

# WAYS OF *BALOMA*



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**WAYS OF *BALOMA***  
**RETHINKING MAGIC AND KINSHIP**  
**FROM THE TROBRIANDS**

*Mark S. Mosko*

**With Tabalu Pulayasi Daniel,  
Molubabeba Daniel, Pakalaki Tokulupai,  
and Yogaru Vincent**



HAU Books  
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Foreword, © 2017 HAU Books and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro

Preface, © 2017 HAU Books and Pulayasi Daniel

Cover and layout design: Sheehan Moore

Typesetting: Prepress Plus ([www.prepressplus.in](http://www.prepressplus.in))

ISBN: 978-0-9973675-6-0

LCCN: 2017945173

HAU Books

Chicago Distribution Center

11030 S. Langley

Chicago, IL 60628

[www.haubooks.com](http://www.haubooks.com)

HAU Books is marketed and distributed by The University of Chicago Press.

[www.press.uchicago.edu](http://www.press.uchicago.edu)

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.

FOR CASSIE



The cover image was taken by the author, Mark S. Mosko, in Omarakana village in 2008. The inscription reads:

TOBOMA MISKAMBATI  
BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI  
1884–1942

NOTABILITY SCIENTIST,  
THE SON OF THE  
POLISH NATION  
FOUNDER OF MODERN  
SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
FRIEND OF TROBRIAND  
ISLANDS PEOPLES  
AND THE POPULARIZER  
OF THEIR CULTURE





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# Foreword

EDUARDO VIVEIROS DE CASTRO

It may sound a little surprising to say that a detailed ethnographic disquisition on such tried-and-tested subjects as “magic” and “kinship” among one of the most thoroughly studied societies in our disciplinary history is bound to raise some anthropological controversy. *Ways of baloma* certainly will, though. And that is a good thing, for an excellent reason: because ethnography is anthropology or it is nothing, as Marshall Sahlins (1994) once quipped, *and* because anthropology is nothing if not speculative, as Tim Ingold recently asserted in his “Anthropology contra ethnography” (2017).

Mark Mosko’s major monograph is a perfect example of how these two very different—at first blush somewhat clashing—proclamations converge. For anthropology is speculation, but not of the introspective kind which lingers on in much of our academic philosophy. It is speculation squared: it takes as its subject matter the speculation of other peoples, other “thought collectives,” to expand a concept from Ludwik Fleck ([1935] 1979). Anthropology is speculative in a radically extrospective, nonspecular sense. If there is any mirroring involved, the mirror, as Patrice Maniglier remarked, “returns to us an image in which we are not *recognizable* to ourselves” (2005: 773–74, original emphasis). This means that an ethnographically informed anthropology must be prepared to jeopardize the master concept of *anthrōpos* (“ourselves”) and the heavy metaphysical baggage underlying the now deceptive obviousness of its empirical referent. To extend

the intension of the *anthrópos* concept to encompass *Homo sapiens* at large was at the heart of a well-known political and epistemological struggle in the history of Western thought, with anthropology at its forefront. It is not certain the battle has been indisputably won, however. This is *one* of the reasons why we need to be aware of the different “senses”—other intensions *and* extensions—that this concept takes in other thought collectives. Our own historical idea(l) of the Human, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights notwithstanding, can no longer hide its serious shortcomings, if the understatement be allowed. It is no longer a viable concept to capture even the mode of existence (of personification) of the official citizens of the West’s well-fortified but quickly crumbling walls. To put things bluntly, let us just state that the “Anthropocene” is the most spectacular end result of such shortcomings.

Anthropology is, then, “speculation with the people in,” to paraphrase a famous definition of the discipline. It cannot but be—to begin by being—ethnography, given the often misrecognized fact that our anthropological theories are nothing more than (by which I mean nothing less than) translatable syntheses into the disciplinary vernacular of the day of what the peoples whose life we shared for some time say and do. (By a felicitous coincidence, the relationship between *saying* and *doing*—what certain particular sayings do and how certain seemingly ordinary doings relate to some “extraordinary” enunciative agents—lies at the very heart of *Ways of baloma*.) It is that abstractive, transethnographic effort that allows those anthropological theories to have an inspiring or exemplary role to other, sometimes culturally and geographically quite removed contexts. Theories jump from place to place. And then, of course, when they land in other lands, they get transformed, often eliciting reverse transformations of the original translatable synthesis—a movement usually named “comparison.”

The above may perhaps justify the unlikely choice, on the author’s part, to kindly invite an Amazonianist to write the foreword to a book about Trobriand society which discusses virtually all the classic themes of Melanesian ethnology, offering new and daring solutions to some equally classic puzzles this region of the world left to the discipline as one of its treasured polemical heirlooms. What was indeed surprising, to this Amazonianist, was to see how ideas that emerged from the ethnographic (anthropological and indigenous) speculation carried out in that other part of the world could be used to methodically *reshape* Malinowski’s canonical work on the Trobriands in a much more comprehensive way than generations of Melanesianists, particularly those who



did fieldwork on the Massim area of Papua New Guinea, had already done in expanding, correcting, and contextualizing—historically, politically, methodologically—the œuvre of our great forebear. On second thoughts, though, it is not so surprising. My own work on Amazonian “perspectivism”—which implied, among other things, the positing of an absolute ontological and epistemological indiscernibility between those dimensions of any people’s life traditionally distinguished as “cosmology” and “sociology,” or “magic” (or “religion”) and “kinship” (or “social organization”), not to mention the arche-metaphysical anthropocentric distinction in which our discipline is grounded, that between “Nature” and “Culture”—owes even more than I was myself conscious of to the ethnographic and theoretical labor of Melanesianists. In this regard, I should mention above all that of Roy Wagner and Marilyn Strathern, to which I might add some remarks of Alfred Gell lying at the origin of my rather sketchy argument about the magic-kinship “duplex” (to hijack a Strathernian concept), which is brilliantly fleshed out by Mosko in this book. Since *Ways of baloma* explicitly takes as one of its guiding perspectives the so-called NME (New Melanesian Ethnography), a modeling of Melanesian sociality put forth by Strathern in *The gender of the gift*, a book that opened new research avenues all across the ethnosphere, we have here then an “ends meet” situation—a unusually rich version of what was pleasantly dubbed “Melazonia” at a meeting of ethnographers of the two areas some twenty years ago.

The specific NME thesis (for there is far more to Strathernian anthropology than it) pursued in *Ways of baloma* is essentially that of the *partibility* of persons and the associated concept of personification. Mosko complements it with the Lévy-Bruhlian theory of *participation*, which, particularly as revived by Sahlins’ recent redefinition of kinship as “mutuality of being” (2013), is to my mind but the obverse side of the partibility thesis, as both converge to dispel the profound anthropological misconception—an expression of the bizarre politico-philosophical imagination of a certain people who came to dominate the planet—of the atomic and autonomic Self and its spectrally magnified version, the Society as a super-Individual. The crucial innovation yielded by this partibility–participation synthesis, as Mosko argues, is that “the sphere of ‘persons’ critically participating in Trobrianders’ human affairs extends beyond the bounds of living people” (p. 27). The point as such was by no means overlooked by Strathern; but what Mosko wants to highlight in *Ways of baloma* is the overwhelming importance of certain invisible persons who have been given short shrift in almost all previous Massim ethnographies: namely, the souls of

the dead and a host of other *baloma* inhabitants of Tuma, the “spiritual” dimension of this world.<sup>1</sup>

A foreword should take care not to contain too many “spoilers”; it is better to let readers follow *Ways of baloma* through to the end so as to fully grasp the wonderfully complex and complete treatment to which Mosko subjects the interweaving of partibility and participation, thereby solving simultaneously two of the more famous conundrums left by Malinowski’s ethnography, or, better yet, demonstrating they are one single problem amenable to an integrated solution. I am referring, of course, to the “magical power of words” and the “virgin birth” debates; more generally speaking, to the role of the *baloma* in the production and reproduction of the material world and to the nature of Trobriand “matrilineality” and its attendant categories and institutions (*dala*, *kumila*, the ethnographically irksome privilege of fathers in this “mother’s brother” society, FZD marriage, etc.). Let me just anticipate that they are solved by a detailed reconsideration of the workings of the asymmetrically perspectival duality central to Trobriand sociocosmology, that between Boyowa, “the visible, material segment of the cosmos that humans inhabit and experience in their waking life” (p. 8, n. 6), and the spirit world of Tuma, the life-source, in many senses, of what is experienced in Boyowa.

Spirits, old denizens of the world that have never gone away, notwithstanding all the witch-hunts (*lato sensu*) promoted by modernity, are back in business then. It is perhaps no accident that at this juncture when “ghosts and monsters” (Tsing et al. 2017) have come to haunt our image of the world, when our symbiopoietic kinship (Haraway) with an untold number of other life-forms that make up the world is acknowledged in both wonder and mourning, and when the geophysical forces and geopolitical influences that have been at work acquire what could only be called a *supernatural* significance, there appears a work such as *Ways of baloma*, which highlights the entanglement—the invisible coextensivity or interpenetration—of spirits and bodies, the visible and the invisible, magic and kinship. This is a book about magic and kinship, again, squared: about the magical relationship between magic and kinship, about the

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1. As Strathern once observed, “Many non-literate people appear to see persons even where the anthropologist would not. And kinship may be claimed for relations between entities that English-speakers conceive as frankly improbable” (1995: 15). She was thinking mostly—i.e., not only—of entities that belong in Western ontologies to the “thing” (or “less-than-human”) category, while Mosko’s interest lies in entities of the “more-than-human” category.

intimate kinship between kinship and magic. It is a book about the creative (in the most literal sense) reciprocal presupposition between images (*kekwebu*) and powers (*peu'ula*), words and worlds: how Kilivila words not only express, but are expressed (enunciated) by Trobriander worlds.<sup>2</sup>

Against the Malinowskian thesis of the “automatic,” magical power of *megwa* spells, which anticipates certain crucial aspects of Austen’s theory of performative speech acts, Mosko forcefully counterposes the efficacious agency of *persons*, both the *baloma* spirits of Tuma and certain humans of Boyowa. The *baloma* end up by having a far more overarching and active presence in Trobriand life than Malinowski granted them. One is led to wonder if this culturally specific correction of what would now be called the “performative” parsing of powerful speech in general may not induce a reconsideration of the universalistic theory of speech acts. Magical words in Malinowski’s sense must be seen as “performative” just as performative utterances in Austen’s sense—in both their illocutionary and the perlocutionary aspects—must be seen as “magical,” insofar as the latter *also* have their “conditions of felicity” in some source of *spiritual* power/authority. In other words, they presuppose the presence of an agency which at the same time *personifies itself* (as a mindful Individual, or as the Law, the Church, etc.) by being identified as the source of the utterance and gives the utterance its world-changing efficaciousness. All in all, the theory of speech acts is strictly dependent on a distinction between the *unreal* notion of an across-the-board “social construction of reality” (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) and a *real* process of “construction of social reality” (Searle)—a distinction the latter philosopher framed as that between culturally relative “institutional facts” and naturally universal “brute facts” (Searle 1995). But of course, among the Trobrianders, all real facts are “institutional,” insofar as the origin of every causal chain is a personal—i.e., “social”—agency. If that is the case, it makes as much sense to argue that magical beliefs are ideology—justifying real social power, hierarchy, domination—as to invert this classic modernist belief and argue that politico-economic realities are the actualization of magical forces. As Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers (2007) have forcefully demonstrated, for example, capitalism is a particularly lethal form of sorcery.

Then we have the kinship side of the equation established in *Ways of baloma*. Mosko, inspired here both by the NME and by Wagner’s earlier, groundbreaking

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2. Kilivila is the official name of the Austronesian language spoken in the Trobriand archipelago.

paper on the nature of social groups in Highland New Guinea (1974), shows the essential imprecision or simplistic reification that generated the “matrilineality” and “virgin birth” themes in Malinowski’s rendition of Trobriand kinship relatedness. To begin with, the role of masculine *megwa* (oral) production and creativity is shown as analogous to feminine bodily (genital) reproduction and procreation, *and vice versa*. Participation joins partibility to illuminate the genderized dimension of Tuma–Boyowa cosmopolitics. The “father” concept penetrates the very core relationship of the “matrilineal” *dala*; nephews become adopted “sons”; the *dala* chief becomes the “father” of his coresidents; husband and wife become analogically assimilated to (and mythically identified with) brother and sister; the FZD marriage is connected to rank and chieftainship strategies and at the same time is shown as “hiding” an actual practice of bilateral cross-cousin marriage.

And then there is sacrifice—exchange (all exchange) redefined as sacrifice—a concept whose presence in Melanesian ethnography is not the least of the surprises *Ways of baloma* proposes to its readers. And there is political diarchy as well. Mosko had already broached these themes in his extensive ethnography of the North Mekeo; he therefore builds, or rather reinforces, that bridge between Melanesia and Polynesia that has long intrigued Oceanic anthropology.

I should stop this already too long foreword here. But I cannot fail to mention what is perhaps the most innovative and likely controversial aspect of the way *Ways of baloma* was crafted. I am referring not to what some might consider the overly harsh treatment that Malinowski’s ethnography meets with in this book, nor to the quite systematic criticism of the most famous of post-Malinowskian Trobriand ethnographies, that by Annette Weiner. Let readers judge for themselves if those strictures are justified. Anyway, they are amply compensated, in my opinion, by the meticulous scholarly justice the author shows in quoting and incorporating the positive contributions of many other distinguished Massim specialists. The truly innovative, and very likely controversial, contribution of the book is its method. *Ways of baloma* is actually the result of an intensive collaborative—should I say a coauthoral?—work, a sustained dialogue with an intellectual elite of high-ranking Omakarana elders deeply interested in keeping alive what they see as the traditional Trobriand life- and thoughtways. In his many periods of collaborative fieldwork with this team of experts, Mosko checked virtually every aspect of the previous ethnographic archive on Trobriand against their own views. In that sense, *Ways of baloma* is a collective enterprise that has adopted a particular point of view, that

of a specific, and in many ways privileged, sociopolitical section of the Trobriand people. So this book is obviously not “the whole story.” But given that there are no whole stories, much less whole ethnographic stories, *Ways of baloma* is one of the most interesting stories ever told about Melanesia.

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## Preface

On behalf of my people of Trobriand Islands, I as the Paramount Chief, would like to thank those who contributed alot towards MARK MASKO's Research work on Trobriand culture and Traditions GULUGULA (SACRED TRADITIONS) and many more which Malinowski have mention or said it 100 years ago.

Particularly Chief TOGUGUWA-T, TOLINA CLAN (RIVAL CHIEF, and many more from chiefly clans, elders or chiefs, village elders, church elders, youth leaders, women elders and women readers in church and also appreciation to what has been done by Famous Anthropologist Malinowski who put Trobriand Island culture and traditions (SACRE TRADITIONS) in recognition to the world by writing in his books what he has learnt many years ago, which attract many young Anthropologist to continue more studies about Trobriands.

One of most privilege Anthropologist is MARK who stayed with me and work with me and the team for more than ten years updating, correcting mistakes and joining to the basics of Trobriand culture and traditions (SACRED TRADITIONS) to Trobriand cosmology.

MARK was adopted in to my clan as (TABALU) the highest ranking clan in TROBRIAND ISLANDS, most respected clan with many traditional obligations such as to look after people / their properties and intermarriage with different chiefly clan and as well commoners (tokai) in different clans.

He was <sup>active</sup> contributor like my backbone with all the clan members when any activity take place in our community or clan obligations.

His wife SANDRA MASKO also been very generous to our community supplying salts to each women every week and selling people <sup>OF TROBRIANDS</sup> at DISTRICT HEALTH CENTRE for two



On behalf of my people of Trobriand Islands, I as the Paramount Chief, would like to thank those who contributed a lot towards Mark Mosko's research work on Trobriand culture and traditions *gulgula* (sacred traditions) and many more which Malinowski have mention or said it 100 years ago. Particularly chief Toguguwa T., Toliwaga clan (rival chief) and many more from chieftain clans, elders or chiefs, village elders, church elders, youth leaders, woman elders and woman leaders in church and also appreciation to what has been done by famous anthropologist Malinowski who put Trobriand Island culture and traditions (sacred traditions) in recognition to the world by writing in his books what he has learnt many years ago, which attract many young anthropologist to continue more studies about Trobriands.

One of the most privileged anthropologist is Mark who stayed with me and work with me and the team for more than ten years updating, correcting mistakes and joining to the basics of Trobriand culture and traditions (sacred traditions) to Trobriand cosmology.

Mark was adopted into my clan as (Tabalu) the highest ranking clan in Trobriand Islands, most respected clan with many traditional obligations such as to look after people/their properties and intermarriage with different chieftain clan and as well commoners (*tokai*) in different clans. He was very active contributor like my backbone with all the clan members when any activity take place in our community or clan obligations.

His wife Sandra Mosko also been very generous to our community supplying salts to each woman every week and serving people of Trobriands at District Health Centre for two

years on voluntary basis.

Been adopted to our clan I honoured Mark a traditional name called (BAGIDOU) in honour of my GREATE GRAND ANCESTORS and his wife

SANDRA as been called (SILIBOMATU) in line with ancestral marriages.

He lived in a ROYAL HOUSE (LIGISA) which is for chiefs to live in only and been following restrictions (TABUS) like ancestral Grands and present clan members.

The difference between Mark's and Malinowski and other Anthropologist who have worked on TROBRIANDS culture and tradition (SACRED TRADITIONS)

Apart from many Anthropologists who wrote about the Trobriands Mark had a team comprising clan members (TABAU) who worked with him during his Research on the TROBRIANDS culture and tradition, and some times he moved to other places to <sup>meet</sup> with different chiefs other clans to discuss related history of their own. Some were invited to come to him at the resting place (BUNETOVA) for discussion according to what he wants.

After length of time been with them he always compensate people and the community with betelnuts, macorods store goods and some amount of cash in appreciation of their time and contributions to his work.

for us as a team been always look after by <sup>our</sup> wives cooking daily for us, and people from our community assisting us through rations and he also supplement with store goods and many more like betel nut, tobacco etc to keep every body awake during discussion.

Some times, the team crack jokes as part of refreshing our minds when having discussions for too long.

years on voluntary basis.

Been adopted to our clan I honored Mark a traditional name called (Baigidou) in honour of my great grand ancestors and his wife Sandras as been called (Silibomatu) in line with ancestral marriages.

He lived in a royal house (ligisa) which is for chiefs to live in only and been following restrictions (tabus) like ancestral grands and present clan members.

The difference between Mark's and Malinowski and other anthropologist who have worked on Trobriand culture and tradition (sacred tradition). Apart from many anthropologists who wrote about the Trobriands Mark had a team comprising clan members (Tabalu) who worked with him during his research on the Trobriand culture and tradition and some times he moved to other places to meet with different chiefs other clans to discuss related history of their own. Some were invited to come to him at the resting place (buneyova) for discussion according to what he wants.

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Some times, the team crack jokes as part of refreshing our minds when having discussions for too long.

As we have spent so much time on Mark's Research work everything that was mention or said about through our agreement is and perfectly relevant to

Trobriland culture and tradition (SACRED TRADITIONS)

I know some may not believe in some of ideas that has been said, but I as traditional highest chief and whose obligation is have an account of all Traditions, history (ULU) for all forms of Trobriland (SACRED TRADITIONS) who lived in the central island in Omapakana Village as the traditional Headquarter of Trobriland islands which is real root of every thing declare that what is been written by MARK MESICO will be a greater benefit for young generation of Trobriland Islanders and new coming Anthropologists who wish to know more about Trobriland culture and traditions.

Therefore my assurance to every reader of Mark's books are perfectly written under my

Authority and justification

(UQUOTOKI) THANK YOU



PULAYASI - DANIEL MBE

PARAMOUNT CHIEF OF

TROBRILAND ISLANDS

TRANSLATED BY



PICALALI. TOKURUPAN

OMAPAKANA VILLAGE

NEPHEW - P/ CHIEF TABALU CRAN.

05- AUGUST 2016

As we have spent so much time on Mark's research work everything that was mention or said about through our agreement and perfectly relevant to Trobriand culture and tradition (sacred tradition). I know some may not believe in some of ideas that has been said, but I as traditional highest chief and whose obligation is have an account of all traditions, history (liliu) for all forms of Trobriand (sacred traditions) who lived in the central island in Omarakana village as the traditional headquarters of Trobriand Islands which is real root of everything declare that what is been written by Mark Mosko will be a great benefit for young generation of Trobriand Islanders and new coming anthropologists who wish to know more about Trobriand culture and traditions.

Therefore my assurance to every reader of Mark's books are perfectly written under my authority and justification.

(Kagutoki) Thank you

[signed] Pulayasi-Daniel MBE

Paramont Chief of Trobriand Islands

Translated by Pakalaki Tokulupai

Omarakana Village

Nephew – P Chief Tabalu clan

5 August 2017



## Acknowledgments

Among Malinowski's most astute observations of Trobriand culture are what he termed the "native canons of classification" (1932: 143): the three-fold conceptualization of practically every entity or activity as a metaphorical expression of botanical progression, beginning with an *u'ula* "origin" or "base," followed by a *tapwala* "trunk" or "middle part," culminating in a *doginala* "tip." Whether it is prototypically the shape or growth of a tree or of a canoe that is at issue—or a *kula* voyage, a *kula* shell, a yamhouse, a human body, a sexual act, a sacrificial offering, a cooking hearth, a magical spell, a garden, a human relationship, a human life—Islanders imagine the world and its manifold parts as action scenarios formally analogous to one another. Unfortunately, Malinowski did not further develop this insight into his ethnography or functionalist theorizing. And unremarked by him, every such progression typically culminates with a fourth element: the generation of *keuwela* "fruit" that serve recursively as new "bases" for further sequences of reproduction and transformation. *Taitu* yams as fruit of a year's planting, tending, and harvesting become either fertile seeds for the next crop's planting or the subsistence base of human life. One's children conceived, nurtured, and married off in turn procreate offspring with complementary potentials of their own as either daughters or sons.

This book is no less the fruit of just such processes. Many colleagues and friends have given much of themselves from the moments of its germination to its realization in the form before you. It would be incomplete if their contributions were not noted and my gratitude duly acknowledged.

The most obvious source for the greater part of what this volume contains is the four gentlemen savants of Omarakana who have devoted major portions of their lives over the past decade toward cultivating in me the knowledge instilled in them from their ancestors. The Trobriand Paramount Chief, Tabalu Pulayasi Daniel, is the ultimate *tokarewaga* ("man of authority") for this project. It has been only because of his support and patience that any of this has been possible. My other three collaborators, Pakalaki Tokulupai, Molubabeba Daniel, and Yogaru Vincent, have been similarly unwavering in their commitment to teaching me the rudiments of their way of life to the best of their knowledge.

I have my own intellectual ancestors whose wisdom has also been foundational in preparing me for the task. Bronislaw Malinowski, of course, stands at the foot of this anthropological pedigree. It was his writings which I first encountered as an undergraduate that stirred me into becoming a professional practitioner. And it is he, after all, who generated the puzzles which have kept my Trobriand curiosity alive. It is an honor to me, and I hope to him, that this volume appears as part of a publishing venture dedicated to him.

Over the course of my training and career, I was to find that other anthropologists who had inspired me were in various ways also intellectual heirs to Malinowski's legacy. Chief among them still is Edmund Leach, one of Malinowski's last students, who in my mind has done as much as anyone to elicit from his mentor's writings the true gems, albeit sometimes in their unfinished forms. Yet it was a student of Leach's at Cambridge who guided me to him: my doctoral supervisor Stephen Gudeman. Although a Meso-Americanist, Gudeman proved exceptionally conversant with the Trobriand corpus as it was at that time. This set the stage for my appreciation of others whose influences upon me cannot be underestimated. Chiefly these are the luminaries of the British and French varieties of anthropology, tracing back to Durkheim, Mauss, and the *Année Sociologique* school, to Lévi-Strauss, Douglas, Evans-Pritchard, Dumont, Gell, Sahlins, and Viveiros de Castro, among many others. Along the way, my encounters with the writings of Marilyn Strathern and Roy Wagner proved to be world-changing. Any reader of this volume will be able to detect their influence throughout. Below the surface, however, Leach and Gudeman have provided me personal as well as intellectual support and encouragement which have propelled me all the way through.

Although his work has sometimes (but by no means always) developed in different directions from my own, Fred Damon, through his friendship, scholarly example, theoretical acumen, and command of regional Massim ethnography,



has done much to keep my interest in Trobriand ethnography and related topics alive at those times when my research interests were focused elsewhere. My recently deceased mentor and friend Eugene Ogan offered unstinting love and support despite his fundamental skepticism regarding the kind of anthropology that I have found irresistible. I have been exceptionally fortunate also in having Michael Young as a friend and colleague for nearly thirty years. On many occasions he has generously shared with me his unparalleled command of Trobriand ethnography and Malinowski's writings, which has helped to correct any number of my mistakes.

The immediate cause of this book, however, is Giovanni da Col, Editor in Chief of HAU journal and this series. Our relationship traces back to our discovery of a mutual scholarly interest in Central Asian and Melanesian notions of "luck" (Humphrey and da Col 2012). To his credit (or blame), after later reading a short preliminary essay I had written on Trobriand magic, he virtually forced me into drafting the precursor article, "Malinowski's magical puzzles" (Mosko 2014b), for publication and then to expand it into the current volume. Like so many others and the profession itself, I am immensely indebted to his scholarly insights and perseverance.

Trobrianders have a fairly specific term, *kepwakari*, for the main body of activity (*tapwala*) of any endeavor upon which its completion depends. The *kepwakari* involved in producing this volume have been expended by many friends, colleagues, and associates laboring in numerous and diverse spheres. Fellow Massim ethnographers have generously shared their ideas with me, whether in agreement or disagreement, over specific issues: Debbora Battaglia, Harry Beran, Shirley Campbell, Andrew Connelly, Melissa Demian, Linus Digim'Rina, Jordan Haug, Edwin Hutchins, Sergio Jarillo, Ralph and Margaret Lawton, Kathy Lepani, Michelle MacCarthy, Susan Montague, and Gunter Senft. Others who have similarly provided valued stimulation and criticisms of different kinds include Serge Dunis, Robert Foster, Jim Fox, Margaret Jolly, Alan Jones, HE Charles Lepani, Xandra Miguel-Lorenzo, Ton Otto, Kathy Robinson, Alan Rumsey, Dominik Schieder, Michael Scott, Serge Tcherkézoff, and Borut Telban. I owe a very special debt to Allan Darrah and Jay Crain for allowing me access to their laboriously compiled database of Trobriand ethnography (Digital Ethnographic Project, DEP), which has proven to be an instrumental resource both in the field and back home. It should be noted that there are few commentators on the Trobriand corpus who have thought it through with as much devotion and ingenuity as Allan. I must express my gratitude as

well to the staff of the London School of Economics Archives and the Royal Anthropological Institute for their support during the months I was poring over Malinowski's and Seligman's fieldnotes, and to the Tuzin Archive for Melanesian Anthropology at the University of California, San Diego, for access to their holdings.

Among Trobrianders themselves, there are many who, whether they knew it at the time or not, voluntarily joined up as active members of my research team. Those in addition to my core Omarakana group who provided key ethnographic information and other assistance include Mairawesi Pulayasi, Toliwaga Toguguwa Tobodeli, Toliwaga Uelasi Tobukukwa, George Mwasaluwa, Tobi Mogakai, Modiala Daniel, Migipunu Mogakai, John and Mary Kasaipwalova, Mark Molubabeba, Kevin Kobuli, M'tabotu Bwabwa'u, Rev. Aaron Uelasi, Jesse M'pwoyola, Seth M'tabalu, Florence Pulitala, Margaret M'woybana, Sanubei Tobodeli, Babaïdo Kweilabuma, Boyogima Tomyala, Ibwelobu Sikayau, Brian Pulayasi, Leonard Louma, M'tabalu Tokwasemwala, Taurisiguyau Daniel, and Tokulupai Tamuanesa, plus many, many others. I wish to express my particular gratitude to the women of Omarakana for sharing their very special knowledge with me and for their kind attentions to my wife.

Numerous other associates in the Trobriands and Port Moresby provided a wide variety of logistical support which has proven instrumental at many junctures: Rev. René (LMI) and Elizabeth Bredow, Sister Valentina Pozzi, the sisters at Wapipi and Gusaweta Catholic stations, the nurses at Losuia Health Centre, Chris Abel, David Auabala, Abraham and Loi Cameron, Fr. Cesare, Ricki Daniel, Georgia Kaipu, Daniel and Fauapo Kipo, Rachel Mairi, Dave and Kerrie Rickards, Jim Robbins, Salona Rudd, Wendy Stein, Rebecca Young, and Nora Yowalela.

Needless to say, this project would have withered on the vine were it not for the considerable financial resources that sustained it. Grants from the Wenner-Gren Foundation and the Australian Research Council provided the bulk of funding which enabled me to compensate, adequately I hope, all those who have devoted their thoughts, time, and energy.

As this effort has neared its *doginala* "tip," there are many who have taken extraordinary steps to bring it to completion. Marilyn Strathern, Roy Wagner, Adam Kuper, Michael Young, Chris Gregory, Maurice Godelier, Allan Darrah, Elizabeth Brouwer, and Sarah Franklin kindly read through previous drafts and offered valuable comments and criticisms. My academic supervisors in the School of Culture, History, and Language at the Australian National University,

Directors Brij Lal and Ken George, freed me up from most teaching and administrative duties so that I could devote myself fully to the book's research and completion. Karina Pelling expertly drafted the book's figures, and Diana Tung competently compiled the indexes. The four photographs taken originally by Malinowski are reproduced here by kind permission of LSE Library and the Malinowski Estate. The HAU Books production staff led by Giovanni da Col and Katharine Herman have made the final efforts considerably less overwhelming than they might have been otherwise. Justin Dyer's meticulous copy-editing has greatly enhanced the readability and coherence of the text. I am particularly grateful to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, who generously agreed under considerable pressure to wade through the following unfamiliar pages and compose the book's Foreword.

The underlying theme and overt aim of this book—optimistically, the fruit it might someday become for anthropology—is that *baloma* are Trobrianders' constant companions in life, by which I mean it is difficult to discern whether the spirits' contributions to the living qualify as base, body, tip, fruit, or all of them. They are vital conferrers at every stage. I have benefited from the blessings of such a near-spiritual sort in the person of my wife, Cassandra. Molubabeba explained to me one day that through their shared efforts and intimacies, a husband and wife become like one person (*tomota mokwita*). And so it has been with Cassandra and me through the course of this book's generation and well before, not to deny or underestimate the importance of the differences which sometimes separately animate us. Without her unstinting love and counsel, this book would never have been realized. It is thus most fitting that it be dedicated to her.



## CHAPTER ONE

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# Introduction

## *On magical images, powers, and persons*

It seems useful to ask ourselves whether magic and kinship have a deeper connection than that usually acknowledged in contemporary anthropological theorizing. This may help explain why it is precisely these two themes that lie at the root of our disciplinary genealogical tree: the “animism” and “magic” of Tylor and Frazer on the one hand, the “classificatory kinship” and “exogamy” of Morgan and Rivers on the other.

Viveiros de Castro, “The gift and the given” (2009:244–45)

For much of the past century, Trobriand Islanders and their culture as interpreted by Bronislaw Malinowski and literally dozens of subsequent fieldworkers and commentators have held a unique and sacred place in anthropology—not only as “ground-zero” for our ethnographic field methodologies but also as an ongoing source of inspiration for any number of theoretical insights spanning the full breadth of the discipline’s topical interests. These range from ceremonial gift exchange, kinship organization, gender classification, and sexual practice to “primitive” law, language, cosmology, religion, mythology, magic, mortuary ritual, and so on. Along the way and in equal measure, the Trobriand corpus has

presented generations of practitioners with a great many ethnographic conundrums and controversies to ponder. I doubt if there is another society which has attracted comparable sustained anthropological attention.

With all this, the world's professional anthropologists and students can understandably be excused for presuming that most if not all the major interpretive problems have been solved, leaving relatively little left to know or say about the Trobriands ethnographically beyond what has been disclosed already. I see this, frankly, as perhaps the most urgent but intractable problem yet to be addressed as regards scholarship on the Trobriands.

Such a view may well be questioned by many readers and taken to be out of step with the emphasis that for generations in anthropology has been placed on studies of change and transformation. The Trobriands, after all, is something of a special case when it comes to the topic of change. On the one hand, despite the vicissitudes of contact, colonization, Christian conversion, Papua New Guinean National Independence, globalization, and so on, the culture and social organization of Trobrianders have in the eyes of many observers exhibited characteristics of being congenitally resilient, conservative, and resistant to external influence. For example,

Kiriwina has shown enormous resistance to fundamental cultural changes while in many other parts of the Massim . . . indigenous responses to Christianity, Western trade, and the enforcement of Western law have been more disruptive. (A. Weiner 1980b: 275–76)<sup>1</sup>

Some today are prone to claim that the day of the chief is past and that the state of affairs described by Malinowski (e.g., in *Coral Gardens and their magic*) no longer exists. This claim has no foundation in fact. Certainly many of the ancient powers are thought no longer to exist but the same was true in Malinowski's day, for many of the things he described were merely accounts of things Kiriwinan people said used to happen. These things aside, the chief's authority in the gardening cycle is little changed from eighty years ago, and his position and power as chief are still sure and firm. (Lawton 1993: 103)

- 
1. Other post-Malinowski ethnographers have reported basically the same perceptions of the same extent of change: e.g., Powell (1950b: 12; 1956); Scoditti (1996: 62); Jarillo (2013); but see Austen (1945); Jolly (1992a); Macintyre (1994); cf. Bashkow (2011).

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A striking feature of modern Kiriwinan life is its tremendous cultural conservation. (Montague 1978: 91)

On the other hand, studies of Trobriand social history have been relatively sparse, tending to focus on single dimensions of change. Detailed, systematic accounts of Trobriand encounters with the West from the perspectives of Islanders from the mid-nineteenth century continuing to the present have been undertaken only comparatively recently.<sup>2</sup> In light of the amount of scholarly attention that has been devoted to Trobriand “traditions,” this is indeed a striking anomaly.

This predicament is greatly compounded, however, if a significant portion of information regarding indigenous Trobriand knowledge and practices has yet to be reported, and, consequently, if a large share of what has come to be the received wisdom is in need of substantial revision. Any plausible analysis of change anywhere must at the very least be launched from as explicit and accurate a departure point as possible. Otherwise, efforts at analyzing the course of social transformation specifically will inevitably be led astray. Very simply, attempts aimed at documenting change can only succeed if they begin with a sound comprehension of the nature of that which is changing.

In this volume, I argue, despite the quantity and quality of all the work that has been expended thus far toward the decipherment of Trobriand social and cultural life, much of that which has become enshrined in our disciplinary paradigm as well as in the popular imagination is in critical need of amendment and rethinking. In a series of previous works, I have laid some of the groundwork that has led me to this conclusion.<sup>3</sup> In the chapters that follow, I carry those arguments further and hopefully deeper into Trobriand thought and sociality, informed, on the one hand, by ethnographic fieldwork I have been conducting

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2. The main studies of Trobriand history that have appeared to date include Austen (1945); Jerry Leach (1978, 1982); Montague (1978, 1985, 1995); Gerritsen (1979); May (1982); Jolly (1992a); Senft (1992, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1999); Young (2004); Lepani (2012); Jarillo (2013); MacCarthy (2012b, 2012c, 2013, 2015, 2016); Connelly (2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2016).
  3. See Mosko (1985: ch. 9; 2000, 2005a, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2015b, 2015c). In chapter 9, after concluding my substantive analysis of Trobriand traditions and their theoretical implications, I shall address the issue of whether ethnographic materials gathered in the present can be relied upon for illuminating the past or merely for indexing the extent of interim processes of social change.

over the past decade at Omarakana village in Northern Kiriwina—the site of Malinowski’s path-breaking Trobriand fieldwork and the home of the Tabalu “Paramount Chief” (fig. 1.1)—and supplemented, on the other hand, by considerable periods of archival study of both published and unpublished sources.

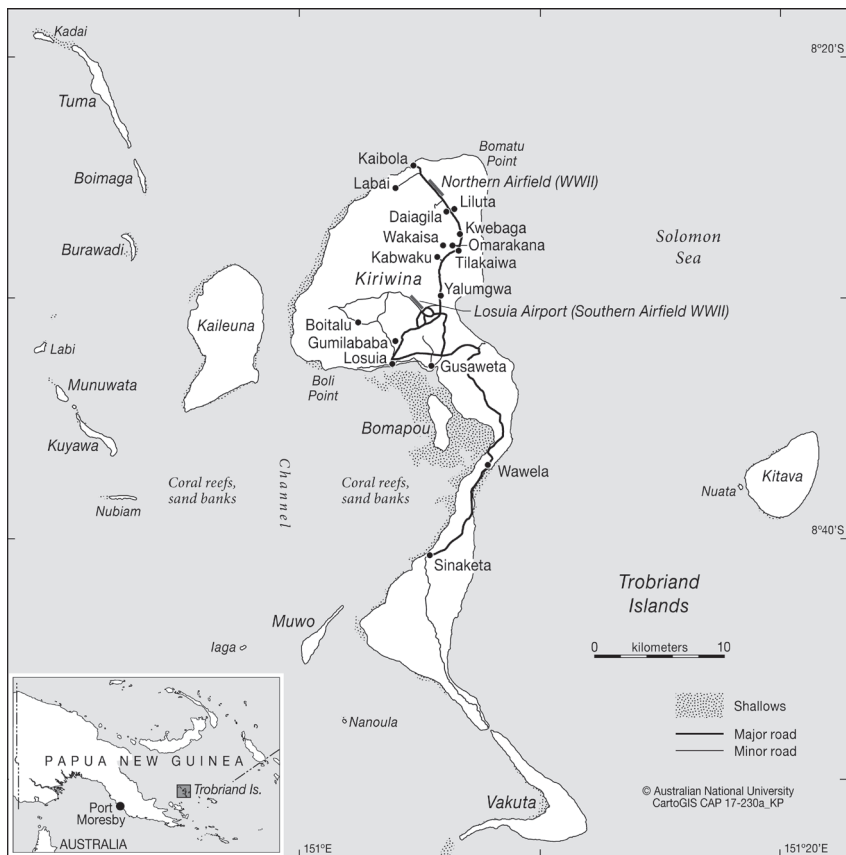


Figure 1.1. Map of Trobriand Islands.

With these materials at hand, I focus upon two major ethnographic puzzles which have until recently been viewed as minimally problematic and only faintly connected. One involves the assumptions and mechanisms underpinning the supposed efficacy of indigenous Trobriand *megwa* or “magic.” The other addresses the logical and empirical foundations of Trobriand kinship as an exemplification of “matrilineal society” and “virgin birth.” As for the link between



them, I shall pursue Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's insightful proposition in his essay "The gift and the given" (2009; see also M. Strathern 2005, 2014; Sahlins 2013), that magic and kinship might well be connected as joint manifestations of the "mysterious effectiveness of relationality" and processes of "personification." Referencing Chris Gregory (1982) and Marilyn Strathern (1988, 1992), Viveiros de Castro argues that just as kinship is conventionally seen as an exchange of persons as gifts, things as well as people in gift economies assume the social form of mystically or magically endowed persons.

For those conversant with the influence that Viveiros de Castro's Amazonian ethnography and his advocacy of the "ontological turn" have had upon the discipline in the past decade or so championing the "radical alterity" of non-Western societies, the positing of anything like a connectedness between "apparently irrational beliefs" (i.e., magic) and more sober "social relations of some sort" (Viveiros de Castro 2015) might seem out of place, or, as David Graeber (2015: 2) has opined, uncharacteristically "old-fashioned." Even so, I suggest, there may be some intriguing possibilities inhering in the relation between magic and kinship yet to be discerned, even with a case like the Trobriands, where it is widely assumed that both realms have been fairly exhaustively described, albeit separately until now, thanks to Malinowski and those who have followed him. Roy Wagner, I think, has accurately and provocatively characterized the issue as follows:

Magic, as Malinowski points out, grants people the illusion of control in areas that are beyond their normal means of control ("a poor man's whiskey," Malinowski called it); kinship, on the other hand, provides the illusion of uncontrollability in areas that are normally assumed to be under strict control. The chiasmic nature of this double relation takes us into theoretical realms that were beyond Malinowski's ability to imagine. (Pers. comm.)

Hopefully, therefore, the treatment I offer of Malinowski's puzzles over Trobriand magical and kinship reckoning will be received as an endorsement of Viveiros de Castro's insight but from an additional and, in certain critical respects, quite different sociocultural realm, one far removed from Amazonia but already familiar to a large number of anthropologists globally. And this in turn may well bear upon numerous additional dimensions of Trobriand ethnography, regional Oceanic cultural variation, and contemporary as well as classical theory.

## FORESHADOWS AND HIGHLIGHTS

A second major impediment confronting me in this study is the extent to which indigenous Trobriand understandings of magic and kin relationship, not to mention other conceptualizations of the same sociosystem more broadly, are exceedingly complex. Some would argue that this is no more the case with the Trobriands than with any other comparable system of Melanesia or beyond. Linked with this, nonetheless, I think there is an irrefutable inimitability of the Trobriand case as currently apprehended: namely, the inestimable influence that Malinowski and his writings have wielded generally over the discipline for the past century, and consequently over the conceptual orientations adopted by numerous Massim field investigators and other commentators. This cumulative situation makes it uncommonly difficult to state precisely just what the places of Trobriand magic and kinship *are* in the anthropological paradigm as we now know it.

Granted, on the one hand, Malinowski's rhetorical treatment of magic and his pragmatic theory of language in alignment with Frazer's (1922) view of magical instrumentality as "false" or "mistaken science" were important in the later works of Austen, Langer, Wittgenstein, Burke, Winch, and others (see Tambiah 1990b), thereby contributing to the development of modern sociolinguistics and other approaches that came to be deployed in critiques of structuralism.<sup>4</sup> However, "magic" on its own has proven to be among anthropology's most intractable topics. In earlier decades, the study of magic was recognized as foundational to anthropology. But as Graeber (2001: 241) has noted, the term had long been largely abandoned or replaced by other rubrics.

On the other hand, in similar fashion, anthropological models of kinship that had also stood as foundational to the discipline and to which Malinowski's reports on the Trobriands greatly contributed were overthrown not all that long ago, thanks to David Schneider's (1984) disclaimer as to the nonexistence of the phenomena, at least as conceptualized up till that point. But in subsequent times ethnographic and theoretical treatments of kinship along with magic have separately experienced notable revivals. It is thus timely for the pair

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4. In his later works elaborating on his functionalist theories of cultural interconnectedness, Malinowski came to distance his views from those of Frazer, stressing the positive contributions of magic to social integration in the Trobriands and elsewhere (see, e.g., Malinowski 1936).

to be subjected jointly to reexamination in the spirit of Viveiros de Castro's proposition.

Rather than attempting a comprehensive diagnosis of the magic-kinship nexus at this early stage (see chapter 2), however, I trust it will prove more expedient and interesting to outline briefly here in a hopefully simple, digestible form some of the remedies prescribed in the chapters that follow, where numerous dimensions of Trobriand culture and sociality are deployed as pertinent examples.

On the side of Malinowski's magical puzzle, and thus basic to virtually everything else reported in this volume, the information I have gathered from my Northern Kiriwina collaborators refutes the bald insistence by Malinowski ([1916] 1992: 201; 1922: 398, 404, 451; 1935b: 213–50) that the agency of Trobriand magical spells (*megwa*) resides, first, in the efficacy of ritually spoken words themselves, and explicitly not, second, in any agency attributed to ancestral *baloma* or other spirits. Instead, those spirit beings who are invoked at the opening of nearly all important incantations are unequivocally considered by practitioners and others to be the spells' chief agents. The importance of this issue can hardly be overestimated. In the view of Michael Young, Malinowski's biographer, for example, "Magic formulas, [Malinowski] believed, were the royal road to the Melanesian mind" (2004: 507).

Under close examination, I describe how the magical power of "words" (*biga*) as conceptualized in the local culture *is* the power of spirits, and vice versa. Thus here at the very outset of the analysis, the effectiveness of Trobriand magic *is* a matter of kinship: that is, of *ancestral* spirit linkage. The relations of living magician-agents of magical spells and their patient-victims, whether human or nonhuman, are likewise conceived in the same terms as used in connection with kin and affines.<sup>5</sup>

It is critical to interject at this early juncture a qualification as to the parameters of a key distinction that I employ throughout this narrative: namely, that between "*baloma*" and "human." It must be understood that in indigenous perspective, every human being (*tomota*) living in the visible, material world known as Boyowa is animated by an internal immaterial *baloma* "soul."<sup>6</sup> Upon dying,

5. My use here and elsewhere in this volume of the "agent"/"patient" dichotomy follows Gell's linguistic classification of those notions (Gell 1998; see also M. Strathern 1988: 268–305). An agent, therefore, is a person capable of changing the dispositions and/or actions of some targeted patient or victim.

6. Boyowa is the indigenous term for the island now known as Kiriwina. The label "Kiriwina" emerged in European discourse early in the historical era from "Kilivila,"

that *baloma* “soul” is understood to exit the corpse and enter a life in Tuma, the land of the dead, as an invisible disembodied *baloma* “spirit” that is still human (*tomota*) in every critical respect. Therefore, Boyowan persons and Tuman spirits are *both* conceived as instances of *baloma*, just as *baloma* spirits and living people are *both* recognized as being equally sentient humans. Nonetheless, for the sake of clearly differentiating the relations and distinctive agencies of *baloma* in their spiritual and corporeal manifestations, it will be necessary to restrict my use of the term “*baloma*” to refer to human beings in the former “spirit” sense. And when I write of “living humans,” “living people,” “Islanders,” “villagers,” and so on, I am still pointing to *baloma* but in their latter substantial materialization. The “ways of *baloma*” that I outline in the remainder of this volume consequently encompass the “roads” and “paths” (*keda*), or “life-ways” (*kedakeda*) pursued by Trobriand human beings in both their cultural and cosmological manifestations.

Perhaps as an indication of magic’s earlier fall from anthropological grace, only a few modern ethnographers or commentators on the Trobriand corpus since Malinowski have taken issue with his claims as to the nonparticipation of *baloma* spirits in people’s magical practices. Classic influential essays by Stanley Tambiah (1968, 1973) are the most notable exceptions (see below and chapter 3). Chiefly for this reason, my engagement with the body of ethnographic writings on Trobriand magic is largely focused on Malinowski’s views together with Tambiah’s. It must be stressed, however, that the substance of Tambiah’s critique of Malinowski on this point is fundamentally different from my own.

Malinowski’s rejection of the magical efficacy of *baloma* spirits invoked in spells was a key instance of his sense of the relatively autonomous character of the relations between villagers and their ancestral or other spirits. Nonetheless, there are other contexts where he did acknowledge some reciprocal interaction of spirits and humans in each other’s affairs. As a preliminary to the performance of some magical spells, for example, magicians were expected to offer “oblations” of food (*ula’ula*) to the spirits named in the spells, supposedly to get them on the magicians good side. Violations of the “taboos” associated with specific spells were noted to have an effect on the outcome of magical performances. *Baloma*

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the local name for the indigenous language. But for Islanders, the term Boyowa is also used in general reference to the visible, material segment of the cosmos that humans inhabit and experience in their waking life. Thus the surface of the land and sea and their tangible content—living humans, plants, animals, “natural phenomena”—are all inhabitants of Boyowa.

spirits often communicated with their living relatives during dreams. Some gifted “seers” or “mediums” upon entering trance states could venture to Tuma, and upon their return to Boyowa they relayed messages from deceased ancestors. *Baloma* spirits themselves returned temporarily to their island villages to visit surviving kin during annual *milamala* harvest festivities. Spirits also participated in multiple other ways in the processes of human procreation and reincarnation.

Thus Malinowski’s blanket abjuring of *baloma* involvement in magical performance and more generally in the affairs of their living descendants appears to be itself anomalous in relation to several other major portions of the culture he himself described, thereby calling for reexamination and reconceptualization.

Malinowski’s puzzle over magical efficacy has an additional twist entangled with controversies surrounding Trobriand notions of “virgin birth”—a matter, once again, essentially concerning kinship. Malinowski ([1916] 1992, 1932) had reported initially that Trobrianders were flatly “ignorant” of the facts of “physiological paternity” in light of villagers’ pronouncements that *baloma* spirits in the form of *waiwaia* “spirit children” were responsible for human conception. Thus spirits’ involvement in procreation, while consistent with villagers’ supposed lack of knowledge of paternal contributions to human biological reproduction, contradicted his disavowal of the agency of spirits in magical performance.

However, there is a flip side to Malinowski’s views of Trobriand procreation theory which has attracted considerably less notice. Although in the third edition of *The sexual life of savages* (1932: lix–lxvi) Malinowski modified some aspects of his earlier assertions of villagers’ stark ignorance of fathers’ contributions to procreation, the initial reports he provided of *baloma* responsibility for causing (or preventing) human pregnancy and birth were left unchallenged.<sup>7</sup> These *baloma* are those other spirits who, informants claimed, transported *waiwaia* from the spirit world, Tuma, to Boyowa and inserted them into the bodies of their mothers-to-be. In some circumstances, as Malinowski’s, my own, and others’ field inquiries confirm, those spirits are understood to do so in response to *megwa* spells performed by married couples or living relatives acting on their

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7. In Malinowski’s own words, “The Trobrianders do not suffer from a specific complaint, an *ignorantia paternitatis*. What we actually find among them is a complicated attitude towards the facts of maternity and paternity. Into this attitude there enter certain elements of positive knowledge, certain gaps in embryological information. These cognitive ingredients again are overlaid by beliefs and legal principles of the community and by the sentimental leanings of the individual” (1932: lix).

behalf (Malinowski [1916] 1992: 219–20, 222–23; 1929b; 1932: 146–52, 154, 156, 160–61, 168, 328; see also Austen 1934–35: 108–11; A. Weiner 1976: 44, 122, 251n; 1988: 54–55; 1989: 40; 1992: 39, 74, 76, 121–22).

In his rejections of Islanders' intellectual grasp of physiological paternity, therefore, Malinowski unwaveringly acknowledged villagers' assertions that *baloma* spirits are viewed after all, at least in this context, as a font of magical efficacy. As I shall attempt to show in chapter 4, this seeming contradiction is a critical one. The ambiguities surrounding Malinowski's magical puzzles and the "virgin birth" controversy are of one piece.

In important ways also, it should be mentioned, plant and animal species and corresponding visible and invisible features of the "natural" world that are also invoked in magical spells but which Malinowski (1922: 427) similarly excluded from magical efficacy (aside from the function of the words or names used to denote them) are personified in Trobriand thought in ways that an earlier anthropology would have classified as "totemic": namely, beings and entities which in certain respects qualify as ancestral "kin" also. This does not necessarily imply, however, that such "natural" beings and entities personify agentive capacities of the same order as *baloma* spirits or living people, only that the precise nature of their involvement in magical practices and the caliber of their status in their relationships with humans were left largely unexamined.<sup>8</sup>

These questions as to the precise location of Trobriand magical agency have additional ethnographic and theoretical implications extending well beyond the bounds of kinship. Malinowski's (1932, 1935a, 1935b) view of the magical efficacy of words as indicative of his pragmatic view of Trobriand culture and language in general, for example, was just one instance of his stated opinion that ancestral *baloma* and other spirits conducted their lives largely sequestered in the remote spirit world of Tuma and thus relatively uninvolved in the activities of their living human descendants. The important point is that nearly all of Malinowski's successors till now have made, whether implicitly or explicitly, the same assumption about the limited engagement of *baloma* and other spirits in villagers' lives, and vice versa.

Consider, however, that Malinowski and others following in his wake have just as staunchly affirmed indigenous magic to be a fundamental creed of

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8. This, incidentally, is one of the theoretically consequential differences between Amazonian and Trobriand (as exemplifying Melanesian) "ontologies"; in the former case, animals are attributed more or less in full the sentient characteristics of humans, where in the latter they are not.

Trobriand culture and cosmology, providing an essential ingredient to nearly every context of social life. As phrased by Tambiah (1990b: 71), for example, magical rites relate to “every aspect of Trobriand life.” Thus if, as I argue, *baloma* spirits can be revealed as the perceived agents of magical practices implicated in nearly all contexts of living humans’ and spirits’ imagined sociality—procreation, kinship, clanship, and affinal relations, mythology, cosmology, chiefly hierarchy and rank, ritual performance (e.g., religious sacrifice, mortuary exchange, *kula*, *milamala* harvest celebration, sorcery and witchcraft, taboo observance, etc.)—then our current ethnographic understandings of Trobriand culture and social organization are partial at best. Taking full account of the significance of *baloma* spirit participation in those areas where magic is implicated holds the promise of profoundly altering much that we over a century have been schooled to understand about the Trobriands and those parts of the anthropological edifice to which they have contributed. And at a certain degree of generalization, this is ironically no different than Malinowski opined:

One of the first conditions of acceptable Ethnographic work certainly is that it should deal with the totality of all social, cultural and psychological aspects of the community, for they are so interwoven that not one can be understood without taking into consideration all others. (1922: xvi)

Revisions of conventional thinking about the nature of Trobriand kinship that I undertake in the remainder of this volume follow from indigenous notions predicated on the magical agency of spirits. But these connections of magic to the social order are fundamentally different from those conceptualized by Malinowski. For him, the sociological function of magic was to organize and regulate the pace of activities in gardening, fishing, trading, and so on, of specific groups of living people in those particular contexts.<sup>9</sup>

The view of spirit participation in magical practices that I have mentioned above has quite other and more far-reaching implications. For example, from the reports of Malinowski and others, the indigenous system of social organization has been generally accepted as paradigmatic of a “matrilineal society” or

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9. This sociological function was secondary for Malinowski, as distinct from the primary psychological one of reducing stress and anxiety when people reach the limits of their technological abilities to control nature ([1925] 1992: 87; but see Malinowski 1939; also Homans 1941).

“matrilineal system” (e.g., Fathauer 1961; Schneider and Gough 1961). On the basis of the ethnographic analogies I draw among magical performance, kin relationship, cosmology, indigenous procreation theory, and chiefly rank based on the efficacy of spirits rather than merely words, and so on, Trobriand kin-based social organization is “matrilineal” only as regards the tracing of spatially dispersed descent identities and the personal capacities that follow from them.

Much as Roy Wagner (1974) argued of the New Guinea Highlands, it can be questioned, on the one hand, whether matrilineal *dala* “lineage” and *kumila* “clan” categories constitute concrete groups, and, on the other, whether they, as undeniably bona fide parts of the social landscape, are sufficient for the characterization of the total social system. The more important day-to-day interactions involving face-to-face coresidential families, hamlets, villages, and chiefdoms, I argue, are patterned instead on paired principles of *patrifilial* identification and *affinity*.

Seen in this perspective, Trobriand sociality presents an interesting ethnographic parallel to shifts that developed in the ethnography of the New Guinea Highlands. Initial accounts of Highlands societies redeploying African models of segmentary patrilineal organization encountered difficulties in making sense of empirical deviations from people’s explicit descent pronouncements (e.g., Barnes 1962; Langness 1964; Meggitt 1965, 1977; de Lepervanche 1967–68; A. Strathern 1972). In particular, to account for the presence in lineages and clans of nonagnatically connected members, singular characterizations of Highland collectivities as “patrilineal” had to be discarded. Virtually the same clarification is required with respect to preconceptions of Trobrianders or their society as being flatly “matrilineal.”

For example, as I outline in several chapters, hamlet and village “leaders” (*tolivalu*) and “chiefs” (sing. *guyau*, pl. *gumgweguya*), who are nominally identified with the matrilineally defined *dala* lands over which they wield “authority” (*karewaga*) as “lineage leaders or headmen” (*tomwaya dala*), are widely viewed as *tama* “fathers” with respect to their diverse and fluid followings of resident *gwa-di* “children,” and expressly *not* “glorified brothers-in-law of the entire community,” as Malinowski proclaimed (1922: 62–65; 1935a: 191–92; cf. Powell 1956: 507; Montague 1978: 95–96). I believe it was Annette Weiner (1976) who first recognized ethnographically the extraordinary importance that villagers attribute to the kin category *tama* as “father.”<sup>10</sup> Rather than being regarded merely

10. However, see my discussion below of Edmund Leach’s topographical analysis of Trobriand paternity in his classic essay “Rethinking anthropology” (1961).



as “mother’s husband” and hence as a nonrelative or “stranger” (*tomakava*), a person’s *tama* father is an intensely intimate kinsman as defined in terms complementary to those used for maternal relatives and for magical efficacy generally. Thus matrilineage headmen and local hamlet and village leaders and chiefs possess the corresponding authority and responsibility of *tama* fathers to “look after” (*yamata*) their immediate lineage and local followings consistent with the indigenous doctrine of paternal agency in human procreation and nurturance. And most significantly for present purposes, it is the persons of headmen, leaders, and chiefs along with *tama* fathers who stand as the repositories and practitioners of the most important magical spells (*tukwa*; see chapter 3), particularly those “owned” by the *dalas* that they nominally manage or direct.

So as not to be misunderstood, this further, critical recognition of paternal-magical agency applies as well to the senior male leader of a lineage even in relation to others of his own “matrilineal” *dala*: namely, that he is viewed as an “adoptive” (*vakalova*) *tama* “father” to his own matrilineage siblings, nephews, and nieces.

Of course, these latter claims beg the whole question of the nature of Trobriand paternity that has for long dogged anthropological understandings of the nature of indigenous kinship and affinity, as most famously illustrated in the “virgin birth” controversy of the 1960s and 1970s. And that debate has not entirely abated.<sup>11</sup> I am pleased that at several junctures I shall be able to present new data regarding this intriguing puzzle.

A related misperception is evident also regarding indigenous prescriptions and proscriptions of the regulation of marriage. Malinowski (1932), Powell (1956), and Annette Weiner (1976), among others, have written of the oft-voiced preference for patrilineal cross-cousin marriage. As I shall describe in chapter 8 on the basis of distinctive Omarakanan alliance conventions of *bilateral* cross-cousin matrimony, marriages between chiefly men and women are effectively “quasi-incestuous” or “quasi-endogamous.” These complicated

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11. The “virgin birth” debate, as it came to be known, was initiated with an essay by Edmund Leach (1966) based on Malinowski’s report (1932) and other ethnography conducted by that time (e.g., Rentoul 1931, 1932; Austen 1934–35; Powell 1956). Additional major contributions to the debate focusing on Trobriand procreation include E. Leach (1968), Powell (1968), Spiro (1968), and Montague (1971). Others have subsequently entered the fray (e.g., A. Weiner 1976, 1988; Spiro 1982; Mosko 1985, 1995, 1998b, 2005b; Delaney 1986; Bashkow 1996; van Dokkum 1997, 2000; Lepani 2012; Shapiro 2014).

arrangements are expressly designed to ensure the orderly hereditary perpetuation of the monopoly of the society's most potent magical repertoires.

These insights into the complex articulations of Trobriand magical practice with matrilineal, patrilineal, and affinal kinship enable me to amend Edmund Leach's classic formulation in "Rethinking anthropology" (1961) of what he characterized as a fundamental ideological opposition in the Trobriands and elsewhere between "incorporation" (i.e., kinship) and "mystical influence" (i.e., affinity and magic).<sup>12</sup> Leach had argued against Radcliffe-Brown, Fortes, Goody, and others that affinity, rather than patrilineal descent as complementary to matrilineal descent in the Trobriand case, more accurately captured the meaning and sort of influence of the indigenous *tama* father category. With new information on magical or mystical agency at hand, in chapter 8 I analyze contexts where the opposition posited by Leach is present but also systematically reversed. For example, similarly to how *dala* headmen and chiefs stand as adoptive paternal authorities to their own matrilineal kin, exogamously joined husbands and wives through the intimacy of their personal interactions become "quasi-incestuous" siblings to one another. Thus within family groups, a child's *tama* father becomes implicitly assimilated to his/her mother's brother (*kada*).<sup>13</sup> Similar to what Malinowski and others have noted, I explain in chapters 3 and 6–8 how it is established practice for Trobriand fathers to pass to their sons rather than their supposedly legitimate matrilineal heirs (i.e., sisters' sons) the magical spells of their own *dalas*.

Critically, these and other inversions of the ordinary oppositions of kinship and affinity outlined by Leach are culturally conditioned by the mythical behaviors of *baloma* and other spirits and deities in the initial phase of cosmic creation (*bubuli*; see chapter 4). My treatment of the links between magical efficacy and kinship thus shed new light on several confusions entailed in earlier discussions of Trobriand views and practices of incest and endogamy, symbolic or otherwise.

12. In this regard, Leach's essay anticipates the linkage between magic and kinship more recently articulated by Viveiros de Castro (see above).

13. This insight sheds new light on Malinowski's portrayal of the separate spheres of authority of fathers and maternal uncles—i.e., "father love" versus "mother right"—which sets the stage for anthropology's classic venture into a critique of Freudian psychology, in this case over the local and species-wide parameters of the Oedipal taboo (see Spiro 1982). For a contemporary theoretical treatment of the mutual implication of husband/wife and brother/sister relations, see M. Strathern (2014: 48–49, *passim*).

As noted above, Trobriand kinship and magic are both implicated in indigenous views of human procreation. In chapters 4 and 7 I demonstrate how not only *tama* fathers, *dala* headmen, and local leaders and chiefs but also paternal relatives in certain contexts standing in for them at every relational scale—father’s sisters (*tabu*), garden and other magical specialists (*torwosi*), and magicians’ now-*baloma* spirit predecessors—are the parties held to be responsible for the relative success of the magic over their *gwadi* “children.” Insofar as a man’s or his sister’s enunciated spells are also conceived as their *gwadi* “children,” his/her agnatically conceived offspring are critically viewed as externalized manifestations of their internal magical capacities, defined in terms of the distinctive constellations of potent, *detachable* and *transactable* “images” or “shadows” (*kekwebu*, *kaikwebu*) incorporated in *both* their spells and progeny.

Those readers already versed in the approach to Melanesian personhood and sociality known as the New Melanesian Ethnography (Josephides 1991; hereafter NME) will recognize in this language of the detachability and transactability of maternal, paternal, and other *kekwebu* images—potent parts or pieces (*posula* or *posu’ula*) of persons and relations—the influence of the theoretical model of “personal partibility” (M. Strathern 1988), which largely inspires this volume theoretically.<sup>14</sup> That orientation and certain conceptual modifications or extensions to it that I explore are outlined in chapters 2–4 and 9. For now it is sufficient to note that this notion of *kekwebu* “images” and the *peu’ula* “powers” or “capacities” associated with them hold the key to unlocking the tie between magic and kinship and virtually all the additional beliefs and practices that follow from it.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the full range of activities which Malinowski and others have noted as critically involving the performance of men’s magic (or that which is done on their behalf by women) amounts basically to partible paternal

14. The root of *posu’ula* (i.e., /*u’ula*/) conveys the meaning that the *posula* “parts” of anything are basic or fundamental (*u’ula*) to its character.

15. In previous publications (Mosko 2009, 2010a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b), I represented this concept as “*peula*,” with the same spelling as found in Baldwin’s (1939), Lawton’s (2002a, 2002b), and Hutchins and Hutchins’ (n.d.) dictionaries (see also A. Weiner 1983: 693; Powell 1995: 74). In my most recent field inquiries, it was revealed that the word is correctly denoted as /*pe* + *u’ula*/. This is a significant amendment. The word *u’ula* for “base,” “origin,” “source,” “cause,” and so on, is a key trope in practically all contexts of Trobriand sociality (see Mosko 2009). According to knowledgeable informants, *peu’ula* has the specific meaning of powers or capacities arising from their “origin” or “base”: “when you have *peu’ula*, you are expressing your *kekwebu*” (i.e., “images” intrinsic to your very being or person).

agents acting with respect to dividual progeny patients. The context of magical performance in the Trobriands, again, *is* kin relatedness and participation, and the context of Trobriand kinship *is* magical performance.

The implications of these and other complex, intrinsic links between Trobriand magical practice and kin relationship go much further and in many additional directions interwoven throughout the book's chapters. For this reason, my presentation may appear at numerous junctures to follow rather elliptical routes. But as I hope to demonstrate, these adhere in numerous respects to the ways Islanders envision the agencies which they, along with their spirit ancestors as extensions of themselves, possess. For example, I present new materials illustrating that activities that Malinowski and others have viewed as exclusively addressing relations among living people, magic just being one example, are understood among Islanders themselves as instances of "sacrificial" exchange (*bwekasa*) organized more or less according to classic anthropological theories (i.e., beginning with Hubert and Mauss [1899] 1964) of reciprocal relations between mortal humans and divinities, in this case *baloma* and other spirits of Tuma. These activities, ranging from food preparation, exchange, and consumption, to procreation, mortuary celebration, *kula* exchange, and the recitation of magical spells, to name a few, give the lie to the premise that ancestral *baloma* and other spirits of Tuma have little involvement in or influence over human affairs. The fact that so many critical activities definitive of familiar elements of the traditional culture and social organization possess this added religious dimension requires, again, a fundamental reconceptualization of the nature of Trobriand sociality.

Taking another example from several chapters, in terms of gender distinctions as outlined by Annette Weiner (1976, 1988), women through their child-bearing and mortuary-performing functions are recognized as the entry and exit points between Boyowa, the visible world of the living, and Tuma, the invisible world of *baloma*. Weiner thus distinguished women as the uniquely central figures in the ahistorical, atemporal dimension of Trobriand cosmology. But as I describe, entitled men's ultimate control and monopoly of the paternal creativity embodied in magical practices—and especially those magical spells and associated procedures owned by *dala* "matrilineal" groupings—are conceived in terms analogous to the procreative powers of women, and vice versa. Indeed, Islanders liken the spirit-impregnated spells that magicians generate from their oral cavities—again, as *gwadi* "children"—to the spirit-impregnated children to which women give birth through their vaginal channels at the opposite end of

their bodies. Here more graphically than anywhere, perhaps, magic and kinship are isomorphic.

Additionally, men's magical knowledge is routinely transmitted *first* from fathers to sons before it is returned to the father's matrilineal *dala* or lineage relatives. This latter datum greatly baffled Malinowski as it contradicted what he thought should be the case with matrilineal inheritance. But as Annette Weiner has noted, in certain critical ways it is a son rather than a nephew who "takes the place of his [the son's] father" (1976: 63, 152, 199). This masculine-paternal function embedded even in supposedly matrilineal contexts and relations positions magically qualified men as critical and complementary ahistorical interlocutors between the very two existential realms of Boyowa and Tuma that Weiner reserved exclusively for women. The relation between indigenous magical creativity and kinship procreativity thus offers a radically new view of the complementarity of Trobriand gender-based personhood, sociality, and cosmology.

In chapter 8 I clarify the rules and preferences by which Trobrianders as affiliates of both their mother's and father's *dalas* claim to practice marriage exchange. The reported idealized system of asymmetrical father's sister's daughter's (*tabu*) marriage has been widely debated by many of anthropology's modern luminaries (e.g., Lévi-Strauss, Leach, Needham, Lounsbury, Weiner) without ever achieving full clarity. At Omarakana, marriage of a man to a woman in his father's *dala* matrilineage (i.e., *tabu*) or to the daughter of his mother's brother (i.e., *latu*)—or reciprocally of a woman to a man in her father's *dala* (i.e., *tama*) or to the son of her mother's brother (i.e., *tabu*)—is ordinarily practiced only among the highest-ranking elites as a deliberate means of restricting access to the most critical magical knowledge shared between two chiefly lineages (i.e., between Tabalu and official representatives of the only other locally resident land-holding chiefly *gumgweguya*, the Osapola-Bwaydaga branch of Kwenama *dala*). According to traditional rule, the Paramount Chief's titled "principal" or "senior wife" (Vila Bogwa) must be of this latter *dala* identity (cf. Malinowski 1932: 113–14; Powell 1956: 51, 100–1, 503, 562), and one of her brothers of the same pedigree serves as the titled "political advisor" or "oratory chief" (Katayuvisa) to the Tabalu. This latter arrangement has till now received the barest of ethnographic attention, mentioned only briefly in Malinowski's and Powell's accounts (see chapter 8; Mosko 2013b; cf. Lawton 1993: 100, 102). Its existence, however, portends a radically different view of Trobriand chieftainship and the overall structure of Kiriwina society and goes a long way toward explaining

the supposedly unique nature, for Melanesia, of the Trobriand paramountcy. However, as I argue further, Trobriand chieftainship in this diarchic form is directly comparable with the “peace” and “war” authority structures of related Austronesian-speaking societies of mainland southeast Papua New Guinea and, most famously, with *ali’i* “sacred” as distinct from *tulāfale* “profane” or “political-orator chiefs” encountered in Sāmoa and variously replicated across Polynesia.

Related to this, when it comes to the Tabalu’s traditional succession, only those Tabalu men whose fathers are of Osapola-Bwaydaga identity are ideally considered plausible candidates. Thus through the formalized arrangement of *reciprocal* (i.e., *bilateral*) patrilineal cross-cousin marriage, the allied *dalas* of the Tabalu and Katayuvisa chiefs are able to maintain what amounts to an exclusive caste-like affinally based quasi-endogamous “magical kinship” that separates them from other chiefs and commoners of the archipelago.<sup>16</sup> Of greatest significance, it is through this pact that the two resident chiefs are able to safeguard jointly their exclusive possession of the most basic knowledge of the Omarakana polity—the magical spells thought to control agricultural plenty as well as catastrophic droughts, famine, and epidemics. Not coincidentally, the distinctive magical capacity of chiefs standing as incarnations of *baloma* and other divinities is grounded in marriage practices that resonate with the systemic “quasi-incestuousness” of descent and affinity discussed above in relation to Leach’s earlier analysis.

One context where Malinowski not only acknowledged but stressed the influence of *baloma* and other spirits in human affairs concerned indigenous eschatology: namely, the belief in ancestral reincarnation ([1916] 1992: 216–20, 234). This is another instance where a major cornerstone of accepted understandings about Trobriand culture can be questioned. As originally reported, upon a given person’s death, his/her internal *baloma* “soul” is thought to exit the body, to travel to the invisible spirit world of Tuma, and there to enjoy an extended spirit life. Eventually, however, the *baloma* spirit is supposed to experience its own spirit-aging, which is brought to conclusion with the spirit’s reincarnation into the visible, material world of living humans by being born

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16. As I shall describe at a later point, under certain circumstances the Tabalu sons of men of chiefly *dala* other than Osapola-Bwaydaga have a decided advantage in succeeding to the role of Omarakana Tabalu “Paramount Chief” (see Lawton 1993: 94). But their advantage is considered to be secondary to that of the sons of Osapola-Bwaydaga unless the marriage of their parents also conformed to the rule of reciprocal paternal father’s sister’s daughter marriage (see chapters 7 and 8).

from the womb of a woman of the *baloma*'s original maternal *dala* identity (Malinowski [1916] 1992, 1932; see also A. Weiner 1976: 39, 121–23).

Omarakanans' views of death and the afterlife, however, posit a second cycle of reincarnation paralleling this first one. In this instance, the components (i.e., *kekwebu* images and associated *peu'ula* powers) of persons as transacted during life between fathers and children also circulate, but separately, between the two cosmic regions. The personal components that a man or woman has received by virtue of a lifetime of contributions from his/her father and other paternal kin are transmitted upon death in the rite of *kopoi* "carrying" from the decomposing corpse to another "Tuma"—the wombs of the women of the deceased's father's and spouse's *dalas*.<sup>17</sup> From that Tuma, the reaggregated images and powers will eventually contribute back to the generation in Boyowa of further children of those women's *dalas* and, subsequent to that, to those women's *son*'s offspring. Here again, contra Weiner, the agency originating in men's creative and procreative activity is conceptualized according to an ahistorical cosmic register analogous to women's.

The ultimate point of significance of these and other findings is that *dala* as embodied and expressed among the living of Boyowa through their relations with each other and with *baloma* spirits of Tuma consists of qualities and capacities that are activated and replicated by and through men as well as women. The realm of men's magical agencies encapsulates those of women, and the domain of women's reproductive powers is critically shaped by those of men.

## ON METHODS, ETHNOGRAPHIC THEORY, AND THE ARCHIVE

This undertaking is informed by articulations among four distinct sources of information. First, I have conducted twenty-five months of ethnographic investigation during ten annual fieldtrips over 2006–16 based at Omarakana village in Northern Kiriwina. As the home of the Tabalu Paramountcy, Omarakana

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17. This cycling of *kekwebu* images back through father's *dala* occurs simultaneously as well with respect to the *dala* of the deceased spouse. How this ties in with the reincarnation of strictly paternal components of persons is explained in chapter 6. In any case, it should be noted that the association of women's wombs with the invisible world of spirits is a common feature of the cosmologies of the cultures of the Austronesian world, most famously perhaps in the case of Polynesian societies.



has proven to be the ideal site for these inquiries. The current Tabalu or “Paramount Chief,” Pulayasi Daniel, is widely regarded across the archipelago as the ultimate authority on virtually all customary matters (*gulagula*), much of which lies outside the public domain for the majority of villagers.<sup>18</sup> Other Tabalu and non-Tabalu residents of Omarakana, nonetheless, constitute an additional rich source of authoritative knowledge. Similarly to how other Islanders view Omarakanans, I quickly came to respect my closest interlocutors as intellectually akin to the “philosopher kings” of Plato’s *Republic* (see below). Thanks to the generous support of the Paramount Chief, I have also had the privilege of access to members of the Kiriwina Council of Chiefs and other leaders and respected members of the wider community.

Second, while this book contains much new ethnographic material from the Trobriands, it deviates from the form of the accepted ethnography insofar as I attempt in each chapter to contextualize my own findings with those of previous investigators. In addition to its sheer volume, the ethnographic literature on the Trobriands is exceptional to the extent that there sometimes appears to be a measure of reluctance on the part of earlier fieldworkers to compare and critique one another’s findings. Malinowski’s works, of course, have been open game all along.<sup>19</sup> But given all the subsequent research that has been conducted

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18. The designation “Paramount Chief” is an artifact of the establishment of colonial control by British and Australian forces in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The correct title for this position is “Tabalu,” but in use that word refers also to the Tabalu’s *dala*, meaning all the other people who affiliate with that *dala*, the Tabalu leaders of other communities besides Omarakana, and additional beings and entities that share the same constellation of images and potential powers (see chapter 4). However, Pulayasi Daniel as the current Tabalu, like several of his last predecessors, is frequently referred to as “Paramount Chief” or “*the* Paramount Chief” in common speech along with simply *Tomwaya* “respected man” or “elder.” Although my main interests here are the multifarious threads of the indigenous culture that persist into the present, when referring to the chiefly Tabalu of Omarakana, I shall occasionally use the gloss “Paramount Chief.”

19. I say this fully aware of the compilations of studies conducted by previous scholars such as contained in the two “Kula volumes” (Jerry Leach and E. Leach 1983; Damon and Wagner 1989), and I may be wrong in making this claim. But I think it fair to say that most of the critical discussion of the works of Trobriand ethnographers up till now has been conducted by scholars who have not done fieldwork there themselves. To my knowledge, there have been since 2010 an additional three fieldworkers conducting their doctoral research on Kiriwina: Andrew Connelly (Australian National University), Sergio Jarillo (University of Cambridge), and Michelle MacCarthy (University of Auckland). As the full results of their research



after exactly a century, it seems opportune at this moment to take wider stock of how far our knowledge of the Trobriands has advanced and to contemplate the possibility that much of the existing canon might require systemic reconceptualization. Indeed, for the Trobriands especially, given the extent of the existing corpus and its centrality to the discipline, it would be, in my view, unscholarly to attempt to contribute anything new which did not engage methodically with previous findings as far as is practicable.

Even so, it is the case that my focus on the relation of indigenous magic to kinship is prompted more directly from the data and assertions of Malinowski than of others. Hopefully, readers will encounter a not-too-disproportionate imbalance in either my attention to Malinowski's writings or my critiques and corrections of them. This has meant in practical terms that some sections of the book might be viewed as a litany of Malinowski's mistakes, oversights, misinterpretations, and so on. In many instances, however, it is the discrepancies and contradictions within Malinowski's own accounts which highlight many of the culture's perduring ethnographic puzzles and point to their solution. And at the risk of tedium, it is simply the case that the differences between Malinowski's (and some others') reports and my own deserve to be canvassed, often in great detail, if the significance of both the old and the new materials is to be appropriately contextualized and appreciated. In the spirit of sacrifice which at a certain stage of this narrative becomes pivotal, to accommodate new intellectual dividends from on high—in this case, the gods of evidence and reason—one must offer up and deliberately dispense with some conceptions that previously had been held dear.

There is an additional and important reason for this perhaps lopsided focus on Malinowski. There are few adult Trobrianders alive today who have not heard of "Malinowski" or who are unaware of the role that the "anthropology" he spawned has played in elevating them and their culture onto the global stage. It is just as widely claimed across the Island, however, that there are many gaps and errors in Malinowski's ethnography, even though it is very difficult to find anyone who possesses more than the barest knowledge of what Malinowski—or subsequent investigators for that matter—actually wrote about them or

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enter publication in coming years, it will be interesting to witness the extent to which the pattern of the past will be carried forward. As of this writing, works by Connelly (2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2016), Jarillo (2013, 2015), and MacCarthy (2012b, 2012c, 2013, 2015, 2016) have already appeared.

where the problems in that literature may lie. With the enthusiastic support of my Omarakana and other interlocutors, therefore, I take there to be a critical need for Trobrianders along with other Pacific Islanders to have available for their own inspection a critical summary of some the major ethnographic themes that anthropologists have constructed about their culture. The only justification I can offer for using this work toward that purpose is that virtually every idea contained in it has been developed in extended collaboration with my Omarakana confrères and run past them for their judgment on innumerable occasions, most recently as of June 2017.

My treatment of the Trobriand magic-kinship nexus has been significantly shaped also by close readings of the most substantial reports of the previous investigators and commentators, which I have tried to reference, where appropriate, to the best of my ability. In this regard, I have had the enormous benefit of extended access to four archival repositories: the library resources at the Australian National University, the Tuzin Archive for Melanesian Studies at the University of California at San Diego, the Archives of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), and the Digital Ethnographic Project (DEP) based at the State University of California at Sacramento.

The LSE and DEP contents proved to be unique and particularly critical for my purposes. During twelve months of full-time study at the LSE during 2012–15 I was able to examine carefully Malinowski's original handwritten (and mostly legible) fieldnotes from his two expeditions to the Trobriands. The DEP materials ([www.trobriandsindepth.com](http://www.trobriandsindepth.com)) accumulated by two Trobriands ethnography buffs, Drs. Allan Darrah and Jay Crain (Darrah and Crain 2016), with the aid of innumerable Sacramento students, contain by far the world's largest collection of published and unpublished documents on the Trobriands and neighboring societies of the Massim. Over the last decade, the majority of the DEP's three thousand or so holdings have been progressively digitized.

The hospitalities offered by LSE Archive staff and my DEP colleagues have enabled me on annual field trips since 2010 to have along copies of the majority of published and unpublished materials ever written anthropologically about the Trobriands for trying out on my key informants. These resources in fact often figured centrally in my daily ethnographic routine and methodology (see below). The solutions to the several ethnographic puzzles proposed in this book are thus significantly attributable to the quality of the questions prompted through my rare access to these extraordinary materials.

Also, the ability to systematically consult the reports of prior investigators from Seligman and Malinowski onward has proved invaluable in demonstrating the potentials and limitations of employing contemporary ethnography and theory for assessing materials gathered a century or more earlier. This sort of cross-checking has helped verify numerous features of the indigenous culture and social organization appearing in my account that did not receive adequate attention by my predecessors—e.g., the extent of *baloma* magical agency, the pervasiveness of *bwekasa* sacrificial ritual, the logic of “taboo” avoidance, the nonmatrilineal basis of local village organization, the presence of a diarchic chiefly structure, the significance of father–child relations, the complementarity of matrilineal and patrilineal kinship, the quasi-incestuous basis of chiefly marriage, and so on—are nonetheless of longstanding significance and not simply the result of ensuing social transformations.

Third, my Trobriand investigations have benefited in ways difficult to overestimate from the research I have performed over the past four decades among another closely related society of southeast Papua New Guinea: the North Mekeo peoples of the Central Province. Between 1974 and 2014 I conducted approximately four years of fieldwork in two North Mekeo villages comprising two years of doctoral study and another dozen or so return visits. While this experience may seem to be only indirectly relevant to the task at hand, in my own view it has guided me to fresh fields and interpretive explorations that could not have been envisioned otherwise. In anticipation of understandable suspicions that my prior North Mekeo research has biased or distorted what I report concerning the Trobrianders, I submit that that prior work has afforded me a vantage from which to scrutinize a highly provocative set of easily and not-so-easily discernible similarities and differences.

Along with many other societies of the region, North Mekeo and Trobrianders are speakers of Austronesian languages. It may not be sufficiently appreciated by some Melanesianist anthropologists that the speakers of Kilivila (the native tongue of the Trobrianders) and other Northern Massim languages are arguably more closely related linguistically to the peoples living along the coastal region of southeast Papua New Guinea, including North Mekeo, than to the Southern Massim peoples with whom Trobrianders periodically interact, as, for example, in the classic case of *kula* exchange. According to Malcolm Ross (1994), the world authority on these phyla of languages, the “Central Papuan Tip Cluster” including North Mekeo, along with the “Kilivila–Lousiades Cluster,” form a taxonomic unit distinct from the more distantly related “Suauic

and North Mainland/D'Entrecasteaux Cluster," which includes, perhaps most famously, the people of Dobu. It is likely also that many anthropologists of my generation have intuitively distanced Central Papuan Tip peoples such as Mekeo, Roro, Motu, and Hula from their Massim counterparts on grounds that the former have been nominally classified as "patrilineal" and the latter as "matrilineal." But as I have already foreshadowed, the summary characterization of the whole of Trobriand and possibly other Massim societies as "matrilineal" (or others as "patrilineal") has led to ethnographic distortions of great magnitude. So yes, my knowledge of North Mekeo *has* greatly influenced my treatment of the Trobriands, but, I hope, for the better, and not only for the reasons just stated.

For example, there are numerous additional cultural and societal features other than language and descent ideology which point to equally interesting comparative possibilities. North Mekeo and the Trobriands both possess well-developed systems of ritual and/or magic which traditionally accompany nearly every important social activity. The Mekeo term for "magical spell," *menga*, is very likely a cognate of Kilivila *megwa*. Most critically, the major ethnographies of Mekeo unanimously affirm the indigenous view that ancestral and other spirits and deities (*tsiange*) are the agents of magical practices (see, e.g., Hau'ofa 1971, 1981; Mosko 1985, 1997; Stephen 1995). The extent of Mekeo society's system of "hereditary" chiefly rank and authority in comparison to other indigenous polities of the country is arguably surpassed only by that of Northern Kiriwina. Chiefly order in both societies is maintained partly through the institutionalized practice of official "sorcery." The most well-developed ritual activities orchestrated by local leaders and chiefs in both contexts consist of mortuary rites whose principal function is the dismantling or "deconception" of relationships initiated in marriage and procreation. Those relationships specifically involve complex articulations between maternally as well as paternally calculated kin. Of particular relevance to the present study, the Mekeo linguist Alan Jones (pers. comm.) has documented that the Trobriand term for human "spirit" or "soul" (*baloma*) is cognate with the Motuan (Port Moresby vicinity) word for personal "soul" (*lauma*), Central Mekeo (*lauma*), and North Mekeo (*lau* or *lalau*).<sup>20</sup>

20. Jones (pers. comm.) goes further in glossing *baloma* (Kilivila), *lauma* (Motu), and *lauma* (Mekeo) not only as "soul" but also as "image," adding credence to my claims above and in subsequent chapters of the intimate connection between a *baloma* "spirit" or "soul" and the *kek'wabu* "images" of which it is composed.

My North Mekeo experiences, however, have afforded me at least one additional advantage that bears mention. The string of commendable ethnographies on societies of the Northern Massim which have followed in the wake of Malinowski have in the main been written by investigators who gathered their materials during their first sustained periods of fieldwork while pursuing doctoral degrees.<sup>21</sup> Although many of these analyses have been openly critical of Malinowski on various specific ethnographic points and have offered many much-needed corrections, I think it to be of some relevance, and completely understandable, that the bulk of post-Malinowski ethnography in the Massim has been significantly conditioned by the frameworks that he put in place. Because I spent the first three decades of my professional training and career focused on a society whose cumulative ethnographic record developed at some remove from Malinowski's Massim legacy, I think I have been able in recent years to reflect on Trobriand ethnography with somewhat fresher eyes. Indeed, I must confess many of the most salient features of the established Trobriand ethnographic record that have perhaps been inordinately shaped by Malinowski's theoretical idiosyncrasies have long not rung quite true for me. The assertions above as to Malinowski's views on the magical efficacy of words rather than spirits, the blanket characterization of the society as "matrilineal," the view of *tama* fathers as "strangers," the avuncular status of leaders and chiefs, and so on, can be taken as examples of these uncertainties. And there are others which I shall address in subsequent chapters. In short, my North Mekeo experiences may well have afforded me a useful perspective that has not been available to most previous Trobriand fieldworkers.

To be sure, I have not conducted my studies of North Mekeo indifferent to the legacy of Trobriand ethnography. From the beginnings of my fieldwork preparations as a doctoral student, I was already keenly interested in what Malinowski and others had by that time written. I was first inspired by Trobriand ethnography, in fact, when in 1966 I received an assignment in my first-year cultural anthropology course at university to write a ten-page anthropological analysis on a culture of my choice from one of the theoretical perspectives that had been presented to us. At the time, this amounted to one or another

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21. Nancy Munn (1986), I believe, is the main exception to this claim, but her prior work was conducted outside of Melanesia among the Walbiri Aboriginal peoples of Australia. And possibly because of that, the originality of her work on Gawa stands out.

version of functionalism. What impressed and surprised me the most was the degree of interconnectedness of Trobriand institutions that could be discerned from the Malinowski texts then available for that exercise, as strange and exotic as so much of it appeared on first inspection.<sup>22</sup> I was guided to yet deeper questionings of the Trobriand corpus as a graduate student at the University of Minnesota while participating in Stephen Gudeman's first-year seminar on Social Anthropology. Although Gudeman is a Meso-Americanist, he had been schooled in Trobriand ethnography as a student of Edmund Leach at Cambridge. Later as a graduate student focusing my interests on Southeast Papuan societies and eventually conducting my North Mekeo fieldwork in 1974–76, I always kept in the back of my mind comparisons with what I had read about the Trobriands. And by the time it came to writing up the results of my own field studies, I had become suspicious of much of what had by then been documented on the islands. Many bits of information that others had been reporting, if I had heard them from my North Mekeo interlocutors, I would have interpreted quite differently. And then there were the numerous intriguing ethnographic anomalies scattered throughout the literature that had yet to be satisfactorily explained. The penultimate chapter of my doctoral thesis (Mosko 1985: ch. 9) raised concerns with several of these issues. Over the next two decades, relying on then-published materials, I explored in print a number of additional Trobriand topics (Mosko 1995, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2005b). In my view, those exercises proved critical in equipping me to undertake the fieldwork on which this volume is based.

So definitely there has been an extended recursiveness to my thinking about North Mekeo and Trobriands together. Notwithstanding, of course, in the final analysis the credibility of my assertions about Trobriand personhood, magic, *baloma*, cosmology, kin and marriage regulation, sacrificial rituals, taboos, chiefly authority, and so on, in the view of readers will depend solely on the adequacy of my accounts of those practices separately and of their overall conceptual coherence, regardless of any perceived affinities to North Mekeo.

It should be mentioned in this connection that at several junctures I also engage with what appear to me to be intriguing comparisons with various features of Polynesian culture. Although I do not take advantage of the opportunity of exploring these similarities as deeply as they deserve so as to keep my focus squarely on interpreting the magic–kinship nexus of Trobriand sociality, I

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22. I would give almost anything to have still a copy of that essay.

am hopeful that these digressions may in the end be as helpful in illuminating Polynesian sociality as that of the Trobriands. I leave it to a later publication to take up these connections more directly and thoroughly.

Fourth, my Trobriand research has from the start been informed by my theoretical interests outlined in the following chapter concentrated in the model of “personal partibility” associated with the NME as inspired by Marilyn Strathern (1988, 1991b), Roy Wagner (1973, 1974, 1975, 1977, 1991), Alfred Gell (1998), among others, and augmented by amendments deriving from Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s “participation theory” of so-called “primitive mentality.” The crucial innovation yielded by this synthesis is that the sphere of “persons” critically participating in Trobrianders’ human affairs extends beyond the bounds of living people. This modified version of the NME, which I label “*Newborn Melanesian Ethnography*” (see chapter 2), differs from those more orthodox studies of the genre which have tended to elide indigenous attributions of magical agency to spirits such as *baloma*. I raise this point briefly here, following Malinowski (1922: 8–9), in acknowledgment of the critical guidance provided by theoretical considerations in the conduct of ethnographic data-gathering.

Of course, the notions of the partibility and transactability of persons and other conceptual novelties that have oriented my investigations were not available to Malinowski a century ago. But neither had Lévy-Bruhl’s ideas been revived nor the NME concept of partible personhood coalesced by the 1970s and early 1980s when the last major round of Massim ethnographers—e.g., Battaglia, Beran, Campbell, Damon, Leach, Lepowsky, Liep, Macintyre, Montague, Munn, Scoditti, Senft, Weiner, Young, and others—conducted the research on which they have based their published findings. Fred Damon’s (1983, 1989, 1990) and Debbora Battaglia’s (1983a, 1983b, 1985, 1990) writings, and to some extent Munn’s (1986) and Young’s (1983), stand out as anticipating critical strands of what eventually developed into the NME, and Munn’s and Young’s phenomenological perspectives share elements with Lévy-Bruhl’s participation.

