Chapter 2
Malinowski as Applied Anthropologist
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Bronislaw Malinowski, like all of us, was a creature of his time. His professional career was demarcated by the two World Wars, roughly between 1912 and 1942. The importance of Malinowski as an anthropologist, his skill as a writer, and the time elapsed since his most important contributions more than half a century ago warrant a reassessment of his work for the benefit of new generations of students of applied anthropology.

It was not until the latter part of the 1930s that Malinowski focused effectively on practical anthropology, the term he used for applied anthropology, although he had begun this work in the 1920s. In the United States, anthropology was not to become involved extensively in solving social problems until that time, but there had been isolated efforts to apply anthropology to practical affairs even in the prior century—efforts by Lewis Henry Morgan, Alice Fletcher, and others. More extensive work was done in the Bureau of Indian Affairs during the 1930s and during World War II, when the Society for Applied Anthropology was founded. In Great Britain, anthropologists had been working with colonial administrators and providing training for overseas bureaucrats since early in the century (Herskovits 1936). The founding of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures in 1926 (International Institute of African Languages and Cultures 1932) and, later, the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute provided new opportunities in Great Britain for developing applied anthropological involvement with administrators and politicians. These were opportunities presented to Malinowski and his students.

His Life

Bronislaw Malinowski was born in 1884 in Cracow, Poland, which was part of Austria at the time. His father was a professor of Slavic philology at Jugiellon University. Malinowski’s first training was in physical chemistry and the natural sciences, and he received a doctorate in 1908 in physics and mathematics. He subsequently studied with Wilhelm Wundt, the father of modern psychology. Arriving in England in 1910, he studied for four years with Edward Westermarck, Leonard T. Hobhouse, James G. Frazer, William H. R. Rivers (better known as W. H. R. Rivers), and Havelock Ellis. In his training as an anthropologist Malinowski followed the works of Franz Boas and Émile Durkheim, each of whom subscribed to a notion of holism. He was awarded a doctorate in 1916 for a library...
study of Australian kinship and gave a lecture on the topic at the London School of Economics (Firth 1957:3; Malinowski 1913a). In the same year he accompanied other anthropologists to Australia to attend the meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and to conduct fieldwork. He was supported by scholarships negotiated by C. G. Seligman while waiting for additional funds. With support from the government of Australia, Malinowski went to the islands off New Guinea, ultimately ending in the Trobriands, where he carried out his best-known field research from 1914 to 1918.

In 1918 Malinowski married Elsie Masson, the daughter of an Australian professor of chemistry. Shortly after his return to Great Britain he was appointed to the first chair of social anthropology at the London School of Economics in 1924, a position he retained until 1938. After visiting the U.S. several times, he taught at the University of California at Berkeley, Cornell University, and the University of Arizona. He spent the winter of 1938–39 in Tucson for health reasons and lectured frequently. The University of Arizona offered him a faculty position, but he declined the offer to accept the Bernice P. Bishop Fellowship at Yale that enabled him to do fieldwork on market systems in Oaxaca (Malinowski and de la Fuente 1982). The following year (1939–40) he was given a faculty appointment at Yale where he died in 1942 (Troy 1998; Raymond H. Thompson, personal communication, October 2 and November 20, 1998).

His Accomplishments

In the more than 50 years since his death Malinowski’s contributions to functionalism and fieldwork have drawn more attention than his other work (Kaberry 1957). This is because the core of anthropology, both in the U.S. and in Great Britain, was focused on theory and attaining first-hand knowledge of aboriginal peoples. A frequent public speaker, Malinowski was famous during his life and widely published. He was read outside of anthropology, particularly in psychology and psychiatry, and he was a great popularizer of the field, with a penchant for titles of books and talks that titillated the public. Malinowski was best known for contributions to fieldwork methodology, as a teacher, and for theoretical contributions in functionalism, culture and personality, culture change, and magic and religion.

Early in his career Malinowski focused on studies of family and kinship (1913a), totemism (1926d), religion and mythology (1926d), economy (1922), warfare (1926c), sex (1929b), and psychoanalysis (1927a). Among his best-known works are the ethnography of the Trobriand Islanders, Argonauts of the Western Pacific (1922) and such more popular works as The Sexual Life of Savages (1929b), Crime and Custom in Savage Society (1926c), Myth in Primitive Psychology (1926d), and The Father in Primitive Psychology (1927a).

Around 1925 a new phase began for Malinowski as he became more concerned with social issues, the changing native, and practical anthropology. His interest and work in these areas of applied anthropology, the focus of this essay, are less well known. From the perspective of applied social science his most influential contributions are studies of culture contact and the changing native, efforts to define anthropology as a science, and the development of a practical anthropology that focused on the study of the social problems of modern aboriginal peoples.
Fieldwork and Methodology

Malinowski’s most famous work, at least among anthropologists, is his ethnography of the Trobriand Islands. He also conducted brief fieldwork among the Yaqui, Hopi, and Navajo in Arizona, the Chagga of East Africa, and the Zapotec of Oaxaca, Mexico. He is often given credit for having established the notion of long-term first-hand field research, living with the subjects, learning the native language, and presenting the information gathered within a holistic framework. His prescription for the appropriate behavior of the fieldworker and for research methodology, found in the introduction to his first Trobriand monograph, bears reading by every student going to the field today (1922:1–25). Here he emphasized the need for good training in theory, having a scientific aim, spelling out the methods of collecting data, awareness of emotional conditions during fieldwork, collecting concrete data such as genealogies, selecting informants carefully, using synoptic tables to show holistic links among different types of information, and joining the natives in activities (later known as participant observation).

