

Life and Works of Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay: Founder of Empiricism in Anthropology

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"The Russian Naturalist, Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay (1982) spent some three years, between 1871 and 1882, studying the people as well as the natural history of the 'Maclay coast' of the Madang district of New Guinea. Despite his political representations to the British government on behalf of those he studied, and his fame in Australia, for some peculiar reason he is never regarded as the founder of the fieldwork tradition in anthropology.) For a while, the expedition in 1898-9 of Cambridge academics to the Torres Straits (separating Australia from Papua-New Guinea) became the model for such investigations." (Angela P. Cheater, 1989: 21)

"The Russian ethnographer Nicolai Nicolaievich Miklouho-Maclay (1846-88), who as early as in 1871m 40 years before Malinowski, carried out intensive field study on the New Guinea coast, and laid the foundation for a rich ethnographic tradition"(Eriksen et. al. 2001:24)

1. Introduction

Malinowski has been recognized as the founder of fieldwork tradition in anthropology in almost entire world academia and anthropology is considered as a child of colonialism. Malinowski's first expedition was in 1914 when he visited Motu and Papua and the Mailu of New Guinea and spent some years from 1914-15 and 1915-18 in the Trobriand Island (Eriksen: 243).

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In this background, author of this article, being a student of anthropology of present Petersburg University and having obtained a Ph.D. degree from NN Miklouho-Maclay Institute of Ethnography felt to bring at sight the lacuna of the discipline. Introducing Maclay's life and work would help Anthropology reach to its very root, which is immensely significant to reveal the conceptual and empirical foundation of the discipline. This article has outlined in brief the life and work of Maclay. It is needless to note that the exploration of work of Maclay would provide fresh insight of the origin of the discipline. However, as within the scope of this article it is infeasible to enter into the entire gamut of Maclay's thoughts and works, the constraints remain obvious. Nevertheless, this article would shed light on Maclay's work to not only those who are undergoing training in anthropology or anthropologists but general readers.

2. Facts for life

MIKLUHO-MAKLAI, NICHOLAI NICHOLAIEVICH (1846-1888), scientist and explorer usually known as Nicholas Maclay, was born on 17 July 1846 at Rozhdestvenskoye, Russia, second son of Nicholaivijch Mikluho-Maklai, hereditary nobleman, and his wife Ekaterina Semenovna, née Bekker. Educated in St Petersburg at a secondary school, he briefly studied law and philosophy at the university and in 1864 moved to Heidelberg. He studied medicine at Leipzig in 1866 and paleontology, zoology and comparative anatomy at Jena. On vacation travels he became a competent linguist, and in the Canary Islands examined sponges and shark brains, on which he published important papers. Marine biology drew him to the Red Sea and after a bout of malaria to the Volga. His attention was drawn to New Guinea as a promising field for anthropological and ethnological studies. Aided by the Imperial Russian Geographical Society he visited European museums and met leading scientists. In October 1870 he sailed in the Russian corvette *Vitiaz* and by way of South America and the Pacific Islands reached Astrolabe Bay in September 1871 (Fischer, D 1956: DD Tumarkin (gen ed), *Sobranie Sochinenii V Shesti tomakh* [Collective works in six volumes, 1990])

3. The expedition

In 1871 he settled on the northeastern coast of New Guinea (now Papua New Guinea) where no white person had been before. While his primary objective in going to New Guinea was to make a comparative study of the racial types of the Pacific region, he is known more for his efforts in defending the rights of indigenous people to their land against the spread of colonialism than he is for his ethnographic work. Miklouho-Maclay spent more than 3 years living and travelling in New Guinea pursuing his ethnographic studies. His work focused mainly on recording the physical characteristics of people and their material culture and paid little attention to social relationships and religious matters.

Although Miklouho-Maclay continued his scientific studies in New Guinea and Australia, the last ten years of his life was mainly devoted to defending the rights of indigenous peoples.

4. Conception of Maclay

A theory was widespread according to which primitive societies were formed of people of a lower type who were incapable of raising themselves to the level of modern civilization. This argument was used in justifying the seizure of land as colonies, the slave trade, and the poverty-stricken existence of huge masses of people. Such views were quite alien to Miklouho Maclay. He was firmly convinced that naturally all people are born the same and equal, that there were no "higher" and "lower" beings, that the primitive state was a historical one, which was fading in the face of the modern world and that it was the duty of the scientist to describe and understand this state better and more fully (D.D Tumarkin (gen ed), 1950-54 *Sobranie Sochinenii* [Collected works], 1990).

