

THE ARGONAUTS AS A CLASSIC OF SOCIOLOGY: MALINOWSKI AND THE RECENT HISTORY OF NEW ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY

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Introduction

At the end of 2021, I received an email from Deborah James, director of the Department of Anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She invited me to attend an event she was jointly organizing with Chris Hann from the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in order to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of Bronislaw Malinowski's celebrated work *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (Malinowski, 1922). The event was to be a workshop that would be held at the same institution where the Polish anthropologist had taught for so many years. In her kind invitation, Deborah said, "Yes, I know you aren't technically an anthropologist, but..." It was, after all, paradoxical for her to invite an economic sociologist—and one from Argentina, at that!—to pay homage to one of the foremost works of economic anthropology. Going over the list of invited guests, the paradox became even more apparent. I was the only economic sociologist to be invited.

In the chapter that follows below, I want to explore this paradox by looking at how the "new" economic sociology took shape as a field¹. I am particularly interested here in the exchange between sociology and anthropology in different

academic contexts and how these dynamics created different conditions for recognizing *The Argonauts* as a classic work of sociology.

The invitation I received is indicative of the frequent and intense institutional and intellectual exchanges between sociology and the anthropology. These are particularly important to me, as they have played a major part in my career as an economic sociologist. In order to understand this connection, it is necessary to reconstruct the relationship between the new economic sociology in the United States and France and economic anthropology, focusing particularly on the scant attention paid to *The Argonauts* in these exchanges. The exchanges between these two subfields in different geographic regions, institutional frameworks, and within other academic traditions has proven especially informative. I am specifically referring here to the context in which new economic sociology developed in the Southern Cone—particularly in Argentina—and the ties it forged to Brazilian anthropology.

Unlike the experiences within "core academia" (Beigel, 2016), the consolidation of economic sociology in these countries since the 2000s has created more favourable conditions for exchanges between economic sociologists and anthropologists. This has enabled less canonical works (from the perspective of the core academia) to be considered as part of the intellectual repertoire of the economic sociologists of the Southern Cone. In particular, the new economic sociology of Argentina demonstrates certain a structural characteristic in the way it connected to the intellectual production of the core academia. Due to its position on the global periphery, Argentina has paid attention to intellectual trends of the United States and Europe while, at the same time, taking a more "eclectic" and less conditioned approach to the canons established in these regions. This structural trait, which was present in the origins of Argentine sociology (Blanco, 2006), can also be seen in the unique configuration of the new economic sociology in the Southern Cone in comparison to the sociologies of the United States or Europe.

This chapter reconstructs the varying paths of *The Argonauts* in the new economic sociology of three academic settings, two "core" (the U.S. and France) and one "peripheral" (Argentina).² This leads into an exploration of how Argentine sociology has related to Malinowski's work since the 1940s and how the generation of new economic sociologists revived this connection after years of dismissal -- a revival accompanied by local transformations within anthropology in Argentina and intense exchanges with the field in Brazil. My overview will provide insight into why *The Argonauts* figures more prominently in the canon of the new economic sociology in countries like Argentina than in the United States or France. In conclusion, I offer up some thoughts on the current state of economic sociology and why *The Argonauts* should be considered as a classic in the field today, three decades since the revival of the discipline.

The New Economic Sociology in the United States and the Place of *The Argonauts*

When the label "new" began to be applied to economic sociology in the United States during the 1980s, it denoted how knowledge of the economic world had come to occupy a novel place within sociology. As Richard Swedberg wrote, "Economic sociology is a term that was rarely heard a decade ago, but which has become quite popular again. Today, sociology departments get ranked according to their prominence in this field, and a respectable number of articles and books that label themselves 'economic sociology' appear every year" (Swedberg, 2006: 2).

According to the dominant narrative of the field's history (Swedberg and Granovetter, 1992; Smelser and Swedber, 1994), during the "classical" period, the big names in sociology had written fundamental works that focused directly on the world of economics. The "founding fathers" of the discipline—Emilie Durkheim, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel—elaborated theories based on their knowledge of an economic world shaped by capitalism and modernity. In the following stage of the discipline's development, economic sociology came to be largely associated with Talcott Parsons. The way Parsons saw things, there was a division to be made in intellectual endeavours: economists were expected to deal with "value" and sociologists with "values" (Stark, 2011). In this perspective, economic sociology was something of an oxymoron, given that the borders between the two disciplines were presumed to be fixed and rigid. The new economic sociology, which began forming in the departments of major U.S. universities during the 1980s, put an end to this division, allowing the field to expand into a vigorous subdiscipline.

