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## Bronisław Malinowski and his reception in Romania

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**Abstract:** The reception of Bronisław Malinowski's works in Romanian culture presents a paradoxical situation. The article aims to analyse the forms of reception, application, and adaptation of the Polish anthropologist's writings in Romania. The paper is divided into four sections. The first section outlines the beginnings of Malinowski's academic career in England, during his friendship with James Frazer. The second focuses on his innovative contributions to world anthropology and the acknowledgement of functionalism as a recognised paradigm. The third section examines the reasons behind the scarcity of significant Romanian translations of Malinowski's works, despite his widespread recognition within the Romanian scientific community, analysing the indirect reception of his ideas and the influence of secondary sources and intermediary scholars. The conclusions of the study are based on the paradoxical – though not unique – case of the Polish anthropologist and lead to a broader reflection on the role of academic translations in cultures that use lesser-known languages. By integrating bibliographic research, historical context, and the analysis of applied works, the paper demonstrates that Malinowski's influence in Romania has been largely mediated through secondary literature, academic adaptations, and selective translations. This approach allows for a better understanding of the situation in which Malinowski's legacy is acknowledged and applied in Romania, despite the limited availability of direct translations of his works.

**Keywords:** cultural anthropology, functionalism, derived reception, translations, cultural policies, bibliographies

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The reception of Bronisław Malinowski's work in Romanian culture is complex. Anthropologists, sociologists, ethnologists, folklorists, and mythol-

ogists frequently refer to his theories in their writings, research or when stating scientific opinions. Yet Romanian culture still lacks a complete translation of his works. In fact, with only a few partial and secondary translations, it could be said that there is no comprehensive Romanian translation of Malinowski's work. The relatively occasional and minor exceptions corroborate this statement. The explanation for this situation, detailed in the final section of this study, is cumulatively connected to several factors: the uneven development of the social sciences in Romania, their complex and often problematic relation with communist ideology, the rapid and abrupt way in which they were imposed after 1990, and the limited editorial programmes of the few publishing houses genuinely interested in promoting bibliographies essential to the field of anthropology. Therefore, when attempting to adopt a systemic approach to the positioning of the Polish anthropologist from an academic or didactic perspective, we are faced with a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, Malinowski is widely cited; on the other hand, access to his original texts remains limited. This study provides an extensive contextualization of Malinowski's work, activity and personality, to minimise the disadvantage of the reader's assumed unfamiliarity with them. However, it is widely acknowledged within the academic community. We are also convinced that such presentational strategies compensate for the lack of translations, even if they project a "derived" image of the scholar. Yet it allows us to evaluate more clearly how his ideas have been received in Romania. This study is an eloquent reflection of such a mentality.

## **Malinowski and Frazer**

The relationship between the two has a providential aura. In a speech given in November 1925 at the University of Liverpool, Malinowski himself admits that after having abandoned his studies in physics and chemistry at the University of Cracow due to illness, the discovery of Frazer and of *The Golden Bough* brought about his acknowledgement that cultural anthropology is a science serious enough for him to study thoroughly and to practice:

If I had the power of evoking the past, I should like to lead you back some twenty years to an old Slavonic university town - I mean the town of Cracow, the ancient capital of Poland and the seat of the oldest university in Eastern Europe. I could then show you a student leaving the mediaeval college buildings, obviously in some distress of mind, hugging, however, under his arm, as the only solace of his troubles, three green volumes with the well-known golden imprint, a beautiful conventionalised design of mistletoe - the symbol of "The Golden Bough". I had just then been ordered to abandon for a time my physical and chemical research because of ill-health, but I was allowed to follow up a favourite side-line of study, and I decided to

make my first attempt to read an English masterpiece in the original. (...) No sooner had I begun to read this great work than I became immersed in it and captivated by it. I realised then that anthropology, as presented by Sir James Frazer, is a great science, worthy of as much devotion as any of her elder and more exact sister - studies, and I became bound to the service of Frazerian anthropology.<sup>1</sup>

It should be clarified that the quotations analysed in this article are taken from Malinowski's original English texts (such as *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and *Magic, Science and Religion*), rather than from partial Romanian translations mediated through French. This choice allows for a more accurate interpretation of his arguments.