Many of his followers claimed precedence for him in making direct observation a key part of fieldwork. Adam Kuper, for example, claimed that Malinowski as founder of social anthropology in Great Britain “established its distinctive apprenticeship—intensive fieldwork in an exotic community . . . and virtually everyone who wished to do fieldwork in the modern fashion went to work with him” (Kuper 1983:1). In fact, there were others who pioneered this technique. In the United States extensive ethnographic work had been underway since before the turn of the twentieth century among American historicists under the tutelage of Franz Boas. Boas himself had conducted fieldwork among the Inuit for two years commencing the year of Malinowski’s birth in 1884. Diamond Jenness spent two years among the Inuit of Bernard Harbor in 1914–1915, out of which came his book The People of the Twilight (1928; George Foster, letter to author, July 7, 1998). Many of the characteristics of the Malinowskian fieldwork methodology were also present in the work of earlier explorers, such as Joseph Lafitau in 1724 and Merriwether Lewis in 1804, naturalist-anthropologists such as Lewis Henry Morgan in 1851, and Zuni ethnographer Frank. H. Cushing in 1887 and many others. Even in Great Britain, the 1898 Cambridge Torres Straits expedition organized by Alfred C. Haddon, with team members Rivers, Seligman, and J. L. Myers, involved extensive fieldwork. Nevertheless, Malinowski provided a widely read example of the methodology and gave it an emphasis and visibility not awarded before.

Malinowski inculcated in his students the need for intense, accurate, contemporary reporting of observations in the field. He shared with Boas an empirical approach and a distrust of unfounded generalization. Information derived from the past, or from incidental observations of missionaries and travelers, could not yield scientifically valid conclusions in his view. Malinowski was 12 years old when Boas launched his attack on the evolutionists and set out the premises of historicism and the importance of first-hand fieldwork (Boas 1896). As a graduate student and young professional, he must have read the American historicists who provided the only antidote at that time to nineteenth century evolutionism. Later he took every opportunity to ridicule and criticize the nineteenth century evolutionists, including his teachers, and also the diffusionists—the British heliocentric and Austrian kulturkreislehre versions, as well as the American historicists. Malinowski referred to his field as social anthropology, a term originated by Frazer in 1906, and as a branch of sociology as distinguished from ethnology, ethnography, and cultural anthropology (Kuper 1983:2).
Teaching

Malinowski’s first seminars were held at the London School of Economics in October 1924. The Trobriand materials were the basis of his teaching, and he used the Socratic method, posing problems and asking questions after reading portions of his manuscripts to assembled students. He used a series of charts and tables for synoptic presentations of cultures and as a guide for fieldworkers. Gaps in fieldwork were identified and analyzed, and questions formulated through this method. Charts formed the basis of discussion and testing of theories. His seminars were attended by other professors or invited persons, who were questioned and encouraged to participate in discussions (Kuper 1983:22–24).

Students characterized Malinowski’s relationship with them as stimulating. He was encouraging and complimentary to his students, although rude, intolerant, and abrupt at times (Francis L. K. Hsu, personal communication, 1975). In an edited volume written to evaluate his work the authors paid homage to his teaching and his pioneering ethnographic work (Firth, ed. 1957). There, Firth assessed Malinowski’s considerable influence and the methods he used to buttress this influence.

To his pupils, Malinowski’s stimulus lay in a combination of many qualities: his subtle power of analysis, his sincerity in facing problems, his sense of reality, his scholarly command of the literature, his capacity for integrating detail into general ideas, and his brilliance and wit in handling discussion (Firth 1957:9).

Functionalism and Theory

Malinowski was one of two originators, along with A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, of functionalism. Radcliffe-Brownian functionalism focused on society, social system, functional integration, and synchronic study as opposed to the diachronism of the evolutionists and the American historicists. His theory held that acts, rituals, values, and other elements in culture had a purpose in the perpetuation of the social system. Malinowski, too, focused on functional integration and synchronous study, but he put more emphasis on the individual and on biological needs. The two versions of functionalism were derived from the French sociologist Émile Durkheim. Malinowski was exposed to the work of Durkheim early in his career; one of his first publications was a review (1913b) of Durkheim’s Les Formes Élémentaires de la Vie Religieuse (1912).

Malinowski agreed with Radcliffe-Brown about the functional integrity of cultural units, which he called institutions. The purpose of institutions is to meet the seven basic human needs: metabolism, reproduction, bodily comfort, safety, movement, growth, and health. Primary institutions provide for these needs and have personnel, ideology, a legal charter, continuity, and purpose (Malinowski 1944). Malinowski maintained that culture everywhere has the same aspect—material, economic, legal, religious, political, aesthetic, and linguistic. At the cultural level institutions function to provide food, form kinship groups, satisfy bodily comforts, promote survival, release tensions, provide training, maintain health, and gratify sexual drive (Mair 1965:234). By emphasizing the physiological and psychological basis of culture Malinowski hoped to provide a universal character to his theory. This differed from the functionalism of Radcliffe-Brown that emphasized social rather than biological needs; Radcliffe-Brown held that
analysis should focus on the functional needs of society (a concept rarely used by Malinowski) rather than on the individual.

