

Anthropology: Argonauts of the Western Pacific

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The book called *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* is a famous and acknowledged work by Bronislaw Malinowski who has managed to approach history from an anthropological viewpoint. It is also one of the brightest examples of anthropological narration that has had a profound influence on generations of anthropological studies. At the beginning of the book, the author sheds light on the story through depicting travelers, journalists, and missionaries to provide a new anthropological perspective on the history. As it is presented in the introduction, non-Western communities should not be viewed as sensational, perceptual, and experimental (Crehan, 2002). The use of anthropological research highlights the observational perspective that makes anthropologists accept the colonialists' worldview. The new method of describing the historic events, therefore, allows the readers to understand most important aspects from the viewpoints of individuals participating in those events. Overall, the book is considered to be an important fieldwork in modern anthropology because it highlights functional and cultural aspects of a participant-observation method.

According to Guillemin (1981), "Nothing can teach us a better lesson in this matter of ultimate importance than the habit of mind which allows us to treat the beliefs and values of another man from his point of view" (p. 3). This statement correlates with other aspects represented in Malinowski's book. In particular, the author insists that humanity requires practicing greater tolerance than it is practicing now. Specifically, the book focuses on the Trobriand Islands that are located to the east of New Guinea. In this region, people live comfortably due to the abundance of gardens and lands. They produce much more goods than they require meeting their needs. The rest of the goods have been provided to local chiefs and leaders who tie their families to other people. The excess that remains could be left to observe Veblenesque tradition waste.

Erickson and Murphy (2008) recognize the fact that Malinowski is the pioneer in employing the ethnographic approach of participant observation. This method is used to achieve ethnographic understanding by a complex synthesis of subjective inside participation and objective outside observation. In addition, the author conveys an evaluation of Trobriand *kula* ring ritual that discusses explored Freudian psychology and economic exchange in the context of Malinowski's anthropological frame that is premised on the theory of functionalism. Despite the fact that Malinowski (1978) was a supporter of functionalism, his vision of culture has been confined to meet human needs that are based on biological needs and are transformed into integrative and instrumental needs (Erickson & Murphy, 2008). In this respect, analysis of cultural, biological, and social needs could be represented as a set of dimensions through which readers could understand various historic events. According to Howell and Paris (2010), "Malinowski came to believe that the diverse customs and behaviors of cultures around the world served a function, meeting people's need for food, comforts, reproduction, safety, relaxation, movement, and growth" (p. 234). Therefore, analyzing tribe and band communities as underdeveloped, primitive, or irrational is less important than evaluating industrialized societies in the context of meeting human needs.

In the book, the author has managed to emphasize the idea that anthropology stands at the core of positive and negative judgments aimed at achieving social science discovery. Despite the fact that the process of goals achievement is based on the overall attitude, anthropologists should deal with narrow-focused problems of theory and methods. In fact, the participant-observation is a more beneficial method for discovering personal psychological boundaries than playing the role of a foreigner in a community. Although a community serves as the unit and the object for exploration, the importance of considering the role of individuals in this community should not be underestimated. In this respect, Guillemin (1981) asserts that self-awareness is the primary aspect for analyzing social and cultural structures.

Malinowski's approach to anthropology, in this respect, focuses on the description of meaning, purpose, and function of all the elements of the culture as a whole. The author also seeks to depict the life of islanders in terms of how they have maintained and developed their society. The story marks a significant departure from old-fashioned methods of research and provides a fresh insight into cultural elements. It focuses on the concept of ritual, ethnicity, kinship, and functionalism. The author's understanding of functionalism is based on the framework of balanced reciprocity that discusses annual visits between commercial partners who exchange their shell ornaments (Guillemin, 1981). The commodities used in exchanges are divided into two types: armbands and necklaces. In this system, each observer should be responsible for two partners, which delivers a deeper understanding of behavioral patterns and forms of social interaction and communication.

In conclusion, Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* depicts the story of the tribes living on the island and establishing specific commercial, cultural, and traditional relations. Based on the participant-observation anthropological research, the author introduces functional and cultural approaches to describing the life of the islanders. Specific emphasis is placed on the analysis of communities in the context of individual perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs. Linking one participant to partners has allowed the author to single out the important patterns of communication and interaction within the community. In addition, emphasizing functionalism has presented a modern anthropological perspective on the research, which sheds light on both the individual and its role in shaping social, cultural, and political processes. This approach differs from the old method of research that relied solely on the analysis of the community in general.

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