long time in Tuma and he dies again there, he comes back to "belly belong a woman"').[33]

His sense that 'the native is not a natural companion of the white man' was probably reciprocated, despite the many friends he claimed among the menfolk of Omarakana. Mutual tolerance and occasional 'rapport' (the catchword for smooth ethnographic engagement with the subjects of one's study) were established – after a fashion. But he was under no illusion that they truly welcomed him in their midst. 'In fact, as they knew that I would

Map 3 Malinowski's sketch map of the Trobriand Islands, showing the villages and districts of Kiriwina. European settlements are not marked. Losuia, Oiabia and Gusaweta are between Kavatari and Teyava; the Kiribi plantation is just to the south of Oburaku.

not dream of intruding, they finished by regarding me as part and parcel of their life, a necessary evil or nuisance, mitigated by donations of tobacco.'[34] The role of tobacco in his fieldwork was fundamental. Manufactured in Australia in the form of sticks of black, molasses-cured twist, it was the common colonial currency in Papua, used to pay for most goods and services required by whites: in Malinowski's case, local foodstuffs as well as information. As he had complained to Atlee Hunt in April when reporting on the penny-pinching of his Mailu expedition: 'I had to be very economical with tobacco, a feature greatly disliked by the natives in a white man's character.'[35] More liberally funded for his Trobriand field trips, he did not stint on trade tobacco when ordering his supplies in Samarai, and his invoices indicate that his annual expenditure on this item was almost £50, about 20 percent of his total fieldwork budget.

He quickly became an object of attention to the curious villagers, and he remarked upon the confident manner and lack of reserve that Kirwinians showed. 'As soon as an interesting stranger arrives, half the village assembles around him, talking loudly and making remarks about him, frequently uncomplimentary, and altogether assuming a tone of jocular familiarity.'[36] Or as he put it in his notebook: 'Always a number of people around both ends of the tent. Men and women. Girls much more easily approachable. Not offended when looked at or even handled (ethnologically!) in public. The whole *baku* full of people when arriving in a village.'[37] In time, such constant and importunate attention became an irritant and he would complain of a 'surfeit of native'.

What they saw was a tall, balding white man of indeterminate age. His beard and disconcerting green-tinted eyeglasses would have made an unattractive impression. Baldness was considered a sign of old age, while beards (as he wrote in his notes) were 'very ugly – men who wear [them] simply don't want to have anything to do with women'.[38] His own beard, then, advertised his celibacy. Later he would write: 'Europeans, the natives frankly say, are not good-looking. The straight hair . . . the nose "sharp like an axe blade"; the thin lips; the big eyes "like water puddles"; the white skin with spots on it like those of an albino – all these the natives say (and no doubt feel) are ugly.' But his Polish features partly exempted him. 'More polite than truthful', they made a 'meritorious exception' of him, tactfully telling him that he 'looked much more like a Melanesian than like an ordinary white man' by crediting him with 'thick lips, small eyes' and a blunt nose on his forehead and hair.

As to his behaviour, Raphael Brudo agreed with the people of Sinaketa in 1918 that the Doctor was rather strange.

> Here is a man who comes from a country far away to fulfil an aim that they thought futile. Neither missionary nor magistrate, neither buying nor selling, always asking questions and giving tobacco in exchange for words. . . . And then at regular hours, towards the fall of night, he went to the beach and performed certain movements similar to mysterious incantations (these were physical exercises). All this was suspicious to them, and I had often to reply to their anxious inquiries about this man whom they thought strange. . . . In a word, he appeared to them not to be overburdened with sense.[40]

Much later, a Catholic missionary who came to the islands in the 1930s would report that Malinowski was 'remembered by the natives as the champion ass at asking damnfool questions, like, do you bury the seed tuber root end or sprout end down?' The local whites 'got back at him by referring to him as the anthrofoologist and his subject as anthrofoology'. They were all, natives and whites alike, made uneasy because 'they did not know what he was at'.[41]

'The kaleidoscope of tribal life'

If the people of northern Kiriwina were preoccupied with the *taitu* harvest during the weeks of July, Malinowski's interests were more wide-ranging. He was covering warfare, stone implements, insults, courtship expeditions, dances, ghosts, witches, burial, mourning, modes of cooking, times of eating, soil types, counting methods, perfumes and colour categories – to mention only some of the topics of his inquiries. He also sketched the most prominent features of Trobriand society: local and descent-based groupings, clan totemism, gardening, land tenure, chieftainship. But if he was working to a plan of investigation it is not evident from the surreal concatenation of subjects in his notebooks. As in Mailu he was opportunistic, taking notes from anyone willing to talk to him authoritatively about anything. When there were no 'expert' informants available, he resorted to *Notes and Queries* and did it by the book, like painting by numbers. Time was short; he expected

prehensive coverage, to 'know' as much as possible about Trobriand culture. His survey strategy was not unlike that of his mentors, his model an amalgam of Seligman and Rivers, and the sheer catholicity of his interests give a kaleidoscopic effect to the pages of his notebooks. There are *imponderabilia* galore: 'I saw a lady washing her hands before preparing food: she took some water into her mouth and let it run over her hands in a fine jet.'