We should not be surprised by the acknowledgement of this scientific „patronage”. Malinowski had just published *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, which had been eulogistically and generously prefaced by Frazer, a fact that decisively contributed to Malinowski's credibility in international anthropology.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, ironically, 1925, the year of the conference in Liverpool, is also the year when Malinowski published the volume *Magic, Science and Religion*, which marked the scientific break from James Frazer. Still, between 1917 and 1938, the year when B. Malinowski went to teach at Yale, they had a very close relationship, along which the Polish scholar almost permanently acknowledges Frazer's pre-eminence in English anthropology. Frazer's first action that will influence Malinowski's destiny is not just that of a patron, but a life-and-death gesture, since the latter's biological and scientific destiny is decided by the outbreak of the First World War, which finds him, an Austrian-Hungarian citizen, in enemy territory in Australia. Normally, he should have been arrested and sent to a war camp, but he was let free and more significantly allowed to continue his study of the indigenous population in New Guinea and on the Trobriand islands in Melanesia, owing to Frazer's intervention, who wrote to his friend Gilbert Murray, arguably the most important classicist of the first decades of the past century, urging him to intercede with his brother Hubert, governor of New Guinea, so that Malinowski could work freely.<sup>3</sup> Malinowski thanks him for his gesture, as can be seen in the numerous letters exchanged by the two starting in 1917. The first one, sent by Malinowski in answer to an encouragement from Frazer, includes the enchantment of the young Polish researcher with his master's praises.

<sup>1</sup> Bronisław Malinowski, *Address at the University of Liverpool*, 1925, later included in *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1948), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer: His Life and Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 245–247.

<sup>3</sup> Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer: His Life and Work*, 180–182.

From this first exchange of letters, the positioning of the two is very clear, with Malinowski explicitly admitting to Frazer's "leader in our branch" position:

I could not have been given a more kindly and stimulating encouragement than that which I received in your letter of July the 5th 1917. Every ethnologist naturally looks up to you as the leader in our branch of learning and approval so kindly and generously expressed has been and will be the most efficient impulse for my future work.<sup>4</sup>

Thanks to James Frazer's intervention, Malinowski may remain free and continue his research, supported by the entire epistemic framework of Malinowski's work: social, economic and judicial organisation, language, myths, rites, building techniques, sexual behaviour, kinship and power relations of the inhabitants of the islands, the participant observation method and the scientific theory of culture. Moreover, the experience gained because of this facilitation has set the Polish scholar's didactic career on the right path, as between 1922 and 1938, when he left for the United States, Malinowski structured the lectures held at the London School of Economics based on the research carried out in the West Pacific islands. These lectures contribute perhaps even more substantially than his writings to the acknowledgement of functionalism, the new current so original and beneficial to anthropological research. Firstly, because they allow him to focus exclusively on a certain subject and on novel themes and methods, secondly, because he can distance himself from mentors, as he does with J. Frazer, by not mentioning them, as noticed Raymond Firth, one of his favourite and later famous students, who shares his interest in the relationship between primitive communities and economy and takes functionalism to another level of theoretical development.<sup>5</sup> Thirdly, because he manages to create a real lineage, whose unofficial leader is the above-mentioned R. Firth.

After 1925, his polite relationship with Frazer is systematically rivalled by the evolution of social sciences, which finds B. Malinowski much more realistically connected to the intellectual movements of the time, a fact that also allows him to counter the effect of the crisis of social sciences after the First World War and to suggest a new direction.

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<sup>4</sup> Bronisław Malinowski to James George Frazer, *The Story of a Marriage: The Letters of Bronislaw Malinowski and Elsie Masson*, vol. 1, ed. Helena Wayne (London: Routledge, 1995), 105.

<sup>5</sup> Raymond Firth, *Malinowski as Scientist and as Man*, in *Man and Culture: An Evaluation of the Work of Bronislaw Malinowski*, ed. Raymond Firth (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), 1–18.

## Malinowski and functionalism

Truly the first modern current of cultural anthropology, functionalism brings into consideration the entire theoretical tradition of the science at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It emerged as a reaction by young researchers dissatisfied with the methods and the evolutionist and diffusionist projects that had directed anthropological research toward the past and the reconstruction of dead societies.<sup>6</sup> Functionalism bravely opted for studying real, living societies, which could be analysed through *participant observation*. This current represents the beginning of a new era in the scientific approach of cultural anthropology.

Their first theoretical step of functionalists was to detach themselves from history, from that invented history of the evolutionists, and focus on the functioning of society, a topic that can be studied without making references to its past. By rejecting any historicist explanation, functionalists developed the *organicist analogy* method, which considers society or culture as a living organism and studies it accordingly.<sup>7</sup> By defining the living organism as an ensemble of independent elements that form an integral whole, in the sense that every element takes part in the good functioning of the whole, society is similarly considered an integrated whole where each institution has a clear function. Consequently, no social institution can be studied in isolation but always in relation to another, and the point of interest is no longer the way in which these institutions have evolved over the centuries, but the way in which they function, the place each one has and its relationships with the other institutions of the social ensemble. The function is also defined by analogy with organic life, leading to the deduction that if the function of an organ is to take part in sustaining life, similarly, socially, the function of an institution is to participate in supporting the life of the society and of the social ensemble.

