Introduction

Argonauts Revisited

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The publication in 1922 of Bronisław Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* inaugurated a golden age in social anthropology. Revisionist views notwithstanding, it is still widely regarded as laying the ground for modern ethnographic methods, as well as being a landmark for the subfield later known as economic anthropology. Malinowski's analysis of Kula and the canoe-paddling seafarers who exchange shell artifacts whose high value depends on their unique histories has been appropriated and reinterpreted by many later authors. Almost immediately after their first publication, Marcel Mauss drew on these materials to illustrate his theory of the gift (Mauss 2015). He also suggested that the necklaces and armbands exchanged by the Trobrianders constituted a form of money, disagreeing with Malinowski on this point. Karl Polanyi read Malinowski in the 1930s. He was inspired by the Trobriand data to propose the concepts of reciprocity and redistribution as "forms of integration" in economies that were embedded in social organization as a whole, with market exchange playing at most a subordinate role (Polanyi 1944, 1957). *Argonauts* was thus prominent in the canon of Polanyi's "substantivist" school; but Malinowski's data were also subjected to "formalist" analysis, and later to feminist reinterpretations. His ethnography continues to feature in the very latest journal articles and textbooks in the twenty-first century.

The significance of *Argonauts* in the history of anthropology is uncontested: for functionalism as a general paradigm, and for the gestation of economic anthropology in particular. This book pays particular attention to what "economy" meant for Malinowski in successive phases of his career—between his intellectual formation in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and his later fieldwork-inspired analyses. Contributors consider various works, including his 1906 Kraków dissertation on the "economy of thought" and the article on "primitive economics" he published in *The Economic Journal* in 1921. His concern with economy and economics does not end with the publication of *Argonauts* a year later. A similarly dense monograph was devoted to Trobriand gardening and property arrangements (Malinowski 1935). Finally, in the summers of 1940 and 1941, Malinowski investigated very different forms of economy in Oaxaca, Mexico (Malinowski and de la Fuente 1982), while simultaneously drafting a last review article that remained unpublished at the time of his death (Malinowski 1940–41).

We ask: what is the legacy of Bronisław Malinowski for later generations of anthropologists investigating economy? Can production, exchange, and consumption in "tribal" and "peasant" societies be investigated in the terms of modern economics? Or is it a mistake to start from these categories, because social orders such as that of the Trobriand Islanders should be approached in their own terms, through relationships grounded in kinship and politics, and practices of magic and ritual? Can these stark alternatives somehow be combined? The chapters in this volume explore these and other questions raised by *Argonauts* in the light of its rich contents and myriad contexts. They investigate the European intellectual currents on which it draws as well as the Melanesian setting, the conditions in which it was written, the importance of this monograph for the career of the author, and its lasting influence, especially for economic anthropology. Our themes are far from antiquarian, for we are also interested in the ways in which *Argonauts* continues to provide a stimulus for contemporary anthropological analysis. Beyond the theoretical and methodological issues of a (sub)discipline, contributors engage with the direction of the anthropological field as a whole. How can the kind of fieldwork pioneered by Malinowski a century ago be adapted and "stretched" to serve the agendas of contemporary, postcolonial anthropology? Does the ethnographic method remain foundational?

Malinowski's Reception and the Organization of this Volume

Bronisław Malinowski has long been celebrated as the founder of a distinctive British school in social anthropology (Kuper 1973). In two decades of often frantic activity before his premature death in 1942, he aspired to exactly this. His publications, notably a series of monographs about the Trobriand Islanders of Melanesia, were immediately influential. Many are still read today, and not just by specialists on the region and historians of anthropology. From 1924 onward, his seminar at the London School of Economics was a training ground for an extraordinary mix of scholars, many of them from outside Britain, who came to dominate anthropological research in the twilight of the British Empire. The standards he set through his long-term field research ("participant observation" as it came to be known later) have remained the gold standard of the discipline into the new century.

And yet, the reception has been uneven. Some of Malinowski's own students expressed ambivalence, for example about the ultimate grounding of functionalist theory in human biological needs. One early participant in the seminar later expressed contempt for "a futile thinker" (Evans-Pritchard 1981: 199). Arguably, the "structural functionalism" of Malinowski's contemporary A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, with its emphasis on controlled comparisons, had more influence on the discipline's later theoretical development. So did the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss, which aimed to grasp universal characteristics of the human mind rather than describe how particular societies functioned to satisfy needs. Political and ethical problems came to the forefront following the publication of Malinowski's (1967) diary. Alongside the charge of personal racism, it was now alleged that Malinowski and the British school he shaped were complicit in colonial rule (Asad 1973; Geertz 1988). An influential historian of the discipline portrayed this school as exporting British folk models all around the world, especially in Africa (Kuklick 1993). Even the originality of Malinowski's field research is questioned: it has recently been argued that many others were practicing ethnographic methods in more or less scientific ways, well before Malinowski's work in the Trobriands (Rosa and Vermeulen 2022).