Of that earlier cohort, Annette Weiner’s (1976) feminist approach to Trobriand kinship and exchange in my view marked the first really major departure from Malinowski for the discipline as a whole. But her broader theoretical program as spelled out in *Inalienable possessions* (1992) is also notable for explicitly challenging Marilyn Strathern’s *The gender of the gift* (1988), which many regard as the foundational text of the NME on matters concerning the nature of gift exchange and gender in the region. Most importantly for present purposes, Weiner explicitly dismissed Strathern’s notion of



the dividual or partible person in favor of what amounted ultimately to an individualist view of Trobriand personhood (Mosko 2000). For this reason among others, at several junctures I focus particularly on dimensions of Weiner's ethnography along with Malinowski's, some of which anticipate my own findings (e.g., the critical importance of paternal relationship), others of which I am critical (e.g., the logic and cosmological significance of mortuary rites and the complementary nature of gender distinction).

It should be noted that I am not the only late-twentieth- or early-twenty-first-century anthropologist to invoke Lévy-Bruhl's later thinking on participation, which, as Martin Holbraad (2009a) has noted, had been long and unjustly derided and overlooked. As discussed in the next chapter, interest in Lévy-Bruhlian participation has been renewed in two areas of contemporary anthropological attention: the topic of magic, which as a formal category had itself largely disappeared from disciplinary relevance; and the development of the so-called "ontological turn," stimulated in large part, firstly, by Viveiros de Castros' (1998, 2001, 2012, 2014) formulation of Amazonian "perspectivism" and, secondly, by him and numerous others as regards the "new animism" (e.g., Descola 1992, 2013; Vilaça 2002; Holbraad 2009a, 2009b; Salmond 2014; Holbraad and Pedersen 2017). It is relevant to the present work that the latter pair of developments has been inspired in large part by Strathern's and Wagner's writings, even though some of their key analyses of Melanesian sociality have tended to elide indigenous views of active participations by Lévy-Bruhlian-type nonhuman persons, whether animal or spirit, in social processes.<sup>23</sup>

It is, therefore, through these several influences that the present account of Trobriand magic and kinship along with associated practices involving ritual sacrifice, mythology and cosmology, political organization, mortuary ritual, taboo observance, marriage regulation, and so on, has come to differ from those of my predecessors.

## RHYTHMS OF FIELDWORK AT OMARAKANA

Beyond this, several colleagues and friends who are privy to the routines of my ethnographic practice encouraged me to elaborate on those details when

23. Wagner's (1973) study of *habu* initiation among the Daribi being, perhaps, a notable exception.



it comes time to write this book. As they have put it to me, much of the new information that I have been privileged to receive has been made possible by the specific circumstances and unfolding of my Omarakana investigations. So I offer the following solely in response to their inducements.

After all, it was through Malinowski's experiences of a century ago detailed in the opening passages of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922: 2–25) and the closing pages of volume one of *Coral gardens and their magic* (1935a: 452–82) that he bequeathed to the discipline its most fundamental methodology, that of participant observation. While living among Omarakanans as well as North Mekeo I have done my best to follow most of Malinowski's cardinal guidelines. But there are several aspects of my work that differ significantly from his (and perhaps others'), notable particularly because it was conducted in the very same locality. These may well explain some of the divergences between the results of previous research and my own. I apologize in advance if these reflections may seem overindulgent.

For me, the greatest advantage and honor I have enjoyed is that I have been adopted into Tabalu *dala*. As Paramount Chief Pulayasi's younger brother, I have been able to engage in close personal relations as kinsman, affine, and/or honorary "chief" (*guyau*) with many others across the Island—a circumstance that likely would not have been possible otherwise. To the best of my knowledge, this was not the case with Malinowski during his tenure at Omarakana, during his second expedition further south, or with subsequent investigators.

I stress this because, by being recognized as Tabalu, it was obligatory for me to observe the behavioural "taboos" (*kikila*; see chapter 7) that effectively regulate how members interact with one another and with people of other *dalas* and ranks. This was particularly the case insofar as from the very first day of my residence in Omarakana, Pulayasi had me sequestered in his elaborately decorated *ligisa* personal hut standing at the very center of the most sacred (*boma-boma*) space of the entire Trobriand cosmos (see Lawton 1993: 110; Mosko 2013b). This is virtually the same dwelling that was occupied by Paramount Chief To'uluwa in Malinowski's time as well as his predecessors and successors (see Malinowski 1922: plate II) (figs. 1.2 and 1.3).<sup>24</sup> It is only adult Tabalu

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24. Since 2000 or so, Pulayasi has continued to reside on sacred *ligisa* land a few meters away from his personal hut in a "modern" clapboard, iron-roofed *ligisa* (i.e., house) raised on elevated steel posts that was originally built to serve as a museum of Trobriand culture.



**Figure 1.2.** To'uluwa's *ligisa* personal hut circa 1917–18. The *lugwalaguvva* stone heap (i.e., the *tokrwai* spirit Bwenaia's "house" [*bwala*]) is in the foreground. Malinowski's tent and Bagido'u's hut are in the background. Photo by Malinowski (3/24/2), with permission of LSE Archives.



**Figure 1.3.** Pulayasi's traditional and modern *ligisa* personal dwellings. Omarakana village (2006).

men, and only those who continue to observe the *dala*'s taboos, who may enter this building. The explanation given to me is simply that, if I was to get close to the Paramount Chief (or other Tabalu people) in the pursuit of my studies, it would be necessary that I observe the same ritual restrictions as he; otherwise, my polluting infractions risked being communicated to him, thereby compromising his ability to perform his ritual duties, including magical performance, effectively. My later inquiries led me to appreciate that the distribution of *kikila* "taboo" observance in accord with *dala* and other distinctions is the foundation of the indigenous system of rank. Therefore, in my relations with other Tabalu men and women, Omarakana residents, the chiefs of other *dalas*, and "commoner" (*tokai*) villagers elsewhere, it was essential for me observe the standards of Tabalu conduct.

One of the specific ideal expectations of Tabalu men and women is that they secure their spouses from among a restricted class of *guyau* chiefly *dalas*. When I returned to Omarakana for my second visit in 2007, I was joined by my wife, Cassandra, who had accompanied me on many of my North Mekeo sojourns. Even before her arrival, she had been adopted into the chiefly *dala* with which Tabalu maintains its most formal affinal ties: Kwenama *dala* ("subclan") of Luk-wasisiga *kumila* ("clan"), which figures importantly in my treatment of rank and marriage regulation (see chapter 8). Kwenama is also one of the most populous *dalas* on the island, with branches based in several disparate locations. On my wife's subsequent visits in 2011 and 2012, she served in her own right for some six months as a volunteer registered nurse at the Losuia Health Centre near Kiriwina's lagoon. This exposure helped considerably in my efforts to familiarize myself with persons living close to the Losuia administrative center and, I think, reinforced our joint reputations as people of strong sympathies with the Island's population. My wife's participation in my research thus tied me personally to communities further afield, which would not have been possible otherwise. But more importantly, the fact of being a married rather than a solitary man contributed to my own status in ways that I suspect would have been denied to bachelor Malinowski. Among Trobrianders, as I had learned earlier among North Mekeo, to be regarded as fully "a man," one must be married (and analogously for a woman).

The *kikila* observances that are pertinent to me as a person of Tabalu *dala* involve not only my own behavior but also circumspection as regards the statuses and actions of other persons with whom I interact. There are many food and other behavioral restrictions I have had to follow, for instance, which do not

present a great problem as my meals are routinely shared with other Tabalu men in the Paramount Chief's *ligisa* after being cooked by their wives or other village women. But I have been normally forbidden from eating food with women or even commoner men, even those I consider close friends and confidants, or even consuming food in public view.<sup>25</sup> Women, even Tabalu women, are forbidden from entering my *ligisa* domicile. Non-Tabalu, even recognized chiefs of other *dalas* (who in most instances have ceased to follow the classic chiefly taboos), are normally barred from entering that house. I thus have had to conduct my interviews when at home with non-Tabalu men and women on the Paramount Chief's *buneova* visitor platform erected next to the *ligisa*. Many commoner peoples, especially older people and strangers to me, are expected to show their respect—not for me but for the Paramount Chief—by bowing down when they approach the *ligisa*, much as in Malinowski's day. Correspondingly, when mingling around other people, I have to ensure that I maintain my upright posture, never sitting when others are standing.

I stress these details because in his evident ignorance of or refusal to observe some of these restrictions, Malinowski more or less automatically distanced himself from those authorities who during his time were in possession of the most important, often sacred, information of the culture. To illustrate, perhaps the most strict *kikila* for all Tabalu persons, especially men as potential magicians (including as well their sons and daughters and, indeed, all of the Paramount Chief's resident Omarakana "children"), is to ingest only "pure" or "clean" (*migile'u*) moving water (Malinowski 1932: 26).<sup>26</sup> Thus Omarakanans must obtain all their fresh water for drinking, cooking, and the washing of food utensils only from the flowing water of limestone caves some two to three kilometers distant, supplemented by rainwater and coconut milk (fig. 1.4). Salt water used in cooking is fetched also from moving surf at the beach (Figure 5). Accordingly, Omarakanans must avoid the "stagnant" (*wotuwotu*) and thus "dirty" or "polluting" (*pupagatu*) water regularly consumed by other persons of Trobriand society (except for members of a few other chiefly *dalas*) obtained from wells

25. On a few public occasions, mostly to do nowadays with church functions, some of the rules of sharing and eating food are relaxed. The restriction on categories of food that must not be eaten by Tabalu, however, are still strictly observed.

26. As explained in chapter 7, Islanders observe the *kikila* restrictions of both their mothers and their fathers *dalas*. The leader or chief of a village stands as a metaphorical father to its residents; therefore, they observe his *kikia* "taboos" regardless of their own separate maternal and paternal *dala* identities.





**Figure 1.4.** Omarakana women fetching fresh water from Ibutaku cave in the coral ridge (*raiboag*) along the northern and eastern coast of Kiriwina. In the 1990s, a pump supplying piped water to Omarakana was installed by a grant from the European Union. Since 2007 it has been dysfunctional. Omarakana village (2007).



**Figure 1.5.** Girls collecting salt water from Omarakana beach in fish-net floats. Traditionally, hollowed-out coconut shells were used for this purpose. Omarakana village (2007).

dug out of the limestone bedrock.<sup>27</sup> Violation of this rule immediately converts a Tabalu or other chiefly personage from being *guyau* “chiefly,” at least as far as magico-ritual capacities and authority are concerned, into being in essence a comparatively impotent “commoner” (*tokai*).

During his stay at Omarakana, Malinowski employed Ubi’ubi, a man he enlisted from the New Guinea mainland, to cook his food (1932: 404; 1967: 134–35). While they were provisioned with raw garden staples by their village hosts, it is unlikely that Ubi’ubi was well schooled in the Tabalu’s food restrictions, and Malinowski himself appears never to have attempted a systematic explanation of them. However, for reasons having to do with his own pollution fears that he brought with him as a European of his era, Malinowski chose to fetch his own water for drinking and cooking from the stagnant well dug by Fijian missionaries some forty meters or so from his tent just beyond the village boundary (fig. 1.6)—a different source from that used by the people with whom he was living.

Ibutaku is named after the water-hole of Omarakana which lies in this field [a grotto or depression three kilometers away in the adjoining coral ridge from which Omarakana women and girls routinely collect fresh water]. This is really a large pool used by the natives not only to draw water but also wash, bathe and frolic. (This does not spoil their pleasure in drinking the water, but I used to draw my water from a small and despised hole which was, however, not large enough for bathing.) (1935a: 433)

Of possible relevance, Malinowski observed that menstruating women particularly “wash themselves daily, for purposes of cleanliness, in the same large water hole from which the whole village draws its drinking water, and in which, also, males occasionally take a bath” (1932: 144).

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27. Members of only a few other branches of selected chiefly *dalas* are renowned for continuing to observe this critical restriction that was expected of all chiefly persons as traditionally instituted in the initial phase of cosmic creation. It is notable that the majority of chiefly *gumgweguya* persons on the island today have been “demoted” or “fallen” (*komgwalala*, *kavila*) as a result of their or their ancestors’ failure to observe the pure-water and other food requirements.





**Figure 1.6.** The waterhole on United Methodist Church grounds from which Malinowski obtained his water for cooking and drinking. Omarakana village (2013).

It apparently did not matter to Malinowski that upon arriving at Ibutaku cave, women carefully fill up their water pots before entering the visibly flowing stream to bathe, and that after a few minutes water tainted by other people's bodily effusions would have flowed visibly on. By regularly imbibing stagnant



water during his stay, in other words, Malinowski affirmed his status in Tabalu chiefly terms as a “polluted” *tokai* “commoner”—something analogous, say, to an avid meat-eater living among Indian Brahmins.<sup>28</sup> He thus effectively separated himself socially from To’uluwa and other ritually qualified men of the community despite living a few short meters from the Tabalu’s *ligisa*.<sup>29</sup> From my experience, this would certainly have limited the quantity and quality of reliable information Omarakanans and others would have made available to Malinowski.<sup>30</sup> As Young has observed, “[Malinowski’s] thin caricatures of his Trobriand friends suggest that the cultural and colonial divide was too profound to allow of any ‘community of souls’” (2004: 499).

28. This reveals some of the complex attitudes held by Tabalu toward their lower-ranking compatriots, which are publicly but resentfully known among many in the lower echelons of the chiefly and commoner populations.
29. This was almost certainly the reason for To’uluwa’s suspicions and lack of warmth toward the ethnographer, and one among several probable grounds for Malinowski’s decision to relocate his studies on his second fieldtrip to distant parts of the island (see Young 2004: 391–92). There were, of course, other factors complicating the relationship between the two men, not the least of which was that Malinowski was perceived as a strange and unpredictable representative of a powerful foreign power. The current Paramount Chief explains, incidentally, why To’uluwa had Malinowski erect his tent so close to his own dwelling—merely to keep a close eye on him (perhaps for the same reason I was placed in Pulayasi *ligisa*!). Indeed, the spot where Malinowski pitched his tent is culturally classified as space associated with dangerous powers such as sorcery (see Mosko 2013b).
30. In hearing this story, Allan Darrah (pers. comm.) has asked: What about Malinowski’s close relationship to Bagido’u, To’uluwa’s nephew and nominally recognized successor, who had been named after one of the great Tabalu chiefs of Trobriand legend? It was the latter-day Bagido’u who lived next to Malinowski’s tent when the ethnographer returned to the village during the second expedition and who was the source of much of the magical knowledge given to him. On being presented with this question, my Omarakana confidants laughed, insisting that Bagido’u was regarded by his contemporaries as “crazy” (*besobesa*, *nagoa*), but still not a total mental incompetent. For example, it is claimed that the content of the spells and other magical knowledge that he passed on to Malinowski were typically incomplete and therefore useless for practical purposes. The Paramount Chief adds, however, that Bagido’u would also pass magical spells along to girls he was courting as *buwala* “payment” for sex (see chapter 6). Bagido’u (and his brother Mitakata, who eventually succeeded To’uluwa) supposedly acquired his Tabalu magical lore mainly from his father, Yowana, the Katayuvisa “Political Chief” of Omarakana. Even so, my research team members are in agreement that Bagido’u’s giving of spells to Malinowski was one of the reasons he was affirmed as mentally unreliable and thus unqualified for becoming the next Tabalu. By his own account, Malinowski (1935a: 458) claimed he “hypnotised” Bagido’u into giving him the spells.

I have gone into these details of Malinowski's ethnographic situation only to illustrate the importance for me of one of his stated, central goals of ethnographic research:

The imponderabilia of actual life, and the type of behaviour have to be filled in. They have to be collected through minute, detailed observations, in the form of some sort of ethnographic diary, *made possible by close contact with native life*. (1922: 24, italics inserted, original italics deleted)

In the discussion that has followed many oral presentations that I have made concerning my Trobriand research in departmental seminars and conference sessions over the past several years, I have been asked by students about my first arrival in Omarakana and the people's reception of me. My experience was certainly different from that, famously, of Malinowski:

Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight. . . . Imagine yourself, then, making your first entry into the village, alone or in company with your white cicerone. Some natives flock round you, especially if they smell tobacco. Others, more dignified and elderly, remain seated where they are. (1922: 4)

It is important, I think, to document that difference. On July 2, 2006 I landed unaccompanied and unannounced on the biweekly Airlines PNG flight from Port Moresby to Losuia Airport, which was greeted by maybe between a hundred and two hundred Islanders kept at bay by a high chain-link fence. It was not until two mornings later that I was able to make my way to Omarakana escorted by a young man from a village close to the airstrip.<sup>31</sup> Upon arrival, I was invited into the open portion of space beneath Pulayasi's house where he had become accustomed to receiving visitors. There were maybe eight or ten others gathered round. Almost immediately after starting to introduce myself, Pulayasi sent for his brother, Molubabeba, a fluent English-speaker and

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31. Other events of the day of my landing on Kiriwina and the following week after my first visit to Omarakana are no less significant than the details I outline here (see chapter 5).

his usual translator.<sup>32</sup> I first gave a synopsis of my academic background as a veteran ethnographer of North Mekeo culture and society focusing on indigenous chieftainship and related issues. I then followed with an explanation of my desire to undertake a similar project in the Trobriands aimed at “updating Malinowski,” hopefully filling in some of the gaps he left and correcting some of his errors. I explained that I had come to Pulayasi first seeking his suggestion of an appropriate venue to do so. After all, I explained, in anthropology at least, he as the Omarakana Tabalu is arguably the most famous “chief” in Papua New Guinea if not the world, but relatively little is actually known about the overall chiefly system of which he is the central figure.

Pulayasi indicated that he was aware that Mekeo and Trobriands had much culturally in common, being the country’s nominally two most hierarchical chiefdoms. We agreed that neither Malinowski nor other Trobriand ethnographers had conducted a thorough study of that topic. I then handed over photocopies of my curriculum vitae and an article I had previously published in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, “Rethinking Trobriand chieftainship” (Mosko 1995), based on my reinterpretation of previous ethnographers’ investigations. I explained that I had concluded from what I had read that a Trobriand chief, rather than being a “glorified brother-in-law” of the community, as Malinowski (1935a: 192) had asserted, was instead something more like a “glorified father” or *tama* to his people. At that, Pulayasi asked me to leave the CV and article with Molubabeba and to return the next morning to discuss things further.

As soon as I reappeared, to my considerable pleasure, Pulayasi congratulated me on my reading of chiefly fathers, saying he agreed entirely with my thesis of his paternal status, and he volunteered to host me himself at Omarakana. I was to take up residence in his *ligisa* hut as soon as it could be tidied up for habitation.

We were soon off and running. Although I did not fully appreciate it at the time, by placing me in his *ligisa* and instructing me in the rules of living there, Pulayasi was in effect declaring me to have joined Tabalu *dala* as brother and granting me many of the prerogatives and responsibilities that go with that. Not long after my arrival, when I explained my circumstances to a new friend,

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32. Pulayasi has a grade six education. He only very rarely speaks in English, but he can do so to some extent, and I have observed that he understands quite a bit of ordinary spoken English.

Florence Pulitala, a daughter of the then recently deceased Tabalu chief of Gumlababa village near Losuia, she remarked, “Oh, so you’ve been promoted!” And as already mentioned, it is largely through Pulayasi’s support and connections and those of his Omarakana confidants that I have been positioned to acquire the bulk of information that informs this work.

In his mid-sixties, Pulayasi is renowned as a quiet and humble man. He is highly respected, even by his rivals, for his knowledge and interest in traditional or sacred culture. At a very early age, he was taken away from his birth parents—Paramount Chief Mitakata’s sister’s daughter’s daughter married to the then-Katayuvisa “political chief”—and adopted as “son” (*latu tau*) and appointed heir to Mitakata. It will be recalled that Mitakata was a contemporary and informant of Malinowski’s who eventually succeeded To’uluwa in 1929 and reigned until 1961. It is common knowledge that Mitakata, widely regarded as the greatest Paramount Chief of modern times, poured his extensive cultural knowledge into his adoptive son. As such, Pulayasi is considered to be the nearly complete embodiment of Mitakata’s—and thus his predecessors’—person and office and the singular reservoir of Tabalu *tukwa*, or traditional knowledge and ritual powers (fig. 1.7). Pulayasi has in his possession the two most potent ritual items of Tabalu *dala* identity upon which the powers of his and other *dallas* and villages of the archipelago still depend for their livelihood: the female *tokwai* spirit, Bwenaia, embodied in an imported igneous stone, and her male



**Figure 1.7.** Tabalu Pulayasi Daniel resting among graves of deceased Tabalu relatives. Omarakana village (2012).

counterpart, Kaisusuwa, inhabiting a wrapped wooden stick (Mosko 2013b). In their conjugal-spiritual intercourse, these two are viewed traditionally as the “source” (*u’ula*) of agricultural plenty and scarcity and epidemic illness for the entire archipelago.

Omarakana continues to retain its regional preeminence inasmuch as the knowledge possessed by Pulayasi is nowadays unrivaled, notwithstanding the usurpations and subversions of Tabalu authority which had been predicated on the aftermath of contact and colonization (Lawton 1993: 101; see chapter 9). I can attest that in his mature old age Pulayasi remains sternly interested in sacred knowledge, which to him is certainly something more than a hobby or casual amusement.<sup>33</sup> Importantly for me, therefore, the information that he holds and that he shares with those closest to him closely approximates the corpus of traditional cultural intelligence and wisdom that was current in Malinowski’s time. This in itself lends considerable credence to the claim that the information which has been provided to me during my field visits captures much of what can be considered authentically “traditional Trobriand culture” (*gulagula*), despite the changes in the aftermath of the arrival of Europeans.<sup>34</sup> To be sure, Islanders have encountered numerous external forces over the past century following the vicissitudes of colonialism, Christian conversion, and capitalism, many of which have infringed on the Omarakana Paramount Chief’s authority. Yet there is an abiding consensus across the island that Omarakana under the Tabalu’s leadership remains the dominant wellspring of the archipelago’s cultural and social traditions.<sup>35</sup>

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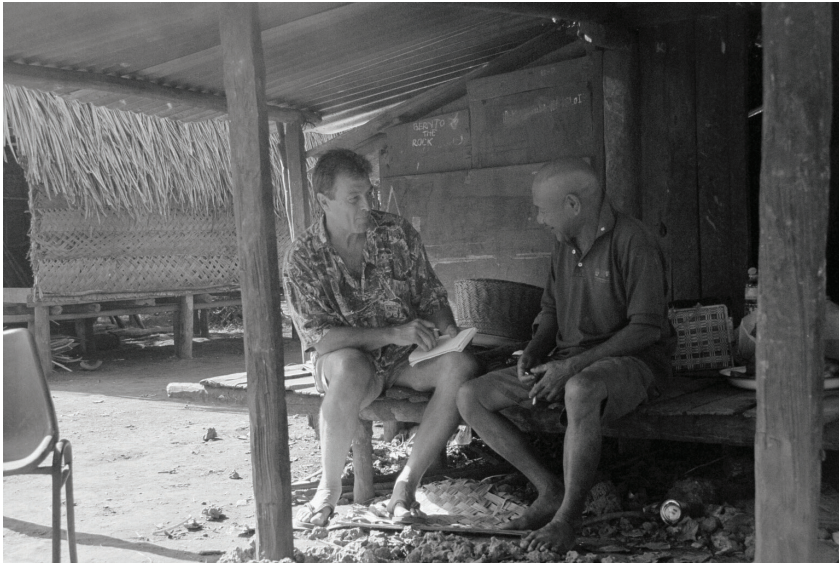
33. It has been suggested to me by some other members of my research team that Pulayasi had earlier groomed one of his highly educated sons with the hope that someday he would write a book summarizing the nonsecret components of his father’s store of indigenous knowledge. That son, however, has now risen to a high administrative level in Port Moresby with heavy responsibilities that have prevented him from following through on his father’s assignment. Evidently, it is my writings that are intended for the realization of the Paramount Chief’s aims in this regard. I am fully aware that Pulayasi’s support of my research (and that of others) has also been intended partly to augment or expand his personal fame (*butula*), if not also his political influence.

34. According to native etymology, the repeated root of *gulagula* is */-u’ula/*, the word for “base,” “origin,” “foundation,” and so on (see Mosko 2009).

35. This is not to deny either the strongly political overtones of Pulayasi’s and Omarakana’s claims to sacred precedence or others’ challenges to it, as discussed at several junctures below.



Now Pulayasi is a very busy man with duties often more pressing than the updating of Malinowski. It is not uncommon for him to be visited several times a day by petitioners from across the island and even other islands. The months of August–October, which have often overlapped with my dry-season visits, typically correspond to planting time, when land disputes are frequent. On those days, Pulayasi has often been spirited away by government officials to assist in adjudicating on people’s conflicting customary land claims. It has not, therefore, been possible for him to participate directly in my investigations every day during my stays, inquiries which have involved an inordinate amount of time and energy on the part of my other core confidants (fig. 1.8). Undoubtedly, much of what these men have had to share with me was obtained through their relations with Pulayasi and other Omarakana elders. But as I explained above, all of them are respected across the island as exceptionally knowledgeable men, even on the Tabalu scale.



**Figure 1.8.** The ethnographer and Pulayasi. Omarakana village (2006).

From my reading of Malinowski’s publications and fieldnotes, it is not altogether clear to me exactly how he went about his interviewing. He often refers by name to the persons who gave this or that piece of information to him in response to his “leading questions.” This is probably the area where my methods

differed most fundamentally from his. During my first stint of fieldwork in 2006, I implemented more or less the same routine I had developed among North Mekeo. Immediately after my arrival, three other gentlemen in addition to Pulayasi became permanent members of my principal research team. Soon I recruited many additional people to contribute in other ways, if not so intensely or regularly.

My “first string” team members in addition to the Paramount Chief include three Tabalu men: Molubabeba Daniel mentioned above, and two of Pulayasi’s classificatory “nephews” (*kada*), Pakalaki Tokulupai and Yogaru Vincent. All three men have pronounced knowledge of and personal interests in their culture, are confidants of Pulayasi, are fluent English-speakers and were committed to working with me as a group on a daily basis.

Like his elder brother, Molubabeba is passionately interested in the traditions of his people and renowned for being so. For a decade or so in his early maturity, he worked as a typesetter for the *Post Courier* newspaper in Port Moresby. His wife, Sanubei, is the elder sister of Toguguwa Tobodeli, the current Toliwaga chief of Kabwaku village—apparently one of the few such marriages to connect Northern Kiriwina’s two principal chiefdoms over the past two or three generations. It is through that tie that I have been able to establish a close friend and exchange relationship with Toguguwa, giving me critical access to the community, which before, during, and after Malinowski’s time was in intense rivalry with Omarkana. It is important to note also that the current friendship (*lubesi*) between Toguguwa and Pulayasi has done much to neutralize the earlier rivalry (fig. 1.9).

Along with Molubabeba, Pakalaki often serves the Paramount Chief as interpreter. In his youth, Pakalaki spent many years in wage employment in Port Moresby. As of this writing he is roughly forty years of age and married to a high-ranking woman, Margaret Mwoybana, of chiefly M’labwema *dala*. Most importantly, Pakalaki is the eldest son of Omarkana’s other resident titled chief, the Katayuvisa “Political” or “Advisory Chief,” Tokulupai Pamwentamuanesa, of the Osapola-Bwaydaga branch of Kwenama *dala*.<sup>36</sup> As such, he and his brothers are the only adult Tabalu males (besides Pulayasi’s younger brothers) who can now claim to be of the ideal pedigree to succeed Pulayasi according to the

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36. Margaret has in her own right become one of my closest female interlocutors regarding women’s affairs. She is currently the President of the United Methodist Church’s Women’s Fellowship at Omarkana.



**Figure 1.9.** The Tabalu, Pulayasi Daniel, with his friend and traditional rival, the Toliwaga chief of Kabwabu village, Toguguwa Tobodeli. Omarakana village (2015).



traditional rules (see chapter 8).<sup>37</sup> And because of the customary knowledge that he has obtained and continues to acquire from his elderly non-Tabalu chiefly father, Pakalaki is an exceptionally adept exponent of his culture.

When I am not in residence, Yogaru (*aka* “Yogs”), in his early thirties, serves as the Paramount Chief’s bag carrier. By virtue of regularly accompanying Pulayasi, he has in some areas a fuller grasp of the Paramount Chief’s knowledge than most others and thus occasionally offers alternative insightful viewpoints. His mother belongs to the Kasanai branch of Tabalu, and his father is a member of a commoner (*tokai*) *dala*. His wife, Ibwelobu, is the brother’s daughter of Pulayasi’s favorite wife, Boyogima.<sup>38</sup> Yogaru is the youngest member of my team’s first string, in his mid-twenties when we first started working together, and partly by virtue of that I have been able to establish workable relations with many of Omarakana’s youths.

Virtually everything that I learned from these men and all additional sources (excepting of course information given to me in confidence) has been regularly discussed by us, often numerous times, as we have found ourselves going back regularly to topics over which we had previously deliberated, often in considerable depth, (see below). I have no doubt also that Molubabeba, Pakalaki, and Yogaru have been induced by Pulayasi to report on my doings, which I estimate to be a major benefit: that is, as a means of eliciting from any of them indications of mistakes in my documentation of their culture.

My “second string” of self-selected contributors includes more than a dozen or two other chiefly and commoner men and women of Omarakana and neighboring villages who on frequent occasions have assisted me with their more specialized knowledge. Included in this list (in addition to Toguguwa and Margaret

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37. Except that in traditional times, nephews and not brothers were normally eligible for chiefly succession. For various reasons—supposedly to avoid undue and harmful competition among potential claimants especially since the number of Tabalu males has increased exponentially in the past several decades—members of Omarakana’s branch of Tabalu *dala* have agreed in the aftermath of Mitakata’s paramountcy to alter the rules of succession. According to the current edict, the paramountcy will be passed along by strict chronological age. Accordingly, M’tabalu Tokwasemwala, the current Tabalu of Kasanai village adjoining Omarakana, is the publicly acknowledged heir to Pulayasi’s Omarakana title.

38. Pulayasi’s Vila Bogwa or official “principal wife,” Babaido, is of the Osapola-Bwaidoga branch of Kwenama *dala* (hence a *dala* “sister” to Tokulupai and a classificatory father’s sister (*tabu*) to Pakalaki; see chapter 8). Publicly their relation is less intimate than that between Pulayasi and Boyogima.

as already mentioned) is the Paramount Chief's resident *kabitam* expert carver, Tobi Mokagai; another of Pulayasi's brothers, Modiala Daniel; one of Pulayasi's favored sons, Mairawesi Pulayasi; the *ilomgwa* leader of Omarakana's commoners, M'tabotu Bwabwa'u; a second Toliwaga "War Leader" and the chief of Wakaisa village, Uelasi Tobukukwa; the head of Yogwabu *dala* ("owners" of the majority of Omarakana's garden lands), Kevin Kobuli; the leader (*tolivalu*) of commoner Kaidoga *dala* of Obuwelia village, George Mwasaluwa; John Kasaipwalova, Kwenama *guyau* of Yolumgwa village; Minister and Rev. Aaron, Aaron Uelasi of the United Methodist Church; and a number of pastors and youth leaders heading various Christian organizations who are assisting me with my current field project on Christian conversion.

There is also a "third string" of people who occasionally help me whenever the appropriate situations arise. I include in this category the members of the Kiriwina Council of Chiefs; male and female elders of Omarakana, Kasanai, and neighboring villages; and rank-and-file residents of Northern Kiriwina (fig. 1.10). I meet and consult formally with the elderly women of Omarakana and Kasanai as a group at least once on each of my fieldtrips when seeking to elicit knowledgeable views of what has been told to me by men as well as other



**Figure 1.10.** Meeting of the Kiriwina council of Chiefs. Bweka Lodge, Yolumgwa village (2007).



**Figure 1.11.** Omarakana women elders and members of my research team. Omarakana village (2012).

information that they wish to share with me (fig. 1.11). Then there are the typical one-off consultations with recognized experts, local officials, and impromptu conversations I have with people whom I encounter at any time or place.

With those interlocutors of the second and third categories, I suppose my interviews have been structured pretty much as Malinowski and nearly every other modern ethnographer would have conducted them. They either visit me at Omarakana or I visit them at their domiciles. Those interviews typically last two, three, or more hours, depending on circumstances, and in many instances are designed to elicit information unavailable to me at Omarakana or to cross-check the data I receive from my first-string associates.

What I take to be a more unorthodox manner of working with my first-string team members probably goes a long way toward explaining the extent to which the information contained in this volume differs from that provided by my predecessors. I regularly meet with my tutors twice every day, once in the morning starting with breakfast and again in the late afternoon or evening at dinner time. We usually spend three or so hours together at each encounter. We meet this way on the small verandah of Pulyasi's *ligisa*. If others (i.e., non-Tabalu) happen to join us, as often happens, we retreat to the Paramount Chief's adjacent *buneova* platform for discussion.<sup>39</sup>

39. But not usually for sharing meals (see chapter 7).

My team members' wives and often other women of the village contribute the cooked vegetables of our meals. I usually supply the protein (purchased tinned or fresh fish), rice for cooking, boiled tea and sugar, not to forget abundant quantities afterward of areca and betel to keep the ideas flowing.<sup>40</sup> It is during these discussions that we five as a group have gone over virtually everything that has consequently found its way into the bulk of my fieldnotes. It is important to stress that that information has normally represented a consensus view. In some cases, though, my collaborators have taken more than a single position. I normally record those differences of opinion, which are reserved until the next time that Pulayasi joins us to give the final word.

While I was a graduate student I acquired typing skills sufficient to enable me to keep up with conversations almost verbatim. Well before my first visit to Omarakana when working among North Mekeo, I had moved from writing and daily typing-up my fieldnotes to the contemporaneous typing of interviews as they unfold on a laptop computer powered by a fairly simple solar set-up. Thus my notes as I take them down are the equivalent of what I imagine other researchers possess only after they have spent many additional hours back home transcribing tape recordings of their field discussions. Importantly, with my fieldnotes stored electronically, I am able in and out of the field to conduct instantaneous word-searches of virtually any topic, keeping track of what I might have recorded even years previously.<sup>41</sup>

Thanks also to the efforts of my DEP colleagues, Allan Darrah and Jay Crain, for several years I have had with me in the field the digitized archive of Trobriand ethnography they have assembled, which I have been able to put to the purpose for searching. While my team members disperse on most afternoons to pursue their own personal projects, I frequently remain in the village methodically plodding through the archival materials stored on my computer, searching for new questions for the next evening's or morning's meeting with my group or the next day's interviews with others. As a result, over the past decade my core team has been able to examine critically and provide advice on revising a large share of the available ethnographic corpus. In fact, this systematic reassessment

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40. The boiling of water on a small kerosene stove in the Tabalu's *ligisa* hut is not forbidden, whereas the cooking of food is.

41. I am also of the belief that the physical act of concurrently typing my notes is itself of considerable mnemonic value as compared with merely participating in conversations as they are chronicled by a tape recorder.

of the extant ethnography has provided us with a critical foil in our efforts to document the details and overall coherence of the culture, at least as it is comprehended at Omarakana. For this and other reasons, my treatments of most major ethnographic topics in subsequent chapters include sections canvassing the reports of previous investigators.

I have also used my solitary afternoons in the village to draft provisional contemporaneous analyses of the materials covered in recent discussions. I keep these notations separately coded from the fieldnotes themselves. Doing this regularly has proven to be another vital source of new questions leading my group ever deeper in our deliberations at the next opportunity. In this I have been particularly mindful of Malinowski's own warning:

Here again, as in most of these notes, I have to insist on the fact that successful research depends upon the synthesis and organisation of evidence done in the field. The greatest source of all the inadequacies and gaps in my own field-work has resulted from the dire methodological fallacy: get as many "facts" as you can while in the field, and let the construction and organisation of your evidence wait till you write up your material. . . . Even so, there remained a great many lacunae in my data, simply because I did not spend time enough in the field collating and synthesising them. (1935a: 467)

The result is that, as new information on specific topics has flowed in, my team's prior attempts at integrating it as a totality have been subject to more or less continuous revision, elaboration, branching outward to additional data, and therefore, ultimately we hope, to greater coherence and improvement.

In my own view, at least, extending my inquiries over a decade rather than concentrating them into a single year or two has been crucial for making the most of the above techniques. Malinowski (1935a: 453) remarked on the same benefit he received from the gap between his first and second Trobriand visits. This work pattern partly suits my interlocutors' availability for participating in our intense and extended discussions. I have purposely timed my visits during the dry-season months of May–October when, for much of that period, the demands of gardening and other work are minimal. This is also the time of harvest when most *sagali* feasting, intervillage coactivity, and recreation take place.

But there has proven to be another benefit of scheduling my field studies this way. For several years now, each time when I have been about to return to Australia, my team members and I adjudged that we had covered enough data



for me to turn to the job of final writing up. But during the intervening months, new critical questions have always emerged in my thinking about the materials in hand or from additional reading. And, typically, it has been with these that we have restarted our investigations on my next arrival. This pattern, consequently, has ensured that we have never run out of topics or new ideas to ponder. By now, whenever I feel sufficiently confident to declare, "OK, I think we've got that one wrapped up," the others usually have a good laugh. Looking back, we as a group agree that working this way has enabled us each time to expand progressively our comprehension of virtually all the topics we have probed.

I feel compelled to say something of the distinctive caliber of the discussions I have had with my closest interlocutors when compared with those Malinowski claims he had with his informants. Malinowski (1922: 86, 426, 453; 1932: 86) states that in his experience it was not possible to engage in noncontradictory abstract discussions with the villagers he relied on for information. I have found exactly the opposite to be the case with my confidants in both North Mekeo and Omarakana. Very quickly after beginning our inquiries, conversations have involved not only the elicitation of fragments of their knowledge but also follow-up questions of the sort which Malinowski asserted failed to yield results for him. The questions I have put to informants have revealed data more or less consistently moving toward finding connections with other previously provided information. *Working closely with the same persons over long periods of time has been critical*, with the result that, by a fairly early stage in our investigations, my confrères were becoming trained to think like anthropologists about the knowledge that they already possessed—that is, differently—just as my analytical preconceptions were being regularly put to the test by my exposure to their manner of examination. Since my Omarakana core group and others have cottoned on to what ethnography (at least as I practice it) is all about, we have been able to engage in discussions of great detail and abstraction. According to their proclamations, they have learned much that is "new" to them about their traditions, just as I have, which no doubt has helped to sustain their interest in what we are doing.

I suspect that because Malinowski apparently tended to move individually from informant to informant for his information, he missed the chance of cultivating a *collective* sense of what he was on about in many of the very people from whom he was seeking assistance. For sure, he had a large number of regular informants—e.g., Tokulubakiki, Bagido'u, Namwanaguyau, Molilakwa, Morovato, Toguguwa, Niyova, Navavile, Toyodala—and he frequently

cross-checked information one person had given him with second and third informants. But it seems he did not surround himself either at Omarakana or elsewhere with a stable group of confidants who, in face-to-face settings, could assist him as well as each other in solving the puzzles presented by their shared knowledge. This, I think, goes beyond the virtue that has long been recognized of working with so-called “key informants.” What I think is novel in my methods is that the overwhelming bulk of information I have acquired from my sources, both local and archival, has been put through the filter of open discussions with several cultural authorities every step of the way. It must be appreciated that the result is a collective one which likely could not have been produced otherwise.

There is one substantive topic, however, which from the beginning was strictly closed. I never asked any of my associates for, nor was ever offered by them, the text of a genuine *megwa* spell—a choice that might seem awkward in a project aimed at magic as well as other topics. This represents a position I have steadfastly maintained throughout the course of my North Mekeo investigations, where I also have been keenly interested in grasping the essentials of indigenous ritual and associated institutions. My basic reason for not seeking to elicit *megwa* verbatim is that, in doing so, I would certainly have raised villagers’ suspicions as to my personal motives, which would have in turn affected the caliber of information I could expect to be given as regards other realms of the culture. Also, of course, in this community, the most valued knowledge, such as that involving the content of verbal spells, is secret. Because of that secrecy, it would not have been possible to discuss spells openly with my team members together, and I would have risked corrupting their relations with each other. And even if knowledgeable people have been confident I was not aiming to use spells myself—spells to which they attribute considerable powers—there is the obvious risk that, through publication, the content of spells might fall into the hands of others whose intentions might possibly be illicit and unpredictable. In any event, the ethnographic record already includes a large number of published *megwa* from Malinowski and others (e.g., Senft, Munn, Scoditti) sufficient to ascertain the general outlines of their structure and content, as I rehearse in chapter 3 particularly. Even so, my confidants assert that it is very unlikely that any competent Trobriand *torwosi* magical expert would hand over to the inquisitive ethnographer the *full* content of their spells. Being incomplete, those spells would have limited utility for most indigenous purposes.

It is important to note that I never acquired a conversational knowledge of Kilivila, the local language, sufficient for me to conduct interviews or follow

conversations in the native tongue. For me, this is undoubtedly the most serious deficit in the work I have done. Having learned the language of North Mekeo to the extent that I can conduct my inquiries in the local vernacular, at least when conversing with people I know well and who know me, I am keenly aware of the advantages of doing so and the disadvantages of failure in that regard.

There are several explanations I can offer. At the beginning of my work in 2006, I did not imagine, nor did I then have the resources to expect, that I would be conducting annual field trips over the coming decade. I was simply aiming to perform a one-off comparison of Trobriand and North Mekeo chieftainship, which seemed like a reasonable goal to aim for in a brief three-month visit.<sup>42</sup> From my experience, I knew that it would take many more months than it took to master North Mekeo to master Kilivila, especially given my age. And learning North Mekeo had not been an easy task even when I was much younger. I simply do not have, nor have ever had, the language skills of someone like Malinowski or many of my Oceanist colleagues. So given the level of English fluency in the people who presented themselves to help me and the realization very quickly that the overwhelming thrust of our conversations would involve the deciphering and translating of the meanings of indigenous words anyhow, we decided together to proceed in our investigations using English amongst ourselves.<sup>43</sup> In any event, once we settled into our conversations in English during the first year, that set the pattern for subsequent visits, the next two or three of which were each initially expected to be my last.

Of great importance, when it has come to conducting the sort of deep systematic critique of the reports of previous ethnographers as outlined above, we found that English was after all the definitively appropriate medium for that task.

When I have set about working with villagers not fluent in English, I require some of my first- or second-string team members' services as translators.<sup>44</sup> The

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42. I should qualify this. I was at that stage confident of research funding for just the first 2006 visit, which only later was I able to extend into the next two years. In view of the success of that first encounter relying on English, and given the relatively few months I was able to devote to each subsequent visit plus other reasons explained above, I never felt that I had sufficient time to commit to learning to converse in the vernacular.

43. My circumstances in this respect seem to be very similar to those experienced by Annette Weiner (1976: xvi).

44. In most circumstances when interviewing non-Tabalu people outside of Omarakana, I find it prudent to employ nonchiefly members of my second- and third-string



advantage for them as people keenly interested in the traditional culture for their own purposes is that they have been exposed to information to which they would not likely have gained access otherwise.

While I would be the last fieldworker to dismiss the importance of conducting ethnography in local languages, I do not think the issue to be entirely clear-cut for reasons additional to those just enumerated. Having already gained a measure of fluency in a language related to Kilivilan was for me an advantage over having no language background beyond English altogether. But more decisively, English has by now become virtually the lingua franca of Trobrianders and other residents of Milne Bay Province in place of Dobuan and “Samarai English” as during Malinowski’s time. Nearly all young people are nominally competent in English these days as a result of formal schooling, and very few Islanders have ever become conversant in the Tok Pisin that is widely spoken in other parts of the country. Therefore, I suggest, given this situation, which is very different from that confronting Malinowski a century ago, in the Trobriands English fluency can be considered a research tool in much the same way that Tok Pisin has become elsewhere in Papua New Guinea. From what I have witnessed informally over my career, some of the Melanesianists who have conducted their ethnographic research predominantly in Tok Pisin have felt little compulsion or reason to apologize for this fact, while conceding it probably would have been marginally better to have mastered the local languages. In discussing this issue many times with my core team members, they have in fact stressed how greatly superior English is over Tok Pisin for conducting the kind of intensive explorations of meaning that we have engaged in all the way through. Malinowski (1922: 5) was, in fact, similarly skeptical about relying on the regional pidgin of his day.

This matter of the ethnographer’s linguistic skills bears additionally upon the differences between Malinowski’s Omarakana data and my own. Malinowski was undoubtedly an exceptionally gifted student of languages. But it appears from his own account that he did not acquire the fluency in Kilivilan for which he is renowned until sometime after he had concluded his lengthy initial visit to

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research team rather than of my core group simply because people who do not know me well have been naturally cautious of opening up when I have had Tabalu people accompanying me. Of course, I have done my best to respect people’s confidentiality when they asked for it.

Omarakana and was concentrating his studies in villages close to the administrative center on the lagoon to the south.

When on my [first] expedition I arrived in the Trobriands (June 1915) I had not prepared myself for work in that language, because I did not intend to settle in that district for any length of time. By September of that year, however, I found that I could use the language readily in conversation with my informants, though it was much longer before I could follow easily conversations among the natives themselves. In fact I do not think that I reached this stage until I had made a very thorough study of my recorded linguistic material during the subsequent interval (Melbourne, May 1916 to August 1917), and had had a month or two's practice on my [second] expedition. From that time I had no difficulty in rapidly taking down notes in Trobriand and in following general conversations among the natives. (1935a: 453; see also Young 2004: 501, 528)

This correlates with what Omarakanans now report about the situation in which Malinowski found himself when he resided there. Several village seniors have told me that in his time there was only one man available to help with English translation, and then only to a limited extent. Thus, they claim, Malinowski's understanding of the culture during the time he lived amongst them was restricted such that he could have benefited greatly if there had been a competent English-speaker available. According to Kevin Kobuli, the elderly headman of Yogwabu *dala* based at Kasanai village adjoining Omarakana (and a key member of my second string),

Malinowski didn't have good interpreters. There was a man, Tom, who had been a policeman, one of the sons of the first Trobriand missionaries trained by the Fijians. The Fijians taught Tom some English but not that good. The Fijians knew a bit of English but not good or much. In To'uluwa's time, Tom was the only one at Omara who spoke English. Tom was living at Yolawotu [a hamlet of Omarakana]. Tom helped Malinowski. He was of Gawai *dala*, one of the Labai villages, a Malasi *wosa* [hereditary supporter] to Tabalus. He helped Malinowski understand *gulagula*. (Fieldnote extract, June 17, 2006; see also Young 2004: 393)<sup>45</sup>

45. Tom's statements are heavily referenced in Malinowski's fieldnotes beginning in July 1915, but entries identifying him as informant taper off significantly by October of that year. His village name was actually Tomeda, described in Malinowski's own

From these many remarks, it is obvious that my account of Trobriand culture and social organization is a strongly, but not exclusively, Omarakana-inflected one. Beliefs, practices, and the historical transformations of specific localities vary across the archipelago. Some of that is recorded in the works provided by my predecessors. But I think anyone truly familiar with the Trobriands today or in the past will acknowledge that Omarakana, with all that it represents, some of which I attempt to replicate here, is widely regarded as a very special, atypical place. This remains true in the present as it was in Malinowski's day, at least as regards questions of what Islanders generally consider to be the wellspring of their traditions.

It must be kept in mind, of course, that Omarakana is unquestionably the most important settlement in the Trobriands. It is its political capital and it is situated in a most fertile belt of agricultural territory. Seven or eight roads converge on the joint settlement of Omarakana and Kasana'i. Five villages are to be found in its immediate neighbourhood, and are indicated on the map—that is, if we count the three small component villages of Kurokaywa as one. (1935a: 430)

For as Sahlins (1985) has noted of societies of this kind—"divine kingdoms" or "chiefdoms"—knowledge is not evenly distributed. And as Frederick Barth (1987) learned from his Baktamin research, there may well exist discernible levels of knowledge which do not differentiate in any simple way between that which is true and that which is false. Dissenting views held by Islanders within or outside of Omarakana, in other words, are not to be taken as necessarily mistaken, but neither in terms of the indigenous epistemology do they all carry the same weight as that of persons of widely claimed authority (*karewaga*). So despite the changes that the Trobriands have undergone in the postcontact era and the political contestations that have arisen from them, Omarakana remains in the eyes of most if not all Trobrianders as the *u'ula* "base" or "origin" of *gulangula* sacred custom. Other locales and their inhabitants might well, and proudly, see their world differently and in opposition to Tabalu hegemony. But there is no denying that even those differences have as their ultimate orientation the Omarakana reference point.

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words as a "friend" and "handsome man from Kasana'i, famous for his strength, his efficiency in gardening and his skill in dancing" (1932: 266). Also, Malinowski indicates that Tom offered his translations in "pidgin English" (1935a: 88n).

## PROGRESSION OF CHAPTERS

The ethnographic and archival materials presented in this volume have been shaped from the start by a fairly specific synthesis of two theoretical perspectives outlined in chapter 2 which has not been previously attempted, at least to my knowledge, in the discipline thus far. For many years, on the one hand, I have been seeking to expand certain conceptual elements of the NME for the sake of additional applications beyond those of their original formulation. Chief among these are enhancements to Marilyn Strathern's (1988) conceptualization of the specifically gendered dividual or partible person so as to include magical or religious components and capacities defined in terms of indigenous estimations of relative sacredness or profaneness (e.g., hot and cold, wet and dry, open and closed, strong and weak, desirable and undesirable). In contexts of magical performance and kinship, I argue, Trobrianders see themselves and other persons as constituted of detachable, transactable components (i.e., *kekʷabu* "images" and *peu'ula* "powers") inclusive of their "sacred" (*bomaboma*) and "profane" (*itugwali*) as well as cross- and same-sex identities. This by itself connects the realm of indigenous magical practice to that of kin relationship in ethnographically novel ways.

Living humans, however, are not the only sentient "persons" (*tomota*) with whom Trobrianders interact in the course of their magical performances and kin relations. Critical agents participating in virtually all dimensions of Islanders' social lives are the *baloma* ancestors and other spirits of Tuma. As mentioned above and outlined in greater detail in the next chapter, I have found Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's ([1949] 1973) theoretical formulation of "participation" in his later writings to be well suited for incorporating the latter class of spiritual agents as envisioned by Trobrianders within this expanded framework of the partibility of persons, living and deceased.

Viewed through these two analytical lenses—partibility and participation theories—I devote subsequent chapters to elaborations of the ethnographic materials highlighted above, paying close attention to the magical and kin or relational "roads" or "pathways" envisioned by Omarakanans that connect *baloma* spirits and their human descendants. In chapter 3, "The magical powers of *baloma*," I conduct an extended critique of Malinowski's, Tambiah's, and others' claims as to the magical efficacy of words. Evidence retrieved from Omarakana and from archival sources instead substantiates the utterly critical role that ancestral *baloma* and other spirits are viewed as playing in all magical

performances. In short, living people *are* their ancestors embodied. Thus when humans act magically, their incorporated spirit predecessors *as kin* are invisibly but effectively acting also. But this tie is but one component of the cosmological linkages between the visible world of Boyowa and the invisible world of Tuma. The chapter concludes, therefore, with an analysis of the pivotal mechanisms of humans and spirits transacting over the detachable components or parts (*posu'ula*) of their persons—namely, the matrilineal and otherwise transacted *kek'wabu* “images” which lend to all beings and entities their external manifested forms and their hidden internal “capacities” or “powers” (*peu'ula*).

Chapter 4, “*Baloma* creations and procreations,” shifts the focus from magic per se to indigenous understandings of kin relationship, not just between humans and spirits but also their interactions with nonhuman “totemic” beings and entities of the universe (i.e., animal and plant species and natural phenomena). These latter are also capacitated, although to a lesser extent, and classified in *meg'wa* spells in terms of their component *kek'wabu* images and associated *peu'ula* powers. To establish these connections, I analyze the principal myth of cosmological creation which illuminates indigenous understandings of the origins of humans’ magical creativity and the procreation of offspring. This discussion thus sheds novel light on earlier debates over “virgin birth” and highlights the critical significance of paternal as well as maternal relationship and agency in both kinship and magical contexts. I argue that the masculine agency of generating magical spells orally is analogous to feminine capacities of giving birth to human offspring vaginally.

As further evidence of the intimate ties between villagers and *baloma*, I describe in chapter 5, “*Bwekasa*: The life-giving sacrificial rites of Trobrianders, living and deceased,” how nearly every activity of gift exchange of the Maussian sort that Trobrianders perform traditionally is construed as reciprocal “sacrifice” (*bwekasa*).<sup>46</sup> The regular offering of *bwekasa* sacrifices is regarded as the *u'ula* “base,” “source,” or “reason” of and for successful magical performance. Surprisingly, although Malinowski and many others have described various elements of *bwekasa*, none have discerned their sacrificial character. In the paradigmatic example of daily family meals, for example, *baloma* spirits

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46. The most notable realm of gift exchange, which I do not attempt to analyze to any great depth in this volume, is *kula*. Although Pulayasi and several other Omarakana elders continue to engage in *kula* exchange, those transactions typically take place at times of the year when I have not been present.

are first offered the invisible *kekwebu* “shadows” of cooked food—i.e., the detached “fruits” of people’s productive bodily labors. In the course of consuming those images of their Boyowan descendants, the spirits leave behind on the foods similarly externalized bodily residues—ostensibly, traces of their potent “saliva” (*bubwalua*). Other reciprocities between humans and *baloma* operate in an analogous manner. In these ways, spirits and living people feed, invigorate, and thereby give life to each other. As the stereotypical way of *baloma*, *bwekasa* is absolutely pivotal to the culture.

The main body of chapter 6, “Cycles of reproduction and reincarnation as *bwekasa* sacrifice,” elaborates on the processes of *bwekasa* in two interlinked contexts: the sacrifices involved in human and spirit copulation, and the sacrificial dimensions of Trobriand mortuary rituals. In both cases, the reincarnated birth or entry of a person into either of the cosmic realms, whether Tuma or Boyowa, is preceded by the decomposition of that person’s essence occasioned by “death” in the other. The conception of a *waiwaia* spirit child in Boyowa, for instance, follows the death of an aged *baloma* spirit in Tuma, just as the ingress of a new *baloma* spirit to Tuma follows the death of a person in Boyowa. These personal transitions, I argue, are effected as outcomes of sacrificial mortuary rites enacted *both* by *baloma* spirits as regard the deaths of their fellow Tuman spirits and by living humans in Boyowa following the deaths of their kin. Of particularly novel significance, through a detailed reinterpretation of the ethnography of mortuary practices—*kopoi* “carrying” and *lusaladabu* “women’s mortuary feasts”—I describe how not only maternal *kekwebu* of the deceased are reincarnated, but also those acquired by persons through the paternal feeding and forming flow cyclically between Tuma and Boyowa as well. Potent *dala* images contributed by fathers to children in earthly life, in other words, are recycled through Tuma also. It is on these grounds, among others, that I argue that the Trobriands has been misleadingly characterized as a “matrilineal society.”

One of the ethnographically least understood components of the indigenous culture are the numerous “taboos”—accurately named *kikila* “ritual restrictions”—that accompany virtually any conventional activity including the performance of *megwa*. In chapter 7, “Totems, taboos, and Tuma,” I develop a new theory of Trobriand taboo (*kikila*) explaining the logic by which both the adherence to and violation of these ritual restrictions are understood to operate through *baloma* and other spirits’ participation. *Kikila* violation, I argue, is tantamount to *suwasova* “incest” or “quasi-incest,” the inappropriate ingestion

of *kekwebu* images that are already components of a person's maternal *and* paternal *dala* identities. The consequences of *kikila* infraction, including sickness, ill fortune, failure in the performance of *megwa*, and so on—what Malinowski called “mystical punishments”—are nothing other than reprimands delivered from Tuma by ancestral *baloma* or other spirits.

In chapter 8, “The supreme puzzle: *Suvasova* incest, marriage alliance, and chiefly endogamy,” I examine a field of *kikila* restrictions that is particularly subject to spirit participation and sanction: namely, the regulation of sexual intercourse and intermarriage, including what Malinowski characterized as the “supreme taboo”—i.e., *suvasova* incest between brother and sister. My treatment of this topic leads eventually to a novel portrayal of the overall structure of Trobriand society wherein the critical knowledge of *megwa* magical practice on which human life depends is maintained and protected by *baloma* sanction. First of all, not all *kikila* violations pertaining to sex and marriage qualify as *suvasova* incest between maternally linked kin; there are others which apply only to patrilineal relations. But then there are yet additional contexts and circumstances where the *suvasova* and patrilineal restrictions placed on both exogamous and endogamous sexual and marital relations are required of chiefly persons by sacred tradition. In this chapter, I attempt to sort through these till-now muddled data by closer examination of the distinctions between maternal and paternal *dala* affiliation and their articulation with differences of chiefly and commoner rank (*ketota*). In particular, quasi-incestuous or quasi-endogamous sexuality and marriage are positively enjoined amongst those occupying the most elevated ranks of the society, more or less as mythically chartered in the cosmic union of the divinities Topileta and Topilupalupa. At Omarakana, these arrangements take the form of an indigenous diarchy mentioned above involving the two resident bilaterally intermarrying chiefly *dalas*: Tabalu of Malasi *kumila* and the Osapola-Bwaydaga branch of Kwenama of Lukwasisiga *kumila*. Each of these *dalas* is led by a designated titleholder—the Tabalu “sacred chief” and the Katayuvisa “political, orator, or advisor chief,” respectively—amounting to a dual politico-ritual structure resonant of more familiar Polynesian and Austronesian forms. There are additional implications of quasi-incestuousness, however, in virtually all marital unions including those involving *tokai* commoners.

In the final chapter, “Analogy, homology, and changing ways of *baloma*,” I summarize the clarifications to Trobriand *gulgula* sacred traditions that this investigation has generated and discuss the theoretical innovations that those

insights now make possible. I attempt to illustrate these points with a discussion of how a clearer view of the “traditional” ways of *baloma* as comprehended by Omarakanans today can shed new light on processes of change and continuity. I illustrate this last point by reference to a brief overview of Islanders’ religious (and magical) conversion to Christianity, the focus of my ongoing research.



## CHAPTER TWO

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# Theoretical orientations

## *Partibility and participation*

In general the spirits do not influence human beings very much, for better or worse.

Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922: 73)

The ethnographic insights outlined in the previous chapter (if they be that) and yet others have been educed primarily from my investigations with Trobriand Islanders in the field over the past decade and secondarily through scrutiny of the extant archival corpus. Whatever sense or intelligibility that can be made of those materials, however, has been only possible for me by viewing them through a pair of particular theoretical lenses of relatively recent fabrication. The first of these, from the NME, has been concentrated through mostly Melanesian materials. The second, involving adaptations of Lévy-Bruhl's "participation" theory of "primitive mentality" as outlined by, *inter alia*, Stanley Tambiah (1990c) and Rodney Needham (1972), has brought within its purview, in varying measure the collective representations of many of the world's other societies.

Not coincidentally, as mentioned in the previous chapter, key elements of Lévy-Bruhl's thought have experienced a substantial revival in recent years, particularly in the anthropological study of magic, religion, and comparative

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Certain sections of this and the two subsequent chapters include revised and expanded excerpts from Mosko (2014b).

ontologies. Even so, I am not aware of any sustained attempt at reconciling the two perspectives featured here, very likely because on first glance they may appear to be incommensurable. I shall examine each of these frameworks in turn with an eye toward points of potential synthesis. I tag this conceptual fusion the Newborn Melanesian Ethnography (henceforth NBME).

## A “NEWBORN MELANESIAN ETHNOGRAPHY: THE “DIVINE DIVIDUAL”

The NME is a highly innovative and controversial elaboration of Mauss’ theory of gift exchange applied to Melanesian personhood, agency, and sociality (Mauss [1925] 2017; see also Gregory 1982). Marilyn Strathern’s *The gender of the gift* (1988; see also 1991b, 1999) is widely regarded as the NME’s foundational text. Some of the writings of Roy Wagner (1973, 1974, 1975, 1986a, 1986b, 1991), Alfred Gell (1998), and others have also been critical.<sup>1</sup>

The key feature of the NME that is most pertinent to this study and which differentiates it from more orthodox anthropological perspectives is the characteristic type of sociality stemming from a novel concept of personhood, the “dividual” or “partible person.” The dividual is a type of person which has been encountered ethnographically in many non-Western societies, but can be discerned in some dimensions of Euro-American sociality. In this view, Melanesians and others are radically reconceptualized as composite or *dividual* beings embedded in systems of Maussian reciprocal gift exchange. Partible persons as social agents are thus constituted differently from the stereotypically bounded *individual*-type persons of modern Western market- or commodity-based societies. Rather than acting and being configured as circumscribed “subjects” categorically differentiated from the alienable commodities, objects, or “things” over which “individuals” transact, the items that dividual persons exchange through reciprocal gifting are considered to be detachable inalienable parts of

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1. Ethnographic works on Melanesian sociality that arguably and varyingly fit within key parameters of the NME would include: Wagner (1973, 1986a, 1991); Clay (1977, 1986); Battaglia (1983a, 1983b, 1985, 1990); Damon (1983, 1990); Mosko (1983, 1985); Harrison (1993); Bamford (1994, 2007); Foster (1995); J. Weiner (1995); Bercovitch (1996); Hviding (1996); Eves (1998); Telban (1998); Englund and Leach (2000); Reed (2003); Miyazaki (2004); James Leach (2003); Kirsch (2006); Crook (2007); Taylor (2008); Stasch (2009); Lepani (2012); D. Dalton (2016).

themselves. As a result of an extended series of such interactions, individuals in relationship are recognized as extensions or parts of one other. Or as Sahlin's has recently (2013) developed the idea in his effort to clarify the nature of kinship cross-culturally, individuals of this sort are constituted and become connected through a commonly recognized "mutuality of being."

The transactions composing persons and relations from this perspective create a history of sequential reciprocities as so many capacities for future agentive action, and thereby particular identities. Thus persons' compositions change through time as they reciprocally attach and detach elements of each other. By acting (i.e., detaching parts of themselves that they earlier acquired as patients from others), agents externalize the relations of which they are, or until then have been, composed. Through acting, partible persons are *decomposed*, anticipating and evincing the recognition of their externalized capacities through the responses of corresponding patients. For me to detach the appropriate part of myself so that it will be effective in drawing forth a desired part of another person (i.e., his or her sister or brother in marriage, a shell valuable, or a magical spell), I must be able to conceptualize the integral capacities of both myself and the intended patient so that I can strategically externalize that part of me which will be successful in uncoupling the part of him/her that I desire. Through these kinds of elicitations, persons stimulate one another to action and reaction. Every action—or *transaction*—is in this way both conventional and innovative (Wagner 1974), thereby presenting an opportunity for change as well as continuity.

On this last point, it is important to situate the present work in relation to the main criticisms which have thus far been leveled against the NME. It has been claimed that in Strathern's and others' handling this approach has been hampered by three critical limitations: (a) its apparent essentializing of the contrast between non-Western and Western peoples and institutions; (b) at least in Strathern's perspective, the analytical construction of Melanesian sociality in "as if" or creatively "fictional" terms as distinct from more empirically intentioned presentations: that is, as a strategic device for exposing prevailing ethnocentric distortions implicit in many Euro-American (including anthropological) preconceptions;<sup>2</sup> and (c) its tendency toward synchronic, seemingly ahistorical kinds of analysis (e.g., Josephides 1991; Thomas 1991; Carrier 1992: 1–21; Jolly 1992b; Keesing 1992; Keesing and Jolly 1992; Foster 1995; B. Douglas 1998, 2001; LiPuma 2000;

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2. See also Roy Wagner's conception of the relation between "relative objectivity" and "cultural relativism" (1974: 2–3, *passim*).

A. Strathern and Stewart 2000; Graeber 2001; Robbins 2007; Scott 2007a, 2007b; Macintyre and Patterson 2011). Insofar as this book focuses upon indigenous dimensions of Trobriand culture and sociality having their roots in the precolonial past and in many respects extending into the present, I see my remarks aimed chiefly as responding to the first two of these claims. However, in the concluding chapter I do address the third stock criticism of the NME, its purported inability to address issues of change. I do this, drawing upon my reinterpretations of indigenous magic and kinship as inspired by my modified NME views of personal partibility and participation, to illustrate a quite different view of the processes which have been involved in Islanders' conversions to Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

It should be stressed that my deployment of the NBME and particularly the core notion of personal partibility represents a fundamentally unorthodox approach to the analysis of Trobriand personhood, agency, and sociality. Among relatively recent ethnographers of Trobriand culture, there are three who to varying degrees and in somewhat different respects have emphasized the "autonomous" *qua* individual component of Trobriand personhood: Annette Weiner (1976, 1983), Susan Montague (1983: 33, 40; but see 1989: 24–25), and Katherine Lepani (2012: 14–15; 2015). Of these, Weiner (1976: 86–90, 212–14, 219, 223, 234; 1983) has written most emphatically in this regard positing a "balance between autonomy and control" insofar as "complete autonomy and total dependence are both anathema" to villagers (1976: 89).<sup>4</sup> Indigenous

3. In any case, here and in a series of other works contributing to my broader program of developing the Newborn Melanesian Ethnography by extending or modifying the NME to my own analytical purposes, I specifically address, first, the essentialist presumption that personal partibility reinscribes the "communalist" versus "individualist" poles that have long been taken to differentiate the West from the Rest. In short, the notion of personal partibility, if effectively deployed, as I have attempted in this volume, presents an alternative *a priori* mode of sociality to both of the established orthodoxies. And second, here as elsewhere, I respond to those critiques of the NME as to its inherent ahistorical limitations by placing the notion of personal partibility at the dynamic center of social changes in the Trobriands and Melanesia generally as well as in certain quarters of Western society (see Mosko 1992, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2013a, 2014a, 2015b, 2015c).
4. Susan Montague's (1983: 33, 40–42) strident claims as to Trobrianders' intense valuation of individual autonomy and self-interest are based on research conducted prior to the coalescence of the NME, which is not the case with Weiner and Lepani, and do not to my knowledge address the implications or possible relevance of the notion of dividual personhood in relation to Trobriand culture and sociality. The circumstance with Lepani, on whom I concentrate my remarks here, is different to that of Weiner, which I discuss elsewhere (see especially chapter 6). Lepani (2015)

magical arts figure importantly in this characterization, as it is largely through magic along with other vehicles of exchange, Weiner argues, that Trobrianders are able to impose their autonomy or undermine or infringe that of others.

Each person is accorded some degree of autonomy in all social relationships. . . . Giving things to others and the use of magic spells are the two most effective persuasive devices available to every individual. Magic spells are an attempt to gain control over objects and persons through powerful verbal persuasion. . . . The dynamics of exchange embody similar, though less powerful, attempts at persuasion. While magic, when successful, can directly control the mind of another, exchange, even when successful, depends on a general ethic of generosity. In exchange, the giver must demonstrate generosity. (1976: 212)

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proclaims an essentially split allegiance to Strathern and Weiner on points of social reproduction, thus characterizing Trobriand personhood as being both “relational” and “individualist” or “autonomous,” respectively (see my discussion of the notion of the “relational individual” as conceptualized by Andrew Strathern and Pamela Stewart [1998, 2000] below). But in her portrayal of Trobriand personhood, Lepani refrains from adopting Strathern’s formulation of “relationalism” in its fullest form (i.e., in terms of the explicit partibility of persons), most likely because the implications of the dividuality of persons, if taken seriously, as I attempt in this volume, become acutely difficult to reconcile with “autonomy.” In a key example she provides, by divorcing her husband a woman, Meriba, “reactivates her individual autonomy,” a “willed transformation . . . free to pursue sexual liaisons” (2015: 53). “My mind is strong: I am still a young girl if I want” (ibid.: 53). In view of the mediated and unmediated experiences that characterized this woman’s prior married life, however, her decision to divorce can be seen not as “autonomy,” but as nothing less than the sorts of routine detachments and extrications typical of the actions of dividuals. And for that matter, as discussed in chapter 3, according to indigenous understandings, a person’s “mind” (*nona*) is, first, merely a *part* of one’s total person, and, second, hardly autonomous, itself the precipitate of relations with others: “The autonomy of one person can become displaced by another through the registered effects of love magic” (ibid.: 61), and thereby, I suggest, *baloma* spirits. Just as Lepani (ibid.: 55) notes in quoting Strathern, “the mind is made visible in the context of multiple social relations with others” (1988: 164). Meriba’s moment of “individual autonomy” is itself an index of the partibility of her person. The solution to this puzzle, I argue, lies in the sorts of dynamics of partibility which can be shown to underpin perceived instances of “personal autonomy,” exactly as Strathern has articulated (see also Mosko 2013a, 2015d). Very simply, when Islanders appear to exert individual autonomy in acts of magic or exchange, they are not acting alone. That which they supposedly transact on their part “individually” consists of prior detachments of other persons (e.g., parents, kin, *baloma* ancestors).

Where even the most seemingly permanent control over others can be lost, all men—and women—use magic in an effort to retain and maximize their own situation. The power of magic is exploited at the highest political level, and every individual attempts to build up her or his own personal repertoire of magic spells. When people believe in the forces of magic, magic becomes the most creative and powerful tool that anyone can wield. Magic is calculated to serve the right cause at the right time. Sometimes its use is deliberately withheld, while at other times magic is accompanied by great ritual and political display. (1976: 214–15)

Although the constant concern with magic produces wariness and fear of what others may do, it also produces a strength in one's own mind that one can defy the intentions of others. Thus the perceived autonomy of personal space is heightened. (1983: 701)

Weiner's claims in this regard would be valid if it were the case, as she argues in an echo of Malinowski, that Islanders can practice magical arts strictly through the force of magical words and independently of *baloma* participation.

Repetition of the spell, accompanied by changes in rhythm, is believed to be the effective force in causing the words to enter the appropriate object. Through the object the agents addressed in the spell are activated into conveying the necessary information to the patient of the spell—the lover, the canoe, the rain. This technique is especially important in assuring success for the most difficult and most valued magical action, such as sorcery, love, changes in weather, success in *kula* or yam growing. In order for Z to control the rain, he must stay awake all night, chanting the spell over and over into a piece of black coral. The repetition acts as verbal persuasion. Such skill and stamina become the measure of one's strength and power increases until finally the desired information has been absorbed by the agent and the patient. While these physical actions and mental abilities are effecting persuasion, one's personal space takes on unprecedented energy and autonomy. Everything is possible in the moment of recitation, where such power generates the strongest sense that one's desires can be secured. The production of magic begins within the domain of a person's mind, but one's thoughts must be exposed in words and transferred to objects. With magic, the fear of exposure is inconsequential. (1983: 702–3)

But as I argue throughout this volume, the enactment of magic and efforts to protect oneself from its use directed by others upon oneself *are* viewed culturally as involving spiritual persons. Trobrianders, therefore, should not be construed as the autonomous beings that Weiner and others have made them out to be. This is all the more so if, as everyone following in Malinowski's wake has affirmed, magic is a critical component of social activity in general.

In arguing this point, I am not *necessarily* asserting that Trobrianders cannot be viewed as "autonomous" in relation to other persons, including spirits at particular moments of ritual process, merely that they are not so in any activity where *megwa* and other instances of gift exchange and ritual are employed in people's personal interactions. And as I shall argue further in chapters 5–6 and elsewhere, *baloma* as spirits are no more autonomous in their dealings than living people. That the worlds of human beings and spirits—Boyowa and Tuma, respectively—are conceived as mirror images (*saribu*) of one another should be sufficient to dispel the claims as to personal autonomy, at least in the forms attributed to them ethnographically to date.

I dwell on this matter because it is indicative of a much larger issue that has preoccupied Melanesian anthropologists ever since the publication of *The gender of the gift* (hereafter *GOG*): namely the extent to which Melanesian persons in general can be best conceptualized as in some respects bounded or autonomous individuals as distinct from individuals being composed of relations with other persons. The whole effect of *GOG*, of course, has been to reveal how several aspects of prevailing ethnographic representations of Melanesian sociality have concealed ethnocentric assumptions harmonious with exogenous Western canons of individualist personhood and the commodity logic of capitalist mentality.

In due course, citing Trobriand and other ethnographic materials from the Pacific, for example, Weiner (1992: 14–15, 122–26) challenged Strathern on the theoretical premise of her model of personal partibility: that is, the "norm of reciprocity." A key element of Weiner's critique was the extent to which Strathern had excluded from consideration evidence of persons' pursuit of individual autonomy through exchange practices, including magic, that were salient in her own analyses.

In other works I have written at length more or less seeking to document how claims as to indigenous Melanesian personal agency in terms of individuality or autonomy have seriously misread what amount to instances of dividual



personhood, at least with respect to indigenous contexts of sociality.<sup>5</sup> The present effort carries forward those critiques in a new direction on the basis of the data concerning Trobriand characterizations of the parts (*posu'ula*) of which Islanders and their relations are composed—the *kek'wabu* “images” or “shadows” and associated *peu'ula* “powers.” Very simply, Trobriand *megwa* performance and other contexts of exchange that Weiner and others have taken as signs of individual autonomy can be seen instead as instances of the elicitive detachment, exchange, and reciprocation of the parts of persons, whether living people or spirits, thus validating in an important ethnographic instance the dynamics of partible personhood.

In the earlier writings just noted, I have struggled to extend the NME in several directions that go beyond its original parameters, at least some of those outlined in Strathern's *GOG*. I shall have considerably more to note about these adaptations. Unless stated otherwise, the NME which I employ in analysing Trobriand magic and kinship is the *modified, extended, or elaborated version* of the NBME that I have erstwhile developed.

Even so, the core features of the NME in its conventional (i.e., Strathernian) form would seem to be at least nominally apropos for my purposes given the extent to which the Trobriand notion of transactable *kek'wabu* images and associated *peu'ula* capacities qualify as the relevant detachable components or parts of persons and relations in contexts of magical performance, kinship, and other modes of sociality I examine.

In Strathern's (1988) influential rendering, the relevant transactable parts of dividual persons are defined in gendered terms of male and female and same- and cross-sex relations. I do not think that any of Strathern's critics have doubted that in Melanesia and elsewhere, gendered distinctions play critical roles in people's identities and relations, just as she claims. But I suggest that gender is not necessarily the only realm of meaning and distinction by which persons and the parts/relations of which they are composed can be defined. Kin classifications and relations, though strongly inflected by gender, cannot be reduced to it. In some contexts, age distinctions feature just as significantly. And in the Trobriands, considerations of rank, lineality, locality, relative sanctity, and existential status, as already noted (i.e., as a living person in the material world of

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5. Of these, my 2000 article, “Inalienable ethnography: Keeping-while-giving and the Trobriand case,” assesses Weiner on this issue specifically; see also Mosko (2001, 2002, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2013b, 2014a, 2015b, 2015c).

Boyowa or a non-substantial, invisible *baloma* spirit in Tuma), figure critically in how villagers identify themselves and thereby transact over the respective parts of their persons.

The key modification to the orthodox NME I propose under the rubric of the NBME, therefore, is the expansion of personal partibility to contexts and relations including but also additional to gender—specifically to beings and entities understood to be composed of attributes of a “sacred” or “divine” immaterial form. This particular innovation, incidentally, was foreshadowed in Wagner’s (1973) analysis of Daribi initiation, where the scope of persons was extended to include ghosts or spirits as well as living humans. In proposing this, I am not invoking the sacred versus the profane dichotomy as it has been accepted in conventional anthropological theorizing; rather, in the materials covered in this volume, sacred and profane involve complex sets of dialectical or recursive transformations along the lines of another of Wagner’s (1986b) theoretical insights: the concept of “analogical flow.” However, I have found the substantiation of this last point to be possible, at least in my own manner of thinking, only after my treatment of Trobriand conceptions and relations has been concluded; hence, I take up the notion of “analogical flow” in the book’s final chapter.

As an initial step in that direction, however, Melanesians have long been construed ethnographically as viewing themselves, the constituents of their persons, and those of other beings and entities of the world, in religious as well as gendered terms: that is, in terms of their relative sacredness (e.g., Codrington 1891: 119–120; Mauss [1902–3] 1972: 22; Lawrence and Meggitt 1965: 6–9; Trompf 1991: 66, 73–74, 84–87; Sillitoe 1998: 215–16). Importantly, in this regard, sacredness in Melanesian contexts has often been described as deviating from the classic Durkheimian formulation in that it is immanent in all beings and things rather than constituting a discrete or transcendent “set apart” sphere. Typically, tokens of sacredness or divinity of this sort are combined with non-sacred or profane characteristics and attributes in the same persons and entities but expressed differentially relative to specific interactional contexts. In the course of relating in circumstances of gift exchange, people’s transactions over the detachable parts of themselves are often inflected by criteria of relative sanctity and/or profanity to no less an extent than considerations of gender similarity and difference. In many respects, persons in this sense as composed of both sacred and profane elements are formally analogous to the dual gendering of Melanesian androgynes in Strathern’s formulation. Unsurprisingly, the markings of relative sanctity often converge with those of gender, but not necessarily

always, and the dynamics of sanctification and desanctification may well eclipse or deviate from those of same- and cross-sex alternation.

The core NBME amendment to the NME notion of personal partibility that I wish to adopt in analyzing Trobriand magic and kinship, therefore, is designed to expand the scope of Strathern's Melanesian dividual to encompass this additional magico-religious dimension. The Trobriand person, I argue, is an expressly *divine* dividual (see Mosko 2014a, 2015b). Through their various interactions in the magico-religious contexts that I examine, village peoples are often detaching, attaching, eliciting, and reciprocating either sacred or profane (along with other) components of their persons.

Readers must remain aware, incidentally, that all deployments of the notion of the "dividual" that appear in the following treatments of Trobriand magic and kinship (and relations between the two) connote meanings of relative or potential sacredness. By this I mean to say that explicitly qualifying all references to the dividual which appear in this volume with the additional adjective "divine" risks unnecessary tedium. *Unless stated otherwise, the "dividual" that features in this work is the "divine dividual" which at particular moments in processes of sociality may be temporarily or permanently deprived of its sanctity.*

It is important to reiterate that this model of the divine dividual, similarly to the classic NME dividual conceptualized in gendered terms, presupposes the absence of the rigid distinction between "persons" and "things," or "subjects" and "objects," that is definitive of the atomized, bounded, possessive *individual* of Western ideology. Thus when people from a Euro-American viewpoint might appear to be exchanging "objects," even seemingly ordinary ones—items of food, wealth, knowledge, and so on, and nowadays money and commodities—from the indigenous Melanesian perspective they are rather transacting bits of themselves as persons periodically modulated with capacities of relative sacredness and/or profaneness.

My deployment of the divine dividual with its emphasis upon the sacred/profane axis follows Strathern's (1988) thinking in another, perhaps less obvious respect. One of the key and more controversial innovations of *GOG* is Strathern's focus upon *relations* and her concomitant rejection of the conceptual framework around which much anthropology theory has been built: namely, that of any inherent opposition between the "individual" and "society." In Durkheim's original formulation of religion as a social fact, the relation of "religion" to "magic" was an explicit expression of that very antinomy. But Mauss' ([1902–3] 1972) critique of his uncle on this point essentially shifted magic into

the realm of the sacred, and thereby the religious and the social. So in effect, my conception of the divine dividual produces the same analytical result: that is, of dismantling the opposition of individual and society while doing the same with magic and religion. In the forthcoming chapters, therefore, I shall continue to gloss the indigenous term *megwa* and associated beliefs and practices as “magic” and “magical,” respectively; but I intend those expressions to be inclusive also of what stands anthropologically as “religion” and “religious.” In short, the various debates over ritual agency involving functionalist, pragmatist, symbolist, structuralist, poststructuralist, phenomenological, and linguistic perspectives, and so on, that have followed Malinowski’s reports might well require reconsideration if it can be substantiated ethnographically that there is indeed a close association, even a kind of identity, between the efficacies attributed to words in *megwa* spells and to named *baloma* spirits.

## WHENCE DIVIDUAL SPIRITS AND OTHER SACRED BEINGS?

In order to accommodate aspects of the sacredness (or its absence) of the divine individual to conventional NME theorizing about personhood and agency, it is necessary to expand the notion of the partible person to include extrahuman creatures and items. Lévy-Bruhl’s mature theory of ritual “participation,” wherein the sorts of extrahuman beings and entities that populate the cosmologies of probably all peoples figure critically, though to varying extents, seems well suited to this objective.

As already noted, some readers may well receive this suggestion with suspicion insofar as conventional NME partibility and Lévy-Bruhlian participation may seem incongruous. However, in the view of Trobriand Islanders, living humans are not the only “persons” with agentive powers populating their universe. Strathern’s ingenious treatment of Melanesian sociality in *GOG*, however, concentrates on the partibility and component transactions and relations among gendered *living human* persons—i.e., in Trobriand perspective those animate people of the visible world of Boyowa. To be sure, the material items and gestures taken up in human-to-human exchanges are considered in her analyses as in my own to be parts also of the transacting persons. However, Strathern tacitly omits from the realm of Melanesian sociality gift reciprocities between beings and relations beyond those strictly human-to-human, sacrificial exchanges perhaps being the most obvious example. For Trobrianders, the inhabitants of

Tuma, the land of the dead, are no less “real” and potent than themselves. Ancestral *baloma* and other spirits such as *tosunapula* “emergence beings,” *tokwai* “nature sprites,” and *itona* or *tauva’u* “warrior spirits” (see chapter 3) share sacred or divine characteristics with their mortal descendants and counterparts, as both qualify as divine individuals as I am employing that concept here.<sup>6</sup> And as I shall describe in subsequent chapters, much of people’s activity with each other in magical, kinship, and other contexts necessarily involves simultaneous reciprocal gifting between them and the divine inhabitants of Tuma.

As Strathern (pers. comm.) herself acknowledges, spiritual-type persons as possible agents have not figured centrally in her analyses of Melanesian sociality insofar as they lay beyond her chief focus—the critique of prevalent assumptions in anthropology regarding gendered relations among living people. But there may be another explanation for her elision of the agencies of sacred nonhuman persons, even ones that happen to be conceived in gendered terms, which is traceable to her having drawn major inspiration from Chris Gregory’s highly influential treatment of gift exchange theory, *Gifts and commodities* (1982; see M. Strathern 1988: 18, 134, 143–45, 161, 293, 362n, 364n, 367n, 368n, 373n, 378n).

As an exercise in political economy, Gregory’s classic exegesis is largely limited to the production, exchange, and consumption of people and things. It thereby effectively excludes from consideration any participation on the part of nonhuman, nonmaterial magico-religious beings as often imagined by people such as Trobrianders immersed in predominantly precapitalist economies. However, as Maurice Godelier (1999) has stressed, there is in Mauss’ classic treatise on *The gift* ([1925] 2017), upon which Gregory drew heavily, a relatively underappreciated fourth obligation additional to those of giving, receiving, and returning: the obligation to present sacrifices to the beings of the imagined sacred world of spirits for the sake of receiving their essential life-giving blessings.<sup>7</sup>

6. *Tosunapula* is the English spelling that has been used for these spirit beings, but the terminal lexeme /-ula/ is actually /-u’ula/, to signify “original,” “foundational,” etc., beings.

7. Elsewhere (Mosko 2010b, 2015c) I have extended Godelier’s insight regarding the necessity of sacrifice to highlight the basically partible character of the persons, human and spiritual, involved in Melanesian and Christian sacrificial gifting. In the indigenous Trobriand case, both living humans and *baloma* spirits as persons are composite beings constituted of the life-giving detachable parts (*posu’ula*) that they exchange between them.

Gregory theorized this issue at length in harmony with most positivist anthropology at the time, but very differently from Godelier, in his essay "Gifts to men and gifts to god" (1980), which served as a precursor to *Gifts and commodities*. A digression into his reasoning on this point is, I think, instructive, although I suspect that his views may have changed over the intervening decades. In systems involving "gifts-to-men" or reciprocal exchange among living persons, he argued that the key motivation is the maximization of net outgoings. This is distinct from capitalist systems, where people instead seek to minimize expenditures. My point is that in Gregory's earlier handling, he positions pre-capitalist "gifts-to-god(s)" systems as proximate to capitalist ones and thereby categorically opposed to the "gifts-to-men" systems with which they empirically coexist.

At least for Mauss, with gift exchange there is typically an indissoluble bond of the "thing" exchanged and its human owner or subject. This is the notion of "inalienability" that Gregory (ibid.: 640) adopts from Mauss and Marx and that Strathern redeployed in *GOG*. In capitalist systems, however, items transacted between persons are classified as categorically distinct from themselves; hence they are "objects" and thus "alienable." Inalienability in this view is intrinsic to gift exchange systems, whereas alienability is fundamental to capitalist systems.

The question of "gifts-to-god(s)"—that is, to seemingly imaginary persons—arises in Gregory's perspective from the fact that such "gifts" implicate alienation, typically through the intentional destruction of the property that is offered, as exemplified in Northwest Coast Kwakiutl potlatching. Consequently, that which is "impossible in [a] gifts-to-man system" (i.e., alienation) is "the very basis of a gifts-to-god system" (ibid.: 641). Gifts-to-god(s) systems for Gregory, in other words, are premised on the same principle as capitalist systems rather than on that which joins both forms of precapitalist economy together: namely, *gifting* and, I suggest, *reciprocity* as well as *inalienability*.

The critical question is: Is the "alienation" of gifts-to-god(s) systems of the same order as that of capitalist systems? Gregory nominates two alternate "idioms" by which gifts-to-god(s) can be represented and interpreted. On the one hand, a "direct relation between the giver and god predominates"; on the other, "the relation of giver to god is a manifestation of a vehicle for the expression of relations between men," as, for instance, where relative rank and prestige are at issue (ibid.: 644). He analyses two empirical cases of gifts-to-god(s) to illustrate these idioms: the institution of potlatch among the Kwakiutl, as already mentioned, in particular the feature whereby, through destruction, highly valued

wealth is sacrificed to ancestral spirits; and church offerings of money by the Motu and Koita peoples of southeast Papua which he researched himself. Under close examination, each case presents analytical problems.

On the one hand, by interpreting gifts-to-god(s) as “sacrifices” and thereby amounting to “alienation,” for Gregory they do not qualify analytically as instances of either “reciprocity” or “gift exchange.”

The Kwakiutl potlatch comprises elements of both idioms of gift exchange. Interclan and intertribal competitive exchanges for rank and prestige illustrate gifts-to-men systems. The feature of some potlatches of destroying highly valued property (e.g., coppers, blankets) as sacrifices to ancestral gods illustrates the gift-to-god(s) type system where the idiom of a direct relationship between the giver and god predominates. Gregory writes:

Mauss (1925: 14) was justified in describing this destruction as a “gift to god”. *A gift to god is a sacrifice, and a sacrifice is, in the words of the Oxford dictionary, the “surrender of a possession”*. The surrender of possession involves the transfer of ownership (i.e., alienation) of something from a natural person to a non-natural person (“god”). It is possible for another person to receive the gift on god’s behalf but that intermediary is not placed in a gift-debt relationship because the gift is alienated from the original owner. Given that a gift is an inalienable thing, is clear that what a gift to god accomplishes is the alienation of the inalienable. In a potlatch the destruction of property results in the alienation of gifts and in this sense it can be called a gifts-to-god system. (1980: 644–45, emphasis added)

Regardless of the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s view on this matter, it is indisputable that in Mauss’ classic treatise authored with Henri Hubert (Hubert and Mauss [1899] 1964; see below) examining non-Western, noncapitalist materials, “sacrifice” entails much more than the mere “surrender of a possession.” It is the detachment and offering of inalienable parts of persons to religious beings *with the overt intent of eliciting from the latter through gift reciprocation their mystical, inalienable blessings*—gifts of life, *mana*, abundant crops, prosperity, salvation, and so on. It does not matter that the religious, sacred, or imaginary recipients of sacrifices are “non-natural persons” if their reality is presupposed by the people who provision the offerings and if subsequent events are interpreted as due reciprocities. For Gregory, it appears that, from his political-economic perspective, because sacrifices do not *actually* elicit or materially *cause* reciprocities in the



form of good weather, health, life, and so on, there is an absence of inalienability in the relations between the natural and nonnatural persons.

This may be the case in Gregory's political-economic worldview, but certainly not in the case of Kwakiutl, Motu and Koita Christians, Trobrianders, or others, including many religiously oriented persons of the capitalist West and non capitalist Rest. From this point of view, Gregory's classification of sacrifice as alienation is tantamount to the very sort of "commodity logic" that Strathern critiques throughout *GOG* and which Firth (1939), Polanyi (G. Dalton 1968), Gudeman (1986, 2008), and others have indicted the entire discipline of economics.

Motuan and Koitan offerings of money to the United Church of Papua, which Gregory offers as a second illustration of a "gifts-to-god" system, were introduced by Christian LMS (London Missionary Society) missionaries. In this instance, clan groups and their leaders compete in the raising and donating of funds to their church. Here, although the money is not physically destroyed as with some potlatch wealth, it is nonetheless "alienated" insofar as it is lost to the community. The recipient church "symbolically destroys the money by ensuring that it does not get back to the donors" (Gregory 1980: 647), so that the community receives no material benefit from it. In Gregory's view, the primary purpose of these gifts is the same as with potlatch. It is

to achieve the ranking of clans and men . . . a sacrifice is made *whose religious significance is secondary*. The gifts are not given with the aim of trying to elicit a counter-gift from the gods, in the form of good weather for crops, or some such similar benefit that involves getting the gods to control the uncontrollable. It is inter-clan rivalry that primarily motivates the giving of gifts. (1980: 647, emphasis added)

Unfortunately, Gregory does not specify the criteria by which he adjudges the relative significance here of the religious versus political-economic idioms and motivations. Even so, it is certainly significant that when Motuan and Koitan group representatives hand over collected monies to the church, it is done *ceremoniously*, initiated with "prayers and hymns" followed by "dancing" (ibid.: 631, 647). Unless Gregory's Papuan informants are different from most other Christian denominations, such material offerings are routinely elicited from congregants with explicit inducements of anticipated spiritual if not also material benefits in either this world, the next, or both. It seems reasonable to assume that without the spiritual significance of Motuans and Koitans offering money

gifts to God, those communities' enthusiasm for sacrificing their wealth would be considerably subdued, regardless of the benefits of clan ranking and prestige, which, to me, seem arguably to be secondary at best.