Some of the same criticisms directed at Radcliffe-Brown and his followers came to characterize comments on the Malinowskian variety of functionalism as well. Both varieties of functionalism ignored any lack of functional consistency in particular cultural settings and the phenomenon of change of function. Additionally, Malinowski was accused of being too empirical, and while his focus on the individual was ahead of its time, the biological needs approach was diminishing in psychology. Malinowski’s anthropological focus, encompassing ethnography, methodology, culture and personality, culture change, and social issues, as well as policy, was also considered too broad during a time when the rest of the field had a less encompassing vision. Unlike his protagonist Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski was not accused of having a conservative ideology that supported the status quo, colonialism, and capitalism. Judging from Malinowski’s desire to support the native, study social issues, and advise administrators and policymakers, one could make the case for his liberalism.

Elizabeth Colson, who participated in Malinowski’s seminars at the London School of Economics, maintains that Malinowski’s functionalism was especially relevant to applied anthropology and that it helped to give anthropologists legitimacy in working to solve social problems.

We were trained [by Malinowski’s functionalism] to look for interconnections across fields of action in a systematic fashion and to ask “If this changed, what else would happen?,” no bad directive whether one is an applied or an academic anthropologist. In fact, while functionalism never was very much a theory it provided a good working method. Today, of course, one would use other terms since each generation needs its own vocabulary—and so we might claim to be developing working models, or writing thick description, or adopting a holistic approach, rather than undertaking a functional analysis. The old term, however, meant something more in the context of applied anthropology, for if something can function it also can fail to function, and this calls for investigation of what has gone wrong; and if something is working, one needs to ask what will happen if one tries to tinker with a working system by introducing change. In that time and place that honored technician and engineer, the term “functionalism” invoked associations that made a place for the anthropologist as technician (Colson 1985:192).

Malinowski as an Applied Anthropologist

After the middle of the 1920s Malinowski’s career transitioned to reflect a greater concern with social issues, the problems of natives overrun by colonial powers, and the practical use of anthropology. This change in focus commenced, perhaps, with his writing on the forces of law in the primitive community in 1925. The following year he wrote a letter to an editor on anthropology and administration (1926a) and an article on social hygiene (1926b). In 1927 came an article on “Useful and Useless Anthropology” (1927b) and finally in 1929 the better-known article on “Practical Anthropology” (1929a). Malinowski’s writing on practical issues continued in this vein on administration (1930a), race and labor (1930b), native education (1936), changing
cultures (1938a), the scientific basis of applied anthropology (1940a), European rule (1940b), war (1941), and the pan-African problem (published posthumously in 1943). A posthumous book, *The Dynamics of Culture Change*, included essays on application and social problems (1945). The book continued themes previously noted such as the necessity for the anthropologist to act as interpreter and advocate for the native, the need to study the “changing native,” the potential advantage in viewing different administrative policies as controlled experiments, and the use of holism and functionalism in the study of modern problems in Africa.

The development of practical anthropology by Malinowski paralleled similar developments in the United States, Mexico, and Holland. In Great Britain, as in the U.S., anthropologists had been proclaiming the usefulness of anthropology since its inception in the middle of the nineteenth century (Partridge and Eddy 1987; van Willigen 1986; Weaver 1985, n.d.). However, in both countries, this proclamation often served as a means to acquire funding for basic research, rather than to achieve any tangible social or policy ends (Forde 1953; Kennard and Macgregor 1953; Hinsley 1979). The Dutch had used anthropology in their colonial efforts in the second half of the nineteenth century. The training of colonial administrators in anthropology had taken place in England since the beginning of the twentieth century (Forde 1953; Hogbin 1957:248). In Mexico, Manuel Gamio, influenced by Boas, had used anthropology in the solution of social problems in the Teotihuacan Valley in the second decade of the twentieth century (Nahmad Sitton and Weaver 1991). In the U.S., anthropologists worked with government programs, particularly with the Bureau of Indian Affairs after John Collier became commissioner in 1934, and during World War II most anthropologists worked in some capacity for the government.

Malinowski’s 1929 essay on practical anthropology was addressed to “the Institute” (presumably the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures established in 1926), and its purpose, perhaps, was to gain funding for his students. Malinowski and his students subsequently worked closely with this institute and administrators for many years. In the 1929 article, Malinowski asserted that a mutually stimulating collaboration could be forged between scientifically trained anthropologists and “practical men.” The terrain could be safely divided with the former studying practical problems and the latter (the statesman and the journalist) sharing responsibility for political decisions. The article ended with a list of recommendations for the institute (1929a:37–38). Practical problems to be investigated as part of the anthropology of the changing native included direct versus indirect rule, land tenure, political organization, primitive law, economics, indigenous financial systems and taxation, principles of indigenous education, population problems, hygiene, and changing outlook (by which he probably meant changing worldview).