Maclay viewed civilization as a corrupting force. He depicted returning Papuan laborers from European plantations as violent agitators who disrupted an otherwise peaceful and pristine lifestyle. (Maclay, 1982 [1874]) Maclay had several ideas for saving the Papuans from what he saw as the evils of colonialism; one was to establish a utopian Papuan community in a zone free of colonial control and exploitation. (Ogloblin, 1997) Underlying

Maclay's liberal concern for the people he studied was the idea that simple Papuan societies would be destroyed by more sophisticated European societies or by the "contaminating influence" of Indonesian civilization. (Greenop, 1944)

In 1874 Russian explorer Miklouho-Maclay selected the Kowiai Coast as the site for one of the first anthropological studies in West Papua. He chose this site because he imagined the Kowiai to be pure savages: "It was told that the natives savagely

5. Methodology

He was convinced that his only hope of overcoming distrust was to gain a command of the language, just as it was the only way for him to understand the customs, and traditions, and mode of life of the natives. The main impediment to learning the language consisted in the fact that it was incredibly difficult to identify the words for notions, actions, and states that one could not point out. Only after four months, for example, did Miklouho-Maclay learn what "morning" and "evening" were called, but he did not know the word for "night". He had discovered how to say "bad" but did not know the word for "good". He got into some funny situations and sometimes simply awkward ones with the language

Maclay knows that for the anthropologist and the ethnographer there is no such thing as minor items everything is important, and one must know everything. But genuine knowledge can only be obtained in the course of lengthy, repeated, direct observations. An outsiders cursory views, or data from unreliable sources frequently mislead scientific research. (Putilov, 1982).

It took 130 days for Maclay to built needed relationship with the Papuan villagers. In those hours Maclay keenly watched all that was going on, attempting to remember every little detail to imprint on his memory every single feature, storing up the observations as an ethnographer and enjoying what he saw through an artist's eye.

Papuans believed that Maclay Besides the fact that he could heal various illnesses lit fire, prevent rain if he wished, it is in the dairy

that he poured a few drops of water into a dish containing alcohol and set fire to the alcohol.

6. Focus of observations

Miklouho-Maclay also attached great importance to the long article "Ethnological Notes on the Papuans". It is sufficient to list the different subjects dealt with to appreciate the scope of the article: "Food" (with a detailed description of the fruits, their properties, harvesting season, and ways of preparing them; with a list of the animals, birds, insects, and shellfish used as food; everything that concerns the cooking of food); "Pots and Utensils"; "Implements and Arms"; "Clothing and Ornaments"; "On the villages and the Dwellings"; "Plantations and the Working of the Soil"; "Dealings and Bartering Among the Villages"; "The Everyday Life of the Papuans" (including marriage, family relations, children, the Papuan's day, painting of their faces and bodies, greetings, and funeral rites); "Notes on the Study of the Language and on Dialects"; "Art" (ornamenting); "On beliefs and the Customs Connected With Them"; "Music and Singing"; "Festivities and Feasts".

An abundance of facts is given systematically. There is nothing superfluous or doubtful, no hasty generalizations; everything is set down in concise form and precisely, but in the necessary detail. Every object is given its local name. The numerous drawings show one what things really looked like. The entire work bears the imprint of the tight restrictions the author imposed on himself.

7. Field work

Miklouho-Maclay wrote several anthropological and ethnographic essays on the islands of Vuap (Yap), Hermit, Palau, and others. He was particularly interested in the purpose of objects, their function in society. He tried to approach this subject unbiased by European ideas and prejudices stemming from the concepts of power, the state, property, and so forth.

Miklouho-Maclay found any attempts to justify theories based on racial discrimination and the practices stemming from them quite

intolerable. Complete equality of rights for all the human races was for him an indisputable scientific and humanist principle: the existence of different races in completely in agreement with the laws of nature, and it should be recognised that these races have the rights common to all people.

He had made an absolutely golden rule to avoid any kind of speculative constructions, poorly founded hypotheses and theories.

Miklouho-Maclay was witness to the consequences of the harmful influence of Europeans on the Melanesians.

Miklouho-Maclay write an open letter on April 8, 1881, to Commodore Wilson, the head of the Australian naval station. Written five days before his second letter to Sir Arthur Gordon, which was printed in the Melbourne newspaper Argus under the heading "Kidnapping and Slavery in the South Sea Islands"

Miklouho-Maclay' path visited Berlin, The Hague, Paris, and London. Among the scientists he met in are Henry Moseley and George Schweinfurth. The former was an explorer who voyaged on the Challenger around the islands of Melanesia.

Miklouho-Maclay toured a number of European capitals not only attending to practical matters, but also building up his contacts with the academic world, and thereby gained popularity and respect which was firmly established in the scientific world after 1882-1883.

Within the time period between 1886 and 1888 Peter the Great Anthropology and Ethnography Museum in Leningrad were Australia and Oceania and New Guinea had been well represented.

Besides his diaries, Miklouho-Maclay also had notebooks in which he entered various scientific observations during his travels: characteristics and drawings of objects, descriptions of customs, rites, festivities, dances he had seen, native words and names, geographical names, the routes of the excursions, various ideas and observations, and others. A sound and consistent positivism formed the basis of his scientific methodology.

He received a letter from Tolstoy which greatly helped him reconsidered nature of his work.

