While Moore is to be commended for touching on the efforts of women’s circles and non-government organisations in mediating and acting for peace, his reliance on media sources means some stories of confrontation that might have been gained from an approach based on more direct research are not included. His methodology also causes him to miss some of the more intriguing points of local involvement, such as the significant influence wielded by the Melanesian Brotherhood as mediators in the conflict. Nevertheless, Moore does an exceptional job of weaving together influences in the country. It remains to be seen whether further developments will come about with the upcoming national election, set for early 2006.

Moore has been doing research in the Solomons for almost 30 years. He is currently at work on both a history of Malaita and a historical dictionary of the Solomon Islands, which was inspired by the challenges he faced while writing Happy Isles.


IRA BASHKOW
University of Virginia

This long-awaited first volume of Michael Young’s monumental biography of Bronislaw Malinowski takes us from his birth in Poland through his legendary fieldwork on the Trobriand Islands. The volume ends with Malinowski sailing from Kiriwina to New Guinea. Young has added a significant amount of new material, including extensive archival research, and has provided a fascinating and detailed account of Malinowski’s life and work.

One of Malinowski’s first principles of method was that the ethnographer put himself in the place of the native. This is particularly relevant given that RAMSI still maintains a presence in the country. The political and practical conditions facilitating Malinowski’s fieldwork were largely owing to Bellamy’s efforts; indeed, it was Bellamy who lent him the “anthropologist’s tent” that, pitched in the village and photographed by a white trader, has long served as the famous icon of his fieldwork myth (p.389). One of Malinowski’s first principles of method was that the ethnographer should “live without other white men, right among the natives” (Argonauts of the Western Pacific, p.6). But as Young reveals, Malinowski grossly exaggerated the amount of time he actually dwelt in his tent. In fact, he spent nearly half his time on Kiriwina enjoying the hospitality of white traders, and his letters describing his intense relationships with the traders attribute to them a psychological richness that contrasts with the “thin caricatures” Malinowski drew of his native friends from Kiriwina (Malinowski, p.499). Addressing the controversy over Malinowski’s use of the racist term niggers in his letters and diary, Young suggests that he had internalised the bigotry of the traders’ society, adopting with it their abusive vocabulary (whose coarseness exceeded that of colonial officers) and aligning himself with their white supremacist views in outrageous passages expressing pique at “spoil natives” and openly advocating “the institution of flogging the niggers” (pp.549-50). Through extensive archival research, Young pieces together the back-story to these and other infamous Diary passages, including Malinowski’s outbursts of loathing and “hated for the niggers” (p.538), his dreams in which worldly ambitions to honours and titles crawled upon him “like lice” (p.567) and his tormented confessions of desire for native girls, several of whom he “pawed” (p.547).

This is no hagiography. Although Young embarked on the project at the invitation of Malinowski’s daughter and enjoyed unrestricted access to privately-held family papers and interviews, he does not flinch from pursuing unflattering themes like Malinowski’s opportunism, paranoia, racism and homoerotic narcissism—this last apparent in an “inadvertently comical” dream he recorded in which he had homosexual sex with his own double! (p.548). The views of Malinowski’s contemporary detractors, such as J.H.P. Murray and Baldwin Spencer, are aired, as are the unflattering opinions expressed about him by natives as well as whites on the Trobriands. Years later, local whites would remember Malinowski as the “anthrofoologist” (his subject was “anthrofoology”), while the Kiriwinans gave him the vernacular name Tosewmana,
the “Show-Off” (pp.397, 528). Tellingly, when Malinowski departed from the field, the event was marked by no native ceremony, and his Diary entry is mean-spirited: “I am glad that the Oburaku niggers are behind me, and that I’ll never again live in this village” (p.527). Yet in fabulations of village lore reported by subsequent ethnographers, the people of Kiriwina generously tell of his departure as it should have been, with a grand farewell feast and Malinowski himself distributing elaborate parting gifts, until he boarded the boat that would take him away, and the people wailing as if mourning (p.530). Young observes that, like many another anthropologist, Malinowski seems to have found a field site that mirrored him: it was “a society of tricksters and ‘show-offs’ with interesting sex lives” who were mythmakers, too (p.510).

What is the meaning of this biography for Malinowski’s historical reputation? For the full answer to that question, we must of course await Volume Two. But in the meantime what is perhaps most remarkable about Young’s vast narrative is that, even as it implicitly answers the more recent literature on Malinowski’s stupendous flaws, it maintains an overarching quality of empathetic understanding, so that one also comes away from reading it with an enhanced appreciation of his accomplishments. Malinowski resolves into a figure of Rabelaisian moods and immense contradictions, who on his good days restlessly struggled to create new forms of integrity in experience and expression. Driven by the characteristically modernist ambition to transcend legacies of the past, he frequently pushed the limits of bourgeois respectability, toyed with sexual and class (if not racial) mores, and set aside tired academic conventions. In fieldwork, he popularised an alternative to the older just-the-facts approach, re-evaluated the “dread of leading questions” (p.429), powerfully confirmed the importance of learning the language, and revised the centrality of memory ethnography by emphasising eye/I-witnessing: the need to see things first hand. Like a dutiful student, he brought along to the field the standard anthropologist’s kit of skull callipers and skin-colour measuring instruments, but once there he renounced physical anthropology and “collected not a jot of the anthropometric data” (p.398). With his boundless capacity for painstaking work and “craftsman’s interest” in doing things well (p.568), he industriously revisited all his field notes weeks or months after writing them, “checking the statements and correcting his initial observations” in an impressively rigorous process he called “controlling” (p.400). When Young read over his field notebooks, he encountered on many pages the word “controlled” pencilled in, together with a date and the informant’s name or initials, like a seal of veracity. Malinowski did not achieve in his work all the innovative aims he envisioned. For example, in his initial design for a Kiriwina monograph, he wrote a “few dozen pages” of notes for an ambitious appendix called “Black and White” that would re-situate the material of the main chapters in relation to colonial change, which he noted was a topic conventionally “ignored or glossed over” by anthropologists at the time (p.470). Nevertheless, he wound up confining his Trobriand publications almost entirely to the “traditional” culture, exactly like the antiquarian schools of ethnology he liked to criticise (p.505). It was left for Young himself to finally contextualise Malinowski’s ethnography in colonial race relations and change.