One of the issues that preoccupied Malinowski in 1929 was direct versus indirect rule in the British colonies. Direct rule had a number of harmful consequences for the native: “forced labour, ruthless taxation, a fixed routine in political matters, the application of a code of laws to an entirely incompatible background. [In] education [it meant] . . . making of the African into a caricature of the European” (Malinowski 1929a:24). Malinowski supported a policy of indirect rule because it was less destructive. However, the problem required study and the solution called for slow and gradual change.

Studies of land tenure were important because they were linked to the occupation of native lands by colonials and the question of how much land should be left for subsistence needs. Land tenure, too, was joined to other aspects of culture. The study must be done not by inquiry, but by mapping ownership and by determining the minimum use requirements of the
Other important problems of land tenure were related to rights of conquest, historical prerogatives, native rights, demand for maximum land for European use, and a need to safeguard native interests (1929a:30).

Previously anthropologists and administrators had studied political organization, but their reports were inadequate or poorly focused, according to Malinowski. African kingships were advanced and possessed extensive traditions and genealogies, ceremony and ritual, and well-developed systems of finance, military organization, and judiciary formations. In introducing change there was no need to touch the established native order; these institutions could continue to function as they had in the past. The problem presented by administrative or government-sponsored studies was that politically sensitive materials were never published. The assignment of two or three anthropologists could solve this problem because they could work more quickly and at less expense (1929a:31). The nature of anthropological work, too, must be changed, however. Past work by anthropologists was slanted to the study of “classical antiquity,” ritual mythology, quaint superstition, and magic. It had not considered how primitive politics actually work or identified the forces that underlie obedience to the king or his ministers (1929a:25).

Malinowski criticized previous studies of primitive law on similar grounds. The “continental school” consisting of J. J. Bachofen, A. H. Post, W. Kohler, and Durkheim, and others depicted natives as displaying blind and passive obedience. Contrary to the findings of the nineteenth century evolutionists, natives had a clearly defined criminal and civil law, principles of government and communal rights to land, and rights over manufactured objects and articles of consumption, as well as systems of inheritance and succession to office (1929a:26). Native law and politics could not be studied in isolation; they were tied holistically to other elements in the culture, such as family and community organization, kinship and descent, clan and local group organization, and language. Previous studies were dominated by the sensationalism of strange customs, such as the couvade, mother-in-law avoidance, the dispensing of the afterbirth, and quaint relations between cousins. Malinowski believed that we knew more about “anomalous forms of marriage or classificatory exaggerations of kinship” than about family organization (1929a:27). Further, only anthropologists were competent to deal with this question because they have no vested interests. They would be alert to the problem in prior studies of forcing terminology into terms borrowed from European law.

Understanding native economic organization could provide insight into several practical problems, such as hygienic conditions, labor, education, taxation, how wealth was capitalized, and the psychology of gift and exchange (1929a:32). Anthropologists must study primitive production and consumption, types and phases of economic activity, and relations to religion, magic and practical arts—not “origins and stages” or “diffusion and histories” (1929a:33). Questions of labor were important including the abolition of slavery and conscription or forced labor versus labor contracts. Subjects that needed investigation included the procurement of food and materials for housing, clothing, and weapons and their preparation and use. Other pertinent subjects included labor associated with the storing and preservation of food, the development of traps, and the production of luxuries, art and monuments, personal ornaments, painting, sculpture, and ritual objects (1929a:34). The study of economy and labor could lead to more appropriate adjustments, for example, of native work patterns to plantation work in Melanesia (1929a:34). (Presumably, Malinowski meant this as an example of a positive adjustment in native labor, but the statement demonstrated an ignorance of the deleterious effects of the plantation system.)
The Changing Native and Culture Contact Studies

It was an easy step from viewing the native “as he is,” that is, unreconstructed, to a concern for a solution to the social problems of the changing native. Despite the judgments of some that Malinowski failed to develop a theory (Firth, ed. 1957), one must admire the integrity of his observations. The development of “culture contact” studies in Great Britain was equivalent to acculturation studies in the United States (Beals 1953), but unlike their American counterpart, British studies explicitly focused on practical application. Malinowski avoided the use of the term acculturation because he considered it linked to traits and trait complexes, and he preferred to identify the basic unit of culture as the institution. He sometimes used the term “transculturation” after the suggestion of Fernando Ortiz who saw the situation as a two-way process (Malinowski 1940a).

Change, for Malinowski, was a process wherein societies were transformed, either by internal growth or rapidly through the contact of two different cultures. The first process led to cultural evolution and the second to diffusion. His reference to diffusion was not related to American or European uses of the transmission of traits or trait complexes, but to the transmission of and change in institutions (Kaberry 1945:vi–viii; Malinowski 1929a:36). Malinowski’s contributions, had they been compared and linked with acculturation studies in the U.S., would have provided an antidote to some of the more mechanistic efforts to sort out traits from “two or more cultures in face to face contact” (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits 1936). A synthesis of the two approaches might have resolved many of the criticisms of acculturation studies that followed in the decades after inception of the theory in the U.S. (Beals 1953).

Malinowski called for the study of changing cultures in the context of Western contact (1938a). The study of the changing native must be a separate field, he maintained, from evolutionist and diffusionist studies of the U.S. and Europe. This new field called for building new methods and principles of research and a new branch of anthropology (1938a:xii). According to Malinowski, studying the contact situation required three processes: identifying the nature of culture contact and change, finding the best methods of fieldwork appropriate to the problem, and translating the theoretical results into practical rules of conduct for the administrator, missionary, entrepreneur, or teacher.

