

Malinowski and the Alps

Afterword

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The essays featured in this volume on Malinowski’s presence in the Alps, published under the umbrella of the Malinowski Forum for Ethnography and Anthropology (MFEA) clearly illustrate, from different points of view, the relationship between the Malinowski family and the beautiful villa in the village of Oberbozen, South Tyrol, in the twenties and thirties of the last century. The contributions integrate the extensive essays by Elizabeth Tauber, Dorothy Zinn and Daniela Salvucci, which have been known and appreciated from many years. Pier Paolo Viazzo clearly shows how Malinowski’s distance from historical research should not be interpreted as radical hostility, but as an inevitable consequence of research concentration in the ‘new anthropology’ he proposes: on social relations, on symbolic-ritual expressions, investigated in the dynamics of continuity and intensity of fieldwork intended as ‘participant observation’ in a social context of limited dimensions.

The central theme of Viazzo’s reflections is: “the possibility of applying the principles and methods of Malinowskian-inspired intensive research to communities in the Alpine regions”. His conclusion strikes me as perfectly acceptable: “the Alps still need Malinowskian anthropology”. It is certainly a fact that the Polish-English anthropologist’s interests in the South Tyrolean villa were not aimed at a possible study of the Tyrolean region. His intense, festive gatherings in the beautiful villa with his many students and colleagues from the London School of Economics were devoted to pleasant and stimulating exchanges of ideas, comparisons of research in progress, discussions among the protagonists of a group that made a point of being recognised as solid and substantially united. And the environment in which they resided, the magnificent Renon plateau, was certainly admired and explored

Part of

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on a few excursions, although, as it transpired from some interviews I conducted in England in the early 1970s (with Raymond Firth, Lucy Mair and Audrey Richards), it was considered less relevant than the stimulating daily exchanges in the life of the villa and its large tree-lined garden. As Peter Schöttler's and Daniela Salvucci's contributions show, contacts between Malinowski and specialists in the anthropology and history of the Alpine region occurred and had a certain relevance. First among these was the meeting with Lucie Varga, whose work on two Alpine valleys (Montafontal in Vorarlberg and Enneberg in South Tyrol) has been rightly re-evaluated, and certainly received stimuli and inspiration from her meetings with Malinowski.

Rather fittingly, the writings of specialists in the Alpine area have insisted on reconstructing the political and social events that characterised the Italian South Tyrol in the 1920s and 1930s, when the Malinowskis assiduously visited their villa in Oberbozen. It is mainly in some of Elsie Masson's writings, in her letters to her husband and in a few passages from Malinowski's *Diary*, that critical information and considerations against the politics of the fascist government appear. It was the era in which the fascist geographer and officer-intellectual Ettore Tolomei had distinguished himself for his tireless and inexorable promotion of the "Italianness of South Tyrol": even in the correction of the German surnames of the region's inhabitants, in the compulsory diffusion of the Italian language in schools, and in the modification of minor local history by eliminating or modifying the accounts concerning the area's Austrian authoritative figures. The recent studies conducted by Di Michele (2003), Bianco (2008), De Iasio, Guerresi (2012), and degli Uberti (2019) have richly illustrated and detailed this sad period of Italian history, which, while leaving painful traces among the inhabitants of the Tyrolean mountains, did not erase the valley's own identity, almost always characterised by an Italian-Germanic bi-cultural intertwining and compatibility.

Among the quality anthropological research works carried out in the Tyrol area, which have interacted with Malinowski's studies, I would like to mention those of Leopold Pospisil, a Czechoslovakian that later moved to the United States, who published a rich monograph in 1995 on a Tyrolean village very close to the Italian border (Oberberg). He accurately recorded the economic processes and characteristics of the region's peasantry, employing very accurate quantitative data and case studies on the mobility of moun-

tain people between different ecological levels, the differentiated production and circulation of goods in small local markets, and the complex relationship with more distant markets (Pospisil, 1995). This author was an expert in ethnographic studies of mountain peoples as he had worked for a long time in the Austrian Alps and before that in the mountains of the Central Highlands of Western New Guinea, among the Kapauku, also discussing traditional legal forms in accordance with Malinowski's well-known research (in his book *Kapauku Papuans and their Law*, 1958). We also owe Pospisil a short yet intense critical-comparative study on the theories of peasantry, which gives great importance to studies on the peoples of mountain areas and harshly argues against the classical theses of anthropological literature on peasant societies as opposed to urban and industrialised societies: equality as opposed to vertical stratification, poverty and struggle for existence, economic self-sufficiency or strong relations with markets, production of high surplus and, above all, great economic flexibility and no isolation or resistance to changes from the outside, and finally no connection with the famous "image of limited goods". All these well-known generalisations about peasants are challenged on the basis of the author's long empirical experience in various European, Oceanian and American regions (Pospisil, 2008).

Therefore, these studies provide us with a decisive contribution to the intensification of bi-disciplinary research, between anthropology and history, especially – but not exclusively – in the Alpine valleys, as also shown in Margareth Lanzinger's essay. This essay not only refers to the tradition of the *Annales*, up to the example of historical-ethnographic monographs such as *Montaillou* by E. Le Roy Ladurie, but also to Italian studies on micro-history. Furthermore, the reference to H. Wopfner's book, which presents a brilliant connection between *Landskunde* and Historical *Volkskunde*, is more than appropriate, also because of the continued insistence on the relationships between technical-practical and economic activities on the one hand, and "popular spirit", "basic psychic structure", "historical-cultural archetypes", "overall collective characters". Anthropological studies on Alpine communities are thus intensifying with this innovative ethnographic-historical approach, in view of some fundamental volumes: *The Hidden Frontier. Ecology and Ethnicity in an Alpine Valley* (by John Cole and Eric Wolf, 1974, translated into Italian in 1993) and *Alpine Communities. Environment, Population, Social Structure*

in the Alps from the 16th Century to the Present (by Pier Paolo Viazzo, 1989), but also the important book by Paolo Sibilla (1980), *Una comunità Walser delle Alpi. Strutture tradizionali e processi culturali*.

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