Within this framework, the development of the topics, authors, and a history of the subdiscipline that formed the official canon is reflected in the publication of handbooks and the syllabi of economic sociology courses (Convert and Heilbron, 2007). A brief overview of the handbooks that had the biggest impact reveal the work the LSE is celebrating was situated.³ Simply put, the works that established the canon in the field made no mention of the foremost classic of economic anthropology, *The Argonauts*, or of its author, Bronislaw Malinowski. Similarly, *The Argonauts* is nowhere to be found in the syllabi of the new economic sociology of the English-speaking world.

In the second edition of the *Handbook of Economic Sociology*, edited by Neil Smelser (1930-2017) and Richard Swedberg, it is paradoxically, a sociologist—Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002)—who represented the voice of anthropology. As noted in the preface to the *Handbook*, Bourdieu agreed to contribute a chapter on "economic anthropology" but after his unexpected death in 2002, the editors decided to replace this with the "Principles of an Economic Anthropology,"

hitherto unpublished in English and originally included in Bourdieu's *Les structures sociales de l'économie* (2000).

The French sociologist had drawn on *The Argonauts* to shape his main argument in *An Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972), using Malinowski's reference to chiefs as "tribal bankers" in contrast with the position held by Marshall Sahlins (1930-2021) and Karl Polanyi (1886-1964). In Bourdieu's telling, Malinowski stands out from these two scholars in his reading of the close connection between unequal economic exchanges and symbolic recognition. This became the basis for the French sociologist's theory of domination. Bourdieu employs *The Argonauts* to develop an argument about how economic capital is converted into symbolic capital, a process neither Sahlins nor Polanyi explored. In Bourdieu's view, this oversight can be attributed to the fact that neither of the two latter scholars focused on the connection between reciprocity and distribution in economic exchange:

The chief is indeed, in Malinowski's phrase, a 'tribal banker,' amassing food only to lavish it on others, in order to build up a capital of obligations and debts which will be repaid in the form of homage, respect, loyalty, and (when the opportunity arises) work and services, which may form the basis of a new accumulation of material goods. (Bourdieu, 1972: 195)

In the courses he taught at the *College de France* in 1985 (Bourdieu, 2016), Bourdieu cited *The Argonauts* in order to illustrate the role of magic as "social technique" through the example of canoe building rituals.

***The Argonauts* Beneath the Shadow of "Embeddedness"**

"Principles of an Economic Anthropology", however, is less about Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence—where he found an ally in Malinowski—and more of a critical take on the dominant trend in the subfield of new economic sociology. Bourdieu's theory of the field is a more radical questioning neoclassical economics than Mark Granovetter's embeddedness (1985), which the French sociologist sees as an attempt to "compensate" for the shortcomings of this paradigm without actually questioning it.

Bourdieu's argument reveals how predominantly Granovetter's vision figured into the formation of the subfield. As Swedberg notes, "the most famous concept in today's economic sociology is by far that of embeddedness" (2006: (3)). Greta Krippner makes a similar argument: "The notion of embeddedness enjoys a privileged—and as of yet, largely unchallenged—position as the central organizing principle of economic sociology. [...] [In fact,] the term has gained widespread

acceptance as representing the core unifying themes of the subfield" (Krippner, 2001: (775).

Economic anthropology clearly played a role in making Granovetter an intellectual leader in the field. Karl Polanyi was considered the "creator" of the concept of embeddedness (Polanyi, 1957) in the new economic sociology, he also enabled two schools of thought to form within economic anthropology (substantive and formalist), becoming part of the canon of the new economic sociology (Granovetter, 1993). This central debate in what was considered to be the "golden" age of economic anthropology (Hart and Hann, 2011) was reinterpreted in order to come up with a perspective suitable for Granovetter's take on the new economic sociology, representing a middle ground between an extreme substantive anthropology and an extreme formalist anthropology:

I have drawn away from what I call the "strong" embeddedness position—an over-socialised assertion that modern economic analysis cannot help us understand behaviour in tribal or peasant societies because economic motives are so thoroughly swamped by more social motives; but I have also avoided the under-socialised assertion of formalist anthropologists, that economist analysis is the royal road to understanding in such settings. (Granovetter, 1993:38)

In *The Sociology of Economic Life* (1992), edited by Granovetter and Richard Swedberg, the weight given to economic anthropology is clear, given the pride of place held by Polanyi and Clifford Geertz's (1926-2006) texts and how Granovetter's ideas are tied to both. The first section of the handbook, "Sociological Approaches to the Economy", is comprised of articles by Polanyi ("The Economy as Instituted Process") and Granovetter ("Economic Action and Social Structure"). In this chapter, Granovetter presents himself as Polanyi's heir, particularly in terms of the theory that "economic action is always social and that is always 'embedded.'" The third section ("The Sociology of Economic Institutions") aligns a chapter by Granovetter ("The Sociological and Economic Approaches to Labor Market Analysis") with the ideas of Clifford Geertz ("The Bazaar Economy"). According to the editors, both authors capture "the need to draw on both an economic approach and a social approach when analysing economic phenomena". (Swedberg and Granovetter, 1992:21).