Malinowski suggested that the anthropologist must give up studies of “anthropometry, detailed technology, [and] the burdensome task of collecting and labelling specimens” (1938a:xxvii). Instead, knowledge must be gained of world politics and economics, finance, colonial policy, overseas education, and missionary goals and activities. Fieldwork must be conducted on Europeans in Africa as a special focus, but also on the changing native as well as on the unchanged native in remote locales. Contact results in three culture types: a shrinking traditional culture, an intrusive European culture, and newly emerging syncretic cultures such as the mining camp and the urban slum. In a brief “birds-eye view” Malinowski portrayed the interactions of representatives of these cultures. He spoke of the “color bar,” the activities of missionaries, acceptance of European cultural patterns by some Africans, and an isolated colonial society where few were even aware of indigenous ways of life (1938a:vii–x). Even if the “subject matter threatens to disappear,” Malinowski believed that the study of the detribalized native and other segments of the society must be included as part of this new science.

Lucy Mair and Monica Hunter, students of Malinowski and contributors to a 1938 collection based on seminars conducted by Malinowski at the London School of Economics (Mair, ed. 1938), spoke of constructing a cultural “zero point” from which to measure change
(Mair 1938; Hunter 1938), and Schapera (1938) studied culture contact under the subheading “Reconstruction of Tribal Culture.” Malinowski disagreed with them and postulated that the reconstruction of a past indigenous culture would depict an idealized culture and not a living reality (Malinowski 1938a:xxv). He cautioned against reconstructing “a savage who does not exist anymore” (Malinowski 1938a). In Melanesia the native had ceased to exist a generation ago, in Africa two generations ago, and in North America about 100 years ago. Malinowski insisted that the focus must be on the study of the changing native “as he is” and on how institutions function, not on how they originated or diffused (1929a:28). The anthropologist must avoid the “highly emotional vision of the past as it lives in present-day mythology of the pre–European Golden Age” or as a “Paradise lost” and “train his vision forward rather than backward” (1938a:xxvi).

Meyer Fortes, Gunter Wagner, and A. T. and G. M. Culwick, also contributors to the 1938 monograph, suggested that focusing on a reconstruction of the past led to bad policy. The memories of old informants were described by Fortes as “a mesh of lies” (1938), and by the Culwicks as producing two distinct, but erroneous pictures, “one of a black Utopia and the other of a bloody reign of terror” (1938). In fact, a more or less substantial residue of the past still survived in smatterings in secret or remote places, including war, slavery, witchcraft, ancestor worship, criminal retributions, exotic sex customs, and sex taboos (Malinowski 1938a:xxviii–xxix). The reconstructed past taught nothing. Living tradition with remnants of past society need not be reconstructed; it can be observed first-hand during fieldwork.

Malinowski disagreed with Schapera and Fortes in their suggestion in the same monograph that African cultures in contact must be viewed as integrated parts of a single society. He did not see the administrator, missionary, or teacher as part of the indigenous system. They represented the European component and remained aloof, possessed little knowledge of the system they were impacting, and might even hold prejudicial views of it. They should be studied separately and then linkages among the three systems demonstrated (Malinowski 1938a:xiii–xvii, xxxvi). He affirmed the value of the functionalist approach, not in the context of a single group, but in the study of surviving institutions and their adaptations to new strains derived from European influences. Functional study was to be conducted not only of surviving institutions but also of new European ones in the context of African culture including mines, factories, courts of justice, and schools (Malinowski 1938a:xxxvii).

Further, Malinowski chastised Schapera for suggesting that the study of the impact of Western civilization on African culture was a special problem. “Impact, after all, is a relation. In the study of this, we cannot cut out one side and study what remains as a mere fragment. Impact and change are action and reaction. They are a mutual interpenetration” (Malinowski 1938a:xxxv). Malinowski held that the three cultures living in Africa were not a “mixture of partially fused elements,” as held by Hunter (1938). Malinowski agreed with Fortes, who maintained that culture contact was “not a mechanical pitch-forking of elements of culture like bundles of hay from one culture to another . . . [nor was it] a transference of elements of one culture to another, but . . . a continuous process of interaction between groups of different culture” (Malinowski 1938a:xix, quoting Fortes).

Malinowski then supported his agreement with Fortes by analyzing African labor in mines, factories, and plantations. The introduction of European institutions and capital had required a new organization of African labor, and the new system needed to be treated as a whole and not separated into African or European components. Forces such as prejudice and segregation, political and economic dominance, special protection of European standards, and
isolation impacted the use of labor in Africa. Malinowski identified the special conditions that created a unique African labor force.

There is no European prototype for colour-bar legislation or practice; for recruiting on reserves; for the method of unemployment insurance by throwing back superfluous labour on the tribal areas in times of slump. [Also not present elsewhere are the type of labor] contract with unilateral criminal sanctions, . . . [and] the inducements to sign on . . . African labour, again, knows no collective bargaining: it is a commodity which is not allowed to conform to the laws of supply and demand; it differs from European labour legally, economically, and socially . . . [and from] tribal economics. . . . No sorting of elements is possible; no invoicing back to a parent culture. We here have to deal with a vast phenomenon which in its essence is defined by a set of economic, legal, and social arrangements which have arisen in response to . . . the large scale exploitation of African resources by Europeans, for Western ends, and by means of African labour (Malinowski 1938a:xx–xxi).