Initially, then, Malinowski worked on a very broad front. He had already renounced physical anthropology (as he had told Hunt earlier that year), and his measuring stick, calipers, skin-colour gauges and other instruments he had purchased in Berlin remained unused in his tent and would later lie forgotten in Billy Hancock's store. He collected not a jot of the anthropometric data Haddon and Seligman would have recorded. He had not yet rejected their 'antiquarian' interests in technology and material culture, however, and his first Kiriwina notebooks reveal a preoccupation with stone tools and their classification, and he collected a great number in various stages of manufacture. With the Melbourne Museum in mind, during the first couple of months he conscientiously amassed as many artifacts as he could lay his hands on – probably with the aid of the magistrate, who could have ordered them to be brought to the station for sale. The flurry of artifact-collecting eased as his projected trip to the Northern Division was indefinitely postponed. Aided by Billy Hancock, however, he remained on the alert for good specimens, and by the end of his last visit to the Trobriands he had accumulated almost three thousand items. By the exacting standards of the ethnologists and museum anthropologists of the day he was a somewhat careless collector.[42] His most serious failing was as a 'housekeeper' and his documentation was sketchy and incomplete. Housekeeping was for servants. His heart was no more in collecting than it was in photography, and he treated them both as 'secondary occupations of fieldwork'.[43] His interest in arts and crafts ('primitive technology') was principally in their economic and social aspects, and he railed against the 'museum moles' who studied disembodied objects torn from the cultural contexts that gave them life and meaning. Such views were integral to Malinowski's temperament, and they are reflected in his earliest thinking about the kind of anthropology that most interested him: 'primitive sociology' rather than 'ethnology'.

notebook. The custom-made notepads that he had ordered in London characterize the first period of his fieldwork in Kiriwina, just as loose-leaf, foolscap sheets characterize the second. The pads consisted of a hundred pages of unlined white bond paper. They opened vertically (one lifted the page rather than turned it) and, with the pages serrated at the top, looked rather like invoice books. On the first page of each pad there was an index, which Malinowski dutifully completed. The pages were numbered consecutively, and when he began his Trobriand fieldwork he was halfway thorough his seventh pad at page number 748. This page is headed 'Ubuia, 23.vi.15'. He wrote most of his notes with a thin-nibbed fountain pen; occasionally he used a pencil.

Malinowski filled thirteen such notebooks between June 1915 and February 1916. His movements can be reconstructed from them, for he generally noted the village location as well as the date of his investigations. In early July he visited Sam Brudo in Kavataria and the mission sisters at Oiabia, where Miss Jamieson explained how women's banana-leaf skirts were made. He was in Omarakana on 19 July to watch the *taitu* being brought into the village for the harvest displays of Milamala, an event he described in colourful detail in his '*Baloma*' essay. Under the personal tutelage of Chief Touluwa, he visited the gardens frequently (his rough handwriting and resort to pencil testify to the discomfort of his working conditions), and he began to photograph activities and compile the detailed eyewitness notes on gardening that would finally bear fruit in *Coral Gardens and their Magic*.

Omarakana was Malinowski's field base from July to December 1915. From there he made forays to neighbouring villages of northern Kiriwina. In November he spent a few weeks at Billy Hancock's place, working in the nearby villages of Teyava and Tukwaukwa. After spending Christmas with Billy, early in the new year he visited the chiefless, low-ranked villages of Bwoitalu and Bau, home of the most virulent sorcery. By the middle of January 1916 he was back in Omarakana, where he spent another month. In mid-February he visited the southern part of Kiriwina to look at coral caves where skulls of the deceased were deposited. On 25 February he was back in Losuia, waiting for the *Misima* which would take him to Samarai. Of a total of eight months on Kiriwina he spent almost six in Omarakana, rather fewer than he later claimed.[44]

revisited all his notes, however, sometimes weeks, sometimes months and even years later, checking the statements and correcting his initial observations. His term for this checking process was 'control' and the word 'controlled' occurs, like a stamp of authenticity, on many pages of his notebooks, together with a date and the informant's name or initials indicated in red, blue, orange or purple pencil. In this way the notebooks became palimpsests of temporal deposits, lightly worked over in different-coloured pencils. His choice of colour appears to have been arbitrary, though it is tempting to suppose that he deployed a code linking colour to groups of topics or to the dates of their revisiting.