Even those who reached more positive verdicts on the life and work of Bronisław Malinowski sometimes did so on the basis of speculation and error. Edmund Leach attributed Malinowski's radical empiricism to a reading of contemporary American pragmatists, unaware that the innovator at the London School of Economics (LSE) had been deeply immersed in empiricist Viennese philosophy before his arrival in Britain (Leach 1957).[1] The source of his notion of needs (*Bedürfnisse*) was in Central Europe. Clouds of confusion concerning formative influences in Kraków and Leipzig before World War I were not dissipated until decades after his passing (Ellen et al. 1988; Young 2004). Anglophone scholars who had come to perceive Malinowski as an apologist for the British Empire struggled to appreciate the ways in which his worldview was decisively shaped by the continental empire of Austria-Hungary and his own identity as a Polish cultural nationalist (Gellner 1988). Those who had bemoaned Anglo-Saxon theoretical naivety in the work of Malinowski now had to recognize that in his youth he had been an outstanding philosopher; and that both his dissertation in the philosophy of science and his subsequent exposure to the economic teachings of the German Historical School contributed to the anthropology that he promoted so vigorously at the LSE from 1920 onward (Thornton with Skalník 1993). The first volume of Michael Young's definitive biography examined Malinowski's life and work up to 1918 (Young 2004). When the eagerly awaited second volume is published, there will no longer be any excuses for obfuscation and speculation in connecting the scholarly corpus to the life of the author.

This book focuses on the major work Malinowski published in 1922, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. This was the first of his Trobriand monographs and it has always been the best known. In addition to laying out the methods necessary for "scientific ethnology," *Argonauts* (as we shall refer to this work throughout) exemplifies Malinowski's approach to theory and is a key text in the emergence of economic anthropology. It also contains diffuse moral and political messages that can only be appreciated when placed in context: the British Empire was still a force to be reckoned with, but World War I had put an end to the empire of the Habsburgs and raised profound questions about Western civilization and the progress of humanity. These contexts are explored further in Part I of this book, in which we are pleased to be able to include a chapter by Michael Young documenting the circumstances in which Malinowski actually wrote *Argonauts* (in collaboration with his wife Elsie Masson).

We have a particular interest in how *Argonauts* gave birth to economic anthropology, which dominates Part II. Malinowski was keen to engage with the economists at the LSE, and thus with a discipline that was a great deal more powerful than his own.[2] How was he to make sense of production, distribution, and consumption in a society lacking money and markets, where these very concepts seemed to have no traction? His answers were shaped by his philosophical training as well as by his exposure to the evolutionism of historian Karl Bücher at the University of Leipzig. Although it was not the main theme of *Argonauts*, Malinowski's theorizing of *work* as it was performed within the complex whole of Trobriand society contrasted it with plantation labor and helped him to develop a concept of "tribal economy," in opposition to the market-dominated "national economies" studied by economists. This was not intended as a sharp relativizing move, since Malinowski explicitly hoped that further localized ethnographic studies like his own would open up comparative vistas and potentially lead to a rethinking of economic theory as well as concrete economic institutions. However, his inductive empiricism was at odds with the deductive models that were beginning to become dominant in mainstream (neoclassical) economics.

The Malinowskian contributions to the study of economy can be assessed from many angles. From one perspective, they are constructive provocations within the history of Western economic thought; from another, they are inadequate compromises that, due to their economic framing, end up imposing a Western view of the world where this is illegitimate. Malinowski himself must have had doubts about the work he published in the early 1920s: the concept of tribal economy was quietly dropped thereafter (Spittler 2008: 225–26). But the seeds sown here came to full fruition with the emergence of economic anthropology as a named subfield in the aftermath of World War II. We discuss these matters further below.

The very name "economic anthropology" continues to make some anthropologists uncomfortable. In Part III, contributors probe further into the contradictions of a stance that insists on the functional interconnections of all social domains but at the same time pulls them apart in analysis that is driven by the categories of the modern Western observer. For the Trobrianders, garden magicians and ancestral spirits are among the most powerful economic agents. Malinowski is also open to criticism for his neglect of recent colonial economic and political history, not to mention long-term history that was not available to him because important archaeological research had not yet been undertaken. The contributors to this section elaborate on points that Malinowski himself began to concede late in life: Kula expeditions and the exchanges that structure *Argonauts* cannot be taken out of time; they never formed a hermetically sealed, stable system. Rather, the salience of ceremonial exchange and limitations placed on accumulation in the Trobriands must be investigated comparatively with respect to belief systems, kinship organization, and a range of historical factors.

Finally, expanding on fragments of materials presented in several earlier chapters, the contributors to Part IV illustrate how the methods emphasized in *Argonauts*—including reworkings of the model developed by Malinowski to grasp Kula exchange in the Trobriand Islands—can be deployed in the contemporary world. The volume closes with an account of the continued relevance of the original Malinowskian methods for extending the boundaries of "digital ethnography" in an adjacent region of Oceania.

Argonauts, Functionalism, and the Ethnographic Method

Astute authorial self-insinuation and the sheer remoteness of the Trobriand Islands at the eastern end of Papua New Guinea have helped Malinowski's first monograph retain its place in the canon. The construction of an unsullied tribe, savage yet entirely rational in ways that neither other travelers nor armchair scholars in the metropolis could readily appreciate, was crucial to Malinowski's reconstruction of the disciplinary field on scientific foundations. But what exactly was *Argonauts* all about, and how did it establish a new theoretical paradigm as well as new methods?

