

Trobriand Cricket: An Ingenious Response to Colonialism
1975 (53 min.)

FILMMAKER & ANTHROPOLOGIST: Jerry W. Leach

As the subtitle of the film proclaims, *Trobriand Cricket* is “An Ingenious Response to Colonialism.” The British introduced cricket to many of their colonies, and Jamaicans, Indians, and Pakistanis are among the world’s best cricketers today. But in the Trobriand Islands, cricket escaped from its English mold. In the hands of the Trobrianders, it was transformed drastically into an enterprise that reflects and supports Trobriand culture, not transplanted English culture.

The film was made by an American anthropologist, Jerry W. Leach. He very carefully constructed it to have the maximum impact on a British audience that knows cricket the way an American knows baseball. In his essay on the film (1988), Leach emphasized how virtually every scene shows the ingeniousness of their Trobriand response to colonialism. This film is certainly one of the most deliberately constructed of all of the ethnographic films. (Heider 1997:289).

Setup Questions

1. Pay attention to the first shots. They are intended to shock an English audience. Why?
2. How much has English cricket itself changed over the years?
3. How does English cricket reflect English cultural values?
4. What effects do the team dances have?
5. What is the function of Trobriand cricket?
6. How do you explain the outcome of this cricket match?
7. Are the officials corrupt?
8. Why does everyone play?
9. What role does magic play?
10. What is the Trobriand view of cricket?
11. Do you think that Trobriand cricket will change even more?
12. Did you understand the purpose of this film?
13. In other areas of Papua New Guinea the game is still played by the official rules. Why, then, did cricket change so much in the Trobriands?
14. During some of the discussion interviews, some of the men are chewing betel (actually a mixture of areca nut, betel leaf, and powdered lime that, when chewed, gives a slight narcotic effect, a mild tingle). As the men dip their sticks into the gourd holding powdered lime, they rattle the stick against the lip of the gourd. Do you think that this rattling noise is at all related to the conversation (A nonverbal part of the communication)?
15. Why is there no magic for catching the ball? (Is the narrator’s explanation believable? What about the out dances?)
16. In this film, you get some information directly from Trobrianders and other information from the (British) narrator. What is the difference? (Different sorts of information? Different effects?)
17. What role do the women play in all this?