Such a theory also imposes a new method of research, capable of connecting social institutions. To highlight this relationship, however, a deep field knowledge is required, which can only be gained through a participant method. Indeed, the method created by functionalists remains the *participant observation* method, still valid over the years and successfully used by ethnologists, irrespective of the label they bear.

<sup>6</sup> Adam Kuper, *Anthropology and Anthropologists: The Modern British School* (London: Routledge, 1996), 18–21.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (London: Cohen & West, 1952), 178, 180–181.

Functionalism is viewed today as the mirroring of cultural and philosophical relativism in anthropology, but also as a current of thought that sees any society as balanced, which is far from the truth, especially in this context of science, when the focus is on conflict and social changes. Robert Lowie makes the distinction between *pure* and *moderate* functionalism. The former type of functionalism is represented by Bronisław Malinowski, while the latter is represented by the German scholar Thurnwald.<sup>8</sup> Among the two, Malinowski is undoubtedly the most famous, as he contributed significantly both as a theorist and as a professor, being a real leader of a school. His students became just as famous, since scholars such as Evans-Pritchard, Raymond Firth or Edmund Leach have marked the history of contemporary anthropology by developing within its distinct domains like symbolic anthropology (Leach) or economic anthropology (Firth).

As a theorist, Malinowski asserted himself by means of the monographs written after the three anthropological investigations carried out in New Guinea, in the Trobriand archipelago (*Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, *Coral Gardens* and *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*), but especially through his work *A Scientific Theory of Culture*, published after his death, where he develops his famous theory on needs. According to this theory, structured around three notions - *basic need*, *derived need* and *integrative need* - culture is seen as an instrument by means of which people's psychological and bodily needs are satisfied. The purpose of each civilisation is to satisfy the individuals' bodily needs, and from this perspective, culture may be defined as a coherent ensemble of answers to these needs. His definition is marked by evident biological determinism, especially when he argues that each stage in the development of society corresponds to a fundamental tendency of the human body. Today, this theory can no longer meet the demands of modern science. It is recognised that Malinowski's approach, although innovative for its time, oversimplifies the relationship between biological needs and cultural structure. Modern research emphasises that culture is a complex system, influenced by historical, economic, social, and symbolic factors, and reducing it to biological determinism is considered outdated.

Still, Malinowski's strength must be identified in the ethnographic dimension of his monographs, which are the result of exceptionally productive and spectacular fieldwork. In fact, Michel Panoff, one of the most attentive exegetes of Malinowski's work, argued that the authentic Malinowski's theory should not be sought in his general formulations, but rather in his applied works, where theoretical principles are directly derived from empirical

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Thurnwald, *Economics in Primitive Communities* (London: Routledge, 1969), 7–27.

observation.<sup>9</sup> It should be mentioned that in the second part of the *Scientific Theory...*, entitled *The Functional Theory*, Malinowski himself insists on the applied aspect of this theory, which he sees working as a work grid useful to any field researcher, even as a prerequisite of any field investigation: "Cette théorie a pour but essentiel de donner à l'enquêteur une vision accommodée et des directives sur l'objet de son observation et le mode de sa consignation."<sup>10</sup>

His most famous work is *Argonauts of the Pacific*, considered by many to be a masterpiece in anthropology. Here, Malinowski describes *kula*, a network of exchanges characteristic of the Trobriand society.<sup>11</sup> This institution brings together several tribes on the Melanesian Islands, not from an economic, but rather from a ritualised and magical perspective.<sup>12</sup> *Kula* is seen as an endless ceremonial exchange during which white shell bracelets (*mwali*) are offered, while red shell necklaces (*soulava*) are received. These are gifts that are not to be worn by the receivers, but to be offered forward, thus creating a lifelong alliance between the giver and the receiver, sometimes even passed down to someone previously initiated into the magic of the *kula*.<sup>13</sup> According to this system of exchange, a person can have allies - friends who are so close that they are as important as parents – in other villages and even on other islands, sometimes so remote that, at least in theory, they would not allow for the systematic character of the relationship. Such a system imposes obligations and duties that can generally be fulfilled by the strongest, the wealthiest members of the tribe. After having reconstructed this system in its entirety, Malinowski concludes that the organising principle of the Trobriand islanders' social life is the principle of reciprocity. This conclusion allowed him to develop that the exchange is a fundamental principle of any type of social life and that, paradoxically, the exchange manifests itself by means of a gift, which he actually sees as a universal category of any primitive society. His conclusion demolished the entire theoretical construct of primitive communism, showing that even primitive societies have an inter-

<sup>9</sup> Michel Panoff, *Introduction à l'anthropologie* (Paris: Payot, 1970), 112.