Malinowski's account of the Kula has been summarized in countless anthropology textbooks. We repeat this here in schematic form, using the "ethnographic present." It involves systematic exchange between trading partners. Annual visits are undertaken by these partners, traveling in canoes, who exchange highly valued shell ornaments: necklaces (*soulava*) and armbands (*mwali*). The voyages require considerable time and effort, not to mention the dangers involved in deep-sea navigation. The main motivation was seen by Malinowski in terms of social function. Each participant is linked to two partners: one partner trading a necklace for an armband of equivalent value, and the other making a reverse exchange of an armband for a necklace. Each of those partners has an additional connection linking him to a further trader, and the system of partnerships eventually forms a circle, with necklaces circulating in one direction while armbands travel in the other. The circle links more than a dozen islands over hundreds of miles of ocean. Malinowski's analysis of its function was threefold. First, it establishes relations among the inhabitants of different islands, maintaining peaceful contact and communication over great distances with trading partners, some of whom have no language in common. Second, it enables the *gimwali* barter of more useful items, piggybacking on that of the shell valuables. Third, since hereditary chiefs own the most important shell valuables and are responsible for initiating voyages, it enhances the status of these chiefs (White 2003).

This, in briefest outline, gives a sense of Malinowski's findings. The high quality of his data was recognized from the start. Economic anthropologists have continued to mine the Trobriand corpus in putting forward their own ideas, for instance concerning money (Hart 1986) and value (Graeber 2001). *Argonauts* has been revisited by countless regional specialists in the century since its first publication. Kula expeditions continued to the end of the colonial era in 1975 and after independence. They were the subject of a large international conference in Cambridge in 1978 (Leach and Leach 1983). New generations of researchers discovered gaps, for example concerning the agency of women (Weiner 1976; Strathern 1988), and also that of the spirits (Mosko 2017, this volume). From the radical perspective of Marilyn Strathern, Malinowski's alleged demolition of "economic man" is based on erroneous premises, because he fails to realize that personhood in Melanesia is constructed on different foundations from the Euro-American individual.

But each successive critique has only cemented the iconic status of Malinowski's book in terms of the fieldwork methods it exemplified. Coming "off the veranda" and living in a tent among the natives "on the ground" enabled a detailed observation of everyday practices. Searching for the deeper significance of these made it possible to see a socioeconomic phenomenon in a far-off setting as contributing to the formation of long-lasting relationships and interdependencies. That is, it made a "functionalist" analysis possible. This approach took anthropology into the realm of methodical social science rather than leaving it as a collection of facts about obscure rituals and inexplicable practices. Crucially, as Malinowski developed it, attention needed to be paid to individual behaviors, psyches, and motivations. The ethnographic method made it possible for an anthropologist to observe discrepancies between reported custom and actual behavior, thus recognizing that individuals are not routinely governed by—or slaves to—such custom.

When Malinowski established his "Thursday seminar" at the LSE, he found a means of inculcating the importance of a fieldwork-based approach to a generation of scholars, including an inner circle of "Mandarins" (Morrow 2016: 90) but also many—like Monica Hunter and Godfrey Wilson, enrolled at Oxbridge—who attended as "guests" rather than registered students (ibid: 89). Not all accepted his style of analysis. Many had fierce debates over "whether or not to be functionalists" (ibid.: 90): some ended up opting, instead, for the "structural functionalism" of Radcliffe-Brown or Fortes's "descent theory." But while the theoretical approach was increasingly contested, the ethnographic method was abiding. These scholars went on, in turn, to hold professorial and other positions at a range of universities, both in Britain and abroad (Foks 2023).

A Century of Ethnographic Economic Anthropology

An early assessment of "The Place of Malinowski in Economic Anthropology" was provided under that title by Raymond Firth in the 1957 volume that he edited. While lauding the ethnographic accomplishments, Firth was critical of his teacher's failure to quantify any of the exchanges he documented and his general lack of sophistication in economics. He complained, for example, about Malinowski's muddled language in describing the "utility" of Trobriand labor: "This is not the terminology of economics, it is almost the language of the housewife" (Firth 1957: 220).

Malinowski has been defended against Firth's "formalist" criticism from quite different angles. On the one hand, the self-proclaimed "substantivist" Marshall Sahlins found the very lack of professional expertise attractive, since the anthropologist should be more interested in the (emic) perspective of the housewife than in the (etic) imposition of the analytic categories of a modern economist (Sahlins 1974: 186). On the other hand, Scott Cook (trained in economics and highly critical of substantivism) found Malinowski to have a shrewd grasp of the economic principles of the market system that he investigated in Oaxaca at the very end of his life (Cook 2017; Cook and Young 2016). Sahlins and Cook belonged to opposing camps in the polemical debates between substantivists and their formalist critics in the 1960s that constituted a coming of age for the field by now known as economic anthropology. Neither school took account of Malinowski's early training in continental Europe (nor indeed did his student Firth). His contribution to the emergence of economic anthropology as a (sub)discipline is generally perceived as weak, primarily ethnographic in character. The later, more intellectually focused, debates are associated primarily with another Central European, Karl Polanyi, who drew heavily on Malinowski's Trobriand data in his seminal work (Polanyi 1944). But a closer look at the background and career of the author of *Argonauts* is instructive for a more adequate grasp of theorizing in this field.