There are scarcely a few score words of Polish in these notebooks; only very occasionally did he use a Polish phrase. (Interestingly, he abandoned English when searching for anatomical terms for describing the butchering of a pig.) An early entry illustrates the clumsy generalizing that he would soon forsake for 'concrete' instances: 'If a married man wants to fuck with another girl he would go with her to the *bukumakula* [bachelors' house], but his wife, on learning this, would be very wild & would very likely thrash the "correspondent", the girl in question.'[45]

The term 'Kula' appeared in his notes within days of his arrival, when he described it as the 'circular transmission of *bagis* [shell necklaces]'.[46] He sketched their general route on the map that Bellamy had drawn for Seligman, and in the opposite direction he indicated the trajectory of *mwali*, armshells. 'The principle of this exchange,' he noted in an unpromising aside, 'is entirely vanity.' These notes were 'controlled' by an informant in Omarakana a few weeks later: 'Two kinds of jewels: those who [sic] were owned individually and did not make the Kula, and the travelling ones.'

The first death to occur while he was in the vicinity of Omarakana was that of a youth named Kimai, who on 6 July had fallen to his death from a coconut tree in the village of Wakailuva. The demonstrative, emotional force of the mourning impressed Malinowski, and his lengthy and lucid account displays some characteristic ingredients of his style: keen, concrete observation combined with an awareness of his own role as witness. (At this date, of course, he could understand only a few words of the language.) It was just before sunset, and men were 'sobbing and slobbering; women keening and wailing. . . . I noticed the squeezing of the noses by the men & smearing the mucus excretia on the ground.' He watched the 'adopted

the whole time in the ritual sing-song, in the typical melody.' Here he sketched the dying fall of the lament from a prolonged G, then to D, back to G, then D, and finally G, or sometimes F. 'She was nursing a piece of mat, like a child, & singing . . . "My child, my belly is sore." There could be no line drawn between the artificial & the genuine in her grief. . . . She accepted my tobacco with quiet dignity.'[47] Only months later did Malinowski learn that Kimai had leapt to his own death.

By the fourth Trobriand notebook, begun in early September, he was using vernacular phrases and inserting short texts. As might be expected, the proportion of matter in Kiriwinian gradually increased, though Malinowski never abandoned English altogether. By November he was collecting sorcery spells (*silami*) from his Omarakana friends: 'They are all afraid of my tent being infected with *silami*. They all dread when I begin to sing one out. . . . The force resides in the voice . . . one should not transmit them face to face, but with each person on either side of a tree.'[48]

The juxtapositions are often surreal as Malinowski ranged from topic to topic. All of human life is here, and there is a resonant parallel between Malinowski's notebooks of this year and his diary of 1917–18. He does not discriminate between things or events according to their salience or relative importance; there is no hierarchy of topics. Nothing is too trivial to record. Every sensation, every observation, is grist to the diarist-ethnographer's mill. The same generosity of observation, the same promiscuity of attention, is evident in both kinds of document. His eye was a camera with variable depth of field, or a bifocal lens that combined the diarist's eye for subjective detail with the anthropologist's eye for social context. It was an essential quality of his genius as an ethnographer that he was able to combine them: to observe an act in close-up, register its unique properties, then draw back to apprehend its general setting, the context that gave the act its meaning. His passionate concern, in ethnography as in his diary, and in anthropology as in his life, was to plumb the depths. 'Try to find out the deeper aspects (native psychology) of these things,' he urged himself. 'By noting everyday observations in diary form agglomerate sufficient number of actual "small facts", e.g. about daily routine.'[49] As for his diary: 'Principle: along with external events, record feelings and instinctual manifestations; moreover, have a clear idea of the metaphysical nature of existence.'[50]

Malinowski invested this event with great significance. In retrospect it came to have an almost mythical import, and he twice described it in considerable detail – in *Crime and Custom* and in *The Sexual Life of Savages*. Indeed, it would be hailed as a pioneering use of the 'case-study method', according to which exemplary cases of a quasi-juridical nature are analysed for the light they shed on customary rules.[52]

For Malinowski, there was a personal dimension to his fascination with the expulsion from Omarakana of the chief's favourite son. A poisonous rivalry between Namwana Guyau (the chief's eldest son) and Mitakata (the chief's sister's son) led to the ceremonial expulsion of the former by the Tabalu 'owners' of the village. It was a complex case involving adultery, deadly insults and the mutual antagonism between sons and maternal nephews, who were true heirs under the system of matrilineal succession. Malinowski theorized it as the enactment of an inherent conflict between two principles: the legal one of Mother-right and the sentimental one of Father-love. The quarrel caused 'a deep rift in the whole social life of Kiriwina' and its political reverberations were felt for years to come. It incidentally affected Malinowski's fieldwork, for his sympathies clearly lay with Namwana Guyau, one of his best informants. Thereafter, the chief retreated into a brooding silence, his favourite wife (Namwana Guyau's mother) died of 'a broken heart', and Mitakata avoided the ethnographer.