<sup>10</sup> Bronisław Malinowski, *Une théorie scientifique de la culture* (Paris: Edition Fracois Maspero), 147. The main purpose of this theory is to give the investigator an adapted vision and directives about the subject of the investigation and about the way to place it in safe-keeping.

<sup>11</sup> Bronisław Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1922), 97–120.

<sup>12</sup> Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*, 45–112.

<sup>13</sup> Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*, 81–84.

nal social hierarchy, understand what social prestige is, and strive to achieve it through constant exchanges. To continue this idea, Malinowski writes *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* to demonstrate another characteristic of the Trobriands' life, namely, garden tending, with its obvious aim to gain or to preserve higher social prestige. The abundance of the food on display, most of the time left outdoors to rot, is not a sign of material wealth, which is not an aim *per se*, but a sign of the garden owner's social prestige.<sup>14</sup>

Another topic researched by Malinowski is the sexuality of primitive populations, a new direction of research imposed by the anthropologist in his study *The Sexual Life of Savages*, followed by a book entitled *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*, where he claims that in the matrilineal Trobriand society the Oedipus' complex does not exist, since its cause, the father-son conflict, is nonexistent (historical statement, contested in contemporary anthropology). Malinowski's conclusion is debatable, but what remains important is his interest in creating the most comprehensive possible image of the researched society, an image on which he builds his theories.

Moreover, the first monographic attempt made by one of his famous disciples, Raymond Firth, entitled *Man and Culture: An Evaluation of the Work of Malinowski* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), which, as the title suggests, is an evaluation as objective as possible of Malinowski's work, brings together positive opinions (R. Firth, M. Fortes, I. Schapera) with critical ones, some even fierce (Evans-Pritchard, Radcliffe-Brown, Leach). The strong point of Malinowski's legacy remains the method of participant observation and the functionalist theory. However, the latter is not free from criticism, such as detachment from history, social change phenomena, and exaggerated biological reductionism. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that he founded a school of thought. From this perspective, Malinowski has a leading contribution to the history of anthropology.

### **Bronisław Malinowski and ethno-anthropological studies in Romania**

As mentioned at the beginning of the study, B. Malinowski's work is facing a paradoxical situation in the Romanian culture. It is widely recognised among scholars, but this recognition is not due to comprehensive translations into Romanian. Currently, there are only two notable translations: the posthumous volume *O teorie științifică a culturii* (*A Scientific Theory of Culture*), published

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<sup>14</sup> Bronisław Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*, vol. 1 (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935), 27–31.

in the 1970s, as a translation of the French version, published in 1970 at François Maspero publishing house, and *Magie, știință și religie* (*Magic, Science and Religion*), translated directly from English and prefaced by Nora Vasilescu, published in 1993 at Moldova Publishing House in Iași, both with small print runs. It is important to highlight that Nora Vasilescu is the only known Romanian translator of Malinowski, which makes her contribution crucial for the reception of his work in Romania.<sup>15</sup> Despite bibliographic scarcity, Malinowski's methodology, especially the participant observation method, has been widely adopted by local anthropologists and sociologists.

In between the two wars, the Bucharest School of Sociology, led by Dimitrie Gusti, adapted the principles of participant observation in Malinowski's method to successive fieldwork research that materialised in a series of monographies extremely valuable for the Romanian folk culture and traditional civilisation (the communes of Drăguș, Nereju, Fundul Moldovei, Runcu, etc).<sup>16</sup> Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, who collaborated with the School of Sociology, promoted field research and social analyses in the spirit of functionalism. George Vâlsan, a geographer and anthropologist, focused on the study of rural communities in a cultural context, using a systemic and contextual approach. The importance of the Bucharest School of Sociology was considerable. After the First World War, when the Kingdom of Romania was unified with the provinces inhabited by Romanians, which until then had been part of neighbouring empires, understanding their social realities became essential for the coherent development of the country and, implicitly, for their integration. This was precisely the mission of the Sociological School. Its founder, Dimitrie Gusti, envisioned a monographic sociology that would provide data and a realistic picture of the rural communities in the Romanian provinces. He selected representative communities from each historical province and formed interdisciplinary teams, which, through participant observation and questionnaires, compiled a series of monographs. In this way, he created a model of field research for the Romanian social sciences that remains relevant today, although Malinowski's participant observation method is complemented by newer approaches, such as life histories, interviews, and surveys.