Malinowski described other changes in African culture as entirely new products of the conditions of contact between European and old African groups. “The school in the Bush has no antecedents in Europe, nor yet in African tribalism. The question of educating men and women to professions from the practice of which they are then legally debarred occurs neither in Europe nor yet Bantu Africa” (1938a:xxii). The idea that European culture is a source of new elements for Africa is balanced by the selectivity of its donation (cf. Foster 1960). Some of the items not shared with the African include:

instruments of physical power, such as fire-arms, bombing planes, poison gas, and all that makes effective defense or aggression possible . . . [as well as] instruments of political mastery. . . . Sovereignty remains [in the hands of the conquerors]. [Africans have] no votes [and are not equal citizens, even] when given Indirect Rule . . . [They are not provided] the substance of economic wealth and advantage . . . except the inadequate wage. . . We do not admit them as equals to Church Assembly, school, or drawing-room (Malinowski 1938a:xxii–xxiii).

These passages have much the sound and feel of modern critical anthropology influenced by neo-Marxist precepts and of modern applied anthropology. They could equally be read as part of either of these two bodies of literature, even if written two-thirds of a century ago.

Science in Basic and Applied Anthropology

The relationship of basic to applied anthropology has long preoccupied anthropologists, and it was particularly important to Malinowski. The issue first arose in the middle of the nineteenth century when a nascent anthropology attempted to pattern itself after the natural sciences. However, the discipline failed to develop a clear-cut methodology suitable to its changing subject matter and failed to identify and agree upon the major components of the research endeavor. Anthropology’s efforts at identifying elements for investigation have not been clearly
or sufficiently spelled out, or have varied so much that subsequent investigators find it difficult to replicate findings and results.

Malinowski advocated focusing on social problems in developing theory. “The pose of academic detachment and persistent blindness to the fact that theoretical anthropology can learn quite as much from practical issues as it can teach in return, have considerably handicapped modern developments in the Science of Man” (1938a:xxxiii). Elsewhere, Malinowski adopted an even more radical stance:

> Anthropology must become an applied science. Every student of scientific history knows that science is born with its application. . . . [The anthropologist must] formulate criteria of practical guidance, . . . define indices of maladjustment, and . . . show the way in which sound knowledge can be translated into useful practice (1938a:x–xi).

Malinowski held the view that anthropology was no less a science than any of the natural sciences. The same principles of observation, testing, and empirical verification were as much present in anthropology as in the physics of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, or Faraday.

> A theory which fails must be amended by discovering why it has failed. [It begins] . . . when general principles have [are] put to the test of fact, and when practical problems and theoretical relations of relevant factors are used to manipulate reality in human action . . . [and] practical application (1938b:11).

He did not believe that anthropology should copy blindly the methodology of the natural sciences, especially their “belief that counting and measuring define the line of distinction between science and loose talk” (1938b:14). Qualitative information was just as valid as quantitative information. Science in anthropology meant that it must identify a legitimate subject, isolate process, and establish concepts and principles in terms of general laws. Each theoretical principle must translate into a method of observation by incorporating practical problems as beneficial to the scope of broad theories (1938b:14).

Malinowski’s position on the definition of science and its social context was similar to the approach taken later in the sociology of knowledge and by Thomas Kuhn (1962). Although Malinowski, like Kuhn, used the concept “paradigm,” for Malinowski it was more a synoptic chart than a dynamic scientific framework. He was addressing, however, the necessity for revamping current ideas about the place of theory in application, and hence, in Kuhnian terms, the creation of a new paradigm. Further, Malinowski’s statements on the subject sound much like those of Gramsci and other neo-Marxists in holding that any observation is grounded in some theory or ideology.

> There is no such thing as description completely devoid of theory. Whether you reconstruct historic scenes, carry out a field investigation in a savage tribe or a civilized community, analyze statistics, or make inferences from an archaeological monument or a prehistoric find—every statement and every argument has to be made in words, that is, in concepts. Each concept, in turn, is the result of a theory which declares that some facts are relevant and others adventitious, that some factors determine the course of events and others are
merely accidental by-play; that things happen as they do because personalities, masses, and material agencies of the environment produced them (1944:7–8).

Malinowski expanded this view of science with the belief that scientific activity is a human endeavor that applies equally to scientists and to indigenous people (1944:7–14). They use the same methodology that begins with observation and leads to prediction. Primitive “science” includes efforts in creating, constructing, and developing culture, in fire making, constructing implements, or building shelters (1944:8). These activities require observation, selection of appropriate materials and forms, principles of performance, and transmission of acquired knowledge. Primitive science was not limited to material culture, but also applied to other aspects of life.

The scientific attitude, embodied in all primitive technology and also in the organization of primitive economic enterprises and social organization, that reliance on past experience with the view to future performance, is an integral factor which must be assumed as having been at work from the beginning of mankind . . . (1944:10).