Malinowski was born in Kraków in 1884, two years before Polanyi was born in Vienna.[3] As intellectuals in the last decades of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, both were immersed in the slow consolidation of a new social order in a region that was as peripheral to the advanced centers of European capitalism then as it is today. They imbibed similar intellectual currents in their respective universities. Positivists were in the ascendant as political economy morphed into neoclassical economics in the closing decades of the nineteenth century (Gregory, this volume). Malinowski received no training in any version of economics in Kraków; but the title of his doctoral dissertation, defended at the Jagiellonian University in 1906, was "On the Principle of the Economy of Thought" (*O zasadzie ekonomii myślenia*) (Malinowski 1993: 89–115). This was a study of the limitations of positivist philosophy, particularly the ideas of Ernst Mach, who was extremely influential at the time. The same works of Mach were imbibed by Karl Polanyi almost simultaneously in Budapest. Malinowski was attracted by Mach's efforts to theorize science on the basis of concepts of minima and maxima and "least effort," though he also expressed criticisms. The excellence of this dissertation secured its author the *Habilitacja* scholarship that enabled him to move to London and begin his celebrated association with the LSE.

"Economy of thinking," according to the young Malinowski, is an invention of late nineteenth-century thinkers. But he proceeds at once to probe the Greek etymology of *oikonomia*, meaning management, be it of "livestock, a social group, or a physical system" (Malinowski 1993: 91). More specifically:

> we understand by economy not management in general but good management. Since the worth of management is measured by the magnitude of the objectives achieved in relation to the means used, we may call economy, in the specific sense of this word, namely thrift, a minimum outlay with the same gain, or a maximum gain achieved with the same means; both formulations come to the same thing. (ibid.)

Although this work focuses on the positivists, it also reveals the influence of Malinowski's early reading of Nietzsche (Thornton with Skalník 1993: 16–26). He concludes that it is impossible to do away with metaphysics altogether. Economy is the basis of Mach's philosophy of science, which posits a physiological basis in the mind of the scientist, whose task is to explain physical phenomena as efficiently as possible. Mach privileges biology and the senses, but he is simultaneously an idealist and a relativist who denies the reality of an empirical world "out there." For Malinowski, however, the "economy of thought" has to be made concrete and contextualized: in other words, connected to particular human beings and their communities. In this way, the Kraków dissertation and Malinowski's later accomplishments as an ethnographer and theoretician of functionalism in terms of biological needs were connected.

These notions of economy, thrift, and efficiency must be placed in a range of contexts. Intellectually, Ernst Mach engaged with the political economist Emanuel Herrmann (Staley, this volume). They were contemporaries of Carl Menger, one of the founders of neoclassical "marginalist" economics from the 1870s. Mach's deployment of *Ökonomie* in his philosophy of science has an affinity with the marginalism of the neoclassicals (and with a more specific Austrian tradition that later included Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich August von Hayek), notwithstanding the fact that the emerging economic science emphasized deductive methods. This tradition emphasizes the choices made by firms and individuals in ways presumed to be rational, that is, to maximize profits and satisfaction respectively.

From Mach, Malinowski also learned that "facts" depend logically on the theory that has been empirically deployed to collect and select them. But the initial theory is subject to testing (later philosophers of science would develop the concept of falsification) and Mach's perspective therefore opened up avenues to develop new ideas and theories promiscuously on the basis of empirical data. As Thornton with Skalník (1993: 35) argues: "In accepting Mach's belief that 'theory creates facts,' [Malinowski's] openness to many theoretical perspectives led him to collect and to observe a great many facts."

After the ceremonial award of his doctorate in 1908, Malinowski moved initially to Leipzig, where he was exposed to the teachings of an influential representative of very different ways of thinking about economy. The economic historian Karl Bücher taught universal laws of development, with the principles of economic organization changing in each successive stage. Bücher hypothesized an initial "pre-economic" condition. The main feature of this *Urgesellschaft* (primitive society) was the "individual search for food." This stage was followed by the "closed household economy," traces of which could still be observed in the European peasantry. But selfsufficient households had generally been overtaken by more complex forms of production and exchange, culminating in the *Nationalökonomie* of the modern state. Karl Bücher represented an empirical *Volkswirtschaftslehre* ("Teaching the People's Economy") rather than an abstract *Ökonomie.* His interest in concrete institutions placed him closer theoretically to Gustav von Schmoller and the Berlin-based Historical School, though he was respectful toward the general theories put forward by scholars based in the Habsburg empire such as Mach and Menger (Hann and Hart 2011: 39–41).

Malinowski's first explicit engagement with economic anthropology (neither the name nor the subfield yet existed) was a 1912 chapter in English in a Festschrift for Edward Westermarck. This paper, based on secondary literature, contains numerous echoes of Bücher (Firth 1957: 211). Malinowski draws an evolutionist distinction between economic and pre-economic labor to argue that only through magic and ritual can primitive man be mobilized to carry out productive activity efficiently in the modern sense (see Smith, this volume). However, following his Trobriand fieldwork, Malinowski became critical of Bücher, while simultaneously polemicizing against mainstream economics and rejecting the concept of "economic man." The complex organization of ceremonial exchange in the Trobriand "tribal economy" contradicted the assumptions of Bücher's first two stages. It was clear that the principle of least effort did not have universal validity, since the natives of Kiriwina on the Trobriand Islands toiled in their gardens to produce many more yams than they could consume (but see Gregory, this volume). This "surplus" was transferred to matrilineal kin in the form of *urigubu* payments, and to chiefs.