The post-war period and especially the establishment of communism brought about a radical change of paradigm, excessive ideologization, bibliographic reductionism, and eventually a ban on sociology and cultural an-

<sup>15</sup> Nora Vasilescu, "Traducerile lui Malinowski în România," *Revista de Etnologie și Antropologie* 2 (1995): 45–52.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Zoltán Rostás, *Monografia ca utopie: Interviuri cu discipolii lui Dimitrie Gusti* (Bucharest: Paideia, 2000).

thropology after the 1970s. In this context, translations of the important works in the field stagnated. This explains why in Romania, B. Malinowski was not translated for two decades. Nevertheless, his theories were indirectly known through secondary sources and the influence of his methods on Romanian scholars.

A complex approach to traditional communities, the importance attributed to context, and the relationship between religion and the economic dimension of existence have influenced the analyses of Romanian folklorists since the 1960s and 1970s regarding the relationship between folkloric text and the social context of its producer. From the 1960s onward, folklorists applied functionalist perspectives inspired by Malinowski, leading to ritualist interpretations of the ballad *Miorița*,<sup>17</sup> functional classifications of folkloric genres, and the tempering of the previous generations' aesthetic enthusiasm for the folklore text as a literary form. All these represented, let us say, a secondary or derived reflection, generally built after consulting translations from other languages or studies published in other cultures than Romanian (mostly French, English, sometimes German). However, there is also a Romanian anthropologist who has consistently shown an interest in the work of B. Malinowski – Gheorghita Geană. A professor at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Bucharest and a scientific researcher at the “Francisc Reiner” Institute of the Romanian Academy, Gheorghita Geană, was considered one of the few anthropologists active during the communist period, when Romania no longer had a department of anthropology. Among his contributions are his studies published in *Fieldwork and Footnotes: Studies in the History of European Anthropology*, edited by Arturo Alvarez Roldán and Han Vermeulen (London: Routledge, 1995), and *Ethnographers before Malinowski. Pioneers of anthropological fieldwork 1870–1922*, edited by Federico Delgado Rosa, Han Vermeulen (New York-Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2022). Both works discuss the objective-participatory method and the establishment of a new anthropological paradigm for field research – a paradigm that brings an end to “armchair anthropology”.

This situation lasted even after the fall of communism, when sociology and cultural anthropology regained their scientific status and became academic specialisations, and at least in the case of anthropology, extensive bibliographic logistics were required. To this purpose, the few specialists who taught the history of cultural and social anthropology immediately after

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<sup>17</sup> *Miorița* – is the most famous Romanian folk ballad, telling the story of a shepherd who learns from his sheep that he will be murdered by two other shepherds. Instead of resisting, he calmly accepts his fate, preparing for death and imagining a union with nature and his family. The ballad depicts acceptance of destiny, harmony with nature, and the spiritual relationship of humans to life and death.

1990 built courses using almost exclusively translations, as the situation of B. Malinowski's works was identical to that of the important figures in this field, except for those associated with Marxism. We have used mostly French bibliography for our course, as well as French or Italian translations for the presentation of the important works in the history of science, while for the book *Orașul subtil* (*The Subtle City*), where we analysed Malinowski's method, a French translation of the Polish anthropologist's *Diary* was used.

Another indirect source of knowledge about B. Malinowski's work in Romania was structuralism and, in particular, the E. Leach – Claude Lévi-Strauss polemic. The 1970s, when E. Leach published his critical volume dedicated to Lévi-Strauss's work, marked the formative years of an entire generation of Romanian ethnologists, folklorists and anthropologists who, rejecting vulgarised Marxism, found their intellectual refuge in structuralism. However, the excess of abstraction that Leach himself reproached the French anthropologist for, as well as Lévi-Strauss's neglect of the concrete realities of the studied communities in favour of schematism and excessive formalism, led not only to the discovery of the English anthropologist's writings but also to the broader intellectual lineage culminating in that generation's mentor, professor Bronisław Malinowski, especially since his *Diary* had been published not long before, in 1967.