Beyond the drama, political import and anthropological lessons of the event, it echoed Malinowski's own plight as an outsider in Papua, a potential *persona non grata*. He already suspected that Chief Murray favoured his expulsion. Namwana Guyau's banishment was a reminder of his own vulnerable status as an enemy alien; conversely, he was trapped in aching exile from Poland. Where did he belong? What was he? Among other identities: prisoner of war, temporary government employee, unfulfilled scientist, frustrated artist and pining lover.

'Sensual temptations'

Persistent themes emerged in his notebooks after a month or two, broad topics that he worried about repeatedly. These were magic and religion, gardening, sex and Kula trade. Sex was a healthy preoccupation of

is needless to suppose that the frequency – and raunchiness – of his notebook inscriptions concerning sexual behaviour were in some way sublimatory. He clearly relished such observations, just as he relished obscene language. ('I suppose you will learn all the "wicked" words first,' Annie had written.)[53] Within days, he was recording salacious details that fifteen years later would delight or scandalize readers of *The Sexual Life of Savages*.

Courting expeditions, he noted, could 'lead to trouble'. 'Row when the girls return if the boys from their own village catch them: "Why you fuck in another village!" In olden days . . . the revenge of the men might be accompanied by a kind of violation. This was done in public on the road: some boys holding a girl & fucking her in turn.'[54] On the custom of biting eyelashes and scratching each other's backs (*kimari*) in love play: 'Tom says that they do not make *kimari* during copulation', only before or after; and Bellamy had told him that scratches on the back were often adduced as proof of adultery – they were therefore of forensic interest to the medically minded magistrate.

Local Europeans were an inexhaustible source of smutty stories, which Malinowski gleefully noted. Billy Hancock told him about a complaisant husband (a minor chief of Sinaketa) who used to take his wife out to the boats of itinerant white traders then wait in Billy's cookhouse until the visitors had finished with her – an example that Malinowski later cited in *The Sexual Life of Savages* to question the existence of jealousy.[55] The trader Ted Harrison of Fergusson Island told him about the steepled yam houses of Sewa Bay on Normanby. 'The shape of the house from the front suggests the female external organs. From the side it reminds one of the male organ in a state of erection,' Malinowski wrote. 'Only good looking girls are allowed into these houses', where they receive one man after another 'till she can't stand it any longer.'[56] (Géza Róheim would call it 'ceremonial prostitution' when he worked in the area many years later.) To amuse himself, Malinowski sometimes wrote of the Trobrianders as if they were Europeans: 'Mr G. was caught copulating with Mrs D. in a garden. Mr G. was ashamed and killed himself with *tuva* [derris root fish poison].'[57] Whites themselves were not exempt from scurrilous gossip: 'None of the missionaries have *kaita'ed* [copulated with local women]. Brudo's accusation of Mr Ballantyne is considered to be a lie. MacGregor never fucked. [Resident Magistrate] Moreton did and so did Bellamy.'[58]

wife she had a hearty laugh. When Mrs Mitakata heard Tokulubakiki's obscene pantomime of fucking she was amused. Gomaya simulated being offended, when yesterday, I called him "*suvasova kuim*" ("incestuous cock") in the presence of ladies.'[59] To differentiate himself from the prudish missionaries, perhaps, Malinowski was being deliberately crude, flouting the courtesies of a culture he had barely begun to comprehend. But his hosts appeared to enjoy his ribaldry, and later there was 'laughter like a group of gentlemen in a smoking room' when he dropped into a conversation the name of the legendary hero who had had his enormously long penis chopped off.[60] In fairness, Gomaya had provoked him by boasting of his sexual adventures, including those with clan 'sisters'. With 'his doglike face', Gomaya amused and attracted Malinowski.[61] 'When I reproach him with Don Giovani-ism he told me with much conviction that this is the net result of knowing magical means for attracting females.' As Malinowski knew from his own experience, one didn't have to be strikingly handsome to win a woman's favours. Gomaya features repeatedly in *The Sexual Life of Savages* as 'a very capable and useful informant', valuable 'because of certain shortcomings in his character'. He was 'vain, arrogant and wilful', lazy, dishonest and an 'incurable braggart' but 'a great *coureur de femmes*'. A talented mimic, he performed a brilliant caricature of the European mode of copulation 'in a clumsy reclining position, and in the execution of a few sketchy and flabby movements'.[62]

From Gomaya, Malinowski learned that 'a breach of clan exogamy . . . is a rather desirable and interesting form of erotic experience' which figured in village life in much the same way as adultery did in French novels.[63] It was one example of many that enabled him to turn conventional anthropological wisdom on its head. The norms of conduct shaped people's statements, though not necessarily their behaviour. As for Gomaya's irresistible love magic: 'I am ugly, my face is not good-looking. But I have magic, and therefore all women like me.' Perhaps with his own experience in mind, Malinowski commented: 'A man of intelligence, of strong will, personality, and temperament, will have greater success with women than a soulless dullard – in Melanesia as in Europe.'[64]

And what of Malinowski's 'sensual temptations' (as Annie called them) in this land of sexual freedom where so many pretty and petite young women – gloriously bare-breasted, scantily skirted and sweetly scented with mint

& stodgy') some photographs from his first expedition, perhaps ones of Suau belles. Annie intuitively understood him as well as anyone at that time, and her barbed commentary on his sexual predicament went straight to its target.