Before writing up his Trobriand analyses, Malinowski read two major works of mainstream economics in the English language: Alfred Marshall's *Principles of Economics* and Irving Fisher's *Purchasing Power of Money* (Young 2004: 603). His seminal publications in the early 1920s reveal a struggle to reconcile the contrasting senses of "economy" to which he had been exposed in his training in continental Europe: on the one hand, rational choice-making to maximize satisfactions; and on the other, a substantive embedding of production, exchange, and consumption in institutions that were locally rooted and regulated by custom, practices, and above all values. The bias of the Trobriand publications is to the latter. Thus, the principle of least effort is rejected again in *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* (1935). Here we learn more about the aesthetic values of maintaining a beautiful yam garden, which have implications for social emulation and "morals." It is bad manners to call a gardener lazy; yet some clearly are, and their reputation suffers in consequence. On the other hand, it is also unwise to be too proficient and diligent. This can lead to accusations of vanity, greed, and even sorcery.[4] Malinowski's lively accounts of individual agency are consistent with his own values and what might be termed his political agenda, which is to refute the notions of collective ownership and primitive communism that were current in early twentieth-century Europe, inside anthropology as well as outside it. Malinowski showed that the "tribal economy" was made up of individual actors who interacted in complex ways. The key to social organization was to be found in the property system, above all in how land was held and used by persons and kin groups. Much of this fitted very well with what was later consolidated in the substantivist school of Karl Polanyi.

However, at his academic base in the 1930s the discipline of economics was developing quite differently. Whether or not Malinowski interacted with John Maynard Keynes through his Bloomsbury connections, or with Lord Lionel Robbins and Friedrich Hayek in the senior common room at the LSE, he must have had some awareness of developments in the larger discipline. The LSE was a stronghold of the emerging neoclassical orthodoxy, in which it was taken for granted that this version of economics had universal validity. Raymond Firth applied this paradigm to the Polynesian island of Tikopia (Firth 1939). Junior members of the LSE seminar working in less remote locations such as the African colonies were even more attracted to the neoclassical approach to economy, in terms of individuals making choices in conditions of scarcity. After the outbreak of World War II, extending his stay in the United States, Malinowski himself undertook field research with the help of a local partner in peasant marketplaces in Mexico (Malinowski and de la Fuente 1982). He found an equivalent of Trobriand Kula in the regional marketing system of the Oaxaca Valley, an institution that integrated far-flung communities, many of them economically more specialized than those of the Trobriands (Cook 2017). Oaxaca commodity markets were highly monetized, yet dominated by peasant-artisans whose sociocultural relations were as complex as those of Melanesia. Malinowski died in 1942 and never wrote up this work in a theoretical framework comparable to that of the "tribal economy" he had proposed two decades earlier for the case of the Trobriand Islands.

While engaging with this new material, Malinowski wrote a lengthy review of a landmark volume by Melville Herskovits (Herskovits 1940; Malinowski 1940–41). His major critique of Herskovits was an echo of the Machian arguments he analyzed in his Kraków dissertation: Malinowski insisted on the primacy of the empirical complexity uncovered by the fieldworker; theorization should only follow later. Yet in the same document he went out of his way to praise the new work of Firth, together with that of David Goodfellow in South Africa (Goodfellow 1939). This represented a more "aggressively neoclassicist" approach than anything advocated by Herskovits (Cook and Young 2016: 668, 671). To judge from this evidence, influenced both by what he had observed on the ground in the monetized economy of Oaxaca as well as the neoclassical approaches that dominated in London, by the 1940s Malinowski was probably ready to grant the rational choice principles of microeconomics more general, perhaps even universal validity. Yet he simultaneously upheld an institutionalist, substantivist approach to understanding particular economies and the relationships between them. He maintained the position that fieldwork should be a basis for fresh theorizing. Yet, for all the rich detail in his notebooks from Oaxaca in 1940 and 1941, there is no sign that the unfinished research in Mexico would yield a new theoretical paradigm.[5]

The arguments of both Herskovits and Malinowski are replete with inconsistencies, even contradictions (Cook and Young 2016). Malinowski tended to see strategizing, maximizing individuals everywhere (Parry 1986: 454), a penchant that may have owed at least as much to his intellectual trajectory in Central Europe as to later influences at the LSE. Toward the end of his life, having embarked on research into peasant markets in Mexico, he seems to have been more willing to endorse theories extrapolated from mainstream economics. He stops short of postulating a new subdiscipline called "economic anthropology." In place of "primitive economics" and "tribal economy," his framework when writing *Argonauts*, by the time of his death, with the Oaxaca project still unfinished, in his unpublished review of Herskovits he offers "ethnographic economics" (Malinowski 1940–41; Cook and Young 2016: 659–60).