In addition to Malinowski, E. Leach also referred to a tumultuous legacy of the Polish anthropologist, a legacy best illustrated in the collective monograph *Man and Culture: An Evaluation of the Work of Malinowski* (1957), edited by one of his students, Raymond Firth. This volume includes, among others, E.E. Evans-Prichard's and Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown critical approach of functionalism, as well as Isaac Schapera's analysis of the methodology that Romanian ethnology adopted as a reflection and inheritance of the Bucharest School of Sociology. Also, contemporary Romanian anthropologists and researchers, such as Vintilă Mihăilescu, highlight clear influences of functionalism and the field anthropology methods introduced by Malinowski. The connection can be considered indirect, resulting from the reception of Malinowski's ideas in Romania. Mihăilescu was a continuator of Malinowski's tradition in Romania, adapting methods and theories for the study of contemporary communities. The Romanian anthropologist acknowledges Malinowski's contributions to the development of modern anthropology:

However, it was Bronislaw Malinowski who imposed the idea of fieldwork as a method specific to anthropology (and, in a way, its founding myth). As a founding father, he thus deserves special attention.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Vintilă Mihăilescu, *Introducere în antropologie – suport de curs* (2007–2008), 38, <https://ro.scribd.com/document/373463237/MIHAILESCU-Vintila-Introducere-in-antropologie-curs-pdf>.

Anthropologist and sociologist, Mihail Cernea was influenced by Bronisław Malinowski, employing participant observation and functional analysis of social institutions in his studies of rural and traditional communities in Romania. In 1995, he was awarded the Bronisław Malinowski Prize by the Society for Applied Anthropology (S.F.A.A.) „in recognition of Mihail Cernea's scientific efforts to understand and serve the needs of humanity through the social sciences.”<sup>19</sup> Ironically, this situation turned into some kind of boomerang of the Romanian scholars' wishes to quickly lessen the bibliographic by means of translations, as probably counting on the renown of names such as L. Morgan, E. Tylor, F. Boas, and B. Malinowski. Their works continued to remain untranslated, although they are leaders of schools without whom no historical perspective on science can be outlined.

Another factor was the very small number of publishing houses willing to create a collection devoted to cultural anthropology, in which financial and time compromises play a certain role. Thus, in the years following the Revolution, short volumes came out (van Gennep, H. Hubert, M. Mauss, E. Durkheim, etc.), their publication required little work on the part of the translator, and the publishers incurred similarly low costs.

Malinowski's work, undoubtedly, was a victim of this context, since, although his masterpiece – essential for defining functionalist ideas – is extremely long, *Argonauts...* remains untranslated. Still, in 1993, before leaving Romania, Nora Vasilescu managed to translate and publish a rather slim volume, *Magie, știință și religie* (Magic, Science and Religion), which has its importance in Malinowski's work, but cannot compare to *Argonauts...*, *Choral Gardens* or *The Sexual Life of Savages*. It was published by a small publishing house with a similarly small circulation. Nora Vasilescu, a poet, prose writer, and ethnologist, currently based in Connecticut, was part of the Student Scientific Circles, which in the 1980s attempted, using the panel method, to return to the old research fields of the Gusti Sociological School in order to evaluate how the village communities studied in the fourth decade by D. Gusti's teams had evolved. She was also a founding member of ASER (Scientific Association of Ethnologists of Romania). Like her entire generation, she realised that the great names of world ethno-anthropology had not been translated into Romanian, which led her to begin a translation program that, unfortunately, included only two titles: the work of B. Malinowski, cited above, and Arnold van Gennep's *Les Rites de passage*.

Thus, the issue of the failed translations from B. Malinowski and others as well becomes significant not just for the history of Romanian anthropol-

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<sup>19</sup> Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA), “Bronisław Malinowski Award Recipients,” accessed September 2025, <https://appliedanthro.org/>.

ogy, but also for a possible theory of science in Romania, a significance that we construct or deconstruct further down, in the conclusions of this study.

## Conclusions

Bronisław Malinowski is widely recognised by Romanian professors and researchers as the founder of modern anthropology. They have repeatedly emphasised the relevance of the participant observation method and applied it in their field research. Malinowski's works have been studied particularly for his field research methods (participant observation) and his emphasis on the culture and social structures of communities. Romanian researchers appreciated his methodological innovation, even though its practical application in the study of local populations was limited. After 1945, anthropological and ethnographic studies were influenced by Marxist ideology. Malinowski was cited for his detailed analysis of social structures and cultural functions, but interpretations were often adapted to the Marxist paradigm. Romanian researchers recognised the value of his empirical method. However, the emphasis on the individual and the social microcosm was sometimes reduced in favour of studying the collective and social classes. After 1989, Romanian researchers rediscovered the theoretical value of his work and began to apply it in urban anthropology, the study of globalisation, and the analysis of local cultures. The emphasis on field research and participant observation was integrated into university programs in anthropology and sociology.