The critiques of Granovetter's uses of the concept of embeddedness were proportional to his ambition to intellectually lead the new economic sociology. Besides the examples by Pierre Bourdieu cited above, other key figures in the field like Greta Krippner (2002), Jens Beckert (2007), and Viviana Zelizer (2012) have taken up this fight. In addition to pointing out Granovetter's skewed version

of Polanyi's concept, these critics position Granovetter's concept within an impoverished proposal of economic action, mainly because it adapts poorly to broader, more complex realities. Ultimately, Granovetter associates embeddedness with a theory of social networks. Could the complexity and richness of *The Argonauts* have fit into this movement? Granovetter thought not, assigning only a secondary role to Malinowski's great work. In the view of the American sociologist, *The Argonauts* is an example of the "oversocialised" perspective of economic action (Granovetter, 1993), ill-suited to an economic sociology that aspires to occupy a dominant place in academia and reconcile with neoclassical economic ideas.

The New Economic Sociology in France, the Marcel Mauss Boom, and the Place of *The Argonauts*

The label "new economic sociology" was applied in U.S. academia and later exported in efforts to establish it within other university spheres worldwide. The resulting dialogue also involved endogenous dynamics, as seen in the configuration of the subdiscipline in other core countries like France. According to the most widely accepted narrative of the subdiscipline's history in France, the new economic sociology was dominated by the Durkheimian school (Marcel Mauss, Francois Simiand, and Maurice Halbwachs) during the interwar period (Steiner, 2010). From the 1950s through the 1980s it received less attention (Steiner and Vatin, 2013). Starting in the early 1990s, however, introductory sources on economic sociology began including the subdiscipline as a core topic, while books, articles, and theses on it multiplied. Critical works regarding the new economic sociology (Swedberg, Granovetter, Zelizer) were also translated into French.

While the new economic sociology in France was less clearly defined as a discipline than it was in the English-speaking world (Heredia and Roig, 2008), it did incorporate variations on heterodox economics (like the regulation school), as well as developments linked to social economy and to a certain type of intellectual activism (like the *Movement Anti-Utilitaire des Sciences Sociales* led by Alain Caillé). In 2009, the first handbook of economic sociology, *Traite de Sociologie Economique*, was published in France. *The Argonauts* and its author are scarcely mentioned in this ambitious 790-page work, with its 19 chapters and 23 authors, edited by Philippe Steiner and François Vatin. By contrast, Marcel Mauss is cited countless times throughout the book. The new economic sociology in France thus drew upon the author of *The Gift* (Mauss, 2016) to build a direct and important connection with classical economic anthropology, especially in the case of schools like the regulation school or the M.A.U.S.S. group.

Over the past 25 years, interest in Marcel Mauss's work has risen, especially in the French-speaking world but also among English speakers. There have been academic conferences dedicated to Mauss. Special journal editions have focused on his work. A monumental biography has been published along with a volume of his political texts (considered the fourth and final volume of his complete works, a publishing effort that had had begun 30 years earlier). A new journal brought together French-speaking intellectuals inspired by his ideas. Another edition was published in French of his celebrated essay on the gift, with a new introduction replacing the original text by Claude Lévi-Strauss. Finally, the Mauss-Durkheim correspondence was published along with and a series of books that assess the legacy of Mauss in the French social sciences. French economic sociology played a critical role in this revival of Mauss's work and the boom it has enjoyed over the past three decades. As we will see, this emphasis on Mauss reverberated across the new economic sociology of Argentina.

The consolidation of the new economic sociology in the United States and France demonstrates the importance of tradition within both disciplines, the intellectual wagers, and even the institutional conditions that either make *The Argonauts* into a "classic"—a pivotal reference in the revival of this subfield of sociology—or dismiss it. In the United States, scholars set out to supplement economic theories by assimilating embeddedness into a theory of social networks, excluding richer and more complex understandings of economic actions of the sort found in Malinowski's work. By contrast, the process of consolidating the new economic sociology in France was linked to the anthropological tradition through the "rediscovery" of Marcel Mauss, consequently attributing only a marginal role to the author of *The Argonauts*.