I make this assertion also on the grounds that this introduced system of gift-giving to the Papuan Church (i.e., tithing) is apparently a transformation of the now-defunct indigenous *hekara* and *tunia* "feast-and-dance" institution which Gregory flatly represents as a gifts-to-men system. But there are indications that the preceding *hekara-tunia* complex also incorporated important sacrificial or gifts-to-god(s) religious overtones. Success in the competitive interclan *hekara* dancing and exchanges "depended on the wealth, talent, range of acquaintance, *ancestral power, and magical resources* (or luck) of the sponsor and his *iduhu* [clan]" (Groves 1954: 8, quoted in Gregory 1980: 629, emphasis added).

On the basis of my own ethnography among North Mekeo and Trobriand peoples in both traditional and post-Christian conversion settings (Mosko 1985, 2010b, 2015c; see also chapters 5 and 9), people's access to ancestral power and magico-religious resources is strongly dependent upon their proper observance of sacrificial obligations to both indigenous and Christian spirits. Also, all we are told about the *tunia* ceremonials as instances of the previous, supposedly gifts-to-men type system is that they were "held to honour the memory of a deceased kinsman" (Gregory 1980: 647) *to whom his survivors were evidently indebted*.<sup>8</sup> Why does *tunia* fall into Gregory's gift-to-men category when it apparently (primarily?) instituted direct relations between the givers and their gods?

My purpose in pursuing this lengthy digression has been two-fold. On the one hand, the trope of sacrifice will emerge as a primary one as I turn to the analysis of Trobriand magic and associated relational practices (see chapters 5 and 6). But importantly also, it has been necessary to demonstrate that there is a critical dimension of the conceptualization of personal partibility that has tended to be overshadowed even within the bounds of NME orthodoxy. For Trobrianders now and in the past, and, I suspect, among other Melanesians, there are potent dividual beings in addition to living human ones, and a not inconsequential portion of Trobriand human sociality in the realms of magic, kinship, and related

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8. I offer these reinterpretations of *hekara* and *tunia* rituals as constituting gifts-to-god(s) systems, contra Gregory, in light of his own admission that very little of these practices is known ethnographically: "To my knowledge no detailed study of this . . . system exists and it is not possible to elaborate on what has been said above" (1980: 634–35).

domains is premised on the involvement of those other kinds of what, to outsiders, appear to be “imaginary” but nonetheless partible agents.

## LÉVY-BRUHL AND “PARTICIPATION” THEORY

With the latter conception in mind, I now take up my other theoretical lens: certain elements of what have come to be known as the theory of “participation” as refined in the later thought of the philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl ([1949] 1973), who wrote on the topic through the first half of the twentieth century. Lévy-Bruhl’s work can be viewed on first inspection as functioning at a different order of magnification from that of the NME: that is, aimed at the characterization of the thought systems of virtually all “primitive” (i.e., nonmodern, precapitalist, non-Western, indigenous, traditional) peoples. But insofar as this category includes Melanesians, certain elements of Lévy-Bruhl’s views on the nature of magic are useful in clarifying the nature of the amendments to the NME listed above that I have been independently contemplating for some time.

However, it must be appreciated that Lévy-Bruhl came eventually to acknowledge aspects of “primitive” participation in the thought patterns of “modern” peoples, differing only in the intensity of their incidence cross-culturally. As already noted, Lévy-Bruhl’s ideas of participation have undergone a belated revival. Similarly, some recent scholars have recognized elements of NME partibility in certain quarters of capitalist societies: namely, in Western kinship and in Christian belief and ritual.<sup>9</sup>

Now although Lévy-Bruhl was not a trained anthropologist and his ideas were dismissed by most of his contemporaries, he had many strong influences from anthropology. He based significant portions of his research on the classic theories of Durkheim, Mauss, and others of the *Année Sociologique* school. On the topic of magic specifically, he was in time swayed by Evans-Pritchard’s (1934, 1937) criticisms of his early writings. And his thoughts on participation theory were much influenced by his close friendship with the New Caledonia

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9. I take this to be a critical point of Sahlins’ (2013) recent influential treatise on kinship. The analogous claim in relation to the dividual character of Christian personhood has resulted in similarly animated debate in the anthropology of Christianity (see, e.g., Hess 2009; Barker 2010, 2015; Errington and Gewertz 2010; Knauff 2010; Mosko 2010b, 2015a, 2015b; Robbins 2010, 2015; Vilaça 2011; Werbner 2011a, 2011b; Bialecki 2015; Bialecki and Daswani 2015; Daswani 2015).

ethnographer-missionary Maurice Leenhardt (1942, 1947 see Clifford 1982).<sup>10</sup> Stanley Tambiah's (1990c) authoritative summary of the essentials of Lévy-Bruhl's later formulation of participation theory is doubly valuable for my purposes.<sup>11</sup> First, Tambiah highlights several aspects of Lévy-Bruhl's thought which converge with the very modifications to partibility theory that I incorporate in my treatment of Trobriand magic and kinship. Second, his reading of Lévy-Bruhl led him to grasp "participation" as a major swing away from the key tenets of his own earlier celebrated "performative" theory of magic (1968, 1973). These points are significant in the present context because, on the one hand, as Graeber has noted (2001: 241), the earlier pair of essays written by Tambiah along the lines of "performance" came to be regarded as the touchstone for "nearly all modern anthropological treatments of magic"; and, on the other, those two essays and an additional one (Tambiah 1990b) were largely aimed at critiquing Malinowski's handling of the Trobriand materials, *a task that Tambiah avoided in the piece devoted to participation* (1990c).<sup>12</sup>

The question thus remains unanswered: What alternative reading of Trobriand magic might emerge if viewed from the participation perspective that

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10. Leenhardt's notion of the Melanesian *personage* as an ensemble of relations not only anticipates the more narrowly conceived gendered partible person of Strathern, but also, through the extended idea of how "the substances of nature live in the person" (Clifford 1982: 172), converges with participation at the scale of Lévy-Bruhl. Paraphrasing James Clifford on Leenhardt's concept of participation, "In an explanatory approach whose point of departure is the multi-relational personage, 'social' relations and '[magico-]religious' relations are not in essence different" (1982: 184).
  11. Rodney Needham (1972: 160–85, 209–12) has, I think, provided the most informative summary of Lévy-Bruhl's ideas on participation in the sense employed here. See also Bastide (1965, 1973); Cazeneuve (1972); Evens (2008).
  12. Tambiah's collection of his later essays, *Magic, science, religion and the scope of rationality* (1990a), includes chapters representing both his "performative" (1990b) and "participation" (1990c) perspectives without commenting upon or attempting to reconcile the differences between them. In the former essay, "Malinowski's demarcations and his exposition of the magical act," Tambiah launches into a critique of Malinowski's theorizing of magic from his (Tambiah's) performative perspective while still characterizing Malinowski's approach in terms similar to his own: that is, as "a dramatic and performative view of the magical performance and a special sensitivity to the role of language in magical acts" (1990b: 71). But it is certainly significant in the context of my remarks here that in his chapter extolling the virtues of Lévy-Bruhl's theory of participation, Tambiah does not return to the Trobriand corpus. This point is explored further in chapter 3.

Tambiah eventually adopted from Lévy-Bruhl? This is one way of conceiving the central issue, complementary to the NBME, which I explore in the next and subsequent chapters.

I follow Tambiah (1990c) in noting that Lévy-Bruhl's "primitive mentality" was/is first and foremost a matter of the influence of collective representations over persons' consciousness. The "laws and relations of participation," in other words, have to do with people's beliefs in, experiences of, and relations with "mystical" or "supra-sensible forces" arising from the distinctiveness of their societal experiences. As Needham sees it, following Lévy-Bruhl,

In the interpretation of what we regard as two experiences, the positive [i.e., "logical"] and the mystical, visible and invisible, there is a connective participation between objects belonging to one realm of experience and those belonging to the other. (1972: 166)

From a Trobriand perspective, these suprasensible forces include beings and entities such as spirits, deceased ancestors, deities, totemic species, and so on, with whom humans identify and consider in certain respects to be consubstantial with themselves; that is, as persons.

While Lévy-Bruhl's suprasensible beings and entities might well evince identity markers of gender in Strathern's terms of male and female, same- and cross-sex, and so on, their very suprasensibility affirms the relevance of other aspects, parts, or dimensions of their personhood. In the Trobriand case, this involves the distinction between Boyowa, the realm of the visible, material world of everyday experience, and Tuma, the land of the dead, which in some respects parallels the division between male and female, but in others cross-cuts it.

In any case, in the view of participation theory, human beings and these suprasensible presences are each understood to play vital parts in the others' lives through ritual practices, including sacrifice (*bwekasa*) and the observance of taboos (*kikila*, *bomala*; see chapters 5–8): that is, as agentive persons on the order of Strathern's dividuals in simultaneous enjoyment of Sahlins' mutuality of being. These relations thereby transcend the division between the "natural" and the "supernatural" realms that underscores Strathern's implicit occlusion of extrahuman transactions.<sup>13</sup> "What Western thought would think to

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13. Interestingly, this dimension of participation theory as enunciated by Tambiah resonates with yet another of Marilyn Strathern's key critiques of orthodox

be logically distinct aspects of reality, the primitive may fuse into one mystical unity" (Tambiah 1990c: 86).

These considerations of mystical participation, perhaps better phrased in terms of *coparticipation*, nonetheless possess their own logical coherence at variance with the "mathematico-logical thought of modern rationality," or "causality," as Tambiah phrased the latter orientation to the world (1990c: 90, 105, 108–9). On this score, participation resonates strongly after all with Strathern's view of Melanesian sociality by standing at odds with the dominant rational, individualistic commodity logic of the West, where the distinction between "subjects" and "objects" is stressed. And somewhat similar also to how Strathern allows for the copresence of "individuals" of certain sorts as well as *dividuals* in Melanesian sociality, Lévy-Bruhl concluded that both the mystical and the mathematico-logical can be discerned in the collective representations of all societies, albeit in different proportions or weightings.<sup>14</sup>

## WHAT PARTICIPATION ENTAILS: RECENT THEORIES

These last remarks should be sufficient to affirm that my proposed NBME synthesis of Strathernian *partibility* and Lévy-Bruhl's participation cannot be achieved in any simple, neatly straightforward manner. The two differ fundamentally on the scope of personhood, while their views on that subject are similarly divergent from modern Euro-centric modelings of the individual. I shall attempt to resolve this conundrum through digressions into the two disciplinary quarters where renewed interest in Lévy-Bruhl's participation is most apparent: in debates over "magic" informed by phenomenological and reflexivist approaches; and in conjunction with the so-called "turn to ontology" beginning in the late 1990s.

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Euro-American (including anthropological) thought in another context—the categorical presuppositions of a culturally universal distinction between "nature" and "culture" (1980, 1981a, 1992) .

14. Strathern's seeming concession to the copresence of "individuality" and "partibility" in Melanesian personhood has often, I think, been seriously misconstrued. The kind of "individuality" Strathern acknowledges for Melanesian sociality is what she terms the "collective individual," referring to the boundedness and individuality of groups emerging temporarily in the course of certain social processes (see Mosko 2013a, 2015b, 2015c). This is the essence of my reformulation of the bounds of *dala* matrilineality, the second of the major puzzles which this volume seeks to solve.

In the new debates over magic, a central issue concerns the epistemological and ontological status of research subjects' *and researchers'* experiences, attitudes, and claims regarding the beings and forces involved in "magical" practices (here defined inclusively with "religion," "ritual," "witchcraft," "sorcery," etc.). The key question is whether the spirits, gods, demons, pagan deities, supernatural forces, and so on, experienced by participants might truly exist and the extent to which such expressions should be taken by investigators as manifestations of human power relations or as either valid or skeptical declarations of sincere belief (e.g., Favret-Saada 1980; Luhrmann 1989; 2012; Turner 1993; Greenwood 2000, 2005, 2009; Graeber 2001: 239–47; Lohmann 2003; Fountain 2013; Morgain 2013; Stoller and Olkes 2013; Blanes and Espíritu Santo 2014; Stoller 2014).<sup>15</sup>

Related to many of these arguments is the claim that the culture-bounded ethnocentrism of the Western "rationalistic," "empiricist," "objectivist" orientation through which most prior anthropological research on magic had been conducted, in presupposing the non reality of a spiritual world beyond the realm of sensory experience, has severely limited the understanding of what could be taken as a universal magical or mystical consciousness, much as that envisioned by Lévy-Bruhl. The ultimate implication of this, although motivated on very different grounds from Strathern's elision of spirit personhood and agency, is similar. To some critics, this seems to involve a problematic mixing of theology and anthropology. As formulated most forcefully by Susan Greenwood (2009), however, the limitations of strictly rationalistic approaches to magic can only be overcome through intense, direct *participatory* engagements in its practice, which require investigators to suspend both their acceptance of prior ontological understandings and their *disbelief* regarding the beliefs held by the people under examination.

Revisiting Malinowski's magical puzzles from the perspective adopted here, I suggest, may indirectly help illuminate some aspects of these current discussions. By "indirectly," I merely say that I do not pretend to offer anything approximating an answer as to the ontological reality of *baloma* or other spirits

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15. See also the Book Symposium on Tanya Luhrmann's *When God talks back* (*HAV: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2013). For additional indications of the relatively recent revival of anthropological interest in "magic" where Malinowski's initial contributions have been heavily cited (if not always also those of Lévy-Bruhl), see Meyer and Pels (2003); Masquelier (2004); Pels (2010); special issues of *Anthropology Today* (2016, 2017).



invoked in Trobriand spells or other rites. That choice seems to me a false one: that is, the necessity of either rejecting or accepting their ultimate reality. Instead, I focus on the kinds of new insights that can be attained by viewing Trobriand villagers' expressed beliefs and attitudes regarding the efficacy of spirits *as if* they are real—a viewpoint compatible, on the one hand, with Luhrmann's (2012: 16–17) methodological and ontological agnosticism and, on the other, with the creative fictions presented by Strathern in *GOG*. I cannot say that the spirits of Tuma are “really real,” since for my purposes it ultimately doesn't matter either way. It is true, however, as I have described elsewhere (Mosko 2004), that some of my past fieldwork experiences have caught me suspended between my usual self-conscious scientific rationalism and my occasional perceptions that the invisible powers of North Mekeo magic might be real after all (see also Graeber 2015).

Nonetheless, that concern is not the critical ethnographic point, which is, I argue instead, following indications from Lévy-Bruhl ([1949] 1973), Needham (1972), Tambiah (1990a), Graeber (2001: 240, 245–46), Strathern (2005), Viveiros de Castro (2009), and Sahlins (2013, 2015, 2017), among others, the intimate tie of magic to the nature of social capacities, including those envisioned with *baloma* spirits. If, as Malinowski correctly observed, Trobriand magic is an indispensable aspect of most if not all indigenous pursuits, and if he was wrong in attributing magical efficacy to the words of spells alone rather than to spirits, then our ethnographic understanding of the gamut of Trobriand institutions and their creative potentialities—kinship particularly, but also chieftainship, yam exchange, harvest celebration, *kula*, mortuary exchange, procreation theory, and so on—is in need of considerable revision.

Not surprisingly, these recent controversies over magic specifically have their counterparts in the wake of the contemporary “ontological turn,” which involves religious and symbolic phenomena more generally. As Michael Scott (2014) has lately characterized the situation, there appear to be two main ontologies (metaontologies?) currently at play in the discipline: the conventional “wonder-occluding” Cartesian dualism of Western science dominant in most earlier twentieth-century anthropology; and what he terms a “wonder-sustaining, relational non-dualism” cohering as the “new ontology” constituted of a range of diverse but overlapping orientations (e.g., Horton 1993; Ingold 2000; M. Goldman 2007; Henare, Holbraad, and Wastel 2007; Viveiros de Castro 2007, 2012, 2014; Willerslev 2007; Holbraad 2009a, 2009b; Latour 2009; Rose 2011; Descola 2013; Holbraad, Pedersen, and Viveiros de Castro 2014; Salmond

2014; Holbraad and Pedersen 2017). It is in some streams of the latter wonder-sustaining orientation that Scott (2014: 869n) detects Lévy-Bruhl's influence, whether direct or indirect.

For Scott, the category "Cartesian dualism" consists of a fairly straightforward series of analogous hierarchical binaries: "material versus immaterial, . . . mind (or soul) versus body; subject versus object; ideal versus real; culture versus nature . . . animate versus inanimate; human versus animal; and ultimately *X* versus not-*X*" (2014: 862). Anthropological perspectives fitting comfortably within this paradigm would include the "naturalism" in Descola's (2013) scheme of ontology types, the Euro-centric commodity logic critiqued by Strathern, and the causality as distinct from participation orientation of Tambiah and Lévy-Bruhl.

Scott's tag "relational non-dualism" for the wonder-sustaining new ontologies, though, seems to me to be potentially misleading. His claim does not seem to be that the "relational non-dualistic" perspectives he endorses are necessarily or entirely *nondualistic*, merely that they are not restricted to the constraints of logic and content specifically inhering in the class of Descartes' dualities (i.e., material/immaterial, mind/body, etc.). For Scott, "In the abstract, the chief distinction between these two ontologies is this: whereas Cartesian dualists see *things*—including concepts, such as religion, for example—as *discrete entities*, relational non-dualists see *things* as *relations*, both internally and externally" (2014: 865, *emphases original*). To this extent, Scott's counterpositioning of "Cartesian dualism" and "relational non-dualism" is premised on criteria virtually identical to Strathern's distinction between gift and commodity exchange systems.

Needless to say, I would think, seeing "things as relations" does not entirely exclude the possibility in numerous cultures that relations are viewed in binary forms, as, for instance, "both internally and externally." Quite the contrary. Scott's "relational non-dualism" is perhaps better perceived to *be* or *encompass* "relational (non-Cartesian) dualism." Many of its exemplars that he lists are not necessarily antagonistic either to other *sorts* of dualism or to the conceptual *substance* of other dualities. From what I understand of the list of tropes and approaches grouped by Scott as representative of the indigenous non-Western world on the basis of generations of ethnographic research—"animism, perspectivism, relationalism, intensive and extensive multiplicity, flux, fractality, participation, transformation, motility, flat ontology, immanence, reciprocity, balance, wonder-sustaining" (*ibid.*: 862)—many of these have been presented

as being rife with dualities. The point is simply that they do not conform to the culturally specific Cartesian-Western ones. Seen from this perspective, there seems to be no reason why Scott's "relational (non-Cartesian) dualism" should be categorically intolerant of other conceptual dualisms, such as those incorporated in Lévy-Bruhl's participation theory, ethnographies represented in the genre of the NME, Strathern's exegeses of personal partibility, or my NBME amendments to it.<sup>16</sup>

The issues germane to Malinowski's magical puzzles, I suggest, historically anticipate the tensions between Scott's two ontologies, but in complex ways. On the one hand, Malinowski's generally pragmatic orientation, including his pronouncements regarding the magical efficaciousness of words alone, fits well with established "wonder-occluding" scientism, while the material offered here underscoring villagers' notions of *baloma* agency and participation resonate with the "wonder-sustaining" terms of "relational (non-Cartesian) dualism," particularly those of its lineaments connected to the NME amended by Lévy-Bruhl's thought. On the other hand, I think it can be defended that "magic" as an analytical category more comfortably fits within Scott's "wonder-sustaining" realm than "kinship" as it has been intuitively classified in much anthropological reporting and theorizing. "Magic," in other words, has never suffered from the same entanglements with Western views of "nature," "biology," and so on, as has kinship. Of course, in my own view, following Schneider, Sahlins, and others, and as I detail ethnographically in chapters 7–8, Trobriand "kinship" is as much

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16. Amiria Salmond (2014) has recently conducted a further illuminating dissection of the three alternate versions of the "ontological turn" at play which variously fit within Scott's "wonder-sustaining" vision. Of the three, Salmond's "recursive" ontological alternative with its attention to "other entities, other ways of conceiving reality, other *relations*, other ways of being" (ibid.: 163, original emphasis; see also Holbraad and Pedersen 2017, and below), comes closest to the approach I am following here. Notably, she acknowledges the influences of Strathern and Wagner upon this stream of the ontological turn. I offer two provisos, however: first, as regards the possibility that the "fictional" character of the models being generated from that viewpoint may well peculiarly illuminate *nonfictional novel* dimensions of the culture of the ethnographer as well as *nonfictional but well-worn* attributes of the worlds as envisioned by those described ethnographically; second, the preponderance of examples of Salmond's "recursive" version of the ontological turn have been taken from "multi-naturalist" Amazonia, where animals are the featured coparticipants of living humans, a circumstance of considerable difference when compared with Trobriand and wider Melanesian patters of spirit-human interaction (see chapter 9).

wonder-sustaining as magic or anything else. My point here is that (a) there exists in anthropology as a token of Western thought generally a tacit presupposition tending to juxtapose magic and kinship in parallel with Scott's two ontologies, which (b) nonetheless intimates how they could well be inextricably linked.

The relation of magic to kinship that I explore in this volume can thus be taken as illustrating the intimate entanglement—not the simple opposition—between Scott's two ontologies, at least in how they are reproduced in the Trobriand ethnographic contexts. The links specifically between Trobriand magic and kinship, in other words, are, on the one hand, of an order comparable with Strathern's exhortation of how our anthropological/Western understandings of other/non-Western societies and cultures remain essentially extensions of our own and, perhaps, on the other, indicative of the chiasmatic structure ventured by Wagner in the previous chapter.

Notwithstanding, there remains one epistemological issue that still differentiates the NME and Lévy-Bruhl which merits further comment—one which, if not addressed here, risks provoking unnecessarily the criticism of some colleagues. Where Strathern's and Wagner's vision of the anthropological enterprise is inherently subject to the above limitations, Lévy-Bruhl was struggling to capture and explain something of the *empirical* world of people's representations of reality. Strathern's sketches of Melanesian sociality in *GOG* (1988: 7–9; see also Wagner 1975; Viveiros de Castro 2014: 187), again, are intended as analytical or “creative fictions” or “inventions” not meant primarily to capture the reality of indigenous thought systems and institutions; they are rather “as if” constructions deployed so as to present alternative viewpoints from which entrenched distortions and errors in Western anthropologists' understandings can be revealed. The virtue of this cannot be challenged.

Nonetheless, Strathern's analytical juxtaposition of gift versus commodity systems has fueled criticism from another direction: namely, of essentializing the differences among societies in Melanesia and the West. And on this point, her position closely approximates Lévy-Bruhl's and Tambiah's dichotomizing of non-Western participation and Western causality as noted above, which also runs parallel to the “radical alterity” featured in the recent turns to ontology. While I fully appreciate the cogency of Strathern's “as if” strategy in exposing distortions in anthropological discourse, I do not take it to be compulsory to restrict the concepts which have emerged from NME discussions such as the partibility of persons and relations only in the manner that she has. In addition to the new light her insights have shed on Western views about non-Western

others, I am not foreclosing the possibility that those perceptions might, after all, *also* add empirical precision to *tentative anthropological understandings* of the character of Melanesian sociality as phenomena of the world. I stress this principally on the evidence of the enthusiasm my Trobriand interlocutors have articulated in the course of exploring the commonalities shared between and differences separating their indigenous from my anthropology perspective.

This synthesis of the conventional NME notion of personal partibility with participation theory converges at least partly with two other dimensions of the current ontological turn. The overlaps and distinctions must be noted. First, in chapter 3, when examining the details of *megwa* performance, I note in passing that magical practice in the Trobriands implies the conjunction of three of Descola's (1992, 2010, 2013) ideal types—animism, totemism, and analogism—which in Sahlins' (2014) critique boils down to an anthropomorphic "animism" of three subtypes: "communal," "segmentary," and "hierarchical." However, the nonhuman world as Trobrianders conceive it is not just humanized through animism, totemism, and analogism; it is also *personified*, hence equipped for participation with humans in terms analogous to how humans engage with each other. In short, ancestral *baloma* and other spirits of the Trobriand pantheon are considered to be sentient, potent persons comparable to living humans and similarly constituted of partible, transactable parts.

This point is reinforced, secondly, when juxtaposed to recent discussions of the "new animism" and, in specific reference to Amazonia, "perspectivism" (Viveiros de Castro (1998, 2001, 2007, 2014; Vilaça 2002; M. Goldman 2007; Willerslev 2007; Holbraad 2009a; Pedersen 2011; Holbraad and Pedersen 2017). The latter framework is relevant to the current exercise on two counts. On the one hand, its advocates have effectively embraced Lévy-Bruhlian participation as regards a wide range of nonhuman agents—animals in particular as well as various types of spirits; and, on the other, chiefly through the influence of Viveiros de Castro (2014), they are indebted to the chief instigators of the NME, Strathern and Wagner, for much of the novelty of their ideas. In particular, in Amazonia the "domain of sexual identity/gender" is replaced by that of the "human/non-human" (Vilaça 2002: 363n).

Even so, there are two fundamental differences between the world of Trobriand Islanders as discerned through NBME lenses and the kinds of ontologies comprising the "new animism," particularly those of Amazonian peoples. First, with Trobrianders and, I suspect, most other Melanesians, spirits alone among "nonhuman" beings are attributed with characteristics of

human personhood. In the case of “multinaturalist” Amazonia and others, however, “ordinary” animals as well as spirits are conceived as sharing with living people the characteristics of humanity, including personhood and agency, largely through the medium of shamanism, which is only minimally encountered in Melanesia.

Second, Amazonian and Melanesian (at least Trobriand) eschatologies are radically different. Among Amazonians,

the difference between living and dead humans is of less importance than the resemblance shared by dead humans and living nonhumans. The world of the dead counts no animals among its inhabitants . . . this is because the dead are themselves animals—animals in their game version—having been transformed into the quintessential meat, wild boars, and thus food. . . . This is why death in Amazonia involves being transformed into an animal: if the souls of animals are conceived as possessing a primordial human corporeal form, then it is logical that human souls would be conceived as having the posthumous form of a primordial animal, or as entering a body that will eventually be killed and eaten by the living. (Viveiros de Castro 2014: 155–56)

In contrast, for Trobrianders there is no understanding by which the animal and plant species which inhabit the visible, material world (Boyowa), though animated by “life” (*momova*), see themselves as human analogous to living people. The *baloma* souls of humans upon dying enter the invisible world of Tuma to become immaterial but nonetheless human *baloma* “spirits” until such time as they are reincarnated and reborn in human form back into Boyowa.<sup>17</sup> As I describe in chapters 3 and 6–7, this separation amid the worlds of the Trobriand living and dead provides the basis for a wide range of sacrificial exchanges between them which, as Viveiros de Castro acknowledges, for Amerindians “makes the elaboration of a classical sacrificial system quite difficult” (ibid.: 157). It is for this reason, as I amplify in the concluding chapter, that the differences between Trobriand culture and sociality and Amazonian animism amount to considerably more than just so many substantively distinct worldviews among others.

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17. As described in chapter 7, however, animated personal components (i.e., immaterial *kekwebu* “images”) of deceased people acquired through paternal relations are also recycled through Tuma in parallel with the deceased’s maternal *baloma* soul.

Which is to say, again, that in this volume I am deploying the NBME as a synthesis of partibility and participation theories toward the ethnographic description and analysis of the sociocultural system which is perhaps the fullest and richest available to anthropology, being guided as I proceed by those who are regarded in the community as the most qualified authorities for that undertaking.



### CHAPTER THREE

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## The magical powers of *baloma*

This power [of magic] is an inherent property of certain words, uttered with the performance of certain actions by the man entitled to do it through his social traditions and through certain observances which he has to keep. The words and acts have this power in their own right, and their action is direct and not mediated by any other agency. Their power is not derived from the authority of spirits or demons or supernatural beings. It is not conceived as having been wrested from nature. The belief in the power of words and rites as a fundamental and irreducible force is the ultimate, basic dogma of their magical creed.

Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922: 427)

Trobriand Islanders are renowned in anthropology for highly elaborated forms of magical practice employing vocalized *megwa* “spells,” “chants,” or “incantations” in accompaniment with nearly all social activities—in gardening, fishing, *kula* exchange, courting, procreation, canoe construction, sorcery and curing,

*milamala* harvest celebrations, warfare, and so on.<sup>1</sup> In Malinowski's view, *meg-wa* spells constituted the "backbone" of Islanders' magic. And indeed, it was through his field experiences that Malinowski was led to the topic of magic as a central focus. Michael Young, the renowned biographer of Malinowski, has shared with me his personal notes on this point based on scrutiny of Malinowski's fieldnotes and other papers:

Concerning his major projects, it was as if he felt impelled (perhaps only half-consciously) to follow "magic" wherever it might lead, as if he had already decided that it would provide the master key to Trobriand culture. In a sense it did, though in an unexpected way that would only be revealed to him on his second [Trobriand] fieldtrip, when he expected merely to be finishing up loose ends, cross-checking, dotting I's and crossing T's. Magic pervaded every enterprise, every institution, every activity. His pursuit of magic led inexorably to the accumulation of spells which, inscribed on paper, became texts. His study of these began a dialectical learning process, which led him—with his remarkable linguistic gift—to a profound understanding of the language in its performative, ritual usages, as in its conversational, everyday (what he would call phatic) use. So he followed magic where it led into kula, hunting, fishing, gardening, sickness, love, war, etc. etc. (Pers. comm.)

Over time, of course, Malinowski's ([1916] 1992, 1922, 1935a, 1935b) descriptions of these activities and his theorizing about them have proved both influential and controversial.<sup>2</sup> However, in all those discussions, few fellow post-Malinowski ethnographers have earnestly addressed the role, if any, of ancestral *baloma* and other spirits in Trobriand magical performances.

*Baloma* are the invisible, immaterial "souls" or "spirits" of living humans which, upon corporeal death, depart the corpse and enter the spirit world of Tuma, the land of the dead. There they enjoy an immaterial existence, but eventually, as Malinowski described ([1916] 1992) on the basis of informants'

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1. The term *megwa* or *meguwa* is nowadays used to refer both to "magic" generally and to specific spells or chants. There is an archaic term, *yopa*, which is occasionally used to refer to verbalized spells (Malinowski 1922: 299).
  2. An incomplete list of critics on topics other than those addressed in this chapter would include, for example, Firth (1957), Tambiah (1968, 1973, 1990c), Rosengren (1976), Annette Weiner (1976), Stocking (1983), Iteanu (1995: 145–46), Senft (1997a, 1997b), and Gell (1998).

accounts, *baloma* spirits age and are transformed into “spirit children” (*waiwaia*) to be reincarnated as new humans given birth by women of the same matrilineal *dala* identity.

During their existence in the Tuma afterworld, *baloma* along with other categories of nonhuman spirits are expressly invoked by practicing magicians (*towosi*, literally “singers”) in *megwa* spells, particularly the most important ones—those closely connected with the *baloma* spirit’s own *dala* membership and identity. I stress this because, on the one hand, Malinowski (e.g., [1916] 1992: 201; 1922: 398, 404, 451; 1935b: 213–50) staunchly maintained, as in the epigraph above, that it was the “words” (*biga*) spoken in *megwa* spells and not the spirits or related natural phenomena expressly invoked therein which Islanders considered to be the agents responsible for producing the desired magical effects.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, virtually every knowledgeable adept of traditional *megwa* ritual with whom I have consulted contends unhesitatingly, contra Malinowski, that it is named spirits who are the critical magical agents, now as in Malinowski’s day and presumably earlier.<sup>4</sup> The correct chanting of the other words and expressions to which Malinowski attributed efficacy, basically enumerating the spell’s specific themes, intentions, and ingredients, is necessary to its effectiveness, but without the active participation of spirits those words in and of themselves are insufficient to produce the desired results.

Like Malinowski, I shall focus here on that class of *megwa* spells known as *tukwa* considered to be most critical in underpinning the traditional system of kinship (i.e., *dala* “subclan” or “matrilineage” identity and rank) and, thereby, the indigenous system of hereditary chieftainship and leadership.<sup>5</sup> Largely by

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3. The term *baloma* refers to the internal “soul” of a live person and that soul’s invisible, immaterial existence once it is released from the body upon death to become a human ancestral “spirit” (Malinowski [1916] 1992). It must be appreciated, however, that the *baloma* spirit existing in Tuma is a composite person of the same order as living humans: that is, constituted of multiple transactable parts. The pluralized form, *bilubaloma*, includes among its referents various nonhuman as well as human spiritual beings, as explained below.

4. Based on others’ previously published ethnographies, two prior investigators (Philsooph 1971; Darrah 1972; see also Baldwin 1971: 282) came to question seriously Malinowski’s claims as to the efficacy of magical words. There are also documented statements available from knowledgeable Trobrianders endorsing the view that spirits are the source of *megwa* powers (Ketobwau 1994: 22–25; Malnic 1998: 143–44).

5. These spells are among the collective *tukwa* “possessions” of *dala* units (see below). Although Malinowski concentrated on these *dala*-based incantations, he was

monopolizing such *dala*-based hereditary ritual assets, “chiefs” (*gumgweguya*), local “leaders” (*tolivalu*), and *dala* “headmen” (*tomwaya dala*, literally “*dala* respected elder”) are capacitated to organize their respective followings.

## TAMBIAH’S PARTICIPATION THEORY OF MAGIC AND NEWBORN MELANESIAN ETHNOGRAPHY

One might reasonably expect that the numerous field studies conducted in the Trobriands over the past century, Malinowski’s foundational contributions to the anthropology of magic, and the many other debates initiated by his other writings would have drawn considerable interest to this issue before now. This has not been the case, I suspect, because of the deserved influence that Stanley Tambiah’s performance view of magic has exerted over generations of ethnographers and anthropologists, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Tambiah’s detailed treatment of Trobriand magic accordingly merits closer inspection.

According to Graeber, nearly all modern anthropological treatments of magic “[have] been, in one sense or another, an elaboration on Tambiah” (2001: 241), specifically the two signature essays, “The magical power of words” (1968) and “Form and meaning of magical acts: A point of view” (1973). There Tambiah reanalyzed the foundational works on magic of Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard, respectively. In his demonstration of “how the language of ritual [including magic] works” (1968: 188), Tambiah reexamined the *vatuvi* spell of Omarakana’s gardening magic, rejecting Malinowski’s (1935b: 3–74) crude pragmatism and focusing instead on the analogical (i.e., metaphorical and metonymical) relations among the words of *megwa* spells to account for their meaningfulness to and persuasiveness for participants.

At the very point of turning to the Trobriand materials, however, Tambiah remarked that he considered deliberation over the agency of words versus spirits—i.e., the very essence of Malinowski’s magical puzzle—to be a symptom of a “Frazerian hangover” (1968: 176) and a “somewhat barren debate” (ibid.: 183).

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apparently not familiar with the named category, *tukwa*. It should be noted that there exists another category of nonhereditary “private,” or “collected” *megwa* spells (*soserwa*), which, unlike *tukwa*, may not necessarily require the explicit invoking of a magician’s own ancestral spirit predecessors but still rely on spirit agency (see Mosko 2014a).

He thus simply proceeded to examine the symbolic functions of the *vatuvi* spell's words only, accepting without further consideration Malinowski's assertions of the nonagentive participation of ancestral *baloma* spirits. So although Tambiah's performance theory went considerably beyond Malinowski's pragmatism, the agency of spells still resided for him in words and the relations among them.<sup>6</sup>

In his other influential early essay (1973) reinterpreting Evans-Pritchard (1937) on Azande magic, Tambiah similarly focused upon analogical connections, here involving enchanted "medicines" rather than spoken spells, to the neglect again of potential spirit participation. In terms I shall examine below, in other words, by dismissing spirit agency from consideration, Tambiah's early performative treatments of both classic reports of magical efficacy had presupposed the Western distinction of "objects" as distinct from "subjects."

This is significant inasmuch as, in Tambiah's (1990c) theorizing over magic and its relations to "religion" and "science" two decades later, he modified his earlier view in adopting and clarifying Lévy-Bruhl's distinction between "causality" and "participation" as the two basic orientations to reality. Laws of causality are characteristic of science and mathematico-logical reasoning. Tambiah's main interest, though, had shifted to the alternative aesthetic and religious orientation, inclusive of magic, whereby "laws of participation," following Leenhardt, Wittgenstein, Febvre, and Bloch as well as Lévy-Bruhl (ibid.: 84–94), effectively muted the subject–object distinction so as to include spirits and similar suprasensible beings as agents in ritual processes and procedures. For instance, "the idea of *mana*, emanating from the individual as suffusing his shadow, hair and nails, his clothes and his environment . . . taboos and avoidances, rites of intensification, rites of severance . . . participation between the dead, especially the ancestors, and spirits and deities with the living" (ibid.: 96). He quotes Lévy-Bruhl, who could well have been speaking specifically of Trobrianders' views of their relations with ancestral *baloma*:

The notion of society, too, is entirely different for the primitive [*sic*] mind. Society consists not only of the living but also of the dead, who continue to "live"

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6. Interestingly, in his analysis of Sinhalese and Pali Buddhist rites conducted in the same essay as his analysis of Trobriand magic, Tambiah (ibid.: 176–80) included the participation of gods, ancestral ghosts, spirits, and so on, as among the effective agents, but not with the Trobriand case.

somewhere in the neighbourhood and take an active part in social life before they die a second time. . . . The dead reincarnate in the living and, in accordance with the principle of mystical participation, society is as much merged in the individual as the individual is merged in society. (Lévy-Bruhl, quoted in Tambiah 1990c: 86)<sup>7</sup>

In short, Tambiah's later participation theory closely approximates the expansion of personhood to include nonhuman agents as proposed in the NBME outlined in the previous chapter.

But there are residual conceptual problems here also that must be sorted out, some proximate to and others distinct from those in Tambiah's work. In *GOG*, Marilyn Strathern (1988: 12–15) is highly critical of the relevance to Melanesian contexts of the conventional analytical distinction between “individual” and “society,” as alluded to in the preceding quotation. But if “person” and “relations” can be substituted for “individual” and “society,” that incongruity between participation theory and the NME disappears. Also, where Tambiah breaks down the subject–object distinction, this also aligns with Strathern's position (*ibid.*: 19).

But for Tambiah, the resulting participation consists of persons both distinguished from and identified with one another in terms of what amount to criteria oriented to a distinction approximating that of the sacred and the profane as defined classically by Durkheim ([1912] 1915). On this point, Tambiah departs from both his earlier performative perspective and the conventional viewpoint of the NME, or at least from Strathern's exemplification of it. Insofar as the persons who mystically participate together share identities with one another in some fashion within Tambiah's framework, we have a theoretical precursor to the “dividual” or “partible person.” According to Strathern's formulation of gift exchange in *GOG* following Mauss ([1925] 2017), persons are composite beings constituted of the elicitive detachment, attachment, and exchange of their respective parts, seen as previously transacted relational elements of still other persons, whether they take the form of material objects, body parts, linguistic expressions, nonverbal performative actions, items of knowledge, and so on. In Tambiah's participation view, just as “things” or

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7. It is curious that despite this considerable shift between his performance and participation approaches represented in two chapters of *Magic, science, religion, and the scope of rationality* where Malinowski and Trobriand magic are discussed, Tambiah (1990b, 1990c) again elides the question of *baloma* participation specifically and any implications that might ensue from it.

“objects” qualify as parts of persons, so also do the imagined spiritual beings toward whom living humans oftentimes orient their actions in ritual and other contexts.

By contrast, in Strathern’s view of Melanesian partibility, the components of persons are more or less strictly construed in terms of the characteristics and capacities of masculinity/femininity and same-/cross-sex relations. Gender, accordingly, tends to eclipse other dimensions of personhood such as, in particular, sacred and profane identities or their analogues. Unquestionably, Trobrianders conceptualize themselves, their relations, and the world around them partly in gendered terms, but those discriminations also routinely articulate with discernments of relative sanctity and secularity (see Mosko 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2015c, and below). Indeed, some of Strathern’s inspirations for both the specific notion of personal partibility and the general framework for her perspective on Melanesian sociality—e.g., McKim Marriott’s (1976) exposition of the “dividual” of caste India and Roy Wagner’s (1975: 120–25; see also 1973) depiction of the dynamics of “innovation” and “convention,” respectively—were formulated with significant regard to complexities flowing from indigenous formulations akin to the sacred/profane opposition.

Strathern’s model of Melanesian sociality and personhood on this score thus runs parallel with Tambiah’s initial performative theory of magic but deviates from his later participation model in effectively occluding the participation of beings such as *baloma* and other spirits marked as to their relative sacredness. This is so even in her foregrounded contexts of ceremonial exchange and initiation rituals, where persons may well engage in elicitive transactions of the parts/relations of their persons in terms separate from or compounded by their gendered components.

Therefore, in adapting the NME and its core notion of personal partibility to the NBME analysis of Trobriand magic and kinship, I am seeking to affect an extension or shift analogous to that between Tambiah’s earlier and later approaches. Trobriand practices in past, present, or changing circumstances cannot be understood without taking into account villagers’ perceptions of the participation of *baloma* and other sacred beings in their persons and lives.

The identities and faculties following from the Trobriand version of personal partibility, I argue, characterize the relations between living persons and spirits and thereby animate indigenous notions of magico-ritual agency. In terms of Trobriand cosmology outlined below, moreover, not only are persons and spirits identified together, but the magical words of *megwa* spells and the



features of the “natural world” to which they refer are all potent components of one another.

## TROBRIAND MAGIC, RELIGION, AND THE CHARACTER OF PERSONHOOD

It is worth considering briefly at this juncture how Malinowski’s magical puzzles resonated with the views of Tylor (1871) and Frazer (1922), current at his time, over the nature of and distinction between “magic” and “religion.”

When Malinowski conducted his fieldwork, Tylor’s and Frazer’s depictions of religion and magic were dominant in anthropology. Tylor’s theory of “animism” as the original form of “religion” was premised on the notion of belief in spirits or souls inhabiting humans as well as plants, animals, and seemingly inanimate features of the material world. For Frazer, similarly, ritual powers attributed by participants to conscious, supernatural beings of a *personal* sort, such as spirits with capacities analogous to humans and requiring propitiation, were classified as belonging to the sphere of “religion.” The agency characteristic of “magic,” however, was presumed to reside in beliefs in the *impersonal*, technical powers inhering in entities other than conscious beings, or persons: that is, in forces of the natural world actuated, for example, by verbalized spells and incantations. The presupposition of the universal existence of these two separate spheres thereby justified Malinowski’s ([1925] 1992: 87–88) portrayal of beliefs concerning ancestral *baloma* and other spirits as manifestations of the people’s “religion” while largely excluding them categorically from participation in “magic.”

Even so, Malinowski did formulate this distinction in one critical respect that differed from Frazer. While questioning the universality and acuteness of the sacred/profane distinction, for him, both religion and magic were matters of the “supernatural,” “sacred,” “miraculous” realm, emanating from “mythological traditions” and “mark[ed] off from the profane world” ([1925] 1992: 87; cf. Mauss [1902–3] 1972: 18–24). In addition, distinguishing religion from magic in the manner of Tylor and Frazer enabled Malinowski to address those topics ethnographically more or less separately. Getting “religion” out of the way, one might say, with his first publication on the Trobriands—“Baloma: The spirits of the dead in the Trobriand Islands” ([1916] 1992), basically a treatise on the indigenous religion—Malinowski was more or less free to concentrate in

the rest of his writings on “magic” purged of any significant participation on the part of ancestral or other spirits.

## AUSTRONESIAN COMPARISONS

Malinowski’s puzzle over magical efficacy pertains not only to the Trobriands but also to Melanesia and the Pacific generally, where the source of sacred powers has been variously reported. Some ethnographies of Austronesian- and non-Austronesian-speaking societies have asserted that local practitioners are believed to recruit spiritual *persons* of various kinds—ancestors, spirits of nature, demigods, creator deities, etc.—as agents of their magico-ritual practices. Others maintain, like Malinowski, that magicians are generally understood to rely instead upon *impersonal* forces of nature named in spells and incantations to perform their miraculous feats.<sup>8</sup> Despite their differing implications otherwise, the supposed efficaciousness of words and spirits share one key feature that is definitive of Oceanic cultures: the notion that all beings and entities of people’s conceived worlds participate in or are animated by mystical forces, *mana* being the most obvious example.

But even on this point, Malinowski’s views are notably anomalous. In his essay “Magic, science and religion,” he argues that Trobriand magic is not an instance of *mana* as that notion had come to be understood at that time through Codrington’s (1891) ethnographic synthesis:

All the theories which lay *mana* and similar conceptions at the basis of magic are pointing altogether in the wrong direction. For if the virtue of magic is exclusively localized in man, can be wielded by him only under very special conditions and in a traditionally prescribed manner, it certainly is not a force such as the one described by Dr. Codrington: “This *mana* is not fixed in anything and can be conveyed in almost anything.” *Mana* also “acts in all ways for good and evil . . . shows itself in physical force or in any kind of power and excellence which a man possesses.” Now it is clear that this force as described by Codrington is almost

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8. A sample of both views would include Codrington (1891: 119–20); Hocart (1914: 99); Hogbin (1936: 244); Chowning (1977: 64–66); Lawrence and Meggitt (1965: 6–9); Young (1971, 1983); Valeri (1985); Lawrence (1988); Shore (1989); Trompf (1991: 66, 73–74, 84–87); Gell (1995); Sillitoe (1998: 215–16).

the exact opposite of the magical virtue as found embodied in the mythology of savages [i.e., Trobrianders], in their behavior, and in the structure of their magical formulas. For the real virtue of magic, as I know it from Melanesia, is fixed only in the spell and in its rite, and it cannot be “conveyed in” anything, but can be conveyed only by its strictly defined procedure. It never acts “in all ways,” but only in ways specified by tradition. It never shows itself in physical force, while its effect upon the powers and excellences of man are strictly limited and defined. ([1925] 1992: 76–77)<sup>9</sup>

Answers to questions deriving from Malinowski’s magical puzzles as to the relations between persons, spirits, magical spells, and the beings and entities of the world named in them do not only bear on contemporary debates over magical efficacy and the nature of kinship but also respond to long-held views about the Pacific generally.

## THE SPIRITS, THE SPELLS, THE WORDS, AND THE PUZZLES

The word *baloma*, again, refers to the internalized “soul” of living persons and that soul’s existence as a “spirit” being once it is released from the body upon death. *Baloma* in the latter sense, then, are human ancestral spirits (Malinowski [1916] 1992). A broader category, *bilubaloma*, refers to those and additional spiritual beings, including *tubu daiasa* “creator deities,” *tosunapula* “first to emerge” spirits of particular *dala* matrilineal identities, *tokwai* “nature sprites,” and potentially malevolent *mulukwausi* “flying witches,” *kosi* “ghosts,” and *itona/tauva’u* “warrior spirits.” To my knowledge, Malinowski never attempted a systematic classification of these.

Malinowski’s claims regarding the supposed noncontribution of spirits to the effects of magical spells conflict with his accounts of the general tenor of relations between living humans and spirit inhabitants of Tuma in several additional contexts. These include procreation and reincarnation, dreams and trances, funerary rites, annual *milamala* harvest celebrations, “food offerings” or “sacrificial oblations” (*ula’ula*) given in accompaniment to *megwa* and other activities, and so on. When presented by magicians to spirits as preliminaries to

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9. Below I describe how Trobriand understandings of personal and cosmic agency are based on a cognate notion of Polynesian *mana*: *momova* “vital essence.”

magical performances, the latter offerings were supposedly separate from the causes and effects of the magic itself (Malinowski [1916] 1992: 214, 243; 1935a: 279, 468–69; but see [1916] 1992: 214–15; 1922: 422–23; 1935a: 95, 279).<sup>10</sup> Otherwise, for Malinowski, *baloma* spirits conducted their spirit lives in Tuma, largely absorbed in their own affairs some remove from the visible world of their living human descendants.

Before turning to the analysis of *megwa* spells in detail, it is important to appreciate additional authoritative detail regarding the relation between the two realms constitutive of the Trobriand cosmos.

I start with the views of Trobrianders documented in the literature. In his Bachelor of Divinity thesis partly based on ethnographic research with village elders and substantially focused on the description and analysis of indigenous Kiriwinian religion, Rev. Ignatius Ketobwau, a Trobriander, directly contradicts Malinowski's depiction of the nature of relations between Tuma and Boyowa. He writes:

Such a case and many other forces in natural phenomena were also assumed by Trobrianders to be a manifestation of spiritual beings. Therefore, Trobrianders' life experience was not limited to this visible, physical world, but also extended into the invisible and total cosmos. This second part required a lot of attention because the beliefs in spirits and the spiritual order constituted a greater part of Trobriand thinking. Details of beliefs and practices varied slightly among clans, totems and islands. However, the underlying truth of the way thoughts were expressed by Trobrianders supported the fact that the spiritual order was a focal point of life and existence for them. (1994: 22–23)

Ketobwau notes also:

The traditional Melanesian way of living revolved around the world of gods/spirits, who have supernatural powers, and who are behind many aspects of natural or human activity. Thus, in Trobriand society, nothing happens by accident. All is originated by the gods/spirits: for instance, a good harvest is a blessing from the gods/spirits, and a bad harvest is a curse by them. (1994: 22)

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10. Evidence I have gathered regarding the logic of *ula'ula* oblations lends further support to my present argument that *bilubaloma* spirits are the agents of magic (see chapter 5 and Mosko 2015c).

The world of gods and spirits here corresponds to Tuma, and that of “natural or human activity” equates with Boyowa. Considerably more information will be provided below and in subsequent chapters regarding numerous relations between the two realms.

John Kasaipwalova, the artist, intellectual, leader of the 1970s Kabisawali Movement, and *guyau* chief of Kwenama *dala* at Yolumgwa village in Northern Kiriwina, has commented at length “on what magic is, particularly in Trobriand culture”:

In practice, magic is very simple: it is a combination of *bilubaloma*, the spirit presence of the dead, knowing their lineage, the poetry and the poetic images. That is really all there is to the practice of magic, be it making a garden, be it attracting and courting a female partner, be it the making of a *mwasila* for a Kula partner. . . . Magic, in Kiriwinan perception, is actually everyday living. Of course it is highlighted on major ventures like Kula, making of canoes, making of sagali, making of gardens, killing of a person, that is not a small thing. War, creating a new born baby, that is also not a small thing. But in every aspect of human existence there is magic. And in Kiriwinan perception, magic is dependent on *doing things in a spiral way*.

. . . That’s where *bilubaloma* comes in, your connective cycle, the cycle of recalling of your lineage, your immediate and sequential past. In my garden in the morning, I talk to my yams. When I call *bilubaloma*, I can address Uncle [Kasaipwalova’s chiefly predecessor, Narabutau] straight away now that he’s become my *baloma*. After him his father, after his father, our clansmen. Once I call upon them they are already there, they are present with me. Then I can immediately see the response from the leaves, and experience the growth, the good feeling in my hewing. Instead of executing a task on a personal basis for this one moment, you execute it with *the presence of the past*, on a timeless basis. That is what *bilubaloma* is.

You were born because someone determined by an act of love to give you what you are. Even though they may have passed on, their spirituality is still with you. So you must call on that. The minute you bring back your connective past, you are doing a fast forward. This tree is alive. This bird there cries, it is talking to you, the voice of the wind, all at this moment. That is a very, very fast forward.

No magic on Kiriwina will work—though you can learn the words, the poetry of it—no magic will give you the answer *without* *bilubaloma*. *Bilubaloma* is the actual connectiveness with the spirit that has given you this magic. . . .

Only when he can match this to the words of the text which he recites, only if he can reach the venture that he undertakes, that's when you have magic. If he only recites the words and calls in certain plants and trees to help, they also help. They are life forces. They have certain enriching qualities that help to make that magic happen. But without bilubaloma, it will not work. (Quoted in Malnic 1998: 143–44, original emphasis)

### *The structure of megwa*

One index of the character of those connections and the source of ritual agency motivating them is provided by the very structure of *megwa* spells. As Malinowski described ([1916] 1992: 196, 199–215; 1922: 428–63; 1932: 182; 1935b: 92), *megwa* spells are typically structured as three sequential segments (*u'ula* “base,” *tapwala* “body,” and *doginala* “tip”) in accord with a particular botanical imagery employed in virtually all indigenous contexts of activity—indeed, which he appreciated as “*characteristic of native canons of classification*” (1932: 143, emphasis added), despite his indifference otherwise to structural concerns.

In the opening *u'ula* section (meaning “base,” “origin,” “foundation,” “cause,” “reason”), the main purpose of the spell is enunciated and ancestral *baloma* predecessors and other spirits are invoked by personal name or kin term (e.g., *tabu* “grandparents”). In the *tapwala* middle section (“body,” “trunk,” “stem”), the specific magical actions intended to take place with respect to the patient are declared. In the spell's concluding *doginala* (“end,” “final point,” “tip”), the magician states the anticipated results. The most well-documented spell exhibiting this three-part structure is the Omarakana *vatuwi* “striking of the soil” spell as presented by Malinowski (1935a: 96–98) and reanalyzed by Tambiah (1968: 191–92).

Not mentioned by Malinowski, with *megwa* and other contexts of *u'ula*–*tapwala*–*doginala* sequencing there is typically a fourth element, the spell's *keyuwela* or *keuwela* (“fruit,” “offspring”), whereby its results are affected or materialize. Typically, such “fruit” possess reproductive capacities (Mosko 2009, 2013b: 498–502).

Malinowski reported that the opening *u'ula* invocation of spirits constituted “the most prominent, persistent and universal, feature of Trobriand magic” (1932: 328), and that the spirits' names were typically recited also in the *doginala* “tip.” But those two segments are distinguished also by the inclusion of the

spell's general theme and intended results, respectively. On those grounds alone, one might reasonably assume that such direct incantations are expressly addressed to the spirits and predecessors as instructions for performing the tasks enumerated in the middle *tapwala* segment.

It will prove useful to examine carefully Malinowski's claims on this matter. In "Baloma," published between his first and second fieldtrips, he commented:

That the names of the ancestors are more than a mere enumeration is clear from the fact that the *ula'ula* ["oblation"; see chapter 5] is offered in all the most important systems. . . . But even these presents and the partaking of the *sagali* [i.e., distributions of food and other wealth], though undoubtedly they imply the presence of the *baloma*, do not express the idea of the spirits' actual participation in fostering the aim of the magic; of their being the agents through whom the magician works, to whom he appeals or whom he masters in the spell, and who perform subsequently the task imposed on them. . . . The *baloma* participate in some vague manner in such ceremonies as are performed for their benefit, and it is better to keep on the right side of them, but this view by no means implies the idea that they are the main agents, or even the subsidiary agents, of any activity. The magical virtue lies in the spell itself. ([1916] 1992: 214; see also 213–15)

In his postfieldwork publications, Malinowski expressed the same reservations even more forcefully. In *Coral gardens and their magic*, his most thorough treatment of Trobriand magic, for example, he noted:

But in every community, among the Trobrianders quite as definitely as among ourselves, there exists a belief that a word uttered in certain circumstances has a creative, binding force; that with an inevitable cogency, an utterance produces its specific effect, whether it conveys a permanent blessing, or inflicts irreparable damage, or saddles with a lifelong obligation. . . . It is this creative function of words in magical or in sacramental speech, their binding force in legal utterance, which, in my opinion, constitutes their real meaning. (1935b: 54)<sup>11</sup>

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11. For additional rejections by Malinowski of the magical agency of *baloma* spirits specifically, see also ([1916] 1992: 196, 213–15; 1922: 407, 412, 433, 435–36; 1935a: 452–82; 1935b: 215–18.)

The words are supposed to exercise a mystical effect *sui generis* on an aspect of reality. This belief is due to certain properties and associations of these words. (1935b: 219)

So, what empirical documentation might have led Malinowski to dismiss the participative or agentive role of spirits in Trobriand *megwa*? In his 1916 "Baloma" essay, he noted:

The data here given concerning the role of ancestors in magic must speak for themselves. *It has not been possible to obtain much additional information from natives upon this subject.* The references to the *baloma* form an intrinsic and essentially important part of the spells in which they occur. It would be no good asking the natives "What would happen if you omitted to invoke the *baloma*?" (a type of question which sometimes reveals the ideas of the native as to the sanction or reason for a certain practice), because a magical formula is an inviolable, integral item of tradition. It must be known thoroughly and repeated exactly as it was learnt. A spell or magical practice, if tampered with in any detail, would entirely lose its efficacy. Thus the enumeration of ancestral names cannot conceivably be omitted. Again, the direct question, "Why do you mention those names?" is answered in the timehonored manner, "*Tokunabogu bubunemasi* [our (excl.) old custom]." *And in this matter I did not profit much from discussing matters with even the most intelligent natives.* ([1916] 1992: 213–14, emphases added)

Of possible relevance, my Omarakana interlocutors claim that in the early years of colonization, including the time Malinowski lived amongst them, there was a concerted effort on the part of villagers under orders from the Paramount Chief, To'uluwa, to keep the details of the beliefs, paraphernalia, and rituals secret from all Europeans. By that time the people had experienced hostility from missionaries and government officials to activities involved in their indigenous magico-religious life, which of course constituted the basis of the political dominance of Tabalu and *gumgweguya* chiefs (Malinowski 1922: 426–27; Young 2004: 497; cf. Glass 1986, 1988).

Malinowski's fieldnotes reveal, however, that on a few occasions during his first and second expeditions he was advised that a particular female "emergence" (*tosunapula*) spirit of Tabalu *dala* was responsible, when prompted by the Paramount Chief's *megwa*, for causing the most desired and the most dreaded and devastating of events in Islanders' experience: namely, agricultural abundance



(*ilamalia*) versus drought, famine, and epidemic disease (*molu*). This was the female *tokwai* “nature sprite” of Tabalu ancestry named Bwenaia (see Mosko 2013b: 486–87, 492–93, *passim*; 2015c: 11). On July 28, 2015, within a month of his arrival, Malinowski records the following with regard to magically chanted *binabina* stones and their connection with Bwenaia:

The binabina stones are round and smooth, they burn herbs with these stones, so when loading time comes, [To’uluwa] puts them under the yam house or with the big support stones. So the kubwawala [vapors, breath] of the megwa goes from the stones into the yams, so a) the yams will not rot even if they are broken in throwing them in. The bigger yams are put in the sides of the logs, very huge ones the chief will not eat them till they rot, because these will have megwa in them. They are protectors of the bweima [yamhouse]. This megwa is called tu’mla bubukwa referring to the logs of the floor of the liku [yamhouse]. They agree that these stones came from Dobu because they are mountain stones that are flat or round but smooth. Some of these stones are used in the garden, and most towosi [magicians] have their own stones that they transfer from one to another garden. *They are buried in the center after the megwa has been chanted. Tokwai live in those stones, when they call tokwai, this is their home in that stone. Bwenaia is a smooth stone too. She is the boss and instructs the other junior tokwai in these other stones.* They have rankings relaying messages down the ranks from seniors down. (1915–18, 2/9: 952–53, emphasis added)

There is no further mention of Bwenaia in Malinowski’s fieldnotes that I have been able to detect subsequent to this early entry until June 8, 1918, nearing the end of his second expedition, which he had spent mostly in the south of the island. This was the day after his first return visit to Omarakana following a two-year absence. It was authoritatively pointed out to him by none other than the Paramount Chief:

Toulu says; inala kiriwina-Omarkana. Pela dakuna Kabwaynaya. (“mother of Kiriwina-Omarakana. *Because of the stone Kabwaynaya*”)—This stone is buried in the house of Toulu under the ground. It is a taboo to see it; the skin would get rotten “bitakapwawa, iguni gwani woulo kumaidona”. This stone is somehow connected with Urikune & vilamalia [prosperity] magic. And the Tabalus of Omarakana have the reputation of being capable to produce drought & molu (“famine, epidemic”) by making the sun shine strongly. (Malinowski 1915–18, 2/29: 156; see also 1935a: 342, 431; [1926] 1992: 113–14)

On a loose sheet among his fieldnotes titled “List of Numakalas wives” referencing specific locations of his 1918 map of Omarakana village, there are these additional brief entries:

Sacred spots in village: 1) Lugwalaguva [inserted purple pencil: ‘heap of stones & a few shrubs’]—there is the kabwaynaya (pers. name) stone; mibua[?] kwabila [center? of garden].—A man is not allowed to go on to top the lugwalaguva [heap]—he would suffer from kleptomania—bimwayna buailai—also: bigimi gwoimi (makawatu, pto’i) wowola. 2) The baloma platform (si kubudoga baloma) would be erected below the bwai[-ma]—as per plan.

The heap of stones for Bwenaia is shown much to the west of the buku-baku, not so much in the east of it. . . . Where Bwenaia ought to be is a house of Orato’u, village idiot, who they say was one of Tolulu’s henchmen, but also notorious for having sex with the chief’s wives. (1915–18, 2/22; see also 1935a: 431)

Practically all tradition-minded adults in Omarakana today and likely before and elsewhere on the island can attest that it is with these *megwa* conveying instructions to Bwenaia and other Tabalu *baloma* that the reigning Tabalu controls agricultural and marine productivity for the entire archipelago. It is through the Omarakana Tabalu’s exclusive access to Bwenaia and her life- and death-giving magical powers that he is afforded his preeminent authority (*karewaga*) over all other *gumgweguya* chiefs, including the Tabalu chiefs of other communities (see Young 1998: 130; Mosko 2013b: 486; cf. Malinowski 1932: 113, 1935a: 160–64, 430).

With this evidence concerning Bwenaia’s powers and those other spirits coming under her, how could Malinowski have contended in his publications that the agency of magical spells arose strictly from the words of *megwa*? Merely as speculation, certain momentous events transpiring shortly after receiving the final information about Bwenaia could have permanently deflected him. Upon returning to Kiriwina for his second expedition just after publishing his 1916 “Baloma” piece, Malinowski spent nearly all of his remaining time away from Omarakana, often living with resident Europeans in locations near the lagoon where chiefs tended to wield less influence. Nearing the time planned for his final departure from Kiriwina, on June 7, 1918, he returned to Omarakana for a five-week visit. On the third day after being reminded by To’uluwa of Bwenaia’s magical powers, Malinowski experienced an intense, extended emotional trauma upon receipt of the news of his mother’s death.

As described by Young (2004: 561–63, 567–70), the distress he suffered jolted him into dealing with the deep guilt that he had long experienced in his personal life, which also complicated his professional ambitions. “The grief and guilt overshadowed everything, and for weeks he worked with a heavy heart, mechanically and apathetically. All his hopes, schemes and plans for the future were diminished” (ibid.: 567). There is an uncharacteristic two-week gap in his fieldnotes at this juncture. “Fieldwork was becoming meaningless and absurd” (ibid.: 568, 569–70), with Malinowski at one point contemplating suicide. It is not difficult to imagine how the significance of To’uluwa’s revelation may have faded away.

It seems, nonetheless, that over the course of his studies Malinowski received other revealing answers to his pressing questions pertaining to this issue that pointed to the magical agency of *bilubaloma* spirits as efficacious persons after all. Sometimes these allusions passed unremarked. For example,

In this rite we have a direct association between a tabooed grove, ancestral spirits, a sacred and tabooed object, the stone and the magician. Although in the Momtilakayva system, as in Kaylu’ebila, the offering to the spirits, the *ula’ula* [oblation] . . . is made in the magician’s own house, this ceremony is said to bring the whole cycle of gardening under the direct tutelage of the ancestral spirits. In this case the ancestral spirits are those of the predecessors of the magician. (1935a: 278–79)

There is one juncture in *Argonauts*, however, where Malinowski records a category of magic: the “conditional curse . . . is the only form of magic, in which the personal agency is invoked, for in some of these spells, the *tokway* (wood sprite) is invited to take up his abode in the *kaytapaku*, that is the stick, with the substance on it, and to guard the fruit” (1922: 426).

But in most other passages of this sort, he interpreted his observations in terms consistent with his theory of the magical power of words:

There are one or two other activities which are typical of the office of garden magician . . . *towosi iula’ula baloma*, “the garden magician presents oblation to the spirits”. Spirits are named at this oblation, at the harvest offerings, and several times in the spells, but *it is the magical virtue of their generic name or of the specific names of ancestral predecessors in the office of magician which, in native belief, produces the magical effect.* (1935b: 148, emphasis added)

Malinowski's insistence that words but not spirits are the agents of spells, in other words, relied on the judgment that the utterance of the names of ancestral *baloma* is efficacious only insofar as they are *biga* "words." Never mind that these words are used grammatically with imperatives in direct address to spirits.

Given what Malinowski felt to be an absence of native exegesis on these matters, the repetitive "rubbing" or "impregnation" of the words of voiced spells into objects which accompanied many recitations impressed him as the "most effective and most important verbal action" (ibid.: 216) of *megwa* performance. For example,

[The magician] prepares a sort of large receptacle for his voice—a voice-trap we might almost call it. He lays the mixture on a mat and covers this with another mat so that his voice may be caught and imprisoned between them. During the recitation he holds his head close to the aperture and carefully sees to it that no portion of the herbs shall remain unaffected by the breath of his voice. He moves his mouth from one end of the aperture to the other, turns his head, repeating the words over and over again, rubbing them, so to speak, into the substance. When you watch the magician at work and note the meticulous care with which he applies this most effective and most important verbal action to the substance; when afterwards you see how carefully he encloses the charmed herbs in the ritual wrappings prepared, and in a ritual manner—then you realise how serious is the belief that the magic is in the breath and that the breath is the magic. (1935b: 216, see also 215–18; 1922: 406–8; 1935a: 93ff.)

These actions are characterized as *yopu'oi wodila*, literally "put into something with mouth." The *kekwebu* "images" and *peu'ula* "powers" of the words of the spell as a complete form (*ikuli*, i.e., as a *gwadi* "child" of the magician; see below) do indeed impregnate the object, but my informants insist that it is only with the agency of *baloma* spirits that this transference can be effected, similarly to how ancestral *baloma* are understood to impregnate women with fetuses from Tuma. And in a critical respect, the verbal impregnation of magical articles with the names of invoked spirits animates those items with potent images of the spirits themselves (see chapters 5–7).

Other evidence Malinowski collected on this point during his second expedition reveals how he tended to deal with apparent contradictions in the information received:

In an institution called *kaytubutabu* we find a ban made on the consumption of coconuts and betel-nuts, associated with a specific magic to make them grow. There is also a protective taboo, used to prevent the theft of ripening fruits or nuts, too far away from the village to be watched. In these cases a small parcel of medicated substance is placed on the tree or near it, on a small stick. The magic spoken over such a substance is a “conditional curse,” to use the excellent term introduced by Professor Westermarck. The conditional curse would fall upon anyone who would touch the fruits of that tree, and would bring upon him one form of disease or another. This is the only form of magic, in which the personal agency is invoked, for in some of these spells, the *tokway* (wood sprite) is invited to take up his abode on the *kaytapaku*, that is the stick, with the substance on it, and to guard the fruit. *Some such small divergencies from the general trend of native belief are always to be found. Sometimes they contain important clues, and a deeper insight into the facts, sometimes they mean nothing, and only emphasise the fact, that it is not possible to find absolute consistency in human belief.* (1922: 425–26, emphasis added)

Nonetheless, at several critical moments in his postfieldwork writings, Malinowski revealed lingering doubts as to whether his unequivocal denials of *baloma* magical efficacy accurately reflected the native point of view. For example, in an appendix to Volume 1 of *Coral gardens* titled “Confessions of ignorance and failure,” he wrote:

There remained a great many lacunae in my data, simply because I did not spend enough time in the field collating and synthesising them. Take, for instance, the problem of the part played by the spirits in general, and ancestral spirits in particular, in native tribal life. . . . What exactly is the relation between the mischance brought about by the offended spirits and mischance brought about by malicious magic? I cannot say, for again I have not investigated this problem as fully in the field as I should have done. I occasionally enquired whether it was really the wrath of the *baloma* or the evil intent of the magic. But the answer would usually be “I do not know”. . . . Here again I have not gone deeply enough into the subject to ascertain what they [spirits] do and whether they are really believed to be there. (1935a: 467–68)

Malinowski in his own mind, therefore, had sufficient reason to leave open the possibility that in the view of his interlocutors *baloma* and other spirits might well have played a critical agentive role in magical practice. And in this regard,

it is notable that in the spells he provided, the person(s) stated in middle *tap-wala* segments to perform the stipulated actions was sometimes identified by a first-person pronomial (i.e., singular “I” or plural “we”), but shifted at other times, even within the same spell, to singular or plural second-person “you.” Malinowski took this to suggest that “the spirits stand in the same relation, as the performer does, to the magical force, which alone is active” (1922: 423). But as Tambiah (1968: 190) recognized, this points specifically to a conceptual identification, and hence potential “participation,” of the invoked spirits with the magician—a view to which I shall return below.

*Magical agency in post-Malinowski ethnography*

Reports from the many ethnographers who followed in Malinowski’s wake have variously addressed questions of *megwa* agency but without clear consensus. Linguist Gunter Senft (1997b, 1998, 2010b), who has most closely studied *megwa* thus far, largely defends Malinowski against the criticisms of Tambiah by affirming that Trobrianders (Kaileuna Island) consciously attribute a special Frazerian efficacy to the power of magical words independent of their metaphorical and metonymical meanings and performative functions. But at certain junctures, Senft, like Malinowski, seems to equivocate over whether *baloma* might after all be included among the possible agents of *megwa*. At one point, for example, he widens the scope of magical interactions (i.e., “participations”) so as to include not only the kind of analogical meanings identified by Tambiah but also the animate, inanimate, and spiritual beings named in spells, including them among the addressees and/or agents (Senft 1997b: 371–86). In other instances, Senft points to invoked ancestral spirits as the relevant mediating agents through identification with the magician. In yet others, the addressed ancestral *baloma* are grouped with the named animate, inanimate, and nonhuman entities as the agents of the spells but distinguished as beings separate from the magician (ibid.: 374–79, 381, 382–86, 387). And in still other contexts, these addressees function as patients subject to the power of the magician’s magical words (ibid.: 388–89).

Harry Powell, who conducted fieldwork near Omarakana in the early 1950s, did not investigate the topic of magic deeply, but still noted that unseasonable weather could result from spirits’ dissatisfaction with people’s misbehaviors toward them, by committing errors in the performance of spells, or failing to provide them with enough food, presumably through *ula’ula* “oblations”

(see chapter 5). Also, he reports that *baloma* spirits invoked in Omarakana's rain magic were understood to have "their [i.e., the spirits' own] magic":

It was no use trying to make rain magic against the *baloma*. The rain was obviously the result of their magic, and as they include in their numbers all of the dead and gone magicians of the past, and as the *baloma* are spirits anyway, obviously no mere human rain magician's efforts could hope to prevail against them once they really got cracking. (Powell 1950a: 12)

Annette Weiner's account of the location of magical agency in "hard words" is similarly ambiguous as to spirit participation. She initially (1976: 218) followed Malinowski in attributing the power of magic to "spoken words" which she amplified in her later treatments (1983: 691–92, *passim*; 1988: 71), conceding ritual efficacy to words through Tambiah's repetitive metaphorical and metonymical significances while continuing to couch her analysis in a theory of language closely approximating Malinowski's pragmatism: "How Trobriand magic is thought to work can be understood only from a theory of Trobriand language in use, not from a theory of magic as such" (1983: 691–92). In the latter work she related how the "objects" addressed by magicians in spells (e.g., animal and plant species, implements, other items of the physical environment which absorb a spell's words) serve as mediating agents carrying the magician's verbal message to the patient (*ibid.*: 702–4), more or less consistent with Malinowski's notions of how the words of spells are "rubbed," "impregnated," or "breathed" into "objects" (*ibid.*: 704; see above). However, at one point she includes "deceased former owners of the spells (ancestors)" (*ibid.*: 702) among those "objects." This at least acknowledges that ancestral *baloma* invoked in opening *u'ula* passages contribute to a spell's agency, but disqualifies them from being considered persons of an order comparable to their living human descendants, who, after all, embody them (see below and chapter 4).

In her analysis of the art and aesthetics of expert (*tokabitam*) canoe carving on Vakuta Island, Shirley Campbell reports that carvers, the items they carve, and the materials employed in their work become "imbued" with magic (2002: 43), and that carving magic is "thought to have a life of its own" as a "separate power that is not only used by the owner but also, to some extent, uses the owner" (*ibid.*: 54; see also 61ff.).

For example, it is thought that a *kabitam* carver can become overwhelmed by his knowledge, the internalised *kabitam* magic compelling him to carve. The carver

prepares his wood and the *kabitam* magic guides his hand. When something is said to be *kabitam*, or the result of *kabitam* magic, reference is being made to this power, or the force of the knowledge directing its owner to release its expression. (2002: 54–55)

However, she does not offer an elaborated account of the mechanics of magical performance or specify further indigenous views of the source of the spell's purported agency, its power, or force.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, at one point Campbell implies that *baloma* cannot be agents of the *megwa* that are regularly employed in *kula* voyaging. Just prior to departing on a *kula* expedition, the canoe owner (*toliwaga*) entreats the male *baloma* spirits of his *dala* to stay back as their presence "is thought to adversely affect the canoe's ability to manoeuvre rough open seas." Campbell reasons, "*Baloma* reside underground while waiting to be reborn. Their subterranean abode connects them to the heaviness of land where they are immobile, in stasis between death and rebirth" (ibid.: 160). My Omarakana informants insist that magical rites performed at sea are directed primarily at the onboard spirits, flatly rejecting any suggestion that ancestral *baloma* are constrained by the heaviness of land or subterranean abodes. And although Malinowski did not consider spirits to be the agents of sailing magic, he was given to understand that ancestral *baloma* did accompany living kin on *kula* voyages (1922: 435–36; see also 120, 154, 197, 218, 252–55, 261–62, 335, 343–44, 404).

Giancarlo Scoditti's treatments of canoe art and oral poetry on Kitava Island (1990, 1996, 2012) include numerous references to *megwa* spells in the inheritance, initiation, composition, memorization, and performance of ritual carvers and poets. But following Tambiah, among others, he (1980, 1990: 89, 98n; 1996: 11, 68, 270; 2012) tends to stress the metaphorical and aesthetic values of spells rather than their inherent magical potency, such that the participation or possible agency of *baloma* spirits is barely considered. Scoditti's interpretation of the "unusuality" and secrecy of *megwa* words (1990: 69n, 98n), for example, recalls the efficacy of utterances themselves as variously argued by Malinowski, Senft, and Weiner. Elsewhere, he (1996, 2012) groups *megwa* with the "songs" and "poems" (*wosi*) composed by contemporary poets, concentrating again on the subtle aesthetics of the words and images as understood and experienced

12. Campbell does, however, present exceptionally detailed information regarding the "taboos" that accompany magical expertise (*kabitam*), particularly in relation to that associated with canoe building and carving (see chapter 7).



by performers and audiences, eliding again indigenous views of magical agency. However, Scoditti notes at numerous junctures that *tokabitam* carving experts in the performance of their spells impersonate the demigod of *kula*, Monikiniki (1980: 68, 90, 113; 1990: 180; 1996: 149), and that the words of spells are “attributes of the mythical hero” (1996: 246; see below). Elsewhere, he comes very close to granting the magical agency of *baloma* proper and not just Monikiniki alone. The carver addresses his spells to the spirit of the wood he is carving “as well as to the soul of his ancestors” (1990: 64). In one spell, the magician-carver invokes his deceased father, from whom he presumably acquired it, “as a protective deity” (1996: 213). Even more suggestively, human chanters of *megwa* are equated with the spells’ ancestral *baloma* authors: “*Megwa* are associated with the past, with ancestors; one might even say that they are the oral representation of this past” (ibid.: 119).

Jerry Leach’s (1978, 1982) doctoral research addressed the development of the Kabisawali Movement across the archipelago in the lead-up to Papua New Guinean National Independence in 1975. With a clearly intimate grasp of the key events and the major parties involved in them, he covers both the continuities and the changes of Kabisawali. He estimates that the Movement was decidedly “secular”:

Unlike so many small rural movements in Melanesia, Kabisawali did not turn to spiritual beings to achieve its aims. I carefully listened for and quietly asked about communications with ancestral souls (*baloma* or *tubudayasa*) or malevolent spirits, even at the peripheries of Kabisawali, to no avail. The closest thing to an appeal to spiritual powers came in meeting prayers after chief Pulitala joined the movement, a pro forma exercise at best. Kabisawali’s appeal was secular. It saw its primal fund of power as the new and large collectivity of people from which it was formed. The power of this new level of organization expressed itself through accumulated funds, which could do more than individuals or villages alone, including the attracting of more funds through loans, grants, and profits from economic programmes. Kabisawali representing ‘the people’ could, so the thinking went, tap the power inherent in money more effectively than small-scale or private ventures. (1982: 302–3)

This may well reflect many of the actualities of Kabisawali as analyzed by Leach. But, hopefully without being dogmatic here, on several grounds it is not necessarily the case that the key leaders of the Movement, including John

Kasaipwalova, the central figure of Kabisawali, his uncle, Narabutau, the then-Tabalu Paramount Chiefs, Vanoi and Waibadi, and others in opposition, were perceived by followers in strictly nonsacred terms. They were, after all, among the highest-ranking *gumgweguya* of Northern Kiriwina, whose distinctive ritual capacities, even according to Kasaipwalova (see above), were, and still are, widely assumed to consist of the monopoly of *bilubaloma* spiritual agency. Such powers, in any case, are precisely those which Islanders hold to be effective in forming village and other collectivities (see chapters 7–8). Several key turning points in the event Leach describes were strongly shaped by consideration of Christian morality and claims and suspicions concerning sorcery and Tabalu-monopolized drought magic. Campaigning politicians in the past two national elections have confided to me that they routinely employ *kemwasila* “attraction magic” which invokes spirits’ powers in the course of their speeches and other presentations to sway listeners and elicit their votes; there is no reason to assume that these means of public persuasion were not at play earlier. In addition, Islanders’ view of “the power inherent in money,” which has become enormously inflated in recent times, consists essentially in its recognized status as Europeans’ principal mystical reserve (i.e., *tukwa*), explicitly analogous to Islanders’ traditional spells and charms (Mosko 1999, 2014a).

Katherine Lepani has discussed the power of *kwerwaga* “love” or “attraction” magic as “transferring or displacing agency from one person to another ... how one person’s intentions and desires are simultaneously projected and reflected in the actions of another” (2015: 59). The magic’s effects are achieved through “mediums” (e.g., consumable substances, contact with objects, love letters, etc.). Once empowered through ritual procedures, including bespelling, the medium transports the spell into the patient’s mind, which is thereby changed or “turned.” There is no mention of the possible involvement of *baloma* spirits in either the spells or their effects.

Frederick Damon, reporting on the *kaluwan* (cognate of *baloma*) spirits of Muyuw Islanders, also provides no data regarding their possible role in magic. However, he (1990: 258n) confides that, for several reasons, his informants were “extremely reluctant” to give him knowledge of magical spells, resulting in a significant gap in this dimension of his ethnography. In this, Damon’s experience was similar to that of Malinowski, whose interlocutors seemed particularly hesitant to engage in exegeses concerning magical spells beyond a certain depth.

Among the previous generation of Northern Massim ethnographers, Nancy Munn (1986: 82–84, 288n) came closest to explicitly naming ancestral spirits as

effective agents. After making this assertion with reference to a single instance, however, she cautioned against generalizing to other Gawan spells.

Another member of the recent cohort of Kiriwina ethnographers, Sergio Jarillo (2013, pers. comm.), reports that in several communities to the south of Omarakana indigenous spirits are viewed as the principal agents of traditional carving spells, which have in certain respects been joined by spirits of the Christian pantheon.

It is noteworthy that further afield in the Massim—i.e., perhaps somewhat beyond Malinowski's direct ethnographic influence—indigenous attributions of magical powers to spirits are prominent and consistent. Susan Kuehling reports from Dobu that there are numerous magical techniques which involve appeals to spirits of various kinds (i.e., of place, the bush, ancestors, the recently deceased) (2005: 126, 169, 237). Ancestral spirits with the ability to observe living people invisibly “are believed to watch, smell, listen and react to what they perceive” (ibid.: 45). On Tubetube, as described by Martha Macintyre (1987), the supernatural powers of male magicians (i.e., practitioners of benevolent and malevolent “sorcery”) and female “witches” are derived from specific mythical archetypes. Magicians are thought to communicate with the culture-hero Taumudulele, whose powers they embody. Magical success, guidance in important activities, assistance in securing wealth, and other blessings among the Sabarl Islanders of the Louisiade Archipelago as described by Deborra Battaglia (1983b: 453, 457–58, 462; 1990: 70, 142, 176) are credited to named *tubu* ancestors, who remain tied to their descendants through various signs or “marks” of memory (e.g., material objects, “magical words,” remains, tales, songs, names). Maria Lepowsky (1993: 126–28) reports that among Vanatinai Islanders, also of the Louisiades, supernatural patrons of various sorts—ancestral, locality, and other spirits—are considered to be the sources of all human powers and influence.

The magicians of food plenty and scarcity (*manumanua*) on Nidula (Goodenough) Island in the D'Entrecasteaux group, as exhaustively described by Michael Young (1983), embody through impersonation the mystical capacities of heroic mythical ancestors, similar to Trobriand ascriptions of magical efficacy to apical ancestral *tosunapula* emergence and other *baloma* spirits. Young notes that he

found no cognate of mana or any such term to denote “mystical force”; there is however some notion of effective magical power or agency. On the efficacy of spells, for example, the Kalauna yam magician's spells “appeal to the ancestors

(toveyaveya or inainala) to bring the ‘spirits’ (maiyou—lit. image or shadow) of big yams” to his own garden from wherever they may find them. “The ancestors thus exhorted are not necessarily in the direct line of the [spell] singer; the names of any dead men remembered for their ability to grow large yams are recited in the spells.” (*Fighting with Food*, p. 150). In Goodenough “balauma” (the cognate of Trobriand *baloma*) are not ancestral spirits but rather malicious evil spirits (usually of terrifying visage) which can be conjured by sorcerers to possess a victim—an act called “balaumina.” (Pers. comm.)<sup>13</sup>

There appears, therefore, to be in the extant ethnography a wide range of views as to the presence or absence of spirits in Trobriand and other Massim peoples’ ritual repertoires. The most vociferous objection to my suggestion of Trobriand *baloma* magical agency has come recently from Susan Montague (2016) in response to the publication of an earlier version of this chapter (Mosko 2014b). Inasmuch as Montague has conducted ethnographic research on Kaileuna Island just to Kiriwina’s west beginning in the 1970s, her assertions bear closer scrutiny.

In an early report, Montague more or less followed Malinowski’s characterization of the relative noninvolvement of *baloma* spirits in their living descendants’ lives:

In Trobriand thought, powerful beings help those who contribute to the set of external arrangements that they are trying to set up or maintain. In general,

13. The significance of Young’s attribution of magical efficacy to ancestral heroes is enhanced when it is appreciated how, citing Mauss and an early work of Strathern’s, his view of Kalauna personhood anticipated the NME notion of the dividual:

The word for “give” in Kalauna is rarely used intransitively, so the recipient is usually present in a suffix. For example: *yaku-barwe yavele-na*, “my pig I gave him” (i.e., “I gave my pig to him”); *akubarwe bi-vele-ku*, “my pig he gave me” (i.e., “he gave his pig to me”). Marcel Mauss pointed out long ago that the gift is a part of oneself; equally, oneself is part of the gift—the *aku* within the *yaku*, as it were. Seemingly, there is a less radical disjunction between person and property than we know in the West; indeed, property relations can be fruitfully regarded as metaphors of social relations (see Strathern 1981[b]). At issue here, however, is the Kalauna notion that personhood can in part be constructed and construed by material objects or “possessions,” though to grasp this notion we must soften the obdurate Western distinctions between subject and object, spirit and matter, and allow that in the Melanesian view they interpenetrate. (1983: 22)

Trobrianders seek “help” from living people, not from dead spirits. The dead are thought to occasionally interfere with the living, but for the most part to be pre-occupied with their own concerns. Since they are more powerful than the living they must be treated with caution and respect, but they are not thought to be a source to be routinely tapped in man’s behalf. (1981: 18)

Later in the same article, however, she provides additional specificity as to her understanding of the involvement of *baloma* spirits in matters of power:

Power, in Trobriand terms, involves *manipulating aspects and attributes of the realm of the dead to alter the realm of the living*. Note that, in line with what I said earlier, this does not involve utilising dead beings as power sources. Instead, it involves knowing things that the dead know and being able to apply this knowledge to human affairs. (1981: 19, emphasis added)

They key problem here, it seems to me, is that, first, “the things that the dead know” are “aspects and attributes of the realm of the dead”; second, that “dead beings” too are aspects and attributes of the realm of the dead, so that “manipulating aspects of the realm of the dead” cannot logically exclude manipulating the dead themselves or aspects and attributes supposedly intrinsic to them.

In a later article, Montague reached basically the same conclusion, it would appear, where *miegava* (cognate with *megwa* for magic or spell) glossed as “noise force” is portrayed as “non-substantial force *possessed by baloma residing in the nonsubstantial part of the universe*. It is manifest and available in living people in terms of sound, as are all other nonsubstantial forces” (1983: 41, emphasis added). Elsewhere, she stated that *baloma* spirits “have their own *miegava* [i.e., *megwa* spells]” (1980: 87). This would seem to confirm that there is a constitutive identity of some nature between *baloma* and living people insofar as what one possesses is comprised of the other, so that when one of the two acts as agent, the other does so simultaneously. Either this, or Montague should clarify how it is that living humans can draw upon forces possessed by *baloma* that are not somehow conjoined parts of both their own and spirits’ personal composition.<sup>14</sup> The confusion is compounded elsewhere in her 1983 article, where it is stated: “The crop-in-the-ground [i.e., garden fertility] ‘magic’ probably

14. Unless, of course, Montague wishes to imply that *baloma* spirits’ “possessions” are categorically distinguished from their persons as “objects” (see chapter 2).

is not magic at all, but encouragements sent to *baloma* to infuse the plants with animation and growth” (1983: 45). It must be asked: On what criteria exactly do such verbalized “encouragements” sent to *baloma* not qualify as “magic”?<sup>15</sup>

In her recent article, Montague objects to my claim as to the magical agency of *baloma* partly on the grounds that “all earlier anthropologists have basically thought otherwise, that magical formulae at least mostly unleash powers from the magicians themselves, even if they did not know how this works” (2016: 150). In this she simply misrepresents my assessment of previous investigators’ mixed views on this point. Montague offers the following explanation for my supposed error in this matter:

My own guess is that Mosko, a newer anthropologist on the scene, has been told the latter . . . that Trobriand magic calls on dead *baloma* to perform, when I and all other older anthropologists have been told otherwise. My own informants indicate that this is what Trobrianders are now telling outsiders because the Papua New Guinean government has outlawed magic and sorcery in the country, with hefty legal prison penalties. But as Yaubada (the Christian God) is simply one of the *baloma* and it is perfectly legal to make ritualized verbal prayers to him, it cannot be illegal to make ritualized verbal prayers to any of the others. So they are claiming that this is what magical chants are about. (2016: 150–51)<sup>16</sup>

Fortunately, I was in the field in late July 2016 when I received a copy of Montague’s article, affording me the opportunity of testing her explanation

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15. It may be relevant that many in the cohort of Montague, Annette Weiner, and others, including Marilyn Strathern, conducted their fieldwork and subsequent reporting at a time when feminist theory and gender as an analytical trope had risen to the top of disciplinary agendas. This would suggest that some of the elision of *baloma* magical agency in the case of the Trobriands was not a simple reflex of Malinowski’s ongoing influence.
  16. It is not true that all magic along with sorcery has been outlawed in Papua New Guinea. From the earliest days of colonial domination, at least in British New Guinea and later Australian-administered Papua, it was only malevolent sorcery and witchcraft, not magic generally, which was outlawed (Keenan 2015). The Sorcery Act 1971, in anticipation of National Independence and in explicit acknowledgment of customary law, forbade only those forms of “magic” or “sorcery” which are understood to harm people. Other “good” or “innocent” types of magic employed for helping people through curing, making rain, growing gardens, chasing away evil spirits, and so on, were not outlawed. There has been, therefore, little need for Trobrianders to devise justifications of the sort claimed by Montague.

with my core team members. They unanimously rejected it. Pulayasi responded by saying merely, “I am right at the *u’ula* [base] of *lili’u* [sacred myths/legends]. You [i.e., Montague at Kaileuna] are out at the branches [*doginala*]” (fieldnote extract, August 4, 2016).<sup>17</sup> Responding to Montague’s explanation of our disagreement, Toguguwa Tobodeli, the Toliwaga “War Chief” of Kabwaku village, volunteered:

“What they told her was what the missionaries had told the people when they came, simply that Yaubada God is the only *baloma* with all the power and that the *bilubaloma* had no powers.” So [Toguguwa] thought that that was what the people were telling Susan, merely repeating what the missionaries had said. “But that is not what is *gulgula* [i.e., sacred knowledge] to them [i.e., Islanders]. The missionaries had to stress the sole powers of God because the people had other ideas about the *peu’ula* [powers] of the *bilubaloma*.” (Fieldnote extract, August 6, 2016)

On the basis of these several regional comparisons, those ethnographic claims as to the absence of *baloma* or other spirit agency in connection with magical practice make the Trobriands appear to be more of an ethnographic anomaly than they have already been perceived to be, on other grounds. So despite Malinowski’s strident pronouncements of the magical effectiveness of chanted words alone, his own writings and those of subsequent investigators and commentators offer at least fragmentary evidence that ancestral *baloma* or other spirits might well be regarded by Trobrianders as playing critical agentive roles similar to those reported from some other parts of the Massim and wider Melanesia. What exactly that role is and how it relates to the efficacies which have been attributed also to other entities and being—words, metaphorical-metonymical relationships between words, nonhuman spirits, other animate and inanimate beings of the “natural” world, and so on—have yet to be rendered intelligible.

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17. I suspect that some of Montague’s seeming confusion in this area traces to her assumption that *baloma*, whether in the form of spirits in Tuma or embodied in living humans in Boyowa, are beings of “total autonomy and self-interest” (1983: 33, 40, 42), a characterization of Trobriand personhood she shares with Annette Weiner (1983; see chapter 2). In other words, the fundamental notion that ancestral *baloma* participate in the lives of their living kindred as extensions of themselves undercuts the presupposition of that villagers have personal self-sufficiency in ritual and other contexts.