Despite the scarcity of direct translations, Romanian scholars have been able to engage with his ideas through French, English, and occasionally German sources, as well as through applied adaptations in ethnographic and sociological studies. This includes the Bucharest School of Sociology under Dimitrie Gusti, Vintilă Mihăilescu's contemporary anthropological research, and Mihail Cernea's functional analyses of rural communities. Nora Vasilescu's translation of *Magic, Science and Religion* represents a landmark achievement in bridging the gap between Malinowski's original work and Romanian scholarship. The reception of Malinowski in Romania cannot be separated from the broader issue of translation and cultural mediation, which determine how scientific ideas circulate and are reinterpreted within national contexts.

To put it briefly, the influence of B. Malinowski's work on Romanian social thought can be summarised as manifesting itself in two ways: direct and indirect. The direct influence manifested itself through the aforementioned translation into Romanian (by N. Vasilescu), as well as access to original

works or translations into commonly used languages, which can be observed and analysed in the bibliographies of anthropological treatises and university study programmes (M. Coman, V. Mihăilescu, N. Paneà). This type of influence was exercised exclusively within theoretical, academic discourses regarding the evolution of world anthropological thought, the development of science, and currents in anthropology. It had a formative and scholastic character. The indirect influence was shaped by different contexts, mostly cultural, and focused on adapting and applying the field method of participant observation in sociological or ethno-folkloric research campaigns. From the monographic research of the Gusti School to the fieldwork conducted by the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore of the Romanian Academy, the method of participant observation remained a constant practice. It was complemented by related methods such as documentation, questionnaires, interviews and, more recently, life stories. It should be noted that, at least during the communist years, the paternity of the method was not always emphasised, being considered instead a part of the legacy of the Sociological School in Bucharest. The results of its application were reflected in the vast number of field collections, which became the primary source for many scientific works in the field. Also, as an indirect influence should be mentioned all those works in which Malinowski's name as head of school is invoked, either as direct posterity, such as the collective work compiled by Raymond Firth in 1957 or the monograph by M. Panoff, or in moments of crisis or paradigm shifts in science, such as the polemic between E. Leach and Claude Lévi-Strauss in the context of the imposition of structuralism or Clifford Geertz's work, *Works and Lives. The anthropologist as Author* (1988), which, like the entire work of the American anthropologist, anticipates postmodernism. This type of influence acknowledges a form of posterity, in which enthusiastic appreciations coexist with rigorous criticisms, yet nevertheless helps to preserve the memory of the Polish anthropologist's work.

The discussion of influence and intellectual legacy naturally leads to a broader reflection on how knowledge circulates through translation – a process that not only transmits ideas but reshapes them according to cultural and political contexts. Any minor culture is concerned with translation. Translating to synchronise itself with others and being translated to assert itself. From Ion Heliade Rădulescu, who in the mid-19th century pioneered the idea of the first universal library of translations, to the contemporary strategies of Romanian government institutions aimed at translating important works of Romanian literature, this obsession has been a recurring theme in the modern history of our national culture. Such concerns are shaped and regulated by cultural policies, which, in turn, influence future policies. When cultural policies are disturbed by non-axiological, ideological,

and reductionist criteria, they become not only counterproductive but also harmful to culture and identity. This was the case of the cultural policies in communist Romania, which intensified nationalist impulses and invented narratives, a personality cult that distorted cultural manifestations and products to the point of caricatures.

Cultural policies regarding translations must continuously evolve and remain in synchronicity with major currents of thought. Discontinuities in such dynamic processes, that are in continuous evolution, lead to the obstruction of cultural dialogues, desynchronization, to the development of retrograde states, which generate frustration and social and cultural complexes. To disregard the great scientific literature in the field of social sciences means not only to leave specialists without the theoretical tools needed to understand an extremely dynamic reality, but more specifically, allowing reality to be dangerously misinterpreted. History shows that not only a lack of information, but also its improper use can have tragic consequences. Such misunderstandings are not limited to the Romanian context. Throughout the history of anthropology, misinterpretations have often led to lasting distortions. In this context, so as not to stray too far from our field, we will use an example from the history of classical anthropology, which, based on information taken from Tacitus' Annals, long believed that Germanic tribes were of matrilineal origin. The misunderstanding of the other, for linguistic and cultural reasons, leads to sometimes even genocidal tragedies. In this sense, the act of translation – whether linguistic or conceptual – becomes both an epistemological and ethical gesture, preserving diversity while fostering cross-cultural understanding.