Malinowski and Argentine Sociology

Any history of Argentine sociology as a university and scientific discipline must begin with Gino Germani (1911-1979), an Italian sociologist who fled Fascism. Widely acknowledged as the "founding father" of modern sociology in Argentina, Germani brought "scientific" theories and concepts from the social sciences in the core countries to his adopted South American country. British anthropology—Malinowski included—was a key source of the theories that Germani sought to instil as the canon of modern Argentine sociology. In 1949, Germani wrote a prologue to *Estudios de psicología primitiva*, a compilation of three of Malinowski's works (*Myth in Primitive Psychology*, *The Father in Primitive Psychology*, and excerpts from *Mutterrechtlich Familie und Oedipus-Komplex*), published by Paidós. Drawing on the Polish anthropologist and other authors like Margaret Mead,⁴ Germani

established a corpus of work that shed light on the cultural dynamics of social change: his principal focus over the course of his career in sociology. As noted by Germani's biographer, Argentine sociologist Alejandro Blanco:

This approach gave Germani access to an issue that was at the heart of his concerns: how the transition from rural to urban life could provoke a range of personality "disorders" associated with one's inability to adapt to one's surroundings. In short, by expanding on the concept of culture, the incorporation of anthropology into the social sciences enabled an exploration of the ties between culture and politics. (Blanco, 2005:222)

Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) was a clear influence on Germani's readings of Malinowski (Blanco, 2006). Parsons, it should be noted, had met Malinowski during his stay at the LSE before heading to Germany to complete his doctorate, as he recounts in his autobiography (Parsons, 2009). The influence of the Polish anthropologist's work, particularly its contributions to the notion of culture, can also be seen in Parsons's theory of the social system (Parsons, 1957).

One of Germani's myriad contributions to the development of the discipline in Argentina was the first university program in sociology, introduced in 1958. As part of his efforts to introduce and build the new discipline at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, Germani taught both introductory and advanced courses in sociology there. In the works that made up his classes' reading lists, Malinowski's texts were included among other classics of sociology. The receptiveness of Argentine sociology toward British anthropology can be seen in a course entitled Social Anthropology, included as an elective in the degree programs in sociology and (later) anthropology (Visacovsky, Guber, and Gurevitch, 1997).

A new degree program in anthropology was created at Universidad de Buenos Aires in 1958, but the author of *The Argonauts* was largely overlooked in the course curricula. Like Germani, the man responsible for introducing anthropology in Argentina, Marcelo Bornida (1925-1978), also hailed from Italy. While Germani's opposition to Mussolini had driven him into exile, however, Bórmida was a supporter of Fascism. At that time, structuralism-functionalism was the dominant school of thought in sociology. The historical-cultural school of cultural circles predominated in anthropology, with an increasing focus on phenomenology (Guber, 2007). In Bórmida's way of thinking, empiricism and the reliance on concrete themes made social anthropology a deplorable trend that should be largely ignored in anthropology degree programs (Guber, 2007). The course that Germani had created in the Sociology Department was the only nod toward social anthropology at the Universidad. While Germani's sociology drew on Malinowski,

the group that shaped the Anthropology program largely overlooked the Polish anthropologist.

The political milieu of the 1960s hindered Germani's project, however. The Italian sociologist was viewed as untrustworthy by up-and-coming leftist intellectuals of the university. He resigned from the public university and later abandoned Argentina, bringing an abrupt end to his work and severing the ties between sociology and anthropology (Blanco, 2006). These bridges would not be rebuilt for many years.

The generation of sociologists that followed Germani were often as involved in leftist activism (and in some cases, guerrilla warfare) as they were in academia. After a coup d'état put the military in power in Argentina in 1976, many scholars left the university and even fled the country. Others who stayed were disappeared and murdered by the regime. After the end of the dictatorship in 1983, academic life was restored, but became overwhelmingly dominated by an intellectual focus on the restoration of democratic institutions in the country (Lesgart, 2003). In other words, sociologists during this period were largely absorbed in studying the stability of democratic regimes. In the 1990s, focus shifted to the social impact of neoliberal policies introduced in Argentina. This reflected a larger trend across the region, as the success of similar policies in the U.S. and the United Kingdom in the 1980s had encouraged Latin American governments to implement pro-market reforms.