## COSMOLOGY

Framing the issue in these terms inevitably calls for a detailed reconsideration of the relevant aspects of Trobriand cosmology, which is more complicated and differently configured than has been revealed thus far. What follows is a condensation of innumerable hours of discussion, questioning, rethinking, and reanalyzing the existing ethnographic corpus and newly elicited data guided by my village interlocutors' knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

All beings and entities of the traditional Trobriand "universe" (*kʷetala valu*, literally "one village" or "place"), whether perceived as animate or inanimate, material or immaterial, or human or nonhuman, are enlivened by a property termed *momova*, variously translated as "life," "vital spirit," or "vital breath" (Baldwin 1939; Scoditti 1996: 68; 2012: 67ff.; Lawton 2002a), or, as I prefer, "vitality," "vital essence," or "life." Even those entities which appear in their outward, material form to be inanimate or lifeless harbor invisible *momova*. Thus all beings and entities of the visible world of Boyowa, including humans, plants, animals, rocks, features of the land, sea, and sky, and so on, possess, embody, and/or participate in inner *momova*.

Critically, however, the *momova* of any particular being or entity of Boyowa is also considered to coexist as, or to be a component of, its invisible counterpart in Tuma, the realm labeled by Malinowski ([1916] 1992) "land of the dead." This latter designation may be misinterpreted, though, insofar as it implies that

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18. As I have been advised by Paramount Chief Pulayasi Daniel, the information contained within the following account of the indigenous cosmology is very likely not present in the knowledge of all or even most Trobrianders. This is partly because it holds a central place as *tukwa* or sacred hereditary knowledge by members of Tabalu *dala*, particularly those based at Omarakana. In this as in other instances, knowledge of *tukwa*, including the content of *megwa* spells "owned" by a particular *dala*, is restricted to selected *dala* members. Therefore, while other villagers, both chiefly and commoner, of different *dalas* may know various bits of Trobriand cosmology as outlined here, it is presumably only Tabalu affiliates, and only some of them at that, who are in possession of the full and most authoritative accounts. Pulayasi adds this as one explanation for why fuller accounts of Trobriand cosmology have not been given to ethnographers working elsewhere in the region. For indeed, despite its significance, the category *tukwa* has itself not appeared in previous ethnographies. However, Jarillo (pers. comm.) has confirmed its usage among his Kiriwinan informants, and Young (pers. comm.) has suggested that the Kalauna concept of *derwa* "custom" or "traditional usages" may be a cognate (see 1971: ch. 4 *passim*).



the various occupants of Tuma are somehow lacking in *momova* or the capacities of life, when actually they are considered to be the ultimate *source* or *essence* (*u'ula*) of *momova*, including the vitality of their material manifestations in the visible world, Boyowa. This does not mean that Trobrianders lack a notion of “death” (*mate*, *kaliga*); far from it. But “life” and “death” are for them differently conceived than in the West. The spirit world, Tuma, and the beings and entities inhabiting it are saturated with *momova*, the essence of life, on which the inhabitants of Boyowa depend for their very material existence.<sup>19</sup>

### *Tuma and Boyowa*

To explain this fully, one must first comprehend knowledgeable villagers' views on the spatio-temporal location of the two realms and their general relations to each other. Ethnographic reports of Tuma's purported location have been quite varied, from the island of Tuma lying north of Kiriwina, either on its surface or underground; the underworld beneath the land surface of Boyowa, Tuma, or other islands of the archipelago; the initial underground habitation of all beings and entities of Boyowa before their cosmic emergence from the cave, Obukula, near the present-day village of Labai to Omarakana's north;<sup>20</sup> the subterranean “holes” or “houses” (*bwala* or *bwema*) from which initial *dala* matrilineage ancestors (*tosunapula*) are believed to have emerged in the aftermath of cosmic creation;<sup>21</sup> and the invisible abode of all *bilubaloma* spirits, including human ancestral *baloma* and other categories of spirit beings yet to be described (i.e., nonhuman *tokwai* “nature sprites,” *itona* or *tauva'u* “warrior spirits,” *tubu daiasa* “creator deities”) (Seligman 1910: 661, 680, 733–34; Malinowski [1916] 1992: 150, 170–71; 1922: 72; Ketobwau 1993: 22; Malnic 1998: 184). Nowadays for

19. In this sense, Trobriand cosmology would qualify as an instance of Descola's (2010) ontology of “animism.”

20. Labai is renowned also as the village where the first ancestors (*tosunapula*) of Tabalu *dala* settled immediately after their emergence from Obukula cave.

21. My Omarakana collaborators account for the seeming contradiction between the notions that all beings and entities of the cosmos emerged from the underground through Obukula cave and that the first ancestors (*tosunapula*) emerged independently from caves, grottos, sacred groves, and so on, scattered across the island. They assert that the latter locations are not *sunapula* “places of emergence” in the literal sense from an underground world but the final places where the migrating ancestors completed their initial migrations across the surface of Boyowa and settled.

most Christian converts, Tuma is likened to the Christian “Heaven” (*labuma*; see Ketobwau 1994; Malnic 1998: 184).

Tuma, however, is not some place physically distant from Boyowa. Rather, in the view of Omarakanans, it is the hidden, invisible, “inner” (*olumwela, olopolala*) dimension of the universe, interpenetrating the visible, material, “external” (*osisuna, yosewa, okaukweda*) world of Boyowa so that the two realms coincide.<sup>22</sup> This is how humans, animals, plants, physical features of the world, and so on, in their material manifestations can exist outwardly in Boyowa, yet harbor inwardly the *momova* of Tuma. Perhaps prototypically, the invisible insides (*lopola*) of Boyowan physical bodies are part of or participate in Tuma. The two realms are not spatially distant from each other in the ways that have been previously reported. They coincide. It is through this intimate, simultaneous, coterminous mystical connection of the two realms, the visible and the invisible, that living humans of Boyowa are able to communicate and interact with ancestral and other spirits. In the context of *megwa* performance, therefore, the spirits invoked by magicians are close at hand.

Regardless of their differing views on the exact location of Tuma, villagers almost universally entertain the notion that Boyowa and Tuma are like “reflections” or “mirror images” (*saribu*) such that every being or entity of outward material or bodily existence (*yo’udila*) has its inner immaterial (*kekwebu*, literally “image” or “image-like,” “shadow,” “reflection”) counterpart containing the ultimate source of the life, or *momova*, for both realms. This relationship of material body to immaterial image characteristic of the two domains is reversible, however. For humans, the world of Boyowa and life as they experience it is “hot” (*yuviyavi*), Tuma and death being “cold” (*tula*). But to *baloma* spirits it is their world, Tuma, that is hot and Boyowa cold. Yet the two realms are coordinated. In terms of the culture’s prevalent “canoe” symbolism, for example, to living humans Boyowa is the “hull” (*waga*) that carries them about, with Tuma as the “outrigger” (*lamila*) that guides or supports the craft. But for *baloma* spirits Tuma is their “hull,” and Boyowa their “outrigger” (see Mosko 2013b: 498–502). On this evidence, Wagner (pers. comm.) has suggested, I think accurately, that

22. It seems that Malinowski received a version of this notion too: “The spirits migrate immediately after death to the island of Tuma, lying in the NorthWest of Boyowa, and there they exist for another span of time, underground, say some, on the surface of the earth, though invisible, say others” (1922: 72).

as the two realms are conceived as “mirror images,” they each interpenetrate the other.

This reversibility, moreover, has both empirical and mythical counterparts. When you look at your reflection in the undisturbed surface of a pool of water or in a manufactured mirror, the image that you see is inverted in a way closely approximating how Islanders conceptualize the relation of Tuma to Boyowa. What is “on the right” of your face as you experience it is on “the left” in the reflection, and vice versa. In illustration of interactions between the two realms, villagers will typically hold their hand out, rotating it back and forth between palm-up and palm-down.

This connection is expressed mythically in the story (*lili'u*) that Islanders recite which accounts for the initial separation of the spirit world, Tuma, from that of Boyowa. Malinowski recorded a version of this story in “Myth in primitive psychology.”

There was a time when people grew old and died, and thus became spirits, they yet remained in the villages with the survivors—even as now they stay around the dwellings when they return to their village during the annual feast of the *milamala*. But one day an old woman spirit who was living with her people in the house crouched on the floor under one of the bedstead platforms. Her daughter, who was distributing food to the members of the family, spilled some broth out of the coconut cup and burnt the spirit, who expostulated and reprimanded her daughter. The latter replied: “I thought you had gone away; I thought you were only coming back at one time in the year during the *milamala*.” The spirit’s feelings were hurt. She replied: “I shall go to Tuma and live underneath.” She then took up a coconut, cut it in half, kept the half with the three eyes, and gave her daughter the other. “I am giving you the half which is blind, and therefore you will not see me. I am taking the half with the eyes, and I shall see you when I come back with other spirits.” This is the reason why the spirits are invisible, though they themselves can see human beings. ([1926] 1992: 133)

According to commentary given to me on this myth, the two halves of the coconut are close approximations of each other, except that one half (*kwematala*) possesses “eyes” that enable the invisible *baloma* mother to see the visible human daughter, while the other “base” end (*kwesibu'ula*) enables the human daughter to be seen by but not to see her omnipresent but invisible mother.

I was given an additional myth much to the same effect by George Mwasaluwa, the *tolivalu* of a major land-owning commoner *dala* at Obwelia village. George offered his story as “the foundation myth of the ideas of *kwesibu’ula* and *kwematala*” shortly after we established our friendship in July 2006.<sup>23</sup>

This happened at Labai, the place of origin of the four *kumila*, and also where Tudava was born in the Tudava myth. The elder brother got sick, told the younger brother, when I get sick, you keep on giving me water all the time, washing me, and I will be ok again. If you don’t, I will die, leave you. The older brother got sick, and the younger brother washed him every day with water. Still the elder brother got sicker, the young brother still washed him regularly. At a certain point, the elder brother’s body appeared to be dead, and the younger brother kept washing him, but the elder brother kept on talking, telling him to keep on washing him with water, he would come alive again. By this point, the elder brother’s legs were rotting. Younger brother smelled the rotting flesh, he spat on the ground to get rid of the smell/taste, thinking the elder brother could not see him, but he saw. Elder brother said, now you have spat, I believe you do not like me anymore. Go get a coconut and put it in front of me. Cut the coconut into *mata* and *sibu’ula*. The bottom part [*kwesibu’ula*] is to be kept by the younger brother, you own it, it is yours. The top or eye part of the coconut [*kwematala*], give it to me, to elder brother. Now you cannot see me, you have no eye. I am going to leave you, and I am going to leave you with the *sibu’ula* base part, so I will come back to you in your presence. I can see you, you cannot see me. The bottom half is blocked without an eye to see. That is how *baloma* comes in, they can see human beings, they can see younger brothers living, but younger brothers cannot see *baloma* of elder brothers. (Fieldnote extract, July 10, 2006)<sup>24</sup>

23. Placing this story at Labai indicates that these events transpired in the era of *tosunapula* initial emergence ancestors and prior to their migration across the island and their settlement (see chapter 4).
24. It is an interesting anomaly that in some versions of both of these myths that I have recorded, including one from the Paramount Chief, the spirit mother and elder brother took the “base” half of the coconut and the human daughter and younger brother retained the “eye” half. Pulayasi explained, Tuma is the base of Boyowa, yet it contains the components of Boyowa which can be seen; hence it is they (i.e., living people) who received the half of the coconut equipped with organs for seeing the visible, but not the invisible.

These mythical relationships between spirits of Tuma and living people of Boyowa affirm, I suggest, a much more complex and nuanced mutual engagement between the two worlds than Malinowski or others have discerned. As I shall explain in chapters 5–6, for example, there are significant sacrificial contexts of Trobriand ritual life where humans feed the *baloma* ancestors analogues of the base end of the coconut they have been mythically allocated, and the spirits of Tuma reciprocally provision their living descendants in Boyowa with essential sustenance by offering substitutes for the *matala* “eye” end of their coconut. In short, Boyowa is the *u’ula* “source” of *momova* life for the nonsubstantial inhabitants of Tuma in ways analogous to how Boyowans are dependent for their livelihood (i.e., the *u’ula* “base of their material existence”) upon the spirit blessings of Tumans. And it is this relationship of mutual, reciprocal interdependence between the two realms that constitutes the broader context through which Islanders’ *megwa* and other ritual practices are understood to acquire their efficacy.

At one stage when reflecting on the mirror-like relation between Boyowa and Tuma, the question occurred to me: What is the mirror image of a living human if his/her soul only enters Tuma upon death? Or phrased conversely: If everything in Tuma has a material complement in Boyowa, what is the Boyowan counterpart of a person’s *baloma* soul once the person identified with it has died and disappeared from Boyowa? The answer I received to both questions is the same, as suggested already: living humans are in critical ways the material Boyowan embodiments (*yo’udila*) of Tuman spirits, and *baloma* in Tuma are the reflections or images (*kekwebu*) of Boyowan beings and entities. The Paramount Chief phrased it succinctly: “We humans are the eyes [*mata*; or face] of our ancestors.”<sup>25</sup>

#### *Kekwebu images and peu’ula powers*

While the beings and entities of Boyowa and Tuma are both “alive” in being animated by *momova*, within each realm their specific kinds or types of *momova* differ from one another as qualitatively varied “forms” or “configurations” (*ikuli*) of distinctive *kekwebu* “images” which accordingly possess distinctive

25. This metaphor of humans being the outward-looking eyes or face of their ancestors is, I believe, a well-known expression in Maori conceptions of ancestral relationship. And in view of this kind of mirror-like imagery, the cosmological tie between Boyowa and Tuma is “analogical” in Descola’s (2010) scheme of comparative ontologies (see also chapter 9).

*peu'ula* “powers” or “capacities” as expressed in their Boyowan manifestations. These two aspects of *monova*—*kekwebu* “images” and *peu'ula* “powers” or “capacities”—draw us considerably deeper into the base of Trobriand magic and kin relations.

The notion of *kekwebu*, first, has been mentioned, if only fleetingly, in several previous ethnographies, variously translated as “shadow,” “reflection,” “characteristic,” “valuable characteristic,” “photo,” “drawing,” “spirit substance,” “image,” “resemblance,” “spirit part,” “spiritual essence,” “spiritual aspect,” “ensemble of pieces/parts,” and “element of knowledge.” Occasionally, it has been equated with the *baloma* “spirit” or “soul” of something, even of nonhumans (e.g., Seligman 1910: 734–35; Malinowski [1916] 1992: 150–51, 156, 167, 180–82; 1922: 512–13, 184; [1926] 1992; Baldwin 1939; A. Weiner 1976: 82, 199; 1988: 42; Scoditti 1990: 58; Campbell 2002: 98, 106; Lawton 2002a; Mosko 2009: 694; Hutchins and Hutchins n.d.).<sup>26</sup>

As a convenient point of orientation, Malinowski characterized *kekwebu* in connection with the notion of *baloma* “soul” or “spirit”:

You may ask: “What is the *baloma* like? Is its body like ours, or different? And in what manner is it different?” You may further point out to the native the problem of the body remaining and the disembodied *baloma* going away. To such questions the answer will be almost invariably that the *baloma* is like a reflection (*saribu*) in water (or mirror for the modern Kiriwinian), and that the *kosi* is like a shadow (*kaikuabula* [*kekwebu*]). This distinction—the “reflection” character of the *baloma* and the shadowy nature of the *kosi*—is the usual, but by no means the exclusive opinion. At times both are said to be like *saribu* or like *kaikuabula*. I was always under the impression that such answers were not so much a definition as a simile. By that I mean that the natives were not at all certain that a *baloma* is made of the same matter as a reflection; they knew, in fact, that a reflection is “nothing,” that it is a *sasopa* (lie), that there is no *baloma* in it, but the *baloma* is just “something like a reflection” (*baloma makawala saribu*). When forced against a metaphysical wall by such questions, “How can a *baloma* call out, and eat, and make love if it is like a *saribu*? How can a *kosi* hammer against a house, or throw stones, or strike a man if it is like a shadow?” the more intelligent replied more or less to the effect: “Well the *baloma* and the *kosi* are like the reflection and like the

26. *Kekwebu* is the Northern Kiriwinian dialectical version of *kaikobu* and *kaikwebu* as reported from other regions.

shadow, but they are also like men, and *they behave all the same as men do.*" And it was difficult to argue with them. The less intelligent or less patient informants were inclined to shrug their shoulders over such questions; others, again, would obviously become interested in the speculations, and produce extempore opinions, and ask your view, and just enter into a metaphysical discussion of a sort. Such extemporized opinions, however, never amounted to very far-reaching speculations; they just turned round the general views above mentioned. ([1916] 1992: 167, emphasis added)

It seems peculiar to me that almost nothing has been made ethnographically till now of the cosmological-ontological significance of *kekwebu*, at least as it is comprehended at Omarakana. Each of the glosses listed above carries a degree of indigenous meaningfulness, but the English gloss for *kekwebu* which I take to be most useful for present purposes is that of "image": namely, the *momova*-laden, nonsubstantial components or characteristics of anything which, by virtue of distinctive associated *peu'ula* ("powers," "capacities"), differentiates and assimilates beings, entities, species, and so on, of Tuma and Boyowa from and to each other.

*Peu'ula* (or *peula*) "power" or "strength" (also "active," "force," "strong," "robust," "hard") as a second inherent aspect of *momova* has occasionally been mentioned ethnographically also (e.g., Baldwin 1939; A. Weiner 1983: 693; Powell 1995: 74; Lawton 2002a, 2002b; Senft 2010b: 76; Hutchins and Hutchins n.d.) but rarely analyzed. By a sort of indigenous *post facto* logic operating similarly to Oceanic *mana*, the visible attributes and capacities of any being or thing in Boyowa are considered by Islanders to be expressions of specific inner *peu'ula* powers inextricably tied to the perceived contours of the form of that entity's invisible *kekwebu* images. The exact visible, material expression of those inner powers and images is understood to be an instance of "emergence" (*sunapula*) directly analogous to the mythical coming forth of the visible Boyowan world from Obukula cave. Accordingly, any configuration of *kekwebu* images with its paired *peu'ula* power(s) has a dual existence, if you will—as the potent nonmaterial form of some invisible being or entity of Tuma and, through the effect(s) of the *peu'ula* powers or capacities intrinsically associated with those internal images, as its embodied material counterpart as a visible manifestation of Boyowa.

*Kekwebu* images and *peu'ula* powers operate between the two cosmic realms in something like the following way. When you peer upon anyone or anything

of Boyowa and then quickly close your eyes, that immaterial but definite image that remains in your “mind” (*nona*, *nano*) is a *kekwebu* (actually, an *ikuli* “formation” of many distinct, separate but integrated *kekwebu*) initially internal to that person or object which, through expression of its *peu’ula* capacities—hence coming forth or emerging (*sunapula*) from Tuma—has been projected so as to be detached from that person or entity, appearing internally as an element of your (the receiver’s) mind and “thought” (*nanamsa*), hence becoming a component of your own person.

Those readers conversant in the NME will readily recognize in this presentation, at least to this point, the generalized dynamics of personal partibility inherent in indigenous understanding of virtually any interaction between persons (inclusive of “things”) of Boyowa as mediated through and manifested by the *kekwebu* images and *peu’ula* powers arising ultimately from Tuma. Others more familiar with corresponding Oceanic animistic notions will, again, hopefully appreciate the extent to which Trobriand thinking in terms of internal and manifested *kekwebu* and *peu’ula* approximate the classic renderings of *mana*. The relevance of Lévy-Bruhl’s, Tambiah’s, and others’ notions of participation and the pan-Pacific immanence of sacredness mentioned above should also be evident in these details of *momova* vital essence in its various transactable forms. But these and additional aspects of *kekwebu*, *peu’ula*, and human–spirit relations, to which I next turn, challenge what in the West are recognized to differentiate categorically “persons” from “nonpersons,” “things,” or “objects.”

#### *Human spirits, nona mind, and nanamsa thought*

Among the scattered ethnographic references to *kekwebu* listed above, there are instances where the inner images of specific nonhuman objects or beings have been described as being equivalent to those entities’ *baloma* “souls,” as if the animals, plants, natural phenomena, and so on, embodying *momova* are constituted of the same order of *baloma* “souls” as are humans and ancestral spirits. I have occasionally heard such attributions in the field. However, when I have asked for clarification on this point—i.e., do these entities possess *baloma* “souls” or “spirits” in the same sense as human beings?—people uniformly declare “Gala!” (no), explaining that allusions to the immaterial *kekwebu* of nonsentient beings and entities as *baloma* are common enough but technically inaccurate. While those other beings are constituted of *momova*-laden *kekwebu* and associated *peu’ula* that generate their material manifestations in Boyowa, those images and



powers do not include *nona* mind and *nanamsa* thought, which critically distinguish what villagers consider to be “persons” (*tomota*). Pigs, garden plots, trees, reefs, winds, and so on, of Boyowa do not possess mind or thought on their own and thus cannot communicate through words with humans, *unless* they happen to harbor beings which are otherwise constituted of mind and thought (see below; cf. Scoditti 1996: 69).

The *baloma* souls of living humans are partly composed of *momova* in the specific *kaikobu* forms and *peu’ula* capacities of mind and thought, thereby distinguishing them as “persons” (*tomota*) separate from nonsentient beings and things of creation. Upon being released from their bodies following death, human *baloma* souls continue to exist in their immaterial *baloma* spiritual form with the components and capacities, mental and otherwise, definitive of persons.

But the *baloma* of humans, living and deceased, are not the only beings in the cosmos which possess images and powers of *nona* and *nanamsa*. Rather, all those beings which have appeared in the literature and are construed by Islanders as *bilubaloma* or “spirits” in the generic—ancestral *baloma*, *tubu daiasa*, *kosi*, *tosunapula*, *tokwai*, *itona/taurva’u*, *mulukwausi*, etc.—are classified as such on the basis of possessing or being constituted of *nona* and *nanamsa*. And it is the criterion of sharing those qualities that all sentient beings can potentially communicate and transact with one another as “persons” as Trobrianders define that notion. Nonhuman *baloma* spirits such as *itona/taurva’u* “warrior spirits” and *tokwai* “nature sprites,” along with human *baloma*, *kosi* “ghosts,” *yoyowa* “witches,” and *mulukwausi* “flying witches,” in other words, qualify as persons precisely in this sense of being composed of the *kekwebu* images of mind with the associated *peu’ula* capacities of thought.

Furthermore, on this basis, not only can humans and spirits communicate with one another, but in the context of *megwa* they do so through the medium of structured sequences or formations (*ikuli*) of thoughts expressed as words. In this specific sense, the magical powers of words, as conceived by Malinowski and others, are the magical agencies of persons, including *baloma* spirits of Tuma and humans of Boyowa, acquired ultimately from other similarly constituted persons. The combined and integrated words of *megwa* spells are thus potent images among the definitive components of the beings in whom they are incorporated as persons. The *u’ula* and *doginala* invocations of *megwa* as illustrated in the *vatuvi* gardening and other spells therefore do not merely pay mythological homage to magicians’ ancestors and predecessors; those words as structured materializations of *kekwebu* have the *peu’ula* capacities of identifying

the magician with the named internalized *baloma* spirits, thereby reconstituting them as the persons empowered to act in the present as they had done in the past since the spell's origination (fig. 3.1).<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 3.1.** Representation of *ikuli* “form” composed of *kekwebu* “images” connected by complex of *wotunu* “tubes.” Omarakana beach (2007).

This can be explained partially by recalling how Malinowski (1922: 315, 409–10, 412; [1925] 1992: 76) and others (Tambiah 1968: 184; A. Weiner 1976: 218, 252; Scoditti 1996, 2012; Senft 1998) have variously reported that *megwa* are seen as being stored in a magician’s “belly” (*lopola*) after entering his person through the larynx or vocal organs of his throat, the seat of “intelligence” or “mind” (*nona* or *nano*), also located in some accounts in or with the *dabala* “head.” All of these reports are only partly correct and in subtly different senses. When a magician transmits a spell to his successor and as the recipient learns

27. The connections between separate images in their coalescence into any given *ikuli* form are known as *wotunu* “tubes” or “veins,” typified in the fibers and tubules of plants, wood, animals’ circulatory systems, the clustering of words in a *megwa* spell, the interplay among the associated powers of a spell’s images to produce the magical result, and so on. On a visit to Omarakana’s beach in 2007, my friends and I came across this bit of driftwood. In discussion, it was agreed that the multifarious links amongst the roots captured something of the kinds of shapes or configurations implied in their notion of *ikuli*. For additional Trobriand and Massim instances of botanical imagery, see Mosko (2009), Damon (2017).

it, they each voice it repeatedly, externalizing in the one case and internalizing in the other.<sup>28</sup> Thereafter, the words of the spell as potent (but not activated) images are stored as scattered images separately circulating throughout the initiated magician's bodily *lopola*.

Here, the term *lopola* refers not only to a person's "belly" or "abdomen" but also to his/her generalized "insides," including the head, larynx, mouth, torso, limbs, organs, and so on, insofar as all inner body regions enclosed by skin are infused with watery blood (*buyai*). Thus the words of the spell with their attached powers, once learned, course disjointedly through the fluid blood of the magician's body, where, in that dissembled (*kaligeya'i*) condition, they are magically inert or "cold" (*tula*). The critical faculty of *nona* mind, concentrated in the magician's "head" or "brain" (*dabala*, inclusive of the larynx, as has been reported by some), is to draw up the disconnected images and powers of the spell from the magician's "belly" and to organize or structure them (*kaliai*) into a particular coherent sequence or form (*ikuli*, *simuli*) of words—that is, as a *nanamsa* thought—exactly as the spell was initially internalized by the magician and his/her *baloma* predecessors. It is the *nona* mind located in the head or larynx, my informants insist, where the *megwa* is thus first recongealed, or, as Malinowski characterized it, "crystallized" (1932: 409).

When the images of the spell in that form are voiced by the larynx and other vocal organs at the oral tip of the magician's body, they become energized or "hot" (*yuviyavi*). In that state, projected as invisible sound into the air or wind (*yagila*) and thus into invisible Tuma, they emerge from the magician's mouth as the spell's potent "fruit," "offspring," or "child" (*keuwela*, *gwadi*). This means that the vocalization of the structured sequence of *kekwebu* images recreates and reinvigorates the identity and relations of the persons of both Boyowan and Tuman realms associated with the spell—the magician and the invoked *bilubaloma*—as one person. I stress, it is the incorporation not only of the images and powers of the magician's person in the spell but those of the invoked

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28. As explained in succeeding chapters, it is misleading to assume that men only are capacitated to perform *megwa*. Although magic is a recognized male speciality analogous to women's preeminence in childbirth, certain *megwa* implicated by the latter processes fall within the strict provenance of women's agency. Similarly, while women predominate in procreation, men also make unique agentive contributions in that realm (see Mosko 2013b). It is for this reason that when discussing the capacities of "magicians," I variously portray them as "his," "her," or "his/her," according to context.

spirits (which are considered part of the magician's person anyhow) that make the spell hot and efficacious.

Those spells which are regarded as the hereditary legacy (*tukwa*) of members of a given *dala* can only be learned and effectively used to their maximum potential by persons customized or constituted of the appropriate *dala* images and powers. Here the claim is that the *kekwebu* and *peu'ula* ingredients of a given *dala's* spells are congenitally contained or stored in the blood of *dala* members from the moment of conception (see chapter 4). However, only those members (predominantly male) who are able to learn the *ordered, structured sequencing of the verbal images or words as a fully formed megwa spell* from a suitably knowledgeable predecessor—that is, through the human capacities of mind and thought—will be able to effect the desired results.<sup>29</sup> This, incidentally, explains why men are supposedly unable to perform effectively the hereditary *megwa* of *dala* with which they possess no identification even if they mentally learn the spells, further refuting Malinowski's claims as to the exclusive magical agency of words (cf. Malinowski 1935b: 243–44). One needs initially to have embodied the appropriate inner *kekwebu* and *peu'ula* stored in one's blood, prototypically through kin relations and the observance of certain ritual restrictions (see chapters 7–8).<sup>30</sup>

There is considerably more significance attached to these processes of storing, forming, and producing *megwa*. The summoned *baloma* spirits are described as instantly coming to occupy positions at the magician's shoulders or back, and then to proceed invisibly as spirits traveling through Tuma to enter the *lopola* (including the head and mind or other organs, depending on the category of *megwa* at issue) of the patient, where the *peu'ula* powers of the spell's *kekwebu* images are activated. This means that they alter the form (*ikuli*) and content of the images and powers previously incorporated in the patient's mind and body.<sup>31</sup>

29. Women of a given *dala* identity are customized to embody the spells of their *dala* also and for the same reasons, but the same bodily density that enables them to procreate puts limits on their ability to perform men's *megwa*. Given the nature of their bodies, men are analogously incapacitated for giving birth to living children.

30. In chapter 8, I address this key issue insofar as the sons of male members of a given *dala* equipped with the hereditary images and powers *through their fathers* are classified as *litulela* "men's children" and thus capable of receiving and practicing their paternal *tukwa*.

31. This process would seem to parallel Malinowski's (1932: 148–49, 152–54, 160) reports of women being inseminated by *wairwaia* "spirit children" through their heads.

To be sure, the words of the magicians' spells are *kekwebu* images possessing specific *peu'ula* powers, but not separate from the *baloma* of which those images and words are themselves detachable parts. In other words, the resolution of Malinowski's magical efficacy puzzle lies in the ways that the words of spells are construed cosmologically as personal components of the invoked spirits as well as the invoking magician.

But still, this is not the complete story. Those beings and entities of the cosmos which do not qualify as sentient *tomota* "persons" in the sense considered here, while they may also embody *momova*-laden *kekwebu* images and powers which partake of both Boyowa and Tuma, they do not host *baloma* "souls" or "spirits" properly speaking since they lack the inner, invisible *kekwebu* constitutive of the *peu'ula* powers specifically of mind and thought.

Nonetheless, those nonperson kinds of beings and entities do play certain active roles in *megwa* spells and contribute to their effectiveness. To explain how they do so in concert with the minds and thoughts of human and spirits, it is necessary to probe even further into the indigenous cosmogony, into the initial creation of the universe as Trobrianders traditionally understand it and the developments which mythically ensued. But also, it is by virtue of the mythical interactions between the initial inhabitants of Tuma and Boyowa consequent to cosmic creation that contemporary Islanders' relations to each other were established in terms of kinship, clanship, and rank through various mechanisms of gift exchange. It is to these matters that I turn in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

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### *Baloma* creations and procreations

The wording of magic is correlated with a very complicated dogmatic system, and with theories about the primeval mystical power of words, about mythological influences, about the faint co-operation of ancestral spirits, and much more important, about the sympathetic influences of animals, plants, natural forces and objects.

Malinowski, *Coral gardens and their magic*  
(1935: 222)

In the previous chapter, seeking to solve the puzzle of the source of agency in Trobriand magic, I identified the terms by which Islanders conceive of a personal identity between magicians and the *baloma* spirits invoked in their spells: namely, through the compatibilities of inherited and learned *kekwebu* images and *peu'ula* powers involving mind and thought. In his writings, Malinowski conceived of this very linkage as “mythological” in nature, by which he meant:

There is another side to the lists of ancestral names in magic, which must be remembered here. In all Kiriwinian magic a great role is played by myths, underlying a certain system of magic, and by tradition in general. . . . The ancestral

names mentioned in the several [magical] formulae form therefore one of the traditional elements so conspicuous in general. The mere sanctity of those names, being often a chain linking the performer with a mythical ancestor and originator, is in the eyes of the natives a quite sufficient *prima facie* reason for their recital. Indeed, I am certain that any native would regard them thus in the first place, and that he would never see in them any appeal to the spirits, any invitation to the *baloma* to come and act, the spells uttered whilst giving the *ula'ula* [oblation, see chapter 5] being, perhaps, an exception. But even this exception does not loom first and foremost in his mind and does not color his general attitude towards magic. ([1916] 1992: 215)

It was this depiction of the magician's relation with his/her spirit ancestors as being "mythological" that also provided Tambiah with his justification for excluding them from his initial performative treatment of Trobriand magic:<sup>1</sup>

The three parts [of a spell; i.e., *u'ula*, *tapwala*, and *doginala*] appear to present the following progression. The *u'ula*, which is brief, states the basis on which the spell is constructed, firstly the major theme or metaphorical idea which is elaborated in the spell and secondly the mythical heroes and ancestors who wielded the magical powers in question and with whom the magician himself becomes identified. This second feature is the portion of the spell that relates the magic to myth, *which I do not discuss*. (1968: 190, emphasis added)

However, there is much more in Trobriand mythology and the cosmology that informs it that is relevant to issues of magical efficacy, particularly the role not only of sentient persons but also of the other nonsentient beings and entities named in spells through the medium of words. How, then, did the entire Trobriand dual universe of Boyowa and Tuma in their spiritual, human, and nonhuman dimensions get mythically established? The answer to this question

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1. As noted in the previous chapter, just as the generation of *megwa* is a predominantly male agency and the reproduction of human infants is a primarily feminine occupation, women possess certain distinctive capacities for *megwa* performance just as do men with respect to procreation. My references to "the magician" as gendered male (i.e., "he," "his," etc.) here and in other passages is not to be taken as denying women's possession and use of magical capabilities, any more than referring to mothers' distinctive agency (i.e., "her," "hers," etc.) for giving birth is to repudiate men's participation in that process.



will touch in due course on the second major puzzle left by Malinowski concerning the indigenous cosmogony and those aspects of kin relationship consequent to human procreation that are embedded within it.

## COSMOGONY

I have been provided with the following details regarding the sacred story (*lili'u*) of *bubuli*, the mythical events of "creation." In outline, at the beginning there was only the primal god, Topileta, and his female counterpart (sister as well as spouse), Tugilupalupa, locked in the embrace of sexual union (cf. Seligman 1910: 679, 732–34; Malinowski [1916] 1992: 156–59, 242; Baldwin 1971: 318, 369–73; Glass 1986, 1988; Ketobwau 1994; Malnic 1998: 185, 196). Topileta is the paternal (*tama*) spirit or god (*baloma*, *tubu daiasa*) of the universe, described by Malinowski and others as the chief (*guyau*) or master of the immaterial, invisible world of Tuma. But Tuma was initially Tugilupalupa's womb; hence she is regarded as the "mother" (*ina*) of creation, and her vagina through which all beings and entities of the cosmos emerged is considered to be the legendary cave, Obukula, at the northerly end of Kiriwina Island near Labai, the ancestral Tabalu village.<sup>2</sup>

From the separation of this primal pair, the universe and all its inhabitants were born or created (*bubuli*) as their "children" (*gwadi*). The visible world of Boyowa and its residents thus emerged (*sonapula*) from invisible Tuma, the womb of Tugilupalupa, with varying progenerative components of paternal Topileta also. As offspring (i.e., *keuwela* "fruit") of the two gods, every *momova*-laden being and entity of creation embodies and is animated by certain sacred (*bomaboma*) characteristics and capacities (i.e., *kekwebu* and *peu'ula*) of the divine parents. Accordingly, every subsequent emergence of beings and entities between Tuma and Boyowa—including, in particular, the vocalization of *megwa* spells and the reincarnation and birth of humans—recapitulates the cosmic procreation of the universe or some focused aspects of it.

The first children to emerge from Tugilupalupa's womb were the spirits who are referred to, like their divine parents, as *tubu daiasa*, which can conveniently

2. This version of Trobriand cosmology, of itself, is consistent with the preponderance of ethnographic evidence which refutes Malinowski's claims of Islanders' supposed "ignorance of physiological paternity" (see below).



be glossed as “creator deities.” The term *tubu* is a variant of the word *tabu*, which in kinship terms nominally refers to “grandparent,” but in this context applies more generally to “first ancestor” or “progenitor.” The term *daiasa* here connotes the possessive “our.” Some of the more mythically famous *tubu daiasa* appear as central characters in various recorded myths, the most popular and frequently cited being the tale of the cannibal monster Dokanikani, heroic Tudava, and his mother Malita (or Mitigis, Bulutukwa) (Malinowski [1926] 1948: 122–24; 1927: 111–14, 244, 340; 1935a: 68–75; Baldwin 1971; Jerry Leach 1971; Lawton 1993: 181–82; Malnic 1998: 164–73).

According to Pulayasi, however, the most notable of Topileta and Tugilupalupa’s *tubu daiasa* offspring is a different Tudava, Ika’ili Tudava, who has often been confused and/or conflated with the Tudava of the Dokanikani story, correctly named Ikuli Tudava. These two Tudava characters are father and son, respectively. The more famous Tudava, Ikuli Tudava, who was born of Malita and who killed the Dokanikani monster, was the son of the other Tudava, Ika’ili Tudava, also known in some Massim myths as Dovana or Gere’u. Ika’ili Tudava, the father, was the first son of Topileta and Tugilupalupa to emerge from Obukula, and he was of Tabalu *dala*. The son, Ikuli Tudava, like his mother, Malita, was of chiefly Tudava *dala*.

The term *ika’ili* means “speaking/saying things, they come into existence.” Thus Ika’ili Tudava had the power or ability inherited from his parents, Topileta and Tugilupalupa, to “say” things into being either by speaking their names from his mouth or by blowing them out through a conch shell. In this fashion, the originally divine *kekwebu* images and *peu’ula* powers distinctive of various species acquired their embodied, material character in Boyowa from the interior images and powers expelled from Ika’ili Tudava’s person.

As he moved about, Ika’ili Tudava created many of the inhabitants and features of the land, sea, and sky orally, as distinct from the way that his female *tubu daiasa* paramour, Malita, gave vaginal birth to her plant, animal, and other children, including the son, Ikuli Tudava.<sup>3</sup> Ika’ili Tudava’s capacity for generating

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3. The famous water (*sopi*) dripping from the stalactite which pierced Malita’s vagina in conceiving Ikuli Tudava is identified by Pulayasi as the watery saliva (*bubwalue*) of Ika’ili Tudava (cf. Malinowski [1916] 1948: 228; 1935a: 68–75). As I shall discuss below, mouths and caves are viewed as analogous to vaginas, capable of giving birth to *gwadi* children. And of critical significance, the notion of “saliva” is itself viewed as analogous to the sexual secretions (*momona*) of both males and females (see chapter 5).

children from his mouth thus stands as a masculine sort of procreative capacity comparable to the ability of females to reproduce children through their wombs. And in coming forth or emerging in this way, Ika'ili Tudava's offspring embody *kek'wabu* and *peu'ula* of their father and mother according to their specific characteristics and, through them, those of the primal cosmic pair, Topileta and Tugilupalupa.

In many accounts of the son, Ikuli Tudava, he was conceived after water dripping from the top of a cave opened his mother's vagina (see Malinowski [1916] 1992: 228; Campbell 2002: 179). However, *sopi*, the term for "water," is commonly used to refer to the specifically magical knowledge transferred from one man to his successor orally (Kasaipwalova 1975; Scoditti 1982, 1996: 96, 199; Campbell 2002: 56; and see chapter 7). By implication, Ika'ili Tudava's son, Ikuli Tudava, was conceived for emergence to Boyowa from the source of the magical voice of his father's words. In some accounts of the Tudava story, it is he, Ikuli Tudava, who, after slaying the ogre Dokanikani, traveled about the Massim region performing many acts of verbal creation. But according to Pulayasi, these latter feats were those of the father, Ika'ili Tudava. It will be remembered, for example, that in the Dokanikani myth the cannibal monster had been attacking many people already in existence, as it was from fear of this that Ikuli Tudava's mother's brothers abandoned their sister and her offspring and escaped to Kitava. The point is that *bubuli* creation was much advanced in the time of Ikuli Tudava compared with the era of the father, Ika'ili Tudava.

Pulayasi adds that Ika'ili Tudava was not the only *tubu daiasa* spirit offspring of the primal pair with the *ika'ili* capacity of creating children through the agency of voice. That capacity was shared with a category of Topileta and Tugilupalupa's *tubu daiasa* progeny known as *tosunapula*, "beings who emerged [from Obukula]" or "first emergent ancestors." These are the brother-sister couples standing as the apical antecedents or founders of separate *dala* matrilineages.<sup>4</sup> Through their spirit pedigrees these sibling pairs together possessed masculine-paternal capacities of *ika'ili*, calling things into existence through voicing their names and other characteristics with words. It is those distinctive configurations which from the beginning differentiate at diverse scales of inclusiveness *dala* "matrilineages," *kumila* "clans," and much else, from each other.

4. *Tosunapula* are the same founding spirit ancestors described by Annette Weiner (1976: 39–41) and Malinowski (1935b: 262–63) as *tabu*.

By the same token, it is by the sharing of *kekwebu* and *peu'ula* inherited matrilineally from *tosunapula* ancestors that members of a given *dala* identify with one another as “kin” (*veyola*, *veyalela*) and with the nonhuman beings and entities specifically associated with it. Ika'ili Tudava not only created many of the features of the world, he also allocated to the separate ancestral *tosunapula* pairs upon their emergence the *kekwebu* images and *peu'ula* powers that would be distinctive of them. And then he issued instructions to each *tosunapula* couple to lay claim to specific parcels of the land and sea. As the *tosunapula* began their migrations from Labai, the ancestral village of Tabalu close to Obukula cave, they began to call into existence the various animals, plants, and other phenomena of the world, which, like them, embodied *some* of the images and powers distinctive of their respective *dala* identities. It was in this way during the episodes of creation and migration that the universe was eventually populated by most of its now-known occupants and features.

It is an important detail that while *tosunapula* ancestral couples qualify as *bilubaloma* “spirits” in the generic sense, they are conceptualized separately from the *baloma* “souls” housed in their human descendants’ bodies and from the *baloma* “spirits” released upon mortal death to experience an afterlife in Tuma before being reincarnated back to Boyowa. The key difference is that *tosunapula* brother–sister couples performed their miraculous feats of creating species children of their own *dala* identities by saying or vocalizing those things into existence in the manner of Ika'ili Tudava. They did not engage in sexual relations with the *tosunapula* of other *dalas*, even those with whom they traveled, until after they settled upon the lands they had been allocated.<sup>5</sup> Once they did come to rest on their assigned parcels, *tosunapula* began to interact with their neighbors of other *dala* identities. Those interactions included exogamous heterosexual copulation, thereby inaugurating Trobriand customary human life and society as villagers now know it. Thus as people settled on the land, fertile married women came to be anchored to their cooking hearths, coinciding analogically with their ability to conceive. And with the innovation of women giving vaginal birth to children following from sexual congress with men of other *dalas* and *kumilas*, the ensuing post-settlement era has been marked by death and reincarnation.

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5. In some cases emergent *tosunapula* sibling couples of different *dalas*, either of the same or of different *kumilas*, traveled together in their migrations. Ancestral *tosunapula* of some of the commoner Malasi *dalas* who currently serve as traditional *wosa* and *gubwatau* supporters of the Omarakana Tabalus fall into this category (see chapter 7; A. Weiner 1976: 56).

Viewed in this way, a person's relations to people external to his/her maternal *dala* and *kumila* that follow from heterosexual reproduction, whether as affines (*yawa*) or as patrilineal kin (*tubulela*), are consequences of the analogous, basically masculine agency that was enacted orally in mythical times by *tosunapula*.

The term "*baloma*" in its narrower and most common usage refers, therefore, to ancestral kin who have been given life through vaginal birth by a human female who enjoyed a material and inter-*dala* existence in Boyowa, and who then died and experienced the spiritual afterlife of Tuma before being reborn back into the visible, material world. *Tosunapula*, however, are unlike their *baloma* spirit descendants of the primal gods in never having been born of mortal women, in never having died, and thus in never having undergone the cycle of rebirth. They continue to exist as some of Tuma's perpetual residents.

Accordingly, the cosmos is currently inhabited by human and nonhuman beings and entities, each of which (or each species of which) is a "child" or partial embodiment of the *tosunapula* persons of a specific *dala* identity. But also, the beings and entities thus created along specifically *dala* lines of differentiation, or at least those *kekwebu* and *peu'ula* powers associated with their respective *dala*, are among the sacred *tukwa* possessions shared among all humans of those respective *dala* identities. Other components of a *dala*'s *tukwa* legacy include its living and deceased human members, similarly associated nonhuman immortal *tokwai* spirits, lands, decorations, insignia, titles and rank, totems, taboos, myths, and so on, and, of particular interest in the present context, the *dala*'s repertoire of inherited *megwa* spells.

All beings and entities of the cosmos as children of the primordial gods, Topileta and Tugilupalupa, are thus animated by *momova* life or vital essence. The specific images and powers that were ultimately inherited by the created beings and entities and their eventual descendants consist of so many distinct manifestations of *momova*. All those versions of vital essence were in the first instance procreative in an explicitly sexual sense, deriving from the conjugal union and separation of the primal couple. Subsequent procreative acts of the *tubu daisa* gods involved the creation of children orally insofar as *tosunapula* brother-sister couples observed the "taboo" (*bomala*) against *dala* and *kumila* sexual incest (*suvasova*). Even so, as they migrated and reproduced children of their kind exclusively orally, they did so *quasi-incestuously* (see chapter 8) through the creative recitation together of *kekwebu* images as words that have associated with them *dala*-specific *peu'ula* powers. Therefore, the primeval procreative and creative powers exhibited mythically by Topileta and Tugilupalupa and by

Ika'ili Tudava and the *tosunapula* of different *dalas* are duplicated in the capacities nowadays exhibited by magicians in the performance of *megwa* through the detachment or enunciation of sacralized words and supported by the continuing participation of invoked *tosunapula*, ancestral *baloma*, and other spirits.

Consequently, as I shall explain below, present-day *megwa* spells are the creative vocalizations of *tosunapula* employed in the proximate aftermath of creation and subsequently transmitted intact to and enacted by living human descendants. However, the miraculous achievements of the divine *tubu daia-sa* and *tosunapula* did not result from the mere utterance of *megwa* "words," as Malinowski maintained of contemporary magicians. This is because those words are properly understood to be and to have been personal *kekwebu* components of the omnipotent sentient beings who, through their externalization, contributed to the creation of the cosmos, or parts of it, along *dala*-specific lines. Therefore, when magicians nowadays call forth the personal images of their predecessors (and other *bilubaloma* spirits; see below), they are effectively replicating or reenacting events of mythological creation. As Malinowski ([1925] 1948: 74–75) correctly reported, all of the potent *megwa* spells in current existence are assumed to be unaltered from their original forms as generated at the time of creation. There are many *megwa*, however, which have been subsequently lost, in whole or in part, or mismanaged, thereby rendering them ineffective or weak.

Because the *tosunapula* siblings ancestral to a specific *dala* are understood mythically to have also verbally created distinctive kinds of nonhuman beings and entities, those latter species are likewise viewed as children (*gwadi*) of those *tosunapula*, thereby sharing with their human codescendants some of the same *dala*-specific identifying *kekwebu* images and associated *peu'ula* powers. I stress *some* here because, as in the case of strictly human procreation as traditionally understood by Trobrianders, children acquire some but not necessarily all of the characteristics of each of their parents. Nonsentient children of the *tosunapula*, in other words, did not acquire the specific images and powers of mind and thought. This means that the portion of every *dala* constituted as a sentient human collectivity is connected by means of shared images and powers to a unique population of nonsentient, nonhuman beings and entities of both Boyowa and Tuma (see chapter 7).

The chiefly Tabalu *dala* of Malasi *kumila*, for example, has various animal and plant, and natural and celestial, beings with which it identifies. Members of Yogwabu, an authochthonous, once-chiefly, now-commoner (*tokai*) land-owning *dala* also of Malasi *kumila* based also at Omarakana, recognize yet other

beings and entities mythically created by its *tosunapula* with whom living members identify, and so on. The general principle here is that, if the word naming a certain species or any of the other features associated with it is mentioned in a *megwa*, that species and its characteristics are part of the *tukwa* of that particular *dala*, ideally inherited unchanged from the time of creation. That species, in other words, is seen as sharing kindred *kekwebu* and *peu'ula* with persons who also identify with that *dala*.

Taking the example of the *tapwala* segment of the *vatuvi* gardening spell discussed by Malinowski (1935a: 96–98; 1935b) and Tambiah (1968: 191–92), the “grubs,” “blights,” “insects,” “beetles,” and so on, that “bore” and “destroy” crops and that are to be “swept” and “blown away” are constituents of the *tukwa* of the magician’s and his/her predecessors’ *dala*.

This is one, but not the only, reason I have argued that the meaning of *dala* goes far beyond “subclan” or “matrilineage group”—the usual definition in anthropology since Malinowski—as it includes also the beings and entities of the cosmos which together embody, in whole or in part, the same images and powers. I believe that only Susan Montague (1979: 43–49, 71, 103–4; 2001) has perceived that *dala* consists not in a corporate group or matrilineage of people but in essentially shared magical capacities—what I have presented here in terms of shared *kekwebu* images and *peu'ula* powers.

The bird, fish, mammal, and plant species, *koni* emblems, designs, and decorations, traditional lands, and politico-ritual rank, as well as the people and the *megwa* they embody as common descendants of the same mythical *tosunapula*, are thus all parts of and participants in the same *dala* identity, its *tukwa*. A *dala*’s store of *tukwa* images and powers is the ultimate source (*u'ula*) of the life of its human and other members. To those *dala* members with the capacity of mind and thought, those *tukwa* images and powers are “sacred” (*bomaboma*). They should avoid ingestion of them in exactly the same sense as people should avoid *dala* incest (*suvasova*) and other practices designated as *bomala* “taboo” (see chapters 7–8).

There are two critical qualifications regarding the scope of *dala*, however. First, not all *tosunapula* who emerged as children of Topileta and Tugulupalupa at the time of creation are genealogically ancestral to living humans. These others are Tuman spirits (*bilubaloma*) of specific kinds who also migrated and settled (*tosibogwa*) across the land- and seascape but never adopted the practices of heterosexual reproduction initiated by humans which followed the eventual occupation of specific locations by *tosunapula* ancestors of humans.

As one result, these other spirits do not undergo the death and reincarnation that became the fate of living people consequent to the initiation of exogamous, inter-*dala* heterosexual reproduction. These nonhuman *tosunapula* emergence spirit beings are thus immortal, with the characteristics and capacities of mind, thought, and perpetual life of inner Tuma, living within specific parcels of land, underground, in large trees, grottoes, large stones, ceremonial carvings, and so on.

These nonhuman *tosunapula* spirits are those which have been described ethnographically as *tokwai* “nature sprites.”<sup>6</sup> The world’s *tokwai* in this sense emerged from Obukula alongside or being carried by their human counterparts, thereby sharing with them the same *kekwebu* and *peu’ula* so as to identify and classify them according to *dala* distinctions. And just as the *tosunapula* progenitors of humans were distributed among specific locations of the land and sea, their nonhuman *tosunapula* relatives were scattered accordingly. It is for this reason, for example, that the human *tolivalu* “owners” of specific partitions of land and seabed share *dala* identity with the *tokwai* that invisibly inhabit those locations, since those *tokwai* are also regarded as *tolivalu* co-owners of the same tracts and included among the *tukwa* of the local *tolivalu* leader’s or *torwosi* magician’s *dala*.

The *tokwai* that emerged and migrated alongside particular human *tosunapula* were endowed by their divine parents with the same *kekwebu* images and *peu’ula* powers of mind and thought. This originating class of emergent *tokwai* spirits, in short, qualify as *tomota* “persons” even though they are not and have never been biologically human. It is for this reason that magicians can communicate with them through *megwa*, invoking them by name along with ancestral *tosunapula* and *baloma* in *u’ula* and *doginala* passages of spells. Consequently, through these and associated ritual means, not just ancestral human *baloma* but also *dala*-affiliated *tokwai* such as Bwenaia can participate in activities undertaken by their human kin. Moreover, a given magician personally identifies with those summoned nonhuman *bilubaloma* as parts of his/her own person through the sharing of *tukwa* images and powers, even though he/she is not descended from them in the same sense that he/she is from his/her human *baloma* progenitors: that is, ultimately through parturition. Thus nonhuman *tokwai* spirits can participate in the magician’s magic as a component part of his/her person.

6. The malevolent, war-like *tawva’u* or *itona* thought to cause epidemic disease are a subcategory of *tokwai*.



Secondly, not all of the beings and entities of Boyowa and Tuma that are commonly proclaimed to house *tokwai* spirits are sentient, possessing the images and powers of mind and thought. Here, as with the term *baloma*, the term *tokwai* carries a certain ambiguity. While the, let us say, “ordinary” visible animals, plants, and other material features of Boyowa are understood to be animated by invisible *momova* vital essence of Tuma and to share many of the images and powers of the original nonhuman *tosunapula-tokwai* of creation, on their own they lack the characteristics of mind and thought. As some informants put it, these visible material beings and entities might well incorporate “*tokwai*” in the sense of *kekwebu* and *peu’ula*, but they are distinct from the mindful *tokwai* of creation with which they are thereby connected or of which they are material tokens. Thus, there is a sense in which magicians can refer to and draw upon the images and powers of named animals, plants, and other features of Boyowa in their spells insofar as those species are animated by the same *dala*-specific characteristics as the original nonhuman *tosunapula* with whom magicians also identify.

A magician as participant in his/her *dala*, therefore, enjoys a “totemic” relationship with the sentient and nonsentient *tokwai* that emerged from Obukula with his/her *tosunapula* ancestors and thus with the specific animal, plant, and natural species associated or identified with them. The shared images and powers connecting them are the *kekwebu* and *peu’ula* that are mainly voiced in the middle *tapwala* segments of spells where instructions to the spirits are recited.<sup>7</sup>

In general, people of a given *dala* must observe certain dietary and other restrictions (*kikila*) associated with exactly the beings and entities that are called upon in the *tukwa* spells of the *dala* with whom they identify (see chapter 7). These include the *bomala* “taboos” mentioned by Malinowski and others that accompany specific *megwa*. Parents instruct their children about food or other behavioral restrictions even if they (the children) do not know or will never know the exact wording of their *dala*’s spells. This way, when grown, those children

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7. In this regard, Trobriand cosmology conforms to Descola’s model of totemic as well as animistic and analogistic ontologies. This explains, in part, Seligman’s (1910: 661–735) strong focus on “totems” in his formulation of Northern Massim social organization. In the language of Trobrianders, however, there is no word which corresponds exactly to the English word “totem.” The “bird” and other totem-like associations discussed by Seligman and others are referred to as *gugurwa* “property,” meaning inalienable “possessions” or “attributes,” of all kinds, inclusive of *tukwa*, *koni*, *gulagula*, and so on, as discussed elsewhere.



who are eventually taught the spells will be able to use them effectively and others will also be able to benefit. Violation of one's *dala*'s taboos, amongst other undesirable consequences, alters the images and powers of one's person, thus rendering them unrecognizable to the ancestral *baloma* who observed those proscriptions after they were created or while they were alive in or on Boyowa. Rather than performing actions as a given spell instructs, the named spirits are "thought to turn their backs" on anyone they do not recognize as themselves in terms of shared images and powers. Violation of the *kikila* restrictions of one's *dala* is thus analogous to the commission of *dala* incest (*suvasova*), which similarly compromises one's *dala* identity (see chapter 8).

The many distinct species of animals, plants, and "natural" phenomena that populate Boyowa are related to one another and thus have the potential of coparticipation, as outlined above, through the perceptions that people hold through their own capacities of mind and thought. This is how seemingly distinct beings and entities of the visible world can nonetheless embody the same or analogous *kekwebu* and *peu'ula*. Even though black clouds and *maua*, a species of black fish, are clearly different entities, their sharing of the image of "blackness" (*bwabwau*) enables them to be meaningfully voiced together in Omarakana's weather magic for producing heavy rains. On yet other *kekwebu* and *peu'ula* criteria, the sea-passage of Kadilabona, the village of Labai, *de'u* leaves, and the leaf ribs of coconut palms jointly cited in the *vatuvi* spell are assimilated to each other.

These are exactly the kinds of metaphorical and metonymical connections that Tambiah (1968), through his initial performative approach, insightfully recognized as explaining what he interpreted as the power of magical words. However, in the view of the indigenous cosmogony and cosmology elaborated here through my NBME adaptations of the NME consistent with Lévy-Bruhl's and Tambiah's later participation theory, the power of those words has everything do with Islanders' understanding that their significations and effectiveness are equivalent to the personal constitution and agency of the magician as identified with invoked *baloma* spirits.

### MEGWA SPELLS AS REPRODUCTION

This leads me finally to consider the agency of spirits in connection with procreation as a key dimension of Trobriand kin reckoning along with magic. From

the very beginning, my field interlocutors have been adamant regarding the magical agency of *bilubaloma* rather than words alone in the performance of *megwa*. My initial impression was that, through invoking those spirits, the magician was recruiting them to transport mystically the invisible images and powers of the named nonsentient species from their specific locations in the external Boyowan world, bringing them together and manipulating them *outside the magician's body* before being transferred by the spirits to the patient for producing the desired results.

In subsequent discussions, though, I was introduced to the basically opposite scenario. The *kekwebu* and *peu'ula* of "natural" species and phenomena that the magician calls forth in the *vatuvi* spell—for instance, the grubs and beetles that are swept and blown away—are seen as coming instead from the magician's own bodily interior (*lopola*) as per the *tukwa* of his/her *dala*, where they have been stored for vocalization and projection, then to be joined with or energized by *yuviyavi* heat and carried forth invisibly by *or as* the spirits from and through Tuma to the intended target or destination. The complete externalized, vocalized animated *megwa* that is viewed as a magician's progeny is thus considered to be equivalent to a mindful person (*tomota*). Spells, in other words, are composites of the *dala*-specific images and powers of the mythical *tosunapula* children, human and nonhuman, generated by their procreative expulsion from the conjugal embrace of Topileta and Tugilupalupa. The utterance of *megwa* through men's oral cavities, in other words, is analogous in different but complementary ways to the *masculine ika'ili* creative acts of *tosunapula* origin ancestors, on the one hand, and to the giving of *feminine* birth through women's vaginas, on the other.

Recall my description above of the procedures by which *megwa* are supposedly produced within and without magicians' and initiates' bodies: namely, how *megwa* vocalized by the magician repetitively emerge from his/her vocal channel to be passed into the initiate's oral cavity; how the *megwa* are repeatedly voiced by the recipient so that they can be internally formed or memorized, indicating that no one can learn a spell through a single repetition; how the memorized words are disentangled from each other so that they can dissolve and flow through and be stored in the watery *sopi* "blood" of the initiate's body; how in being recalled as *megwa* they are summoned to the magician's mind, where they are reconstituted or re-formed into a coherent, ordered thought; how that insubstantial but ordered thought can then be repeatedly enunciated by the organs of the throat and mouth for emergence, at once to Boyowa, to

outside the magician's material body, but invisibly also to be injected into the internal, invisible realm of Tuma that permeates the outer visible world.

These steps follow closely the processes involved in indigenous views of human procreation and birth as I have elsewhere summarized them (Mosko 1995, 1998b, 2005b) on the basis of the reports of previous investigators but subsequently affirmed in general outline through my field inquiries.<sup>8</sup> I present the key connections here as a series of analogies between procreation (**in bold**) and magical generativity (*in italics*):

**Children are conceived partly as a formation (*ikuli*) of the gendered elements or contributions of two gendered parents, a feminine, largely substantial but fluid or bloody mother and a masculine, largely insubstantial but nonfluid, inelastic father.**

*Megwa consist of a formation (*ikuli*) of elements drawn from two gendered parts of the human body (i.e., disconnected words stored in/flowing amorously through the body's bloody *lopola* interior and masculine, largely insubstantial/reasoned/structured *nona mind*).*

**Human children are the products of the formation of a fetus wherein the disconnected images and powers flowing in the blood of the mother's *lopola* are drawn down and coagulated in the womb by the repetitive forming influences of the father.**

*The disconnected words of a spell stored in the blood of the magician's body are drawn up into the throat by repetition ordered through the reasoning or thinking capacities of the magician's mind.*

**The repetitive acts of sexual intercourse that have the ability to form or coagulate the mother's womb-blood do so insofar as, being acts of "work" or "labor" (*paisewa*), they generate *yuvuyavi* "heat" possessing transformative powers.**

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8. Tambiah (1968: 195) observed how Malinowski failed to appreciate the symbolic parallels between garden and pregnancy magic, although his informants were clear on the relationship. My argument here is more general: namely, that in the terms of the culture, the logic of *all* masculine magical *megwa* production and creativity is analogous to feminine bodily reproduction and procreation, and vice versa.

*The repetition of chants that consolidates the magical words into coherent spells consist of “labors” (paisewa) which contribute to the spell’s powers of yuviyavi “heat.”*

**As work or labor, acts of sexual intercourse are understood to age the human body.**

*As work or labor, every performance of megwa contributes to the magician’s aging.*

**From the vaginal end of the woman’s body, she gives birth to material children identified as tukwa of her dala.**

*From the head end of the prototypically male magician’s body, he gives birth to immaterial children identified as tukwa with his dala.*

**The father sexually penetrates the vagina of the child-to-be’s mother.**

*The magician mentor provides the spell which enters the initiate’s body through the mouth.*

**The father’s contribution to the child consists in the feeding (*vakam*) of immaterial, invisible images that have the capacity of conveying form (*ikuli*) to the child.**

*The mentor’s contribution consists of immaterial, invisible images that have the capacity of giving form to the disconnected images and powers of the spell otherwise dispersed in the initiate’s body blood.*

**The father feeds the fetus through the mother’s vagina with repetitions of sexual intercourse, resulting in the fetus “child” being *ikuli* “coagulated,” “congealed.”**

*The mentoring magician orally recites the spell numerous times for it to be received, internalized, and *ikuli* “coalesced” as his “child” formed in the initiate’s memory.*

**The mother contributes two components to the child which identify her and it with her *dala*: the distinctive character of her substantive blood and the non-substantial *waiwaia* spirit child sent from Tuma.**

*The magician embodies substantially the tukwa images and powers of his dala along with the nonsubstantial baloma immanent in his own person.*

**The waiwaia spirit child is brought to the mother by baloma spirits of Tuma who identify with the mother's or fetus' (or also the father's) dala.**

*The spell as recited by the magician and transferred to the patient is accompanied by baloma spirits of Tuma who identify with the dala of the magician and mentor (or his father; see below).*

**The repeated acts of sex between the parents shape or coagulate the images and powers of the mother contained in her blood so as to form a fetus in the mother's lopola, after which repeated acts of sex are suspended.**

*The magician's and mentor's repeated reciting of the spell continues until the spell has been completely formed or memorized, whereupon it is stored in the magician's lopola.*

**The fetus gestates in the mother's lopola until such time as she gives birth through her vagina.**

*The spell resides inertly in the magician's interior space until such time as he/she is ready to externalize it through his mouth.*

**The mother's reproductive organs consist of a moist inner lopola container (bam "womb"), delivery tube (bulabola, wila "vagina"), clitoris (kasesa), and labia (bila, bilabala).**

*The magician's vocal apparatus consists of a moist inner lopola container (wadola "mouth"), delivery tube/throat (kayola), uvula (kasesa), and lips (balola, bila) (see Malinowski 1932: 478).*

**In the process of giving birth, women excrete red fluids likened to blood along with the newborn child.**

*When magicians vocalize their megwa in song, they typically excrete or spit red fluids likened to blood from their mouths (i.e., betel spittle, as the chewing of areca nut with betel pepper and lime is a normal preliminary or accompaniment to reciting megwa;*

*also, betel chewing is overtly recognized, as in many Melanesian cultures, as expressive of sexuality).*

**The human child who emerges is constituted of the images and powers of its *tosunapula* and *baloma* ancestral spirits in Tuma.**

*The enunciated magical spell is constituted of images and powers shared with the magician's ancestral *tosunapula* and *baloma* spirits in Tuma.*

**In order to conceive and give initial birth, women's reproductive organs must be penetrated by some external physical means, since being of a given *dala* identity (*tukwa*) is of itself insufficient to conceive and give birth to children.**

*In order to learn a spell sufficiently enough to use it, a magician must internalize the spoken contents of the spell, since being of a given *dala* is not sufficient to mentally know and perform the *tukwa* spells of that *dala*.*

**Owing to the incest taboo (*suvvasova*) forbidding sexual intercourse with persons of one's own *dala* and *kumila*, a child's human father (*tama*) must be of a different matrilineal identity to his child. Fathers and children are thus of distinct maternal *dala* identities (but see chapter 8).**

*A man in possession of the *tukwa* spells of his own *dala* typically mentors and passes that knowledge to a son before it is later returned by the son, acting in the place of his father, to men of the original *dala*. Mentors and recipients of *megwa* are thus normally of different maternal *dalas* (see chapter 8).*

**When parents fail to inculcate their images and powers into their children properly or exactly according to their respective *dala*, the children will be ineffective in their own lives.**

*When magicians fail to learn and operationalize their *megwa* perfectly (as, for example, in leaving words out, violating related "taboos"), the magic will not work properly.*

**The child born to a woman contains the images and powers of the *baloma* spirits of her and their *dala*.**

*The megwa spell voiced by a magician contains the images and powers of its baloma predecessors.*

**Children born of women embody the distinctive images and powers of human and *baloma* “persons” with mind and thought, who are thus capable of exhibiting agency.**

*The megwa children (i.e., spells) created by magicians contain the images and powers (i.e., words) distinctive of human and baloma persons with mind and thought, who are thus capable of exhibiting agency.*

From these parallels, it can be inferred that the magical words of *megwa* do have pragmatic and performative effects, but not only in the narrow ways claimed initially by Malinowski, Tambiah, and others. The magical powers of the words of *megwa* are inseparable from the personal characteristics and capacities of the persons of living human magicians and the spiritual beings who embody them through *dala* or other relationships and identities. In the same respect, humans in Boyowa are the embodiments of the persons of their *bilubaloma* ancestors in Tuma.

## REPRODUCTION BETWEEN AND WITHIN *DALAS*

For the sake of concluding this chapter, I shall concentrate on the implications the above analogies have for indigenous views of human creativity, procreative as well as magical, along lines consistent with Viveiros de Castro’s formulation of the intrinsic relation between magic and kinship. The *momova* vital essence given expression in *megwa* is as magically creative as human procreation is magical.

Returning to Pulayasi’s rendition of cosmic generation, the *tosunapula* ancestors of the various *dalas* were born of the sexual separation of the primal deities from whom they inherited their definitive and distinctive images and powers. But during their creative journeys before settling, the human *tosunapula* did not utilize their genital organs in sexual relations to reproduce offspring of their same *dala* kinds. They were brother–sister pairs who together, while conforming to *dala* prohibitions against sexual incest (*suvasova*), nonetheless possessed the capacity of creating *quasi*-incestuously from their oral cavities

“children,” or beings and entities of the eventually settled world with whom they shared *dala*-identifying images and powers. But still, the parental *brother* of the divinely created *tosunapula* couple is implicitly their *tama* “father” just as the parental *sister* of the *tosunapula* pair is their *ina* “mother.” And in the same respect, the offsprings’ father in this sense is also their *kada* “mother’s brother,” just as their *ina* mother is their *tabu* “father’s sister.” Once settled and entering into relations with persons of other *dala*, however, those children proceeded to reproduce human offspring heterosexually and exogamously from the opposite ends of women’s bodies, their genital “tips.”

Seen in this light, the creative images and powers of *megwa* issuing from magicians’ mouths in the present are remnants among living humans of the creative images and powers of mind and thought emergent from the persons of *tosunapula* ancestors. And insofar as those *megwa* children emerge prototypically from men’s mouths similarly to how women as mothers primarily conceive and give human birth from their genitals, the procreative agency of magicians is “masculine” and “paternal” even though their spells are among the *tukwa* of their own supposedly matrilineal *dala* identities.

This is the case even in those circumstances where particular *megwa* are the exclusive “property” (*guguwa*) of women: namely, with respect to the magic of parturition and the growth and beautification of children (*kemwasila*) performed typically by mothers and fathers’ sisters. While the performance of *megwa* is commonly regarded as a capacity monopolized by men, there are contexts where women, despite their complementary specialization focused on uterine reproduction, generate spells as magical children in a manner comparable to that by men, that is, orally. Similarly, women are not the exclusive agents for giving live birth to human children. They are greatly appreciated for this major role, as befitting their bodily and mental constitutions as defined mythically and otherwise in the culture. But as I outline at various junctures in this volume, men are equipped for contributing vitally to procreative processes as well, albeit as secondary or minor participants in comparison with women. This is one among several contexts where the competencies associated with the two gender categories are distributed such that men and women participate in *both* procreative and magical modes of reproduction but with differing yet complementary weight.<sup>9</sup>

9. Elsewhere (Mosko 2013b), I have described how Trobriand categories of male and female conform to Strathern’s model of Melanesian gender androgyny, wherein



Returning to the mythical charter of bodily and magical reproduction, the *ika'ili* magical powers of the *tosunapula* brother–sister couples were endogenous as to *dala*. Human *tosunapula* of different *dalas* effected their diverse miraculous creations without interacting sexually with one another until the time of eventual settlement aboveground on the land. Thereafter, life changed in all its aspects, including the giving of birth, death, and reincarnation of the descendants of the human *tosunapula* (i.e., their human offspring, who, unlike them, eventually died to become *baloma* spirits in the narrower sense). From that time, *dala* entities have incorporated images and capacities necessary to reproduce their magical and human children both with and without contributions from beings or entities of other *dalas*. A single *dala* by definition thus contains certain capacities of both endogenous and exogenous reproduction—capacities nowadays still embodied in the blood of people's bodies but principally formed and externalized as human offspring by women vaginally and as *megwa* by men orally.

This theme of a seemingly contradictory mix of implications pointing toward both endogamous and exogamous reproduction of *dala* as exemplified in Pulayasi's creation myth recurs systematically in numerous spheres of the culture, as discussed in subsequent chapters.

### *Melanesian "virgin birth"*

In anticipation of those deliberations, it will prove helpful to reflect upon one such context which has already received considerable anthropological attention, the classic reports of Trobriand "virgin birth." As famously reported by Malinowski and others, Islanders have claimed that women conceive their children through the inseminating influence of a reincarnated *waiwaia* "spirit child" of their own *dala* identity. There are several critical ethnographic caveats on those flat assertions.<sup>10</sup> First, *waiwaia* "spirit children" are seen as originating in

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men and women alike (or relational contexts defined as "masculine" and "feminine") exhibit qualities of both genders but in different, complementary proportions. In North Mekeo distinctions of gender, similarly, the distinct reproductive capacities of men and women both involve the ritual "opening" and "closing" of their respective bodies—activities equally critical to the performance of magic and giving birth—but women's predominant manner of opening is inimical to men's magic just as men's closing is detrimental to women's giving of birth (Mosko 1983, 1985).

10. It is not my intention at this juncture to reopen the debate over "virgin birth," for in subsequent chapters, particularly chapters 6 and 8, I delve into the many additional

Tuma, an invisible womb-like, maternal kind of place as illustrated by Obukula cave. But a *waiwaia* spirit child's constituent images and powers, being invisible and *nonsubstantial* yet eventually manifested in its physical appearance in Boyowa, are to that extent masculine or paternal in origin (see Mosko 1995: 767–70). As noted above, the internal *baloma* soul of a living person originating in the implanted *waiwaia* is intimately connected also with the nonsubstantial *kekwebu* images and *peu'ula* capacities constitutive of that person's eventual *nona* mind and *nanamsa* thought or reason—that is, qualities categorically identified with human persons, particularly men and masculinity. To that extent, the inseminating *waiwaia*, although it is of the same *dala* identity as the mother, qualifies as a *masculine* sort of contribution to the child's person complementing the substantive, feminine blood that the child received through its mother.

In short, inseminating *waiwaia* spirit children of maternal *dala* identity are entities constituted also of masculine characteristics, and they can secondarily take the developed form of being “male” (*tau*) or “female” (*vivila*) as well. This is essentially the same recipe as when senior *dala* males transmit their spells to their *dala* juniors, and when male magicians give voiced form to the images and powers of spells coursing through their blood.<sup>11</sup> Acquiring the images and powers of one's *dala* through birth (i.e., as custom-made) by women is not enough for their possessor to effect those capacities magically; one needs also to combine those disjointed images and powers through the structuring, forming, *ikuli*-making agency forthcoming from magical initiations by same-*dala* men—that is, endogenously, whether directly from male *dala* seniors, or indirectly from fathers to sons and then back to the son's father's sister's son(s).<sup>12</sup>

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data which point to a deeper significance of Trobriand paternity than has been reported. Here I am merely focusing on the agentive parallels of *baloma* ancestral spirits in procreation and *megwa* performance.

11. I shall explain below and in subsequent chapters that the notion of “*dala* juniors” includes the children of male (*litulela*) as well as female (*veyalela*) *dala* members.
12. In this passage, I allude to the way in which the gender distinction of “male” versus “female,” along with other key dichotomies in the culture, is systematically cross-cut such that anything conceptualized initially as “male” is typically composed of both “male” and “female” parts, and the same for any being or entity initially classified as “female” (see Mosko 2013b). This formulation comes very close, I think, to exemplifying Marilyn Strathern's (1988) notion of androgynous Melanesian persons conceived in terms of cross- and same-sex relations (see also Scoditti 2012: 67).

Secondly, in the bodies of living humans, the *lopola* bodily interior is viewed as primarily feminine, substantial, and wet, whereas the *nona* mind as the seat of *nanamsa* thought or intelligence to which the *baloma* of a human is intimately associated is viewed as nonsubstantial, dry, and thus mainly masculine in the persons of both women and men (cf. Montague 1983; Scoditti 1996: 69; 2012: 69–71).<sup>13</sup>

Thirdly, even if in some sense a *waiwaia* spirit child embodies masculine qualities to be fused or formed (*ikuli*) with the same-*dala* images and powers flowing in the mother's blood, it is still understood to be transported to Boyowa through magical elicitations of other *baloma* of Tuma, who, according to some reports, are inseminating *male* ancestors (Malinowski [1916] 1992: 219; 1932: 148–49, 150; A. Weiner 1989: 40), or even by *baloma* ancestors of the fetus' human father's *dala* (Malinowski 1932: 147, 150). This, it will be recalled, constituted one of the ethnographic contexts that contradicted Malinowski's theory of the magical power of words.

In sum, even if the *waiwaia* child's *dala* identity is that obtained from its female mother, it is "male" as regards its nonsubstantial masculine *baloma* character. Accordingly, the spirits (whether male or female) seen in the character of their action as responsible for transporting the nonsubstantial *waiwaia* to the mother are masculine and hence "paternal." Being such, the contribution of the inseminating *baloma* on the basis of sharing *dala* identity with the mother is effectively incestuous or quasi-incestuous.

This should not cause total surprise. Within the framework of "matrilinal inheritance" of *dala* identity as it has been presupposed in most prior ethnographic accounts, there are indications from the indigenous cosmology of complementary masculine-paternal spiritual agencies—agencies which in one way or another involve contributions of images and powers outside of or separate from the lineaments of strict *dala* maternity.

This is my main, final concern. Virtually the same logic of procreation applies in the intergenerational cycling of *megwa* spells. Since the *tosunapula* settled into village communities at the end of their mythical wanderings and their vocally generated offspring perpetuated the exogamous heterosexual reproduction

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13. For the sake of completing the full set of parental contributions, although the *vakam* "feeding" of children both pre- and postnatally is construed as a largely paternal contribution as it consists significantly of substantial food, the father's contributions include feminine elements complementary to the masculine ones originating through mothers. In Mosko (2013b) I have discussed additional cultural contexts where the male/female dichotomy is recursively bisected.

of their human descendants, their *megwa* spells have *not* been typically or by rule inherited *directly* or *automatically* by nephews from uncles or other *dala* elders. To Malinowski's considerable consternation ([1916] 1992: 226–27; 1932: 345, 349; 1935a: 177), the most important and powerful *megwa*, such as those of chiefs, village leaders, garden magicians, and other ritual specialists (i.e., *tukwa* spells), are regarded as among the collective wealth of their matrilineal *dala* groupings. But the *dala* men supposedly entitled to inherit those formulae are typically not the first to be given them; rather, customarily, they must pay heavily (*pokala*) whereas, paradoxically, magicians' sons are given them "freely" by their fathers first, even though those sons possess different matrilineal *dala* and *kumila* identities as strictly defined. For Malinowski, this illogic was a key source and manifestation of what he saw as the conflict between principles of "matriarchy" and "patriarchy," or "mother-right" and "father-love" (1927; cf. Powell 1956; A. Weiner 1976: 137–68; Spiro 1982).

I attempt to resolve this seeming contradiction in a detailed analysis contained in chapter 8. For present purposes, it will prove useful to present a brief sketch of that argument. The children (*latu*) of male members of a given *dala* are classed as a particular subcategory of *dala* members and hence as *part of their fathers' dala's tukwa*. These children of men are termed *litulela* "men's children" (and reciprocally a person's father's maternal *dala* kin are called *tubulela*), as distinct from the children of *dala* women and the *dala* kin of one's mother (*veyalela*). *Litulela* affiliates receive through procreative and other contributions and retain through their entire lifetimes the distinctive *kekwebu* and *peu'ula* of their fathers' maternal *dalas*, not only those of their mothers. Fathers and children are thus anything but "strangers" (*tomakava*) to one another as claimed by Malinowski (1932: 3, 5, 16; cf. Robinson 1962; A. Weiner 1976; Hutchins 1980). This is why, for example, children exhibit the appearance or form (*ikuli*) of their father, and a man's children are expected to contribute to funerary and other *sagali* exchanges alongside their *tubulela* paternal kin even when they, as *veyalela* members of their own maternal *dala*, are sometimes the formal recipients of those prestations, and vice versa (see chapters 6 and 8).<sup>14</sup>

14. To my knowledge, the only other ethnographer to have mentioned this classification of inter-*dala* relations is Katherine Lepani in connection with mortuary *sagali* performance:

*Veyalela* is working *sagali* for one's own *dala*, or the mother's side, and *litulela* is working *sagali* for the father's side. As verbs, these terms describe how

Not only is this directly relevant to indigenous theories of procreation and to the rationale for magicians customarily to transmit their secret *megwa* to their sons rather than to their supposedly legitimate *dala* heirs (see also Mosko 2013b, 2014a, 2014b); it underscores how *dala* “matrilineages” and *kumila* “clans” are neither *matrilineal* nor *groups*, and how the Trobriands can be taken to exemplify a “matrilineal society” only with great distortion.

These claims can be independently verified by reference to the typical pattern whereby *dala* land is inherited. As Edwin Hutchins (1980: 19–43; pers. comm) has clarified (see also Powell 1956: 391, 393–97; A. Weiner 1976: 125, 157–59, 163; Campbell 2002: 52), the rules for men to inherit *dala* land apply in most particulars to the transmission of *megwa* I have outlined. This is because land and *megwa* are both considered to be the principal *tukwa* of any given *dala* additional to its human and spiritual membership. Fathers are indeed expected to give their land or spells either as *buwala* to favored sons or as *mapula* reciprocities for the *kaivatam* indulgences (e.g., food, labor, areca and betel, tobacco, money) that considerate, loving children customarily present to fathers over the full course of their lives (see chapter 6; Hutchins 1980: 26, 34–35). These exchanges are part and parcel of the intimate *litulela*–*tubulela* relationship which conjoins the people of father’s maternal *dala* and their offspring. Such reciprocities and other observances are accepted as sufficient justification for a father to give important items of male wealth imbued with the images and powers of his

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one participates in *sagali* and contributes to the distributions; as nouns, they describe the particular form a distribution takes. The women who bring massive amounts of *doba* to *sagali* are from the *toluu’ula dala*, or they are the daughters of the male members of the *toluu’ula dala* who “go inside” *sagali* to work for their fathers. Women are always compelled to do *sagali* for their father’s *dala* because, they say, “He was the one feeding me when I was a child.” One woman explained it this way: “When it comes to *sagali* for the father’s side, we can feel the difference between our mothers and our *bubus* [i.e. father’s sisters]. Mothers have nothing to do with it. That’s the time we feel the separation from our *dala* and we feel closer to our father’s relatives.” (2012: 77)

To avoid misunderstanding, men also affiliate in exactly the same manner as *litulela* to their respective paternal *tubulela dalas* in mortuary and other contexts. And for the record, Powell followed Malinowski in disavowing a kinship role between fathers and children aside from being “affines” to one another: “There is no socially defined ‘father right’ or principle of patrilineal descent in the Trobriand kinship system; there can therefore be no conflict between a social principle of father right and one of mother right as the basis of the matrilineal kinship system” (1956: 156).

own maternal *dala* to one or more of his favorite sons, and sometimes daughters, who, as *litulela*, are “one *dala*” (*kɔwetala dala*) with him and his maternal relatives.

Mainly because of the usual residence pattern of patri-virilocality, a man’s dispersed male *dala* relatives (uncles, brothers, nephews) are practically excluded from those same opportunities; hence, it is much later in their adulthood that male *veyalela* maternally related kin might present substantial *pokala* solicitations to their elders, more or less in substitution (*kemapu*) for the *kaivatam* or *kipatu* gifts of sons, with the intention of acquiring land, *megwa*, or other *dala* wealth. Those *pokala* prestations are intended to cultivate in the uncle or *dala* elder dispositions of “pity” (*ninabwela*) and “love” (*yebweli*) analogous to those routinely generated through intimate participation in paternal relationships. Through *pokala*, in other words, *dala* junior males are viewed as attempting to establish “adoptive” (*vakalova*) father–son ties with their own *dala* seniors. It is according to the identical logic that, on the one hand, chiefs and local leaders will often formally adopt a young chosen nephew as “son” (*latu*) to succeed them, as in the case of Pulayasi;<sup>15</sup> and on the other a chief’s village and regional followings comprising persons of numerous *dalas*, including his resident fellow *dala* members, affirm their status as *gwadi* children, or sons and daughters, to him as their *tama* father (see chapter 8).

The result is that before the land and *megwa* spells of a specific *dala* are transmitted endogenously across generations, they commonly pass from fathers to sons—including to “nephews” or others adopted as sons, and nominally, therefore, to men in that specific respect “outside” of the maternal *dala*—before they can *exogenously* reenter the *dala* of their matrilineal origination. If a *dala* elder’s son has already received *tukwa* from his deceased father, then the father’s male *dala* relatives must make a special payment (*katuyumali*), more or less equivalent to *pokala*, to the son who has “replaced the father” (*kemapula*; A. Weiner 1976: 26, 133, 196–97; Mosko 1995: 771), so as to elicit the *tukwa* of their own *dala* from him.

In short, *megwa* children are regenerated within a *dala* according to processes analogous to how human children are procreated with their endogenous masculine and feminine *dala* identities and through extra-*dala* *litulela*–*tubulela* paternal contributions. Although the capacities of *megwa* recapitulate the

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15. The contemporary chief of Kwenama *dala* based at Yolumgwa village, John Kasaipwalova, was also formally adopted as a son by his mother’s brother, the previous chief, Narabutau (see chapter 9).

mythical asexual-endogenous masculine creative powers of *tosonapula* origin kin before settlement, the processes by which they are reproduced nowadays within and between *dalas* reflect as well the exogamic exchanges inaugurated by *dala* ancestors subsequent to their mythical settlement on the land.

I shall return to this complex interweaving of the implications of both incestuous/nonincestuous and endogamous/exogamous reproduction in chapter 8 in relation to the circumstances of particular concern to persons and *dalas* of high chiefly or other rank.

To close the current discussion, the notions of “personal partibility” and magical “participation” implicit in the composition, generation, and transmission of *megwa* spells provide new lenses through which two prominent puzzles of Trobriand culture can now be reconfigured and hopefully solved. The crucial conceptual innovations here are that in the Trobriands persons are not viewed as unitary, autonomous subjects in the sense of canonical Western “individuals” separate from the inanimate “objects” or “things” that they “possess” or “own.” Instead, they and their thoughts and products are composed of the detachable, elicitive components of other persons, including the elements and relations of *baloma* souls and spirits and the *kekwebu* images and *peu’ula* powers of which all beings of the cosmos are constituted and in terms of which they participate with each other.

As concerns Malinowski’s puzzle over magical efficacy, the words of spells are effective not following from their categorical differentiation from *baloma* and other spirits, but because they *are* spirits, or at least detachable, personal components of them. As for the enigmata over “virgin birth,” the inseminating influences of matrilineal spirits, *waiwaia*, blood, warmth, dripping water, and so on, are in the terms of the cosmogony and wider culture not separate from the agency of procreative fathers; they embody them.

However, the utility of personal partibility and participation as lenses for reinterpreting Trobriand culture as demonstrated in this and the preceding chapter does not stop there. From a Malinowskian viewpoint, without the aid of these two analytical devices, it is difficult to envision the images and powers of *megwa*, including the words used to index them, as anything other than mere “objects” categorically distinct in character from the *kekwebu* and *peu’ula* animating parents, children, and *baloma* as “subjects.” After all, it is the faculty of personal partibility and participation to dissolve the distinction of persons and things that has enabled indigenous views of magical and procreative agency to be seen as analogues of each other.

## CHAPTER FIVE

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### *Bwekasa*

#### *The life-giving sacrificial rites of Trobrianders, living and deceased*

In a number of magical formulae, there is an invocation of ancestral spirits, and they receive offerings in several rites. But there is nothing of the mutual interaction, of the intimate collaboration between man and spirit which are the essence of religious cult.

Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922: 73)

The correspondences between performances of magical spells and the procreativity of sexual reproduction are but two of the ways *baloma* spirits and living Trobrianders participate in sustaining each other's lives. This and the next chapter describe additional pathways along which spirits and villagers as partners interact prior to the performances of *megwa* and, it can be argued, sexual intercourse. These interactions involve Trobrianders offering obligatory "payments" (*ula'ula*) and "sacrifices" (*bwekasa*) to *baloma* and other spirits in order to elicit successful ritual outcomes, whether as the realization of their magical or their

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This and the following chapter consist of elaborations of a paper (Mosko 2015a) of the same title presented at the symposium, "Malinowski's legacy: 100 years of anthropology in Milne Bay Province," Alotau, August 2015.



reproductive intentions. Similarly, as described in chapter 7, for magical spells and sexual acts to be effective, persons as agents must have observed specific “taboos” or restrictions on their general behaviors in accord with the *dala* identities they share with their ancestral and magical predecessors.

At numerous junctures in his writings, Malinowski mentions how at various times Trobrianders make “ceremonial payments” or “sacrificial offerings” to *baloma* spirits in connection with their performance of certain *megwa*. Because he confounded the two principal functions of these prestations under the single label, “*ula’ula*”—that is, the distinction between “payments” and “sacrifices”—his exegeses of *ula’ula* led him into certain misunderstandings, as interpreted at Omarakana, that contributed to his broader misreading of the source of magical agency and the character of relations between living people and the spirits of Tuma. In order to unscramble this confusion, it will be necessary to summarize as a tentative strategy the two classes of *ula’ula* as Malinowski understood them. First, virtually all public ceremonials executed by chiefs, village leaders, and *towosi* ritual experts on behalf of their communities are formally initiated by the presentation of *ula’ula* which qualify, and correctly so, in Malinowski’s terms as “ceremonial payments” (e.g., [1916] 1992; 1935b: 94–95, 148). These dispersements struck Malinowski as particularly notable in being “the only ceremonial element (in the narrower sense) in magical performances [he] was able to detect” ([1916] 1992: 172). In the footnote to this passage, Malinowski explains by “ceremonial in a narrower sense” he meant “as opposed to the mere uttering of the spell over a certain object” (ibid.: 261n).

In respect of the “payment” dimension of these transactions, Malinowski additionally remarks,

A further economic feature of magic is the payment, which the magician receives for his services. There are many types of payment; some given occasionally by an individual for a definite act of magic, as in the case of sorcery or healing magic; others, paid at regular intervals by the whole community, as in the case of garden and fishing magic. In some cases the payments are considerable, as in sorcery, in rain and fine weather magic, and in garden magic. In others, they amount to little more than a mere formal offering. (1922: 426–27)

*Ula’ula* prestations in this sense are significant insofar as they are regarded as mandatory preliminaries to the performance of public rites, but the extent to which they qualify as being “sacrificial” is questionable. In any case, this class of

*ula'ula* offerings must be regarded as essential components of the overall indigenous magico-religious complex.

Performances of the second type of rite discussed by Malinowski under the rubric of *ula'ula* are actually recognized by Kiriwinans as *bwekasa*, which corresponds closely to the anthropological concept of "sacrifice" (see below). The common English word "sacrifice" is also an appropriate gloss for *bwekasa*, but not for *ula'ula* in the view of my English-speaking interlocutors. In certain passages of his initial "Baloma" article ([1916] 1992: 171–90) mostly to do with activities performed in *milamala* harvest festivities, Malinowski introduced briefly two concepts which are closely tied to bona fide *bwekasa* sacrifices—*bubwalua* and *katukwala*—but again his grasp of these notions as *ula'ula* resulted in his failure to appreciate the agency that villagers attribute to *baloma* and other spirits as kin and thus as critical participants in their lives.

With reference to Malinowski's descriptions of *ula'ula*, the most dramatic and extended of *bwekasa* offerings occur during the annual *milamala* harvest period when *baloma* spirits travel from Tuma to Boyowa to join their living descendants over weeks of collective singing, dancing, and feasting ([1916] 1992: 171–90).<sup>1</sup> On these occasions, the spirits are presented with abundant foodstuffs and valuables (*veguwa*, *veigua*, *veiguwa*) of various sorts in addition to being honored and lavishly entertained. The spirits are understood to consume or take away the internal "*baloma*" (i.e., *kekwebu*) of the proffered articles for their own enjoyment.

Unlike the case with *ula'ula* payments, Malinowski's account of these latter *milamala* offerings included no mention of any direct connection with the efficacy of magical performance. Undoubtedly, though, he does make clear how pronounced sexuality, and therefore the eventual generation of kinship relations, is a conspicuous theme of the harvest festivities of which the *baloma* spirits also partake. And perhaps because of this, he was prevented from grasping the general tenor of cosmological relations between the visible world of Boyowa and the invisible world of Tuma.