The main point that Malinowski made here was not so much that “primitive man” had science, but that the scientific attitude “is as old as culture” and that “science is derived from any pragmatic performance” (Malinowski 1944:10). These observations on the principles of science not only permeated his approach to the egalitarian study of “savage” society, but also suggested the related concepts of practice as theory, cultural relativity, holism, and advocacy. The integrity of his observations and his analysis of related concepts would validate Malinowski, not only as academician and theoretician, but also as major contributor to a modern theory of application.

Ian Hogbin, a contributor to the 1957 Firth volume evaluating Malinowski as an anthropologist, agreed that in the operation of the natural sciences basic science was directly linked to the solution of applied problems, although the practitioners of the scientific and practical subfields might not be the same persons. In the natural sciences, the knowledge that comes from experiment and analysis is utilized for exploring theory and for technical goals.

While the academic physicist is probing more deeply into the structure of matter, the civil engineer, designing bridges and viaducts, is utilizing the existing data on the behaviour of stone and metal under conditions of stress; and while the academic biologist strives to find out more concerning the principles of heredity and the mutation of genes, the plant breeder can proceed on established facts to develop strains of seed suitable for areas of low rainfall or great extremes of temperature (Hogbin 1957:245).

Hogbin believed that the anthropologist was less like an engineer and more like a meteorologist forecasting tomorrow’s weather. The weather forecaster could say what to expect provided that pressure systems continued along known paths and rates. Applied anthropologists could not rely on prior theories worked out by other investigators. New problems encountered require new theories and methods. He held that most anthropological theory was based erroneously on the descriptive, structural, and organizational goals of static systems, rather than on the dynamic social problem issues found in changing human environments. Hogbin identified
as a major problem that policymakers and the public at large would accept the word of scientist-experts on plants and bridges, but considered themselves as capable as the anthropologist at making observations on society and social problems (Hogbin 1957:246).

The Anthropologist as Advocate

Malinowski felt it was the duty of anthropology to chronicle contemporary events that occurred in conjunction with Westernization. At the same time, he cautioned that as a humanist the anthropologist must be aware that the process of Westernization was under the control of agents of Western civilization. Malinowski appealed to the moral obligation of every scientist and especially the anthropologist to be a “fair and true interpreter of the Native”; anthropologists had an obligation to explain the native to all Europeans (1945:3).

In advancing the idea that anthropologists should be advocates for native rights, Malinowski did not mince words or shy from strong language.

In reality, the historian of the future will have to register that Europeans in the past sometimes exterminated whole island peoples; that they expropriated most of the patrimony of savage races; that they introduced slavery in a specially cruel and pernicious form; and that even if they abolished it later, they treated the expatriated Negroes as outcasts and pariahs (1945:4).

Malinowski encouraged anthropologists to continue as advocates in the face of the long-standing vested interests of administrators, missionaries, and industrialists (1945:153). The following statement resonates with Firth’s later depiction of anthropology as “the uncomfortable science” (Firth 1981:198):

The voice of the anthropologist here is even more inconvenient than the harangue of the pro-Native, because he speaks in terms of fact and figures, and of the irrefutable logic of measuring ends and protestations against the means adopted for their achievements. But this cannot silence the voice of the scientific research worker, especially when he knows that what he has to say is the truth (Malinowski 1945:153).

In spite of field techniques that brought anthropologists into close contact with natives, guided by the scientific approach and their humanism, they had, in Malinowski’s view, consistently avoided involvement with the native’s social problems. This aloofness, he believed, was wrong. “The science which claims to understand culture and to have the clue to racial problems must not remain silent on the drama of culture conflict and of racial clash” (1938a:x). The many letters to editors, publications, and speeches he gave during his lifetime are indicative of his direct advocacy and not just advocacy of advocacy.

Policy Science

Malinowski’s observations about the use of policy appeared almost a decade before the first statements of policy scientists (Lasswell 1951) and decades ahead of the first statements by other
social scientists (Weaver 1985). Malinowski pleaded eloquently with anthropologists to register the tragic errors of the past and to have the courage to apply necessary remedies. In repetitive calls for advocacy for the native he emphasized the necessity of influencing policymakers and becoming involved in political matters. One who failed to do so remained “an antiquarian covered with academic dust and in a fool’s paradise” (Malinowski 1945:4). He warned, however, of the practice of politicians to appoint a commission of inquiry after harm has been done to cover up the problem and to “deaden the pangs of conscience” (1945:4).

Shall we, therefore, mix politics with science? In one way, decidedly “yes,” because if knowledge gives foresight and foresight means power, it is a universal stultification of scientific results to insist that they can never be useful or used by those who have influence (1945:4).

Malinowski’s approach to culture change and the study of social problems in African colonial society was intricately related to policy. He viewed policy not only as an appropriate arena for the application of scientific knowledge, but also as a controlled experiment through which social theory could be tested by observation in fieldwork (1945:7). Here Malinowski was referring to the necessary study of planning, execution, and aftermath of such policies as indirect rule and European-directed education.