> Those native girls seem so very well set up, good looking girls – I wonder whether St Joseph has protected you thus far. I am afraid my praying to him would not be of much avail – especially as the 'goods' are so cheap, always a recommendation to you. Are they free from disease? I think it is quite wonderful that the 'dream of your youth' has not yet been realized with regard to them or at any rate hadn't been up to the time you wrote. I wonder if the realization will exceed the anticipation – I think there would be an after feeling of disgust![65]

There was the rub. It was a residual Catholic conscience, a fear of racial or caste pollution, and, not least, a horror of physical disease that enabled him to keep the nubile sirens of Omarakana at arm's length, despite recurrent surges of lust for them. What Malinowski needed, the Trobrianders lacked – a magic of abstinence.

'My Dear Seligman'

Malinowski had been in Kiriwina for little over a month when he wrote his first letter to Seligman. He could already claim to have a more comprehensive view of Trobriand culture than his supervisor had achieved. In September 1904, Seligman had spent only a week on Kiriwina, mainly in the missionized village of Kavataria where Gilmour was based. Much of his information he had received from his correspondence with Bellamy, and much of the rest he took from the reports of the Rev. Fellowes and the administrator Sir William MacGregor in the *British New Guinea Annual Reports*. But, Malinowski wrote authoritatively,

> there are lots [sic] to be done yet and things of extreme interest. There is their whole system of 'ceremonial gardening' – almost an agricultural cult . . . there are several beliefs and ceremonies about the spirits . . . the unusual harvest feast MILAMALA . . . a regular All Souls day. Then

> sight. But I am only sketching things and I propose to do the N. Massim together with Misima and Panaiati and perhaps Dobu . . . they all belong together, in a way.

As for his plans: 'I am going by the next boat to the Mambare district where I shall stay for at least 6 months – then if I am very seedy I'll go South again.'[66]

A few weeks later he confirmed this general plan in a letter to Atlee Hunt. 'If the war still lasts,' he concluded, 'I should very much like to return to Papua again having finished my library work in Australia.' His postscript was diplomatic: 'I need hardly add that I am paying special attention to Land Tenure, native authority and law and in general questions which may perhaps be of some practical interest.'[67]

His letter provoked a flurry of official exchanges between Melbourne and Port Moresby. Hunt accepted it as 'tantamount to an application for a continuance of the subsidy' into 1916, and he approached his minister, who sought Murray's advice. Already mistrustful of Malinowski, Hubert Murray had earlier advised against extending his 'contract' beyond 1915, and he now recommended that 'the present arrangements be not continued'.[68] He felt that since Malinowski was being paid from the Papuan budget he should be subject to his control. As it was, he protested, 'it is only by accident I hear where he is or what he is doing'.[69] The upshot of the official exchange was that Malinowski would be permitted to return the following year, but would receive no further funding from the Papuan government.

Towards the end of September Malinowski wrote to Seligman again, almost apologetically, telling him of his revised plans. 'I am not a little cross with the fact that I am working here on a field which you have done before. I was, as you know, practically pushed into it by circumstances.' He was probably referring to the disruption of boat schedules, but now he told Seligman that Copland King, the Anglican missionary in Mambare, had been called to Dogura, the Anglican headquarters in Papua, as Henry Newton's replacement. Newton had been appointed bishop of Carpentaria in Queensland ('worse luck for me!' Malinowski cursed lightly. 'All Bishoprics be d–d'). Still, he was beginning to speak the vernacular and was 'getting such damned good stuff' in Kiriwina that he hoped Seligman would forgive him anything.

He proposed to send Seligman an article for the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. Would he like something on land tenure and garden magic? Or would he prefer something on death, burial, mourning and the afterlife (he had already 'seen 3 deaths, one almost immediately after expiration, 2 in wailing stage; 1 burial & any amount' of mortuary exchanges)? He tactfully pointed out that 'this information would encroach on your stuff', though he felt that Seligman's chapter on death was 'the only one that needs serious amplification'. Finally, he proposed a 'short article about reincarnation; ideas about conception and pregnancy'. In the event, what he completed a year later was his groundbreaking essay '*Baloma*: The Spirits of the Dead in the Trobriand Islands', which dealt in some measure with all of these topics.

As for his immediate plans, he now intended to stay in the Trobriands until November. Kiriwina, he judged, was 'absolutely necessary' if he was to deal next time with Misima, Sudest and Rossel, the main islands of the Louisiade Archipelago. As yet no ethnographers had worked on them, and Seligman was especially keen for him to visit Rossel. Malinowski proposed to 'do Rossel' in 1916, adding, 'Jenness did only Goodenough and I should love to do Dobu & the Amphletts in connection with Kiriwina.'[70]

It was December by the time Seligman received this letter, so it was not until Malinowski was on his way back to Australia that he learned of his supervisor's encouraging response.