As I delve deeper into the differences between *ula'ula* payments and *bwekasa* sacrifices, it should be kept in mind that both fit equally well within the theoretical parameters of personal partibility and participation as introduced in earlier chapters.

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1. Additional sources of varying detail on *milamala* are provided by Baldwin (1971: 283–84, 321–32, 348–56); Ketobwau (1994: 52–53); Scoditti (1996); Senft (1996, 2009).

*ULA'ULA*; CEREMONIAL PAYMENTS

Malinowski relates how *ula'ula* payments and offerings he observed typically follow a two-stage process, although there are notable variations (1935b: 130–31, 242).<sup>2</sup> First, community members contribute substantial quantities of food to the magician who is about to undertake his official ritual duties. Soon after, second, the magician takes a small portion of the *ula'ula* prestation for offering to the *baloma* spirits he is about to address in the opening *u'ula* or base segment of the spell he has been recruited to recite. In his “Baloma” article, for example, Malinowski records:

Another reference to the *baloma*, and a much more important one, though it does not take place during a ceremony, is the exposition or offering to the spirits of the *ula'ula*, the fee paid for the magic. The *ula'ula* is brought to the *torwosi* (garden magician) by the members of the community, and consists usually of fish, but there may be betel nuts or coconuts, or, nowadays, tobacco. This is exposed in the house; the fish only in the form of a small portion of the whole gift, and, as far as I know, in a cooked condition. While the magician chants over the magical leaves and implements in his house, previous to taking them out into the garden, the *ula'ula*, offered to the *baloma*, ought to be exposed somewhere near the medicated substance. ([1916] 1992: 202; see also 1935b: 148)

Note in this passage that Malinowski provides a second meaning to *ula'ula*, that of “fee paid for the magic” (see also 1935b: 242, and below).

*Ula'ula* prestations figured centrally in each of the several ceremonial moments of garden magic that Malinowski described in *Coral gardens*:

2. The word *ula'ula* as recorded by Malinowski and other linguistically qualified investigators (e.g., Lawton 2002a; Hutchins and Hutchins n.d.) is a compound of the word *u'ula* for “base,” “origin,” “cause,” “foundation,” “source,” “reason,” and so on (Mosko 2009). As with similar morphemic duplications in Kilivilan, /*u'ula*/ + /*u'ula*/ suggests the progressive activity of “base-ing,” “source-ing,” “causing-ing,” “doing what is the base, the source, the cause,” and so on. The division of the *ula'ula* prestations that receiving magicians distribute to their *dala* kin along with their magical predecessors therefore affirms the “base,” and so on, of the *megwa* spell at issue, which includes not just the ancestral *baloma* of the magician's matrilineage but the entirety of sentient beings and entities identified with that *dala* (see below). Merely to avoid unnecessary complication, however, I shall adhere to Malinowski's original spelling of *ula'ula*.

In some of the spells [the *towosi* magician] has to repeat the whole series of the names of those who have wielded the magic before him. At one or two stages of his magic, he offers a ceremonial oblation, consisting of a minute portion of cooked food taken from the substantial present he has received, to the spirits of his predecessor. Such presents from the community are the expression of their gratitude and their submission to him rather than a commercial gift. They are the recognition of his services, and in this spirit they are offered to him and to his forerunners. This ritual offering of food, which is an integral part of the magical proceedings, is called *ula'ula*. (1935a: 65)

He notes an additional variation where the preliminary presentation of substantial food to the magician was absent. For instance, he documents how a *towosi* magician “sacrificed” a wild yam to *baloma* spirits at a “sacred grove” (*kapopo*) in the outskirts of Omarakana at the initiation of the annual gardening cycle. In this case, there does not appear to have been a communal sharing of any main bulk of *ula'ula* foods which occurs in other contexts after the *baloma* have eaten their fill (see below):

[Ovavavile] consists of a large clump of trees which has not been cut for many generations, and it lies about midway between the villages of Omarakana and Tilakayva.<sup>3</sup> . . . It occupies the centre of a field which really belongs to Omarakana, but the tabooed grove mythologically and traditionally plays a role only in the Tilakayva magic. It is strictly tabooed to all save the magician, and even he would only enter it for ritual purposes. Anyone who violates this taboo is liable to be stricken by the *pɔwawa*, a swelling of the sexual organs. The natives are so averse from anyone entering it that I never inspected its interior, though I had to pass within a stone's throw of it almost every day during my long sojourn in Omarakana. In the middle of it, I was told, there is a large stone, and on this the *towosi* of Kurokaywa performs a rite. Just before the *kayaku* [gardening council] is held, he carries a large tuber of a species of yam called *kasiyena* into the [sacred place], and laying it on the sacred stone as an offering to the ancestral spirits, utters the following spell:

3. Tilakaiwa (Tilakayva in Malinowski's account) is one of the satellite communities of Omarakana. Traditionally its residents cooperate in gardening activities with the people of Omarakana proper, Yogwabu, Kasanai, and other constituents of the Omarakana chiefly cluster. The Ovavavile grove has been cleared of foliage since Malinowski's time, with the land now subjected to the local cycles of swidden agriculture.

## FORMULA 32

“Who is it that bends down in the grove of Ovavavile?  
 I, Nasibowa’i, I am bending down in the grove of Ovavavile;  
 I shall carry this bending down in the grove of Ovavavile;  
 I, Nasibowa’i, I am bending down in the grove of Ovavavile;  
 I shall carry this my basket on the head into the heart of Ovavavile;  
 I shall carry this my (pledge of) new growth into the heart of Ovavavile.”

In this rite we have a direct association between a tabooed grove, ancestral spirits, a sacred and tabooed object, the stone and the magician. Although in the Momtilakayva system, as in the Kaylu’ebila, the offering to the spirits, the *ula’ula* . . . is made in the magician’s own house, this ceremony is said to bring the whole cycle of gardening under the direct tutelage of the ancestral spirits. In this case the ancestral spirits are those of the predecessors of the magician. (1935a: 278–79; see also 1935b: 326)

Malinowski also describes a food offering to the spirits at the ceremonial planting of *kamkokola* poles—one of the critical stages in the gardening cycle—just prior to the magician’s performance of the requisite spells. Here the collectively proffered food is distributed amongst the villagers in attendance.

The normal *sagali* (distribution) started the ceremony; a man walked past the heaps of food, and at each heap called out the name of one of those present, after which this portion (which had been placed on a wooden dish) was taken by a woman (a connection of the man called) and carried into the village. The women thus departed to the village, taking with them the babies and children. This part of the ceremony was said to be for the benefit of the *baloma*. The food thus distributed is called *baloma kasi* (food of the *baloma*), and the spirits are said to take some part in the proceedings, to be present there, and to be pleased with the food. ([1916] 1992: 204)

I shall have more to report on this “normal” *sagali* practice below in the context of explicating *bwekasa* distributions during *milamala* festivities.

*Ula’ula* offerings feature in the “first-fruits” ceremonies of taro and yams (*taitu*).

The harvest of taro is associated with the ritual eating of fish, *tavakamsi yena*. The fish is caught by the younger men of the village and some of it is offered by the magician to the ancestral spirits as *ula'ula*. Then there is a festive meal in each household, after which taro can be eaten. After the ordinary ritual opening of the yam harvest by the *okwala* and *tum* ceremonies . . . , the magician ritually eats *taytu* (*ivakam taytu*) very much as in Omarakana, and then the new *taytu* may be eaten as well as harvested by all the members of the village, including the *torwosi*. I am not quite certain whether, in Vakuta, there is a general taboo on eating the new *taytu* till the magician has partaken, but I think this is so. (Malinowski 1935a: 424)

Note that it is not stated exactly who eats the larger portion of fish that is *not* presented to the spirits or how the “festive meal” of taro is organized beyond the fact that it is separately consumed by household groups.

In other passages, Malinowski provides additional detail on these “first-fruit” *ula'ula* offerings.

The complex ritual of harvesting the taro and the large yams follows—the *isu-napulo* [literally “emergence”] as it is universally called in the Trobriands. . . . [The magician] carries the digging-stick to the garden and leaves it there till the evening, when he digs up a few large yams and taro. These are brought to the village and next day laid on the graves of those who have died since the last harvest. It is called “the sacrificial offering to the graves” (*ula'ula walaka*). When there are no new graves a ceremonial exchange is made with the village of Tukwa'ukwa, and the festive consumption of fish follows. (1935a: 429; see also 1935b: 130–31)

Elsewhere (1935a: 166) he records that, in the days before village burials were prohibited by government, the freshly harvested tubers were placed at two facing locations on the village's central *bukubaku* plaza: households that had experienced deaths of members in the past year placed their foods on the graves of the recently deceased; others piled their crops on the dancing ground. According to ritual protocol,

Such publicly displayed food is not eaten by the owners, but given to some friend or relative, preferably to those relatives-in-law who normally receive harvest tribute. The kinsmen of the recently dead invariably share their offering with the widow or widower and those relatives by marriage of the deceased who have

taken part in the grave-digging, burial and mortuary rites. On such occasions a pig is often killed and distributed for a festive meal. (1935a: 166)

For the sake of later reference, these first-fruit rites are staged at the beginning of the harvest season that culminates in *milamala* celebrations.

Malinowski observes that the practice of offering *ula'ula* to *baloma* as a prerequisite to performing magic is not restricted to gardening but “obtains in all the other systems” ([1916] 1992: 202). Also, ancestral human *baloma* are not necessarily the only *ula'ula* recipients. For example, *tokwai* “nature sprites” inhabiting a large tree marked for use as a canoe hull are induced to vacate their home with small gifts of food or areca nut inserted in an incision in the tree’s bark accompanied by the canoe carver’s *megwa* incantation (1922: 126–28, 407–8). Similarly, nonhuman but anthropomorphic *tauva'u* spirits are propitiated with offerings of polished stone axe-blades and *kula* valuables in the manner of “chiefs” when they, in the material form of crabs, lizards, or snakes, venture unexpectedly into village quarters (1922: 76–77, 512).<sup>4</sup>

These several entries would seem reasonably to imply that *ula'ula* offerings are deliberately intended to elicit the aid of *baloma* spirits in facilitating the magician’s work as agents in his/her own right. And this seems to be the factor predominant in the minds of the participants. At the “striking of the soil” rite which inaugurates the gardening cycle,

The magician is usually just about to finish his work when, from the western outskirts of the village, a shrill *tilaykiki*, an intermittent yell, is heard, and panting, screaming, racing one another, the men with the offering rush in, and throw down the strings of fish at the magician’s feet, with the words, *kam ula'ula da towosi*, “thy sacrificial oblation, O garden magician”. Usually they add some such words as, “make our gardens good”, or “offer it to the spirits—may they bring prosperity to our village”. (1935a: 94–95, emphasis added)

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4. According to Pulayasi, the category of spirits labeled by Malinowski as *tauva'u* are more accurately called *itona*. *Tauva'u* is the personal name of one of the chiefs or leaders of the war-like army of these nonhuman but anthropomorphic *tokwai* spirits that are responsible for inflicting epidemics upon the people. The Omarakana Tabalu chief has the sole authority or power (*karewaga*) to call out these malevolent spirits in connection with the implementation of his *molu* magic, which causes droughts and famines.

Another point, where magic touches the super-normal or supernatural, is in the association of spirits with certain magical performances. A special type of magical payment, the *ula'ula*, is at the same time an offering to the *baloma* (spirits). The magician will detach a small bit of the large quantity of food brought to him, and put it down on some special place, with the words: "Partake, O spirits, of your *ula'ula*, and *make my magic thrive*." (1922: 422, emphasis added)

Despite this and other evidence, however, Malinowski refrains from drawing any conclusion concerning *ula'ula* that contradicts his assertions regarding the agency of magic being in the words of spells rather than in the participation of *baloma* spirits.

Again, it is to be noted that, though there is a certain amount of communion between the living and the spirits by dreams, etc., the latter are never supposed to influence in any serious way the course of tribal affairs. No trace of divination, taking counsel with the spirits, or any other form of customary communion in matters of any importance, is to be detected. ([1916] 1992: 189–90)

Part of Malinowski's difficulty with this issue in respect of the agency of magical spells can be reliably traced either to informants' unwillingness and/or inability to elaborate their thoughts or to his own shortcomings, or both.<sup>5</sup> When given vague answers to his questions about the participation of *baloma* in the *kamkokola* ritual, for example, he comments: "Beyond these generalities, however, it was absolutely impossible to obtain a more definite or detailed statement from any of the natives, including Nasibowa'i himself" (ibid.: 204). But then he also notes in his "statements about errors of omission and commission" in *Coral gardens*,

Offerings may be made to the spirits, as in the first inaugural rite or in uttering the spell at one of the harvest rites, or in the *kamkokola* ceremony. . . . Then their presence is much more real and effective. But here again I have not gone deeply

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5. In *Sexual life* Malinowski confesses, "I paid little attention to the investigation of dreams, of daydreams, and of free fantasies. It did not take me long to see that dreams did not play the part among the Trobrianders ascribed to them by Tylor and others, and after that I did not trouble much more about them" (1932: 325). This attitude also explains perhaps his failure to collect data regarding *kibobuta* "personal correctness" (see below).



enough into the subject to ascertain what they do and whether they are really believed to be there, at least in the same way as they are believed to be present during the *Milamala*. I did not by direct questions and discussion with the natives collate my observations concerning the *Milamala* with my knowledge of the *ula'ula* offerings. Therefore I can only show the lacunae and state that these are not due to the intrinsic impossibility of answering the question, but merely to my neglect. (1935a: 468–69)<sup>6</sup>

For reasons similar to those explaining the relative absence of additional commentary on the agency of *megwa*, subsequent ethnographers had relatively little

6. In his ethnographic writings, Malinowski ventures no further in the direction of theory to explain the broader function of *ula'ula* or even its role in connection with other facets of village life. However, in his essay “Magic, science and religion” ([1925] 1992), he does offer an opinion with the Trobriand material clearly in his mind. Surprisingly, he retreats to a rare interpretation that smacks of evolutionary speculation, including that of Lévy-Bruhl’s early ideas concerning spirit participation in the mentality of “primitive” peoples.

Sacrifice and communion, the two main forms in which food is ritually ministered, can now be held in a new light against the background of man’s early attitude of religious reverence towards the providential abundance of food. That the idea of giving, the importance of the exchange of gifts in all phases of social contact, plays a great role in sacrifice seems—in spite of the unpopularity of this theory nowadays—unquestionable in view of the new knowledge of primitive economic psychology. Since the giving of gifts is the normal accompaniment of all social intercourse among primitives, the spirits who visit the village or the demons who haunt some hallowed spot, or divinities when approached are given their due, their share sacrificed from the general plenty, as any other visitors or persons visited would be. But underlying this custom there is a still deeper religious element. Since food is to the savage the token of the beneficence of the world, since plenty gives him the first, the most elementary, inkling of Providence, by sharing in food sacrificially with his spirits or divinities the savage shares with them in the beneficial powers of his Providence already felt by him but not yet comprehended. Thus in primitive societies the roots of sacrificial offerings are to be found in the psychology of gift, which is to the communion in beneficent abundance.

The sacramental meal is only another expression of the same mental attitude, carried out in the most appropriate manner by the act by which life is retained and renewed—the act of eating. But this ritual seems to be extremely rare among lower savages, and the sacrament of communion, prevalent at a level of culture when the primitive psychology of eating is no more, has by then acquired a different symbolic and mystical meaning. Perhaps the only case of sacramental eating, well attested and known with some detail, is the so-called “totemic sacrament” of Central Australian tribes, and this seems to require a somewhat more special interpretation. ([1925] 1992: 42–43)

to add as regards *ula'ula*. For Kilivila dictionary definitions, Fellows (1902) and Lawton (2002a, 2002b) provide “gift to garden sorcerer.” Baldwin (1939) defines *ula'ula* as “food or other offerings for support *of relatives*, of garden magician, etc.” (emphasis added), a clarification to which I return below. Hutchins and Hutchins (n.d.) go somewhat further with “ritual exchange and eating of the first produce of the garden, a few yams and a few taro. This community event is an important psychological maker in the garden cycle.” Campbell (2002: 160; cf. Mosko 2014b: 17–18) observes that *toliwaga* canoe owners make offerings of areca nuts, bananas, and coconuts to ancestral male *baloma* prior to the departure of a fleet on a *kula* expedition. She also offers an interpretation of the *ula'ula* offerings of fish for the *torwosi*'s performance of garden magic in connection with the symbolic status of women's and gardens' anchoring and fertility:

The magician makes a selection of the offering and places this on the hearthstones in his house. In catching fish and offering these to the garden magician, men are collectively engaged in the weighing down, or anchoring of the garden's fertility in the same way they weigh down and anchor their wives in marriage. The garden magician places a selection of fish on hearthstones prior to entering the gardens and performing magic to weigh down the soil's fertility. The combination of hearthstone and fish in these inaugural rites links the weighing of women's fertility with that of the garden. (2002: 182)

It is uncertain if this interpretation would carry over into other contexts of *ula'ula* practice (see below). Campbell (ibid.: 153) confirms Malinowski's report of gifts being offered to a *tokwai* “nature sprite,” inducing it to vacate a tree that people wish to cut down for a canoe hull.

In sum, there is only fragmentary information beyond what Malinowski sketched out which sheds reliable light upon the indigenous motivations for *ula'ula* offerings. I claim this with some confidence because *ula'ula* does not qualify as “sacrifice” in the sense ordinarily attributed to that notion in classic theory. The alternative indigenous conceptualization of what Malinowski termed *ula'ula*—i.e., *bwekasa* reciprocities as performed during *milamala* festivities and other contexts—however, does closely approximate anthropological definitions of sacrifice, which I now outline.<sup>7</sup>

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7. These I take to exemplify classic understandings of sacrifice, in stark contrast to Gregory's conceptualization of “gifts-to-god(s)” systems outlined in chapter 2.

## SACRIFICE IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY

It should be recalled that from Hubert and Mauss ([1899] 1964) onward sacrifice typically involves a notion of reciprocal gift exchange between moral persons, including deities as well as the humans who propitiate them. The typically avowed purpose of sacrifice is to affect communication—hence coparticipation in the Lévy-Bruhlian sense—between the sacred and profane worlds so as to change the religious condition of the person on whose behalf the ritual is performed. In the preliminary act of consecration, the person or subject of the sacrifice (“sacrifier”) undergoes a process of initiation whereby elements of his/her “temporal being” are stripped away, reducing him/her to an unalloyed condition of sacredness. Similarly, the mediating “sacrificer” (e.g., a priest) must detach from his/her person qualities/elements antithetical to sacredness, thereby enabling the attachment of the temporal elements detached from the sacrifier (i.e., sins, pollutions, oaths) to his/her own person. These are to be conveyed to the gods or spirits; hence, sacrificed. The person of the sacrifier is assimilated to that of the sacrificer-priest as his/her representative or “mandatory” in the rituals. To this extent, the relevant personal parts of the sacrifier and sacrificer are merged.

On this score, as I shall argue, *bwekasa* reciprocities between humans of Boyowa and spirits of Tuma do closely approximate “sacrifice.”

Succeeding contributors, however, have amended Hubert and Mauss’ model in ways further affirming the sacrificial character of *bwekasa*, particularly in clarifying the pertinence of the sacred/profane dichotomy. The sacrifier’s detached “temporal” features, which Hubert and Mauss equated with profane existence, can in certain circumstances be seen as sacred. In the writings of Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1952), Edmund Leach (1976), Mary Douglas (1966), Valerio Valeri (1985), and others, the sacred realm is typically highly ambivalent, with positive as well as negatively valued and dangerous/powerful elements (sins, pollutions, curses) that sacrificers must shed. In many personal sacrifices, victims are employed to stand for or represent sacrificers. Here the implicit theme of the partibility of persons and relations is paramount: “Indeed, it is not enough to say that [the victim] represents him [the sacrifier]; it is merged in him. The two personalities are fused together,” as Hubert and Mauss ([1899] 1964: 32, 98–99)

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Critical modern amendments to Hubert and Mauss by Evans-Pritchard (1956), Valeri (1985), Lévi-Strauss (1963, 1964), and Viveiros de Castro (2014), among others, are discussed in subsequent sections and chapters.

observed. The victim thus contains a detachable sacred element, “a spirit which it is the very aim of the sacrifice to liberate” through killing for conveyance to the gods (*ibid.*: 30). In light of subsequent theorizing over these sacred ambiguities, the “temporal” elements removed from the sacrificer are transported to the gods or spirits in tandem with the victim’s released soul or spirit.

Given the frequent substitution of slain animal victims for sacrificers, many commentators have focused on death and blood-letting, implying that other kinds of gifts are mere metaphorical extensions of “true” sacrifice (Evans-Pritchard 1956; Beattie 1980; Bourdillon 1980: 16–17; Valeri 1985: 87–88). Hubert and Mauss ([1899] 1964: 12) effectively reject these criteria as arbitrary. I suggest that the element common to blood and other kinds of sacrificial offerings is the detachment of animated elements of the sacrificer’s person. It is not the shedding of blood only that is critical, but also the separation of a vital part of the victim that cannot be detached and then conveyed to gods or other sacred beings by any other means. In many sacrifices, victims’ material parts other than blood are transferred as gifts to gods to consume or assimilate, with remaining body parts subject to other interpersonal transactions, often being eaten by the priest, the sacrificer, or the community at large, thereby transferring to them divine capacities detached from and reciprocated by the gods (e.g., blessings, good fortune, fertility) (*ibid.*: 36–43, 62–63). These latter elicitation are typically the stated objective of sacrifices. At the stereotypic conclusion of such rites, the sacrificer, sacrificer, and other recipients are obliged to take steps to ensure that none of the detached spiritual powers are inappropriately distributed in the world.

Participants reenter the profane realm only after shedding the sacred tokens attached to themselves during the rites (*ibid.*: 45–49, 51). Sacrificial exchange, then, as a prototype of making “gifts to the gods and to the men who represent them” (Godelier 1999), is premised on transactions among agents and patients who are conceived along NME and NBME lines as divisible or partible persons. Not just human actors but also the participating sacred recipients of sacrifices can respond with potent blessings because they too are divine individuals, capable of surrendering potent elements of their persons when appropriately elicited through sacrificial exchange.

In my view, Hubert and Mauss unnecessarily risk confusion when they invoke a distinction between “personal” and “objective sacrifices” (*ibid.*: 10, 51, 57–58, 61, 64–75; cf. Evans-Pritchard 1956: 199–200, 280; Beattie 1980: 30, 39–41, 44). In the former case, sacrifices are performed for the benefit of persons as the ultimate recipients of divine powers and blessings; in the latter instance,

Hubert and Mauss see *objects* as the recipients of the rituals' effects. But they are careful not to reinscribe the Western culture subject-versus-object dichotomy, noting that such "objects" are "things which appertain more or less directly to [the sacrificer's] person" ([1899] 1964: 10, see also 13, 65–66; cf. A. Strathern and Stewart 2008b: xxiv–xxv, xxix; but see A. Strathern and Stewart 2008a: 231–33, 241, 242). This is reinforced in Mauss' subsequent view in *The gift* ([1925] 2017), where he argues that in precapitalist systems, distinctions between persons and things are deemphasized or even nonexistent. Transacting with sacred beings as though they are persons implies that elicitive gift exchanges between living human beings likewise incorporate elements formally corresponding to sacrifice. This, I suggest, makes good ethnographic sense for Melanesia generally. As noted in chapter 2, it has long been appreciated that in Melanesian religions the sacred and profane realms are conjoined in every social activity and relationship, rather than kept radically separate.

In NBME terms, the agencies of both sacrificer and sacrificer derive from the dividuality of their persons into sacred and profane components and their consequent transaction. By becoming a sacred being through the initiatory surrender of profane personal qualities, the sacrificer-priest is construed as either a representative of the gods or spirits, a repository of their powers, or a god or spirit him/herself, indicating further interpersonal detachments and attachments implying the receipt of a sacred token of the divinity at issue (Hubert and Mauss [1899] 1964: 23–25).

Granted, in some respects, Malinowski's account of *ula'ula* oblations would seem to meet these criteria. Of particular significance in this regard is his depiction of what amounts to the merging of the persons of the community, the magician, and the spirits:

This gift to the spirits, which is a diminutive share of the magician's own *ula'ula* reward received from the community, and the words which he addresses to them, are correlated. They establish a sacrificial *communion between spirits, magician and community*. (1935b: 253, emphasis added)

This coparticipation of magician and spirits is indicated also in the specific linguistic use of possessives:

The magician associates himself with the spirits in sharing with them the food which he has received from the community. Thus he speaks about the oblation as

*da*, “our” (inclusive plural), *vaka’ula’ulasi* (*vaka*, prefix; *ula’ula* – oblation; *si* – possessive pronoun plural). (1935b: 254)

This again obscures the key feature of *ula’ula* “ceremonial payment,” which differentiates it from “sacrificial oblation”: that the *ula’ula* portions of fish, areca nut, tobacco, or nowadays money that magicians receive for the provision of their magical services are not shared only with *baloma* spirits but with potentially all members of their respective *dalas*, who claim the *megwa* spells about to be uttered as their collective *tukwa*. For example, when the Tabalu Paramount Chief is given *ula’ula* for performing on the community’s behalf the spells of his *dala* to bring rain or sun, he ideally shares the bulk of the payment he receives with all other Tabalus, living *and deceased*, entitled by their *dala* identity (and their immediate family members) to benefit.

In the course of my field investigations I have been presented with numerous complaints against current chiefs and leaders on precisely this point—that the *ula’ula* and other material benefits received by them in the performance of their official duties are not for their personal use alone but must be shared amongst all who possess equivalent *dala*-based claims to them. Therefore, the token gifts of *ula’ula* that magicians pass on to spirits have instead a separate rationale to that of “sacrifice,” simply to distribute *ula’ula* payments among all persons, spirit as well as human, who legitimately share in the entitlement or authority (*karewaga*) of providing those services as theirs.

## BWEKASA: SACRIFICE

These qualifications of the meaning of *ula’ula* support villagers’ general claims that *baloma* and other spirits are appreciated as the key agents of *megwa*. The payment (*mapula*) of *ula’ula* with those spells requiring it is intended to obligate *baloma* to participate, and failure to pay it will expectably result in the failure of the procedures. Nonetheless, the isolated act of provisioning *ula’ula* is not alone sufficient to elicit the support of *baloma* when the magician eventually turns to them in the context of performing *megwa*.

This is because the Trobriand ritual repertoire also includes the second type of prestation to beings of the sacred realm of Tuma known generically in Kilivilan as *bwekasa* or “sacrifice.” This is the alternate category of offerings alluded to above that Malinowski conflated with *ula’ula* payments. A key difference which

underscores the considerably deeper significance of *bwekasa* is that the *regular* presentation of it by persons singularly and collectively is considered an essential component for securing success in all magical performances. Many times I have been told that if the magician does not strictly follow the road traveled by his magical predecessors, including the regular offering of *bwekasa*, the spirits will “turn their backs (*bikai'isi*) toward him.” If he does sacrifice often to his ancestors as expression of his caring for and love of them, they will stand or sit behind him facing his shoulders or back (*baikeyagi*)—the position *baloma* assume when they are ready to do the magician's bidding. As Pulayasi puts it, *bwekasa* is “the *u'ula*” (i.e., base, cause, foundation) of *megwa* and, by virtue of that, of all human *and*, as I shall explain, spiritual life.

Some of the offerings Malinowski classified as *ula'ula* are actually instances of *bwekasa* sacrifice to the spirits. These include, as outlined above, the “*individual* [payments] for a definite act of magic”; the offerings of feast foods and the displays of *vegurwa* valuables during *milamala* festivities; the “normal” *sagali* distributions of “food of the *baloma*” at *kamkokola* rites and numerous other ceremonial occasions; and the festive meals associated with first-fruit offerings, including the *isunapula* presentations placed on the graves at opposite ends of the central space of the village before being redistributed and consumed.

There is one context where *ula'ula* and *bwekasa* gifts may seem to converge, however. With *bwekasa*, as I shall explain below, the food or other material residues of items offered to the spirits for the sake of their enjoyment are afterward consumed or utilized by specific living humans, albeit not those who have specifically offered them. This is not the case with the bits of fish, areca nut, or tobacco that the *towosi* magician presents to his magical predecessors taken from the *ula'ula* payment he receives from the community. It is forbidden for anyone other than *bilubaloma* to consume these latter morsels. This may seem to be an inconsequential distinction, but in the view of villagers, it is not.

Moreover, many other cultural practices that Trobrianders perform in the course of their collective lives, including several institutions that have been intensively described already in the ethnographic literature under other rubrics, incorporate *bwekasa* sacrifices among their core constituents, but not necessarily *ula'ula*. Therefore, the relative omission of *bwekasa* sacrifice in its own right from anthropological accounts of magic, kinship, and other institutions is not a deficiency of Malinowski alone.

Despite exhaustive attempts, I have been able to discover only a single instance where the word “*bwekasa*” or a cognate of it, and not just the frequently

cited allusions to *bubwalua* “saliva” (see below), appears in the reports of previous investigators. In Damon’s description of the cooking of *mon*, a sago dish and “important delicacy” in continuous preparation throughout the duration of Muyuw (Woodlark Island) mortuary rites, he notes an apparently cognate form of Kilivilan *bwekasa*, or *bwekasiw*.

A man invariably stands over the pot, stirring it with a long, paddle-like spoon. . . . It is the “eye of the food,” the stuff that is supposed to precede all other food. However, some men make a practice of eating nothing but sago (or flour) *mon* during a ritual, refusing everything not up to their standards. In any case a wellprepared pot is finished when, all of a sudden, the coconut oil comes bubbling up and coalesces at the pot’s surface. “*Bwikasiw*” people say. This translates as “It ejaculated!” The statement represents much of the ritual’s sense. The ritual owner’s affines bring him piles of vegetable food and pig, both of which, in this context, are given and received as signs of the affines’ masculine potency. *Mwamon* (fat [cognate with Kilivila *momona*]), now just as often called *gilis*, from the English “grease,” is a metaphor for sexual fluids, most especially semen (*pwak*). (1990: 130–31)

In the Trobriands, *mona* holds a ritually similar special place in virtually all ceremonial exchanges, and there are indications that linguistically the word *mona* is the root of *momona* “sexual fluids” (fig. 5.1).<sup>8</sup> This would seem to confirm that *bwekasa* is a concept of longstanding significance in Northern Massim culture. In support of this, my colleague Alan Jones (pers. comm.), a linguist of Mekeo and related Austronesian languages of Southeast Papua New Guinea, has located an entry in Baldwin’s Kilivila dictionary (1939) for the word “*kasali*,” the /*kasa*-/ root of which is translated as “urge on, incite,” “bequeath, hand on,” “consent,” and “betray.”<sup>9</sup> In a telephone call from Australia to Omarakana in April 2016, my primary research team members concurred with the first two definitions and that, indeed, as Jones suspected, *bwekasa* and *kasali* share the same root. They added, however, that the core meaning of both terms goes significantly further, not merely to urge on, incite, bequeath, say, but to *elicit* or

8. This dish consists of smashed portions of taro cooked by men with boiling coconut oil in large clay pots for formal prestations at mortuary and other ritual performances.

9. Lawton (2002a) adds “agree to terms.”



encourage a specific response from another party, prototypically *bilubaloma* spirits. From his knowledge of languages of this phylum, on hearing this clarification, Jones indicated his agreement, and it fits well with the concept of elicitation that Strathern, Wagner, and others conversant with the NME have featured in their writings about gift exchange.<sup>10</sup> According to my informants, this is not the case with *ula'ula*—a claim which points to the essential difference between the two kinds of spirit prestation.



Figure 5.1. Making *mona* “taro pudding.” Omarakana village (2012).

At Omarakana, *kasali* refers mainly to gifts that fulfill “major purposes,” as when people present a pig, large fish, or big bunches of ripe areca nuts to an important person such as a chief or village leader. Pakalaki notes, “It should be given with heart. There might be an obligation to reciprocate, but only if the recipient can.” He volunteered the example of the Christian God, Yaubada, who gave the life of his son, Yesu, to humanity, with the expectation but not the certainty of return. “That would be *kasali*.” The main difference between *kasali* and *bwekasa*, then, is that the former covers important gifts of all kinds, whereas *bwekasa* involves only those offered to spirits of Tuma (or perhaps Heaven; see chapter 9).

10. I am exceedingly grateful to Jones in this as in other instances for the benefit of his linguistic expertise. As for “consent” and “betray,” he is in agreement with my interlocutors that, in the examples he provided, those translations were plausible but misleading.

I mention in passing that one implication of recognizing the indigenous distinction between *ula'ula* and *bwekasa* is that the two kinds of rituals correlate roughly with the Frazerian dichotomy that Malinowski endorsed between “magic” and “religion,” respectively. Since *ula'ula* payments to *baloma* spirits, as Malinowski construed them, do not involve any propitiation on villagers’ part toward supernatural beings for the sake of receiving direct benefits, they are consonant within his definition of and pragmatic theorizing over “magic.” *Bwekasa* sacrifices connected with magical performance, however, involve precisely the sort of “worship” of *baloma* ancestors that would place them anomalously in the category of “religion,” thereby fundamentally confounding Malinowski’s Frazerian scheme. Thus by grouping the rites that actually qualified as *bwekasa* under the heading of “*ula'ula* payments,” Malinowski was able to avoid this shattering implication.

#### *Daily bwekasa meals*

The most effective way of introducing to readers the basic mechanisms of *bwekasa* is by rehearsing my own initiation into that knowledge, which transpired in the days of my fieldwork immediately following my arrival in 2006. Upon landing at Losuia’s airstrip with a considerable load of supplies and equipment, I was soon left nearly alone after the crowd had dispersed. A middle-aged Asian woman approached me, no doubt sensing my marooned state, and inquired if I was looking for transportation or lodging. As I had been unable to secure arrangements prior to arriving, I accepted her offer of staying as guest with her and her husband at “Bweka Lodge.” Upon being dropped there by her brother-in-law, Maurice, I was introduced with considerable surprise to her husband, John Kasaipwalova, the renowned poet, playwright, and 1970s Kabisawali Movement leader.

I was already aware of those aspects of John’s career having read Jerry Leach’s (1982) account of Kabisawali, but I did not remember until reminded that John was the *guyau* chief of the Yolumgwa village branch of Kwenama, an important *dala* in Northern Kiriwina. I also did not know until told that John was uncommonly knowledgeable and passionate about Trobriand *gulaḡula* “sacred tradition,” thanks to the mentoring of his uncle and adoptive father, chief Narabutau (see chapter 9; Malnic 1998).

In any case, as we were seated on the Lodge’s small veranda that evening, I noticed a large Amphlett Islands clay pot adjacent to the entry door holding

a large ripe papaya. I offhandedly asked John about it. He said it was *bitarwai kebila* (also known as *waiwai kebila*, literally “construct platform [i.e., for presenting *bwekasa*]”), the practice of offering, in this instance, some food to one’s *baloma* ancestors, who, in the course of eating the food’s “spiritual essence,” leave a residue of their *bubwalua* “saliva” on the material substance. John’s papaya, he noted, was being offered to his deceased uncle, Narabutau, and his other magical *baloma* predecessors. He emphasized that the proffered food must be left undisturbed in the pot for some period before it is removed, and then it must be given away to another person. The person offering the *bitarwai kebila* cannot consume it him/herself, and the recipient should share it with his/her own family members or other close relations. If possible, at some later point the first recipient should reciprocate with a return gift (*mapula*) of *bitarwai kebila* to the person who previously gifted him or her in that same fashion.

I came to learn that John makes regular *bitarwai kebila* offerings to his ancestors, the residues of which he passes on to relations in nearby Yolumgwa village. One evening during that first week while my Omarakana home was being prepared, an Australian residing at Kaibola village, who for several months had been running a passenger bus running the length of the island, stopped by and joined us, setting himself down on the chair next to the offering pot. My being a newcomer, the conversation turned to his impressions of Islanders. In the middle of his chastisement of the typical Trobriander as “uncivilized,” he casually extended his arm to flick the ashes from his cigarette into the offering bowl. I will never forget the glances John and I exchanged at that moment.

It was on the second morning following my arrival that I made my initial approach to Paramount Chief Pulayasi at Omarakana (see chapter 1). My curiosity about *bitarwai kebila* had been piqued. Once established, I learned additional details, including the fact that it was just one of many contexts of exchange that amounted ethnographically to *bwekasa*. Thus from the very beginning of my field inquiries, I was equipped to interpret the new information I was to receive over subsequent years as so many aspects of the reciprocal interactions between the villagers and the inhabitants of the invisible world of Tuma around and within them.

I was given my first deep impressions of *bwekasa*’s significance soon after I moved into Pulayasi’s ceremonial *ligisa* dwelling. Every morning and evening, I would share a meal on the veranda with the key members of my small research team, often including the Paramount Chief. Each of those men’s wives would bring a covered bowl of cooked food to the house which, upon arrival, would be

uncovered and placed on a shelf (*bagila*) above our heads until the last expected bowl had come (fig. 5.2). Sometimes we would be given an extra bowl or two of food from other people with whom I had been working. After resting a while on the shelf, the food would all be brought down for us to share out, Pulayasi, if he was present, being served first.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 5.2.** Evening gathering of my “first string” of research collaborators: from left to right, Yogaru, M’tabalu Tokwasemwala (visiting on this occasion), Pulayasi, Molubabeba, and Pakalaki. The shelf on which we regularly offered *bwekasa* is overhead. Omarakana village (2015).

It took me only a few days before I asked if there was any significance to the waiting period and was told, indeed, that while the food was resting there the ancestral *baloma* spirits of our group were consuming the invisible “shadows” (i.e., *kekwabu*) of the food, leaving behind traces of their “saliva” (*bubwalua*). This

11. Customarily, men as household heads are served their food separately and before children, the wife, or others are fed. Pulayasi’s precedence in being served first on the *ligisa* is a token of his relation to members of the research team (i.e., his brothers and nephews) as our *tama* “father” (see chapters 4 and 8).

was basically the same explanation that Kasaipwalova had given me for *bitawai kebila*, except that he additionally referred to the foods after the spirits had extracted and eaten their share as “leftovers” (*kobwaga*). My friends stressed that just as the *momova*-laden shadows or images of the offered food are necessary for the sustenance of the *baloma*, so too are the *kekwebu* traces of *momova* in the *balomas*’ saliva essential for human life.<sup>12</sup>

As our discussions on this topic unfolded over the next few days and afterward, I was guided to a number of critical realizations. For example, without the “hot” (*yuviyavi*) input of the spirits’ *kekwebu* images incorporated in our meals through their depositions of *bubwalua*, the foods, however they were prepared, would have only minimal capacity or strength (*peu’ula*) for fueling human labors and existence generally. The eating of food by humans in any amounts without the benefit of spirits’ *bubwalua* is considered barely, if at all, sufficient (i.e., *mama* “weak,” *tula* “cold”) to sustain human life.<sup>13</sup> By the same token, for humans to prepare and consume their meals without offering *bwekasa* to *baloma* is tantamount to starving them—the very beings upon whom humans rely for their own reproduction and production. In any case, the *bwekasa* routine we had been following was more or less the same that separate family groups (*kaukweda*) observe with their daily meals.<sup>14</sup> Eventually I was to learn that families knowingly share their meals as a *bwekasa* prelude to every one of their common undertakings.

### *Bwekasa reported as “bubwalua”*

Before proceeding, it will be helpful to document other investigators’ references to the *bubwalua* “saliva” concomitant of *bwekasa*. As limited as they are, these data support the broader interpretation of *bwekasa* provided below.

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12. Malinowski records several contexts where this shelf in a magician’s house is used for several kinds of offerings to *bilubaloma* additional to *ula’ula* (1935a: 99, 170, 221, 428). The placing of articles there “pleases the ancestral spirits” (ibid.: 166).
  13. The term *yuviyavi* for “hot” or “heat” refers both to articles or practices which are not merely hot temperature-wise but hot in the sense of ritually effective in producing results. *Megwa* spells, for example, are *yuviyavi* “hot” for growing food, catching fish, courting, practicing sorcery, and so on.
  14. There appears to be no single word for “nuclear family” as such in Kilivila. The term *kaukweda*, which nominally refers to the small porch adjacent to the entry of a *bwala* “house” where household members customarily gather and entertain visitors, is used to refer to the collectivity of what in English is considered as the immediate coresiding family unit.



While the term *bwekasa* (Muyuw *bwikasiw*) has largely passed unnoted in the literature thus far, there are numerous references to “*bubwalua*” (alternatively *bubwaluwa*, *bubualu’a*, etc.) and/or “saliva.” Malinowski gives a brief account of the “usual” practice of “*bubualu’a*” that is performed in reciprocal exchanges between households of kin and friends.

Such food, offered to the *baloma*, and subsequently given away to a friend, is called *bubualu’a*. It is usually put on the bedstead in the house, and the man, laying down the *kaboma* [wooden serving platter], says: “*Balom’ kam bubualua*” [*baloma*, eat *bubwalua*]. It is a universal feature of all offerings and gifts in Kiriwina that they are accompanied by an oral declaration. ([1916] 1992: 182)

Although Malinowski presents this kind of daily exchange as a feature of the *milamala* season, it is actually a major fixture of daily life throughout the year among neighboring kin and others.

The sequencing of persons to consume this food, once it is ready for serving, is known as *kobwaga* (literally, “scraps of food, leftovers”; see Baldwin 1939), whether it involves members of a single family unit or larger groups.

*Bubwalua* is about *sopi* [“water”]. *Kobwaga* is also about *sopi*, it refers specifically to the first person to touch the food after *bwekasa* has been offered. So the *baloma* are the first ones to touch the food with their saliva that comes out from their mouths onto the food, so they are *kobwaga*. First the food is served to the chief and then the rest of the people, so if the chief eats before you, his saliva is *kobwaga* to you. It has the *bobwelila* [“blessings”] of the *baloma* in it. (Fieldnote entry, August 22, 2013)

In this way, *bwekasa* offerings trace out rank orderings among those who ultimately ingest the sacrificed food as successive personal blessings of their own for those who follow them.

The practice is illustrated with Kasaipwalova’s offering of *bitawai kebila*—that is, building a base or platform for relationship to a friend or neighbor as well as to ancestral *balomas*. In this instance, however, the recipient of the initial gift should feel obligated to return at the next opportunity roughly the equivalent amount and quality of food in the same bowl, offered as a separate *bwekasa*. The logic in this instance is that one does not consume by oneself the food viewed as a product of one’s personal efforts and sacrificed to the spirits.

In this way, relatives, affines, and friends are not only exchanging the fruit of their labors, they are also offering gifts to other persons who have been blessed by their own (i.e., the givers') ancestors. This additional sacrificial ingredient to *bwekasa* offerings, including those presented to the spirits and with which they reciprocate with saliva, is identified as an expression of "affection" or "love" (*yebweli*) and the reciprocal sharing of *momova* life, the avowed purpose of the transaction.<sup>15</sup>

On the point of oneself not consuming the *bwekasa* offering that you provide, there are many occasions where it might seem that the sacrificed foods are being ingested by the very people who offered them, as, for instance, in the daily sharing of meals by my research team members or in what Malinowski describes as the practice of "normal" *sagali* distribution (see above). These typically collective distributions, however, are not regarded as equivalent to eating the residua of one's own sacrifice. In virtually all instances of this practice, the various contributions of specific persons are mixed together before they are summarily offered up. The food eventually shared amongst them after the spirits have eaten their share is, therefore, not considered to be anyone's individually. The mixing of the presented foods, their spiritual blessing, and the pattern of their redivision ensure that everyone is sacrificing for the enjoyment and benefit of others and that no one is consuming his or her own gift (fig. 5.3). The process of *kobwaga*, beginning, for example, after the wife or mother who cooked and rested the food passes it to her husband and then on to each subsequent consumer in rank order, indicates that each step constitutes a discrete instance of *bwekasa* in a chain of such augmented offerings.

As Malinowski and others have documented, Trobrianders expend considerable effort in displaying food at various stages of its production. The logic of each of these actions is the same as that described for everyday meals: that is, that the *bilubaloma* spirits extract the *kekwebu* shadows of the food, leaving behind invisible traces of their life-giving *bubwalua* "saliva" or *kepwe'isi* "sweat" (figs. 5.4–5.10).

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15. In light of several other possible Polynesian analogies ventured in this volume, I cannot help but wonder whether there are similar sacrificial notions underpinning Hawaiian *aloha*, Sāmoan *talofa lava*, Maori *kia ora*, *aroha*, and so on.



**Figure 5.3.** “Normal” or “ordinary” type of collective *bwekasa* distribution where offerings from several households are pooled. After the *bilubaloma* have eaten their share, the remainders are distributed for consumption by those who contributed them. Omarakana village (2006).



**Figure 5.4.** Paramount Chief’s central *liku* yam storage house. Omarakana village (2007).





**Figure 5.5.** *Gugula* heaps of *taitu* yams. Obwelia village (2006).



**Figure 5.6.** *Kuvi* long yams displayed on Chief's *buneova* platform. Omarakana village (2012).



**Figure 5.7.** Sacred *togita* back portion of village pig donated by Malasi *gubwatau* affiliates of Tabalu. Pulayasi's wife, Boyogima, acting in the capacity of Vila Bogwa is responsible for the cooking and serving of *togita*. Omarakana village (2011).



**Figure 5.8.** *Pwatai* “towers” used for formal food presentations among groups. Okaikoda village (2012).





**Figure 5.9.** *Sagali kaula*, the largest category of mortuary distribution. Every ten to fifteen years a *dala* completes the rites for all deaths over the intervening period. Omarakana village (2009).



**Figure 5.10.** *Bwekasa* with store-bought goods. During national elections, most candidates express their appreciation to potential voters with these distributions of store-bought goods. Omarakana village (2012).

There are a few references to *bubwalua* in the existing dictionaries of Kilivilan. Lawton provides the simple definition: “saliva” (2002a). Hutchins and Hutchins (n.d.) elaborate: “water in the body,” “serum,” “serum like water in the body tissue.” It will be recalled that Hutchins and Hutchins (ibid.) also mention *bubualu’a* in the context of *ula’ula* “ritual exchange and eating of the produce of the garden”—a rite connected with the harvest and *milamala* festivities—and that Malinowski ([1916] 1992: 182) refers to as “food offered to the *baloma*, and subsequently given away to a friend” (see above).

Malinowski’s accounts of *bubwalu’a* in the 1916 “Baloma” article concentrate on the food exchanges conducted at *milamala* harvest ceremonies, and particularly the phase of ceremonies called the *katukwala*.<sup>16</sup>

All this is merely a show which must afford the *baloma* a purely aesthetic pleasure. But they receive also more substantial tokens of affection, in the form of direct offerings of food. The first repast which is given to them takes place at the *katukuala*, the opening feast of the *milamala* with which the festive period really begins. The *katukuala* consists of a distribution of cooked food, which takes place on the *baku* [cleared village center], and for which the food is supplied by all the members of the village and redistributed among them. This food is exposed to the spirits by being placed on the *baku*. They partake of the “spirit substance” of the food exactly in the same way as they take away to Tuma the *baloma* [i.e., *kekwebu*] of the valuables with which men are adorned at death. From the moment of the *katukuala* (which is connected with the inauguration of the dancing) the festive period begins for the *baloma* as well. Their platform is, or ought to be, placed on the *baku*, and they are stated to admire the dance and enjoy it, though, in fact, mighty little notice is taken of their presence.

Food is cooked early every day, and exposed in big, fine wooden dishes (*kaboma*) in each man’s house, for the *baloma*. After an hour or so the food is taken away and is presented to some friend or relative, who in turn will present the donor with an equivalent dish. The chiefs have the privilege of giving to the tokay (commoners) betel nut and pig, and of receiving in return fish and fruits. . . .

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16. The *katukwala* (Malinowski uses the variant *katukuala*) does not initiate the dancing and other activities comprised in *milamala*, but refers to the concluding three or four days of the festival when *bwekasa* sacrifices to the *baloma* are most intense. Note also that at this early stage of his ethnographic inquiries, Malinowski is conceptualizing the invisible *kekwebu* images of food and other things in the same terms as *baloma* “spirits” and “souls.”

*Silakutuva* is the name for a dish of scraped coconut exposed to the *baloma* (with the words “*Balom’ kam silakutuva*”) and then presented also to some man. It is characteristic that this *baloma* food is never eaten by the man who offers it, but always presented after the *baloma* has finished with it.

Finally, in the afternoon before the departure of the *baloma*, some food is prepared, and some coconuts, bananas, taro, and yams are put handy, and the *vaigu’a* (valuables) are placed in a basket. When the man hears the characteristic beat of the drums, which constitutes the *ioba*, or chasing away of the spirits, he may put these things outside, the idea being that the spirit might take away their *baloma* as a parting present (*taloi*). This custom is called *katubukoni*. The putting of these things in front of the house (*okaukueda*) is not quite essential, because the *baloma* can take them out of the house equally well. This was the explanation given to me when I was looking for the *baloma* gifts in front of the houses, and saw only one place (in front of the chief’s house) a few stone tomahawks. ([1916] 1992: 181–83; see also 1922: 184)

Elsewhere, Malinowski indirectly confirms the sacrificial nature of *bubwalua* offerings when he notes that the term for the wooden dishes on which food is ritually served is *kaboma* “sacred” or “tabooed wood” (ibid.: 171, 217), meaning also “piece of wood surrounded with observances” (1935b: 146).<sup>17</sup>

As with his view on the nonparticipation of *baloma* in magic, however, Malinowski presents contradictory information as to the motivations and perceived consequences of these offerings. On the one hand,

Again, except in the cases of people recently dead, there is little personal feeling about the spirits. There are no provisions for singling out individual *baloma* and preparing a special reception for them, excepting perhaps the gifts of food solicited in dreams by individual *baloma*. To sum up: the *baloma* return to their native village, like visitors from another place. They are left to a great extent to themselves. Valuables and food are displayed to them. Their presence is by no means a

17. It is forbidden to disturb any food that is presented on *kaboma* platters, as *bilubaloma* are taking their share. The meaning of the root */boma-/* here and in other common expressions—e.g., *bomaboma*—comes closer to the English word “sacred” as in the classic definition of “set apart” (Malinowski 1922: 217, 220, 445; 1935b: 146). In Kilivila there is a separate term used to reference specific “taboos”: *kikila*. However, entities or actions involving *kikila* are by definition also *bomaboma* “sacred.” Additional aspects of the word */boma/* are discussed at length in chapter 7.

fact constantly in the native's mind, or foremost in his anticipations of, and views about, the *milamala*. There is not the slightest scepticism to be discovered in the mind of the most civilized natives as to the real presence of the *baloma* at the *milamala*. But there is little emotional reaction with reference to their presence. ([1916] 1992: 190)

On the other, he notes,

The presence of the *baloma* in the village is not a matter of great importance in the mind of the native, if compared with such all-absorbing and fascinating things as dancing and feasting and sexual licence, which go on with great intensity during the *milamala*. But their existence is not altogether ignored, nor is their role by any means purely passive—consisting in the mere admiring of what goes on, or in the satisfaction of eating the food they receive. The *baloma* show their presence in many ways. Thus, while they are in the village it is remarkable how many coconuts will fall down, not by themselves, but plucked by the *baloma*. Whilst the *milamala* was on in Omarakana, two enormous bunches of coconuts fell down quite close to my tent. And it is a very pleasant feature of this spirit activity that such nuts are considered public property, so that even I enjoyed a coconut drink, free of charge, thanks to the *baloma*.

Even the small unripe coconuts that fall down prematurely do it much more often during the *milamala*. And this is one form in which the *baloma* show their displeasure, which is invariably caused by scarcity of food. The *baloma* get hungry (*kasi molu*, their hunger), and they show it. Thunder, rain, bad weather during the *milamala*, interfering with the dancing and feasting, is another and more effective form in which the spirits show their temper. As a matter of fact, during my stay, the full moon, both in August and September, fell on wet, rainy and stormy days. And my informants were able to demonstrate to me by actual experience the connection between scarcity of food and a bad *milamala* on the one hand, and the anger of the spirits and bad weather on the other. The spirits may even go further and cause drought, and thus spoil the next year's crops. This is the reason why very often several bad years follow each other, because a bad year and poor crops make it impossible for the men to arrange a good *milamala*, which again angers the *baloma*, who spoil next year's crops, and so on in a *circulus vitiosus*. ([1916] 1992: 183–84)

It is surprising that Malinowski would so lightly dismiss the influence that a poor *milamala* performance would have on visiting *baloma* in that the resulting

“drought” (*molu*) that he refers to is by far the most feared event in Trobriand experience. The recurrent droughts to which they have been subjected in coordination with El Niño episodes as far back as their memories stretch invariably resulted in famine, often followed by disastrous disease epidemics. Indeed, the single most crucial power that the Omarakana Paramount Chief is presumed to possess over all other chiefs, magicians, and other Islanders is his magical control of the ancestral and other spirits responsible for causing the weather that brings either *ilamalia* prosperity or *molu* drought, famine, and pestilence to the archipelago (Mosko 2013b: 486).

This points to a certain confusion, albeit an illuminating one, in using the word *bubwalua* to refer to the practice of *bwekasa*. First of all, villagers claim, the most frequent meaning attributed to the word *bubwalua* is “saliva.” Rev. Ketobwau, who conducted field research on the indigenous religion, describes one among several instances of what is technically *bwekasa* offered to *baloma* on their annual visits to the villages of Boyowa:

When the moon was positioned 45 degrees to the East, relatives prepared special cooked taro in big claypots called “mona”, brought out ripe bunches of banana, betelnut and mashed long yams called *towamata* for the spirits to eat. The brothers and maternal uncles together with the sons of the deceased would prepare this important meal and exchange this food, as the spirits’ *kalabubwalurwa*. In this exchange the brother of the deceased would bring any of the above to his paternal uncle with the words, *kalabubwalurwa tamagu* (my father’s saliva). The spiritual form of the food was believed to have been eaten by the spirit, and the physical form, smeared by the spirit’s saliva, was to be eaten by either his brothers, maternal uncles or his sons. This exchange was done only for the spirits of the recent dead. Those households who had no recent dead, did it also for the “former” spirits. Thus, every household and family prepared the sacred meal to welcome their relatives back from *Tuma*. (Ketobwau 1994: 52, see 99n; Lawton 2002a; Hutchins and Hutchins n.d.; and below)

More technically, the category *bubwalua* can be used to refer to any of the body’s watery substances, especially once they are excreted, as with the fluids that emerge from corpses in the course of their decomposition, drool, sweat, phlegm, nasal discharge, blood, tears, urine, sexual fluids, and so on. In the context of *bwekasa* and elsewhere, though, *bubwalua* is commonly used as a euphemism specifically for *momona*, the fluid sexual ejaculates of men and women.



Speaking the word *momona* publicly, as used by Malinowski in his inquiries on human procreation to refer to both men's and women's "semen," is regarded as exceptionally rude or impolite. In proper conversations, people should use either *bubwalua* in the general sense of bodily exuvia or *sopi* ("water"), another term applied to virtually all such liquids.

The implication of these nuances of meaning is that the *bubwalua* "saliva" exuded from the mouths of *baloma* spirits embodies the *kekwebu* images of their persons imbued with life-giving *peu'ula* capacities or powers analogous to those accorded to sexual reproduction. Recall from chapter 4 that Trobrianders recognize clear but complex analogies between the oral and genital "tips" of the human body in the similarity, for example, between magical and sexual reproduction. And after all, the spirits' *bubwalua* saliva is an emanation of beings that are dead, just as in indigenous understandings *momona* associated with the capacity of generating new life is excreted by men's and women's bodies at the moment of coitus, a kind of death or dying (*kaliga*).<sup>18</sup> In these and other cultural associations, new life is generated from "inside" (*olumoulela*, i.e., the dead of Tuma) to "outside" (*opapala*, i.e., the living of Boyowa).<sup>19</sup>

In relation to the indigenous theory of the material and immaterial aspects of food consumption and nutrition through *bwekasa*, I have been presented several times with the example, analogous to *bubwalua*, of the squeezing of shredded coconut to extract the *tova* or "cream," an instance of *sopi* "water." The flesh of coconut is saturated with *tova*, which, when removed, is considered to be an essential ingredient in practically every cooked meal, whether boiled or cooked in earth ovens. The *tova* of a coconut is claimed to be an ingredient particularly rich in containing the essence of the nut's *momova*. Thus when, through cracking open, scraping, and squeezing—essentially "killing" the nut—the *tova* is separated from the shreds and collected, it can be added to and mixed with the corresponding extracts of foods such as yams, sweet potato, or taro that are softened in the process of cooking. Since the life-giving *momova* of the coconut has been detached from the meat, the resulting shavings are considered to lack any

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18. Later in this chapter, examining additional dimensions of the relations between humans of Boyowa and *baloma* of Tuma, I shall elaborate on contexts where "death," seemingly paradoxically, is construed as a key source of life.

19. But as noted above, these relations between Tuma and Boyowa are reversed in accord with the exchange of perspectives between Tuman spirits and Boyowa people. From the point of view of *baloma*, Tuma is outside and Boyowa is inside, and daytime in Boyowa is night in Tuma, and vice versa (see also Mosko 2013b).

nutritional or other value for either human or spirit consumption; hence, they are fed to chickens, pigs, and dogs, or discarded as lifeless “rubbish.”<sup>20</sup>

The reciprocity of images and associated powers between living people and *baloma* spirits through *bwekasa* meals not only affirms the convergence of NBME theories of personal partibility with indigenous ideas—namely, that every being in Boyowa and Tuma is essentially composed of analogous life-giving parts—it also underscores how, in critical ways, humans and spirits are involved in dynamic relations of coparticipation. The foods that humans produce through their bodily labors or exertions on land and in the sea of Boyowa are understood to be inalienable detachments of their persons. The yams, taro, plantains, and so on, that a married couple grow in their subsistence gardens to feed their family, for example, incorporate detached images and powers of those who labored in their creation and growth. The couple’s crops are, indeed, regarded as their *gʷadi* “children,” separations of their persons, which acquired their specific characteristics from those of their human parents, making them compositionally distinct from the crops of other parents.

In identical fashion, people’s *bwekasa* gifts of food that they produce and prepare through their bodily efforts are externalizations of parts of their persons for the assimilation by *baloma* ancestors; it is just that the spirits’ reciprocated *bubwalua* excretions are incorporated into the very persons of the Boyowan descendants with whom they identify. It is no distortion to claim that, as a result of *bwekasa* sacrifice, living people, their ancestors, and their relations are mutually constituting and mutually constituted parts of each other.

Seen from this perspective, the “fruit” of human labors—of people’s “sweat” *kepwe’isi* as *bubwalua* exuded through *paisewa* “work” as a process akin to dying—as exemplified in exchanged food is analogous to the life-giving “saliva” of the *baloma*. When parents, for example, wish to remind their children of the food (or anything for that matter) that they, from their exertions, “feed” (*vakam*)

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20. North Mekeo culinary practice in this regard is identical to that of Trobrianders, which for many years in the early stages of my research puzzled me no end, intellectually and dietarily. It was only when I learned about the significance of *ngaka* present in all coconuts and other life-forms—the North Mekeo counterpart of *momova* as “vital essence”—that I came to appreciate the logic of this practice, which flies in the face of Western nutritional assumptions. I understand that this treatment of shredded coconut is quite common across the Austronesian world, and for similar reasons, relating very likely to Polynesian, Melanesian, and Micronesian understandings about the character of *mana*.

to them for the sake of their life and growth, they will often use the metaphor of giving them their “sweat.” Hence, there is a certain logical consistency in sweat and saliva being reciprocated for each other across the divide between Boyowa and Tuma. But from the Trobriand cultural perspective, this life-giving-via-death-or-dying function of the reciprocities between humans and spirits is not greatly different from that affected in the gift transactions, whether substantial or nonsubstantial, between living humans over analogous labor-effusions of their respective persons.

The daily sacrificial exchange of *bwekasa* foods also has several additional and (in indigenous terms) quite mystical features. For one the *bubwalua* saliva that the spirits leave smeared on the foods offered to them is referred to as, or as containing, *bobwelila* “blessings,” similar to how current-day Christians refer to the blessings such as “grace” that they receive from God through Jesus’ sacrifice and their own offerings of prayer, penance, and praise.<sup>21</sup> The numerous rules and restrictions (*kikila* “taboos”) that are attached to *bwekasa* in everyday food consumption and other settings are indications that those practices are *bomaboma* “sacred,” and thus *katuboda* “closed” or “restricted,” as distinct from *ilemwa* “free,” “open,” or “profane” (see chapter 7; Mosko 2013b). Accordingly, the regular and correct performance of *bwekasa* is expected to please the spirits and to elicit favorable life-sustaining blessings from them, just as the improper performance of *bwekasa* or its neglect will anger them, inducing them to bring misfortune to their living kin. Malinowski acknowledged as much in his discussions of *ula’ula* (see above).

Also, because *bwekasa* foods, in being harvested, processed, and especially cooked, are killed, they are “dead” (*kaliga*) things. Dead things are “dirty” or “polluting” (*pupagatu*) to people living in Boyowa and must be avoided in the manner of “taboos.” Trobrianders, like other Melanesians, are quite finicky about what they do and do not eat. They eat only “clean” (*migile’u*), or “open” and “free” (*ilemwa*), non-polluting things which contain the capacity of giving them life, fertility, and health. The ingestion of dirty, dead things is one of the paths that can lead to illness, infertility, and death.

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21. Others have presented similar translations of *bobwelila*, *bobwailila*, and so on: “gift of ‘thanks’” (A. Weiner 1976: 115); “gift of love” (Senft 1986); “love, gift, generosity, or contribution” (Lepani 2012: 84); “gift of love . . . for no special purpose” (Hutchins and Hutchins n.d.).

It is *bwekasa* in the daily routine of food sacrifice and consumption that resolves this blatant contradiction. Cooked, dead things, being dirty prior to being sacrificed, are regarded as *bomaboma* “restricted” or “sacred” to living humans as excreta of their persons, and so must be avoided or respected. But the extraction of the killed or deceased *momova*-laden potent images from the cooked food through its consumption by the *baloma* and the deposit of their *bubwalua* saliva on the residual food transforms it. The dirty food is made clean or free and thereby “hot” for consumption and to sustain the life of people of Boyowa. This conversion is analogous, I suggest, to those familiar in Polynesia as between *tapu* and *noa*.

It might well be asked here: Why would spirits of the sacred realm of Tuma be offered foods that are considered by their living descendants to be dead, dirty, and polluting? The answer is simply that the *baloma* are themselves *already* dead, so things that are dead and thus dirty and *bomaboma* to living humans are by definition clean, open, free, and life-giving to the spirits, *and vice versa*. Therefore, the *bubwalua* saliva excreted by the *baloma* is a dirty excretion to them just as people consider the exuvia of their own bodily exertions, including the products of their labors (i.e., “sweat”), to be unclean. But what is dirty and *bomaboma* to the spirits is by definition clean to their living human descendants. And after all, the *baloma* leaving saliva on the sacrificed food are ancestral kin to the people who consume it. And as kin, their respective bodies are constituted of the same images and associated powers as each other. This explains why “foods offered to spirits” are sometimes called *popula*, the word that also means “excreta,” “shit,” and, in verbal form, “shitting” (Fellows 1902; Malinowski 1915–18, 2/8: 857; (2/11): 1196; (2/15): 1517, 1542, 1551, 1584; (2/32): 381; Baldwin 139; Lawton 1993: 187; 2002a, 2000b; Hutchins and Hutchins n.d.).<sup>22</sup>

The basic form of *bwekasa* sacrifice according to this interpretation is not unprecedented in the literature of Pacific Island religions. In a way closely approximating Hocart’s ([1936] 1970, 1953) accounts of Fiji and the rest of Polynesia, through daily meals of *bwekasa* sacrifice humans and spirits participate

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22. In a related meaning, *tapopu* is the term for taro gardens that provide the taro for provisioning *bwekasa* offerings to the spirits at feasts. In my April 2016 phone conversation with my Omarakana team, one member questioned this association on linguistic grounds, but conceded that the logic of offering bodily exuvia for purposes of *bwekasa* made sense. Also, the term for “uncut scrub” and “sacred grove” where certain magical rites including spirit offerings are made is *kapopu* (Malinowski 1935a: 126, 286).

together through mutual life-giving relations. They do so by the reciprocal exchange of blessings consisting of their respective bodily excreta or wastes.

The case of ancient Hawaii as described by Valerio Valeri in *Kingship and sacrifice* (1985) most strikingly resembles that of the Trobriands. Hawaiian sacrifices in the precolonial era operated in general terms according to virtually identical transformations of “clean” and “dirty” (i.e., between “purity” and “impurity”). Humans offered their own impurities to purify the gods, and what the gods reciprocated as impure to themselves was pure (*mana*) and life-giving to humans (ibid.: 74, 84–105, and *passim*). More specifically, Hawaiians routinely consecrated their meals by *bwekasa*-like sacrifices to a god or gods through which the food was desacralized, rendered *noa*, and thus edible:

Every time the farmer cooked an oven of food, he offered to the deity a potato or a *taro* before eating of it, laying it on the altar or putting it on a tree . . . thus, in addition to the firstfruits of the harvest the first portion of each meal is offered to the deity. This is the daily form of the cult. (Valeri 1985: 43, original references and footnote deleted)

Perhaps most arresting are the systemic parallels between the Hawaiian *makabiki* and the Trobriand *milamala* festivals. *Makabiki* and *milamala* nominally mark the start of each new year, and during the period of their performance regional peace reigns between otherwise hostile interdistrict polities. Both rites coincide with annual harvests and involve sacrifices of first-fruits upon the earthly “return” of spirits—Lono in the case of Hawaii, *baloma* ancestors in the case of the Trobriands. Lono’s return is basically a funerary rite where he mourns his iniquitous mythical murder of his human wife; *lusaladabu* and other Trobriand mortuary *sagali* that are staged in compensation for deaths among the spirits and the living are scheduled preliminaries to *milamala* (see chapter 8). Festivities in both cases are marked by activities expressive of fertility and sexuality (dancing, singing, sport, laughter, feasting) and are understood to be efficacious for productivity and generativity of gardens and human women in the coming year. Egalitarian relations are enjoyed between chiefs and commoners as the “taboos” that ordinarily enforce hierarchical distances between them are temporarily lifted. The people in each instance are viewed as being ruled during the ceremonials by their respective gods and/or spirits. In the course of the *makabiki*, the king is ritually sacrificed; the contents of the Tabalu’s emblematic central yamhouse (*liku*), recently restocked by “tribute” from his various followings,

along with “his” pigs, areca nuts, coconuts, and so on, are sacrificially depleted. Portions of foods sacrificed to the Hawaiian and Trobriand divinities are consumed by them; the remainders are accordingly desacralized and distributed for eating by human participants. As Lono and his entourage circle the island, each village celebrates its local version of the *makabiki*; the *baloma* spirits are hosted village after village as *milamala* sweeps from one end of Kiriwina to the other. At the end of *makabiki*, Lono is ceremoniously (and unceremoniously) carried away similarly to how *baloma* are chased away with *ioba* (Malinowski [1916] 1992: 171–90; 1932: 210–13, 327; Valeri 1985: 203–33, 28; see also Sahlins 1981, 1985: 92–94, 114–20).

On a recent visit to my longstanding fieldsite in North Mekeo, it considerably surprised me to learn that villagers had their own ritual counterparts to Trobriand *bwekasa* sacrifice. When life-giving foods are ceremonially shared on a daily basis by clansmen on chiefs’ clubhouses after having been displayed for a short period and when heaps of *pange* foodstuffs are, more rarely, ritually exchanged in mortuary ceremonies (*umupua*) between “owners” and “receivers,” the ancestral spirits (*tsiange*, *au akaisa*) are invisibly present (figs. 5.11–5.12). Not only do these foods undergo analogous transformation between “dirty” (*iofu*) and “clean” (*igua*)—I had reported this many years previous; see Mosko 1985: chs. 7–8—but the spirits are also thought to consume the foods’ invisible *ngaka* “vital essence,” which invigorates them and makes them “happy” (*aotsi kengama*). These rites, as in the Trobriands and Hawaii, are staged only when mourning owners have been able to accumulate sufficient food reserves (i.e., following annual harvests). Immediately after the spirits have eaten their fill of the food heaps, the whole community joins in ceremonial singing, drumming, dancing, and courting, understood as regenerating social and cosmic life. It is typically in the context of these revelries that sexual and eventually marital relations are secretly initiated. By participating in the celebrations alongside their living descendants and being made happy, the spirits are expected to lend their support to the projects of their descendants, as, for example, in executing the instructions they receive by virtue of the magical spells (*menga*) subsequently addressed to them. Otherwise, the spirits will presume that their living relatives are not thinking about or do not like them, so they, like *baloma*, will turn away.<sup>23</sup>

23. I first came across this North Mekeo analogue (*atsiatsi*, *lakafo fokamanga*) to Trobriand *bwekasa* in 2011 after having already conducted nearly three-and-a-half years of fieldwork over thirty-five years, but only after I had benefited from





**Figure 5.11.** North Mekeo *atsiatsi* “sacrifice” to *tsiange* spirits on peace chief’s ceremonial platform. Maipa village, Central Province (2014).



**Figure 5.12.** North Mekeo *pange* “sacrifice” to *tsiange* spirits at *umupua* mortuary ceremony. Maipa village, Central Province (2014).

my Omarkana inquiries. Not having asked directly about the North Mekeo counterpart to Trobriand sacrifice, I wonder if I would ever have learned of it. Also, there is a Trobriand equivalent (*kibobuta*) to the North Mekeo notion that ancestral spirits on favorable terms with their descendants can aid them in various ways without explicit recourse to performing *megwa* or *bwekasa* (see chapter 7).



On that point, it must be appreciated how Trobrianders' consumption of *bwekasa* foods following the deposition of the *baloma* spirits' blessings is organized and understood. In normal family contexts, the most senior male present—normally, the father or husband—is regarded as *guyau* “chief” or “distributor” to the other members. The *bwekasa* offering to the spirits is made in his name as representing the group (*boda*) whose collective labors have provisioned it. Thus it is his sacrifice first and foremost. Accordingly, he is the first to be served and to eat (cf. Malinowski 1922: 171). And as he does so, he, like the spirits, is understood to leave a bit of his *bubwalua* on the remaining food, which, as *kobwaga*, is then passed down the rank order of other adult men present, then to the children, and lastly to the wife or mother.<sup>24</sup>

The reciprocal consumptions of sacrificed *bwekasa* foods are not the only religious transactions effected through household *bwekasa* ceremonies. In the past and for many Omarakana families in the present, the evening meal has been the principal occasion by which parents mold or shape (*ikuli*) the character of their children. It is over this repast that fathers and mothers transfer verbally to their children the knowledge—i.e., the images sourced from the *baloma* thought to be in attendance—of the *gulagula* sacred traditions of their maternal *dalas*, their fathers' *dalas*, their *valu* “villages,” and their culture. This kind of information is termed both *guguwa* (“property,” “wealth”) and *guguya* or *sikatayuvisa* (“advice”). In this sense, parents, as the embodiments of the appropriate identifying images of their predecessors, are the intermediaries of knowledge and its accompanying *peu'ula* powers between *baloma* in Tuma and the spirits' youthful descendants. This exchange is a critical component of the daily family *bwekasa* rite, of the regular manner of spirits' participation in human affairs, and of living humans' engagement with their ancestors.

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24. North Mekeo again practice almost the identical rite. Fathers, elders, and chiefs are always served first, with others ideally eating in order of seniority, with *ngaka* “vital essence” transmitted down the line. And in the *kava* rite of Sāmoa and some other Polynesian societies, the sequence of ceremonial consumption not only follows similarly the order of descending rank among chiefs (*matai*); the *kava* concoction is itself symbolically associated with water and saliva in that previously the root was traditionally chewed by untitled *taulele'a* male “servers” to soften it before it was mixed with water and served to assembled chiefs (Tcherkézoff 2017: 10, 17–18). And as Edmund Leach (1972) argued, the Tongan *kava* rite is distinctly sacrificial. I hope in another publication to investigate these and other ritual parallels between Polynesia, North Mekeo, and the Trobriands.

Looking back upon my own experiences of living at Omarakana, the daily conversations that I have enjoyed with my team members and others as we shared our meals, presumably with the participation of Tabalu *baloma*, fitted rather perfectly with the way that villagers themselves instruct and are instructed in the most important lore of their way of life which continues to emanate from Tuma. My thoughts and understandings about Trobriand culture, in other words, have been molded in me through an interactional or participatory context nearly identical to that undergone by my mentors in their own times and which they effect in their own households.

### Bwekasa *foods and nonedibles*

I have elaborated on the details of the daily *bwekasa* sacrifices of *kaukweda* family groups that involve food and advice insofar as they are viewed as a prototype of how local chiefs and leaders as *tama* fathers are expected in other distributions and contexts to “look after” (*yamata*) the welfare of their communities—communities consisting of their human subjects’ ancestral *baloma* and other spirits. There are, in other words, numerous additional contexts of Trobriand sociality in wider public realms that also conform to the parameters of *bwekasa*.

As it turns out, it appears Malinowski eventually came to recognize the global significance of sacrifice in its religious sense, even if he never really investigated it with the same perseverance he applied to other dimensions of the culture and social organization. Buried in *Crime and custom*, for example, he notes:

*As to the acts which usually would be regarded as religious rather than magical—ceremonies at birth or marriage, rites of death and mourning, the worship of ghosts, spirits, or mythical personages—they also have a legal side clearly exemplified in the case of mortuary performances, described above. Every important act of a religious nature is conceived as a moral obligation towards the object, the ghost, spirit, or power worshipped; it also satisfies some emotional craving of the performer; but besides all this it has also as a matter of fact its place in some social scheme, it is regarded by some third person or persons as due to them, watched and then repaid or returned in kind. When, for example, at the annual return of the departed ghosts to their village you give an offering to the spirit of a dead relative, you satisfy his feelings, and no doubt also his spiritual appetite, which feeds on the spiritual substance of the meal; you probably also express your own sentiment towards the beloved dead. But there is also a social obligation involved: after*

the dishes have been exposed for some time and the spirit has finished with his spiritual share, the rest, none the worse it appears for ordinary consumption after its spiritual abstraction, is given to a friend or relation-in-law still alive, who then returns a similar gift later on. *I can recall to my mind not one single act of a religious nature without some such sociological byplay more or less directly associated with the main religious function of the act. Its importance lies in the fact that it makes the act a social obligation, besides its being a religious duty.* (1926: 43–44, emphases added)

In the following chapter, I shall examine several of those additional contexts of religious *bwekasa* sacrifice (rites of death, mourning, and reincarnation). For now, setting the stage for that exercise, I shall concentrate on additional dimensions or aspects of *bwekasa* sacrifices of food. These will hopefully shed new light on practices which have already been described in some detail that have to do in one way or another with magical performance and parallel processes in the realm of kinship.

Most of the examples which have been touched upon above as *ula'ula* or involving *bubwalua* are concentrated in the exchanges and consumption of food that feature in the various stages of *milamala* harvest festivities in coordination with the elaborate series of *megwa* performed for the benefit of *baloma* spirits in attendance: sharing of first-fruits; sacrifices to recent deceased kin and more remotely related spirit ancestors; the distributions of food marking the *katuk-wala* inaugural phase of the *milamala* festivities; the daily staging of “normal” *sagali* distributions of “food of the *baloma*”; the host chief’s offering of pig and areca nut to the common peoples and their reciprocation with fish and fruits (see above).<sup>25</sup>

From Malinowski’s accounts, there are additional distributions of food materials that conform with the outlines of *bwekasa* sacrifice, even though they do

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25. Malinowski’s writings convey the impression that *milamala* is an annual event. *Milamala* as traditionally practiced, however, is staged by a given village only when it has generated a particularly abundant harvest. This is consistent with the theme of *bwekasa* I am expounding here insofar as spirits’ contributions to the successful harvest are being acknowledged through their sharing in the exceptional results that they have helped to produce, and thereby in encouraging them to similarly contribute in the coming year’s agriculture. Accordingly, in years when harvests are sparse, it is assumed that the spirits, whether by punishing living descendants or for other reasons, have not fulfilled their own ritual obligations in implementing the magical instructions that they would have received from the *torwosi* community magician.

not involve their immediate ingestion by either living people or *baloma*—for instance, when the harvested crops are first brought to the village from the gardens, then heaped, and later stored in the yamhouses around the perimeter of the central *baku* space (e.g., [1916] 1992: 182; 1922: 171; 1935a: 171, 177, 222–23); and in numerous other modes of ceremonial food display such as *gugula* garden heaps, and long *lagogu* and upright scaffoldings (*pwatai*) supporting large quantities of raw produce ([1916] 1992: 181; 1935a: 171–77). Indeed, practically every kind of exhibition of food amounts to a sacrifice and exchange conforming in general outline to *bwekasa*. Even the long-term storage of yams in a chief's or other man's yam-house is regarded as *bwekasa* whereby *baloma* spirits in Tuma can themselves display and celebrate the potent images of the fruit of the magical labors they have expended in support of the gardening efforts of their living descendants leading up to the harvest.<sup>26</sup>

An important implication of *bwekasa* in this regard is that a given item can be offered up to spirits at several distinct stages in an extended series of sacrifices. The cooked *taitu* yams included in the *bwekasa* offering preliminary to a family meal, for example, have by that point and during the subsequent process of *kobwaga* among the participants gone through a series of prior sacrifices. At each of these, life-giving *kekwebu* images are detached and reciprocated between humans and spirits. The prior offerings of first-fruits, the displays of heaped tubers in gardens and the village, the storage and display of yams in yamhouses, the presentation of raw yam gifts in subsequent exchanges, and so on, are all *bwekasa* moments. The performance of each of these rites is what enables *baloma* spirits in Tuma to share in mirror-like fashion the *kekwebu* shadows of all those items, and the deposition of the spirit's watery bodily leavings makes their life-giving powers accessible also at every stage to humans in Boyowa. The inner *kekwebu* of a single *taitu* yam thus embodies capacities for inclusion in several sequential offerings. Each of the presentations in such a series, however, is regarded as a separate *bwekasa* sacrifice with its own distinctive form (*ikuli*).<sup>27</sup>

26. Baldwin notes that the foods ceremonially displayed in a chief's yamhouse are an "*ula'ula*" (*sic*) offering to Tudava, an "atonement" (1971: 321).

27. This sequential ordering of *bwekasa* sacrifices conforms to the pattern of "base-body-tip-fruit" (*u'ula*, *tapwala*, *doginala*, *keuwela*) characteristic of basically all indigenous creativity and agency, as illustrated in this volume with the structuring of *megwa* spells, the cooking of food, mortuary transactions, exchanges over sexuality, and so on (see Mosko 2009, 2010a). See also my remarks concerning Wagner's concept of "analogical flow" in chapter 9.

But foods, whether displayed raw or eaten cooked, are not the only material items offered to *baloma* as *bwekasa*. As mentioned in passing during *milamala* celebrations, the spirits are presented with *kula* shell and other valuables as offerings (*yoyova*) on the host chief's or leader's visitor's platform (*buneova*). These items are "what is most valued by the living" (Malinowski 1922: 512). And then in anticipation of the ritual *ioba* departure of *baloma*, offerings of armshells, necklaces, stone axe-blades, pigs tusks, and so on, are left on people's verandas ([1916] 1992: 181–82). In these cases, the *baloma* extract the invisible interior *kekwebu* images of the items—what Malinowski referred to as their "essence" or *baloma* "spirit substance" (ibid.: 181)—so that they can return contented to Tuma with "their minds good" (1922: 512). The unexpected encounter with *tauva'u* warrior spirits in the form of snakes, crabs, and lizards and the expelling of *tokwai* nature sprites from trees chosen for canoe hulls similarly elicit offerings of valuables as *bwekasa* appeasements.

Additional examples of *bwekasa* sacrifices involving nonconsumables include displays of long yams (*kuvi*) in the roof cavities of *bwemaveka* village men's meeting houses (see Mosko 2013b) and the ritual display of a returning *kula* expedition's haul of *veguwa* valuables (*tanarere*; fig. 5.13).<sup>28</sup> Of the latter, Malinowski (1922: 374–75, 391, 512) described how upon arriving at their home beach, the sailors of each crew pool the armshells or necklaces that they have acquired under the leadership of their canoe master, the *toliwaga*. The articles are either lain together on mats or suspended on strings between horizontal stakes. While exhibited in this manner, the *baloma* spirits who had participated in the voyage take away the *kekwebu* shadows or image-parts of the valuables to be deployed in the spirits' own subsequent *kula* transactions in the invisible Tuma realm.

As regards this general category of sacrificial noncomestible offerings, whether as bulk foods in storage or nonfood, it might well be pondered: What might be their counterpart to the *bubwalua* "saliva" that *baloma* deposit as their blessings on food offerings? I have been given two answers. First, in the same way that sacrificed dead foods embody the detached labor-generated dirty "sweat" (*kepwe'isi*) of the persons offering them, the *kekwebu* shadows of *bubwalua* that

28. *Kuvi* (*Dioscorea alata*) long yams that are formally presented to chiefs, leaders, and others are usually not eaten. Instead, they typically undergo a long series of exchanges before they are eventually cut up into small portions to serve as "seeds" (*yagogu*) for replanting.



**Figure 5.13.** *Tanarere* display of *kula* arm shells (*mwali*) retrieved from Kitava Island, 2013. Losuia station (2012).

*baloma* leave behind on nonconsumable sacrifices consist of the dirty excretions of their laboring spirit-skins, which nonetheless incorporate for living humans life-giving properties (i.e., images and powers) not dissimilar to those of the spirits' saliva. In the example of *tanarere* sacrificial displays of *kula* wealth, the sweat that the spirits deposit on the valuables imbues (or reimbues) those items with the potent *bubwalua* sweat of earlier *kula* masters. It is thus largely through *tanarere* transfers, augmented each time the shells are traded along *kula* roads, that their renown, weight, and fame are cumulatively enhanced, and for this reason also they darken with age as humans' laboring bodies are reputed to do.

Second, and following from this, people who make regular and substantial *bwekasa* offerings, whether of food or nonfood materials, for the benefit of their ancestors, kin, and friends will in due course generate *butula* "fame" as extensions of their own persons. Much has been written, of course, on the topic of *butula* in the Trobriands and elsewhere in the Massim, particularly in relation to the practice of ceremonial *kula* exchange (e.g., Jerry Leach and E. Leach 1983; Munn 1986; Malnic 1998). In Northern Kiriwina, at any rate, men and women can earn fame as a result of demonstrated excellence in the performance of any culturally approved activity, including "sorcery" (*bwagau*). And insofar as eventual success in any important undertaking usually involves mastery of the requisite *megwa*, achievements which generate fame are intimately connected

with the effective enlisting of *baloma* support. In and of itself, in other words, the acclaim and praise expressed in the *momova*-laden *kekwebu* images contained in a person's thoughts and externalized in his/her words and other actions which circulate as fame are conceived as being or containing *bobwelila* blessings from the spirits he/she has supplicated, magically or otherwise, in the course of realizing that success. Thus, when a chief is praised for his excellent organization of a *sagali* feast or when a man or woman demonstrate his/her exceptional merit in the performance of *lisaladabu* distribution, the fame they generate consists not only in the images that have been internalized in the minds of other inhabitants of Boyowa; they, the *kekwebu* images, only exist there because of the mystical *peu'ula* powers fueling them, which originate in the persons of spirits of Tuma.

#### *BWEKASA* SACRIFICES OF THOUGHT (*NANAMSA*)

There are four further contexts I shall introduce here where villagers have similar *bwekasa* interactions to those that I have already described. These are of an intrinsically more immediate and specialized variety than those which involve saliva, sweat, or other extrusions of participants' bodies. In these, people's own personal thoughts (*namamsa*) as detachable elements of their minds (*nona*) are conveyed sacrificially to ancestral *baloma* in Tuma. In due course they elicit potent blessings from *baloma* that augment the life of the eventual human recipients in ways consistent with the other categories of *bwekasa* described above.

#### Mimi: *dreams*

Malinowski and others have reported that through dreams (*mimi*), villagers commonly experience or receive images of their *baloma* ancestors, which are interpreted as messages transmitting important information ([1916] 1992: 165–66; 1932: 328). These can take the form of replacing or correcting mistaken words of secret *megwa* spells so as to make them complete and effective; giving magicians advice and instructions on how or whether to perform certain spells or other rites; implanting dream images into the minds of a magician's patient (e.g., victims of sorcery, sleeping targets of courting magic); inspiring expert carvers with new designs; delivering whole new songs (*wosi*) or dances (*kaiwosi*) for performance in praise of *baloma* spirits during *milamala* festivities;



foretelling events such as becoming pregnant; provisioning other useful knowledge unknown to the recipient; and so on. There are also occasions when *baloma* visit their survivors in dreams with requests for specific offerings, typically *bwekasa* presentations of food when they become hungry (e.g., Malinowski 1915–18: 2/35: 356–57; [1916] 1992: 184, 219; 1922: 400, 423; 1927: 91–95, 125; 1932: 148, 179, 326–34, 340–41; Hutchins 1987: 271; Scoditti 1996: 89, 129, 251).<sup>29</sup> There are divergent views as to whether in dreaming one's *baloma* soul leaves the body for these communiques with spirits, or the *baloma* one encounters remain in Tuma but from there (i.e., inside the sleeper's mind) converse with him/her directly.

Regardless, these exchanges qualify as *bwekasa*. First of all, although people when dreaming will often experience interactions with deceased kin in ways that seem to be “real” or “true” (*mokwita*), it is common knowledge that not all such dreams are in fact spirit visitations. Also, *balomas* are supposedly more likely to pass on more highly valued secret knowledge only when their surviving kin have met certain conditions: namely, that they expressed their “love” (*yebweli*) and “pity” or “sympathy” (*ninabwena*; literally “good thoughts”) for them through regular and generous *bwekasa* offerings of food, tobacco, areca nut, and other wealth; and that in other regards they have upheld the sacred rules and taboos (*kikila*) of their *dala* lineage and *ketota* rank identities.

*Masisi* “sleep” is viewed in the culture as a kind of temporary “death” or “dying” (*kaliga*), so on this point the exchange of dream messages is consistent with how other types of *bwekasa* are mediated through life–death transitions. The key items transacted here, though, consist in reciprocal “externalizations” of mental images as specific and highly marked components of personal identity. I say “externalizations” with caution insofar as a living human's mind and thoughts are considered to partake of the inner world of Tuma and thereby to be already inhabited by or accessible to *baloma* spirits.

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29. It is widely claimed that all of the *megwa* that have ever existed emerged with the initial ancestors at the time of creation, so that it is impossible for new spells to be composed. The revelations I am discussing here concerning *megwa* are those parts of spells which in earlier generations had been lost or improperly transmitted. Most *wosi* songs as the *tukwa* wealth of specific *dala* groups are similarly understood to have been created with the first ancestors as inherent components of them or, later, by them, although it appears to be possible for *baloma* spirits to relay new songs to people through dreams.

It is important to note in this and other contexts outlined elsewhere in this and the following chapter that the sleeping “dead” body of the dreamer is construed as a *bitawai kebila* “platform” analogous to the clay pot of Kasaipwalova’s spirit offerings or the elevated shelf or bedstead of routine *bwekasa* offerings of food. Seen from this perspective, the mental images of the dreamer are directly comparable to the “spirit substance” of items of which *balomas* imbibe in more materially based kinds of sacrifice. And in the same respect, the images contained in a sleeper’s dream correspond to the *bubwalua* saliva and sweat left behind from a *baloma*’s person in other *bwekasa* contexts yet to be described.

#### Tokaisivila: seers

There are, second, some communities which include among their members a few rare persons said to possess an extraordinary specialized ability of visiting Tuma and reporting back on their experiences there. When such a *tokaisivila* “seer” or “medium” enters a state of sleep or death-like trance, it is understood that his/her *baloma* soul exits the body and travels a road that he/she has discovered leading to Tuma. Once there, over varying lengths of time, his/her *baloma* soul engages in discourse and otherwise interacts with *baloma* spirits before returning to Boyowa to awake bodily. Malinowski ([1916] 1992: 161–65; 1929b, 1932: 111, 146) gives fairly rich descriptions of these phenomena, which he observed during his field stay.<sup>30</sup> Villagers will sometimes contract a seer to make inquiries on their behalf during their Tuma visits, and usually the seer returns with reports of what he/she has witnessed during his/her travels. According to Malinowski, it is from these seers’ testimonies that some of the widely shared knowledge about Tuma and the life of the *baloma* spirits there has originated and entered the public domain. And it is in the context of seers’ Tuman adventures that other villagers present *bwekasa* offerings, particularly to the recently deceased (Malinowski 1929b, 1932: 365).

The experiences of *kataisivila* seers are themselves viewed as instances of *bwekasa*. The medium’s internal *baloma* soul, full of the possessor’s mental thoughts with their unique mystical powers of transport, are offered up, say, to

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30. It is interesting in this context to consider the claim that, if the seer’s soul consumes any spirit food on its visit to Tuma, it must remain there. As discussed above, this food as *bwekasa* sacrificed by living persons in Boyowa would be considered dead, effectively converting the life of the traveling seer into his/her death such that he/she could not return to bodily life in Boyowa, at least by merely awakening.

spirits in Tuma in the form of the discourses and other interactions in which they mutually engage during the visit. As noted above with respect to dreaming, what the *baloma* leaves behind as a counterpart to the *kekwebu* images of the *bubwalua* saliva or sweat elicited from more material sacrifices by magicians or family and other groups are the mental memories and other knowledge gained by the seer's soul during the trip. Upon waking, the seer shares the information he/she has gained from the spirits with others in attendance. It is significant that mental thoughts (*nanamsa*) and the general capacity of mind (*nona*) are frequently referred to as *sopi* "water." As such, the memory leftovers with which the seer returns from Tuma for distributing with others in Boyowa are a type of *bubwalua* as defined above—a watery fluid of bodies, and particularly bodies of the dead. In that regard, as with cooking, ordinary dreaming, and other kinds of *bwekasa*, it is relevant that the seer's thought-laden soul is released by his/her body at the moment of "death" upon entering sleep or trance. And perhaps most significant of all, as Malinowski noted, seers often perform their sacrificial services on behalf of people who are mourning the loss of recently deceased relatives. The blessings that seers provide upon their return from Tuma thus are seen as possessing life-giving properties analogous to the *bubwalua* "leftover" foods consumed by family members after their ancestors have eaten their share.

