

### Bronislaw Malinowski

Was a Polish Anthropologist (1884-1942)

Regarded as the father and inventor of modern fieldwork

Most Important works: *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (considered the first modern ethnography) and *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*

Often considered one of anthropology's most skilled ethnographers, especially because of the highly methodical and well theorized approach to the study of social systems

The goal of the anthropologist, or ethnographer, is "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world" (*Argonauts of the Western Pacific*)

### Background to Argonauts of the Western Pacific

In 1914 he was given a chance to travel to New Guinea accompanying anthropologist R.R. Marett, but as World War I broke out and Malinowski was an Austrian subject, and thereby an enemy of the British commonwealth, he was unable to travel back to England. The Australian government nonetheless provided him with permission and funds to undertake ethnographic work within their territories and Malinowski chose to go to the Trobriand Islands, in Melanesia where he stayed for several years, studying the indigenous culture. Upon his return to England after the war he published his main work *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) which established him as one of the most important anthropologists in Europe of that time..

### The Kula (from the AWP)

**The System** -the kula is a system of socio-economic exchange centered on two kinds of valuables, armshells and necklaces, with other minor valuables of secondary use. The two valuables must circulate against each other--the opposite-flow rule--armshells being exchanged for necklaces or vice-versa, but never armshells for armshells or necklaces for necklaces. Viewed from above, the armshells move counter-clockwise and the necklaces clockwise around a giant circle of islands and communities.

**The Nature of the Valuables**- the valuables are system-communal property and cannot be owned privately or kept in one's possession for very long. The valuables derive their principal social value and meaning from being the objects of kula exchange, having few other uses in the social lives of the transactors or in their pursuit of an economic livelihood. Shells accumulate value as they circulate among partners around the ring. Armshells are ranked in value against each other as are necklaces inter-ranked amongst each other, the highest of each type being named and having shell-histories.

**Principles of Exchange** The valuables are exchanged according to the principle of reciprocity, like value for like value. The reciprocation of valuables must be delayed, not simultaneous, transactor A going to B to seek a prestation shell x, B returning later to A for a reciprocating shell y, C coming to A to seek shell x, and later A going to C to get a reciprocating shell z. Actual exchanging takes place only between individuals, though these individuals often move en bloc as 'kula communities' from one island or area to another.

### The Kula (from the AWP) (cont)

**Partners** Kula exchanges occur between kula partners, individuals who are, unless serious breaches take place, in fixed lifelong relationships with each others. With rare exceptions, only men can be kula participants. A man is brought into the kula at adulthood by a kinsman, usually a father or mother's brother. A man may have a minimum of 2 partners, one on either geographical side, or multiple sets of partners up to large numbers such as 100 or more as in the case of local leaders. A man's partners normally come from the kula communities to his proximate geographical left and right, though they sometimes come from within his own kula community. Partnerships are linked in chains around the ring, but a man exchanges only with partners to his proximate left and right, not with everyone around the entire chain of which he is one link. Kula participants solicit particular shells from their partners with preliminary gifts of valued items, which should be themselves ultimately reciprocated. Transactors do not haggle with their partners over relative value in exchanges

**Other Features** Men gain considerable prestige from participating in the kula. A large amount of utilitarian trade in essential and luxury resources takes place on kula expeditions, though this kind of exchanging is conceptually and behaviorally separate from kula exchange to the participants. Kula partners do not trade or barter in a utilitarian sense with each other. Except in minor details, the transactional rules of kula exchange are the same all around the ring.

What was so special about the kula?



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