> It's a most important area and I am delighted you are working there: the fact that I lightly scratched the soil has nothing to do with it. Please get out of your head any idea about 'encroaching' on my stuff, the whole of my Massim work was the merest preliminary survey, and I shall not feel in the least sore if even much of it does not hold. Your business is to go ahead and publish the right stuff, no matter whom you may contradict, but I agree there is no hurry as to publication.[71]

This was magnanimous. To this day anthropologists are territorial animals, and apt to feel threatened when their colleagues or students wander into preserves they have marked as their own. Long before receiving this reassurance, however, Malinowski had again written to Seligman offering Christmas greetings, and with uncanny good luck his letter reached its destination on Christmas morning. He still felt uneasy about working on the Trobriands without Seligman's explicit sanction. He had now been on Kiriwina for four months, and his work was 'going fairly smoothly' despite the fact that he had recently sacked his interpreter, who was 'a bloody scoundrel

year to get a glimpse of the mainland *pure Papuans*'. His health was fairly good', although, he said:

> at times I feel damnably 'sick' (in the metaphorical sense) & I long to get away. Mind you, I am absolutely alone amongst niggers & at times they get on your nerves & add to it a bit of feverishness – any one would drink whisky under such circumstances. Now I don't use neither [sic] whisky nor the other 'white man's solace' – and such double abstinence makes life less merry'.[72]

Although it arrived too late to be of much consolation, Seligman's answer offered sympathetic advice. 'I know that "nerves" feeling you write about; although I was never very long alone in New Guinea I had a good deal of time by myself in Borneo. I expect the thing is for you to get South for a bit and get some decent grub, see the magazines and talk to people at the clubs.'[73]

In October, Malinowski also wrote to Rivers, telling him of his 'intensive work in the Trobriands'. In a covert boast he added:

> my linguistic facilities are some use in this, though my experience has shown me that it is possible to do almost as good work with an interpreter, though one looses [sic] much time; when one begins to understand the natives talking among themselves, the old men discussing your questions, of the people gossiping in the evening, lots of things crop up automatically.

Rivers might well have flinched, for he had learned the vernaculars of none of the people he worked among. As if to console him, Malinowski continued:

> I have your last book [*The History of Melanesian Society*] with me and am paying special attention to many points raised by you. As far as method of inquiry is concerned, I am of course following your advice of 'getting everything through concrete facts'. Genealogies, village census, plans of land in land tenure etc. are means which allow gaining possible knowledge.[74]

Haddon had written to him in late June, congratulating him on getting his Mailu work into press; he would write to Atlee Hunt to thank him for the financial support, 'a kindly as well as a wise action'. He urged Malinowski to pay attention to the Melanesians of the east. He agreed with Seligman that 'Rossel Is. needs doing very badly'. There was an ethnological puzzle to be solved there, he believed, 'since Elliot Smith, Rivers, & Perry are very keen just now on the megalithic problem – or "heliolithic" as they term it as they are satisfied that megaliths go with a sun cult. . . . As this question is so much to the fore, it might not be a bad plan if you definitely worked at it in New Guinea.' In pursuit of this problem, he even suggested that it might be worthwhile for Malinowski to go over the same ground Seligman had covered.[75]

Malinowski would have been delighted to have his efforts approved by such a high authority, one that actually encouraged him to work in the same area as Seligman. He was proceeding according to his own agenda, however, and had no intention of being distracted by the British diffusionists' search for traces of an ancient sun cult. He replied to Haddon in the obsequious tones he had used since first meeting him. 'It was very kind of you to write in such encouraging terms and to show so much interest in my work. And I value it all the more, as it comes from you and I know well how much I owe you in connection with this journey.' The year's work, he promised, ought to yield 'somewhat better than the Mailu stuff'.[76] As for megaliths ('stone circles'), he would 'try to investigate them in the d'Entrecasteaux Islands'. He never did so, but he would surely have been less dismissive of megaliths had he only known of several that would be discovered on Kiriwina and Kitava some twenty years later.