Kibobuta: *personal correctness*

A third type of more direct communication between *baloma* and living people that qualifies as *bwekasa* sacrifice in indigenous terms—*kibobuta* or "personal correctness"—is said to occur during a living person's ordinary waking life. Malinowski described this phenomenon as "what is effected by furtive, short glimpses of spirits, as seen by men while awake and in a normal state of mind" ([1916] 1992: 171). Here, the man or woman receives silent mental messages from spirits in Tuma in the form of images that appear seemingly spontaneously in his or her consciousness. It is just that the person receiving these communications cannot be certain that they originate from *baloma*, similarly to how it is commonly recognized that *baloma* may be contacting their descendants when the latter dream, but there is no way of knowing if a particular dream is a genuine *baloma* missive.

As explained more fully in chapter 7, every traditionally minded Trobriander is expected to observe the behaviors and taboos appropriate to the *dala* and rank of both their mother and father(s), whether "true" (*toluuna'i*) or "adopted"

(*tolivakalova*). According to the same stipulations, all members of a hamlet or village should also follow the corresponding restrictions of their *tama* “father” leader or chief even if he is identified matrilineally or patrilineally as of different *dala* to them. The assumption with *kibobuta* is that, even if one is not knowledgeable of the specific *megwa* that are incorporated in the *tukwa* legacies of these identities and relationships, the *baloma* ancestors of those groupings can still assist one in one’s undertakings. Mainly, they can surreptitiously provide advice (*guguya*, *sikatayuvisa*) and other thoughts into one’s own conscious mind as personal blessings (*bobwelila*). Alternatively, on their own volition, they can affect the thoughts, and thus the actions, of other persons as patients. In short, if villagers succeed in keeping their personal lives in good order, their ancestors will “look after” them in the pursuance of their various projects.

Keeping one’s personal relations and activities generally in proper form in this regard consists in incorporating all appropriate ingredients into one’s life as per *dala* and rank statuses while excluding all inappropriate elements. Such effort is itself classified as *paisewa* “work” or “labor” in that it is something toward which one must deliberately apply oneself with the appropriate concentration of *peu’ula* powers. To this extent, the achievement of *kibobuta* in one’s life is analogous to moments of death, just as the efforts of bodily labor for the sake of producing the necessities of life involve cyclically transitory deaths to one’s person. Achieving *kibobuta* is thus as much a life-giving sacrifice occasioned in the first instance by a death as any other instance of *bwekasa*. If people ignore the standards of their social status and thereby display disrespect to their ancestors, as for example in paying no mind to the *kikila* ritual restrictions that should be observed—actions amounting to the mixing or incorporation of improper components into one’s person owing to a lack of proper vigilance and effort—then the *bilubaloma* will not look after them. Instead, they will turn their backs to them as though they are strangers (*tomakava*) (fig. 5.14). It is according to this logic that *kibobuta* “correctness” or “completeness” in one’s personal affairs implies that there are no untoward disturbances that might distract one from unhindered concentration on appropriate tasks at hand.

To be *kibobuta*, one must ensure that all of one’s social relations are in harmony—no suspicions of adultery or stealing, no unrequited debts, no recent deaths amongst one’s relatives, no feelings of shame, and so on. Also, one must maintain amicable relations with the spirits, with whom one identifies by thinking and behaving in accord with their thoughts and actions: that is, living as they did, given the specific *kekwebu* and *peu’ula* that animated them when they



**Figure 5.14.** Trobrianders roll their tobacco in newspaper, which among other goods I import for distribution. In this instance, a gathering of men tore off and smoked all portions of a sheet of newsprint avoiding the photograph (*kekwebu*) of the Australian rugby league player. They explained that, since they did not know what foods this gentleman had consumed, they could not “eat” (i.e., smoke) it for fear of ingesting *kekwebu* contrary to their standards of personal correctness (*kibobuta*) and ritual restriction (*kikila*). Omarakana village (2011).

were alive. The root of *kibobuta*, /*bobuta*/, means “round,” as something with no corners or interruptions. Personal disturbances engender the opposite of *kibobuta*, the internalization of inappropriate images and powers, rendering one *ikaligeya*’i “incomplete,” “dismantled,” or “incorrect.”<sup>31</sup>

Achieving *kibobuta* in one’s relations thus results in ancestral spirits of Tuma completely identifying with one’s thoughts and desires to the point of affecting them with blessings in the visible world of Boyowa, even in the absence of explicit verbal instructions via *megwa* or overt elicitations through food or other offerings. The villager who knows no *megwa* but labors in his garden in a state of achieved *kibobuta* with the support of his wife, children, kin, and chief or leader can thus expect to be successful as a result of his or her ancestors’ agency and beneficence, while the *ikaligeya*’i gardener who experiences disturbance or

31. The concept of *ikaligeya*’i has as its root /*kaliga*/ “death” or “dead,” and in many contexts of its use refers to processes of decomposition or dismantling (*kaligeya*’i) that accompany dying. Thus the very concept of personhood, whether in life or death, connotes a sense of plural composition and partibility.

conflict in his/her relations will predictably be unsuccessful and produce a small or unhealthy crop.

Since commoners are typically burdened by fewer *kikila* “taboos” or restrictions and less complicated political ties than persons of chiefly *dala*, they are thought to have a certain advantage for success strictly on *kibobuta* grounds, except that commoners are also reputed to have a tendency toward (i.e., to be composed of the *kekwebu* of) mental slackness as compared with chiefs.<sup>32</sup> However, insofar as members of high-ranking *dala* have more *kikila* burdens placed on them, with greater consequences either way, they are thought to more forcefully strive to achieve *kibobuta* correctness and to benefit accordingly. Insofar as polygynous *gumgweguya* adopt the *kikila* of their wives upon marriage, their lives are all that more burdened. This contributes also to the sequestering of the Omarakana Paramount Chief in his personal *ligisa* dwelling (see chapter 8).

When I have inquired as to why *baloma* spirits would be so concerned about the correctness of the activities of their living descendants, people have responded that the personal offerings of *kibobuta* enable the ancestors to identify with their specific descendants living in Boyowa and thereby to equip them for sharing with the ancestors the prosperity that they, living people, generate through their labors, as for example in provisioning *bwekasa* sacrifices of food and other wealth. And importantly too, when humans attain fame for their achievements in Boyowa, partly as a result of blessings by *baloma*, their ancestors partake of it in Tuma also.

#### Megwa: *spells*

The fourth category of personally intimate ritual practice qualifying as *bwekasa* in the sense I have been discussing it thus far is that which has engaged our main attention from the outset—the offering up of *megwa* spells to *baloma* for the purpose of eliciting their blessings in the form of the realization of the *doginala* results and *keuwela* fruit intended and desired by the magician in the first place.

As described in chapter 4, a magician’s vocalized spell is regarded as a *gwadi* child, as in any detachment from his person. Spirits hear or receive the

32. This of course expresses the view prevalent among persons of chiefly rank, but it is a perspective that many commoners are conscious of and sometimes admit to having internalized.

structured words of the spells offered up to them in their names, for the explicit reciting of their monikers is an indication that they are not being forgotten or neglected at least by the magician who solicits their blessings. The *bubwalua* that the spirits leave behind in Boyowa are the results that they produce in the world, either in the powers they activate in the person of the magician or upon they who are the spell's patients in relation to him or her.

The general significance of dreaming, spirit mediumship, personal correctness, and *megwa* performance as contexts of *bwekasa* sacrifice is that they underscore the intimacy and constancy of the personal exchange of images between living humans and their *baloma* ancestors, and thereby the intensity of coparticipation of the persons existing in the two interconnected cosmic realms. More specifically, however, these four and additional modes of *bwekasa* illustrate how, through simply unmediated actions of their persons, Trobrianders, living and deceased, partake in each other's lives.<sup>33</sup> It is this exceedingly intimate sort of interpersonal participation between people and spirits enacted in yet other contexts that I examine in the following chapter—contexts addressing rather more directly than those discussed thus far the articulation of human and spirit life and death.

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33. On reading this chapter, Michael Young (pers. comm.) asked "How many of the observances/offerings etc. you describe would be done outside of Boyowa—e.g., while visiting or residing in Moresby. Do *baloma* accompany you wherever you go? I think of Linus [Digim'Rina, an anthropologist and Trobriander] in Canberra, USA, UK or Germany!" The answer I received on my last village visit was emphatically "Yes," that the parameters of *bwekasa* outlined here would apply to wherever a tradition-minded Trobriander travels.





## Cycles of reproduction and reincarnation as *bwekasa* sacrifice

These social activities and [mortuary] ceremonies have no connection with the spirit. They are not performed, either to send a message of love and regret to the *baloma* (spirit), or to deter him from returning; they do not influence his welfare, nor do they affect his relation to the survivors.

Malinowski, "Baloma: The spirits of the dead in the Trobriand Islands" ([1916] 1992: 149)

In elucidating the range of *bwekasa* sacrifices, it has been useful to distinguish between those offerings that involve material detachments (food, items of wealth) from living people's persons and others that entail unmediated presentations of their immaterial thoughts and sentiments. Although villagers of my acquaintance have had little difficulty differentiating *bwekasa* in this way, those with whom I have discussed this matter in depth concede that there is actually little to discriminate between them, at least by that criterion. This is simply because, first, *bwekasa* offerings of all sorts are in one way or another necessary preludes to the successful performance of *megwa* magic, which itself qualifies as *bwekasa*. Second, whether appearing to be mediated or not, the

essence of the items transacted between humans and spirits are always of the same nature: that is, detachable invisible, immaterial *kekʷabu* images and associated *peuʼula* powers of the persons transacting over them. Third, the *bobwelila* blessings given by the spirits in return for what has been given to them are not to be taken and enjoyed solely by the sacrificer who initially offered them but must be passed along to some third party (or parties), who in due course is obligated to reciprocate with the blessings received through his/her own sacrifice. And, fourth, all variations of *bwekasa* involve ritual transitions from Boyowa to Tuma and back again, and thus between “life” (*momova*) and “death” (*kaliga*) in all their cosmic manifestations.

In this chapter, elaborating on this last point, I shall explore additional dimensions of *bwekasa* in Trobriand culture which tie the performance of magic yet closer to the indigenous modes of sociality that correspond to anthropological understandings of kinship. Those readers who are already familiar with the outlines of Trobriand social organization as documented by other ethnographers will hopefully appreciate that the beliefs and practices pertaining to it consist to no less an extent in preoccupations with the extinction as well as the creation of life. What I suspect may be less obvious is that these core elements of Trobriand kin connectedness are also predicated on *bwekasa* sacrificial transactions over the detachable parts of human beings in Boyowa and their complements in the persons of *baloma* spirits of Tuma.

## MAGIC AND PROCREATION

It will be recalled from chapter 1 that, when viewed together, indigenous understandings about the efficacy of magic and the processes of human procreation as initially described by Malinowski contain a fairly explicit contradiction. While *baloma* spirits supposedly intervene only rarely and in mostly inconsequential ways in the lives of their Boyowan descendants, as for instance in denial of any agentive contribution on their part in magicians' spells, there are *megwa* performed specifically to ancestral *baloma* spirits directing them to secure their active support in achieving women's pregnancy. At the conclusion of chapter 4, I explained how the oral generation of magical spells by men is understood in mythical and other critical ways to be comparable to the vaginal generation of offspring by women, and how both of these extrusions are regarded as their creators' *gwadi* children given birth and life by similarly constituted Tuma-like

organs of *sunapula* emergence at opposite ends of their respective bodies. I also noted how in the mythical cosmogony, explicit themes of incestuous and non-incestuous or exogamous creation and procreation appear both together and in juxtaposition. Indeed, it somehow seemed to be in the tension between those two kinds of mystical creativity that death along with life as humans now know it was mythically introduced into the Trobriand universe.

These connections are not coincidental in the terms of the culture, for the focal moments of both creating life and ending it in their most essential respects consist of *bwekasa* sacrifices. The processes of procreation according to the indigenous theory of human reproduction and the ritual protocols surrounding death and mourning involve reciprocal exchanges of potent *momova*- or life-giving images consequent to particular kinds of deaths. These two—indigenous understandings of procreation and death—are, with the possible exception of *kula* exchange, the contexts of Trobriand culture and sociality which have in the past received the greatest anthropological attention. Not having yet been comprehended as *bwekasa* sacrificial forms, however, the ethnographic understanding of both till now is seriously incomplete.

Even so, when thinking about it, the connections at issue should not be entirely unexpected. The conception of a Trobriand *waiwaia* fetus that eventually grows into the *baloma* soul of a live, physical human being and the bodily release of that *baloma* soul set to become a *baloma* spirit are nearly identical or mirrored events. One initiates human life in Boyowa, the other *baloma* spirit existence in Tuma; and by the same token, the former results from the death of a *baloma* spirit of Tuma and the latter from the death of a human being of Boyowa.

Perhaps the most pronounced and longstanding conundrum arising from Trobriand ethnography, and one that has certainly overshadowed that of magical agency, concerns the indigenous theory of human procreation, famously and colorfully celebrated in the context of the “virgin birth” debate of the 1960s that surfaced initially in the journal *Man*. The whole question arose from Malinowski’s early report of Islanders’ belief in spirit impregnation as the basic “cause” (*u’ula*) of pregnancy, expressive, therefore, of a supposed “[ignorance] of the physiological process of impregnation” ([1916] 1992: 215, and *passim*).

It is tempting to revisit the full list of opinions and reinterpretations of Malinowski’s original data and the several amendments which have been provided by subsequent fieldworkers and contributors, especially in that so many of the greatest luminaries of twentieth-century anthropology joined the fray. After

much of the dust had settled, Carol Delaney (1986) ventured that much of the confusion was generated from the anthropologists' own "ignorance of (or lack of attention to) the meaning of paternity in their own culture [which] made opaque what should have been transparent . . . with regard to other people's beliefs about procreation" (1986: 509). As she stated, by Malinowski's time in particular, Mendelian genetics had not yet been rediscovered. The prevailing ideas of procreation in the West had fathers providing the essential "seed," which was merely "nourished" during incubation in mothers' wombs (*ibid.*: 508), and it seems it was some version of *this* theory of which Trobrianders were supposedly ignorant.

When, instead of merely asking about the *u'ula* of pregnancy, I directly advanced the embryological view of the matter, I found the natives absolutely ignorant of the process suggested. To the simile of a seed being planted in the soil and the plant growing out of the seed, they remained quite irresponsible. They were curious, indeed, and asked whether this was "the white man's manner of doing it," but they were quite certain that this was not the "custom" of Kiriwina. (Malinowski [1916] 1992: 223)

But that has not been the only confusion. The ethnographic details of Trobriand views of reproduction as reported by Malinowski and debated by others have been from the start seriously incomplete.<sup>1</sup> According to my reading of most of the existing sources on Trobriand "virgin birth," a thorough reexamination would unnecessarily distract me from my main purpose as concerns the

1. As many have noted, in his Special Foreword to the third edition of *The sexual life of savages* (1932: lvii–lxxxii), Malinowski modified certain elements of his earlier 1916 report of the status of Trobriand "*ignorantia paternitatis*" (see chapter 1).

For present purposes, however, Malinowski's views on the critical ethnographic questions at issue are unchanged: namely, Trobrianders remain unaware of "the causal connection (between copulation and pregnancy)" owing to their "faulty knowledge . . . when it comes to process of sexual fertilization" (*ibid.*: lxxv). His adherence to the substance of his initial report would seem to be necessary if his thesis of "mother-right" versus "father-love" was to be maintained. "Their strong matrilineal principles of law make the recognition of paternity a remote question to them, and the supernatural version of the causes of childbirth has the strongest hold on their imagination and the greatest influence on their institutional life" (*ibid.*: lxxvi).

connections between magical agency and kin reckoning and behavior.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, as an initial step in that direction and to be clear as to the direction in which I shall be heading, I will summarize the main parameters of the indigenous theory of human procreation at least as I have been instructed in recent inquiries at Omarakana and as partly summarized in chapter 4. It will hopefully become apparent that the process of conceiving a child corresponds to, and indeed is an instance of, *bwekasa* sacrifice. This, I suggest, has been the missing piece of critical information which, if included in Malinowski's original presentations, would have made indigenous views of paternity, procreation, and much else vastly more intelligible. With that goal in view, I trust I will be excused for embarking on a close reexamination of the essential points in Malinowski's account, highlighting the clues to the solution of the "virgin birth" puzzle which actually have been long available but overlooked. It is my hope that, in assessing indigenous views of these matters through an awareness of *bwekasa* in the context of both procreation theory and beliefs about the Tuma afterlife generally, the rationality and elegance of Trobriand culture on these points can be redeemed.

#### VIRGIN BIRTH REDUX: CONCEPTION AS *BWEKASA*

A condensed version of contemporary Omarakanans' traditional ideas about human procreation runs as follows. In the act of human sexual intercourse (*kaita*), a woman's body, and particularly her internal womb, functions much like the clay pot in Kasaiwalova's illustration of *bitarwai kebila*: that is, as a "built-up platform" on which *bwekasa* offerings can be deposited as a point of access to Tuma. Malinowski ([1916] 1992: 218) makes explicit reference to such a view.

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2. In the opinion of Michael Young (2004: 432), none of the fieldworkers who have followed Malinowski have seriously questioned his claims as to spirits being the reputed cause of conception. Those readers who wish to review the main contributions to the debate that had appeared by the 1990s should consult the references listed in Mosko (1995, 1998b, 2005b). I should mention that the interpretation of Trobriand conception appearing in my 1995 piece "Rethinking Trobriand chieftainship," composed before I had undertaken my own fieldwork, while differing slightly from certain details in what follows, was expressly informed by the NME notion of personal partibility and is thus not fundamentally inconsistent with the view presented here of procreation as an instance of *bwekasa*.

The offerings consist of watery *bubwalua* fluids excreted from the *lopola* interior of *both* the woman's and her partner's bodies into her vaginal cavity (ibid.: 223). The woman expels *buyai* "blood," and the man's *momona* "semen" is said to "feed" (*vakam*) the fetus, both being types of bodily discharge or *bubwalua*.<sup>3</sup> These effluvia are understood to emerge (*sunapula*) as ejaculations produced by the "heat" (*yuviyavi*) arising from the exertions of copulation—the active exertions of the man's penis upon the women's comparatively passive genitalia but also in the couple's mutual embraces, their sharing of body heat, their love for each other, and so on. That heat, furthermore, is incorporated in the *momova* life of the created fetus. Once ejected into the woman's womb, the two fluids are stirred or mixed through the couple's repetitive coital labors. The man's *momona* and exertions are said to be responsible for the initial "coagulation" or "hardening" of the woman's more fluid *buyai*. Over the course of numerous such acts of intercourse, therefore, the woman's blood is gradually coalesced or congealed into a new "amalgam" or "formation" (*ikuli*), which is subsequently enhanced by further feeding depositions of the father's semen.

According to several of the classic accounts of indigenous views on procreation, a woman can supposedly conceive only if her vagina has been "opened" through sexual or other means. I think it fair to say that this assertion has been widely interpreted to mean that the critical point of this penetration concerns the woman's hymen, consistent with Western understandings of what

3. This procreative life-giving "blood" (*buyai*) released by the woman's bodily interior into her womb during coitus is perhaps best characterized as "womb-blood" to differentiate it from dead "menstrual blood," which is released from her womb in the event, following intercourse, of unsuccessful conception of a fetus. As Malinowski (1932: 144) recorded, the blood of the living body carries the linguistic possessive of "nearest possession" (*buyaigu*), as with intact body parts, where that of menstrual blood employs that of "second nearest possession" (*agu buyai*), such as with external decorations, clothing, and so on. According to my informants, both female and male, the womb-blood involved in conception is living and clean, whereas menstrual blood, consisting partly of the man's semen acquired through sexual intercourse insufficient for conception, has become dead and dirty. Contrary to Malinowski's assertion (ibid.), contact with menstrual blood is strictly tabooed for adult males for fear of its negative effect on courting magic. A woman's womb-blood secreted into her womb, in other words, undergoes either of two destinies: successfully stopped up through the activity of copulation, it contributes to the living body blood of a fetus; or in the absence of sufficient masculine and/or spiritual contributions, it is evacuated according to the monthly cycle. The eventual menstrual flow is thus understood to be a mix of the dead, procreatively failed sexual secretions of both the woman and her partner (see chapter 7; ibid.: 234–35; Mosko 2005b, and below; cf. Montague 2001).



categorically distinguishes the virgin from the non-virgin. It has been explained to me, however, that the action of “opening” which enables a woman to conceive is not at the vagina’s external aperture but at its internal terminus—in medical terms, the woman’s cervix. This is significant because it is from this point that her womb-blood is forceably ejected from the bodily interior (*lopola*) of her abdomen into the space classified as her “womb” (*bam*). In other words, the necessity of “opening” the woman’s vagina for the sake of fertility is not merely that of physically producing a channel for eventual childbirth; it is rather the critical means through which her partner elicits the excretion of womb-blood, whether it results in the generation of a child or the excretion of menstrual fluids.

In the former circumstance, the initial formation of the fetus-to-be comprises a composite of the *kekwebu* images connected with the *dala* identities of both parents, assuming that they are themselves unrelated to each other as regards any previous sharing of *dala* identities in the persons of their own parents.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in the case at hand, the complete *waiwaia* fetus that eventually results from the full process of conception (i.e., including the spiritual contribution of a reincarnated *waiwaia* “spirit child” (see below)—contains images and capacities of both its parents. At birth, the child will embody in its substantial blood *kekwebu* of its mother’s *dala*, and in its physical form, which has been fed by the father, the child will manifest images of his/her *dala*. As regards the latter process, it is due to the coagulating capacities of the father’s semen and other contributions associated with the *kekwebu* of his/her maternal *dala* that the child assumes the father’s bodily appearance.

It is important to appreciate that sexual fluids—men’s and women’s *momona* ejaculates and womb-blood—when excreted to the outside of human bodies, either independent of coitus or mixed together as menstrual blood, are “dead” (*kaliga*) and “dirty” (*pupagatu*) things.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, excreted sexual fluids are

4. For the sake of simplicity, I am here portraying a generic case of conjugal relationship which might in certain circumstances be otherwise, particularly when a couple hail from two matrilineal *dalas* that are regularly connected through bilateral cross-cousin marriage exchange: for example, when a man or woman marries into his or her father’s *dala* (see chapter 8).

5. There is ethnographic evidence in traditional understandings that Trobriand women, like their North Mekeo counterparts, do not menstruate except as a consequence of sexual intercourse that is inadequate for producing a fetus. Also, my reference here to “womb-blood” as distinct from “menstrual blood” points to a distinction critical to the understanding of indigenous Trobriand views of procreation (see chapter 7; Mosko 2005b; Lepani 2012: 99).

analogous to any other secretions that emerge from inside the skin as evidence of the general process of bodily *kaligeya'i* decomposition. Consistent with this, villagers testify that their experience of the immediate aftermath of sexual climax is similar to death: they feel compelled to sleep. But when sexual fluids are ejaculated and mixed together in women's Tuma-like wombs as described above, the "death" of the copulating couple is understood to be conducive to the generation of new life—a circumstance symptomatic of virtually all contexts of human agency (see Mosko 2009).

To be clear, the father's feeding and forming contributions, which continue by various means through the duration of the father's and child's relationship, do not affect or modify the character of the images constituting the maternal contributions of blood and *baloma*, but they do contribute in critical ways to the constitution of the conceived child's completed, total person. On assuming that the mother and father did not already share maternal or paternal connections, a woman's children are "strangers" (*tomakava*) to their father only as regards the status of their parents' relationship at the moment prior to their first sexual congress (see below). Thereafter and for the rest of a man's and his children's lives, they are anything but "strangers." It is the narrow definition of "physiological paternity"—basically a Trobriand oxymoron—introduced into these considerations by Malinowski and unquestioned by others which has led to the erroneous conclusion that fathers and children are *tomakava*, sharing nothing personal.

So how do these details of procreation add up to its qualifying as *bwekasa*? The woman's womb is a platform for the sacrificial mixed offering of the heated *ikuli* of her and her husband's sexual fluids to ancestral *baloma* spirits. In this instance, it is not a case where the ancestral *baloma* consume or ingest, as in "eating" with their spirit mouths, elements of the foods contained in *bwekasa* meals; rather, when living people in Boyowa engage in sexual intercourse, their spirit ancestors in the mirrored world of Tuma are capacitated to participate in it too. So in reciprocation for the presentation of the human couple's sexual fluids into Tuma to be made available to *baloma* spirits, the spirits engage in sexual relations of their own, leaving behind on the blood-and-semen *ikuli* concoction of the copulating couple *bubwalua* residues of their, the spirits', sexual exuviae.

This will require a fair measure of additional explanation.

In many recorded descriptions of the afterlife of *baloma*, Tuma is described as a "paradise" where, among other enjoyments, inhabitants are thought to engage in frequent coitus. Consistent with this view, *baloma* spirits engage in sexual relations in the same moments as do their human descendants. And if certain *baloma*

spirits as long as they exist in Tuma are fortunate to have a multitude of living descendants partaking of sex then they, the spirits, will have that many more opportunities for enjoying simultaneous sex in their own right.

Timing in the Trobriands, as elsewhere, is everything. Throughout his writings, Malinowski gave the strong impression that, according to the traditional culture, adult villagers' sexual activity is a year-round, daily activity (e.g., [1916] 1992: 236). The overwhelming preponderance of sexual intercourse for those adults equipped to participate in it supposedly occurs instead, however, in the two or three months immediately following the annual harvest of yam and taro exchange gardens, when intensive garden work and other heavy labors are effectively forbidden. This coincides with the season of *milamala* celebrations, when, in the aftermath of an especially abundant harvest, *baloma* ancestors are thought to return to their Boyowa villages from Tuma and to participate in the singing, dancing, and other festivities, including acts of sex, in harmony with their descendants. The remaining months of the year are taken up with intense death-like gardening labors (*paisewa*), including the work of garden magic, as performed conjointly by humans and *bilubaloma*, that is required for the reproduction of people's and spirits' plants rather than human "children." Accordingly, when at harvest time people do turn to procreating their human offspring, they desist from the labor of engendering garden foods. Ancestral *baloma* simply allocate their creative powers in coordination with those of humans. After all, it is when they are supposedly visiting their relatives and practicing spirit sex in the festive aftermath of harvest that they are understood to be on hand to convey *waiwaia* spirit children from Tuma to their human descendants directly.

At this juncture, it must be asked: What form does the sacrificial counterprerestation or spirit blessing for coital *bwekasa* take? The answer: the *waiwaia* spirit child emerging from an aged *baloma* spirit that has shed its skin. A *waiwaia* fetus is essentially the detached residue of a *baloma* spirit that emerges from the spirit's decomposing body at the moment it dies in Tuma. As Malinowski recorded, the *waiwaia* assumes a liquid form when it is transported by another *baloma* spirit of Tuma to be deposited into the womb of its human mother.

After his transformation in Tuma, [the *waiwaia*] becomes just some sort of "blood," *buia'i*. In what manner he could be subsequently transported in such liquid form was not certain. But the term *buia'i* seems to have a slightly wider connotation than fluid blood merely, and it may mean something like flesh in this case. ([1916] 1992: 217, emphasis added)

This blood qualifies, of course, as a type of *bubwalua* bodily fluid akin to saliva and sweat rather than solid flesh.

Once deposited in the mother's womb, during the pregnancy and after being born, the *waiwaia* can be fed by various donations (*kopoi*) through the feeding agency of the father. This is why numerous acts of sex on the father's part are necessary to feed and build or grow the fetus progressively so that the *kekwebu* images he imparts can shape or form the infant child so as to resemble him. And the additional feeding and forming contributions of the father continue well after the child's birth (see below).

Therefore, in addition to substantial blood and feeding, mothers and fathers contribute nonsubstantial *baloma* spirit and *ikuli* form, respectively.

The indigenous notion that numerous acts of sexual intercourse are necessary to successfully conceive a child recalls the requirement shared with other kinds of *bwekasa* that regular acts of sacrifice are needed to achieve desired magical results. Once is not enough. Magicians must repeat their spells and the separate passages of them many times in their initial internalization and on any later occasions when they recite them in magical practice. Couples, family units, magicians, and whole communities must also regularly sacrifice to their ancestors in various ways in order to produce and reproduce the favorable results that they desire.

The fact that sacrifice via sexual intercourse involves a combination of both male and female contributions conforms to *bwekasa*'s general pattern. Daily family meals, for example, ideally consist of both meat and plant foods, symbolically identified as "male" and "female," respectively. Also, the boiling of food by rule should include *sopi* waters of two gendered categories: masculine salt water from the sea and feminine fresh water from the land. The hot (*yuviyavi*) process of cooking, as noted earlier, is regarded as akin to killing, and by it the constituent foods are softened or decomposed so that their inner animate *kekwebu* ingredients can be released, enabling them to mix together in the womb-like pot to form a new *ikuli* (i.e., the meal), one distinct from its separate constituents. A woman's hearth (*kailagila*) as a *waiwai kebila* offering platform is a sacred (*bomaboma*) place that must never be used for the cooking of prohibited things. This is because it is considered to be an exit and entry point between Boyowa and Tuma, a site for exchanging *kekwebu* between beings of the realms of the living and the dead.

This comparison between food preparation and procreation as analogous forms of *bwekasa* sacrifice is further affirmed by the very term for "spirit child": *waiwaia*. The *waiwaia* created from the conjugal mixing of father's and mother's

personal essences with that of a reincarnated *baloma* spirit is a *waiwai kebila* sacrificial offering in the strictly literal sense. The *waiwaia* deposited into the woman's womb by transporting ancestral *baloma*, in other words, is a sacrificial *waiwai* or *waiwaia* item presented upon an appropriate place or "platform" (*kebila*) for building or consolidating relationships.

Additionally connecting cooking with procreation, at the moment women remove chunks of boiled food from a cooking pot for serving, they typically cry as when grieving, even to the point of quietly singing a funeral dirge as performed at the death of a relative. "That is another moment of *bwekasa*," explained Molubabeba.

She thinks about good food, thinks back to her brothers or parents, how dead ones looked after her. That's what triggers it. Right then a connection of Boyowa with Tuma is made. So this is part of women's special role of being a kind of medium between Tuma and Boyowa. (Fieldnotes extract, August 15, 2015)

Thus the generation of life through cooking and procreation is similarly predicated upon preliminary dying.

Molubabeba's comment reveals another requirement of all *bwekasa* sacrifices, at least those that can have any hope of bearing fruit. The people making whatever kind of offering should be thinking fondly of their ancestors, not only as they cook the food, for example, but also as they share it among family members, indeed when they are reciting *megwa* spells or engaging in sex, and so on. *Bwekasa* in all its forms is regarded as a reciprocal act of "love" (*yebweli*) and "sympathy" (*ninabwela*) on the part of humans for their ancestors and on the part of ancestors for those who remember and sacrifice to them. True love and sympathy require more than isolated, irregular actions. If one presents a merely material *bwekasa* offering free of the appropriate feelings or sentiments (*lunkola*), the ancestors will simply not receive it or respond with their blessings. This detail helps to explain why the copulations of loving married couples are expectably blessed with children whereas single people's inconstant casual unions are understood to result only rarely in pregnancy.

#### *Malinowski's hints of procreative bwekasa*

With these clarifications in view, a close reading even of Malinowski's original writings suggests a fundamentally different picture from the one he struggled

to represent. It should first be noted that Malinowski ventured into the topic of human procreation as a digression within the broader topic of his interest in the “Baloma” paper: namely, Islanders’ belief in reincarnation ([1916] 1992: 215).

When the *baloma* has grown old, his teeth fall out, his skin gets loose and wrinkled; he goes to the beach and bathes in the salt water; then he throws off his skin just as a snake would do, and becomes a young child again; really an embryo, a *waiwaia*—a term applied to children in utero and immediately after birth. A *baloma* woman sees this *waiwaia*; she takes it up, and puts it in a basket or a plaited and folded coconut leaf (*puatai*). She carries the small being to Kiriwina, and places it in the womb of some woman, inserting it per vaginam. Then that woman becomes pregnant (*nasusuma*).

This is the story as I obtained it from the first informant who mentioned the subject to me. It implies two important psychological facts: the belief in reincarnation, and the ignorance of the physiological causes of pregnancy. ([1916] 1992: 216)

So the *waiwaia* spirit child is an aged *baloma* spirit of Tuma who has shed its old, wrinkled skin as snakes do, but resembles also what the *baloma* soul of an aged human of Boyowa does when it abandons its timeworn corpse at the moment of its mortal death. And the transfer of the *waiwaia* to the mother’s womb is “definitely” affected by the action of another *baloma* spirit, either “some woman,” as in this passage, or a male *baloma* of the same *dala* as the mother, and sometimes in the course of the mother’s *bwekasa* dreaming (ibid.: 219–20).

The real cause of pregnancy is always a *baloma* [sic], who is inserted into or enters the body of a woman, and without whose existence a woman could not become pregnant; all babies are made or come into existence (*ibubulisi*) in Tuma. ([1916] 1992: 216)<sup>6</sup>

It is hardly surprising that Malinowski was perplexed by the manner of the fluid *waiwaia*’s transport, since he was relatively uninterested in religious dimensions of obligation and exchange as exemplified in *bwekasa* sacrifice. But

6. This word *ibubulisi* shares the root */bubul/* “create” as in the time of *bubuli* “cosmic creation” (see chapter 3).

elsewhere he gives other accounts of how the *waiwaia* is transported via water, specifically the seawater connecting Tuma to Boyowa (ibid.: 217–19).

Further insights consistent with broader understandings of *bwekasa* can be discerned in additional claims Malinowski presents concerning whether Trobrianders were truly “ignorant of physiological paternity.” While he expresses his certainty as to villagers’ lack of knowledge on the latter point, he admits that he is “stressed” by other statements that a woman’s vagina must be “opened up” sexually or otherwise before she can become pregnant (see above).<sup>7</sup> To him, the people were holding two completely contradictory viewpoints (ibid.: 221–23, 227–29). To resolve this contradiction, he devises a

distinction between impregnation, that is the idea of the father having a share in building up the body of the child on the one hand, and the purely physical action of sexual intercourse on the other. Concerning the latter, the view held by the natives may be formulated thus: it is necessary for the woman to have gone through sexual life before she can bear a child. . . . The state of knowledge in Kiriwina is just at the point where there is a vague idea as to some nexus between sexual connection and pregnancy, whereas there is no idea whatever concerning the man’s contribution towards the new life which is being formed in the mother’s body. ([1916] 1992: 221; see also 228–31)

Summing up the evidence that led him to this position, and specifically the point concerning a woman’s engagement in “sexual life,” he notes,

To direct questions as to the cause (*u’ula*) of a child being created, or a woman becoming pregnant, I received the invariable answer, “*Baloma boge isaika* (the *baloma* gave it).”

Of course, like all questions about the *u’ula*, this one has to be put with patience and discrimination, and it may at times remain unanswered. *But in the many cases when I put this question bluntly and directly, and when it was comprehended, I received this answer, though I must add here at once that it was at times complicated in an extremely puzzling manner by some hints about copulation.* ([1916] 1992: 221–22, emphasis added)

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7. Kilivilan terms for this process of “openness” or “opening” are *ilemwa* and *katuyewa*, the opposite of *katuboda* “closed” or “closing.”



But if copulation is viewed as *bwekasa*, then the extreme puzzlement that Malinowski experienced evaporates. A man's and woman's joint sexual encounter is part of the sacrificial process that results in spirits bequeathing the *waiwaia* to the woman as their blessing of *bubwalua*. But this explanation fell outside the conditions that Malinowski demanded through the nature of his questions: essentially, that the father contribute *to the child's "blood."* He could not envision another sort of bequest of the father's that, according to indigenous thought, triggered that of the spirits. If, for the sake of argument, the father's contributions are not *physiological*, they are certainly *physiological*.

With human sexuality and procreation viewed along these lines, there is much evidence that in the terms of the culture human children do result ordinarily from the sexual interactions of their parents, mediated, however, by the extraordinary agency of spirits in offering *bobwelila* blessings responding to acts of procreative *bwekasa* sacrifice. The question as put by Malinowski and pursued by others subsequently as a simple choice between spirit versus paternal agency is a false one. Claims as to the agency of spirit insemination are not equivalent to denials of paternal agency but consequences of it. It is only from being unaware of the full significance of *bwekasa* and *bubwalua* that Malinowski could write:

The spermatic fluid (*momona*) serves merely the purposes of pleasure and lubrication, and it is characteristic that the word *momona* denotes both the male and female discharge. Of any other properties of the same they have not the slightest idea. Thus, any view of paternal consanguinity or kinship, conceived as a bodily relation between father and child, is completely foreign to the native mind. ([1916] 1992: 223–24)

The questions Malinowski asked in regard to pregnancies among unmarried women basically affirmed the same answers he had received with other inquiries, but with a new twist:

"There are plenty of unmarried girls, why did this one get with child, and the others not," the answer would be: "*It is a baloma who gave her this child.*" And here again I was often puzzled by some remarks, pointing to the view that an unmarried girl is especially exposed to the danger of being approached by a *baloma*, if she is very unchaste. Yet the girls deem it much better precaution to avoid directly any exposure to the *baloma* by not bathing at high tide, etc., *than*

*indirectly to escape the danger by being too scrupulously chaste.* ([1916] 1992: 222, emphasis added)

On numerous occasions, I have been told that a woman who engages in frequent sex with multiple partners is actually *less* likely to conceive a child than a woman who sleeps with a single regular lover.<sup>8</sup> The building up of the fetus's *ikuli* form with a plurality of male donations supposedly overcomplicates or confuses (*wou'ya*) the shape that it would assume if it was properly nurtured for sustained, unhindered growth in the mother's womb. In this circumstance, the woman menstruates (see Mosko 2005b). The logic here is that when a couple intentionally seek to conceive children, they will do so ritually, that is, as *bwekasa*. Copulating otherwise entails a minimum of procreative potency, similarly to how the eating of foods lacking the *bubwalua* of the ancestors contains minimal sustenance for bodily strength.

#### BUWALA: FREE GIFTS

There are further entailments of reciprocal gift-giving enacted in the context of coitus that point to additional performances of *bwekasa* sacrifice. In connection with his view of fathers as "strangers" or "non-kinsmen" of his own children, Malinowski reported the contrast between the "free gifts" known as *buwala* that a father lavishes upon his children and the payments (*pokala*) he expects of his matrilineal heirs when they seek to persuade him to transfer items of his wealth to themselves (1922: 177–80; 1926: 40–41).<sup>9</sup> He states that the extraordinary

8. In a related respect, Malinowski (1932: 167–68) was puzzled by the seeming low frequency of pregnancy among young women despite their reputed frequency of sexual intercourse. For pronouncements on this phenomenon by his contemporaries, see Austen (1934–35: 19) and Montagu (1937, 1946); more recently, see Greenfield (1968) and Chowning (1969) on the "Bruce effect"; Montague (1973); Lepani (2012: 99).

9. I cannot proceed without alluding to how *buwala* as "free" or "pure gift" has figured at the center of a longstanding debate in anthropology with theoretical implications as arguably momentous as those attending the virgin birth debate. Malinowski's original account of *buwala* that a man gives to a woman during and after courting and to his children as father (1922: 177–80) was eventually adopted in Marshall Sahlins' (1972) concept of "generalized exchange," which was triggered by an earlier critique from Mauss ([1925] 2017: 186–89) which led Malinowski (1926:

attentions a man devotes to his children are “payment” (*mapula*) for their mother’s gifts of her body and the other services that she provides to the husband for his pleasure and enjoyment.

When the man gives [magic, wealth, property] to any of his *veiola* [kin], to his younger brother, or his maternal nephew, he receives a payment, called in this case *pokala*, and a very considerable payment it has to be. When magic is taught to the son, no payment whatever is levied. This, like many features of native custom, is extremely puzzling, because the maternal relatives have the right to the magic, and the son has really no right whatever, and he may be, under certain circumstances, deprived of the privilege by those entitled to it; yet he receives it free of charge, and they have to pay for it heavily.

Forbearing other explanations, I simply state the native answer to this puzzling question (my informants saw the contradiction quite clearly, and perfectly well understood why I was puzzled). They said: “The man gives it to the children of his wife. He cohabits with her, he possesses her, she does for him all that a wife must do for a man. Whatever he does for a child is a payment (*mapula*) for what he has received from her.” And this answer is by no means the opinion of one informant only. It sums up the stereotyped answers given to me whenever I discussed this matter. Thus, in the native mind, the intimate relationship between husband and wife, and not any idea, however slight or remote, of physical fatherhood, is the reason for all that the father does for his children. It must be clearly understood that social and psychological fatherhood (the sum of all the ties, emotional, legal, economic) is the result of the man’s obligations towards his wife, and physiological fatherhood does not exist in the mind of the natives. ([1916] 1992: 226; see also 1915–18, 2/11: 1167–78)

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40–41) later to reconceptualize *burwala* as reciprocal exchange (see Parry 1986: 454, 458, 461–62, 464–65; M. Douglas 1990; cf. Weiner 1980a). In the absence of the information presented here concerning *burwala*, its qualification as *bwekasa* sacrifice involving the participation of *baloma* has been overlooked. Among those noted, however, Parry, following Mauss, stands out in appreciating the religious dimension of such transactions in societies of this type where gifts incorporate elements of the persons transacting them. Also, clarifying *burwala* as the transmissibility of *kekwalu* contained in sacred *bubwalua*, therefore, is potentially of considerable theoretical significance for rethinking both “pure gifts” in general and the Maori *hau* specifically.

The husband's gifts to his children are indeed viewed as *mapula* "payments" or "repayments" in response to the mother's gift of her body sexually, but also for everything else that she does for him in her capacity as wife and also for what his maturing children begin to reciprocate to him on their own part.<sup>10</sup> My interlocutors claim that Malinowski's puzzlement here is largely due to his failure to appreciate the gifts of both parents as transactions involving *baloma*: that is, as *bwekasa*. In the context of sexual intercourse, the woman's presentation of her body to the husband offers him access to the sacred Tuma space encapsulated in her womb. From that encounter, the husband is able to receive the *bobwelila* blessings of her ancestral spirits composed of *kekwebu* images of her *dala*. Those hot blessings flood his body with the intense *peu'ula* powers and pleasures of climax. Here as with *bitarwai kebila* and in other sacrificial contexts, the blessings returned by the spirits do not come back directly to her—the "sacrifier," in Hubert and Mauss's classic model—but are passed on to a third party, her husband. Accordingly, he is then obliged to reciprocate to his wife with *burwala* (*mapula*; see chapters 6 and 8; cf. Lepani 2012: 116). But as I have described for other instances of *bwekasa*, she is not alone in consuming or benefiting from the husband's *burwala*. She is obliged to share it with others of her *boda* group. She

10. Katherine Lepani (2012: 71–72, 112–18) has thus far presented the most detailed description of *burwala* in the contemporary context, but she concentrates exclusively on the transactions between unmarried courting persons to the neglect of *burwala* between a married couple and their children as discussed here. In her view, the *burwala* transactions of unmarried lovers engage the couple in a wider field of relations preliminary to the possible sealing of the marriage bond in that the male approaches his kin for the articles to give as *burwala*, and the female recipient passes the items she receives to her kin. This would not be inconsistent with sexual intercourse as an instance of *bwekasa* sacrifice to the extent that the token offered by the male and received by the woman is normally not consumed by her but passed along to others. While Lepani stresses that her informants reject the suggestion that the offering of *burwala* constitutes *mapula* "payment" for the man's enjoyment of the woman's sexual services, she notes that "people do speak about *burwala* in terms of an equivalence of exchange, that is, in terms of replacing one thing for another, which suggests the interchangeable value of sex and goods as equivalent resources" (ibid.: 116). This seems to me still to overly restrict *burwala* to the sphere of non-religious economic transactions when sexuality and reproduction in practically all other contexts of the culture as discussed in this volume involve the sacred participation of *baloma*. In support of this view, my research team affirm that when a bachelor gives *burwala* to a woman, it signifies to her that he is intent upon building their relationship in the same sense as conveyed with *bitarwai kebila*: that is, of building a "base" or "platform" for an exclusive sexual relationship between the two leading to marriage.

will do this in relation to certain persons of her same *dala*—prototypically with her mother when she is single, her children when she is married.

So what is going on when the father offers *buwala* payments (food, shelter, knowledge, land, valuables, etc.) to his spouse and/or children in reciprocation for the sacrifice of the mother's sexuality and other services? He gives a sacrifice of *kekwebu* images as incorporated in his person and thereby of the *tukwa* legacy of his *dala* (or the *dala* of his father; see below and chapter 8). In the course of daily exchanges of this sort, the father can continue to imbibe in the blessings received from his own ancestors, but not as the singular person who offered them up as sacrificer. When he shares in the meals he has provisioned along with other family members, he is only one among the *boda* recipients of the spirits' blessings, so technically he is not consuming his own sacrifice.

My collaborator Pakalaki volunteered a further example of *buwala* involving the regular sacrificial relations pertaining between the Omarakana Paramount Chief, his Vila Bogwa "principal wife" (Inala Kiriwian, literally "Mother of Kiriwina"), and all Islanders who fall under his authority as Tamala Kiriwina, "Father of Kiriwina."

Pakalaki volunteered that *sebuwala* must come from outside, cannot come from inside the matrilineal *dala*. Thus that is what fathers do, they are absolutely necessary for the *dala* to have anything, even its own wealth and personnel. So this is all confirmed, and reveals a very different understanding of kinship. Father gives his *kekwebu* to his children, but it is a kind of reciprocation for the use of the mother's body. Thus when the Paramount Chief is father to his people, he is making *sebuwala* to Inala Kilivila when he distributes his yams and other wealth to his children. So the relation of the chief to the Katayuvisa [political chief] and Vila Bogwa (and all the other chiefly wives) as Inala Kilivila is a marital one, and this is why the chief looks after his following, those acts of feeding and forming are his *sebuwala*. (Fieldnote entry, September 25, 2012)<sup>11</sup>

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11. As I describe elsewhere (Mosko 2013b; cf. Lawton 1993: 100, 103) and elaborate in chapter 8, there are two chiefly *dalas* based at Omarakana conforming to the diarchic pattern of sacred and secular chieftainship common to Polynesia. There is the sacred Tabalu chief and resident Katayuvisa "advisor" or "political" or "oratory" chief of the Osapola-Bwaydaga branch of Kwenama *dala*. Among other responsibilities, the Katayuvisa is charged with conveying to the community at large the instructions of the Tabalu and convening the village and/or cluster council or advisory body. The Tabalu's principal wife is recruited from Osapola-Bwaydaga as the Katayuvisa's sister,

It is important to note that, in the same sense that a father's *burwala* gifts to his wife and/or children are not "free gifts," neither are his wife's and (adult) children's ongoing reciprocities of material items and services. A critical step in every son's and daughter's maturation as well as in every woman's marriage occurs when they for their own part initiate counterprestations to the father's and/or husband's *burwala* devotions. These figure critically in the detailed logic of mortuary exchange.

### MORTUARY RITES AS *BWEKASA*

The point of this last digression has been to demonstrate how sexual intercourse, *burwala* gift-giving, and other practices connected with the transfer of *waiwai*a spirit children from Tuma to Boyowa are but analogous steps in a chain of *bwekasa* sacrifices focused not only upon the procreation of human children but also on the building or tying together (*sipusipu*) of relations generally between the dead and the living.

The other comparably decisive episode in the ongoing transformations of the wider Trobriand cosmos transpires in the mortuary ceremonies occasioned by the exit of *baloma* "souls" from humans' bodies at the moment of corporeal death, initiating their new life as *baloma* "spirits" in Tuma. In his inaugural essay describing beliefs and practices connected with *baloma*, Malinowski refrained from treating mortuary practices because he was focusing at that stage only on the life of the spirits in the spirit world, and also because "the [former] are extremely complex, and, in order to be properly described, a thorough knowledge of the native social system would be required" ([1916] 1992: 150).

At one brief later juncture, however, Malinowski cited "rites of death and mourning" among the religious acts involving moral obligations to the "object,

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and thus the "Mother of Kiriwina." The point here is that all of the distributions of yams, pigs, areca nut, entertainment, and so on, and the performance of magic that the Tabalu distributes to his people qualify as *burwala* received in consequence of *bwekasa* sacrifice. On the basis of this evidence, the Tabalu/Osapola-Bwaydaga paramountcy qualifies as a "divine chiefdom," as outlined by Hocart ([1927] 1969, [1936] 1970), Sahlins (1981, 1985, 2017), and others. Also, in chapters 7 and 8 I comment further on Pakalaki's remarks concerning what fathers must do insofar as *burwala* must come from outside the *dala*, and so on, in the context of rules of exogamy and the incest taboo.

ghost, spirit or power worshipped" (1926: 43), which seem to allude vaguely to the pattern of *bwekasa* I have outlined thus far. But as Annette Weiner has surmised, Malinowski never reached the point of analyzing funerary activities with the detail that he devoted to sexuality, *kula*, family life, gardening, and so on, on the grounds, perhaps, that they appeared to be "women's business" and "unworthy of careful study" (1976: 7–8, 12–13; cf. Young 2004: 427, 514, 519). And for this reason, Weiner and others with the benefit of recent ethnographic field research—particularly contributors to the second *kula* volume (Damon and Wagner 1989)—have written at length analyzing mortuary rites across the Massim to fill this vital gap.<sup>12</sup>

Even so, the situation remains similar to that encountered above in my account of the extant ethnography on views of procreation. From what is known thus far about Trobriand life and death, it might be reasonably expected that indigenous understandings of the relations between Boyowa and Tuma would find explicit expression in mortuary practices. While in the writings of Malinowski and others who have contributed to this topic there is the occasional mention that the ancestral spirits of the dead are presumed to be in attendance at *sagali* ceremonials, there have been no overt suggestions that any of the exchanges of feast foods or other materials amount in any consequential way to religious offerings to *baloma* or other spirits. Malinowski's view on this possibility replicates the generally accepted outlook about the relative autonomy noted earlier of human and spirit affairs:

Among the natives of Kiriwina, death is the starting point of two series of events which run almost independently of each other. Death affects the deceased individual; his soul (*baloma* or *balom*) leaves the body and goes to another world, there to lead a shadowy existence. His passing is also a matter of concern to the bereft community. Its members wail for him, mourn for him, and celebrate an endless series of feasts. These festivities consist, as a rule, in the distribution of uncooked food; while less frequently they are actual feasts on which cooked food

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12. It should be noted that only Lepowsky (1989, 1993) among the contributors to the second "*kula* volume" records unambiguously that mortuary prestations are simultaneously offered to ancestral spirits to gain their favor in the hope of receiving from them abundant crops, good health, and fertility and to avoid the spirits' displeasure, which is seen to cause epidemics, famines, droughts, and death when they are displeased. There is a slight hint in Damon's chapter (1989: 84) that the central mortuary gift among Muyuwans may have similar spiritual significance.



is eaten on the spot. They center around the dead man's body, and are closely connected with the duties of mourning, wailing and sorrowing for the dead individual. But—and this is the important point for the present description—these social activities and ceremonies have no connection with the spirit. They are not performed, either to send a message of love and regret to the *baloma* (spirit), or to deter him from returning; they do not influence his welfare, nor do they affect his relation to the survivors. It is possible, therefore, to discuss the native beliefs in afterlife without touching the subject of mourning and mortuary ceremonies. ([1916] 1992: 149–50; see also 1922: 490)

With this, Malinowski gave himself license to contemplate Tuma, the land of the dead, as a realm distant from Boyowa and the concerns of the living.

I can attest that the transfer of the *baloma* soul or spirit released by the deceased's body at the time of death and nearly all of the numerous transactions and associated practices that follow from it are viewed by knowledgeable villagers as instances of *bwekasa* with the greatest import.<sup>13</sup> In short, the *bwekasa* sacrificial processes initiated in mortuary celebrations consist precisely in the first coordinated steps taken by living people and *baloma* spirits that result eventually in the reincarnation of spirits back from Tuma into the realm of Boyowa, as outlined above in acts associated with sexual intercourse.

It must also be kept in mind that the inappropriate or incomplete performance of mortuary obligations on the part of survivors can affect the temperament of *baloma* in Tuma—hence their willingness to lend support to their living relatives' magical or other undertakings, including the management of the orderliness of relationships among kin.

#### *Annette Weiner on mortuary ritual*

Although Malinowski did not develop a detailed treatment of mortuary practices, Annette Weiner has famously done so in her book *Women of value, men of renown* (1976; see also 1978, 1988). I estimate that Weiner's account of

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13. As John Kasaipwalova, for example, explained in specific reference to *lusaladabu* and other *sagali* food offerings, the food given to *bilubaloma* is *bwekasa*. The spirits eat the bottom half *kwesibu'ula* and their saliva is the top half *kwematala*, the part that has life for humans in it; see chapter 3 discussion of the upper "seeing" (*kwematala*) versus lower "blind" (*kwesibu'ula*) halves of coconuts as elaborated in the myth of the separation of Tuma from Boyowa.

Trobriand funerary rites, particularly her analysis of *lisaladabu*, the “women’s mortuary ceremony,” has become enshrined as state of the art. For this reason, I shall draw heavily on her ethnography along with Malinowski’s juxtaposed with my own to highlight the additional analytical dividends that can be gained from the vantage offered by the NBME synthesis of partibility and participation theories.

It must be noted at the outset, however, that in a subsequent book, *Inalienable possessions* (1992), Weiner directly challenged the basic premises of the NME through a critique of Marilyn Strathern’s deliberations in *GOG* on gift exchange and personal partibility and their applicability to Trobriand personhood and exchange (see Mosko 2000). The following remarks, therefore, are intended as a critical response to Weiner as regards both her analysis of Trobriand mortuary practices and her dismissal of the NME theory of gift reciprocity and partible personhood. In short, in this exercise I hope to vindicate the latter through an appreciation of the Lévy-Bruhlian-style participation of *baloma* spirits.

There are several complicated issues which must be untangled preliminarily. To her considerable credit, Weiner (1976) was the first to draw serious attention to the significance of *tama* fathers in the shaping of the development of their children, on the one hand, and of paternal relationship, along with maternal kinship and marriage, in the overall organization of Trobriand sociality, on the other. However, her treatment of mortuary rites in particular misgauged the complementary but distinct contributions of women and men to the same processes of personal, social, and cosmic regeneration and transformation.

In the cycle of life and death, men and women effect transformations of persons differently. They thus basically control differing aspects of generational time. Women control the regeneration of matrilineal identity, the essence of person (the *baloma* or spirit . . . ) that moves through unmarked cosmic time. Therefore, the power of women, operating in an ahistorical continuum of time and space, is particularly meaningful at conception and death. Men control property, a resource contained within sociopolitical fields of action. The male domain of power and control is situated in historical time and space that, unlike unmarked time, are particularly meaningful in relating specifically named individuals over various generations. For example, because men, through their knowledge of the history of a plot of land, may control that land, the power that men effect continues through specific generations of historical time. The symmetrical and complementary integration of these two aspects of time and space produces complex

patterns of interaction between women and men, enacted in exchange events throughout their lives. (1976: 20, see also 22–23)

In this passage, for example, she stresses how women control the matrilineal essence of insubstantial *baloma* in cosmic ahistorical dimensions whereas men control substantial articles of “property” as “resources” in concrete sociopolitical fields of action. This flatly contradicts the information I have provided thus far in relation to magical and sacrificial performances, where men engage just as much as women in regulating transactions over nonsubstantial items through the participation of *baloma* spirits in unmarked cosmic time. Correspondingly, the activities supposedly involving women alone, especially their monopoly of the exchange of “women’s wealth” (i.e., material *doba* banana-leaf bundles and skirts) in *lisaladabu* ceremonies, involve “resources” just as substantial as men’s with their control of yams, *kula* shells, land, and other *dala* “property” (cf. *ibid.*: 39, 120). As suggested in chapter 4, indigenous understandings of gender do not coincide in the simple way that Weiner presupposed in her notions of “male” and “female domains.” As I have argued above regarding the Trobriands and as Marilyn Strathern has contended for Melanesia generally, what women are and do involves masculine components just as men’s persons and actions presuppose feminine elements.

Critical for my purposes also, Weiner’s interest in mortuary ceremonial is squarely limited to relations and interactions among the living. From her vantage, *baloma* souls released from life in Boyowa to partake of ahistorical spirit existence in Tuma are removed from participating thereafter in the lives of their Boyowan descendants, at least until such time as they become old and undergo reincarnation as *wairwaia*. In this, Weiner (*ibid.*: 43, 70) subscribes to the impoverished view of the course of autonomous *baloma* spirit life, one mostly detached from human experience, that systematically warped Malinowski’s accounts of the traditional religion and cosmology.<sup>14</sup>

14. Except that in *Women of value*, which is devoted primarily to the analysis of mortuary feasting, she neglects to consider even the critical fact central in Malinowski’s accounts that *lisaladabu* and most other *sagali* “feasts” are annually staged in exactly the same time frame as *milamala* festivities undertaken by neighboring communities that have not suffered deaths among their members over the previous year (1976: 48, 62, 131). In traditional circumstances, this is the principal period when, at least for Malinowski, *bilubaloma* travel from Tuma to join their *baloma* kin and to participate alongside them (see above).

For other but related reasons, in previous publications (Mosko 1985: ch. 9; 1995, 2000) I have challenged Weiner's interpretation of *lusaladabu* and her understanding of the basic character of the complete mortuary cycle even as regard relations restricted to the living. Her basic claim was that the death of a person constituted an entropic threat to the relations among surviving kin akin to a tear in the social fabric. The subsequent series of exchanges lasting over years among the surviving relatives, of which *lusaladabu* is just one, thus served the function of repairing the tears in the preexisting relations and "avert[ing] the entropy of death," so that ordinary life could carry on amongst the survivors (A. Weiner 1976: 22–23, 85–86; 1984: 666–67). For example, where death threatened the integrity of the deceased's *dala* and its external relations, *lusaladabu* and subsequent *sagali* ceremonials had the effect of extricating the deceased from ongoing affairs amongst the living and thus regenerating or restoring them (1976: 119–20; 1978: 181–82, 185; but see *ibid.*: 183).

*Lusaladabu* is but one of a long series of exchanges that follow the death of every villager, and in many ways it epitomizes the sorts of transformations between life and death that are similarly displayed in the several rites that precede it, from the time of death and burial to the final ceremonies that end the mourning. No doubt Weiner focused on *lusaladabu* for this reason, but also because it is then that women play their roles most conspicuously and at the largest societal scale.

Fred Damon (1983) was, I believe, the first Northern Massim ethnographer to challenge Weiner's interpretation of *lusaladabu* as presented in *Women of value*. He argued that, instead of repairing the tears occasioned by death, the main purpose of *lusaladabu* and funerary rites in general is to *complete* the severing of ties specifically between the surviving matrilineal *dala* and *kumila* kin, on the one hand, and affinal and patrifilial relatives, on the other, so that whole new reproductive relations can be initiated among them through the commencement of new marriages.<sup>15</sup>

Weiner's (1984) highly critical dismissal of Damon's comments, however, contradicts her more nuanced analysis in *Women of value*, which I interrogate

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15. Among Massim investigators, Debora Battaglia was also writing similarly at roughly the same time as Damon concerning mortuary (*segaiya*) exchanges performed by Sabarl Islanders in the Louisiade Archipelago. For example, "The object is a total cancellation of debt between these [i.e., mother's, father's, and spouse's] groups and the equal redistribution of property (primarily valuables and land) among the clans" (1983b: 460). I was writing as well at this time with respect to North Mekeo mortuary feasting in terms of "de-conception" (Mosko 1983).

below. This inconsistency can be encapsulated through a brief comparison of her claims in attacking Damon with some of her other assertions in her earlier book. Against Damon she reiterates, "Exchanges at death and annually, at harvests, are about *perpetuating the deceased's affinal and patrilineal relationships*" (1984: 666, emphasis added), which is the expressed view in *Women of value* that Damon had repudiated. But there are brief passages in *Women of value* where Weiner proclaimed the exact opposite, more or less affirming Damon's charge of her inconsistency. For example,

When a kinsperson dies, women say that through their distributions *they "cut" the deceased away* from all relationships established throughout his or her social career. Payments are made which on one level have significant economic value. But I suggest that economic value is transcended by the fact that at death rituals women must restore that which is *dala* to their *dala*. Women *cut away social relationships developed through exchange* and, in so doing, secure the regeneration of pure *dala*. The trauma of death is averted as women once again, as at conception, reproduce a being now disconnected from the widest range of social networks. (1976: 119–20, emphases added)

In sum, here as elsewhere, Weiner has been seeking to have it both ways. She also argues against Damon that, "Unlike Muyuw, *kula* valuables rarely are used in Kiriwina marriage and mortuary events. Yams and cloth wealth are the central objects that link women's and men's production to each other in profound ways" (1984: 667; see also 1976: 181). This is again contradicted in *Women of value*, where, as I discuss below, she notes two categories of gifts (*kalakeyala kakau* and *kalakeyala kapu*) to deceased's paternal and affinal kin involving large quantities of clay pots, stone axe-blades, *kula* shell wealth, and other pieces of "male wealth" (*kuve murwala*) that are "among the most important exchanges, ranking with the distributions [of bundles] for men who contributed yams" (ibid.: 113).

And there are other vacillations of the same order in *Women and value* and Weiner's other treatments of Trobriand mortuary practices if read and scrutinized carefully. Rather than dwell on those inconsistencies, it is more important for my purposes to examine the purposes and functions of the several distinct *lusaladabu* exchanges as initially listed by Weiner. This is a necessary step in my demonstration of the fundamentally sacrificial nature of the exchanges affected in Trobriand mortuary ceremonial through the participation of *baloma* spirits.

In *Women of value*, Weiner listed sixteen distinct named transactions involved in a full performance of *lisaladabu* (ibid.: 105–16). Of those, two concern gifts between members of the two gender-specific subgroups of *toliu'ula* (or *toliuili*) “owners”: the women of the *dala* of the deceased and its adult men, each category supported by additional relatives (see below). These gifts consist of, first, small piles of *kemelu* (*kaymelu*, *kaimelu*, *keymelu*) or *kemelu doba* banana-leaf bundles (*nununiga*) assembled by the women and given to the men who have given them in the past, or will be doing so later in the day, small heaps of raw yams, taro, areca nut, tobacco, and nowadays money (ibid.: 107, 110–12; fig. 6.1). Secondly, after *lisaladabu* proper has concluded, the men who had received *kemelu doba* duly reciprocate with the *ligabwa* heaps of yams, and so on, known at Omarakana as *kemelu kaula* (i.e., *kemelu* “food”; ibid.: 114–15; fig. 6.2).



**Figure 6.1.** *Kemelu doba* “banana-leaf bundles” exchanged at *lisaladabu* between women and men of the *dala* of the deceased. Omarakana village (2015).

Because these women’s gifting of *nununiga* bundles extend over several hours taking up most of the time devoted to the day’s activities, and, I suggest, because women appear to be dominant in these exchanges, Weiner declares the women’s *kemelu* transactions to be “the most important [*lisaladabu*] exchange involving women” (ibid.: 110, emphasis added). It is for this reason apparently that she tags *lisaladabu* overall as the “women’s mortuary ceremony.” Weiner translates the term *lisaladabu* in her text as “mats for mourning” (ibid.: 61, 245n) and in





**Figure 6.2.** *Kemelu kaula* food heaps distributed by men of the *dala* of the deceased to female *veyalela*, *keyawa*, and *litulela* kin. Omarakana village (2012).

her glossary as “shaving one’s head for mourning.” The translation given to me is “removal of mourning.” As significant as women’s *kemelu doba* contributions and men’s *kemelu kaula* counterprestations are in demonstrating the strength (*peu’ula*) of the owners’ *dala*, Weiner’s choice of her gloss for the ritual adds to the confusion noted above as to the overall function of the day’s events.

Besides the two *kemelu* exchanges that are transacted between people nominally related matrilineally who can be correctly viewed as repairing the relations amongst them torn by the recent death, *the remaining fourteen categories of exchange address concerns over relations between matrilineal kin (supported by certain others)—the toliu’ula “owners”—tied to the toliyouwa “workers” through extra-dala affinal and patrilateral connections.* Moreover, Weiner provides evidence that these latter exchanges are at least as important as, if not more so than, the two types of *kemelu* exchanges she has emphasized. And rather than restoring relations threatened by death, these extra-*dala* transactions are oriented to the completion of their severance, much as Damon argued. Moreover, it is only through actions resulting in the full extinction of those preexisting relations that new ties can *later* be negotiated among resulting nonkin (*tomakava*) through the arrangement of new exogamic marriages. The indigenous term for this process



is *taneku* “untying,” in the sense of being “freed” or “released,” the opposite process from *sipusipu* “tying together.”

I appreciate that this point of contention with Weiner over the logic of Trobriand mortuary practice may appear to be a relatively minor one, but it invokes a fundamentally different view of the overall process of social reproduction. And following from that, as I shall explain presently, these instances in *lusaladabu* of relational “de-conception” or “decomposition” (Mosko 1983, 1985; M. Strathern 1988) figure centrally in the wider sacrificial functions of the ceremonies and the organization and orderly maintenance of the cosmos.

In extended inquiries with my team members, *lusaladabu* is presented as being important for the host *dala* or “owners” to exhibit publicly their collective power or strength (*peu’ula*). But this is accomplished primarily in the extravagance that is demonstrated—not solely in the two intra-*dala* *kemelu* exchanges among owners, but also in the two main transactions between “owners” and “workers” that formally open and close the day’s proceedings: *sepwana* and *deli*.<sup>16</sup>

*Lusaladabu* proper begins with the formal presentation of *doba pela sepwana* (“women’s wealth for the *sepwana* skirt”) or simply “*sepwana*,” which involves “the presentation of huge pile[s] of new bundles” (A. Weiner 1976: 105–7; cf. Lepani 2012: 198) (fig. 6.3). In Weiner’s time, according to her account, for any one death there were only two such heaps—one given by a selected owner woman for a nominated female worker among *dala* relatives of the deceased’s father (*kapu*) and another for the deceased’s worker spouse or her representative (*kakau*). These two basic categories of worker recipients, *kapu* and *kakau*, are those relatives of the deceased who have been in seclusion since the time of death and mourning and have undertaken official mourning obligations: intense expressions of grief, food and sex abstentions, the wearing of black clothes, blackening of the skin, avoidance of washing, and so on. Nowadays also, and probably in Weiner’s time and before, there is a third category of *sepwana* heap recipients: the surviving children of a male deceased (*milabova*). These workers are those survivors who have personally shared the experience of death with the deceased.

16. The remaining categories of exchange at *lusaladabu* between owners and workers involve transitions of specific categories of the latter persons. These transitions are of the same nature as *sepwana* and *deli* more generally.



**Figure 6.3.** *Sepwana* heaps of *doba* given by women “owners” to *kapu*, *kakau*, and *milabova* kin of the deceased at *lisaladabu*. Omarakana village (2013).

It is not uncommon in recent years for five, ten, or twenty such *sepwana* heaps altogether, and much larger ones, to be presented, one by one, by multiple owners to manifold recipients in both the deceased’s father’s and spouse’s *dalas*. As Margaret Jolly (1992a) has argued, this change is representative of the generalized inflation in the scale of materials exchanged in Trobriand mortuary rites that has occurred in historical times (fig. 6.4). The basic categories involved in these transactions as outlined here seem, however, to have remained relatively stable.

The earlier topping of *sepwana* heaps with colorful leaf skirts that Weiner observed has been replaced with hand-woven pandanus mats, lengths of store-bought cloth, and nominal pieces of paper money.

Although the *sepwana* heaps are presented to the recipients at the start of *lisaladabu* proceedings, they are left intact as witness to the day’s proceedings, only being removed and distributed among the *dala* kin of each recipient (i.e., both *veyalela* and *litulela* relatives) once remaining *lisaladabu* exchanges are concluded. And although the leaf bundles comprised in *sepwana* (and also in *kemelu* transactions; see above) are commonly denoted as “women’s wealth” (*kuve vivila*) based on the fact that they are manufactured by women, they are actually *gwadi* children of *both* the woman who makes, stores, or transacts them and her husband who in various ways provisions their production, accumulation, and exchange (cf. A. Weiner 1976: 78).



**Figure 6.4.** Example of the *lisaladabu* inflation with expansion of *sepwana*. Omarakana village (2013).

As each worker recipient of a *sepwana* heap steps forward, the officiating woman of the owners' *dala* assisted by others replaces his/her dirty, blackened clothes and wraps around him or her new skirts appropriate to their gender and age status. This symbolizes the end of their mourning ordeals and their return to ordinary life.<sup>17</sup> Also at these moments, owners make gestures of removing the charcoal from the skins of the workers and dab colorful paint or white talcum powder on their faces. The process is described as untying and *ulusi* "freeing" in that mourners are "opened" or "cleaned" (*ulemwa*) of the contaminants of death. The new clothing and facial decorations are tokens of the heightened intensity

17. This woman of the deceased's *dala* is honored to wear the "*sepwana* skirt" and to lead the *kemelu* and *sepwana* distributions (see A. Weiner 1976: 95–100, 104, 105; Montague 1989: 31, 37–38). In some cases, the wrapping of the mourners is done instead at the moment that *deli* "men's wealth" is handed over (see *ibid.*: 38). Montague (*ibid.*: 39) also reports that on Kaileuna, male workers do not themselves have skirts tied on their person, as a female relative will stand in for them in this circumstance.

of life that is also enacted ritually in *milamala* festivities when *baloma* spirits arrive at their Boyowan villages and their living kin celebrate the end of the death-like laboring struggles that have led up to the harvest (cf. Lepani 2012: 199).

The *baloma* ancestors of the owners and workers are understood to be invisibly present and participating in all of the exchanges that take place through much of the day involving banana-leaf bundles and skirts. As I shall explain below, *baloma* spirits have their own separate reasons for acquiring images of the bundles and skirts, and it is only through the *bwekasa* transactions of those items of their living descendants that they can acquire them.

The other key *lisalsabau* exchange category, *deli*, is staged to mark the end of the day's proceedings. There are two separate transactions involved in *deli*—*kalakeyala kakau* and *kalakeyala kapu*—as portrayed by Weiner (1976: 112–14; see below). Both of these exchanges involve *veguwa* valuables that are for the most part managed by men; hence, Weiner (ibid.: 120, 287) refers to them as “male wealth” and “male valuables”: clay pots, stone axe-blades, shell valuables otherwise exchanged in *kula*, and nowadays substantial amounts of cash.

I write “for the most part” because included among the “men’s wealth” that is transacted during *deli* are some of the same type of traditional ceremonial skirts exchanged earlier in the day with *sepwana* heaps of bundles. These skirts are woven by women, yet in this context they are classified as *veguwa*, distinguishing them from banana-leaf bundles, which are not *veguwa* (ibid.: 113). These particular *deli* skirts qualify as “male wealth” (*veguwa, kuve murwala*) in that they must be of the longer version that men wear in certain dances during *milamala* (figs. 6.5–6). When later used by women, these must be shortened to lengths appropriate for wearing by a married or single woman. But also, as is the case with banana-leaf bundles, the skirts and other items of male wealth used in *deli* are *gwadi* children of both a man and his wife.

In *deli*, these items are exchanged by exactly the persons who transact over the *sepwana* heaps at the start of the ceremonies (ibid.: 105–7). They are given by the “owner” kin of the deceased’s *dala* and received by the “workers” in the *dalas* of the deceased’s spouse (*kakau*) and father (*kapu*) (ibid.: 105–7, 112–14; cf. Lepani 2012: 198–99).

Even though, as noted above, Weiner has emphasized the restoring function of *kemelu doba* exchanged between owning matrilineal kin as the core of *lisaladabu*, she notes in passing, “This distribution [*kalakeyala kakau* to deceased spouse’s kin] and a similar one [*kalakeyala kapu*] made to the father of the deceased are among the most important exchanges, ranking with the distributions of





**Figure 6.5.** Men's long and women's short *doba* ceremonial dancing skirts. Omarakana village (2009).

*bundles for men who contributed yams [i.e., kemelu doba]*" (1976: 113, emphasis added). That comparison is somewhat misleading also, however, insofar as the large *sepwana* heaps of bundles exchanged as *deli* among the same people greatly surpass in quantity and quality all the other *keyawa* distributions of bundles.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, Weiner does not elaborate on these valuations in her book except to note that the purposes of *deli* are to recompense the spouse "for having taken care of the deceased when he or she was alive" (ibid.: 113) and to "honor one's father, who gave his child everything that his child needed" (ibid.: 114). According to my information, these gifts of *sepwana* and *deli* are aimed partly at honoring and paying compensation (*mapula*) on the part of the deceased's *dala* kin for the *bwekasa* contributions that the father, spouse, and their respective kin made to the deceased during the course of his/her life. Recall that during a

18. As an indication of the importance of *deli*, the *veguwa* items transacted at *lisaladabu* are also used similarly in exchanges among the same relationship principals in the *sagali* feast (*yawali*) staged in the immediate aftermath of the death (see ibid.: 72–74).



**Figure 6.6.** Men's pubic covering (*napweya*). Omarakana village (2009).

deceased's lifetime, a father would customarily have made frequent *buwala* gifts to his son and daughter in sacrificial reciprocity "payments" for the sexual and other services rendered by the mother, his wife. But also, husbands and wives regularly reciprocate with intimate gift detachments of their persons throughout their married lives.

As Pulayasi explains, children have been receiving *buwala* from their father throughout their lives, so when the children die, the father's *dala* is compensated with sacrificed *sepwana* and *deli*. Similarly, a widow or widower would have provided many services to his/her marriage partner, so the deceased's surviving *dala* kin compensate them at *lusaladabu*. Therefore, it is through *sepwana* and *deli* compensations for such services as previously rendered by extra-*dala* relations that owners seek to unmix, untie, attenuate, finish, or kill (*kaligeya'i*) their relations with the workers. In doing so, the stage is being set for the surviving erstwhile relatives who are being ritually transformed into "nonkin" or "strangers" to marry and initiate new inter-*dala* relations of exchange.

This understanding of *deli* is dramatically acted out at the moments of transfer when owners parade to every principal recipient in turn. Each procession is led by a male owner carrying a ceremonial wooden axe-handle in one hand. In the other hand he grasps a *beku* stone axe-blade that is about to be presented to the designated worker recipient, after which the remaining *deli* items are passed over (figs. 6.7–10). As he walks forward, the man's cutting motions with the axe signify the severing of the relations between owners and mourners that the presentation of *deli* wealth, along with that of *sepwana*, accomplishes. *And similarly as noted above in connection with the displays of sepwana, attending baloma spirits are said to be taking the potent kekwabu images of the transacted items for use according to the spirits' own intentions.*

Hopefully, these and additional data affirm that *lusaladabu* in its full breadth amounts to more than a "woman's mortuary ceremony."

Before I return to my main theme—the sacrificial transformation in relations between living people and *baloma* ancestors occasioned by human mortality—it will be helpful to translate the basic operations involved in Weiner's essentially secular account of *lusaladabu* into the indigenous terms that I have been employing from the start in my treatment of Trobriand personhood and spirit participation. Very simply, the contributions that each person gives and receives through a lifetime of gift exchange with matrilineal, patrilineal, and affinal relatives consist of the mixing and mutual embodiment of the *dala*-identifying *kekwabu* images and associated *peu'ula* capacities of which they are





**Figure 6.7.** *Deli* procession cutting ties between “owners” and “workers” at close of *lusaladabu*. Omarakana village (2015).



**Figure 6.8.** Preparations for *deli* at *lusaladabu*. Photo by Malinowski (3/5/5), with permission of LSE Archives.

composed. In the event of death and the ensuing *sepwana* and *deli* distributions, the images and powers the deceased has previously received through extra-*dala* transactions are returned to their sources. Contrary to Weiner’s assertions, it is



**Figure 6.9.** *Deli* procession in Malinowski's time. Photo by Malinowski (3/5/7), with permission of LSE Archives.



**Figure 6.10.** *Deli* exchange of *vegurwa*. Omarakana village (2011).

not the *dala* of the deceased that, through *lisaladabu*, “reclaims” property that had been loaned to other *dala* (A. Weiner 1976: 119–20, 159);<sup>19</sup> *it is those people*

19. There are contexts where *dala* members do “reclaim” *dala* “property,” but these transactions take place outside of or separate from *lisaladabu* rites.

of other *dalas* of the deceased's father and spouse that, through *lusaladabu*, are doing the effective reclaiming, in the sense of taking back the images and powers constitutive of their *tukwa* and their identities that had earlier been given to others. To be sure, members of a given *dala* may reclaim items "loaned" to persons of other *dalas* in the lifetimes of the givers or after the *lusaladabu* staged in their name has been completed.<sup>20</sup> The function of *lusaladabu* in the aftermath of death from the point of view of the deceased's *dala* is otherwise; it is rather to extricate from itself the extraneous images and powers it has incorporated over the lifetimes of its separate members—more or less being purified or cleansed of outside, dead contaminating ingredients—and in so doing returning it in the long run to the mythically and magically empowered condition of the *tosunapula* origin ancestors. And, of course, in reclaiming that which was given out to other *dalas* through the persons of spouses and male members' children, the *dalas* of the deceased's spouse and father are similarly reconstituted.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Lusaladabu as bwekasa*

The exchanges that take place in *lusaladabu* as I have described them thus far fall into two principal categories: those between persons who share matrilineal identity with the deceased (i.e., *kemelu doba* and *kemelu kaula* strictly transacted among male and female *tolu'u'ula* owners), and those between matrilineally unrelated persons (i.e., mainly *sepwana* and *deli* from female and male owners to patrilineally and affinally related female and male *toliyowwa* workers). As readers might already be able to anticipate, details of the manner of conducting these exchanges and the materials taken up in them bear numerous signs of *bwekasa* sacrifice. Most obviously, each category of *lusaladabu* exchange item (i.e., banana-leaf bundles, yams, pork, clay pots, stone axe-blades, bunches of areca nut, etc.) is either displayed or otherwise placed on the ground by one party before it

20. Weiner (ibid.: 39, 64, 126–27, 133, 167, 208, 231–32, 264n) argues that land features among items "loaned" out by *dala* men that are "reclaimed" in the course of women's *kemelu doba* exchanges. My Omarakana informants unanimously dispute this. There is a separate category of *sagali* that can be staged by the deceased's *dala* kin if they possess the *veguwva* wealth and determination to do so, but only well after the deceased's *lusaladabu* celebration has been concluded.

21. At this level of generalization, Trobriand social reproduction as effected through *lusaladabu* exchanges accomplishes virtually the same mythical ends as North Mekeo mortuary feasts (see Mosko 1983; 1985: chs. 7–8).



is taken up by the other or, in the case of articles of shell currency, money, skirts, and mats, held conspicuously in people's hands in sustained public view. These presentations thereby qualify as *bitarwai kebilua* "built platforms" preliminary to *bwekasa* with the intention of completing the death, decomposition, or dismantling (*kaligeya'i*) of the relations between givers and receivers as a necessary step toward their conversion or possible future recreation, thanks to life-giving blessings received from *baloma*.

As I noted above, some at least of the key articles of male wealth exchanged in *deli* are also offered as sacrifices in other contexts (e.g., yams and other foodstuffs, *veguwa*, stone axe-blades, etc.) at various points in the gardening cycle, during *milamala* festivities, when appeasing *itona* spirits, and as *tanarere* offerings at the conclusion of *kula* expeditions. In all instances, the persons who initially receive the articles are forbidden from using or keeping them for their own benefit, unless by some other relationship they qualify also as recipients. In such cases, they are acting in their separate capacities as distinct persons. And finally, as with both *sepwana* and *deli*, participating *baloma* spirits are understood to extract the invisible images of the transacted articles for their own use.

So indeed, the main *lusaladabu* transactions within and between both male and female owners and workers are mediated by the same sorts of simultaneous sacrificial gifts and counter gifts as between the human and the *baloma* personnel in other contexts. And it is through the powers contained in the blessings deposited on the transacted items from attending ancestral spirits of Tuma that the mystical transformations involved in each category of exchange are accomplished for their survivors in Boyowa. It is for this reason that Paramount Chief Vanoi once defined *lusaladabu* for Weiner as "*sagali pela baloma* ('a distribution for the spirit of the deceased')" (1976: 91, emphasis added).<sup>22</sup>

On Vanoi's point concerning *baloma* participation in *lusaladabu*, Montague has noted:

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22. There is a certain irony here as concerns ethnographic bias on the basis of gender. Ira Bashkow has documented how Weiner's claims as to the andocentrism of previous (male) Trobriand investigators with respect to their ignoring of women's wealth and ritual activities, particularly *lusaladabu*—what he characterizes as "anthropology's most famous example of 'male bias' in fieldwork" (2011: 10)—are largely unfounded in light of evidence in Malinowski's and Rentoul's original materials. On the basis of additional information presented here, there appears to be a question of gender-based bias on Weiner's part.

Finally, *kanua* [i.e., *kaula* yam and taro] crops are all dedicated to the recently dead. As I toured Kaduwaga's gardens at harvest time in 1981, man after man showed me his plot, saying, "All that you see here is for mortuary distribution!" That is not literally true, but sentiment is what counts. (1989: 27)

The one category of *lusaladabu* exchange item which has not yet been noted as being involved in any other *bwekasa* context are the banana-leaf bundles (*nununiga*) transacted in *kemelu* and *sepwana* rites. I am not aware of any data already published that explains why banana leaves are used in the ways that they are in *lusaladabu* rites. They, like all the other *lusaladabu* exchange items, are after all "dead" (*kaliga*) things. They no longer possess the life that they once embodied before being removed from trees, cut up, dried, shredded, and woven. And although *nununiga* leaf bundles are regarded as women's wealth insofar as it is women who devote the most labor to their manufacture, caring, and exchange, husbands, as already noted, expend considerable energy toward their provision. Importantly also, it is men, not women, who plant the trees from which the leaves are obtained. Hence bundles are joint children of marriage partners, and as such they embody the *kekwebu* images and *peu'ula* capacities, including their exchange value in petty *valova* transactions (Weiner 1976: 78–80, 102–3), extracted from both parents' labors. Banana-leaf bundles and skirts, along with the full range of articles exchanged through *sepwana* and *deli*, are thus analogous to dead, dirty cooked food before it is offered up to *baloma* spirits for blessings that cleanse and empower it for reinvigorating humans and their relations.

That the *nununiga* bundles and skirts used in *sepwana* heaps must be "new" ones (i.e., newly manufactured or, in the case of old bundles, newly retied) signifies their capacities for renewing life. But also, bundles and skirts are made from only one variety of banana tree, *wakeya* (or *wakaiya*, or *wakaya*), which happens to be a plant "totem" of Tabalu *dala* and hence sacred (*bomaboma*) to them and, by extension, to all Islanders regarded as their *gwadi* children.<sup>23</sup> This means that they

23. *Wakeya* trees are distinguished as the largest variety of banana in the Trobriands, with stout massive trunks and large swellings near the ground. Their fruit is also the largest of local bananas. Aside from their use in the manufacture of bundles and skirts, their leaves were used in fertility and gardening magic. With respect to the latter function, it was *wakeya* leaves that *torwosi* would use for wrapping medicines around stone axe-blades in rites of "striking the soil" so as to affect the growth and size of yams underground (Malinowski 1935a: 94, 106, 107, 170, 275n; 1935b: 114, 154).

are among the *tukwa* items that the *tosunapula* of Tabalu carried with them when they emerged from Tuma at the time of cosmic creation. As a result of this identity, Tabalu women can exercise a special prerogative toward *wakeya* trees and leaves. While men and women of all *dala* affiliations are “free” (*itugwali*) to plant and harvest *wakeya* leaves and use them in making *nununiga*, only Tabalu women are “free” to take *wakeya* leaves from the trees cultivated by non-Tabalu others; those leaves are theirs. Similarly, large bunches of *wakeya* fruit, when harvested, must be presented to the Omarakana Tabalu or one of the other Tabalu “chiefs” on the island for distribution as *bwekasa* to their respective local followings.

These details are important in that the images and powers contained in *wakeya* leaves are those of Tabalu *dala*, in this instance incorporating the capacities for engendering both life and death as demonstrated in the mythical birth of the cosmos.<sup>24</sup> On the side of life, this is expressed in the fact that the decorated *doba* skirts made of *wakeya* fibers by women are not worn by women only. In the most conspicuous dance of *milamala*—the circle dance (*wosimwaya*)—men as well as women wear skirts. And inasmuch as all skirts are manufactured initially long, they technically begin as male skirts, only later to be trimmed for wearing by women. This is most significant in that it is these coverings which wrap and contain the life-giving sexual organs of all adult men and women, specifically in the time periods when they are in heightened ceremonial mode and most sexually active (see Gell 1992).

On the side of death, however, the Tabalu images incorporated in *doba* skirts and the genitals of women and men that they enclose evince the powers of Tuma, a realm generally populated by spirits of the dead but in this case specifically by the ancestral *baloma* of Tabalu *dala*. When *doba* skirts are exchanged at *lisaladabu*, therefore, they embody not only the images and powers of the *dala* ancestors of those presenting them; they specifically contain the life-giving powers of the primal deities of the cosmos, now represented in living Tabalu persons. The fact that the ordinary skirts traditionally worn daily by women are also made of *wakeya* leaves highlights the particular but not exclusive role that their genitals play in mediating between life and death, Boyowa and Tuma.<sup>25</sup>

24. Weiner (1976: 94) claims that women “own” *wakeya* trees, but she notes elsewhere (ibid.: 247n) that she did not gather sufficient information to confirm any precise symbolic meaning for the leaves or fruit.

25. The inner fiber sheaths of the base of areca palm leaves (*mwebuwa*) that are used for men’s pubic coverings (*napweya*; fig. 6.6) in both daily and ceremonial attire are similarly *momova*-laden *guguwa* possessions of Tabalu *dala* and *gumgweguya* chiefs

From this viewpoint, bundles and skirts made from *wakeya* leaves evince the immediate purpose of *lusaladabu* and other mortuary practices. From the moment of the deceased's demise, members of the *dalas* of his/her father and spouse enter a condition of mourning likened to death. They experience severe Tuma-like seclusion in the dark interiors of their dwellings; they cease to consume the life-giving foods (*kaula*) of ordinary consumption and thus are denied *bwekasa*, being fed by relatively *peu'ula*-impoverished ripe "fruits" (*keuwela*); they refrain from washing away black charcoal and the bodily residues of the deceased's corpse on their skins; they remove the hair of their heads associated with youthful sexuality; they abstain from sex; others are forbidden to address them by personal names signifying the death of their persons; and so on. The bundles that they are given at *lusaladabu* by the *toliu'ula* owners who do not suffer the mourning privations nonetheless contain images and powers in reciprocation for what they, the *toliyowwa* workers, had given the deceased during his/her life. By receiving these substitute items, the workers are in effect taking back newly sanctified images and powers as compensatory substitution (*kemapu*), enabling their transformation from death back to ordinary life in Boyowa. Bundles and skirts unblessed by the *baloma*, however, even as containers of the images and powers of the living people who manufactured them, are insufficient to effect this transition. This mystical conversion is achieved instead principally by the potent Tabalu images of *wakeya* and its products along with *deli* articles. The bundles and skirts of *sepwana* heaps, in other words, incorporate the *bubwalua* or "sweat" (*kepwe'isi*) of the *baloma* spirits of Tabalu *dala* as their life-giving *bobwelila* blessings. But in that the bundles and skirts are also sweat residues of the owners' labors, they incorporate also the life-giving sweat of the owners' *dala* spirit ancestors.

The bundles exchanged in *kemelu doba* between owner women and men who share maternal *dala* identity perform a sacrificial function that is similar, but not identical, to that achieved in *sepwana*. Although the death of their kinsperson inflicted them with the inner sensation of sadness and grief, they did not experience bodily death in the same way or to the same extent as the workers. On the one hand, owners continue to participate in ongoing life in

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generally. As Michael Young (2004: 499) notes, early in the colonial era, European white pearl traders undermined chiefs' monopoly on areca nut by importing them from other islands.



precisely the ways that are deprived to workers. Most importantly, this enables them to continue in the personal performance of the life-sustaining work in gardening, fishing, manufacturing bundles and skirts, and so on, that is required for provisioning *lisaladabu* and the other funerary transactions. On the other hand, the owners must observe particularly strict “taboos” regarding contact with the corpse of their relative and the emanations of its decomposition. As described below, it is these very intimacies that are repulsive to the owners which characterize the identification of the workers with the deceased during the mourning ordeal. Therefore, the *kemelu doba* and *kemelu kaula* exchanges transacted between female and male owners perform a fundamentally different function to that of *sepwana* and *deli*. Rather than elevating each other from death to life—they are already living—their reciprocities enhance or strengthen the life that they already enjoy. To that extent, they recapture something of the vitality possessed by their own *tosunapula* ancestors following their cosmic emergence but before they settled amongst people of other *dala* identities. Yet to achieve that state completely, *kemelu* reciprocities are not enough. Owners must additionally extricate from their midst any lingering elements of polluting death and “weakness” (*mama*). They do that through donations of the *sepwana* and *deli* exuviae of their labors blessed by their *baloma* ancestors, which thereby contain the additional capacity of bringing the dead workers back to life. In this and other respects, the exchanges between owners and workers recapitulate the transactions between the living and the dead in other contexts of *bwekasa*.

There are numerous indications in the extant ethnography that the remaining items transacted in *lisaladabu* ceremonies possess life-giving properties analogous to those of the products of *nununiga* bundles that I have just enumerated. Arm-shell and shell necklaces of *kula* and *deli* exchange, for example, incorporate the images and powers of Ika’ili Tudava, aka Monikiniki, the mythical hero of Tabalu *dala* who bequeathed to humankind the institution of the *kula*. As they exchange *kula* valuables, men sequentially “die” and are “revived.” Certain ancestral stone axe-blades (*beku tabula*) are said to be the equivalent of a human life in that they and only they can be paid in blood compensation (*kulututu*) to save homicides from interclan retaliation. Money conceived as originally a *tukwa* of Europeans but adopted/incorporated by Islanders in recent times (Mosko 2013b) has become a critical source for sustaining people’s lives and the main material item offered up for annual sacrificial Christian tithing.