The resulting changes also influenced the intellectual styles of sociology. While the former generation had focused on institutions, younger sociologists were more concerned with daily life in a society plagued by rising unemployment and the dismantling of the welfare state. In this context, ties between sociology and anthropology were renewed. Anthropological readings and the ethnographic method allowed the new generation of sociologists to forge a new identity for the discipline, distinguishing themselves from the scholars who had preceded them.

Argentine anthropology also experienced changes in these years. Until 1984, Malinowski, like other social anthropologists, was largely absent from the syllabi in the Anthropology program at the Universidad de Buenos Aires (Visakowsky, 2021). During those first years of democracy, there were plenty of critiques of classic anthropology which piqued interest in political philosophy and social theory, although fieldwork was frowned upon (Visakowsky, 2017). Starting in the 1990s, there was a shift back to traditions in social anthropology, the ethnographic method, and fieldwork. *The Argonauts* became an essential reference in this new context (Guber, 1991).

***The Argonauts* and New Economic Sociology in Argentina**

Although *The Argonauts* is rarely included in the syllabi of economic sociology courses of the United States, it has become a must-read in the "social studies of the economy" in Argentina over the past ten years. Other "classics" of the new economic sociology include *The Gift* and Granovetter's work. Themes of interest in recent years include the sociology of markets, money, and finance. All figure prominently in course curricula. Degree programs in sociology created in the 2000s at new universities like the Universidad de San Martín or the Universidad de Villa María form the institutional framework for these courses.

The Argonauts is a reference, either implicit or explicit, for the new economic sociologists of Argentina whose work often draws on ethnographic research (Figueiro, 2013; Wilkis, 2017; Hornes; 2020). These intellectuals embrace the canon built on the validation of fieldwork in Malinowski's classic. In general terms, knowledge of Malinowski's work—and the recognition of its status as a classic—creates an essential intellectual bridge between sociology and economic anthropology, following their key debates and current developments. Yet what conditions had to be in place for *The Argonauts* to take on this role? How do those conditions relate to greater interactions with anthropology and its traditions?

In Argentina, economic sociology became a recognised sub-discipline in the 1990s. While the economy has always been important in local sociology, earlier generations of sociologists largely subordinated their analyses of economic objects to broader topics like development, poverty, political participation, or democracy. Many of them worked within a strong Latin American Marxist tradition or relied heavily on dependency theory—one of the original theoretical innovations produced in Latin America to understand the relationship between economic, social, and political systems.

The intellectual development of Argentine sociology in general was marked by the repression and consequent dispersion of intellectuals during the 1976 dictatorship, which led to the decimation of a generation of social scientists. The rebuilding of Argentine sociology by scholars who had remained in exile or underground—or in similarly unfavourable conditions for intellectual production (Benzecry and Heredia 2017)—did not begin until democracy was restored in 1983.

Since the 2000s, a "new economic sociology" grew up with the expansion of local MA and PhD programs, more public funding available for the social sciences, and an increase in the number of social science scholars who travelled abroad for graduate degrees (especially to the U.S. and France). As a result of these changes, new institutional spaces, thematic agendas, publications, and international networks opened up for the development of economic sociology in Argentina.

The new generation of research topics demonstrates the influence of doctoral training abroad and its synthesis with local concerns. Among other things, these topics include the performativity of economics, the social construction of specific markets, the social uses and meanings of money, the financial practices of low- and middle-income sectors, monetary and financial institutions, economic expertise, illegal markets, consumption, economic subjectivities, and valuation studies. New lines of research reflect the concerns of a recent generation of sociologists with detailed empirical work that is less reductionist than earlier sociological traditions in Argentina and which seeks to produce cumulative theoretical innovations (Benzecry and Heredia 2017).

These topics are not merely imported from the United States or Europe: they express specific Argentine concerns and intellectual styles. For example, disciplines and subdisciplines are not as rigidly divided in South America as they are in the United States, creating a constant dialogue regarding themes and concepts between economic sociology, economic policy, political economy, economic anthropology, and other fields (all beneath the umbrella of "social studies of the economy"). Conceptual innovations from American and European sociology are also integrated into longstanding scholarly traditions in Argentina. To give some examples, the sociology of money has developed in dialogue with traditional themes such as marginality and poverty (Wilkie, 2017; Hornes, 2020). The analysis of financial institutions is entangled with the sociology of protest and collective action (Luzzi, 2015). Work on consumption and household credit has relied on local ethnographic research traditions in low-income neighbourhoods (Figueiro, 2013; Roig, 2015).