In conclusion, the reception of Malinowski in Romania illustrates the complex interplay between historical constraints, limited translations, and methodological innovation. In this context, translations play a crucial role in transmitting knowledge and facilitating the reception of foundational works. We would say that translations emphasise one of the greatest cultural qualities of the human species, diversity. Any translation is a lesson about accepting the Other, about tolerance.

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## Bronisław Malinowski i jego recepcja w Rumunii

**Abstrakt:** Recepceja dzieł Bronisława Malinowskiego w kulturze rumuńskiej przedstawia paradoxalną sytuację. Artykuł ma na celu analizę form recepcji, zastosowania i adaptacji dzieł polskiego antropologa w Rumunii. Artykuł został podzielony na cztery części. Pierwsza przedstawia początki kariery uczonego w Anglii, w okresie jego przyjaźni z Jamesem Frazerem. Druga część koncentruje się na jego nowatorskim wkładzie w rozwój antropologii światowej oraz na uznaniu funkcjonalizmu. Trzecia część przedstawia i analizuje przyczyny braku znaczących przekładów dzieł Malinowskiego na język rumuński, mimo że jest on powszechnie znany w rumuńskim środowisku naukowym, badając pośrednią recepcję jego idei oraz wpływ źródeł wtórnych i badaczy pośredniczących. Wnioski płynące z badania opierają się na paradoksalnej, choć nieodosobnionej sytuacji polskiego antropologa i prowadzą do ogólnej refleksji nad rolą przekładów naukowych w kulturach posługujących się mniej znymi językami. Łącząc badania bibliograficzne, kontekst historyczny i analizę dzieł stosowanych, autor dowodzi, że wpływ Malinowskiego w Rumunii był w dużej mierze pośredni – kształtowany przez literaturę wtórną, adaptacje akademickie i wybiórce tłumaczenia. Takie podejście pozwala lepiej zrozumieć sytuację, w której dorobek Malinowskiego jest w Rumunii jednocześnie uznawany i wykorzystywany, pomimo niewielkiej liczby bezpośrednich tłumaczeń jego dzieł.

**Słowa kluczowe:** antropologia kulturowa, funkcjonalizm, recepcja pośrednia, tłumaczenia, polityka kulturalna, bibliografie

## Bronisław Malinowski und seine Rezeption in Rumänien

**Abstract:** Die Rezeption der Werke von Bronisław Malinowski in der rumänischen Kultur stellt eine paradoxe Situation dar. Der Beitrag hat zum Ziel, die Formen der Rezeption, die Anwendung sowie die Adaption der Schriften des polnischen Anthropologen in Rumänien zu analysieren. Die Arbeit ist in drei Abschnitte gegliedert. Der erste beschreibt den Beginn von Malinowskis akademischer Laufbahn in England während seiner Freundschaft mit James Frazer. Der zweite konzentriert sich auf seine innovativen Beiträge zur Weltanthropologie und auf die Anerkennung des Funktionalismus als ein etabliertes Paradigma. Der dritte Abschnitt untersucht die Gründe für das Fehlen bedeutender rumänischer Übersetzungen von Malinowskis Werken, obwohl er in der rumänischen Wissenschaft weithin bekannt ist. Dabei wird die indirekte Rezeption seiner Ideen sowie der Einfluss sekundärer Quellen und vermit-

telnder Forscher analysiert. Die Schlussfolgerungen des Beitrags beruhen auf dem paradoxen – wenn auch nicht einzigartigen – Fall des polnischen Anthropologen und führen zu einer weitergehenden Reflexion über die Rolle wissenschaftlicher Übersetzungen in Kulturen, die weniger verbreitete Sprachen verwenden. Durch die Verbindung von bibliografischer Forschung, historischem Kontext und der Analyse angewandter Arbeiten zeigt der Beitrag, dass Malinowskis Einfluss in Rumänien weitgehend indirekt war – geprägt von Sekundärliteratur, akademischen Adaptionen und selektiven Übersetzungen. Dieser Ansatz ermöglicht ein beseres Verständnis der Situation, in der Malinowskis Vermächtnis in Rumänien zugleich anerkannt und angewendet wird, trotz der begrenzten Verfügbarkeit direkter Übersetzungen seiner Werke.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Kulturanthropologie, Funktionalismus, abgeleitete Rezeption, Übersetzungen, Kulturpolitik, Bibliografien