'My dearest little son'

News of the war filtered through. From Losuia, Campbell sent him terse notes about terrible battles in France. In November, Marjorie Peck wrote from Melbourne:

> You must feel so sad – desolate – for your country which has always suffered so and now has been fought over again and again. . . . The letters we get from our men at Gallipoli make us weep – they are so tragically cheerful – making the best of a pitiful business – and our streets are full of maimed and broken looking men who till now have taken life more or less as a picnic.[77]

worried that her letters were not reaching him. Seligman did his best to keep her informed, and wrote to her directly whenever he heard from Papua. Occasionally she received these reassuring messages. One reported Haddon's visit to her son in Mailu, and she gratefully acknowledged that 'even such news though short and imprecise brings me great joy'.[78] She was overjoyed to receive two letters from Bronio in August, one via Washington D.C. that took three months to reach her, another that took only half that time. But she feared that now he was back in New Guinea the letters would be indefinitely delayed again. News of her sister had come at last, but it was not good and told of her privations. Dr Konrad Dobrski (who had attended young Bronio) had died in Warsaw, and Jerzy Żuławski (who had joined the Polish legion) had succumbed to typhus in a military hospital. The only good news came from Professor Estreicher, who had assured her that her son's book on primitive religion would soon be in the bookshop window.

In October she told Bronio that six of his letters had reached her in the previous months, each by a different route. The last one came 'as an official document from the Ministry of External Affairs' – which could only have been sent through an obliging Atlee Hunt. She was well, but 'unspeakably sad for many, many reasons'. She had finally managed to visit her sister at the Janiszów estate. The situation was heartbreaking. The stables, pigsties and hen coops had been burned down, the mill badly damaged, the horses and cattle were gone. Although the manor house remained intact it had been comprehensively pillaged.

> What couldn't be taken was destroyed, burnt down or smashed. The portraits of Zygmunt [Malinowski's cousin, who had died in 1912] and others were shredded – the eyes pierced. Nothing survived of our things. We lost all the beautiful linen, sheets, lots of important papers, books, my clothes, two fur coats, some silver and jewelry, a huge box of china, so now we have nothing whatsoever. Also some very important family papers of my father have been lost, all the big photographs of your father and my parents, your beautiful portrait painted by Witkiewicz, and a whole lot of other things I can't enumerate.[79]

In a later letter she added:

> All that pillaging was by our countryfolk! They carried Auntie away during a battle, almost by force, and as soon as she left, the peasants plundered the replace what we've lost, but the worst sorrow is over the things that can't be bought! Even your doctor's diploma has been torn to pieces.

His imperial gold ring was safe in Warsaw, however, along with a small cache of other valuables.[80]

By February 1916 she had heard almost nothing from her son since the previous June. 'I'd be so happy if you . . . moved south, to healthier conditions! After all, you've done enough in that place! And Miss Stirling is so nice!'[81] She could not know that he was indeed about to sail back to Australia. She had received an undated letter from him via California, for which she gently rebuked him: 'Please, my dear, always write the date. Even though I know you don't do it out of forgetfulness but on purpose, to make me think it's more recent, this is precisely why it's less meaningful to me.'[82] In another of his letters he told her about the Trobrianders, who were 'nicer, more intelligent, excellent carvers, and generally better culturally developed' than the Mailu. 'So generally speaking, they're more attractive than the local "savages". Now the word "savage" seems very funny to me, if applied to the people whom I came to treat like good acquaintances. Some of them are quite nice and decent.'[83]

Mama's letter of 3 April 1916 informed him that she had set aside a hundred gold coins for his return journey. (The value of their money in Russian Poland had already been halved.) She pestered him about the sulphur treatment for his hair: 'I'm worried that for all kinds of reasons you stubbornly refuse to do it.'[84] The previous year he had obediently followed the odoriferous cure: 'I treat my hair and will continue every day,' he told her, 'but with sulphur in alcohol, because the ointment, particularly in summer, melts, drips, and goes rancid.'[85]

Nina the muse

Malinowski had mentioned to his mother his feelings for Nina Stirling. He had also told Annie, who wanted to know more. 'I was very pleased to hear about her & would be really glad to know that you were in love with a nice girl like she must be.'[86] Annie offered her frank opinion.

> I daresay anyhow that some day you will be less fond of change & more disposed to be true to one person, especially if you are really in love with

> fast & true lover. . . . What about the New Guinea temptations? The thought of that 'British girl' ought to be enough to keep you from yielding – I daresay you must find it hard at times – the loneliness must make it worse.[87]

As much as absence, loneliness did make his heart grow fonder. It was important for him to keep a desirable woman in mind as he endured the inner solitude of the field. Curiously, although Nina's letters fed his desire, they did not inspire him to resume his diary. He had vowed, in his single entry of 1 August, to 'start another diary' and 'fill the empty blank pages of these last five months', but he failed to do so.[88] Yet all his significant love affairs to this point had been accompanied by the kind of minute scrutiny of his soul that a journal allowed. Perhaps the very distance that lay between Adelaide and Kiriwina obviated the emotional oscillations that had characterized his other affairs. He had known Nina for too short a time to spin resentments and concoct jealousies, so he was spared the storm and stress that close proximity engendered.