An important feature of the new generation of economic sociologists is their level of collaboration and exchange with international networks. Many Argentines who earned PhDs abroad returned to Argentina. Others stayed overseas (in the States, France, Germany), but remained in touch with and doing work on Argentina. Sociologists in other Latin American countries like Chile and Brazil built similar networks that were more generational than national. It is thus possible to speak of a growing "Latin American economic sociology." While it boasts its own identity, this regional subdiscipline is nevertheless integrated with theoretical and empirical innovations elsewhere.⁵

Anthropology and the New Economic Sociology in Argentina

Economic sociologists in Argentina joined this transnational, transdisciplinary environment in the Southern Cone, with strong ties to core academia. The context proved conducive to a new rapprochement with anthropology after

years of separation. At the same time, the configuration of the new economic sociology of Argentina favoured intense exchanges between anthropologists and economic sociologists, as has been seen in academic events, in participation in transdisciplinary networks, and in publications over the past 15 years.

In light of this process, an international transdisciplinary community of sociologists and anthropologists of the economy has formed. This has helped integrate Argentine sociologists with a canon of works and authors less rigidly aligned with sociology who have driven the regional version of the new economic sociology. Several key figures have been critical to this process, "translating" the classics of anthropology into a "lingua franca" in exchanges with sociologists. Since the beginning of the 1990s, ties between Argentine and Brazilian anthropologists have intensified, thanks in part to a number of Argentine graduates in anthropology who travelled to Brazil to do graduate degrees at Universidade de Brasilia, Universidade do Rio Grande do Sul, and—a large number—at the Museu Nacional (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro) (Semán and Grimson, 2006). Many Brazilian professors also visited Argentina in the 1990s as well (Visakowsky, 2021). Cooperation programs between the two countries received government funding that proved decisive to expanding and consolidating these ties.

In 2004, as part of the social anthropology program at Museu Nacional, the Culture and Economy Research Group was created by renowned Brazilian anthropologist Lygia Sigaud (1945-2009) and Argentine anthropologist Federico Neiburg, who had earned his doctorate at Museu Nacional a few years earlier. The group became very active in building an extensive network of "social studies of the economy" in the Southern Cone and disseminating the ideas and concepts of economic anthropology among network participants, including interpretations of classic works in the discipline. The group's efforts in this regard coincided with a strong tradition of encouraging international ties among professors at the social anthropology program at Museu Nacional, most of whom earned their degrees at institutions in the core academis and who maintained strong connections with these universities, staying abreast of their latest topics and discussions (Isola, 2018).

Neiburg, for example, published pioneering articles on the anthropology of money in the region (Neiburg, 2006) and, at the same time, helped authors—both sociologists⁶ and anthropologists—and theories from core academia circulate in the region. His involvement and recognition by the core academia (in France and the United States, among others) made him a key figure in this transdisciplinary space of "social studies of the economy." Neiburg has thus played a key role in consolidating the exchanges between anthropologists and sociologists of the economy in the Southern Cone.

Sigaud was the other major figure in the Culture and Economy Research Group. The normative model of political action merited a strong critique in her

conception of anthropology. Many Brazilian and Argentine anthropologists embraced this model, which was associated with the idea of citizenship and rights. These understandings of the social sciences began taking root during the period when democracy had only recently been reinstated in both countries (1983 in the case of Argentina; 1985 in Brazil). In one of her most cited texts, Sigaud asks how workers make decisions as to whether to take their bosses to court in a context favourable to such lawsuits. Knowledge of the law does not explain the lawsuits: it is the norms and social coercions that influence social exchanges and the interests associated with them. Sigaud draws on authors like Max Weber, Marcel Mauss, Bronislaw Malinowski, Norbert Elias, and Pierre Bourdieu to argue that an interpretation of social action depends on the interdependencies, constraints, and obligations that bind people (Sigaud, 1996).

In the history of anthropology sketched out within this transdisciplinary canon, Malinowski was closer to sociologist Norbert Elias than to other English-speaking anthropologists:

The interdependence that Elias describes as inherent to social relations enables an examination of exchanges as reciprocally dependent, noting the coercions and individual interests at work in these relationships, as noted earlier by Malinowski (1935 and 1961) and Mauss (1991). Dimensions such as these have been largely overlooked by English-speaking anthropologists who, from Lévi-Strauss on, have instead treated them as a mechanical demonstration of the principle of reciprocity (especially Sahlins, 1974). (Sigaud, 1996:385)

Sigaud sketched out this distinction between authors (both sociologists and anthropologists) who contributed to an anthropology of social exchange and those who advanced an anthropology of mechanical reciprocity (including anthropologists who offered a one-sided interpretation of the legacy of both *The Gift* and *The Argonauts*) (Sigaud, 1999).