Conclusions

There have been many who praised Malinowski and perhaps an equal number who have criticized his work. A recent biographer of Margaret Mead, another anthropological icon in her time, commented on the ambivalence displayed toward Mead by her peers. The biographer spoke of the “paradox that while Mead was acclaimed by the public, her reputation as an anthropologist was often dismissed by her academic peers—perhaps because of the ‘female’ topics she often focused upon (such as parent-child relationships and socialization), perhaps because of her theoretical focus on culture and personality, or perhaps simply because of professional jealousy” (Lutkehaus 1998:13). This statement could apply as well to Malinowski with his popularity with the public, his focus on applied topics as outlined in this essay, and his pioneering work in functionalism and practicing anthropology as alternatives to just pure jealousy.

Malinowski was a pioneer in many fields and certainly his work in applied anthropology was at the leading edge of the discipline in the 1930s. Herskovits (1936) hailed the new direction Malinowski had charted for applied anthropology. By the 1940s a strong basis for developing applied anthropology had been laid in many countries, especially in Great Britain, the Netherlands, Mexico, and the United States. The retreat of anthropologists to academia after World War II allowed applied anthropology to fall into a state of neglect, however. Had anthropologists not retired to university teaching, the inroads into development and practicing anthropology that have been achieved in the last two decades would have occurred much earlier.

Kuper paid compliment and homage to Malinowski at the end of a chapter that is acute and balanced.

Malinowski’s greatness lay in his ability to penetrate the web of theories to the real man, boasting, hypocritical, earthy, [and] reasonable; and he passed on to his students an invaluable awareness of the tension which is always there between

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what people say and what they do, between individual interests and the social order. It was Malinowski too who was the first to show the way in which the principle of reciprocity might serve to bind the individual, in his own interests, to the community (1983:35).

Kuper maintains that Malinowski’s book *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) and its discussion of ceremonial exchange stimulated Mauss’ *The Gift* (1954) and ultimately was the central inspiration for Levi-Straus and the French structuralist perspective (Kuper 1983:35). In the conclusion to his book Kuper continues this accolade:

If one can talk of a Malinowskian revolution, it is because Malinowski changed the relationship between theory and ethnography in social anthropology. To be crude and schematic, but not misleading, before the First World War the relationship between theory and ethnography (and theorist and ethnographer) was as master to servant. . . . There was, in short, a division of labour. The Brahmin-anthropologist pondered theories in his study and sent out his questions; the Sudra-ethnographer did the dirty work and more or less passively responded to the demands of the specialist (Kuper 1983:193).

If one substitutes “applied anthropologist” for ethnographer, the paragraph above reflects the relationship between academic and applied anthropology in the U.S. until recent times. The academic as “colonialist” viewed the applied anthropologist as an agent who went out among the natives and gathered data for the academic formation of theory in the safe confines of the ivory tower. Malinowski led the way to recognizing this relationship between ethnography and applied anthropology and theory formation.

The posthumous publication of Malinowski’s field diary written during his Trobriand Island fieldwork (Malinowski 1967) created an uproar among social scientists. Malinowski expressed feelings in his diary that were quite at variance with his image as a fieldworker, participant observer, and advocate of the native. To be fair, the diary reflects some of the problems commonly experienced by anthropologists living in isolation from their own society. Compulsively reading novels, worrying about health without the presence of modern medicine, missing music one is accustomed to hearing, anger and disdain for informants who break promises, and yes, sexual longings are the fate of anthropologists in the field. Malinowski explained to his students that keeping a diary had been a venting mechanism from the boredom and emotions of the field that included sexual deprivation and loneliness (Kuper 1983:13; Wax 1972). He would have enjoyed the controversy at the anthropology meetings brought on by Francis L. K. Hsu’s presidential address in 1975 in which he seemed to take joy in reporting publicly some of the material revealed in the diary. Malinowski would have been pleased to know that his writings have continued to create disquiet among his colleagues.

Perhaps, Michelle Rosaldo provided a more realistic perspective shared by many ethnologists regarding Malinowski’s diary when she wrote:

Although my field diaries are replete with evidence of Malinowski’s now scandalous ambivalence, and our first trip, in particular, was by far the most emotionally and psychically demanding experience of my life, I find it difficult to recall old feelings of pain and confusion. Instead, my memories of Ilongot living
are touched with the romantic cast that was, of course, part of what led me to seek such “exotic” surroundings. Writing at this moment, I find myself overwhelmed with gratitude and nostalgia for a world that is typified by the warmth, consideration, and playfulness of people who tolerated and cared for us, and finally, became our dear friends (Rosaldo 1980:xiv).

It is regrettable that Malinowski’s diary appeared almost twenty years after his death. One wonders had he been alive whether, reflecting on his experience, he would have written a passage like Rosaldo’s that she would have quoted in 1980.

Notes

1His students over the years included Ashley Montagu, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Raymond Firth, Camilla Wedgewood, Audrey Richards, Monica Hunter (later Wilson), Gregory Bateson, Isaac Schapera, Meyer Fortes, S. F. Nadel, Fei Xiaotong (Hsiao-tung), and F. L. K. Hsu (Firth 1975; Kuper 1983; Leach 1984). Before becoming anthropologists, Fortes was an experimental psychologist, Firth was an economist, and Nadel had doctorates in philosophy and psychology as well as being an accomplished musician. Others who attended his seminar included Talcott Parsons, Hortense Powdermaker, Elspeth Huxley, Jomo Kenyatta, Prince Peter of Greece, and L. S. B. Leakey (Wax 1976:332–333).

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