Born in 1899 in London, Dr Audrey Isabel Richards was known as a British social anthropologist focussing mainly on sub-Saharan Africa. Raised in India most of her youth, she studied in Newham College in Cambridge (1928), where she received her Biology M.A. After the end of the First World War where she served in Germany as a relief worker, she joined an anthropological seminar at the London School of Economics, and completed a PhD (1929), under the supervision of Bronislaw Malinowski who became her academic mentor, where she taught later (1931 – 1932 / 1935 – 1937). Dr Richards also taught in Cambridge University (1956 – 1967) and there, founded and directed the Centre for African Studies.

Dr Ray Abrahams describes her as witty, amusing and a good supervisor while Jean La Fontaine, who wrote the introduction of the Cambridge Anthropology “Audrey Richards : in memoriam” (Volume 10, Number 1), says that “There are many, like myself, who have reason to feel grateful for the intellectual and practical support she gave us” and “she felt that anthropologists had a duty to publish, in the fullest possible detail, the data they had collected so that it might be of use to others in the field”; two sentences that can get us closer to the professional and leader she was. Marilyn Strathern supports this point of view in her article devoted to Dr Audrey Richards, in the “Proceedings of the British Academy : 1992 Lectures and Memoirs” (Number 82, 1993), where she declares “As one colleague recalls, she could be by turn delightful, maddening, generous, unkind, witty – but never, never boring. She had the rare gift of not standing in the way of her own line of vision”.

Through Dr Richards work, it’s observed that she was mostly interested by the social and economic situation in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), South Africa and Uganda. Thus, if she was herself studying these African countries, she also received many papers from other academics, such as J. C. Mitchell whose works about the African Marriage in Northern Rhodesia and Marriage Stability in Bantu (South Africa) can be found in the MS RICH 2 Box.

Dr Audrey I. Richards’ kind donation to the Centre of African Studies Library also contains other academics’ investigations and studies of her own work.

For example in MS RICH 1 Box, Max Gluckman’s paper: “How the Bemba make their living : An Appreciation of Richards’ Land Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia” (1945)

Or in MS RICH 2 Box, a Conference given by J. Clyde Mitchell: “Richards and Social Structure in Bantu, Africa” (1961),

It can also be observed that Dr Audrey I. Richards has kept the work of some of her collaborators, such as Jean La Fontaine who wrote an introduction for her following work “Chisungu : a girls’ initiation ceremony among the Bemba of Zambia” (1956), and whose work “Tribalism among the Gisu – An anthropological approach” can be found in the MS RICH 1 Box. In this box, you will also find the following French documents: “Des Cauris et des Hommes: production d’esclaves et accumulation de cauris chez les Samo (Haute-Volta)” (1975) and “La Notion de Personne en Afrique Noire” (1971) both written by Francoise Heritier-Izard – (please note these sources may require an advanced knowledge of French) which provide readers a different perspective of Anthropological Methodology, as well as the perception of Africa from another country. We can look for Adam Kuper’s work in the South Africa Box, an anthropologist with who Dr Audrey I. Richards wrote “Councils in action” (1971), a study about Tribal Government and Political Anthropology in Africa.
Dr Audrey I. Richards’ donations to the Centre of African Studies Library are as vast as they are deeply exciting and should be perceived as an anthology of her research interests, and the intellectual views of her academic contemporaries. Thus, different links can – and have to – be found in the different papers and ideas.

- BIBLIOGRAPHY, BIOGRAPHIES AND FURTHER READINGS