In short, everything disclosed thus far about *lisaladabu* points to the conclusion that its component exchanges involve sacrifices to ancestral or other spirits in Tuma.

If so, the critical questions remain: What are the *baloma* spirits thought to do with the funerary sacrifices that they are given, and why do they require them in the first place?

### *LISALADABU RITES CELEBRATING BILUBALOMA*

Malinowski ventured that “there is no connection between the mortuary ceremonies and the lot of the spirit that has departed” ([1916] 1992: 188), or for that matter the lot of other spirits in other contexts. From this, he deduced that there were the two “series of events” noted above—I shall suggest *keda* “roads” or “paths”—along which persons’ activities proceed.

Yet the various other types of *bwekasa* offerings—of food, tobacco, areca nut, sex, *kula* valuables, a person’s mind in dreaming and trance, and so on, as explained thus far—have a certain plausibility about them. At the very least, that is, *baloma* spirits in Tuma need to partake of the invisible shadows or images of those items if they are to enjoy a mirror life to that of their descendants in Boyowa and to provide the blessings that their descendants require also. But to what specific end might *baloma* put the *kekwebu* of articles sacrificially offered up to them in *lisaladabu*, most particularly the *nununiga* bundles, *kulia* clay pots, *beku* axe-blades, and other *veguwa* valuables?

#### Kopoi “*carrying*” as *bwekasa*

To answer this question, I shall retrace the first organized actions that are taken immediately after it is recognized that a specific person has truly died (see Malinowski 1922: 512; 1932: 102, 127, 130–39, 489–95, 572; A. Weiner 1976: 36, 64–65, 81–82; 1988: 33–38, 41).

Malinowski found the whole mortuary complex “stiff, conventional, [and] incomprehensible” (1932: 130), and indeed “the most difficult and bewildering aspect of Trobriand culture for the investigating sociologist” (ibid.: 126). A key source of his puzzlement was villagers’ elaborate attentions to the corpse, which supposedly “have no connection with the spirit” in that the “soul (*baloma* or *balom*) leaves the body and goes to another world, there to

lead a shadowy existence" ([1916] 1992: 149). This enigma has remained unexplained to this day.

The newly deceased corpse is left in the care of two basic categories of mourners (or others of the same *dala* identities substituting for them): women of the deceased's father's *dala* (*kapu*), prototypically *tabu* or father's sisters, commonly referred to as *bubus*; and the deceased's surviving spouse (*kakau*), whether a widow or widower. Significantly, these relatives will be included among the principal recipients of the numerous categories of prestations given by the owners to the workers, as outlined above. Nowadays, for example, the *bubus* along with the deceased's father and the widow or widower will be counted among the recipients of the major *sepwana* and *deli* offerings given by the owners to the workers when the deceased's *lisaladabu* is celebrated with the next harvest. Also, the children of a male deceased termed *milabova* in this context will receive *sepwana* and *deli* at *lisaladabu* alongside their mother if she survives.

These persons together perform a rite known as *kopoi* or "carrying," staged in the deceased's home, that lasts during the hours immediately after death to the time of burial, usually the next day. This rite is the focus of activity involving all of the deceased's relatives, more or less as laid out by Malinowski.<sup>26</sup>

First the corpse is washed, anointed, and covered with ornaments. Then the bodily apertures are filled with coconut husk fibre, the legs tied together, and the arms bound to the sides. Thus prepared, it is placed on the knees of a row of women who sit on the floor of the hut, with the widow or widower at one end holding the head. They fondle the corpse, stroke the skin with caressing hands, press valuable objects against chest and abdomen, move the limbs slightly and agitate the head. The body is thus made to move and twist with slow and ghastly gestures to the rhythm of the incessant wailing. The hut is full of mourners, all intoning the melodious lamentation. Tears flow from their eyes and mucus from their noses, and all the liquids of grief are carefully displayed and smeared over their bodies or otherwise conspicuously disposed. (1932: 130–31; see also 31, 133)

The rite is repeated once the corpse is exhumed the next day following its first burial. At that time the body is inspected for signs of the cause of death, and

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26. The word *kopoi* is used in a variety of other contexts, mostly to do with procreative contributions of fathers to children in the pre- and postnatal phases of reproduction—a not insignificant detail (see Mosko 1995).

some of its bones are removed to be used as relics. Afterward, the remains are permanently buried.<sup>27</sup>

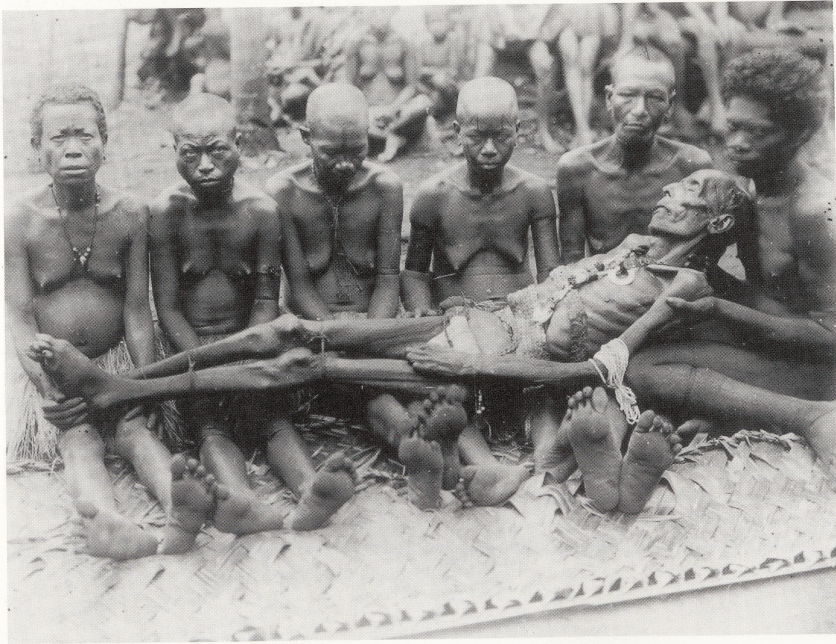
There is a significant division of ritual labor among the *kopoi* participants. It is the deceased's paternally related *bubus* as *tubulela* kin who hold the outstretched corpse across their extended legs. The widow or widower (*kakau*) is seated at the deceased's head, but if a male deceased's widow is already dead, one of her children (i.e., *milabova*, who stand as *litulela* to the *veyalela* "owners" or their father's *dala*) takes her place. Membership in both of these parties is therefore a reflection of extra-*dala* relations initially predicated through of the agency of males to non-*dala* others: namely, *tubulela*, *litulela*, and *yarwa* ("in-laws").

Maternally related *veyalela* kin are forbidden to participate in *kopoi* for fear of contamination with any of the "dead" effluvia emanating from the corpse. However, they typically gather and express their grief outside the house where non-*dala* kin are gathered around the corpse. Unlike the carriers, the *veyalela* maternal kin of the deceased are not "dead" in quite the same way, despite their feelings of grief. They are not sequestered, they do not change their diets or attire, and so on. They are still formally "alive."

On one occasion, for the sake of taking a photograph in daylight, Malinowski (1932:131n; see 1922: plate LXV opp. p. 512) staged a *kopoi* ceremony with the deceased laid across the extended thighs of a single row of *bubus*. In this case, the deceased's son occupied the head position. In actual practice, the women arrange themselves in two facing rows with their outstretched legs interdigitated (fig. 6.11).

As news of a death spreads to surrounding villages, people related to the deceased come to cry and grieve at the site of the carrying. Although the melodies of the dirges (*libu*) are exceedingly mournful, the words are pronounced in the ancient dialect spoken by the *tosunapula* emergence spirits (*biga baloma*, *biga tomwaiya*). Many of the verses consist of the same laments that are sung in praise (*wosi*) of *baloma* ancestors during *milamala* ceremonials. The forced manipulations of the deceased's limbs mimic the movements of dances staged at *milamala*, and the clothing and decorations used to dress the corpse are those employed in the same festivities. The rubbing of the stone axe-blades and other *vegurwa* wealth transfers the "shadows," "spiritual substance," or "essence"

27. Except in the case of Tabalu and other chiefs, whose remains are subjected to additional ritual treatments. It should be noted, if not already grasped, that these last details regarding exhumation are no longer performed.



**Figure 6.11.** *Kopoi* rite of “carrying” deceased’s corpse prior to burial. Photo by Malinowski (3/6/28), with permission of LSE Archives.

(i.e., *kekwebu*) of the objects to the deceased’s *baloma* soul for offering to Topileta, the primal god and gatekeeper to Tuma, to gain admission. According to Malinowski (1926: 89), the corpse is initially buried along with the *vegurwa* wealth that had been rubbed into it, but those articles are retrieved soon after—usually the following day—when the body is exhumed. This indicates that those first burial offerings are *bwekasa* sacrifices of the *vegurwa* items to Topileta, upon which he has deposited his own *bubwalua* sweat with the capacity of invigorating those items for future human use.

As noted in the previous chapter, during the closing *katukwala* period of *milamala* the same categories of *vegurwa* are offered as *bwekasa* to spirits upon their departure for Tuma. Also during *milamala* performances, participants often ornament themselves with the same types of *vegurwa* they might have in their possession. Annette Weiner (1988: 37) has suggested that the actions involving *vegurwa* in the *kopoi* rite are intended to return the deceased’s soul to a state of youth for its future life in Tuma. But insofar as *vegurwa* retrieved from *kopoi* are soon afterward worn as ornaments to mystically enhance the physical

beauty and attractiveness of people in Boyowa (i.e., at the next *milamala* festival when villagers are collectively courting and sexually active), those valuables have specifically incorporated the potent blessings of the spirit(s) with and to whom they had been sacrificed, and it is the human survivors who take possession of the wealth items who receive the blessings' benefits.

To explain these and other details of *kopoi* that point to *bwekasa* offerings, it is necessary to recall the countervailing trajectories of human life in Boyowa. In addition to the "blood" and *baloma* "soul" (*waiwaia*) received via mothers in procreation, fathers make two contributions: substantial "feedings" (*vakam*) of various kinds which affect the children's abstract or nonsubstantial "form," "shape," or "appearance" (*ikuli*). Life subsequently consists of recurrent building, compounding, expanding, or consolidating (*kaliai*) as one receives donations from other persons, interspersed with moments of the opposite tendencies, of decomposition, dispersion, spreading out, and disintegration (*kaligeya'i*) in acts of reciprocal giving. Labor (*paisewa*), the expenditure of internal *peu'ula* powers or strength, is the means by which processes of building life (*kaliai*) for the benefit of others are effected. But labor itself entails a kind of countervailing dismantling (*kaligeya'i*) and death of the person conducting it for the sake of the life of some other beneficiary.

What this means in relation to mortuary practices generally is that, from the moment of corporeal death onward, components of the deceased's person experience extended processes of *kaligeya'i* which, when completed, are followed by the initiation of new life, or *kaliai*. The departure of the nonsubstantial matrilineally identified *baloma* spirit containing the specific *kekwebu* images of its *dala* is the first element detached from the corpse, but only one such. That was the first of the two "roads" Malinowski recognized. In the other one, the remaining material components of a deceased's person in the form and substances of its body undergo parallel processes of *kaligeya'i* during burial that amount to the person's deconception or decomposition in quite specific terms.<sup>28</sup> The fluid blood of the corpse that the deceased had received from his/her mother at the time of conception and subsequently augmented by exchanges with other *veyalela* kin contains the *kekwebu* of her *dala*. With death, that "blood" (i.e., *sopi*, *bubwalua*) and the rotting flesh into which it had been

28. The classic theoretical treatise on this aspect of mortuary ritual is Robert Hertz's essay "A contribution to the study of the collective representation of death" ([1907] 1960).



incorporated tends to flow out of the body analogous to oceanic tides (*tīliala*), either by exiting through orifices or by rotting. To prevent this, the carriers block up the deceased's bodily apertures. Consequently, the blood of the deceased's body will be dispersed in the hereditary land of his/her *dala*. This is accomplished through the requirement that every Trobriander, if at all possible, must be buried in the soil of his/her "motherland," stereotypically that plot of earth from which the *tosunapula* ancestors of the *dala* mythically emerged. In this way, the images and powers incorporated in the maternal blood as well as the *baloma* soul of the living are returned to the Tuma underworlds of their specific *dala*.

The nonbloody fluids flowing from the corpse after the *baloma* has departed are *pupagatu* "dirty" or "polluting" and dangerous to living people. Even so, these substances are conspicuously deposited on the skins of the carriers during their ordeal. This is because the *kekwebu* of the decomposing residues of the corpse are not dirty or polluting to the "dead" *kapu*, *kakau*, and *milabova* mourners in exactly the way that *popula* "excreta-like" *bwekasa* sacrifices are not dirty to the *baloma* spirits of the dead who receive them. Specifically, to the *kapu* and *kakau* women and the *milabova* children who perform *kopoi*, for as long as they are "dead," these effluvia of the corpse are clean (*migile'u*) and "agreeable" or "compatible" (*itugwali*) to them, with the qualification that they must not be orally consumed. Even the noxious escaping *kubwawala* "vapors" may be safely inhaled by these workers—after all, they are in process of joining the deceased in a condition of *kaliga* "death." Even though in olden times a man's sons were expected to use their teeth to separate the exhumed flesh from the bones—a procedure employed mainly for a chief's remains—they must be careful not to swallow any of it (see Malinowski 1932: 132–33).

There is the possibility, however, that those dirty waters can make anyone who touches them sick and possibly die. They are "sour" (*yaiyana*) to the living. If left overlong on the skin, they may cause boils. Thus the *tokopoi* carriers do their best to prevent the fluids from coming out, as it is rude as well as dangerous to other people to be slack in this regard. Inevitably, however, over the course of the *kopoi* ordeal, traces of the dirty *tīliala* of the corpse are deposited on the skins of the carriers. After burials at Omarakana, the Tabalu performs specific *megwa* on the purple leaves of a plant (*bologu*) that is otherwise employed for *kemwasila* beauty magic. The carriers rub the leaves on their bodies. The *baloma* associated with the spell weaken or remove the *peu'ula* of the sickness that would otherwise affect the carriers.



The effective sealing of corpses is particularly important with the death of members of chiefly *dala* and other magically qualified persons as their exuviae contain the images of the potent *megwa* that the deceased had embodied in his/her life, regardless of whether he or she ever actually acquired the knowledge for performing that magic. The corpses of Tabalu men and women along with suspected sorcerers are particularly feared out of the suspicion that they contain the ingredients of the deadly spells of famine (*molu*) or sorcery (*bwagau*).<sup>29</sup>

Malinowski and most others have missed the corresponding decomposition of additional elements of the deceased's person that is enacted in *kopoi*, *lisaladabu*, and other mortuary rituals for the same reason they have misunderstood indigenous views of conception and also marriage: namely, the assumption that fathers and children (and also husbands and wives as progenitors of the children) are strangers to each other and share nothing consequential in their persons, not only at the time of initiating their relations but throughout the course of their respective lives. However, just as people are fed and formed by the agency of their *tama* fathers from the time of conception onward, when they, the children, die, the two kinds of potent *kekwebu* contribution that they received from their fathers disintegrate also. Those *kekwebu* images which fathers and father's kin (*tubulela*) had fed to the deceased during his/her lifetime conveying external form and appearance to his/her person are recaptured in the aftermath of the deceased's death by the people performing the *kopoi* rite. These substances consist partly in the nonbloody, dismembered *sopi* or watery fluids of the dead, decomposing body represented in the mucous and other effluvia that the mourners conspicuously smear and mix with the black charcoal covering the skins of their grieving bodies. By these actions, the *kopoi* mourners are made to be "dead" (*kaliga*) along with the deceased.

The similar logic of *kopoi* in relation to surviving spouses (*kakau*) was explained to me as follows. Through the mutual intimacies of their marriage (*veva'i*), husbands and wives who begin their courtship (sharing initially, it is assumed, no maternal *dala*-based *kekwebu* images between them) engage in various kinds of intense mutual daily feeding (*vakam*) so as to sustain their respective lives and thus modify their physical forms. Sexual intercourse via the

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29. I received information from some informants that the practice described above of bespelling leaves that are rubbed on the skins of carriers is done only in the event of a Tabalu death, not just for the chief himself but any corpse of a person who has the *kekwebu* of the *dala* in his/her body. Those images are "clean" (*migile'u*) and conducive (*kaliai*) of life while people are still living, but with death they become *pupagatu* "dirty" and proceed to disintegrate or decompose (*kaligeya'i*).

genitals is but one such context whereby married couples mutually nourish each other. As a result of the specific form of these reciprocities predicated by men external to a woman's *dala*, husbands and wives are viewed over time as becoming like *tomota kwetala* "one person."<sup>30</sup> As such, they share the distinctive *kek-wabu* images of their respective *dalas* resulting from shared feeding and forming just as they do in the joint procreation and the parenting of their children.

Therefore, when the body of the deceased undergoes *kaligeya'i* disintegration, there is a gradual dissipation of the shared substances derivative of feeding and forming by the deceased's father and paternal kin, on the one hand, and of the intimate gifts between spouses and, in the case of a male deceased, the reciprocities of his children in adult compensation for his earlier *burwala* generosities, on the other.

But where do they go? First of all, while rotting, the deceased's corpse decomposes (*kaligeya'i*), meaning that it loses the physical form that allowed the substantial masculine *kek-wabu* images resulting from the deceased's father's and patrikin's life-sustaining feedings (*vakam*) to themselves disperse, disintegrate, and flow outward. From there, they are transferred in the act of carrying to the skins of the burdened mourners. Those *kek-wabu* shared by the deceased and his *tubulela* patrikin, including the carrying *bubus*, on the one hand, therefore, are disintegrating together. Similarly, and on the other hand, effluvia of the deceased obtained through his/her sexual relations with the surviving spouse, *kapu* (and extended to the children of a male deceased, the *milabova*) undergo a parallel process of *kaligeya'i* dispersion once deposited on their skins. Those polluting substances of death gradually and invisibly disintegrating in concert with the bloody remains of the buried corpse reach completion roughly at the time that *lisaladabu* is performed.

Second, there are additional exuviae of the deceased's person that are non-substantial and invisible, which enable them to invade the bodies of the carrying *bubus* through another route. It is claimed that the *kubwawala* vapors of the rotting corpse, which are deadly to the deceased's maternal kin, pass from the corpse through the vaginas of the women carrying it on their thighs into their wombs. These are the women of the deceased's father's *dala*, or female *tubulela*.<sup>31</sup>

30. In chapter 8, I shall elaborate on how spouses are in certain related aspects conceived as *luta* "siblings" analogous to ancestral *tosunapula* couples.

31. As Malinowski noted (see above), the deceased widow or widower is normally assigned to carry the head, so in the case of a surviving widow or her adult children,

Their wombs are hidden places likened to Tuma, the land and habitat of the *baloma* spirits of the dead—except that the disintegrating *kekwebu* captured by these women are not those of the deceased's maternal kin; nor are they of the same maternal *dala* identity of the deceased's *baloma* soul or spirit. These are the nonsubstantial images of *ikuli*-forming capacities fed to the deceased by his/her father and paternal kin in the course of their lifetimes together, now being returned to "the Tuma" from which they had once originated. Similarly to how the course of disintegration of the substantial residues of the deceased body in burial and deposition on the skins of carriers run parallel to each other, the reentry of the deceased's maternally identified *baloma* soul back to the Tuma from which it was spiritually conceived at the time of its previous Boyowan procreation has its own nonsubstantial patrilateral counterpart.

Before explaining further these last details of *kopoi* in connection with the logic of *bwekasa*, it will be helpful to relate how I was first led to this understanding. During my first several fieldtrips, my team members and I engaged in conversations covering many topics. As new (to me) information was uncovered, we frequently found ourselves returning to our previous reflections on certain indigenous beliefs that had been featured in much earlier ethnography: not surprisingly, these concerned procreation and reincarnation. After numerous mullings over the funerary data that I was collecting, it occurred to me one afternoon when I was alone that the images of the deceased's body that originated from the father might be *de*-forming and going back into the wombs of the *kapu* women while they carried the corpse. This, I reasoned, would explain why the deceased's body is laid close to the *bubus'* vaginas. That evening after our evening meal, I rehearsed with my team members the details that had led me to consider this possibility and asked whether this made any sense. To which immediately Pulayasi responded, "Yes, it is true. I was not going to tell you because I did not think you would believe me." And the others present immediately concurred, as have additional informants, including experienced elder Omarakana women who had enacted the rite and with whom I had afterwards consulted.

I have witnessed three performances of *kopoi*. In a curious way, one of those yielded unexpected confirmation of Pulayasi's explanation. A girl of around

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they do not absorb into their bodies this additional emanation that is captured by the deceased's paternally related women. This is consistent with the fact that both a man's widow and his children through their lifetime interactions assimilate the *kekwebu* of his maternal *veyalela* identity, not those of his personal *tubulela* relations.

ten years who was brother's daughter to one of the Paramount Chief's wives had died of mouth cancer. When I came to pay my respects, the *bubu* "aunties" were assembled with her decorated body laid across their legs in the usual fashion, except that the outer fringe of the large woven mat holding the corpse and upon which they would ordinarily be sitting was placed to cover their legs (fig. 6.12). I asked about this and was told that, being Christians, it would be sinful for the women to have dealings with anything connected to *baloma* spirits, who, in the official view of the United Methodist Church, were evil demons in league with the biblical Devil. By putting the mat between themselves and their niece, the women were blocking her decomposing images from reaching the Tuma that they themselves embodied.



**Figure 6.12.** *Kopoi* rite with mat blocking passage of decomposing *kekwebu* of the deceased. Omarakana village (2008).

The four mortuary pathways outlined above each qualify as *bwekasa* sacrifices offered up to a distinctive "Tuma." If so, it must be asked: What are the counterparts of the life-giving *bubwalua* saliva or sweat that the spirits leave behind on sacrificed food and other items?

First, with proper burial, the maternal *kekwebu* images of the deceased's blood, once they have completed their underground disintegration, are returned to the soil that is part of the deceased's *dala's tukwa* from which they mythically

originated. At the end of their disintegration and dispersion, the separated images and powers previously contained in the deceased's blood are no longer dirty or dead, but neither are they merely inert. They are thought to have become clean, hot, and available for contributing positively to the generation of new life (*kaliai*) in the soil of the *dala*'s motherland. So just as with other forms of *bwekasa*, death in the form of the deceased's detached blood that is transferred to underground Tuma elicits life-giving blessings available to *dala* survivors. Importantly, the agricultural wealth that is subsequently generated from reinvigorated *dala* land accrues, through exchange, to others rather than benefiting *dala* kin.

Second, the nonbloody fluids worn on the skins of the carriers and other mourning workers undergo a similar process of gradual decomposition. They are, after all, of the corpse, and they are initially deposited in a Tuma-like, inner, closed, dark place containing the dead along with the secluded "dead" workers. Eventually, in parallel with the decomposition of the buried corpse, the previously dirty substances on the carriers' skins become clean and no longer pose a danger to the deceased's *veyalela* kin. When they, along with other *kapu* and *kakau* mourners, reach that point, they are deemed fit to return to ordinary life. This is ritually enacted in the rites of *lisaladabu*, whereupon shedding the tokens of death that they have borne, the carriers receive in substitution considerable amounts of wealth imbued with the images and powers of initiating and sustaining new life for themselves and their kin—articles of *sepwana*, *deli*, and so on, that have been blessed by *bubwalua* deposited on them by attending *baloma* spirits.<sup>32</sup>

Third, the divine counter gift for the sacrificial offering up of the deceased's *baloma* soul is the eventual watery (i.e., *bubwalua*) *waiwaia* spirit children produced at the end of a spirit's Tuman life for reincarnation back into the visible human realm of Boyowa via transport to the womb of a woman of the same *dala*. Although *dala* kin of those reincarnated children will find enjoyment from their mutual relations, a woman's children, like other services she provides in marriage, are considered to be sacrificial gifts on her part to other persons—i.e., to her husband and her children's paternal *tubulela* kin.

32. *Lisaladabu*, however, is not the final stage of these processes. In its aftermath, *kapu* and *kakau* relatives of the deceased will undergo further ordeals of deconception through the performance of additional sacrificial *sagali* distributions.

Fourth, since the *bubus* who carried the deceased have themselves also “died,” the *kekwebu* that they take back into their Tuma wombs are not dirty and polluting to them in the way that they are to the deceased’s maternal kin. At the conclusion of their disintegration, those now-clean, blessed, and revived *kekwebu* and *peu’ula* become available for the conception, feeding, and forming of *veyalela* and *litulela* children of their *dala*: namely, their own offspring and they whom their sons and brothers will sire and whom they will themselves later magically beautify.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, the sacrificial reciprocities given by spirits in Tuma in exchange for the oblations of blood and other bodily fluids, *baloma* soul, and paternal *kekwebu* of the deceased’s person eventuate in the regeneration of new life for subsequent generations of people in Boyowa. This conclusion—that the *waiwaia* spirit children received by women for the sake of procreation are reciprocities in response to mortuary *bwekasa*—is reinforced in native etymology insofar as the duplicated root (/wai/ sometimes shorted to /wa/) of the word *waiwaia* (i.e., /wai- + wai-/) is the same morpheme found in the terms *bitawai* (or *waiwai/warwai*) *kebila*, the synonym for *bwekasa* (see chapter 5). According to Pulayasi and others, the meaningful link here is that the transported *waiwaia* spirit child is a gift that enables ancestral *baloma* to “build” or “create” (*bitawai*, *waiwai*) relations with their living *dala* descendants.

## REINCARNATION: THE *KEDA* “ROADS”

In the scenarios I have just outlined, two are basically *separate but interconnected* roads or paths (*keda*) followed by nonsubstantial components of the deceased’s person that lead to reincarnation and the revival of human life. There is first the road traveled by the *baloma* spirit after it departs Boyowa or the world of the living for a lengthy existence in Tuma. As described by Malinowski ([1916] 1992: 217; 1932: 366), during its spirit life there, every *baloma* experiences a series of sequential, cyclical deaths and rebirths. As its hair grows grey, its teeth fall out, its skin wrinkles and darkens, and so on, the *baloma* sheds those aged forms in the manner of crabs, snakes, and prawns to emerge with new, youthful hair, teeth, and skin. This recurrence of *baloma* aging, death, and

33. I refer her to the magic of beauty and attraction (*kemawsila*) that *tabu* father’s sisters apply to a brother’s children (Malinowski 1932: 295–301; A. Weiner 1976: 133).



rebirth in Tuma corresponds to the patterning of human life in Boyowa, where, in routine gardening, fishing, carving, coitus, performing *megwa*, mourning, and other labors or work, people recursively “die” (*kaligeya’i*) and, with rest, return to ordinary life refreshed and rejuvenated (*kaliai*), only to die and recover again and again in the same fashion until reaching their ultimate demise.

Eventually, however, after undergoing numerous such deaths and rebirths, the *baloma* “tires” of its Tuman spirit life and desires to return to the visible, material realm of Boyowa. The decrepit *baloma* goes to the seashore of Tuma Island to bathe and is there again decomposed, the crashing waves peeling off the aged skin once and for all—sloughing off, in other words, all the extraneous images and powers that had been acquired during its previous Boyowan life. All that is left is the minute, watery, memoryless *waiwaia* spirit child constituted of the invisible images and associated powers that it had acquired matrilineally in its previous earthly conception. In this deconceived liquid, formless state, the spirit child is ready for transport from Tuma to the wombs of a Boyowan woman sharing the same *dala* identity, as posited in Annette Weiner’s account of women’s supposedly ahistorical contribution of cosmic reproduction.

But there is also the second path of cyclical movement between the two cosmic realms initiated when, *through originally masculine agency*, Boyowan children as *litulela* receive in procreation and afterwards nonsubstantial forming donations from their father which contain the *kekwebu* and *peu’ula* distinctive of his maternal *dala*. When the children eventually die, the *kekwebu* that they had received from fathers and other paternal kin are returned through *kopoi* to their ultimate source, the Tuma-wombs of the father’s female *veyalela* relatives. From there, the recaptured, reinvigorated paternal *kekwebu* are made available for further acts of procreation of children either of that *dala*’s women or of its men. This second road of cosmic reproduction predicated through male agency is no less recursive or ahistorical than that associated with woman’s life-giving capacities.

In sum, the first of these roads involves the circulation of nonsubstantial, gendered female *kekwebu* and *peu’ula*, the second involves noncorporeal gendered male images and powers.

#### *Lisaladabu in Tuma*

I can finally move closer to answering the question of why *baloma* spirits in Tuma might require the images contained in the sacrifices given to them at



*lisaladabu*. Very simply, *baloma* in Tuma are understood to perform *lisaladabu* mortuary ceremonies of their own upon the deaths of their aged spirit kin in the course of their transformation into *waiwaia* and their reincarnation back to Boyowa. These spirit deaths obligate the surviving *baloma* in Tuma to amass and exchange great quantities of the shadows of banana-leaf bundles, skirts, stone axe-blades, arm shells, shell necklaces, clay pots, money, and so on, for their own funerary transactions. And how else could *baloma* acquire the required spirit items except through sacrificial donations by their human survivors in Boyowa? This, after all, is what would be expected in the case of an invisible spirit domain mirroring that of visible, material Boyowa.

It so happens that the provision and receipt of the material items for mortuary exchange by members of specific *dalas* in Boyowa supposedly take place simultaneously among the corresponding spirit parties in Tuma. When members of Tabalu *dala*, for example, present yams, bundles, skirts, *veguwa*, and so on, to their Kwenama or other paternal kin or affines, the *baloma* of Tabalu are equipped to do likewise. It is highly relevant that a village, if it has experienced deaths in a given year, schedules the subsequent mortuary rites (with the exception of *yawali* burial feasts, which are performed in the immediate aftermath of unscheduled deaths) in the period immediately following the next harvest. But in years of enhanced agricultural productivity, this coincides with the period just prior to *milamala* celebrations when *baloma* spirits visit their living descendants. This is also the time when, traveling from Tuma to Boyowa, sexually active spirits are well positioned to deposit the *waiwaia* spirit children of their recent dead for the insemination of women of their own *dalas*. After all, this is when the spirits are already close at hand and, according to the culture, living people are actively working to generate new extra-*dala* relations and, through them, new offspring.

Susan Montague has reported two ethnographic details that contribute to explaining why aged *baloma* spirits might desire to be reincarnated back to the material world in the first place. On the one hand, she argues that the death of people in Boyowa is caused ultimately by being starved through the breakdown of food reciprocities with other humans (1989: 25–28). On the other, she describes how, when *baloma* “minds” (i.e., “souls”) of living people become “bored,” they can find no value in continuing life in Tuma (ibid.: 26).

These assertions, I suggest, make a good measure of sense for explaining how *baloma* spirits could reach such a state of “tiredness” or “boredom” that they desire rebirth to new life in Boyowa. In the context of *bwekasa* sacrifices

between the living and the dead, *baloma* rely on being fed their spirit food and other necessities by their Boyowan descendants. But those offerings are only received by those spirits who are personally recalled in the minds and sentiments of the people making those sacrifices. After the passing of many years, it is inevitable that living people's memories of a specific *baloma* ancestor will fade (i.e., *kaligeya'i* decompose) to the point that they are forgotten. It is at that point that the *baloma*, excluded from *bwekasa* offerings, will undergo spirit starvation in exactly the manner of living humans who are deprived of spiritually blessed material food.

But also, through the passage of time, the names of magicians' *baloma* predecessors may also be forgotten, in which case there is no one left in Boyowa who calls upon them to perform the tasks that animate Tuma life. So indeed, there is considerable sense in the idea that *baloma* eventually become tired or bored with their spirit life.

I suggest additionally that *baloma* ultimately reach the point of dying out of ritual neglect on the part of their living kin. Without receiving *bwekasa* sacrifices offered up in their own names, *baloma* inevitably die, to be reborn as *waiwaia* spirit children in very much the same manner that living humans are reborn in the form of the *baloma* spirits that leave their Boyowan bodies to enter Tuma.

It is for this reason that *baloma* spirits in Tuma stage their own mortuary feasts celebrating the spirit-death of their own members. To do so, they require the *kekwebu* shadows of the same categories of female and male wealth that their living counterparts transact in their names when they perform their Boyowan *lisaladabu* and other mortuary rites.

### *BWEKASA, KINSHIP, AND KULA*

Having reached this point of acknowledging the significance of *bwekasa* sacrifice in several of its forms, human life in the larger, cosmic sense can be seen as the cycling of essentially two separable nonsubstantial components of every person along coordinated roads connecting the paired existential realms of Boyowa and Tuma. Each of the detachable constituents consists of *kekwebu* images or shadows with associated powers. There are those *kekwebu* in the form of nonsubstantial *baloma* "souls" and "spirits" circulating between Boyowa and Tuma along basically feminine roads. These are the *kekwebu* which define people in terms of shared matrilineal *dala*. Then there are those potent *kekwebu*

which similarly cycle between Tuma and Boyowa but primarily through men's rather than women's procreative and other agencies. These are the images and powers that are later recaptured in rites of *kopoi* performed by women on the basis ultimately of patrilateral relationship.

Viewed in this light, Trobriand eschatology and cosmology consists of two cyclical sequences of reproduction defined in gendered terms: one feminine and the other masculine. These two cycles intersect during the lifetimes of living humans when people are engaged in the full range of interpersonal, elicitive reciprocities of the detachable components of their respective persons. These latter exchanges consist fundamentally in transactions following from the initiation of both intra-*dala* and inter-*dala* reproduction and the maintenance of *dala* and extra-*dala* kin relationships. But in the event of human death, the two paths diverge in more or less opposite directions in accordance with their gendered distinctions. Note particularly that *baloma* souls and spirits of a given maternal *dala* identity are incapable of cycling between the two realms strictly on the basis of the *peu'ula* powers embodied in their own *dala*-specific *kekwebu*. Just as male or masculine contributions are necessary for propelling *waiwaia* from Tuma to the wombs of women of Boyowa, mediated by "dead" *baloma* agents of Tuma, so also are corresponding masculine ingredients of personhood required for facilitating the transfer of paternal images from Boyowa to Tuma, mediated in this case by "dead" female agents of Boyowa.

I mention this because it is not the only context of Trobriand culture involving two such gender-marked, inversely oriented cyclical movements marked by moments of conjuncture as well as disjuncture. There is also that well-known sphere of activity embracing all the societies of the Massim known as *kula*, where valuables contrasted as male and female move in opposite directions, occasionally joining together at the same time and place in the course of "marrying" before separating and proceeding until they meet and marry again. At Omarakana, *mwali* arm shells are regarded as males and *soulava* necklaces are the females in these exchanges, hence husbands (*mwala*) and wives (*kwawa*), respectively.<sup>34</sup>

The marriage (*veva'i*) analogy is carried further with respect to *kula* insofar as exchange partners are conceived as analogous to courting couples and/or spouses, and the exchanges between them are conceptualized in the same terms as employed in conjugal *bwekasa* (see above). The visiting partner is the "husband"

34. In other quarters of the *kula* ring, the gendering of these wealth items is reversed.

and the partner visited is the “wife”—positions that are reversed depending on the items exchanged and their directions (see Malinowski 1922; Damon and Wagner 1989). The “hospitality” (*yamata*, literally “looking after”) offered by the *kula* “wife” to his partner is described as similar to that offered by married women to their husbands, and the gifts that *kula* husbands present to their “wives” expressing their appreciation for their favors (*pali*) are equated with the husband’s repayment (*mapula*) of *buwala* (cf. Munn 1983; 1986: 52, 55–56, 282n). It is expected that the *yamata* and *pali* gifts will be shared by the recipients among their close kin.

The “true” (*mokwita*) *kula* items—the arm shells and necklaces—figure in this scenario as the *gwadi* “children” of the partners. The *mwali* or *soulava* that the “wife” gives to his partner is compared to the son or daughter that birthing women present to their husbands. In this respect, the recipient husband adopts (*vakalova*) the valuable as his child. And importantly, these asymmetries in *kula* marriage are reversed when visitors and the visited trade places in future exchanges.

It is not insignificant either, I suggest, that the medium through which the elements of sacrificing and reincarnating persons and the articles of circulating *kula* wealth move is basically *sopi* “water,” whether in the form of blood, saliva, sweat, sexual fluids, thoughts, freshwater, or seawater. In this respect, the dimensions of Trobriand cosmology I have outlined constitute a further instance of the “fluid ontologies” type-model that has been claimed for the religions and philosophies of Highlands peoples of New Guinea (L. Goldman and Ballard 1998; see also Mosko 2006). But this time, the flows are circulating among peoples inhabiting the Melanesian seaboard.

Seen in this light and on the additional evidence of *bwekasa* presented in the next two chapters, it would appear that this form of the dual cycling of potent images distinguished in terms of opposite genders and relative sanctity is paradigmatic of Trobriand religion, culture, and social organization.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

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# Taboos, totems, and Tuma

The magician has to keep all sorts of taboos, or else the spell might be injured.

Malinowski, “Magic, science and religion” ([1925] 1992: 76)

Apart from the lack of superstitious fear, there are no taboos connected with the behavior of the living towards the spirits.

Malinowski, “Baloma: The spirits of the dead in the Trobriand Islands” ([1916] 1992: 190)

The preceding two chapters have introduced the practice of *bwekasa* sacrifice in several of its many forms as, on the one hand, essential preconditions for the successful execution of *megwa* magical spells and, on the other, critical procedures for moderating and coordinating kin-based relations among and between living humans in Boyowa and *baloma* spirits in Tuma. It has been revealed also that effective magical performances *themselves* evoke the presentation of *bwekasa* offerings and the reciprocities of spirits’ blessings that are conducive to human life, including the procreative conception of both neophyte humans and spirits (i.e., newly arrived *waiwaia* to Boyowa and *baloma* entrants to Tuma, respectively) as conceptualized in the terms of the indigenous cosmology.

Adherence to another category of ritual procedures—actions known conventionally as “taboos”—has been presented by Malinowski as a prerequisite for the fruitful performance of magical spells:

In a primitive community, not yet in bond to science, magic lies at the root of innumerable beliefs and practices. *Megwa*, which may be almost exactly rendered by our word “magic,” is, to the Trobriander, a force residing in man, transmitted to him from generation to generation through the medium of tradition. This force can only become active by the performance of a ritual appropriate to the occasion, by the recital of proper incantations, *and by the observance of specific taboos*. (1932: 290, emphasis added)

And as already noted, *megwa* spells are in one or another way essential components of virtually all customary institutions in the Trobriands. To that extent, therefore, indigenous social life can be seen as well saturated with “taboos.”

The common-sense meaning of “taboo” as an act of religiously motivated self-deprivation or denial would seem to have much in common with sacrifice. However, for Trobrianders this link is subject to considerable qualification, as *bwekasa* offerings and those practices which have come to be labeled anthropologically as “taboos” do not map neatly onto each other. For one thing, many ritual restrictions are expressed in positive terms enjoining activities that certain categories of persons *must do* as well as what they should shun. To avoid misunderstanding, I introduce the indigenous term *kikila* “ritual restrictions” as inclusive of, but not amounting exclusively to, “taboos” as prohibitions.

The ethnographic situation with *kikila* is similar to that which I encountered initially with *bwekasa*: that is, explicit references to it by name have only minimally found their way into the published record. The word *kikila* does not appear at all in Malinowski’s publications or fieldnotes as far as I have been able to ascertain. Scoditti has offered up “support,” “supporting part,” or “base” (1996: 132). Lawton’s Kilivila-to-English dictionary (2001a) lists *kikila* as

“a custom, ceremony, espec. of ceremonial purification after having broken a taboo, . . . a good act, . . . act[ing] in a righteous way, . . . to do only good, do no bad thing, act blamelessly, . . . to put [something] aside for a special purpose. With punishment for anyone who takes and uses it for any purpose to other than intended, . . . to put [someone] under a taboo so he cannot eat certain things. Example: ù Ikikilaisi magudina “They are putting the child under a taboo (so he cannot eat what is forbidden for this matter).”



In his English-to-Kilivilan text, Lawton (2002b) adds: “purification (rite releasing from taboo),” “dedicate,” “ritual uncleanliness or prohibition,” and “because of taboo.”<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, there are innumerable references to behavioral “taboos” scattered throughout nearly all the major ethnographies. My sense from working with the DEP materials is that there are few entries with more “hits” than the word “taboo.” Even so, there has been only scattered effort on the part of just a few ethnographers to describe *in detail* the mechanisms by which such “taboo” restrictions operate or precisely how they impact upon people’s other ritual capacities and/or affect their social relationships. The subject remains in considerable confusion.

As an indication of this, Malinowski (1922: 217, 220, 230, 452; 1932: 387–89; 1935a: 301; 1935b: 146, 303) regularly presented the indigenous term *bomala* as synonymous with “taboo.” In certain contexts he translated *bomala* not only as “forbidden” or “prohibited,” and so on, but also as “sacred” or “sacred thing” (1922: 217, 219, 424; 1932: 387; see also Fellows 1902; Baldwin 1939; Powell 1950b: 4; Senft 1986; Ketobwau 1994; Lepani 2012: 185; MacCarthy 2012a: 63; Jarillo 2013: 12, 266; Hutchins and Hutchins n.d.).<sup>2</sup> Yet elsewhere he contradicted himself on this critical point.

[*Bomala*] is used for magical taboos, for prohibitions associated with rank, for restrictions in regard to food generally considered as unclean, as, for example, the flesh of lizards, snakes, dogs and man. *There is hardly any trace of the meaning of “sacred” attached to the word bomala.* (1922: 424, emphasis added)<sup>3</sup>

1. Damon (2017: 46–48) reports from Muyuw a concept, *kikun*, meaning the “following” of a “principle.” Just prior to going to press, my Omarakana team members have confirmed that this closely matches their understanding of *kikila*, and that the two words are probably cognates.
2. Perhaps as an indication of her reluctance to engage in discussions of sacredness, Annette Weiner uses the word “taboo” freely in her publications, but never once that I can detect does she provide an indigenous lexical counterpart. My guess is that she was well aware of the complications I am here addressing and thus steered clear. Susan Montague, who is one of the few ethnographers to offer a theory of the logic of Trobriand “taboo” (see below), still does not nominate an indigenous word for the concept. However, this is likely because she too has been aware of some of the difficulties.
3. Not surprisingly, the term “sacred” is used with relative abandon throughout Trobriand ethnography with few attempts at connecting it with indigenous categories.

At one point in his writing, though, Malinowski, to his credit, came close to this realization when he sought to clarify the meaning of *bomala* as “taboo”:

This noun [*bomala* “taboo”] takes the prenominal suffixes of nearest *possession*—*boma-gu* (my taboo), *bomam* (thy taboo), *bomala* (his taboo)—which signifies that a man’s taboo, the things which he must not eat or touch or do, is linguistically classed with those objects most intimately bound up with his person: parts of his body, his kindred, and such personal qualities as his mind (*nanola*), his will (*magila*), and his inside (*lopoula*). *Thus bomala, those things from which a man must keep away, is an integral part of his personality, something which enters into his moral makeup.* (1932: 388–89, emphasis added)

As I shall explain, there is no paradox or contradiction here. The *external* things that an Islander must restrict from him- or herself are reflections of *the intrinsic images or parts of his or her very person*.

## TABOO IN OCEANIC PERSPECTIVE

It will be useful first to reflect briefly upon the concept of “taboo” as it has thus far appeared in anthropological, and particularly Oceanic, contexts. There, the mere mention of the concept invokes one of the discipline’s most long-standing and intractable quagmires. Some of the more notable contributors to debates over the meaning and function of taboo include Frazer (1910), Freud (1913), Radcliffe-Brown ([1939] 1952), Lévi-Strauss (1963, 1964, 1966, 1969), Mary Douglas (1966), Edmund Leach (1976), and many others. I believe Bradd Shore’s (1989) comparative analysis of *tapu* in relation to *mana* and *noa* as reported across Polynesia to be, to date, the most definitive and also the most relevant to the current exercise.

It must be born in mind at the outset that in Shore’s view *tapu* is a “confusing term,” one that has

proven to be particularly difficult for Western observers to understand. This is probably because the meaning of a taboo seems intuitively obvious to most of us. We tend to impose our meanings uncritically on the Polynesian term.

We have voluminous ethnographic evidence for the importance of *tapu*, particularly in Eastern Polynesia. Yet the range of its referents in various

Polynesian locales has frustrated attempts at a synthetic general understanding of the concept. (1989: 143)

Many specifics of the full Polynesian *mana-tapu-noa* complex resonate with numerous details of the Trobriand case, yet a significant number do not, or do not exactly. Given the immensity of these complications, an exhaustive comparison of Trobriand *kikila* with Polynesian *tapu* in all its forms would draw me into areas well beyond the confines of this chapter.

However, it will be useful to remark on one dimension of *tapu* as reported in many Polynesian materials which sheds light on what I shall discuss as regards Trobriand *kikila*. For several respondents, according to Shore (ibid.: 144–48), especially those reporting from Eastern Polynesia, *tapu* and *noa* in their pre-contact forms tend to map fairly closely onto “male” and “female,” respectively. Thus women are described in terms such as “common,” “polluting,” “dangerous,” “intrinsic impurity,” and so on, owing to their associations with “child-birth,” “menstruation,” “cooking,” “death,” “everyday life,” “darkness,” “earth,” and so on. Men and masculinity, however, connote values such as “organic and conceptual purity,” “cosmic divinity,” “cosmic and social reproduction,” “categorical integrity,” “by nature *tapu*,” “light,” “heaven,” “life triumphant,” and so on.<sup>4</sup>

However, Shore points out that there is “a good deal of contradictory evidence about the evaluation of women’s reproductive status in this region, particularly with regard to the status of menstrual blood” (ibid.: 146). Specifically, those data point to situations where women and femininity register as *tapu* and thus sacred, as distinct from *noa* or profane. This is definitely helpful, but the prospect of corresponding complications with respect to men’s ritual status as potentially *noa* also has barely been mooted.

The information that I have already reported particularly concerning contexts of *bwekasa* sacrifice shows that Island women no less than men and *spirits* participate in, transact over, and are personally transformed in and through sacred/profane (i.e., *bomaboma/itugwali*) transformations across the Tuma/Boyowa divide.

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4. Shore cites specific passages from Best (1914), Johansen (1954), I. Goldman (1970), Levy (1973), Dening (1980), Hanson (1982), Valeri (1985, 1990), and Thomas (1987).

In any case, I do not think that this particular ethnographic and analytical possibility has been yet sufficiently exploited in the literature on Polynesia. Just to take one example from Valeri's (1985) excellent account of kingship in ancient Hawaii (but see Valeri 1990), because the kingly rituals organized by men featured religious sacrifice, men appeared to correlate with or monopolize *tapu*. But because women's childbearing functions were not traditionally perceived to involve comparable elements of sacrifice, women and the definitive practices of their gender (and not only cases of "sacred queens"; see Linnekin 1990) have tended to be positioned only on the side of *noa*.

In the Trobriands, however, women's and men's gender-specific sacrifices entail *kikila* restrictions that set them each apart from their own ordinary or profane gender-defined contexts of action. Women and men thereby embody and consequently alternate between *bomaboma* "sacredness" and *itugwali* "profaneness" in their respective domains of activity. Accordingly, *kikila* are observed not only with reference to *megwa* as men's magical incantations. Just as the most important *tukwa* magical spells in the Trobriand repertoire are connected intrinsically to particular *dala* identities, the specific *kikila* associated with women's birthing procedures (Malinowski 1932: 179–99) and other practices involved in the management of human reproduction are distributed in parallel along *dala*, hence kinship, lines. And as previous chapters make clear, *baloma* and other spirits are active participants in all these processes.<sup>5</sup>

Partly for this reason, therefore, I concentrate on the complexes of *kikila* associated with men's magical and women's procreative agencies, which inevitably involve spirit participation. And this is only appropriate if, as I have already argued, men's magical practices and women's childbearing are cultural analogues of one another. Just as significantly, while the performance of *bwekasa* sacrifices and the observance of *kikila* restrictions operate according to distinctive procedures, it will be necessary to outline how they must be coordinated in fairly exacting ways if villagers' ritual and other, more profane ambitions are to be realized.

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5. This arrangement between the genders is formally isomorphic with the cooked, polluted, dead food offered up in *bwekasa* as clean and life-giving to the dead spirits who receive it, and the *bubwalia* saliva which is dirty to the spirits is clean and life-giving to the people who ingest it. North Mekeo gender dynamics as alternations between "open" and "closed" are analogous with those described here for the Trobriands (see Mosko 1983; 1985: chs. 4–5). I suspect that similar systemic inversions might well pertain to traditional Polynesia.

## APROPOS THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF TROBRIAND TABOO

According to the same format I have employed in previous chapters, I begin with a summary of the state of anthropological knowledge concerning the subject of taboo in the Trobriands. I have already listed the main glosses that have appeared for this notion in previous accounts. I now probe deeper, starting with Seligman's account of the indigenous "system of linked totems" (1910: 667).

*Seligman*

Charles Seligman's interest in the topic of Trobriand totemism was characteristic of the evolutionary theorizing that dominated the discipline in his day. Hence he devoted more than one third of the fifty-eight pages of his treatment of the Northern Massim in *The Melanesians of British New Guinea* (1910) to explicating the detailed association of purportedly nonhuman ancestral species with social groupings.

The relevance of Seligman's concentration on "totems" to the present topic of taboo is three-fold. First, the emblematic species of plants, animals, and "natural" phenomena associated with particular *kumila* ("clan") groupings are among the items that are (or were), to members, characteristically taboo and thus avoided when it comes to their possible harming, killing, or eating.<sup>6</sup> Second, according to myths, these totemic affiliations originated at the time of cosmic creation, the first emergent *tosunapula* ancestors of each group either creating or carrying with them their totem species (ibid.: 679). Third, throughout the Northern Massim, the several species or phenomena regarded as totems of a particular group of people were themselves viewed as *linked* together in some intrinsic way. In the Trobriands, for example, each of the four *kumila* possessed a "major bird" (*manua*) totem which had attached to it several "linked totems" involving additional species of land animals, trees, creepers, fish, and so on. The logic of these connections, however, escaped Seligman's understanding:

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6. The Europeans residents on Kiriwina from whom Seligman obtained most of his information during his brief visit as a leader of the Cooke-Daniels Expedition in 1904-5 were mostly aware of the totemic links of species to *kumila* "clan" groupings, to the relative neglect of *dala* "matrilineages," which, as we have seen, are vastly more significant in villagers' daily life.

In spite of these legendary close associations of men and totem animals, there does not appear to be any generally recognized physical or psychical resemblance between men and their totems, nor are the latter regarded as omen-giving. A man should not eat his totem bird, the penalty for transgressing this rule being a swollen stomach and perhaps death. (1910: 680)

Adding to this riddle, the rule of avoiding or not eating one's own totem species appeared to apply inconsistently, with cases reported to him of certain people obligatorily eating or killing their totems in specified contexts. For example,

At Boitaru on Kiriwina where pig is one of the totems of the Malasi clan, no men of this clan would eat bush pig, though here, as on certain of the Marshall Bennett Islands, they would eat black-skinned village pig, but would not eat pig of a yellowish-brown colour, for this, it was explained, was the colour of man. Men of the Malasi clan kept pigs and would not hesitate to kill black village pigs, but brownish pigs would be sold or exchanged with men of other clans who were stated to be indifferent to the colour of the pigs they ate. Mr. Bellamy considers that what has been said as to the eating of brownish pigs applies only to the Tabalu family group of the Malasi clan. This, as is noted later, is the family group to which belong the chiefs (*guyau*) of the Malasi clan. Mr. Bellamy writes: "The brownish-red pig of the Trobriands is a village pig and not a bush pig. Individuals of the Tabalu family are forbidden to eat this pig, although it is freely eaten by other chiefs and by commoners (*tokai*).” Further, Mr. Bellamy was told that a Tabalu might not eat a village pig which has been speared or killed in any other way than by being roasted alive over a fire, having previously been caught by hand and tied to sticks which are supported over the fire. Mr. Bellamy did not hear of any reason for abstinence from brownish-red pigs, and in answer to a question he was told “our fathers did not eat it.” The penalty for infringing this rule was a swollen belly and perhaps death. (1910: 681)

However, not all taboos were tied to ancestral or totem affiliations. Other categories of persons observed additional restrictions that might change over the course of life:

Certain fish were only eaten by old men; it was believed that if unmarried or only recently married men ate these they would become unpleasant to the opposite sex who would not then permit free access. The fish which were avoided for this

reason were *kurasi*, *mamila*, *milabwaga*, *sigau*, and *tabobo*. There were no birds which were avoided on this account. (1910: 681n)

There are several further points of particular interest in Seligman's account. While people were forbidden to kill animals of their own totem, there was no restriction on killing persons sharing the same totems in warfare, at least on that basis (*ibid.*: 684). People should avoid sexual relations and marriage with persons who shared the same totem on the grounds of common *kumila* identification. And villagers were expected to respect the totems of their fathers' *kumila* at the same time that marriage with such persons was forbidden (*ibid.*: 683, 714). It is claimed in later studies, however, that while marriage is not allowed with persons of father's *dala*, with whom, on that basis, totemic affiliations are shared, in certain circumstances those unions are tacitly preferred and encouraged (see chapter 8).

The best that Seligman could offer to explain these apparent anomalies in the irregular linking of totems was the assumption that in the distant evolutionary past there existed a consistent logic tying groups of people to ancestral nonhuman species, but, given the vicissitudes of subsequent evolutionary transformation, that logic had become corrupted so that only fragmentary survivals of the prior system remain.

### *Malinowski*

Under the banner of his functionalism, of course, Malinowski largely eschewed evolutionary explanations (1932: lx–lxiii). As noted above, the Kilivila term he presented as containing the meaning “taboo” as “forbidden,” “prohibited,” and “sacred” is the noun *bomala*, which in use takes the possessive, “those objects *most intimately bound up with his person*” (*ibid.*: 389, emphasis added). Unfortunately, Malinowski did not pursue further the general character of personhood in Trobriand thought, at least along the lines that I am following here. Linguistic motivations aside, the link between that which is tabooed and that which is intrinsic to persons' compositions will prove critical.

Complicating the picture, Malinowski elsewhere claimed that “the question of taboo . . . varies with the village, each having its own system of garden magic” ([1916] 1992: 195), but here he misunderstood the basis (i.e., patrivirilocal) of village organization. He did note, nevertheless, that where specific spells continue to be associated with particular localities, the magician must be a member



of the same *dala* as the mythical ancestor who created it (1922: 411). This datum was contradicted, however, by the claims that fathers would typically pass their magic to their sons or in some instances to others (1922: 412). In any case, Malinowski settled upon the argument that the main function of taboos, along with other institutions in the absence of a formalized system of law and justice, is the maintenance and enforcement of “the biddings of tradition,” even if only “partially and imperfectly” (1926: 98). Taboos performed this function in the Trobriands simply because their infringement elicited penalties, depending on the specific nature of the taboo violated.

After surveying the range of *bomala* taboos he had discovered in his inquiries into sexual behavior, where restrictions were heavily concentrated, Malinowski settled upon three categories of *bomala*—the first of which is divided into two subcategories (see below)—distinguished according to “rules of usage . . . the genuine taboos with supernatural sanction, the clear prohibitions without supernatural sanction, and prohibitions of acts which must not be done because they are shameful, disgusting, or else dangerous” (1932: 392, see also 25–26). In a footnote to this passage, Malinowski noted that he devised these groupings merely for the sake of easily surveying the varieties of taboo, and that other bases of classification could be employed. Still, the prominence he attributed to the presence and/or absence of “supernatural sanctions” is significant. Among other reasons, by referring to the “supernatural” without further specification, he tacitly evaded declaring in this context the basic distinction he developed elsewhere categorically opposing “magic” to “religion.” In other words, in Malinowski’s treatment of *bomala* or taboo, there is no indication of which forces in the supernatural realm are specifically responsible for delivering penalties.

Something of the importance of this can be gauged in connection with illustrations from each of Malinowski’s renditions of the native categories of *bomala*. The paradigmatic instance of *bomala* inciting supernatural sanctions is that of *suvasova* “incest.”

In its full and correct meaning, the word *bomala* applies to all the acts which are specifically called by the natives *suvasova*—that is, to incest within the family and breach of exogamy. In this context, the word *bomala* denotes an act which must not be committed because it is contrary to the traditional constitution of clan and family; and to all the inviolable laws which have been laid down in old times (*tokunabogwo ayguri*, “of old it was ordained”). Besides this general sanction, which is felt to be rooted in the primeval nature of things, the breach of the

*suvasova* taboo entails a supernatural penalty: an illness which covers the skin with sores and produces pains and discomfort throughout the body. (This supernatural penalty can, however, be evaded by the performance of a specific magic which removes the bad effects of endogamous intercourse.) In the case of incest between brother and sister, a very strong emotional tone enters into the attitude of the natives, that is, into the significance of the word *bomala*, endowing it with an unmistakable phonetic colouring of horror and moral repugnance. Thus even in their narrowest and most exclusive sense, the words *bomala* and *suvasova* have various shades of meaning and imply a complex system of traditional law and of social mechanism. (1932: 389)

On this point of the quasi-incestuous implications of things and behaviors classified as *bomala* tabooed, same-gendered persons sharing *dala* identity who are forbidden to engage in carnal relations with their cross-sex siblings are precisely the persons who expressly share the same *kikila* restrictions of consuming as well as avoiding the same food categories. Since persons of different *dala* observe different *kikila* as to the species of ingestible foods, they must be circumspect when sharing cooked food with others. Cross-sex adults, including cross-sex siblings, are prohibited, in any case, from sharing food together in accord with the *bomala* regulation that men and women should not eat simultaneously and face-to-face. But among persons of the same gender but differing *dalas*, only those who observe the same *bomala* restrictions may share food (Malinowski 1922: 170–71). In short, those for whom the partaking of food together is *itugwali* open and free are those for whom sexuality is *bomaboma* sacred and *katuboda* closed, and vice versa.<sup>7</sup>

According to Malinowski, the infraction of several “minor” prohibitions which nonetheless qualify as “legitimate” *bomala* “such as are inherent in a man’s office, situation or activity . . . still carries something of the idea of a peremptory traditional rule, maintained by supernatural sanctions” (1932: 390). He elaborates:

Another important manifestation of rank is the complex system of taboos, and this is equally binding on man and woman. The taboos of rank include numerous

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7. The one key exception to this rule is that newly married couples during the first period of their marriage do share their meals but eat separately for the rest of their lives once this initial episode has passed. The critical case of the commensal and sexual relations of married couples is discussed further below and in the next chapter.

prohibitions in the matter of food, certain animals especially being forbidden, and there are some other notable restrictions, such as that prohibiting the use of any water except from water-holes in the coral ridge. These taboos are enforced by supernatural sanction, and illness follows their breach, even if it be accidental. But the real force by which they are maintained is a strong conviction on the part of the taboo keeper that the forbidden food is intrinsically inferior, that it is disgusting and defiling in itself. . . . Now a woman of rank fully shares in this disgust, and in the danger from breaking a taboo. If, as does occasionally happen, she marries a man of lower rank, she must have all food, all cooking utensils, dishes, and drinking vessels separate from her husband, or else he must forgo all such diet as is taboo to her; the latter is the course more usually adopted. (1932: 26–27; see also 1922: 409–11)

The two remaining classes of taboo where there is supposedly no supernatural sanction involve an incorrect, inaccurate, or “less rigid sense of *bomala*” (1932: 390). These include taboos against adultery, infringements against chiefs’ sexual entitlements, interrank mating, and “shameful and unnatural . . . actions of which no sane or self-respecting person would be guilty” (ibid.).

So again, when read carefully, Malinowski’s characterization of the legitimate sense of *bomala* is applicable only to the first two of his four categories, which, in the breach, involve supernatural sanctions. Nowhere does he venture an account of how or by what supernatural mechanism the bodily or other penalties following the violation of “correct” *bomala* are generated. And this only exacerbates the confusions, as above, over whether *bomala* is or is not a concern of sacredness and over the question of the source of magical efficacy.

Among knowledgeable Omarakanans, all of Malinowski’s taboo categories qualify legitimately as *bomala* precisely because they *do* involve supernatural sanctions, albeit in varying intensities and via distinct mechanisms. This is because it is ancestral *baloma* and other spirits of Tuma who are understood to be the agents bestowing the benefits and exacting the penalties for their observance and violation, respectively.

Before delving more deeply into this issue, it will prove useful to consult remarks on this topic provided by Gioncarlo Scoditti, Shirley Campbell, and Susan Montague. These are the three relatively recent ethnographers who have provided substantive new information which has led them to hazard something approximating theories of the operation of taboo. Each, therefore, has grasped, although differently, some of the essentials on which I shall elaborate below.

*Scoditti*

Scoditti (1990) discusses Kitavan taboos in nearly exclusive relationship to the ritual restrictions of expert canoe carvers (*tokabitam*). These taboos involve the avoidance of certain foods (ibid.: 52, 56). The rite of initiation connected with these avoidances itself serves to open and clear (*katuyewa*) the novice's mind so that the complicated "graphic signs" or designs that are eventually to be learned during subsequent apprenticeship and eventually carved into the prowboards in accompaniment with the reciting of *megwa* spells can be fixed there in memory. If, following initiation, a novice or expert carver consumes one of the tabooed foods, his initiation is invalidated, and he supposedly loses the ability to carve. This is because the carver's mind becomes "closed" or "confused" and ceases to hold the "perceptive power" instilled in initiation (ibid.: 46, 55).

Actually, Scoditti's two principal *tokabitam* informants disagreed on this last point of the extent of confusion that results from the violation of the food taboos. One of the two who had himself eaten a forbidden food maintained that he was still able to carve effectively. The other strongly disputed this. According to Tobi Mokagai, the initiated *tokabitam* expert at Omarakana, and others, the Kitavan carver who had violated the taboos would be able to carve canoe prows incorporating the appropriate designs, but they would lack the magical powers that they would have had if the taboos had not been violated and the appropriate rites had been correctly performed. Here as elsewhere, being without magical powers amounts to the lack of critical participation on the part of *bilubaloma*.

Scoditti ventures that the list of food taboos constitutes a "technical treatise,"

a sort of compressed oral manual, which an initiate should follow if he wishes to become a good carver, and the rules are expressed by metaphors like, for example, the metaphor relating to the prohibition on eating fish tails: "... Do you know what it means not to eat fish tails"? If I ate them, at the moment of carving, my hand would tremble. These are the taboos, this is the meaning of "taboo" that I respect and because of which, as you can see, I can now carve, and because of that my hand is sure, steady, and my mind is sharp, perceptive. If I ate forbidden food, like fish tails and the soft internal parts of animal heads, then my mind would get confused. This is the meaning of "taboo" and these are the results if they aren't respected. (1990: 55–56)

According to similar metaphorical linkages, the eating of the convoluted internal organs of animals would compromise the clarity and intelligibility of a

carver's designs. Boiled vegetable foods cooked with shredded coconut produce a slippery lining to the mouth, causing "one's ideas, one's images to 'to slip away', to lose forever the meanings that the carver will want to fix in the graphic signs carved on the wood" (ibid.: 56), and so on.<sup>8</sup>

Translating the relevant elements of Scoditti's account of the carving taboos into the terms I have been employing, the forbidden foods contain certain images (*kekwebu*, or Scoditti's "metaphors") which, when ingested, obscure or negate the exceptional openness and clarity of the initiated *tokabitam*'s mind so that the memorized graphic signs (*kekwebu* also) cannot effectively be implemented in his manual attempts at carving. In this muddled condition, the uncontaminated prowboard images absorbed mentally through initiation have lost their capacity (*peu'ula*) to generate facsimile material products, at least those incorporating powers originating, according to my analysis, in the carver's magical predecessors.

### *Campbell*

Reporting from Vakuta Island to the immediate south of Kiriwina, Shirley Campbell (2002) provides an account of the food taboos which in most respects parallels Scoditti's, largely because she also focuses on the ritual procedures connected with the expert knowledge of canoe carving, especially the rites and techniques centering on initiation and apprenticeship phases. The foods prohibited to Vakutan *tokabitam* are mostly the same as those for Kitavans (fish tails and brains, entrails, slippery cooked foods, etc.). They are prohibited because they embody visual qualities which are taken to reflect "characteristics" (i.e., *kekwebu*) that exemplify "the antithesis of carving aesthetics and the smooth transference of knowledge" (ibid.: 60).

Campbell notes also a rule that the daily gifts of food that *tokabitam* experts receive in connection with their first carving commission cannot be eaten publicly by the carver or his family; instead, they are left on the veranda of the carver's house for passers-by to partake of them. This might appear to qualify as instances, on the one hand, of *ula'ula* "payments" received by a magician and

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8. Scoditti does not provide an indigenous term for the notion of "taboo," but he does discuss a version of the word *kikila*—*kai-kikila*—referring to the notch at each end of the canoe where the main prowboards are joined to the hull and each other. In respect of this, Scoditti translates *kikila* as "supporting part" or "base" (ibid.: 77, 132). In this sense, I suggest, the observance of *kikila* restrictions supports magical efficacy.

distributed among his relatives or, on the other, of *bitarwai kebila* or *bwekasa* offerings to spirits (ibid.: 61). Campbell stresses, however, that the most important rule of etiquette is that carvers must not copy the designs of other *tokabitam*. They can legitimately carve only those figures (i.e., *kekwabu*) they received while undergoing apprenticeship and initiation (ibid.: 61, 106).

Campbell elaborates somewhat more than Scoditti on two aspects of *ka-bitam* magical knowledge, including the command of *megwa* spells. First, she differentiates three categories of magical expertise: that which nearly all adult men and women possess in accordance with their gender and *dala* identities; the individual possession of spells, potions, and other specialist techniques; and specialized magical disciplines for the benefit of magicians' communities, corresponding to the *torwosi* or *tokabitam* ritual expertise described by Malinowski (e.g., in gardening, fishing, weather, *kula*, war, fishing, skirt-making, canoe carving) (ibid.: 52–53). It is only the last of these kinds of specialization, however, which involve the sort of elaborate ritual initiations experienced by carvers.

Nonetheless, Campbell's (ibid.: 62–64) discussion of certain details of the ritual initiation of carvers and other experts, which are mostly included in Scoditti's (1990: 33–46) text too, are suggestive of the kinds of positive *kikila* restrictions that accompany most, if not all, categories of magic. The ritual initiation of *tokabitam* and *nakabitam* specialists is known as *sopi*, the word for both "water" and "knowledge."<sup>9</sup> In the case of Vakuta, initiation takes place in three steps. In each of these, the *tokabitam* master prepares a bespelled substance (e.g., areca nut with betel pepper and lime, spring water at the beach, and/or drops of the blood of a particular species of "slippery" snake) which is chewed or drunk by the initiate or dabbed on specific parts of his/her body. By these means, knowledge, "specific aesthetic qualities," and the "essence of the *kabitam*," depending on the type of specialization at issue, are imparted to and absorbed by the initiate (Campbell 2002: 62, 64). In particular, though, as both Campbell (ibid.: 64) and Scoditti (1990: 43–44) emphasize, the *sopi* ritual is intended to convey images with the powers of opening and sharpening the mind of the initiate, which otherwise would be closed and lacking in perceptivity.<sup>10</sup>

9. In this context, the prefix *to-* signifies "male" magical expert, *na-* signifies "female" magical expert.

10. From my information, this process is known as *bwegima*, meaning that obstructing "rubbish" (*pupagatu*) is evacuated from one's "mind." The chewing of betel and areca similarly clears impurities out of the body as well as the mind.

The point is, in both renditions so far, the acquisition of magical capacity involves not only the avoidance of inhibiting *kekwebu* as reflected in the visible characteristics of certain species and actions, but also the ingestion and transference of detachable *kekwebu* incorporating qualities thought to instill or enhance appropriate magical powers. At Omarakana, both of these ritual functions are conceptualized as *kikila*, and the latter positive behavioral injunctions are not limited to the initiations of *tokabitam* and *nakabitam* experts. They are typical of magicians at all levels of expertise.

### *Montague*

Susan Montague's account of ritual food avoidances among Kaileuna Islanders as outlined in her article "The Trobriand kinship classification and David Schneider's cultural relativism" (2001) is more broadly framed than either Scoditti's or Campbell's in addressing the ways that *kikila* violation affects the magical capacities of all persons, not just carvers, in accordance with their *dala* and *kumila* identities. But there are several ethnographic and analytic complications that require untangling, particularly in light of Montague's explicit rejection of *baloma* participation in the performance of *megwa* (see chapter 3).

First, she argues that *dala* and *kumila* are not exclusively matrilineal groups, at least based on any continuity of bodily "blood" connecting a child with its genitrix or other relatives (ibid.: 178). As noted earlier, she stands out in asserting, as I have on different grounds, that *dala* and *kumila* are not "matrilineal groups" in conventional anthropological terms of "kinship" or "clanship." Thus she attempts to redraw the boundaries of *dala* and *kumila* in accord with two categories of kin relationship, respectively: *veyotatu* and *veyo* (ibid.: 173–78).<sup>11</sup>

Second, she argues that this latter classification refers to distinctions among humans and *baloma* spirits on the basis of variations in people's personal composition, similar to but not identical to my own claims as per *kekwebu* and *peu'ula*. For Montague, the critical components that differentiate people are ultimately "diet" and "menstrual blood." Regarding diet,

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11. The clarifications to the meanings of *dala* and *kumila* that Montague is attempting in her description of *veyotatu* and *veyo* kin categories must be noted but they are largely tangential to the issue here of the logic of *kikila* ritual restrictions, including food taboos. For present purposes, for *veyotatu* and *veyo*, read *dala* and *kumila* relationship, respectively.



the categories are *veyotatu*, *veyo*, and *tabu*. Ego's *veyotatu* are people who avoid consuming the same *manua* ("bird") as does ego and who also avoid consuming the same *kawenu* ("plant foods of the air") as does he. Plant foods of the air consist of leaves, fruit, and seeds. Ego's *veyo* are people who avoid consuming the same bird as does ego, but who avoid consuming different plant foods of the air than does he. Ego's *tabu* are people who avoid consuming different birds than does he. It does not matter whether or not they avoid consuming the same plant foods of the air. (2001: 169)

As for menstrual blood,

a woman's menstrual blood differs compositionally from her bodily blood. Her menstrual blood is composed solely out of digestively transformed *kanua* "plant foods of the ground" (certain roots, tubers, and corms), while her bodily blood is composed out of every foodstuff she has ever eaten. So the new body which she grows in her womb does not have the same kind of bodily blood as does she. Moreover, while her bodily blood is unique to her because, throughout her lifetime, she has consumed a unique personal diet, *the bodily blood of her newborn child is exactly like that of every other new born child. It only becomes differentiated when the child begins to eat.*

The first food that any newborn child routinely ingests is mother's milk. Because mother's milk contains traces of everything that mother has ever consumed, and because, through digestion, mother's milk enters into the newborn child's blood, the newborn child's blood becomes compositionally identical to that of the woman whose breast milk it consumes. The result is that this woman becomes its *veyotatu*, *a person who has avoided consuming the same seasonal wind-related bird and same plant foods of the air as ego*. Likewise, all of her *veyotatu*, *veyo*, and *tabu* [i.e., "non-relatives"] also become the child's *veyotatu*, *veyo*, and *tabu*. In addition, this woman becomes the child's *ina* ["mother"], someone who provides processed foodstuffs to a dependent child. So now she and the child are related both as *veyotatu* and as *ina* and *natu* ["child"]. (2001: 174–75, emphases added)

Here Montague seems to be claiming that, being conceived of the mother's menstrual blood generated by her life-long consumption of the same staple diet (*kanua* tubers and corms; i.e., yam and taro) as other Islanders, at birth but before the start of nursing all infants' body bloods are compositionally identical. It is chiefly through subsequent ingestion of constellations of otherwise distinctive

foods (milk and “plants of the air”: namely, “fruits, leaves, and non-tuber seeds”) that human children (additionally distinguished in terms of gender) establish their kin (*veyo*, *veyotatu*, *tabu*) identities; hence, *kumila* and *dala* distinctions are only attained subsequent to birth. But in any case, through lactation and other feedings, the infant and mother eventually end up with identical body bloods.

As I have outlined in the previous chapter, Montague, like Malinowski, acknowledges there to be an indigenous distinction between the blood of a woman’s body and her menstrual blood, but beyond that her and my information diverge profoundly. As noted earlier, at Omarakana a woman’s body blood (*buyai*; “my blood” *buyaigu*, nearest possession) that is ejaculated into her womb in the course of sexual intercourse—what I have glossed as “womb-blood”—is alive (*momova*) insofar as it possesses the capacity of contributing to the generation of new life in a fetus, and by virtue of that it is regarded as clean (*migile’u*, *ulemwa*). Menstrual blood that proves to be unsuccessful in conceiving a child and accordingly flows out of her body (*agi buyai*; “my blood,” second nearest possession) is understood to contain the mixed, now-dead and thus dirty sexual secretions of the woman and the lover(s) she has entertained since her last menstruation or pregnancy. I have been unable to corroborate any correlation of Montague’s specific food types with these two categories of women’s sexual bloods.

Third, in Montague’s dietary scenario there is no mention of procreative contributions of infant’s *dala*-specific *baloma* soul (i.e., *waiwaia*) or the father’s feeding and forming contributions (see chapters 4 and 8), both of which otherwise contribute to *dala* (i.e., *veyalela* and *litulela/tubulela*) identity.

Fourth, to complicate matters further, Montague claims that persons can be assimilated to one another as being of the “same *dala*” merely because they are proficient in the performance of the same activities. She mentions, for example, the shared ability to swim (ibid.: 183). Apparently, this is independent of the personal dietary histories that differentiate persons as between *veyotatu*, *veyo*, and *tabu* categories. Clearly, this must be a metaphorical extension of “*dala*” to domains of activity other than magical competence. If two persons must be of the “same *dala*” to perform the same *megwa* (at least the important *tukwa* categories of spells), shared swimming ability is not enough. Possessing the requisite customized bodily components and knowledge of the *megwa* spells, however, is critical.

Fifth, because *veyotatu* (qua maternal *dala*) identity, at least, is supposedly established after birth, Montague asserts that *dala* is mutable to the extent that

erstwhile kin embark on the consumption of distinctive diets (ibid.: 185n). Conceivably, in other words, two children born of the same woman can change their *veyotatu* and *dala* identities by virtue of consuming the milk of unrelated women or radically changing the categories of food they eventually consume. The first circumstance is negated, I suggest, insofar as a child must be nursed by a woman of the mother's *dala* as ascertained on other grounds if the birth mother dies or proves to be incapable. And in the second case, people's *dala* identities are not changed (e.g., a Tabalu becoming non-Tabalu) even when one of them violates his/her *dala*'s given *kikila* restrictions—in Montague's terms, eats his/her own bird or plant foods of the air. It is merely the case that their ability to perform the magical spells of their *dala*'s *tukwa* is negated.

Despite these difficulties, Montague's efforts to correct anthropological understandings of Trobriand kinship do highlight one key issue: people's diets—what people avoid or taboo as food as well as what they actually eat—affect their adult magical capacities. But how exactly? Magical spells (*megwa*, *mieguva*, or *meguva*)—"noise force," as Montague prefers—exist in a person's "mind." "Mind" is the gloss that she gives to the term *baloma*, otherwise translated as a living person's soul as well as the *baloma* spirit that survives death to assume a life in Tuma. Recall from chapter 3, however, that Montague (2016) has rejected my claims that *baloma* spirits of the dead are regarded as the source of magical efficacy. She notes nonetheless that *meguva* or "magic is a mode of production appropriate to death" (ibid.: 146), and that *baloma* spirits *do* have capacities for effecting changes in the world:

A standard disembodied *baloma*'s formula for action can be described as *migi* "face," *magi* "desire," and *migai* "transforming action." "Face" here is short-hand for perception. The *baloma* turns its "face" around to perceive what exists. Then it formulates a desire. Then it issues a command which simultaneously *releases power to effect that command to alter the surrounding environment*. (2016: 146, emphasis added)

Presumably, other living humans would be among the elements of that targeted "surrounding environment." However, in none of Montague's publications have I been able to ascertain exactly how the released "powers" of spells are understood to effect the changes in their intended human or other patients. In this regard, her account of magic's efficacy goes little further than Malinowski's assertions that it resides in magical words.

In any case, for Montague, what dietarily differentiates people into *dala* (or *veyotatu*) categories is in the first instance mother's milk (*nunu*). It is, therefore, because women share *veyotatu*, *veyo*, or *tabu* identities with each other that their children do likewise and hence consider themselves either *veyotatu* and *veyo* relatives or, in the case of *tabu*, nonrelatives.

Nonetheless, Montague does entertain specific ideas about how the eating of proper and improper foods affect magical abilities. Since mothers do not feed children the specific totemic wind-related *mauna* "bird" that they themselves avoid, she asserts that children eventually end up being fed the flesh of the three bird species that are associated with the remaining *kumila* composing wider Trobriand society (2001: 169).<sup>12</sup> In so doing, the child assimilates into its body *the same kinds of flesh as persons of the other three kumila have separately avoided*. This latter flesh "consists of condensed energy drawn from that wind" (ibid.: 170). This means that it is this singular dietary commonality that identifies the same-*veyo* (i.e., for present purposes, same-*kumila*) status of its members. By this criterion, persons of the same *kumila* are basically equipped to perform only the one corpus of magic connected with their common *avoidance* of their own wind-associated *mauna* bird. This implies that magicians are excluded from performing the spells associated with other birds and winds because they have consumed those categories of bird flesh. The one group of spells that they are qualified to perform, however, are those connected to the wind-associated bird that they have *avoided* for consumption.

In Northern Kiriwina and, I think, elsewhere in the Trobriands, there are magicians in personal possession of *megwa* that involve more than just the one wind that is associated with their particular *dala* and *kumila* identities. And as already noted by Seligman, the major bird totems that are connected with the four *kumilas* each figure as just one member of a multispecies chain of "linked totems," the consumption of any one of which, as Scoditti in particular has argued, will negate the eater's magical powers the same as if the bird had been eaten. Also, Montague's claim that villagers observe the bird taboo of their own *kumila* is contradicted by the fact that people also avoid the bird(s) of their father and, upon marrying, their spouse (see chapter 8). I shall return to these critical points below.

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12. Apparently, this is because it is through one of the four seasonal winds, each associated with one of the four *mauna* bird species, that *megwa* travel from the magician to the patient or target.

Despite these difficulties, there is one aspect of Montague's handling of the bird avoidances which merits close attention:

It [i.e., eating the flesh of any one of the four birds] fails because the bird's flesh has become incorporated into that person's flesh and, as the magic originates in the person's mind and *passes outwards through his body, it travels through his flesh and meets its target there*. Then the magic just dissipates and never gets to the outside world. (2001: 170, emphasis added)

Here the flesh of the magician's body, merged with the ingested flesh of the eaten bird, has unintentionally become the magic's effective target. The magic associated with that bird cannot therefore escape to be supposedly transported by the specific wind with which it is totemically associated.

This argument, as far as it goes, partly correlates with information I have received, except that, first, there is no involvement of *baloma* spirits, and the logic of the direct connection of birds specifically to winds posited by Montague would not seem to carry over in explaining how or why the consumption of other (i.e., *nonbird*, *nonflying*) linked species such as those listed by Seligman, Scoditti, or Campbell also inhibit men's as well as women's magical capacities.

Second, according to my information, rather than being blocked by the body's density, the images or words of the spells constitutive of the magician's *dala* and *kumila* identities that circulate disconnectedly through his/her body's blood are *duplicated in the components (i.e., kekwebu) of the ingested tabooed foods*. There they meet their target, as Montague has suggested, but rather than dissipating, they amalgamate and are together excreted. The spell's images previously coursing through the magician's body awaiting oral congealing and hot magical activation for oral release into the air or wind, in other words, are peremptorily removed from his/her person through other apertures as cold, "dead" feces, urine, sweat, vomit, menstrual blood, and so on. This is how the violation of food taboos in particular makes the magician's body closed or blocked up (*katuboda*), at least as regards the proper oral externalization of *megwa*.

Third, in the scenario laid out above by Montague it is inferred that when a magician has *not* consumed a tabooed food, spells generated in his mind travel unhindered through his physical body en route to being generally released by it. This pathway, however, seems to bypass the vocal tract, which, after all, is the very organ specialized for the production of the "noise" constitutive of magical "noise-force" intended for oral externalization and, in the reports of

other investigators, identified also as the locus of “intelligence,” “mind,” and/or “knowledge” (e.g., Malinowski 1922: 315, 409–10, 412; [1925] 1992: 76; Weiner 1976: 218, 252; Scoditti 1996; 2012: 69; Senft 1998: 78). This particular conflict disappears, however, if men’s oral performance of *megwa* conducted with the participation of *baloma* is taken to be analogous to women’s procreative capacities grounded similarly in ancestral spirit agency.

Fourth, it is unclear in Montague’s account of gendered body differences how it is that women, with denser bodies than men, are nonetheless capable of performing *megwa* in relation to childbirth and child beautification.

Additional details in Montague’s explanation of taboo violation raise further problems. The consumption of the forbidden plants, she argues, limits the ability of *meguva* to achieve their intended results by affecting the density of the magician’s body:

Trobrianders hold that some, but not all, plant foods of the air thicken the body’s substance when humans eat them, making it harder for magic to pass successfully outward through the body. As Toinabuena told me, “Kidamwa bakam kawenua gaga, wowogu bibubutu agu miegava. Mapela gala betei yagina” (If I were to eat the wrong plant-food-of-the-air, my body would blunt my magic. Therefore it would not cut into the wind). Moreover, diet affects the body in a series of gradations. The more kinds of bodily substance-thickening plant foods of the air an individual has consumed, the thicker his bodily substance will be, and the less effective his magic. *The fewer kinds of substance-thickening plant foods of the air an individual has consumed, the thinner his bodily substance will be, and the more effective his magic.* The result is that the best magicians are the people who have consumed the fewest kinds of the bodily substance-thickening plant foods of the air. The worst are those who have consumed so many kinds of bodily substance-thickening plant foods that they really cannot perform effective magic at all, even if they are the right gender and possess the requisite knowledge. (2001: 170, emphasis added)

By “right gender” here, Montague is alluding to the common understanding that men’s bodies are considered to be “solid” or “hard” (*kasai*) and less substantial than women’s, which are comparatively “squishy” or “quasi-liquid” (*pwapwasa*; Montague 1983: 37–38). Men’s hardness, she argues, facilitates their ritual aptitude for easily emitting *meguva* but denies them the capacity to conceive and

nurture human infants. It is women's more substantial and weighty bodies, however, which enable them to give birth while constraining their ability to practice magic (a point emphasized in chapters 3 and 4).

In the passage just quoted, Montague presents three inconsistent ways in which the eating or avoidance of plants of the air affect magician's effectiveness: through gross quantity, greater overall variety, and treatment of specific species. The overeating of plants of the air generally might well thicken a man's body, making it less able to "cut into the wind." But this explanation does not carry over into the latter two avoidances. Eating a greater variety of plants of the air, for example, would not seem necessarily to affect a man's bodily thickness if eaten in small quantities—unless there were some additional reasons why *specific* plants of the air regardless of quantities consumed are avoided by magicians. Therefore, only the third of Montague's views of the dietary blocking of magicians' bodies holds up: that is, magicians must avoid *specific* species of plants of the air if their *megwa* are to be effective.

This is indicated where Montague notes additionally that the differences in bodily substance achieved dietarily which are characteristic of chiefly and commoner men account for the differential distribution of magical capacities between the two rank categories.

Trobriand male gender is complicated by the fact that not all men have the same bodily potential. Just as *kanua* makes all men's bodies hard or solid, *karwenua* "wild foods", makes them of different density. This is important with regards to weather controlling magic because overly thick bodies are thought to blunt magical force expenditures. The Tabalu chiefs stand out due to their thin bodies and associated magical powers. (1983: 45n)

In other words, Tabalu and other chiefs possess enhanced magical capacities because they avoid *karwenua* "wild foods" more so than commoner men.

So which *karwenua* specifically do Tabalu and other chiefs avoid? The problem, partly, is that it is not only "wild (plant) foods" generally that can blunt a magician's bodily capacities. *Karwenua* (or *karwelua*) as a category includes certain "plants of the air" which, in their avoidance, also differentiate people of the same *kumila* into distinct *dala* identities. And the category *karwelua* includes not only "wild foods" of the bush but domesticated nontuber, noncorn staples (rice, papaya, ripe banana, pineapple, etc.; see Montague 1978: 101n).



Now every major spell (and most minor ones) carries with it *kikila* restrictions that involve avoidances additional to the consumption of plants or other foods, as outlined above by Seligman, Malinowski, Scoditti, and Campbell. But it is typical also that possession of any given spell places restrictions on the magician's behavior that involve activities other than the consumption or avoidance of specific consumables. How, for example, does the perpetration of theft (see below) affect one's bodily density so as to frustrate one's magical ability, or, in the case of a Tabalu man, how does allowing others to rise physically higher than himself produce the same results?

That the consumption of plants of the air in quantity and variety index instead the consequences of consuming specific species of them is implied in Montague's above account of Tabalu and other chiefs' enhanced capacities of magical expertise and efficacy. It is true that Tabalu men have typically thin bodies, perhaps observably more so than other Island men. True also, they claim to eat fewer quantities and types of *karwelua*. And these are indeed important data. But this is because, compared to commoner peoples, Tabalu and other *gumgweguya* are typically in their very persons composed of numerically more *tukwa* spells, each of which consists of abundant components (i.e., *kekwebu* images with associated *peu'ula* powers designated by reference to named distinct animal and plant species, natural phenomena, and human activities). There is, in other words, a direct correlation between the image content of a high-ranking chief's magical repertoire and the scale of the cosmos to which the words of those spells summarily allude. The more beings, entities, and actions in the world that are referenced in a magician's corpus of spells—prototypically in a given spell's middle *tapwala* part (see chapter 3)—the *greater portion of the universe is prohibited or otherwise restricted to him and his behavior; accordingly, the greater proportion of the cosmos his megwa are capable of affecting*.

What, therefore, distinguishes Tabalu from commoners and even from most other chiefs is the breadth of the specific restrictions that they follow regarding not only the eating of plant species of the air but also innumerable other activities which for the sake of preserving magical efficacy are either expressly forbidden or enjoined. And this is more or less the essence of the conclusion Montague herself reached in explaining why the spells specifically associated with given *kumilas*—and *dalas*, as I maintain—can be implemented only by persons who identify with and ritually respect those birds and the other species and activities linked with them (see above). Despite other shortcomings, on this precise point Montague's presentation converges with my own.

## KIKILA: RITUAL RESTRICTIONS

I return now to the term that Malinowski provided for “taboo,” *bomala*. As already noted, this word consists of the core word /*boma*-/ and the intimate possessive: /-*la*/ in the case of third person, /-*m*/ for second person, and /-*gu*/ for first-person singular possession, and so on. Other sorts of intimate possession conforming to the same grammatical convention include references to a person’s body parts and general *lopola* interior, his/her mind (*nanola*) and thoughts (*nanamsa*), his/her desires (*magila*), and his/her kin relations. By “intimate” here I am referring to “things” possessed by persons that villagers regard as inalienable components of themselves. Contexts employing this linguistic construction, in other words, can be seen as exemplifying the NME notion of personal partibility, which is devoid of the subject/object distinction that is characteristic of the canonical commodity or market-based logic and individualism of the West.<sup>13</sup>

At first approximation, it must seem to English-speakers contradictory that the very “things” that Trobrianders classify as *bomala*, including those which they should *avoid* as “taboos,” are nonetheless explicitly marked as intrinsic components of their very persons. But in the indigenous terms by which persons and relations are identified and distinguished, there is no inconsistency. Those external “things” which are *bomala* and which must be avoided for contact or consumption (to take the paradigmatic case) by a person consist of the same potent *kekwebu* images that specify that person’s *dala* identity *acquired by other means* (e.g., through the *dala*- and *kumila*-based *genital-sexual* contributions of parents). In other words, the “things” that are *bomala* to a given person consist of the same images of which that person is composed; or as Malinowski put it, “those objects most intimately bound up with his person . . . integral part[s] of his personality, something which enters into his moral make-up” (1932: 388).

In light of the treatment of *megwa* which has dominated the preceding chapters, the most relevant example of this connection I can offer is how the very species or “things” of the exterior Boyowa realm that are mentioned in a particular spell consist of the same internal *kekwebu* images that course through

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13. I am not claiming here that such linguistic expressions of personal possession are *necessarily* indicative of indigenous partibility, or that there are not other syntactic devices which could fulfil the same function. It would take a qualified linguistic analysis to establish either contention. I am merely suggesting that this general form of intimate possession encountered in the Trobriands which is widespread throughout Melanesia is compatible with the distribution of NME partibility.

the body of the magician. With the most important spells—the *tukwa* incantations that are inalienably and exclusively associated with a specific *dala*—those same images also flow through the internal composition of all who identify matrilineally (or patrilineally; see below) as being of or associated with the same *dala*. On these grounds, Trobrianders' bodies can be regarded as customized to house the *megwa* of their respective *dalas*.

Therefore, when Omarakanans or other Trobrianders shun the consumption of a specific food or activity that is *bomala* tabooed to them, they are avoiding the reincorporation of distinguishing *kekwebu* images of which they are *already* personally composed. This notion of consuming one's *bomala* species is tantamount to something like endo-cannibalism.

