

# Malinowski and the Argonauts: a hundred years of economic anthropology and the ethnographic method

4-5 July, 2022

Anthropology of Economy Programme, LSE  
Max Planck/Cambridge Centre for Ethics, Economy and Social Change



## Centenary workshop – call for papers

Date: 4-5 July 2022

Venue: LSE, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE

The publication in 1922 of Bronislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* inaugurated a golden age in social anthropology. Recent revisionist views notwithstanding, it is widely regarded as inaugurating modern ethnographic methods, as well as being a landmark for the sub-field later known as economic anthropology. Malinowski's analysis of *kula* and *gimwali* has been appropriated by many later authors, including Marcel Mauss and Karl Polanyi. It has been prominent in the "substantivist" canon, but also subject to "formalist" as well as feminist reinterpretations. The ethnographic materials presented by Malinowski continue to feature in the very latest journal articles and textbooks in the twenty-first century.



Send paper proposals/abstracts by 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022 to the organisers: Deborah James [d.a.james@lse.ac.uk](mailto:d.a.james@lse.ac.uk) and Chris Hann [hann@eth.mpg.de](mailto:hann@eth.mpg.de)

The workshop will run along several dimensions. What did "economy" mean for Malinowski in successive phases of his career, between his formation in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and his last project in Mexico? We encourage engagement with earlier and later publications: his Cracow dissertation on the "economy of thought", the article on "primitive economics" published in the *Economic Journal* in 1921, the monograph *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, with its rich materials on garden work and property, and the posthumous study of a Mexican market system (co-authored with Julio de la Fuente).

The significance of *Argonauts* for anthropological theory is uncontested. Can production, exchange and consumption in "tribal" societies be investigated in the terms of modern economics, or should social orders such as that of the Trobriand islanders be approached through relationships grounded in kinship and politics, and practices of magic and ritual? Malinowski's work addresses the core questions of economic anthropology, a field that flourishes in very different global and intellectual contexts a century later.

Beyond the foundational theoretical issues of a sub-discipline, the workshop will engage with questions of method and the direction of the discipline. 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 to the discipline?