As his principal love object during this period, Nina was the only contender for the role of muse. His letters to her (perhaps diary-letters as he had written for Annie and Żenia) might have been a satisfying substitute for an intimate journal, though later we hear him complaining that her letters did not satisfy his craving for 'subjective depth'. Almost certainly, too, he talked to her in his head. It was an enjoyable indulgence and kept his love on the boil, though he sometimes despised the habit as 'telesentimental monomania'.[89] To Nina Stirling, then, went the honour of being the imaginary companion who sustained him throughout this productive period of fieldwork. He needed such spiritual succour: a guiding light, someone to work for and to impress. His mother could no longer adequately fulfil this role, though she had set the pattern. Memories of Tośka were fading; she was far beyond reach and their love had wilted for lack of nourishment. Annie Brunton was now 'the past' and also impossibly far away.

He had made a few other female friends during his brief and busy stay in Melbourne, notably the five Peck sisters who lived with their recently widowed mother in a comfortably large house called 'Warton' in St Kilda. It was perhaps through Nina that Malinowski met the Pecks, for she was a close family friend, having been nursed through a girlhood illness by a voluptuous figure. Even after committing his soul to Elsie Masson he lusted secretly after her. 'Malina dear,' she would address him in her letters, suggesting that they had enjoyed an affectionate flirtation. Like many of her female friends – unmarried, upper-middle-class Anglo-Australians – Leila dabbled in paints and clay-modelling, read the latest novels, went to concerts and public lectures, looked after the children of others and spent part of the year 'resting' in country houses on the Mornington Peninsula or in the Dandenong Range. These young women were moderately cultivated, serious-minded and as well educated as women of the period could expect to be. They hungered for self-improvement and, vaguely dissatisfied with their leisure, sought useful employment in the 'caring professions'. The war in Europe had given them a fresh urgency, even as it delivered opportunities – Muriel Peck, for instance, sailed for France as a military nurse. But the loss of so many young men left a proportionate number of spinsters: Leila and one of her sisters would be among them.

The Peck family were well aware of Malinowski's courtship of Nina Stirling; it was Mrs Peck who fondly referred to Nina as his Galatea. Marjorie (or Madge), the second eldest, initially disapproved of the potential match. Writing to Malinowski in November 1915, she admitted that she had seen 'nothing but tragedy in it' for them.[90] During his months in Kiriwina, he had lived with the knowledge of others' misgivings – he even shared some of them – so it must have come as sweet relief and vindication that Marjorie confessed to having 'misunderstood'.

> You see Nina had not told me then all you were to her and she to you – Idiot that I was – I thought you were just strongly attracted – yes possibly I meant physically not that wasn't by any means all. But then you didn't understand that she was absolutely just awakening . . . till she met you she really knew nothing.

Nina brought out protective instincts in other women. In courting her, Malinowski was treading on very dangerous ground.

Within six months Nina had been transformed by his epistolary attentions. 'You have done for her what no one else could,' Marjorie told him. 'She is independent and oh, most delightfully in love. . . . Your letters to her and the fact that she can speak openly to you has made the difference. . . . she is such a glowing splendid *woman*.' But Majorie Peck still had reservations about the relationship, and hinted at them by asking Malinowski 'to

plain to his female correspondents when there was nothing to be read there. Marjorie, though, left little unsaid. She managed both to congratulate him as a Prince Charming for awakening Nina to life, and to warn him that the battle for her was far from over. A thorn of reproach lay concealed in the bouquet of praise she offered him.

> Nina tells me that you may return in February and I wonder what that will mean. She so dreads another parting & it will be so hard for you both. I agree with her that where love comes in it seems so dreadful that marriage is the only solution. – Marriage is such a final sort of business and I expect *you'd* say 'stodgily *British*' but here it is the only solution. Oh please, please forgive me but I am writing so crudely.[91]

To help him through his 'dark hours', Marjorie sent him a new novel by Conrad's erstwhile friend and collaborator, Ford Madox Ford. It was *The Good Soldier*, a melancholy tale of an upright man destroyed by passion – 'the saddest story' of an appalling betrayal that led to three deaths and the madness of an innocent girl. 'I wonder how it will impress you,' wrote Marjorie mischievously.

At the beginning of March 1916, as Malinowski sailed for Port Moresby aboard the *Misima* he drafted a letter to Seligman. 'Your letters were most welcome – as I have been feeling very depressed lately. The life I led in Omarakana was trying enough, and as I told you, I began to feel "queer" about the natives. I got to such a loathing of them that I was unable to work.'[92] He was perhaps referring to the imbroglio in Omarakana following the expulsion of the chief's son.

Although Annie expressed it awkwardly, she put her finger on an important aspect of Malinowski's achievement. As it would be defined nowadays, this was his acquisition of 'ethnographic authority'. 'Don't you feel,' she wrote,

> now that you have been on the spot and done research work yourself that it is almost absurd for anyone to set up as an authority on your particular science who has never been out of civilized (!) Europe? You remember I used to laugh at you about it. At any rate you must feel that whatever you write and say now must carry a great deal more weight than it did before.[93]

Precisely – he had been there.