Unlike the processes in the core academia of the United States, no intellectual luminaries worked to build alliances with economics as the new economic sociology of Argentina took shape. Similarly, Argentina lacked the kind of intellectual tradition that could have led to the creation of a reference point in anthropology, as occurred in France. At the same time, since the formation of the subdiscipline in Argentina involved none of the demands associated with power or tradition, conditions were conducive to a vigorous exchange with anthropology. Scholars in Argentina were thus able to propose a set of works drawing on both anthropology and sociology in which *The Argonauts* shared a common heritage with *The Gift*, *The Court Society*, and *Practical Reason*.

Final Reflections on *The Argonauts*: A New Classic of Economic Sociology

There is nothing neutral about the consolidation of an academic field when it comes to the works and authors ultimately chosen as “classics,” that is, sources of intellectual legitimacy. During the process in which the new economic sociology took shape, *The Argonauts* was not considered a source of intellectual legitimacy either in the United States or France. Neither the U.S. agenda (and the concept of embeddedness) nor the French agenda (and the Mauss tradition) created conditions favourable for the recognition of *The Argonauts* as a classic. As shown in the history reconstructed here of the Southern Cone exchanges between sociologists and anthropologists of the economy, however,—operating with relative autonomy but with connections to the core academia—the book’s status as a classic has been socially and historically assured.

The anthology edited by Swedish sociologist Patrik Aspers and English sociologist Nigel Dodd, brings together predominant figures in the field in both the United States and Europe and is telling in this regard. *Re-imagining Economic Sociology* (2015) could be considered a second-generation book aimed not at consolidating the field but at looking back on what has occurred in economic sociology in recent decades. In this book, whose explicit objective is to “reinvigorate the role of theory in economic sociology,” Malinowski’s name and the references to *The Argonauts* change slightly in comparison to the foundational handbooks of the field published in the two previous decades. In the book’s introduction, the editors acknowledge the relatively late appraisal of the theoretical fundamentals of economic sociology and Malinowski’s place in this tradition:

First, economic sociologists *do not define the economy as a separate dimension of society*. One early scholar who deserves to be considered among the key figures of classical economic sociology was an anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski (1922). Malinowski referred to *Kula* ring as ‘Trobriand Economic Sociology’ (Malinowski 1922: 129 n.). (Aspers, Dodd and Anderberg, 2015: 4)

A Different Moment of the New Economic Sociology, A New Place for *The Argonauts*

In a previous work, Patrick Aspers had noted the contribution of Malinowski’s classic in highlighting how social networks help facilitate trade transactions (Aspers, 2011). If *The Argonauts* deserves to be a “key” figure in classic economic

sociology—let me insist—this implies going a step further than what Aspers proposes. One must do more than merely evaluate whether *The Argonauts* bears comparison with the works of the past acknowledged as classics for recognizing the social dimension of the economy. Instead, these work's contributions must be acknowledged as shedding light on the developments of the new economic sociology today.

Neil Fligstein (2015) speaks of an "intellectual structure of economic sociology." The following "clusters" comprise this structure: studies of social networks (around the name of Mark Granovetter), the economic policy perspective (around the name of Karl Polanyi), the cultural sociology of the economy (around the name of Viviana Zelizer), and scientific studies focused on the performativity of economic theories and commensuration (around the name of Michel Callon) (Wang, 2012, cited in Fligstein, 2015). In the analysis of the *Kula* ring, *The Argonauts* brings together not one but all of the topics associated with these "clusters." In the first place, as Aspers noted, *Kula* is an exemplary case of how social networks are built to strengthen trade. Secondly, because of the *cultural* sociology of the economy's preoccupation with the contents and meanings of economic action, Malinowski's study on the ritual and moral dimension of *Kula* is a crucial reference. Third, the authority of the tribal chiefs or political alliances of the inter-tribal trade in Melanesian New Guinea described in *The Argonauts* connects with the "cluster" of literature developed around the political dimension of economic processes. Finally, the performative role of magic as the problematic question of equivalencies in *Kula* gifts serves as precedent for the "cluster" of studies on the performativity of economic theories and the commensuration of goods, people, services, or parts of the body.

The consolidation of an academic field leads to internal processes of differentiation that build structure but entail a risk to the field's unity and programmatic coherence. The lesson to be learned from the relationship that economic sociology in the Southern Cone has cultivated with Malinowski's foremost work serves as a mirror in which we can recognize *The Argonauts* as a classic, where the unity and coherence of economic sociology can be reimaged three decades after its rebirth.