Malinowski never used the concept of "embeddedness," which later became the mantra of the substantivist school.[6] He never recommends a strong relativism, in which the world consists of incommensurable local models. He does not reduce economics to culture (Gudeman 1986). Like Polanyi, he was interested in generalizations and the comparison of types of economy. Both were uncomfortable about defining these types simplistically in terms of evolution. Malinowski would surely have objected to the attempt by Janet Tai Landa (representative of the so-called "new institutionalism" that built on earlier "formalist" approaches and enjoyed considerable popularity in the last decades of the twentieth century) to rationalize Kula exchanges from the point of view of an evolutionary economics driven by rational choices to minimize transaction costs (Landa 1994).[7] What Malinowski accomplished in *Argonauts* and repeated in *Coral Gardens* was to demonstrate that the study of economy must be adapted to prevailing institutions. It must include the study of beliefs and values as well as material flows. This is why Malinowski's "ethnographic economics" was congenial to the Polanyians; and why it was defended by Sahlins against the reservations expressed by Firth; and why it continues to inspire anthropological approaches to economy in the twenty-first century.

The Chapters

We have found it convenient to organize the volume in four parts, even though some chapters touch on multiple themes and might have been classified differently. The first four chapters situate *Argonauts* in a series of contexts. Grażyna Kubica provides insight into Malinowski's family background, supplementing the information presented by Michael Young (2004) in his biography with archival material from the Archive of the Jagiellonian University and other sources. She demolishes the common assumption (even "myth," possibly promoted by Malinowski himself) that he was a Polish aristocrat. In fact, he belonged to the emerging, "post-noble," intelligentsia—a social *stratum* rather than a *class*—whose cultural capital far outstripped their wealth but who remained aloof from the masses. The son of a poorly paid professor of Slavic linguistics at the Jagiellonian University who died when his only child was still a schoolboy, Malinowski grew up practicing "snobbery on a shoestring." This background, argues Kubica, affected the way he interacted with white settlers and colonial officers in Melanesia—and perhaps also his understanding of the sociopolitical hierarchies of Trobriand society.

Moving on to the moment of post-fieldwork, Michael Young's chapter discusses the writing of *Argonauts* in 1921, when Malinowski and his wife Elsie, together with their new baby, took up residence on Tenerife. Malinowski had initially planned a comprehensive volume on the life of the islanders entitled "Kiriwina," but soon realized that this would be impossible. What was originally intended as a mere chapter of that volume turned into a volume of its own; its contents and approach are carefully summarized in the chapter. Elsie assisted with the writing in crucial ways, as he acknowledged by writing on the flyleaf of the copy he eventually gave her—she "had half the share at least and more than half the merit"—but her name was missing, along with those of many others who assisted, from the publication. With what appears, in retrospect, to be an extraordinary lack of foresight, Macmillan declined to take it on, on the grounds that "it is very difficult to get a sale" for "these anthropological books." *Argonauts* has been in print in the Routledge catalogue ever since.

Delineating the functionalist approach that, first outlined in *Argonauts*, would go on to become a hallmark of the Malinowskian school (albeit one that attracted criticism from the beginning), Adam Kuper's chapter shows how the other features of Malinowski's "new paradigm" informed and underpinned that approach. In setting out the "function" of rituals and institutions, Malinowski saw the individual as logically prior to the community. Averse to Durkheimian-style holism, he saw the "give and take" of exchange, although it contributed to solidarity and was "organized and regulated by custom," as being initiated by individuals who manipulate rules to suit themselves. Here, the "imponderabilia of actual life" (especially those aspects that appeared not to fit with homogenizing views of custom) were important. The chapter also points to a key "flaw" of such work, namely Malinowski's ignoring of "external influences."

While this may have been true of *Argonauts* itself, as Freddy Foks shows in his chapter, Malinowski was well aware of the "extractive economic regime" that was unfolding in the Western Pacific during this period. Foks characterizes Malinowski's attitude toward plantation labor as "ambivalent." He postulates the Kula as the "mirror image" of that system of production, and thus a critique of the utilitarian or profit-driven economics that undermined evolved native economies. To draw labor away from this system via recruitment would necessarily degrade the economy. Malinowski, shows Foks, supported a protectionist approach called "trusteeship." He supported chiefly rule (up to a point) in the "interests of the natives," and was, in effect, an "anti-colonial imperialist."

Several chapters explore the nature of economy and economic explanation. The fact that production, exchange, and consumption were regulated by custom and kinship rather than money and markets did not mean that natives were not "economically minded." This fundamental point is explored further by Rachel Smith in the first chapter in Part II. Her particular focus is on "incentives to work," and on Malinowski's distinction between the drudgery of labor for white plantation owners and the fulfilling character of work done in the local setting where work "makes life worth living." Drawing (as do Foks and Staley) on evidence given by Malinowski in 1916 to a parliamentary commission investigating the Labor Question, Smith highlights the problematic boundary between the "economic" and the "non-economic" or what Malinowski called "not purely economical." If the "incentive" to cooperate with others in productive activities lay in magic, religion, or kinship organization, the implication was that these activities would have to be recognized as "economic." Malinowski evidently felt that the motives of Indigenous peoples were structured according to an entirely different and incompatible social system.

Richard Staley traces continuities in Malinowski's concept of the economic from his dissertation work in Kraków through to the fieldwork-based publications that culminated in *Argonauts*. Respecting the native point of view in its own terms will, Malinowski argues at the end of the book, provide the basis for a true "Science of Man" and for a better understanding by Europeans of their own culture. According to Staley, while the Trobriands are presented as an allegory of the world economy with its industrial, agricultural, and fishing centers and international trade, Malinowski nonetheless relativizes Euro-American assumptions (both expert and lay) about economy and economics. But although his concept of tribal economy enabled him to represent the integrity of native life and customs, it limited his ability to recognize and represent critical elements of its engagement with other economies.