West Papua has been described as "an earthly paradise for anthropological research" where indigenous societies are "untouched by Western culture." (de Bruijn, 1959) Colonialism has often been considered a force that can corrupt indigenous societies (Kirksey, Eben, 2002)

From his hut at Garagassi Point, Maclay visited many villages, collected specimens, drew faces and scenery and named mountain peaks. With patience, courage and medical skill he won the confidence and co-operation of the inhabitants. He found them far from long-headed as earlier reported and studied their languages and characteristics. His necessities were running out when the corvette *Isumrud* arrived in December 1872. He named the Maclay Coast from Isumrud to Vitiaz Straits and in the corvette went to the Halmaheras and Philippines where he found primitive tribes similar to those he had seen in New Guinea. In 1873 at Batavia he published his anthropological observations, sent specimens and comments to his European teachers and recuperated for six months at Buitenzorg in the mountains. He then visited the Celebes and Moluccas, and at Papua-Koviai in west New Guinea found ethnological traits similar to those on the Philippines and Maclay Coast. After local exploration he returned to Papua-Koviai and found that raiders had smashed his hut, stolen his equipment and killed some local supporters. With skill he captured the chief offender and brought him to justice, but the experience contrasted so strongly with the goodwill of the more isolated natives of the Maclay Coast that he determined to preserve their cultures.

8. Key works

The works of Miklouho-Maclay were published in 1873 in Russian, German, Dutch, and English editions. Miklouho-Maclay published some of the results of his research in articles in journals, printed in German in Batavia, and in English in Singapore.

In 1878, in Sydney he met William John Macleay with whom he wrote three scientific papers. In April 1874 Maclay went to Amboina, where in June he was found seriously ill by Captain John Moresby who had been sent to look for him. By July Maclay was at Buitenzorg resting and preparing publications. In November he went to Singapore and for 176 days traveled in Malaya where he found more primitive tribes whose ethnological characteristics were akin to those in the Philippines and New Guinea. In December he returned to Buitenzorg and published four papers suggesting a relation between the natives of the regions he had investigated.

In January 1876 Maclay sailed to the Halmaheras and Carolines, and on the Admiralty Islands established that the natives' enlarged teeth were not a racial trait but resulted from chewing betel nut with lime. He returned to Astrolabe Bay in June and with material from Singapore built a new home at Bugarlom near Bougu village. Renewed friendships and greater facility with dialects enabled him to visit many villages in the mountains and on the coast and islands. He prevented violence which threatened to erupt from superstition and warned his native friends against slave traders. He also made drawings and collections of local animals but confined his diaries to anthropological matters. In November 1877 he sailed north among the islands and reached Singapore in January 1878. He went to Hong Kong in June and in July arrived at Sydney with large collections.

9. Visit to Australia

On 26 August Maclay addressed the local Linnean Society on the need for a laboratory of marine studies on Sydney Harbour. The lecture was one of his thirty-four research papers and notes published by the society; he was made an honorary member in 1879. In November 1878 the Dutch government informed him that on his recommendations it was checking the slave traffic at Ternate and Tidore. In January 1879 he wrote to Sir Arthur Gordon, high commissioner for the Western Pacific, on protecting the land rights of his friends on the Maclay Coast, and ending the traffic in arms

and intoxicants in the South Pacific. In March, after continuing his campaign for the laboratory, Maclay sailed in the *Sadie F. Caller* for the islands northeast of Queensland. In April 1880 he went to Somerset, Queensland, and thence to Brisbane, where he resumed his studies on the comparative anatomy of the brains of Aboriginal, Malayan, Chinese and Polynesian origin.

Maclay returned to Sydney in January 1881. With the help from the government and scientific societies in Sydney and Melbourne his ambition for a marine laboratory was at last realized. While it was being built at Watsons Bay he worked in Sydney museums and collected evidence for his campaign against the exploitation of natives. In August he went to New Guinea in hope of providing guidance at the trial of the murderers of native missionaries and their families at Kalo. He returned in October and found the laboratory almost complete. When the Russian Pacific fleet visited Melbourne in February 1882 Maclay joined the *Vestnik* and arrived at Kronshtadt, Russia, in September.

Maclay lectured to the Russian Geographical Society and each morning explained his collections and drawings to enthusiastic visitors. He was awarded a gold medal by the society and a certificate of honour by the Czar but failed to raise funds.

Maclay wrote to Bismarck in October seeking protection of pacific islanders from white exploitation and later protested against the German annexation. Early in 1886 he returned to Russia with his family and twenty-two boxes of specimens. He arranged some publications, lectured in St Petersburg and on his travels visited the family estates and scientists. At Vienna he and his wife were married by rites of the Russian Orthodox Church. He intended to return to Sydney but his health deteriorated and he died on 2 April 1888.

10. Conclusion

It is widely established that anthropology, especially the field work tradition has been founded by Malinowski who was a polish by origin and a mathematics and Physics by training and son of a Professor of Philology of Slavic Language who has published his

first Ethnographic text the Argonauts of the Western Pacific published in 1922. At least 40 years before in 1871 in one of the Oceanic Island Papua New Guinea and led the foundation of empiricism in anthropology. Further, it is recognized that Colonialism has given the birth of anthropology. These to pivotal questions appears to be different if a look at the very root is evident regards the founder instead of Malinowski it is seems to be NN Miklouho-Maclay who struggle against Colonialism through out his life. Therefore, a detail, both extensive and intensive exploration would be of great academic value. Basic constrains of this writing is nonavailability works of Maclay in English language and the limited scope of this article.

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