Notas

- 1 The label "new" economic sociology came into use in the 1980s in the US academy.
- 2 The Spanish publisher Peninsula released the first Spanish language version of *The Argonauts* in 1973, more than fifty years after its original publication (by).
- 3 Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg (Eds.). 1994. *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*, second edition. New York and Princeton: Russell Sage Foundation and Princeton University Press. Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg (Eds.). 2001. *The Sociology of Economic Life*, second edition. Boulder, CO: Westview. Randall Collins, Mauro F. Guillén, Paula England and Marshall Meyer (Eds.). 2002. *The New Economic Sociology: Developments in an Emerging Field at the Millennium*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. Frank Dobbin (Ed.). 2004. *The New Economic Sociology: A Reader*. Princeton University Press: Princeton.
- 4 Germani's efforts also led to the publication of the following worked by Margaret Mead: *Coming of Age in Samoa* (released in Spanish in 1945) and two years later, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*. In 1952, the publishing house Paidós released a compilation of Mead's works entitled *Educación y cultura* (Blanco, 2006)
- 5 Thanks partly to the collective blog *Estudios de la Economía*, Latin American economic sociologists (as well as anthropologists, management scholars, science and technology scholars, and so on) are connected and constantly exchanging ideas, new work, and new readings as well as collaborating in research and conference organization (Nelms, 2014).
- 6 In 2009, Neiburg and Argentine sociologist Mariana Luzzi wrote the prologue to the first book by Viviana Zelizer translated and published in Latin America.

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THE ARGONAUTS AS A CLASSIC OF SOCIOLOGY: MALINOWSKI AND THE RECENT HISTORY OF NEW ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY

Abstract

This essay was presented at the tribute to Bronislaw Malinowski, 100 years after the publication of *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* organized by the Department of Social Anthropology of the London School of Economics. Its objective is to reflect on the exchanges between sociology and economic anthropology in different academic contexts and how these dynamics generate different conditions for the field of the "new" economic sociology to recognize *The Argonauts* as a classic. Unlike the academies of the center of the global anthropological system, the interpretation that is presented here illuminates the favorable conditions that occurred in the Southern Cone – particularly through the influence of Brazilian anthropology and, especially, the role played by the Nucleus of Culture and Economy of the National Museum – in generating this recognition.

Keywords: Malinowski; Argonauts; Sociology; Anthropology; Brazil; Argentina.

OS ARGONAUTAS COMO UM CLÁSSICO DA SOCIOLOGIA: MALINOWSKI E A HISTÓRIA RECENTE DA NOVA SOCIOLOGIA ECONÔMICA

Resumo

Este ensaio foi apresentado em homenagem a Bronislaw Malinowski, cem anos após a publicação de *Os Argonautas do Pacífico Ocidental*, organizado pelo Departamento de Antropologia Social da London School of Economics. Seu objetivo é refletir sobre as trocas entre a sociologia e a antropologia econômica em diferentes contextos acadêmicos e como essas dinâmicas geram distintas condições para que o campo da "nova" sociologia econômica reconheça *Os Argonautas* como um clássico. Diferentemente das academias centrais, a interpretação que se apresenta ilumina as condições favoráveis ocorridas no Cone Sul – particularmente a partir da influência da antropologia do Brasil e, principalmente, do papel do Núcleo de Estudos em Cultura e Economia do Museu Nacional – para gerar esse reconhecimento.

Palavras-chave: Malinowski; Argonautas; Sociologia; Antropologia; Brasil; Argentina.

LOS ARGONAUTAS COMO UN CLÁSICO DE LA SOCIOLOGÍA: MALINOWSKI Y LA HISTORIA RECIENTE DE LA NUEVA SOCIOLOGÍA ECONÓMICA

Resumen

Este ensayo fue presentado en el homenaje a Bronislaw Malinowski, a 100 años de la publicación de *Los Argonautas del Pacífico Occidental*, organizado por el Departamento de Antropología Social de London School of Economics. Su objetivo es reflexionar sobre los intercambios entre la sociología y la antropología económica en diferentes contextos académicos y cómo estas dinámicas generaron diferentes condiciones para que el campo de la "nueva" sociología económica reconozca a *Los Argonautas* como un clásico. A diferencia de las academias centrales, la interpretación que se presenta ilumina las condiciones favorables que se dieron en el Cono Sur – en particular a partir de la influencia de la antropología de Brasil, y, en especial, al rol de Núcleo de Estudios de Cultura y Economía del Museo Nacional – para que se genere este reconocimiento.

Palabras clave: Malinowski; Argonautas; Sociología; Antropología; Brasil; Argentina.

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