The dichotomy of knowability versus uncertainty is central to Chris Gregory's chapter. He takes us back to debates about economy in the early years of the twentieth century concerning the predictability of economic outcomes and demonstrates that Malinowski played a key role in these. John Maynard Keynes and Malinowski were both concerned to demonstrate how people deal with the unknowable. Keynes, like others in the Bloomsbury group, was opposed to cold Benthamite calculation. His "theory of the knowability of the unknowable reveals a paradox that lies at the heart of mainstream theory of entrepreneurial decision-making, namely, that the necessity for action in the face of incalculable economic uncertainty leads to the paradox of having to measure the unmeasurable" (see p. 154). Economists such as Frank Knight could not grasp uncertainty (though their successors have presumed to do so down to the present day). The solution in the Trobriand Islands lies in "meaningless words:" magical chants help the islanders to cope with uncertainty in verbal rather than numerical terms.

Benoît de L'Estoile challenges the framework in which, he claims, economic anthropology has been trapped since the pioneering work of Malinowski. Despite the best efforts of Malinowski to open up new horizons for anthropology by studying primitive economic life alongside later forms, anthropology has thrived as the study of 'other economies,' largely on the periphery of capitalist markets. Both in *Argonauts* and in his programmatic article in *The Economic Journal* published in the previous year, Malinowski argued that the Trobriand Islanders had a form of organized economy both equivalent to and different from the one in the modern West. To analyze this economy, he used familiar terms such as production, work, consumption, and division of labor. For de L'Estoile, this betrays an inability to shed "our own Western native ontological beliefs and categories" (p. 153) accentuated by anthropologists' keenness to be taken seriously by "real" economists. In place of this distorted "economic framing," he proposes fieldwork-based emic visions of economic life that he interprets in terms of the ancient Greek word *oikonomia*, emphasizing not rational management but the dimensions of "government" and "autonomy." In contemporary Latin America, it is precisely people's vulnerability to the imposition of random government forces that makes "control" within the house so important.

In addition to considering political issues such as control, might Malinowski have paid more attention to other, seemingly "non-economic," aspects of the systems he plotted, such as the magic spells and incantations he detailed? And can modern-day anthropologists think more seriously about the broader topic of time and how changes have been—and perhaps still are—incorporated in system-oriented (once called "synchronic") analyses like that of the smoothly operating Kula? The exploration of how colonial arrangements enabled and influenced Malinowski's views on exchange, labor, and the like opens up questions such as: what happened earlier—and why have we not consulted the archaeological record to find out? Broadening the discussion beyond Papua New Guinea, might Kula-type arrangements be found in other settings? The three chapters of Part III revisit Malinowski's Trobriand ethnography from these perspectives.

Mark Mosko looks again at the relation between economic and non-economic with reference to cosmology. Based on long-term fieldwork on Kiriwina, his chapter suggests that Malinowski's determination to find something "economic" in all Trobriand activity led him to underestimate otherworldly economic agency and thus portray "tribal economy" in narrowly materialist terms. Mosko sees Malinowski's understandings of the meaning of "labor" as pragmatic and as underpinning a rigid divide between the economic and the non-economic (more or less equivalent to the divide between living beings in the here-and-now and those that exist beyond). The dense verbiage used by magicians that Gregory notes in his chapter did not, claims Mosko, work in the quasi-mechanical manner Malinowski presumed. Rather, it functioned to communicate with ancestral spirits (*baloma*). Acknowledging this allows one to recognize that spirits have their own Kula and thereby to shed new light on the celebrated "virgin birth" debate. Mosko concludes by noting that Malinowski's neglect of this dimension was only obliquely critiqued in Marcel Mauss's *The Gift*.

Many critics of Malinowskian functionalism, and of *Argonauts* in particular, have complained about the neglect of history. Hans Steinmüller draws on both archaeological and ethnographic data to argue that "the ethnographic Kula was a relatively recent invention, and that the history of the Kula was intimately tied in with changes in ecology, warfare, and memory." He shows that for Malinowski "to emphasize rational rule-following, it was necessary to downplay violence and creativity": specifically, the warring between islanders that was brought to an end by colonial "pacification." This suppression of warfare likely released valuables into the exchange system, thus inflating the worth of Kula valuables and setting the stage for the emergence of "big men." The rules of the Kula reflect long-term creative adaptations. Neglecting such changes, according to Steinmüller, serves to simplify and abstract the nature of this exchange system. It led to a model called "reciprocity" that mistakenly presupposed the equality of the various parties involved in exchanges.

Yongjia Liang also pursues a historical approach to the Kula, in this case through the lens of the *Laozi*, a Chinese literary work of the sixth century BCE. Here, too, the attribution of high value to goods that cannot be accumulated but must be circulated functions to integrate societies while keeping them small and peaceful. The chapter explores parallels between Laozi's idealized political system and "dual chiefship" in the Trobriands, where there is a paradoxical opposition between kinship-based exchange and land-based administration. Matrilineal kinship dilutes the potential for monopoly by allowing for alternative social orders. At least temporarily, it held these internal tensions in balance, where resolving them would have moved the system irrevocably toward patriliny (and hierarchy). At a metatheoretical level, Liang argues that introducing a Sinic civilizational perspective alongside the dominant Greco-Roman episteme (cf. de L'Estoile, whose radical critique of "economic framing" remains within the Western universalist tradition) can make anthropology more truly global. He rejects a relativist collapsing of analysis into a plethora of non-Western exceptionalisms.

We close with three more chapters illustrating how the influence of *Argonauts* has traveled and continues to make itself felt in space and time. Maxim Bolt seizes on the idea of "circulation," a notion with a long history in political economy and central in very literal ways to Malinowski's analysis of the Kula. In Bolt's study of newly instantiated private property in urban South Africa, in a postapartheid setting formerly characterized by communal or family ownership, houses are transferred from the hands of a group in one generation into the hands of a specific individual in the next. In a context of fracture and dispute, pathways of value can create circuits (or fail to do so); conceptions of movement and circulation can coexist within a single field; and forward movement and change can coexist with reversal and repetition. While "folk models" of circulation imply quasi-automatic processes of flow and onward movement in a single direction, the ethnographer is able to show how much more complicated possession and ownership are in reality—not unlike Kula circulation itself.

Sociologists, too, have drawn on *Argonauts* for inspiration, particularly in South America. A Malinowskian-style ethnographic approach informs Ariel Wilkis's analysis of money in Argentina, although he departs from Malinowski in identifying a range of diverse types (or "pieces") of money in the two contrasting settings he has investigated. Among the poor of Buenos Aires, a householder parcels her finances up into separate conceptual bundles ("pieces") occasionally converting one into the other strategically, in a manner informed by moral calculation, political necessity, or the need for social continuity. In the countryside, at a time when the peso was subject to wild fluctuations and the US dollar was seen as "healthy" by contrast, farmers used the soybean for speculation, alternately converting or cannily withholding it to maximize returns. Overall, the chapter explores how "social ties, economic transactions, and political actions are configured by monetary hierarchies that organize and classify the uses, meanings, and functions of money."

Finally, we return to the Pacific, in this case to Solomon Islands, where Geoffrey Hobbis and Stephanie Ketterer Hobbis report on latecomers to digitalization, delayed by a range of environmental, infrastructural, and geographic barriers. The digital practices they investigate turn out to be both "in but also beyond" capitalism. To understand them, "digital ethnography" is not sufficient. Like the Argonauts of Malinowski's account, their interlocutors "surf the world wide web to build, maintain, and strengthen relationships of perpetual mutual indebtedness." Wealth earned through enterprise is valued, but must be redistributed rather than hoarded; doing so enables them to acquire relational fortune and fame. The economic lives of city-dwellers and the inhabitants of remote Malaita are very different: in the latter, the "bush internet" consists of a unique human infrastructure in which people download files and move them along Kula-like pathways. In a human–object communications network that brings the country into a new sort of "ring," these files are carried in pockets, bags, and wallets and transported on trucks and in ships, dugout canoes, and banana boats, creating and affirming relationships of perpetual mutual indebtedness.

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Notes

1. Adam Kuper (this volume) continues to find merit in Leach's account on the grounds that American pragmatism was "fashionable" in England before World War I.
2. In the early 1920s, the subject was still popularly known as ethnology and Malinowski followed this usage. However, the designation "social anthropology" was gaining ground thanks to James Frazer, who chose this name for his chair at Liverpool in 1907, and also to R. R. Marett in Oxford. Given his formation in Central Europe, Malinowski might have been inclined to opt for cultural anthropology when specifying the title of his LSE readership in 1923; but the concept of culture was claimed (in quite specific ways) by local rivals at University College; see Firth (1988: 38–39).
3. Polanyi, though born in Vienna, grew up in Budapest. Like Malinowski, he was a cultural nationalist: a patriotic Hungarian throughout his life, most of which was spent in exile. Polanyi's bourgeois family was prosperous in comparison with the academic household in which Malinowski was raised in Kraków, but much of the family's wealth disappeared with a bankruptcy in 1906. Malinowski's family experienced financial pressures following the death of his father, a university professor (see Kubica, this volume).
4. Malinowski (1935, vol. 1: 175–176). Nowhere does Malinowski use the concept of a moral economy. But in the second volume of *Coral Gardens* he does write of "the moral tradition of a tribe"; he puts "economic values and morality" on a par with hunger and sex as determinants of "vital interests" (ibid., vol. 2: 47; cited in Spittler 2008: 239).
5. Malinowski's concerns in the unfinished Oaxaca project can be glossed as Weberian (Cook and Young 2016: 673). It is perhaps more accurate to state that the lasting legacy of his studies of Mach was a functionalism that was compatible with quite different traditions in social and political theory. Scott Cook finds the contributions of Herskovits to be confused and contradictory; it is hard to avoid reaching the same conclusion about the work of Malinowski himself.

6. The first anthropologist to use this metaphor was Malinowski's contemporary Richard Thurnwald (Firth 1972; Thurnwald 1932). Polanyi drew heavily on both Malinowski and Thurnwald in proposing his own concepts for the comparative analysis of economies not dominated by market exchange, namely reciprocity and redistribution; see Polanyi (1957).
7. Stephen Gudeman has repeatedly critiqued the work of Landa; see, e.g., Gudeman (2005: 138–40).

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