Although he did not appreciate fully their significance, Malinowski recorded a number of observations which point to this very conclusion. For example,

The same type of doctrine underlies also the taboos which Bagido'u has to keep. It has been already mentioned that on the day of a ceremony he must fast completely till the ceremony is over, after which he can eat his fill. *He has also permanently to abstain from certain foods; some of which are associated with the substances used in his magic.* Thus Bagido'u may never touch the flesh of the ordinary bush-hen (*kwaroto*) or its eggs. Neither may he eat *mulubida*, the smaller species of bush-hen. He must not eat the *wakaya* bananas, nor the tubers of the *ubwara*. He is not forbidden, however, either coconut or betelnut. *If he broke any of the food taboos associated with his magic, the taytu would not grow properly. His magic would become "blunt".* (1935a: 106–7, emphases added)<sup>14</sup>

Elsewhere, as noted above, Malinowski states that *bomala* in its “full and correct meaning . . . applies to all the acts which are specifically called by the natives *suvasova*—that is, to incest within the family and breach of exogamy” (1932: 388). By analogy, I suggest, the eating or touching of the animal or plant species that are *bomala* taboo to oneself is tantamount to virtual, pseudo-, or quasi-incest.

Malinowski and others have written at length of how the prohibition in sex and marriage of literal *suvasova* (which also is the label for the bodily disease

14. Note in this passage that Malinowski observed that *wakaya* (*wakeya*), the banana species which provides the leaves for *doba* bundles, is associated with Tabalu *dala*, as described in the previous chapter, and on that basis, its fruit is *bomala* for eating by Tabalu persons.

that literal incest produces) is the strongest and most abhorred of all *bomala* taboos. Below and in the next chapter I delve into the logic of *suvasova* incest avoidance proper in connection with the regulation of marriage exchange and its operation in connection to kin relationship and classification. For now, it will be sufficient to indicate that the root */boma-/* when doubled as */bomaboma/* closely approximates the anthropological-English gloss “sacred.” Any entity or activity that is *bomala* taboo to a Trobriander is thus *bomaboma* sacred in the sense of being in certain respects intrinsic as well as “set apart” from, hence restricted to, him/herself.

The way in which something that is *bomala* tabooed is composed of elements congenitally identified with the person for whom it is ritually forbidden conforms to the model of “structural ambiguity” developed by Mary Douglas (1966) and Edmund Leach (1976). Perhaps closer to Leach’s thinking here, something *bomala* to a Trobriander is that which is “not part of me” yet is still “part of me” in the same time and place. This condition is an instance of what in Kilivilan is called *wo’uya* or “confusion.” Hopefully, it is not out of order to suggest that Douglas’s and Leach’s structuralist claims about taboo were based on a pre-NME conceptual grasp of the significance of the partibility of persons and relations.

As I have discussed with regard to Trobriand notions of ritual status in another context—that pertaining to the spatial and social relations that structure Omarakana village (Mosko 2013b)—that which is *not bomala* tabooed or *bomaboma* sacred to a given person or persons sharing the same *dala* identity is *itugwali* free, open, or profane to them. If that something is classified as a food, those people can eat it. If it involves some other type of behavior, they can enact it. In the course of social life, therefore, Trobrianders, much the same as people of other societies around the world, undertake any variety of ritual activities that involve conversions between *bomaboma* and *itugwali* states. *Bwekasa* sacrifices are perfect examples of this logic: namely, when dead, dirty, polluting, and *bomaboma* sacred cooked foods are ritually converted to clean, edible substances; when initially taboo harvested first-fruits are offered to ancestral spirits before being distributed and consumed; and when during *lisaladabu* rites the *bomaboma* restrictions are removed from mourners, making the activities of ordinary village life free and open to them again; and so on.<sup>15</sup>

15. On this and other evidence, I am led to suggest that details of Trobriand *bomaboma/itugwali* conversions may have some relevance for interpreting variations of the

There is an additional dimension to the observance of *kikila* restrictions involving the alternate personal statuses of *bomaboma* sacred and *itugwali* free or profane that is relevant to many categories of magical performance. I earlier introduced the condition of *kibobuta* personal correctness, where all of one's personal thoughts, actions, and affairs are ordered in culturally and morally approved conditions. Even when a person lacks specific knowledge of *megwa* spells, ancestral *baloma* spirits can aid him/her in his/her projects. The achievement of *kibobuta* can thus be seen as the effective avoidance of anything defined as *bomala* sacred and thereby prohibited. Closely connected with this notion, in many categories of *megwa* performance the magician must undergo a range of abstentions such as fasting, sexual abstinence, avoidance of children and persons of opposite gender, to list the most common. The most important *tukwa* magic of many *dalas*, such as in major rites performed by *towosi* in gardening, fishing, warfare, canoe carving, and *kula*, requires these abstentions (Malinowski 1922: 198; 1932: 291, 414–45; 1935a: 65, 106–7). Adepts typically undergo such renunciations for a day or two before undertaking the rites themselves.

These avoidances are similar to the ones connected with the voicing of species named in *megwa* incantations, but with a somewhat different rationale. When reciting a spell, it is critical that the magician's thoughts are absolutely focused upon the content of the spell, and that his/her bodily desires and emotions (*lunkola*) are not being deflected in other directions by extraneous temptations. If one is going to perform the magic of gardening, for example, any thoughts, feelings, or sensations involved with eating, courting and sex, *kula*, children, other categories of magic, and so on, will compromise the sacred single-mindedness that is required to establish complete harmony of one's person with those of the *baloma* spirits being appealed to for support.

This is technically no different from the requirement that the magician must recite the words of the spell in exactly the form that they were first generated by the *tosunapula* ancestors who composed them. No extraneous words can be added, and no intrinsic words can be omitted. Ignoring the required abstentions thus makes one's person *migugaga* "impure" or "dirty," at least in relation to the spell, as distinct from the *migile'u* "pure" or "clean" ancestral spirits who in their own lifetimes ritually prepared their persons properly.

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*tabu/noa* complex found in Polynesia and cognate forms—such as North Mekeo "dirty" (*iofu*) versus "clean" (*ikua*) (Mosko 1985)—present in other parts of the Austronesian sphere.

In slightly different terms but to the same effect, the forbidden activities which ordinarily are *itugwali* open or free (consuming food, engaging in sex, laboring, etc.) are made to be *bomaboma* sacred and thus *bomala* forbidden to the magician intent upon performing his/her arts. Correspondingly, the ritual actions that were previously *bomaboma* sacred in relation to normal life—such as casually repeating the words of the spell—have become *itugwali* accessible to the magician. In other words, the magician must detach or set aside those ordinarily life-giving *kekwebu* elements of his/her profane person as experienced in ordinary Boyowan experience in order to achieve a sacred condition where he/she can participate with spirit beings in Tuma. Once the rite is concluded and adjudged to be successful, the magician can readjust those actions defined relativistically as *bomala* and *itugwali* and return to ordinary life.<sup>16</sup>

Analytically, this class of *kikila* ritual restrictions can be seen as something of the inverse to those perpetual quasi-*suvaso* renunciations of contact with the *tukwa* species that are intrinsic to one's *dala*-defined person. The eating of food, the practice of sexual intercourse, interaction with youths and persons of opposite gender, and so on, are activities involving the regular incorporation of entities and substances into one's person. Ordinarily, those acts are *itugwali* open or free and *migile'u* clean to every living human at the appropriate phase of their lives. But in ritual contexts where the magician seeks intimacy and identity with Tuman spirits, they become *bomaboma* sacred, *bomala* tabooed or closed, and *mitugaga* dirty. This is formally distinct from the permanent rejection of totemic species as determined by *kumila* and *dala* in that the magician is renouncing, but only temporarily, that which is normally *itugwali* open to him/her and thus part of his/her person.

## TABOO VIOLATION, *SUVASOVA* INCEST, AND MAGICAL EFFICACY

With the understanding mentioned above of the meaning of *bomala* as having to do with incest in both its literal and virtual meanings, I return to the explanation of how *kikila* restrictions in the sense of both prescriptions and

16. To this extent, the process conforms closely with the general pattern of rites of passage (van Gennep [1909] 1960; see also Mosko 2015b, 2015d).

proscriptions affect the successful performance of *megwa* magical spells and thereby shape and reshape the contours of persons and social relations generally.

Malinowski wrote that the word *bomala* in its “full and correct meaning” applied as well to restrictions other than the prohibition of literal sexual incest and endogamy. These are what he considered “minor prohibitions, such as are inherent in a man’s office, situation or activity, and in this application it still carries something of the idea of a peremptory traditional rule, maintained by supernatural sanctions” (1932: 390, see also 425). These *bomala* taboos are anything but minor, however, for it is through the handling of the *kikila* forbidding quasi-incest pertaining to a person’s “office, situation or activity,” along with the management of the literal incest taboo, that the entire realm of Trobriand sociality has come to be constituted in its traditional form. I am referring here to the composition of *dala*, to the processes of procreation and reincarnation, to the character of rank and chieftainship, and to the organization of village communities. And to the extent that all these and other activities are premised on the competent performance of *megwa* conditioned by the observance of *kikila* restrictions and by the imposing of supernatural sanctions for their observance and infraction, interventions by *baloma* and other spirits affirm their critical participation in human affairs of Boyowa.

As also noted previously, the category *dala* encompasses all humans and other beings and entities of the cosmos that share a specific configuration of *kekwebu* images and associated *peu’ula* powers. This collection of images makes up a *dala*’s *tukwa* or *gugurwa* “property” or “body of possessions.” In Seligman’s (1910) early report, what amount to the *tukwa* of a given *dala* would include its relations with all the linked totemic animals, plants, and natural phenomena with which human members identify on the basis of shared *kekwebu*. Among the most treasured components of a *dala*’s *tukwa* are its hereditary *megwa* spells. Those animals, plants, and natural phenomena that are named in a given *dala*’s *tukwa* corpus of spells on the basis of specific characteristics (i.e., exhibiting the inner presence of the same invisible *kekwebu*) are included as *tukwa*, thus members of or belonging to that *dala* category.

Malinowski (1922: 429; see also [1925] 1992: 20–21) was notified of this connection.

So far, we only spoke of the relation between spell and rite. The last point, however, brings us to the problem of the condition of the performer. His belly is a tabernacle of magical force. Such a privilege carries its dangers and obligations. It



is clear that you cannot stuff foreign matter indiscriminately into a place, where extremely valuable possessions are kept. *Food restrictions, therefore, become imperative. Many of them are directly determined by the contents of the spell. We saw some examples of this, as when red fish, invoked in magic, is tabooed to the performer; or the dog, spoken about in the Ka'ubana'i spell, may not be heard howling while the man eats. In other cases, the object which is the aim of the magic, cannot be partaken by the magician.* This is the rule in the case of shark fishing, *kalala* fishing, and other forms of fishing magic. The garden magician is also debarred from partaking of new crops, up to a certain period. *There is hardly any clear doctrine, as to why things mentioned in magical formulae, whether they are the aims of the magic or only cooperating factors, should not be eaten. There is just the general apprehension that the formula would be damaged by it . . .* the proper behavior of the magician is one of the essentials of magic, and that in many cases this behavior is dictated by the contents of the spell. (1922: 409-10, emphases added; see also 1935b: 299)

In the case of the *gubugwabu* and *tourikuna* weather magic that is jointly included in the *tukwa* of land-owning Yogwabu and Tabalu *dalas* of Omarakana, for example, there are several species or properties of them which are mentioned in the spells.<sup>17</sup> With reference to the *bomala* species avoided by Bagido'u, the Tabalu weather magician at Omarakana, Malinowski observed that:

*Sina*, a bird with black plumage, must not be eaten or else the rain would be frightened. The magic would not produce wet weather, and this, though not its direct end, inevitably accompanies every important ceremony as part of its *ka-riyala* (magical portent). The cuttle fish, *kwita*, if eaten would have the same undesirable effect, highly pernicious to the gardens. This fish, which squirts out its black fluid into the sea, is mystically associated with rainclouds. As Bagido'u explained to me, the reason (*u'ula*) for this taboo is that the animals are black.

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17. According to Pulayasi, the *gububwagu* and *tourikuna* magic for sun and rain is originally the *tukwa* of Yogwabu *dala*, which at the time of Tabalu settlement at Omarakana during the era of migration was taken over initially by the newcomers as their *sosewa* (see Mosko 2014a). Subsequently the two *dalas* have cooperated in its implementation. It is largely for this reason that historically some Tabalu and Yogwabu have engaged in *veva'i* bilateral cross-cousin marriages despite their membership in the same *kumila*, Malasi. But after all, the leader of Yogwabu *dala* traditionally served as the Katayuvisa "political advisor" to the Tabalu chief of Kasana'i despite their common membership in Malasi *kumila* (see chapter 8).

Should he partake of their flesh, the rain clouds (*bwabwa'u*, lit. the black things) would not follow the magic, there would be no *kariyala* and the gardens would die.

A number of other fish are not allowed to the magician, some of them because they are of dark or black colour, some of them because they live in the coral outcrops of the reef. . . . The following are the native names of the forbidden fish—*yabwa'u*, *milabwaka*, *mamila*, *sekela*, *sig'a'u*, *marwa*, *bayba'i*, *madolu*, *lum'gwa*. (1935a: 107)

Still, Malinowski conceded, “Why these latter are tabooed [he] was not able to ascertain” (ibid.: 107; see also 1935b: 299).

Contemporary Tabalu and Yogwabu authorities explain that the image of “blackness” (*bwaba'u* or *bwabwau*) exhibited by each of these species is the same *kekwebu* evident in the storm clouds that bring the rain which is required for the growth of plants (especially garden plants) and also for the life and health of animals and humans. Every person who identifies with either Yogwabu or Tabalu *dala* and thereby incorporates in his/her person the image of blackness is prohibited from eating any of those kindred species, for if they do so it will destroy their ability to perform the magical spell aimed at controlling the weather. But there can be other deleterious consequences too. The Yogwabu or Tabalu person who eats one of the tabooed species may also become sick or even die as a result. And if a man or woman eats any of those species sharing the image of blackness, their descendants will likewise have lost the ability of performing that spell, even if they are subsequently indoctrinated to its words.

These effects can be understood if viewed in light of how violation of the *kikila* restrictions associated with the *tukwa* spells of one's *dala* amounts to a kind of quasi-*suwasova* or quasi-incest if compared with proper exogamous marriage and nonincestuous coitus. In the latter case, as a result of the many activities that couples conduct in concert, including sexual intercourse, husbands and wives share their respective *dala*-based, detachable *kekwebu* with each other (see chapter 6). The *kekwebu* that are reciprocated between married partners through these intimacies are not only those of the husband's and wife's maternal *dalas*; the *kekwebu* of their paternal *dalas* are passed between them just as a fetus in conception and afterwards receives images marked by both genders from each parent. These images, therefore, are the very ones to be eventually unscrambled over the course of *lisaladabu* and other mourning ordeals following the death of the spouse.

For the sake of clarity, when a man and woman as husband and wife (or otherwise) engage specifically in nonincestuous sexual intercourse, there is an exchange of the detached *dala*-specific *kekwebu* images of their respective persons through the transfer and sharing of their sexual fluids, their caresses, their bodily warmth, their confessions of love, and so on. Images of the husband associated with his *maternal and paternal dala identities* are transferred to the wife, and vice versa. After numerous such exchanges, a husband and wife incorporate in their persons detached images of each other's *dala* constitutions, but they are marked in reverse gendered terms. For example, the Tabalu husband's contributed *dala* images incorporate the overall masculine capacities of feeding and forming consisting of substantial and nonsubstantial (i.e., female and male) elements respectively, whereas the Kwenama wife's feminine *dala* images similarly consist of feminine substantial and masculine insubstantial components. When the husband, say, incorporates images from his wife into his person, they are not images that duplicate *exactly* his own contributions of feeding and forming, just as the images incorporated by the wife from the husband do not *precisely* duplicate those of her blood and spirit.<sup>18</sup>

By this logic, from the onset of their conjugal life together a husband and wife who have married according to rules of *kumila* and *dala* exogamy come to share nearly identical images between them. For this reason, spouses adopt each other's maternal and paternal *dala*-based *kikila* restrictions from the moment they initiate cohabitation. Despite their near identity, however, for the reasons just given, their union does not equate with sexual *suwasova*. This is because, even though married couples become composed of *kekwebu* of the same nature and potential capacities, *they remain differently marked according to the gendering of the relations by which they have been acquired*. Therefore, their sexual intimacies do not qualify as "true" *suwasova*.

Nonetheless, by virtue of this reciprocal conjugal gifting of *kekwebu* images and *peu'ula* powers, the relation of husband (*mwalala*) and wife (*kwawa*) comes to resemble that of brothers and sisters or opposite-sex classificatory siblings (*luguta*). Consequently, the conduct of their sexual lives, at least as it is acknowledged in the public arena, approximates that of cross-sex siblings. Malinowski

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18. This logic of the sharing of potent *kekwebu* images between married partners and the offspring resulting from their interaction follows rather perfectly that of North Mekeo peoples of the Central Province, whose social organization in this respect and others mirrors that of the Trobriands (see Mosko 1985: chs. 7–8).

presented data much to this effect. In public contexts according to decorum, it is always presumed that a husband and wife are *not* sexually active together much in the way that sibling incest is abominated. Husbands and wives may interact relatively freely in public “as long as any allusion to sex is rigidly excluded” (1932: 95–96, see also 392; Montague 1980: 90). It is for this reason that the most serious insult one man can level at another is, “Copulate with thy wife” (Malinowski 1932: 95; see also A. Weiner 1976: 195–96).<sup>19</sup>

19. This arrangement whereby married couples effectively comport themselves in public as brother and sister can be seen as a transformation of kin classification among North Mekeo and Sāmoans. Among the former, it is tacitly acknowledged that, after generations of endogamous intermarriage among the various patrilans of a “tribal” political unit, all fellow tribespersons of opposite gender can be reckoned as classificatory “siblings” (*atsiatsitsi*). Bridewealth transactions strategically de-conceive remote cognatic ties between prospective spouses so that erstwhile distant classificatory siblings can unite as unrelated spouses (Mosko 1983, 1985).

Similarly, in Sāmoa, through extensive bilateral *'āiga* kin connections, virtually everyone can be regarded as a nominal sibling to everyone else, often along multiple genealogical connections. As reported by Serge Tcherkézoff (2017; see also Schoeffel 1979), by various mechanisms, however—mainly, through the abeyance of common ceremonial coparticipation—distant *'āiga* kin are considered to be unrelated and thus eligible to marry. The one difference with Sāmoa is that village units are exogamous, whereas in the Trobriands and North Mekeo coresidential village and village-cluster groupings are ideally endogamous as long as the rules proscribing marriage between genealogically distant kin are followed. It is particularly interesting in the Sāmoan case, however, that husbands who reside in their wives' villages are effectively adopted into the grouping of village sons (*aumāga, taulele'a*), thereby making them, for customary or ceremonial purposes, both “brothers” to their respective wives as village “sisters” or “daughters” (*tama'ita'i*) and “sons” to the chiefly *matai* village “fathers.” (In the reverse situation, however, in-marrying wives do not join the corresponding circle of “ladies” or *tama'ita'i*.) Nearly identically to Trobrianders, the circle of *matai* chiefs of a given village stand collectively as “fathers” to their following on the basis of residence, even those *'āiga* kin connected genealogically through matrilineal links, recalling the Trobriand convention that chiefs and village leaders stand as *tama* “fathers” to their own *dala* members. In Sāmoa, even female *matais*, of which there are a few, stand as “fathers” to their *'āiga* fellows, and in postconversion contexts male Christian pastors are likened to “sisters” of their communities. It appears to be relevant as well that Sāmoans differentiate “incest” (*māta'ifale*) among *'āiga* kin from the prohibition against village endogamy—the latter characterized as “shameful,” “unseemly,” or “bad”—similarly to how in the Trobriands, according to some reports, sexual relations between “fathers” and “daughters,” while ordinarily forbidden, do not qualify as *suvasova* (see chapter 8). This overall societal complex appears to be one of the more provocative instances of structural similarities connecting the Trobriands with Polynesia, despite their reputed ideologies, respectively, that underscore

This near identity of opposite-sex siblings and spouses emerged many times in conversations with my team members. The implication of *suvasova* in relation to magical performance and *kikila* restrictions, however, is just one instance.<sup>20</sup> As regards indigenous procreation theory, with the proper mixing of *kekʷabu* images between exogamously related spouses there is an appropriate, “strong” (*peuʻula*) formation or *ikuli* of the *bubʷalua* of the mating couple and of any fetus that might be conceived. By “appropriate” or “strong” bodily formations, those substances which should remain inside the body do so; those which should not remain there are safely expelled. In the case of *suvasova* incestuous unions, however, the proper formation of the bodies of the parents and the fetus is blocked, inhibited, or weak, conditions considered to be unhealthy and dangerous. This is the identical scenario encountered in my discussion above of the effects of consuming foods composed of *kekʷabu* images duplicating those of one’s own *dala* and *kumila* identities. That which should be kept inside (i.e., blood, flesh) is subject to decomposition (*kaligeyaʻi*) and release, and that which should be expelled (e.g., feces, urine, pus, nasal discharge) may well be enhanced (*kaliai*) and retained.<sup>21</sup>

The feeding that the incestuous male contributes in the act of coitus embodies the same *kekʷabu* images as contained in his female partner’s blood; other components have been acquired from the same paternal or other relations. His images for forming match hers, and so on. As a result, the power or capacity (*peuʻula*) of healthy *ikuli* coagulation that ordinarily results from exogamous intercourse is substantially incomplete and thus weakened, and the bodies of both the man and the women and any resulting offspring suffer accordingly. Their teeth fall out, their skins lose their tightness and become wrinkled with oozing sores, they drop weight, their physical strength lessens, they suffer from

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“matrilineality” and “patrilineality”—an analysis that would take me well beyond the scope of the present work.

20. The regulation of marriages according to rank and particularly those involving men and women of chiefly *dala* identity are discussed at length in chapter 8.
21. This treatment of *kikila* taboos illustrates yet another context where oral and genital processes, despite their differences, are viewed as analogous. Alfred Gell (1992), Marilyn Strathern (2000), and Mosko (1985) have discussed the formal properties of this dynamic of inside, outside, inside-everted, and outside-inverted spaces and their implication for ritual transformations of various kinds. Gell’s analysis is particularly apropos as it deals with the structure of ritual bodily and societal transformations encountered across Polynesia.

breathlessness, they age prematurely, and so on. The potent (*peu'ula*) images for feeding and forming that are effective when being detached from a man of a *dala* different to that of a woman are absent, and the maternal blood that siblings share from their common *dala* heritage is insufficiently powerful (*peu'ula*) to preserve the coherence and integrity of their bodies.

There is an additional spiritual factor that also contributes to the ill health and possible death of perpetrators of sexual incest and, as I shall explain below, violators of the *kikikla* restrictions associated with *megwa* spells. The act of sexual intercourse by living persons is understood to incite simultaneous copulation among the couple's *baloma* ancestors in Tuma. The problem that *suvasova* incest presents to those spirits is that they are the supposed guardians of *gulagula*, and it is assumed that they did not engage in *suvasova* during their previous lives as living humans in Boyowa. So rather than bless the act of coitus with their *bubwalua* as a type of life-giving *bwekasa* as they would do otherwise for a legitimate coupling converting into renewed life the momentary death that is experienced upon reaching climax, the spirits are angered and refuse to participate. By not thereby receiving the spirits' blessings analogous to the *bubwalua* saliva left on *bwekasa* foods, the incestuous couple is left enraptured in the embrace of sexual death, effectively failing to regenerate life in either new offspring or their own persons.

This replicates almost exactly the mythological fate of the sibling couple of Kumilabwaga who first violated the *suvasova* taboo and, from their death together in unrelenting copulation, spawned the *sulumwoya* "mint plant" that became the basis of love and courting magic. This couple was of Malasi *kumila* (Malinowski 1926: 84; 1932: 455–74), which includes Tabalu *dala*, whose apical ancestor was the *tubu daiasa* Ikali'i Tudava, eldest son of Topileta and Tugilupalupa. The sister accidentally brushed her hair against the love charm of coconut oil her brother had prepared. Upon smelling it, the magic entered her, "turned her mind," and she fled in hot pursuit of her brother. Upon apprehending him, the two copulated over and over, refusing to eat or drink, succumbing to death in the very act of otherwise spawning life.

The effect of magic to "change" or "turn people's minds" (*ika'u nanola*) is to reverse or transform that which people would otherwise desire to do (i.e., what they consider *itugwali* free or open) into what they resist, and similarly to convert what they would usually avoid (i.e., as *bomala* tabooed) into what they seek out. It is not coincidental in light of the conjugal union of the *dala* identities of husbands and wives outlined above that the very power or force of erotic

exogamic attraction is premised on the images and powers shared by cross-sex kin. To this extent, the capacities of *megwa*—in this case, courting magic understood to incite connubial love and attraction—are transforms of the mystical capacities of incestuous *tosunapula* sibling pairs during the era immediately following *bubuli* cosmic creation.

#### WEINER ON SPIRIT INCEST AND *DALA* ENDOGAMY

At this point it is necessary to interject a commentary in response to a claim by Annette Weiner in *Inalienable possessions* that in the normal course of human procreation, “Trobriand belief demands that conception occur within the confines of the matrilineage” (1992: 74). By this she means through the agency of “sibling intimacy”—essentially that of a brother, a male *baloma* spirit of a women’s own *dala*, who transports the *waiwaia* from Tuma to her body. Contrary to Weiner’s revelations elsewhere of the importance of the contributions of *tama* fathers to the reproduction of their children (see chapter 4), in this later work she emphasized instead that it is this incestuous “sibling intimacy” that is “fundamental to the ‘pure’ reproduction of matrilineal identity” (ibid.).

She reasons,

So unifying is this claim that women are thought to conceive through the impregnation of an ancestral spirit child maintaining the Trobriand belief that those who are members of the same matrilineage have the “same blood.” This spirit child is believed to be regenerated from a deceased matrilineal kin. Most often, a woman is impregnated with the spirit child by another deceased *kinsman* who transports the spirit child from the distant island of Tuma where, after death, all Trobrianders continue their existence. . . . The “cosmological” intimacy between a woman and her deceased *kinsman*—the purveyor of her child—provides for the tightly controlled reproduction of matrilineal identity. (1992: 73–74, emphases added)

Weiner offers this new theory of Trobriand procreation partly in echo of Malinowski’s defense of Islanders’ suppression of “a husband’s supposed biological role in reproduction . . . when a child is born it is not thought to have any internal substance from its father” (ibid.: 74). Contrary to this, though, she celebrates instead the reproductive centrality of the brother–sister tie consistent



with her rejection of the Maussian theory of reciprocity, which she sees as falsely premised on the exogamous reproductive bond of husband–wife. The ethnographic accuracy of this claim is, therefore, of considerable theoretical import, and also because it can easily be confused with my summary of sacrificial spirit impregnation presented in chapter 4.

In a footnote to the above passage, Weiner cites Malinowski ([1916] 1992: 219–20) for ethnographic support:

Malinowski also reports this: “The *waiwaia* [spirit child] is conveyed by a *baloma* belonging to the same subclan as the woman, . . . the carrier is even as a rule some near *veiola* [matrilineal kinsperson]”. Some Trobrianders say a female relative brought the child, *but others insist it must be a male relative*, emphasizing the ambiguity. In the specific examples Malinowski gives, it is most often a man. (A. Weiner 1992: 172n, emphasis added)

At the risk of pedantry, nowhere in Malinowski’s texts, as far as I can determine, does he write that the transporting *baloma* is “most often a man.” On the previous page of “Baloma” that she cites, Malinowski actually writes, “As a rule, it is a female *baloma* that appears in the dream and brings *waiwaia*, though it may be a man, but the *baloma* must always be of the *veiola* (maternal kindred) of the woman” ([1916] 1992: 219).

In further support of her contrary claim in the same footnote cited above, Weiner concludes,

Even today, when most villagers are aware of Western biological explanations, many still point out how pregnancy began with *dreams of male ancestors bringing the spirit child*. (see Weiner 1976: 121–22; 1988: 53–55). (1992: 172, emphasis added)

But nowhere in the cited passages from her earlier works is there any indication that the ancestors bringing the *waiwaia* are male.

To avoid further confusion, I must stress two seemingly contradictory points: First, among my knowledgeable male and female interlocutors, there is near unanimity that the transporting spirit of their traditional beliefs is *always* female. Yet, second, they affirm that the female *baloma*’s *act* of depositing the *waiwaia* into the mother’s womb constitutes a *masculine* one, a point to which I return below.

## TABOO OBSERVANCE, *SUVASOVA* AVOIDANCE, AND MAGICAL EFFICACY

There are a whole host of additional implications following from the correct observance of *kikila* restrictions that are relevant to magical efficacy which have yet to be enumerated. In this and subsequent sections, I shall discuss each of these in turn.

I first continue with the point that *kikila* violation is viewed as an instance of *suvvasova* quasi-incest, with consequences for the magician that equate with the kind of death experienced mythically by the brother-sister couple who first committed the act in the literal sense of sexual intercourse. Rather than passing through sexual climax to be returned to life, in the myth the siblings became permanently *locked* there in death, even though the act of sexual congress is understood to involve just momentary “death,” and in any case is culturally viewed as the quintessence of the generation of life.

These details connect the processes of correct magical performance, including the proper observance of *kikila* restrictions, with procedures of *bwekasa* sacrifice as outlined in the two previous chapters. The sacrificer detaches from his/her person what have become in that very act effectively dead *kekwebu* for gifting to deceased *baloma* spirits. To the dead recipients, however, those images are clean and life-giving. Upon taking possession of the offering, the participating spirits leave behind what are, to them, dead *bubwalua* of their persons which contain the essence of life for the humans who initially offered the sacrifice. I mentioned at an earlier juncture also how the correct recitation of a magical spell qualifies as an instance of *bwekasa*. The throat and oral cavity serve as a *kebila* platform for offering spoken or sung *megwa* spells to spirits who require them for engaging in activities on their own part in Tuma. As they do so, the invoked spirits leave behind in the mouth of the chanter the potent *bobwelila* blessings detached from their spirit persons, which, embedded in the words or images of the spell, give them their mystical force for invisible verbal conveyance to the patient.

Viewed in these terms, the correct performance of *megwa* spells, along with other *bwekasa* sacrificial forms, conforms to the fractal scenario that Malinowski himself recognized as being indicative of indigenous classificatory schemata (1932: 143).<sup>22</sup> As I have argued in chapter 3, virtually all forms of personal

22. The fractal or self-scaling capacities exhibited in these connections are discussed in greater detail in Mosko (2009, 2010a); see also M. Strathern (1991a, 1991b); Wagner (1991).

agency among Trobrianders conform to this four-fold ritual template of base, body, tip, and fruit. These steps of Trobriand magical practice correspond as well to those of *bwekasa*. Taking the paradigmatic example of food offerings, the properly prepared platform from which the offering is to be made is *u'ula* base. The activity of producing and transforming the offering through the operation and detachments of human labor is *tapwala* body. The eventual transformation of the food from their cooked and thus dirty, dead condition to being clean and revived, thanks to the deposition of the spirits' saliva leavings, is the sacrifice's *doginala* intended tip or end point. The enhancement of human life generated by the eventual incorporation of the *baloma* spirits' blessings is the *keurwela* fruit of the full procedure.

By analogy, a magician's preparation of his person through the correct *kikila* observance as to what he has previously accepted or rejected for ingestion in his mouth is the *u'ula* base of the performance. The activity of reciting the spell through his voice is the *tapwala* body. The receipt of the correctly uttered words by the spirits and the deposition of their sweat back upon the uttered words so as to empower them for achieving the desired results constitutes the *doginala* tip. And the desired effect observed in the patient is the spell's fruit.

My purpose in explicating here the ties between *megwa* performance and the ritual processes of *bwekasa* with the conventional scenario of Trobriand personal agency is to draw attention to another aspect of *kikila* observance and violation with cosmological implications. The critical moments of mystical conversion in the performance of magical spells and other *bwekasa* sacrifices occur at the points when there is contact by the living humans of Boyowa across the boundary that separates them from the spirits of the dead in Tuma. The fruit that are generated for humans from successful magical and other sacrificial rites arise as a consequence of these engagements with death. Contact with or the experience of ritual death, it can therefore be generalized, is a necessary step in all forms of human agency aimed ultimately toward the creation and sustenance of human and cosmic life. There is no legitimate short-circuiting of these processes.

*The supreme chiefly taboo: Libulebu theft*

Nonetheless, there are *illegitimate* ways of short-circuiting these processes that are of the greatest import and efficaciousness. Malinowski stressed in his writings that sibling incest and endogamy amounted to

the supreme taboo of the Trobriander; the prohibition of any erotic or even of any tender dealings between brother and sister. This taboo is the prototype of all that is ethically wrong and horrible to the native. It is the first moral rule seriously impressed in the individual's life, and the only one which is enforced to the full by all the machinery of social and moral sanctions. It is so deeply engrained in the structure of native tradition that every individual is kept permanently alive to it. (1932: 437)

But there is yet another *kikila* restriction within Trobriand sacred tradition, the gravity of which, it can be argued, surpasses or encompasses that of the taboo against *suvasova*. This is the prohibition against "theft" (*libulebu*, also *vela'u*, *kaugaga*), and particularly the stealing of food (*kopatu*) or the basis of life. As the renowned Kwenama *guyau* Narabutau, uncle to Chief John Kasaipwalova, famously declared, "There is no soap strong enough to wash away the stain of theft." I have been told so many times that the thief (*tolibulebu*) is the most despised kind of person in Trobriand society. Being publicly labeled as a thief of others' possessions in previous times left the miscreant with only two choices: either to commit suicide or to seek permanent exile, in either case to disappear from the community for ever, to become effectively dead as a person to those left behind.<sup>23</sup>

My purpose in mentioning this is that Pulayasi himself stressed to me, and others have confirmed, that the prohibition against stealing is the most serious *kikila* that every *guyau* chief must strictly observe. Even if a chiefly person's theft is undetected by any other living human, his *baloma* magical predecessors will have seen what he has done, being as they are his constant invisible companions. They will turn their backs on him permanently. By stealing something from someone else, the *kekwebu* images of that other person which are inalienably incorporated in the item stolen are transferred to the person of the thief at the instant it comes into his/her possession—to a place, that is, where they do not properly belong. Theft in its formal consequences is thus analogous to the consumption of *bomala* forbidden foods to the extent of generating categorical confusion as between what is "self" and "other person," amounting also to the disruption of normal life by subverting the legitimate progressions

23. The latter alternative was not a practicable one in precolonial times as it was virtually impossible to find sanctuary anywhere beyond the range of the infamy (*butula*) the act of thievery had generated.

of base–body–tip–fruit.<sup>24</sup> It must be noted also that the “shame” (*mosila*) that accompanies the discovery of theft is not restricted to the actual thief. The fame and reputations of his/her parents and other persons of their respective *dalas* are similarly impacted, which is what could be anticipated in view of their shared identities.

There are several categories of *megwa* typically found in the repertoires of chiefs and *tolivalu* village leaders which compound the punishments for stealing imposed by the thief’s own ancestors. According to these spells, the illegitimate acquisition of anything which is not validly one’s own but which is desired sufficiently strongly to instigate its theft is made to be “dirty” and “polluting” (*pupagatu*) to one’s person. The idea here is that the images constitutive of the thief’s desires for the item in question, to the extent that they feature in his/her private thoughts, have become part of his/her personal constitution, making it, the material artifact, *bomala* to him/her. Therefore, when the thief takes possession of the stolen article, its internal *kekwebu* are mystically ingested by him/her as a kind of quasi-*suvasova* that will lead to sickness.

The *megwa* spells possessed by the Omarakana Paramount Chief that are intended to punish thieves and which rely on his (the Chief’s) exclusive access to the *tokwai* spirit, Bwenaia, are all that more vindictive. Having stolen a first time, the thief’s mind is turned, changing his/her initial caution against being discovered into an intense desire to steal regardless of any disgrace that might befall him/her until, being publicly exposed, ordinary village life becomes impossible. The logic of magical obsession here is virtually identical to that of the mythically incestuous couple. In the case of a man or woman belonging to a chiefly *dala* who steals, he or she is from that moment utterly abandoned by his/her ancestral *baloma* supporters. The *megwa* evaporate that he or she might be expected to perform or be qualified to perform for the benefit of the life of other members of the community. Such a thief ceases to be *guyau*. And in certain conditions, his or her entire chiefly *dala* and all of its human and spirit members lose their chiefly *ketata* or rank; they are “demoted” (*komgwalala, kavila*).

Interestingly, Malinowski conceded that acts of thievery did not occur with much frequency in village life during his time, and the only cases brought to his

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24. The diversion of high-ranking *kula* valuables from their proper *keda* roads is regarded as a sacrilege for this very reason. In precisely the same sense, to commit incest of the literal, sexual sense is to divert oneself, one’s partner, and both parties’ circle of kin from the proper paths of exogamous marriage exchange (but see chapter 8).

notice involved the feeble-minded, outcasts, and minors. As for the stealing of food especially, he observed, "There is no greater disgrace to a Trobriander than to be without food, in need of it, to beg for it, and an admission by act that one has been in such straits as to steal it entails the greatest humiliation possible" (1926: 117).

Malinowski was peculiarly amused by the contrast between villagers' expressed horror at the thought of sibling incest and their relatively casual attitudes to violations of actual *suvasova*, at least those involving *kumila* "clan" endogamy among distantly related kin.

Breach of exogamy is rather an enviable achievement, because a man thus proves the strength of his love magic in that he is able to overcome, not merely the natural resistance of women but also their tribal morality. (1932: 430)

The fact is that the breach of exogamy within the clan . . . , though officially forbidden, ruled to be improper, and surrounded by supernatural sanctions, is yet everywhere committed. (1932: 436)

Well, not everywhere. All the "incestuous marriages" with which Malinowski was familiar, including the unfortunate mythical sibling pair who first committed the offense, involved members of Malasi *kumila*, particularly chiefs and other men of Tabalu *dala* with women of the different *dalas* within their *kumila* and, in a few instances, with same-*dala* women and the men's own sisters (1926: 84; 1932: 429–30, 432, 458–59, 474–75).

A contemporary instance is the current Paramount Chief, who, prior to his succession to office, took, without shame, as his first wife a senior *dala* sister (Iyoduba Tobuwabu) of the *tolivalu* leader of Yogwabu *dala* of Malasi *kumila*, Kevin Kobuli, based in Omarakana. Together they raised five healthy, now-adult children and apparently suffered no ill consequences. Pulayasi explains that he possesses the magic mentioned by Malinowski (1915–18: 2/11: 1157; 1932: 430, 448n, 458–59) that earlier generations of Tabalu men also had possessed that give him and his family immunity from the symptoms of *suvasova*.

In the next chapter I shall examine the *kikila* of incest and exogamic avoidance and their *perpetration* in connection with the ritual prerogatives of chiefly authority, including the case of Pulayasi and others between Tabalu and Yogwabu and members of yet additional chiefly *dalas*. These have everything to do with the chiefly monopolies of the most powerful magic in the archipelago.

For the present, I have sought to establish the point that the act of stealing in general and of food in particular amounts to interventions directly antithetical to the giving of life, both to human beings and to their counterpart *baloma* ancestors in Tuma. Food or other items of wealth diverted by theft from their preordained relational pathways of being sacrificed to the spirits before their use or consumption by living people is tantamount to the denial of life to those persons, both human and spirit. It is principally for this reason that the violation of sacred *kikila* taboos entails the spiritual (i.e., Malinowski's "supernatural") as well as moral sanctions that they do.

### *KIKILA* RESTRICTIONS OF WHAT PEOPLE (INCLUDING CHIEFS) SHOULD DO

I emphasized above the seeming paradox that those things and actions which are *bomala* sacred to particular categories of persons are not limited to what they are forbidden to do or affect but include prescriptions as to what those persons are definitely expected to do. Of course, many of the "taboos" in the conventional sense of avoidances are the logical inverse of rules regarding what should be done. But living amongst the Tabalu and other people of Omarakana, I have become sensitive to *kikila* as regards the various behaviors that must be positively enjoined by all persons, whether chiefly or commoner.

Scoditti's and Campbell's accounts of the initiation rites of *tokabitam* expert carvers include several instances of *kikila* in this sense. The chewing of the medicated areca nut and betel pepper with lime, drinking of pure spring water, and the imbibing of drops of the blood of the slippery lagoon snake are actions meant to convey to the novice specifically potent *kekwebu* that will become instrumental in his ability eventually to exhibit his command of those powers in the forms of his actual carvings.<sup>25</sup> As regards the persons and relations of

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25. One question these reports raise is: Do the *tokabitam* carving initiates already possess the *kekwebu* characteristics of "openness" and "clarity" for carving in their persons analogous to those included in the *tukwa* of *dala* members that are to be later reinforced by the acquisition of magical knowledge and techniques; or is it assumed that it is possible for a young boy of any *dala* identity to be ritually initiated and then apprenticed to become a qualified carver? The data provided thus far by Campbell and Scoditti are, I think, unclear on this point, as there are indications, on the one hand, that *kabitam* knowledge and expertise are restricted to youths



*gumgweguya* chiefs, the observance of analogous *kikila* restrictions in the positive as well as negative sense is essential to chiefs' abilities to perform magic effectively (see, e.g., Malinowski 1932: 369–70). Indeed, there are variations of the *sopi* ritual which convey to chiefly and other *tokabitam* initiates the appropriate aptitudes for the practice of magical arts additional to those of carving (cf. Campbell 2002; Scoditti 1990, 1996).

The classification of people into *guyau* chief and *tokai* commoner categories was mythically effected at the time of cosmic creation. Initially, the paired *tosunapula* members of each *dala* category embodied images and powers of a certain configuration. But over the course of subsequent mythical history those forms in certain instances have been transmuted so as to produce the structure of society as it became at the time of European arrival and was modified further subsequently. It will be necessary to describe the main outlines of those changes for they bear directly on the link of *kikila* restrictions to magical efficacy.

According to the Omarakana–Tabalu version of cosmogony, the *tosunapula* brother–sister pairs that emerged from Obukula cave were the first ancestors of those human and nonhuman beings and entities which eventually became identified with their respective *dalas* and *kumilas*. By the time of their emergence, the *tosunapula* couples were already grouped into two major categories or “ranks” (*ketota*): *guyau* chiefly and *tokai* commoner. The *tosunapula* of each *dala* were distinguished by the *tukwa* possessions that they brought from Tuma acquired when they emerged to Boyowa. The *tukwa* of a given *dala* encompasses all the invisible *kekwebu* images and associated *peu'ula* powers that are embodied in its members, both those in Tuma and those in Boyowa. Above I focused on those images and the powers of a *dala*'s *tukwa* that appear in its hereditary *megwa* spells and the *bomala* tabooed species and behaviors associated with them. But a *dala*'s *tukwa* also includes many other kinds of characteristics distinctive of it: the *dala*'s name, the personal names of its human and nonhuman (i.e., *tokwai*) members and its nonsentient linked totemic species; the collection of *kikila* ritual restrictions, whether proscriptive or prescriptive, associated with its *ketota*; the decorations (*koni*) that members are entitled to display ritually on their persons and, in the case of chiefs, on their implements, dwellings, yamhouses,

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sharing *dala* identity through either maternal or paternal relationship with their mentor, and, on the other, that a young person of any *dala* identity can conceivably be trained to become *tokabitam* if he otherwise exhibits the appropriate personal qualifications. I myself have received information pointing to both conclusions.

and canoes;<sup>26</sup> certain songs and dances that members may exclusively perform; and all the *kikila* restrictions not directly prescribed or proscribed by their being mentioned in the texts of the *dala's tukwa* spells.

Pulayasi's Tabalu *tubu daiasa* ancestor, Ikali'i Tudava, allocated the various *tukwa* to the *tosunapula* siblings of each *dala* as they emerged. Those who were granted the title of *guyau* chief were given *tukwa* that typically comprised more components than those assigned to *tokai* rank: more magical spells, more *bomala* prohibitions, more decorations, more *kikila* restrictions, and so on. And at that beginning time, the various chiefly *dalas* were themselves differentiated in accordance with the quality as well as the number of items in their respective *tukwas*. *Tokai* commoners' ancestors were similarly distinguished amongst themselves. By "quality," some chiefly ancestors were granted *tukwa* features or images of greater or lesser power. In particular, Tabalu as descendants of Ikali'i Tudava, the eldest son of the divine couple, Topileta and Tugilupalupa, held preeminence in relation to other chiefly and *tokai dalas* (cf. Malinowski 1935a: 33–34).

At this initial point in creation time, the other *tosunpula* ancestors of separate chiefly *dalas* were distinguished by the varying content of their respective *tukwas*, but there were a number of *tukwa* components which all *gumgweguya* emergence ancestors otherwise shared. In the previous section I mentioned one of these—the requirement of never committing an act of theft. A chiefly *dala* whose ancestors were guilty of stealing, especially stealing food, would have immediately been reduced to *tokai* status. There are a few additional *kikila* which involve the strict avoidance of specific *bomala* foods: most definitively wild pig (*brwalodila*), "bush tulip" (*lokawai*), "many-boned fish" (*katakaila*), and stingray (*va'i*) (Malinowski 1932: 26, 1935a: 311).<sup>27</sup> And there are still other restrictions.

26. The term *koni* has an additional meaning of "burden." The decorations which entitled *dala* members can exhibit are burdens in this sense. But *koni* as burden also refers to the responsibilities and privileges or authorities (*karewaga*) that distinguish chiefly *dalas* in particular.

27. These species are apparently named in the *ilamalia* "material plenty" spells of Tabalu *dala* and in the corresponding *tukwa* spells of other *gumgweguya*, and hence should be *bomala* to them and avoided. They are mentioned in these spells as they provide a disproportionate amount of wild foods to the diet of commoner peoples. Over the generations, it is the eating of these species, particularly during periodic droughts and famines, which has compromised the high rank of some chiefly pedigrees, resulting in their demotion.

For the members of the highest-ranking chiefly *dala*, perhaps the one prescriptive *kikila* whose importance nearly approximates the prohibition against theft involves the compulsory drinking of pure fresh water (*sepi*). According to *gulagula*, all persons of chiefly rank, their children, and their local followers should drink and cook with only the pure, clean, uncontaminated, moving water of springs, rain, the sea, and coconuts (Malinowski 1932: 25–26, 390; and see below). And in a very general way also, a *guyau* chief is expected to observe the *kikila* of properly “looking after” (*yamata*) the life of the people, living and deceased, of his community.

After the *tosunapula* pairs were mythically allocated their respective *tukwas*, they were directed by Ikali’i Tudava to move out and colonize particular plots of land on the island. These initially assigned parcels, once settled, became included in the *tukwas* of the *dalas* that received them, especially after they came to house associated *tokwai* nature sprites and incorporate *kekwebu* detached from the human settlers through their sweat and burials. It was during their wanderings across the land or sailing to their destinations that the *tosunapula* and related nonhuman *tubu daiasa* engaged in the extension of the acts of *bubuli* creation by voicing life to the various plant, animal species, and natural phenomena tied to their *dala* identities.

Until they settled, the emergent ancestors did not engage in sexual intercourse. As with other creations, they generated their magical *gwadi* children from their oral cavities. It was also during this episode of settlement, however, that the *tosunapula* ancestors of some chiefly and commoner *dalas* accidentally or otherwise violated the *bomala* taboos or other restrictions with which they had been burdened by Ikali’i Tudava. These indiscretions proved to have permanent consequences for all future descendants of the emergent beings who committed them. If, for example, the *tosunapula* encountered and ate a food that had been prohibited as *bomala* to them initially, they automatically lost any magical capacities connected with the images contained in that food and mentioned in spells as part of their *tukwa*. The food that had been *bomaboma* sacred to them became *itugwali* free, open, or profane. And in eating it, those spirits suffered accordingly with loss of vitality, either mentally, bodily, or both, per the logic of *suvasova* discussed above. And with richer volumes of *kikila* to observe during the episode of mythical settlement, it was principally the ancestors of some but not all chiefly *dalas* who were demoted so as to lower their *ketota* rank.

Once the *tosunapula* of all the *dalas* settled on the land, the rankings particularly of chiefly *dalas* that had been modified over the course of migration were

set in place as idealized “tradition” (*gulagula*) and, in many respects, remain as such up to the present. It was therefore during the phase of migration in the aftermath of cosmic creation that the main parameters of contemporary Northern Kiriwina were initially set.

This initial postsettlement situation is apparently reflected in the regional distinction between *olakaiwa* “people of the upper place” (i.e., falling under the *karewaga* authority of the Omarakana Tabala) in the north of Kiriwina, who (or whose ancestors) ideally follow(ed) the chiefly *kikila* restrictions, on the one hand, and *otilawa* “people of the lower place,” led by the Toliwaga chief(s) based at Wakaisa and Kabwaku villages, who historically have disregarded those restrictions, on the other. The former population is often referred to as *iloguyau*, “of the chiefly place,” as distinct from the latter grouping, *ilotokai*, “of the commoner place.” Ideally in traditional times, all *iloguyau* peoples, whether of chiefly or commoner *dalas*, were expected to observe the chiefly *kikila* of their Tabalu “father,” whereas all *ilotokai* peoples ignored those restrictions in following their Toliwaga “father.”

Nevertheless, from the time of settlement onward, when neighboring people of distinct *dalas* began to marry and reproduce children together, the rank ordering of the society did not remain motionless. This is a topic of great contention even today. Although the, say, formal or official system of ranking of *dalas* has supposedly not been additionally modified in the aftermath of the migrations of *tosunapula*, specific shifts in ritual capacity have occurred, mainly in the direction of further demotions, as chiefly persons singly, specific *dala* branches, or entire *dala* categories have violated the *kikilas* that pertained to them at the time of settlement. Members of most of the *gumgweguya* chiefly *dalas* of the archipelago, including cadet branches of Tabalu in other parts of Kiriwina, have now forsaken the *kikila* of drinking only pure, clean, nonstagnant water (Malinowski 1935a: 38–39). Some of those chiefly personages are today publicly known to be partaking also of the tabooed bush tulip, bony fish, and wild pig of their *tokai* followers. In the view of Omarakana Tabalus and members of only a few other chiefly *dalas* who continue to observe the traditional restrictions (i.e., Osapola-Bwaydaga and Tubuwana of Kwenama, Mwauli, and Tudava), those other chiefs and their respective *dala* affiliates are still publicly granted the formal respect of being *guyau*, but in private they are spoken of as having actually become *tokai* commoners, with accordingly diminished ritual powers. These postsettlement developments, compounding the demotions that occurred mythically in the era of migration, continue to

affect the organization of marital as well as political and ritual relations across the island.

For the sake of completeness, it must be noted that there are certain occasions in Trobriand oral history where specific persons and *dala* groupings inclusive of spirit as well as human members have undergone transformations in rather the opposite direction, rising to chiefly status from the commoner rank they were accorded initially. Here the indigenous social system has provided opportunities for some *tokai* to elevate their politico-ritual rank through the forceful "big head" (*keveka nona*, literally "determined mind") defense of claims to ritual proficiency to which they are not hereditarily entitled. This process is termed *kobala* ("usurpation," "subversion"). But the supplanting of lower-ranking persons and groupings by higher-ranking ones on the same grounds qualifies also as *kobala*.

The ethnographically most dramatic instances of *kobala* are the legendary precolonial displacements of the Yogwabu and Sakapu-Katagava chieftainships at Kasanai and Omarakana, respectively, following the resettlement of the Tabalus after their departure from their home village, Labai. Subsequently, as Tabalu women married into villages headed by prominent land-holding families across the region (e.g., M'losaida, Gumilababa, Kavataria, Tukwaukwa, Sinaketa, Vakuta, Kaduwaga, Olivilevu, Kaduwaga), their offspring effectively supplanted the autochthonous leadership. The *kobala* attempts by To'uluwa's predecessor, Numakala, to secure wives and agricultural surpluses from the *toliwaga* leaders of Otilawa villages where he did not have traditional claims resulted in the 1899 defeat of his military forces by the Toliwaga war leader of Kabwaku village, Moliasi, the burning of Omarakana, and its temporary abandonment (see Fellows 1893–1900: 8–18; Seligman 1910: 664–69, 694; Malinowski 1922: 66; 1926: 122; [1926] 1992: 123–24; 1932: 68–69; 1935a: 328, 365–68; Powell 1956: 482, 512, 515; 1960: 141–42; Uberoi 1962: 23–24, 129; E. Leach 1976: 70, 199; Jerry Leach 1978: 253–54). The precolonial rise to chiefly status of the originally *tokai* commoner, war-like *toliwaga* leaders of Toliwaga-Wabali *dala* of Wakaisa and Kabwabu villages on the basis of their proven command of extraordinary military strength in the aftermath of the decline of chiefly Sakapu or Katagava *dala* of Lukwasisiga *kumila* was itself an instance of *kobala* usurpation, at least from the viewpoint of *gumgweguya* affiliated with the Tabalus. The Toliwaga achievement of essentially chiefly rank through their military might is attributed to wielding successfully two ancestrally related *tokwai* spirit-impregnated weapons and the magical powers thereby embedded in them.

Other examples of attempted or successful *kobala* in modern times involve the establishment of colonial domination under British and Australian administrations and Methodist missionaries aimed at displacing the indigenous chiefly hierarchies; the dispute between Namwanaguyau and Mitakata witnessed by Malinowski (see below and chapter 8); the incursion of Catholic missionaries in the 1930s so as to contest the monopoly of the Methodists; the challenges by Kwenama and Toliwaga leaders of the Kabisawali Movement of the early 1970s to Omarakana Tabalu's preeminence (Beier 1975; Jerry Leach 1978: 70, 199; 1982; Gerritsen 1979; May 1982); the recent successes of many commoner men and women and their families in government, church, educational, and business enterprises; and the relatively recent arrival of Pentecostal church leaders into those Christian communities previously dominated by the established United and Catholic churches.<sup>28</sup>

### CHIEFLY *KIKILA* AND *KETOTA* RANK

In light of the significance that *kikila* observance and violation have had in sustaining and transforming the overall structure of Trobriand society prior to and subsequent to settlement, it is essential to enumerate in some detail the behavioral content of those restrictions, particularly those involving *dalas* ranked as *gumgweguya* chiefly. These data are important in their own right by virtue of the critical role that they play in magical efficacy. But the *kikila* that apply specifically to chiefly persons also have direct bearing upon the practices and organization of marital exchange and kinship reckoning which feature in the following chapter. This material, therefore, is critical background for that analysis.

As other investigators have reported, there are a number of gradations of rank amongst chiefly personages, but there is no absolute consensus as to these

28. *Kobala* might appear to be a culturally sanctioned case of "autonomy" or "complete individual autonomy." However, as the case of Toliwaga illustrates, the usurping leaders of Tiltaula were only able to elevate their rank by the exercise of powers that they and others attributed to the mystical support and participation of the *tokrwai* and ancestral *baloma* spirit members of their *dala*. Instances of *kobala* as usurpers of traditional chiefly authority instigated in historical times with the arrival of *dimdim* ("foreign") government, mission, and business agents have been similarly attributed to the *tukwa* powers possessed by the foreigners' military might, the Christian God, money, and so on (see Powell 1956: 482–83, 512, 515; Connelly 2014; Mosko 2014a).

distinctions either in the views of Islanders or those of the anthropologists and others who have studied them. There is virtual unanimity, however, that members of the branch (*nunu*) of Tabalu *dala* based at Omarakana still preserve to greatest extent the *kikila* that were originally allocated among all chiefly *dalas* during the time of *bubuli* creation. In doing so, the Omarakana Tabalu chief remains the sole person qualified to wield the *ilamalia* and *molu* magic that regulates agricultural and marine productivity, droughts, and famines affecting the entire archipelago (Malinowski 1932: 26–29, 113, 299, 420, 1935a: 38). The Omarakana Tabalu's possession of *molu* spells also, when necessary for punishing his followers, enables him to inflict epidemic disease upon the island's population by calling out the warlike *tokwai* spirits known as *itona*.

In accordance with these extraordinary powers, the Omarakana Tabalu chief and those with whom he lives and comes into intimate contact have had to observe a number of critical *kikila* to protect his life- and death-giving powers (Malinowski 1922: 66). They must drink only pure moving water, as noted above, and avoid the several species of wild plants and animals that mythically were imposed on all *gumgweguya* chiefly *dalas*. The Omarakana Tabalu's position is unique, however, as expressed in numerous additional restrictions which do not apply to other *gumgweguya*. As Malinowski and others have observed, when in the presence of the Tabalu himself, commoners and other chiefs are obliged to lower themselves (*kavagina*). In traditional times, commoners would prostrate themselves to the ground. Chiefly men and women of other *dalas* would gesture downwards even to others of Tabalu *dala* to differing extents depending on their own rank. Those next most highest ranking chiefs (Osapola-Kwenama, Burayama-Sakapu, Mwauli) would lower their heads at the neck, those next lower (other Kwenama, Toliwaga, M'labwema, Tudava, etc.) would bow down from the shoulders, and so on.<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly, adult male members of other branches of Tabalu *dala* living in other parts of the island and archipelago are not expected to gesture in any of these ways in the presence of Omarakana Tabalu men. All Tabalu women as women, however, are expected to bend at the waist when approaching a Tabalu man, for in terms of indigenous classification men are generally classed as *guyau*

29. The *dala* referred to by Malinowski as "Burayama," today known also Katagava or Sakapu after a hole of ancestral emergence close to Omarakana, is now extinct, but there were survivors living at Kwebaga village in Malinowski's time, and a son of one of them, Buleniga Toluabu, was still living during the first several years I was conducting fieldwork.



“chiefly,” women as *tokai* “commoner.” This rule gets reversed when *tokai* males pass near a Tabalu woman; the former are expected to gesture toward the latter in accord with her Tabalu rank (Malinowski 1922: 54–55). For this reason, traditionally, when a Tabalu woman takes a *tokai* man to be her husband, he is expected to bow in her presence, at least when the two are in public.

These restrictions have to a significant extent been relaxed over recent decades, at least since Malinowski’s time. But still, male commoners passing by Pulayasi’s *ligisa* personal dwelling will still release the basket containing their personal possessions from their shoulders to carry them in their hands out of respect, but also to ensure that any *kekwebu* they are transporting which might be harmful to the chief do not contaminate his person and powers. If riding a bicycle as they pass by, they dismount for the same reason.

The logic of these restrictions, however, is the important point here. The head of a Tabalu chief, or any Tabalu person for that matter, is *bomaboma* to all others (Malinowski 1932: 29; 1935a: 34). This is because it is believed that it is in his mind and vocal organs at the apex of his body that the knowledge for wielding the magic as *keurwela* fruit containing the ultimate powers of life and death for the inhabitants of Boyowa—and also those of Tuma through *bwekasa* sacrifice—is stored and from which it potentially emanates. Those powerful mystical *nanamsa* thoughts when released are understood to descend in the same manner that pure, clean water (*sopi*) flows downward. Indeed, any person’s learned *megwa*—for that matter, any knowledge—is categorized as *sopi* with the capacity of rapid, unimpeded fluidity or movement. For someone of lower rank to elevate his head above that of the Tabalu or some other chief would amount to comparatively dirty, stagnant, slow-moving cogitations entering and disturbing the comparatively unhindered movement of thought in the chief’s magical organs. For this very reason, in precontact times a number of ritual attendants to the Tabalu resided in Omarakana with responsibilities to ensure that his person and particularly his head were not polluted. These men not only had to observe the same food and other *kikila* of the Tabalu, they had to be members of the other most high-ranked chiefly *dalas* on the island, whose members were all uniformly observing the same restrictions. They were responsible for delicing the Tabalu’s head, cutting his hair, feeding him his food on long sticks, and so on. Today as in the past, it is from these men’s *dala* sisters that the Tabalu’s most important wives are selected.

There were additional restrictions on the Tabalu’s relations with others. During meetings, ceremonies, distributions, and so on, that took place on the

central *bikubaku* of the village, he would traditionally sit on an elevated platform outside his personal *ligisa* hut; nowadays Pulayasi reclines on a chair while others sit on the ground. For the same reasons, in olden times the Tabalu would be carried on a small platform (*kebila*) when he traveled from Omarakana to other villages.

There were a number of *kikila* that the Tabalu chief has to observe particularly as regards the cleanliness of his mouth. When in earlier times the Tabalu was eating or being fed, he had to ensure that his food was clean and free of untoward contaminations; hence, everyone in the community was forbidden from making loud, abrupt sounds which could taint his food and his person and magical powers. I have noticed that Pulayasi is very meticulous in removing any traces of food from his mouth after ending his meals.

Today as in the past, the Tabalu not only has to avoid swearing himself, he also has to take steps distancing himself from other people's profanities. Even seemingly innocuous references to *pupagatu* polluting substances when in the presence of the Paramount Chief are technically forbidden; he must keep his mind free of such pollutants.

One of the most stringent *kikila* avoidances for all observing Tabalu and other chiefly persons concerns the equipment used in the preparation and consumption of food. Those items must be such that they have never been in contact with the mouth of a *tokai* person. This is because, from the perspective of chiefly *gumgweguya* persons, the dirty (to them) *kekwebu* incorporated in the blood and diets of *tokai* people are transferred to those articles by their saliva (*bubwaluea*). Thus cooking pots and other normal implements that most *tokai* families of other villages have used for cooking bush tulip greens and bony fish cannot be used for cooking any food that is to be consumed by a Tabalu. The Tabalu and certain chiefly others (e.g., other Tabalu men, the Tabalu's sons of chiefly mothers) who observe this *kikila* may share drinking cups, spoons, and forks with each other, but not with *tokai* (cf. Malinowski 1922: 467).

The same rules apply with the sharing of the lime and implements used in the chewing of areca nut, and for the same reasons. There is one exception, however. Those *gumgweguya* chiefly persons who observe the traditional food and water prohibitions may not eat together with those who do not, but they may chew in each other's company as long as the lime and implements are not shared (see Malinowski 1932: 372–73).

For these reasons, the Paramount Chief and others of his *dala* sponsor special retainers in the villages they occasionally visit—normally households

including the closest *dala* relatives of the Tabalu's hereditary wives (*kebasi*, *kai-basi*) or members of Malasi *dalas* closely affiliated with Tabalu (*gubwatau*, *wosa*; see chapter 8). In most cases, the heads of the former households will be either sons of the Tabalu or sons of his predecessor. In either case, these are persons who are knowledgeable of Tabalu *dala*'s *kikila*. Accordingly, those households must have complete sets of cooking and eating equipment used exclusively for their infrequent Tabalu guests. In my experience, these *kikila* of daily life for Tabalu and other *guyau* chiefs are the most onerous and worrying in their observance, and, after stealing, the most serious in their infraction.<sup>30</sup>

As another instance of this significance, when a woman of Tabalu or other chiefly *dala* who observes the traditional *kikila* marries a *tokai* man, it is necessary for her husband to have a separate set of eating utensils, which are *bomala* to her and thus avoided. Even so, from the start of their cohabitation, all married couples observe each other's *kikila*, and their children not only follow the restrictions of their mother, they also conform to those of their father's *dala*. It is on the basis of the contribution of father's *dala*-specific *kekawabu* images and *peu'ula* powers to his offspring through the various forms of feeding and forming that children ideally subscribe to the *kikila* of their father from the moment of their conception. And it is according to the same categories of relationship that all persons, whether or not they are of chiefly rank, follow the *kikila* of their local chief or leader. The *ilomgwa* "followers"—e.g., the people of Omarakana whom Malinowski consistently referred to as "vassals and servants," meaning all the *tokai* residents—thus restrict their ordinary daily diets to the pure, fresh water and clean foods of their *tama* Tabalu chief.<sup>31</sup>

30. These *kikila* presented me with similar anxieties when in the course of my research I visited commoner families who were not versed in the details of chiefly restrictions. As hospitable hosts, such persons typically felt obliged to cook tea or food for me, which, as Tabalu, I had to refuse. I found these occasions exceedingly awkward and embarrassing. I eventually learned to notify people in advance of my visits in as polite a manner as possible that I did not need to be entertained. Instead, I always arrived with gifts of store-bought consumables.

31. There is at least one entry in Malinowski's fieldnotes that all persons who came under the *karewaga* authority of the Omarakana Tabalu—i.e., all members of those *dalas* and villages who contributed wives and yams to him—across Northern Kiriwina were expected to follow the Tabalu's *kikila*. The one exception to this rule is in the hunting and consumption of wild pig, which continues to be an occasional preoccupation of many *tokai* men across the island. Even when a chief's *tokai* followers observe the restrictions pertaining to bush tulip and bony fish, they may continue to consume wild pig. But when they do so, it is only under certain

In this chapter I have focused my analysis of *kikila* restrictions on the effect that their adherence and violation have on the efficacy of *megwa* performance. It is in this sense that the meaning of “supporting part” suggested by Scoditti is specifically applicable.

There are a number of additionally critical aspects of *kikila* which have thus far been left out of focus. I refer here to the “taboos” which apply to sexuality and intermarriage additional to those pertaining to persons of the same *ku-mila* and *dala*. In the traditional system as reported by Malinowski (1932: 71, 384–85) and even today, it is expected that people should restrict their sexual activities and marriages to persons of the same *ketota* rank—i.e., so that their respective *kikila* ritual restrictions harmonize—except of course in the specific case of a polygynous chief, who is expected to take a wife from each of the *dalas* regardless of rank represented in the land-holding segments of the community that come under his authority. Therefore, according to *gulagula* sacred conventions, sexuality and marriage are regulated by *kikila* stipulating both the exogamic sex and marriage restrictions as per shared *dala* and *kumila* identity and the endogamic intercourse prescribed by shared rank. These arrangements, as I describe in the next chapter, have as much to do with the ways that the society’s most important *megwa* spells are managed intergenerationally as they also must do with the constitution and organization of kin relations.

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conditions. It is forbidden to bring that meat into the village spaces dedicated to domestic quarters. The meat must be butchered and cooked (roasted on fires or cooked in earth ovens) by men only rather than on women’s domestic hearths and well away from the village, far enough that the smoke and odors of its cooking flesh cannot be inhaled by chiefly persons who might be in residence. Because *tokai*, even those living at Omarakana, may occasionally (and secretly) eat wild pig even under these circumstances, they have entirely different cooking and eating implements for that cuisine only.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

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### The supreme puzzle *Suvasova incest, rank, marriage alliance, and chiefly endogamy*

Does this myth *explain* anything? Perhaps incest? But incest is strictly forbidden; it is to the natives an almost unthinkable event, the occurrence of which they do not even want to admit. They cannot tell stories in explanation of things to them unthinkable. . . . The myth also contains a potential excuse for such transgressions of incestuous and exogamous rules as sometimes occur, and it sanctions the forces which give an exclusiveness in the practice of magic to certain communities.

Malinowski, *The sexual life of savages* (1929a: lxxix-lxxx)

Central to the quandaries concerning the Trobriand magic-kinship complex is the prohibition of *suvasova* incest in its literal sense as described by Malinowski: namely, a *bomala* prohibition against sexual congress and endogamous marriage with cross-sex siblings (*luta*) or persons sharing the same *dala* and *kumila* identities (*veyalela*, *veyo*). Numerous aspects of this issue have been touched upon already, but for the most part separately. Addressing them jointly and at

length will be useful in tying up a number of ethnographic and theoretical loose ends.

For Islanders of Malinowski's time, the specter of *suvasova* was sufficiently intense, morally and otherwise, that he could characterize it as the "supreme taboo." And as described in the previous chapter, he singled out *suvasova* from all other *bomala* prohibitions as constituting their prototype.

Although the prohibition of *suvasova* incest and endogamy is certainly a key feature of the indigenous system of kinship and social reproduction, it might not appear to be connected with the practice of *megwa* magical performance in any direct or consequential way, at least at first glance. However, during the mythical era immediately following cosmic emergence up to the time of settlement and the establishment of exogamous intermarriage, the miraculous acts of creativity which survive in the form of the *tukwa* corpus of *megwa* spells of each *dala* were first composed and enacted verbally and thus quasi-incestuously by ancestral *tosunapula* brother-sister pairs, and the initial act of cosmic creation was itself an instance of *suvasova* on the part of the primal deities. It is no coincidence either that those persons living in the postsettlement era who have evidently indulged in *suvasova* shamelessly without developing physical or mental symptoms—most notably, knowledgeable men of Tabalu *dala* and others sharing Malasi *kumila* identity, especially Omarakana Paramount Chiefs—have been able to do so precisely because they possess the appropriate prophylactic *megwa* created by and inherited from *tosunapula* ancestors. To commit *suvasova* and remain healthy is a sign, in other words, of doing so with the sanction of ancestral blessings and thereby being in possession of the divine powers that can elicit their support.

These points must be kept in mind as I proceed insofar as the analysis of *suvasova* in this restricted context of *kikila* restrictions of sexuality and marriage necessarily requires a narrowing of focus upon relations between different categories of humans coexisting in Boyowa. So although I shall have fewer occasions to mention the magical involvement of ancestral *baloma* in my account of the following materials as compared with earlier chapters, their participation must be appreciated as given.

Less dramatic, perhaps, but no less perplexing if viewed from the appropriate perspective are the stated ideal rules of sexual intercourse and marriage stipulating that a man should court and seek a spouse in his father's *dala* and *kumila* (i.e., *tabu*) and that a woman should pursue a man who is a classificatory son of her mother's brother (i.e., *tabu*) (Malinowski 1932: 450–51). From the



time of its first report, this arrangement has been analytically characterized as conforming in anthropological terms to (from a male Ego's vantage) "patrilateral cross-cousin marriage."

From Malinowski's point of view, where *tama* fathers are "strangers" to their *latu* children with no bodily connection between them, this rule presented no logical problem at least as far as risk of *suvasova* was concerned. But empirically there was a glaring anomaly: while father-daughter intercourse and marriage do not qualify as *suvasova*, such unions were "definitely and strongly prohibited" (ibid.: 384). The evidence I have presented refuting Malinowski's claims as to Islanders' ignorance of physiological paternity indicates that, through the multifarious ways by which fathers feed and form their children, they are indeed intimately related to them in analogous terms as connect mothers and children: that is, the sharing of inversely gender-marked *dala*-based *kekwebu* images and associated *peu'ula* powers. But how this datum accounts for the incongruity of forbidding father-daughter congress has yet to be specified.

An important clue, however, has already been provided. *Tabu-tabu* marriage as presented by Malinowski and others consists of the union of two persons who are already connected by *other paternal* *dala* connections: The man is marrying a woman who is *tubulela* to him, and she is marrying a man who is *litulela* to her (see chapters 4 and 6).

I begin with the question: Why is it that sexual intercourse and marriage of a male Ego with a patrilaterally related female are not only permitted but, as reported, positively sanctioned as ideal? I have outlined similar conundrums surrounding the claims that, through their private conjugal relations, husbands and wives initially conceived as being of distinct *dala* and *kumila* identities nonetheless come to embody reciprocally one another's images and powers, making their relationship akin to that of cross-sex siblings; and that calling public attention to the fact that a stated married couple are sexual partners constitutes one of the greatest of all possible insults (Malinowski 1932: 95; A. Weiner 1976: 195–96; 1992: 77).

These puzzles are not a consequence only of the new material regarding the images and powers constitutive of persons that I have introduced. They have counterparts in other features of Trobriand marriage regulation that were documented by Malinowski from the beginning and discussed subsequently by others. For instance, circumstances appear to be similarly complicated in connection with the broader range of restrictions on whom persons should wed. For Malinowski, although sexual congress or marriage between a woman and her natal *tama* father, who epitomizes the *tomakava* stranger, does not qualify

as *suvasova* but is still utterly reprehensible and prohibited, her marriage to that man's sister's son—a man also terminologically classed as *tama* “father” to her as *latu* “daughter”—“is not strictly forbidden, but . . . is regarded somewhat askance” (1932: 447, 448). And similarly to how the prohibition of relations between *luta* classificatory cross-sex siblings and more distantly related *dala* and *kumila* kin are relaxed with genealogical distance (ibid.: 425–26, 431–32), the severity of the prohibition against classificatory *tama*–*latu* relations declines beyond that of actual father and daughter (ibid.: 384, 447–48, 449).

So I return to the question: What difference does the recognition of kin relationship through the father make for the understanding of the regulation of marriage, specifically the taboo restricting sexual and martial relations between a father and daughter and the stated preference for a man to court and marry a woman traced through paternal relationship? And what might any of this have to do with the practice of magic in Trobriand sociality?

Enough has been presented to suggest that the rules which enjoin and forbid sexuality and marriage do not so starkly differentiate what is legitimate and illegitimate as some ethnographic reports thus far have argued. Malinowski was well aware of some of these ambiguities.

Crosscousin marriage is, undoubtedly, a compromise between the two ill-adjusted principles of mother-right and father-love; and this is its main *raison d'être*. The natives are not, of course, capable of a consistent theoretical statement; but in their arguments and formulated motives this explanation of the why and wherefore of the institution is implicit, in an unmistakable though piecemeal form. Several points of view are expressed and reasons given by them which throw some further light on their marriage. (1932: 86)

It is as important to bear in mind, however, that the limitations, taboos, and moral rules are by no means absolutely rigid, slavishly obeyed or automatic in their action. As we have seen again and again the rules of sex are followed only in an approximate manner, leaving a generous margin for infringements; and the forces which make for law and order show a great deal of elasticity. (1932: 453)

The fact is that the natives, while professing tribal taboos and moral principles, have also to obey their natural passions and inclinations, and that their practice is the compromise between rule and impulse, a compromise common to humanity. (1932: 479)

But is that all there is to the matter—that there are rules, but they are only imperfectly followed because of some generalized laxities or emotional urgings of Trobrianders, which are no different from those of others? Or are these sorts of ambiguities more systematic?

When you think about it, for example, the importance that Trobrianders place on the practice of beauty and courting magic (*kemwasila*), *despite its mythical origins in the act of sibling incest*, is seen as facilitating the arrangement of legitimate *nonincestuous* marriage that can result in successful reproduction. But then, the very means by which *megwa* and other *tukwa* items, including the offices of chiefs, are supposedly transmitted from one generation to the next between persons sharing *dala* identity also smack of quasi-incestuous exchange: that is, for example, when passed from a mother's brother to a sister's son. And the mythically first purveyors of magical spells (i.e., *tosunapula*), it will be recalled, were sibling couples. These are just a few of the indications easily at hand that the management of magical performance has much to do with *suvasova*. And by the same token, it should be apparent in some of these examples that magic has equally much to do with the inverse of *suvasova*, with the practice of nonincestuous intercourse and nonendogamous marriage.

Theorizing over incest and its prohibition cross-culturally has, of course, been a central fixation of Western imagination for longer than anthropology has been recognized as a scholarly discipline. For the past century, thanks to Malinowski's and others' ethnographic reports, Trobriand attitudes and behaviors as regards incestuous and nonincestuous relationships have played a disproportionate role in shaping those discussions. Unfortunately, any attempt at retracing the invoking of Trobriand data in debates over these matters at the global scale—e.g., their pan-species nature, their role in human evolution, their contribution to the invention of culture as distinct from nature, their deep-seated psychological and familial dynamics—would lead me unnecessarily far away from my principal objective. I therefore limit my treatment of the literature on Trobriand *suvasova* and the regulation of legitimate marriage to those sources whose primary aim has been similar to mine—understanding indigenous institutions in villagers' own terms.

## PREVIOUS ETHNOGRAPHY ON MARRIAGE REGULATION

The taboo (*bomala*) against *suvasova* as reported by Malinowski involves the avoidance of sex and marriage by peoples sharing maternally transmitted *kumila*

and *dala* identities. But matrikin (*veyalela*) are only one component of the overall universe of human sociality.

There are additional dimensions of marital regulation which have occasionally been noted. One of these is essentially a kind of inverse to *suvasova* prohibition. Persons should ideally court and marry *endogamously* those who belong to certain categories of relationship specified in terms other than “kinship” as usually understood: namely, persons residing in villages within a geographic district, and those belonging to the same *kekota* rank (Malinowski 1932: 70–71). Clusters of villages coming under the authority of a single recognized *guyau* chief tend to be strongly endogamous. And specifically within those groupings (*boda*), it is widely asserted that high-ranking chiefly men and women should marry each other, leaving lower-ranked *tokai* people to marry amongst themselves (ibid.: 385). Polygynous chiefs such as the Omarakana Tabalu, who is supposed to recruit a wife from each of the chiefly and commoner land-owning *dala* groups coming within the range of his authority, are the notable exceptions. In addition, the several lowest-ranking *dalas* comprising the “outcaste” communities of Boitalu and Bau in possession of some of the most powerful sorcery (*bwagau*) on the island traditionally formed what amounts to an endogamous connubium (ibid.: 420–21).

All of these *kikila* restrictions, if you will, must be taken into account to achieve a fuller understanding of how the society is structured; how it is able to reproduce itself in that form; and, therefore, how *megwa* plays critical roles in those processes.

## EXTENSIONS OF PRIMARY KIN TERMS VERSUS CLASSIFICATION

The previous chapter outlined several of the main traditional *kikila* restrictions to the choice of sexual and marriage partners, chiefly as described by Malinowski, in terms of the prohibitions qualifying as *suvasova* incest. Thus, the “supreme taboo” prohibiting intimacies between brother and sister constitutes “the centre of all that is sexually forbidden—its very symbol; the prototype of all unlawful sexual tendencies within the same generation and the foundation of the prohibited degrees of kinship and relationship, though the taboo loses force as its application is extended” (ibid.: 440). It must be noted, however, that proceeding in this fashion, Malinowski had purposely adopted an analytical

strategy beginning with the relationship where the prohibition against *suvasova* was viewed as most stringent *from the perspective of Ego and his immediate family ties* and moving to other relations where, through “gradual extension, and corresponding change in emotional content” (ibid.: 443), the taboo became progressively lax.

I have intentionally and carefully distinguished this from so-called classificatory kinship ties; for the mixing up of the individual and the “classificatory” relation, kept apart by the natives in law, custom, and idea, has been a most misleading and dangerous cause of error in anthropology, vitiating both observation and theory on social organization and kinship. (1932: 442)

This analytical divergence later became the basis of Edmund Leach’s (1958) critique of Malinowski and Floyd Lounsbury’s (1965) critique of Leach as regards the analysis of the meaning of Trobriand kinship terms and the rules regulating marriage. After pinpointing a number of anomalies in Malinowski’s materials, Leach adopted a “classificatory” (i.e., more or less structuralist) procedure which viewed kin terms as referencing categories connected in the context of the total system of classification. He thereby rejected Malinowski’s notion of kin terms acquiring their primary meanings from their rootedness in the nuclear family, then extended outward. Lounsbury in turn defended Malinowski on his assumptions regarding the meaning of kin terms and the universality of the family: that is, retracing the extension of terms from their “primary” familial referents to ones later acquired over the course of the individual’s maturation. It appears that the debate was not settled by Leach and Lounsbury, as evidenced by Shapiro’s (2014) recent critique of Sahlins (2013), and Bamford and Leach’s (2009) reconsideration of the genealogical model.

The remainder of this chapter is inspired by theoretical premises kindred to those of Leach involving the conceptual coherence of the overall sociocultural system of meaning, not just the kin terminology. In their ethnographic particulars, however, it should be noted that both Leach’s (1958: 123–27) and Lounsbury’s (1965: 147, 176, 178) ingenious analyses are flawed owing to their reliance on several of Malinowski’s data which had not been ethnographically clarified by that time. Specifically, first, both scholars’ models of kin classification are premised on Malinowski’s account of postmarital residence, whereby adult males normally relocate from father’s to mother’s brother’s subclan hamlet, joined by their virilocally resident wives (E. Leach 1958: 123–25; Lounsbury

1965: 176–77). Actual rules of residence with high percentages of conformity produce instead hamlet and village communities populated by a fluid mix of patrivoril locally residing males under the leadership of a land-owning *tolivalu* who, as local *tama* “father,” is of different *dala* identity from most of his followers. The only males who, by rule, establish adult residency in their maternal *dala* homelands are the successors to *tolivalu* positions (see A. Weiner 1976: 42–43, 154–55, 147, 167; Hutchins 1980: 22; Mosko 1995: 774–75; 2013b).

Second, both scholars accept Malinowski’s characterization of *tama* “father” as *tomakava* “stranger” and the implications following from that, whereby patrilineal kin are basically classed as “nonrelatives” or “outsiders.” Leach goes so far as to characterize patrikin as “enemies who must be treated as ‘friends’; dangerous people who must be appeased by gift giving” (1958: 122).

Following from that, third, both analyses fall short of accounting for the stated preference or rule of patrilineal cross-cousin marriage, but on somewhat different grounds. Leach’s analysis of Trobriand marriage preferences works only for a male Ego (ibid.: 126). Specifically, Leach pursues meanings of the critical category *tabu*, noting that women employ the term *reciprocally* with the stated ideal marriage partner, mother’s brother’s son (ibid.: 122), but he does not develop the implications of this further (though see below). And his interpretation of Malinowski’s account of marriage regulation leads him to speculate falsely (as adjudged on the basis of my field materials) that the stated rules of exogamy are based in factors other than *dala* or *kumila* identity: that is, as characterized instead in terms of *kekwebu* and *peu’ula* (ibid.: 143–44). For his part, Lounsbury (1965: 172) cites Malinowski (1932: 86) on the reciprocal use of *tabu* between a man and his father’s sister’s daughter (or a woman and her mother’s brother’s son), but like Leach he refrains from pursuing that datum any further, conceding in the end that the idealized rule of “patrilineal cross-cousin marriage” as portrayed by Malinowski is basically irrelevant to the system of kin classification (ibid.: 176).<sup>1</sup>

1. On this latter point, it is noteworthy that in the kinship diagram provided by Malinowski (1932: 435) which Lounsbury cites, terms of in-law relationship for both “man speaking” and “woman speaking” are presented, but with genealogical ties noted only for those of a male Ego. Where a male Ego’s mother’s brother’s son and daughter are indeed classed as *latu* “child” with himself standing as *tama* “father” to them, for a speaking female Ego, the same cross-cousins are terminologically *tabu*. I discuss this anomaly further below.

It is interesting, however, that despite these errors on the part of Leach (1958: 138–39) and Lounsbury (1965: 176, 180), they both reach conclusions nominally compatible with the present analysis: namely, that the ideal voiced rule of patrilateral cross-cousin marriage is an artifact or expression of an additional factor—that of rank and/or chieftainship.

It is necessary to note at the outset that “the nuclear family” as commonly conceptualized in anthropology is culturally highlighted in Trobriand social organization as *kaukweda* (literally, “house veranda” or “family group in public view”), and that there exist critically important conventions of marriage alliance stated in terms of pan-societal categories other than extended kin terminologies: namely, *ketota* “rank” distinctions. Some of these additional guidelines can be gleaned from hints that are variously sprinkled in Malinowski’s “more rambling presentation” (Lounsbury 1965: 146). Certain critical others have unfortunately been carried forward into subsequent accounts and have yet to be reported. As a result of these shortcomings, the significance of marriage regulation as containing implications for the relationship between kinship and magic has yet to be fully appreciated.

Briefly recapitulating Malinowski’s position, there are several intersecting grounds on which sexual relations and marriage between particular categories of kin are assessed as *suvasova* incest. First, the relationship of brother and sister as *luguta* cross-sex siblings born of the same parents is the supposedly primary tie that is extended to all opposite-sex same-generational, same-*dala*, and same-*kumila* affiliates similarly classified as *luta*: basically, persons who share the same maternal blood and/or spirit identity. The strictness of this prohibition declines in consideration of the second criterion: namely, whether or not the couple are members of the same household. Illicit relations between a son (*latu*) and his mother (*ina*) are classed as *suvasova* on the basis of the mother’s supposed similarity to the sister, by extension as a person of same *dala* and *kumila* identity, and as a member of the same household. Thus sexual relations or marriage with a mother’s sister’s son or daughter (*luta*) are less serious than with one’s own cross-sex sibling (*luta*) with whom one is domiciled. Similarly, marriage or sex between any man and any woman who are classified as children on the basis of their mothers being “sisters” (*tuwa*, *bwada*) through sharing same-*dala* identity is strongly condemned, whereas the same union between classificatory “siblings” belonging to distinct *dalas* of the same *kumila* is regarded with less abhorrence (Malinowski 1932: 425, 430–33, 448).

The predicament with the prohibition of father–daughter (*tama*–*latu*) sexual and marital relations presented Malinowski with a particular problem, as noted



above. He reported that fathers and their children were strangers or nonrelatives (*tomakava*) to one other, so sexual relations between the father and his daughter did not qualify as *suvasova* (ibid.: 447). Same-generational cross-sex kin in father's *dala* and *kumila* from a male's perspective (i.e., *tabu*) were accordingly classified as potentially ideal or "lawful" spouses (ibid.: 445, but see below), and from a female's point of view males in father's *dala* termed *tama* "father" were not strictly forbidden (ibid.: 447). The "stranger" father himself, however, was prohibited from sex or marriage with a daughter on the grounds that such relations were "illegal and improper . . . viewed with moral repugnance. Marriage between father and daughter is not allowed nor even imaginable to the native" (ibid.: 445).

But what explains this moral repugnance? The only classificatory criterion that Malinowski employed which could exclude father–daughter sex and marriage from being legal is that they reside in the same household. *But as I have argued in the previous chapter, legitimate husbands and wives hailing from different dalas and kumilas are also coresiding members of the same household, and it is they who, through their intimacies, come to share personal characteristics mirroring those of cross-sex siblings and who are expressly enjoined to engage in lawful sexual relations for the sake of reproduction, as long as that fact is not pointed out publicly.*

Very simply, in other words, Malinowski's individualist theories of household and terminological extension fail to account for the prohibition of father–daughter sexuality and marriage and the private authorization of husband–wife sexuality and marriage.

I shall have considerably more to say about the marital bond below. For now, the father–daughter prohibition is best explained in reference to the practice of *burwala*. Recall from chapter 6 that in reciprocation for the sexual enjoyment of his wife's body and the other personal services that she provides to him, the husband is obliged in numerous ways as father to "look after" his sons and daughters. For a man to have sex with or marry his own daughter is thus to confuse or compound the two relations that should be contracted by mutual exclusion with separate persons. As one of Malinowski's informants stated, this is "very bad, because already he married her mother" (ibid.: 446) and because his daughter is "his wife's nearest kinswoman" (ibid.: 447). More specifically, a man receives pleasures and services from his wife, say, and reciprocates for them with gifts to other persons: his and his wife's children. In short, the father should not be *taking* pleasures from she whom he instead should be looking after and *giving burwala* compensation. In these terms, the prohibition of father–daughter

sexuality is based in the same kind of structural ambiguity as regards the logical basis of *bomala* taboo in general and in the patterning of *bwekasa* sacrifice of which *burwala* is an instance, requiring the direct recipient of *baloma* blessings to forward those fruits to other parties.

This explanation of the father–daughter prohibition as a special case of the complications arising from *burwala* obligations helps account for the fact that a woman’s amorous affairs with other “fathers,” prototypically represented in the person of her father’s sister’s son and other adult males of his *dala* and *kumila*, are “not strictly forbidden” (ibid.). Having not received the enjoyment of a given woman’s mother’s body, these classificatory *tama* “fathers” are not obliged to provide *burwala* compensation to their classificatory daughters.

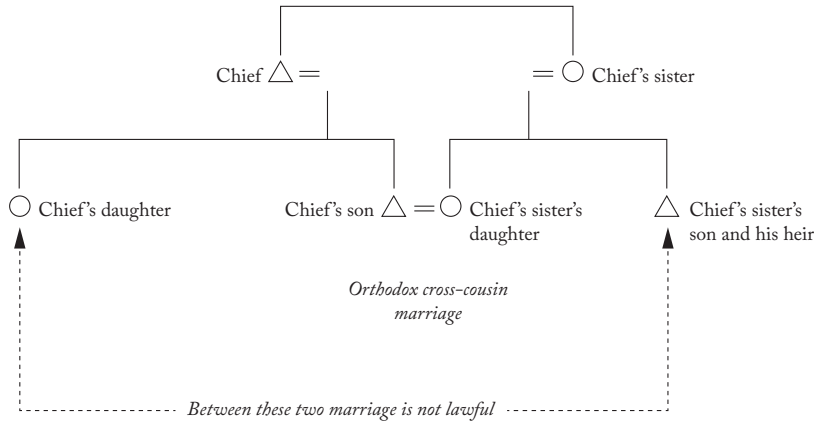
Even so, it should be noted again, Malinowski recorded that sexual contact and marriage of a woman with her *tama* “father’s sister’s son” (or a man with his *latu* “mother’s brother’s daughter”) appears to evoke ambiguous sentiments. While not absolutely prohibited, this arrangement “was perhaps least censured among the Malasi of Kiriwina” (ibid.), particularly the chiefly Tabalu of Omara-kana. In view of the novel interpretation of Trobriand paternity (i.e., *tubulela* and *litulela* relations) that I have presented thus far, it should occasion little surprise that the father–daughter or *tama*–*latu* relation, including its quasi-incestuous implications, figures significantly in additional aspects of societal cohesion.<sup>2</sup>

One of those further dimensions is the positing of a man’s father’s sister (*tabu*) as the “prototype of the lawful, and even sexually recommended woman” (ibid.: 450), or, for a woman, her brother’s son (*tabu*). Because of predictable age differences, it is typically through genealogical extension that it is a man’s father’s sister’s daughter (*tabu*) and the woman’s mother’s brother’s son (*tabu*) who “really [play] this part” (ibid.: 450–51). And through further extensions from

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2. At several junctures below where I focus on the joint *veyalela*–*litulela* of *dala* composition, it may be helpful to note that supposedly “agnatic” Sāmoan ‘*āiga*’ (and very likely analogous kindreds in other Polynesian societies) and “patrilineal” North Mekeo *ikupu* “clans” are constituted on analogous dual grounds. According to Serge Tcherkézoff’s (2017) reanalysis following initial insights by Penny Schoeffel (1979), every ‘*āiga*’ at broadest genealogical expanse consists of two categories of potential members: *tamātane*, or the male and female descendants of the mythical founder’s “brothers” and “sons”; and *tamafafine*, male and female descendants of the founder’s “sisters” and “daughters.” In the case of North Mekeo, there are *inangome* (literally, “owners of women”) claiming *ikupu* clan membership by virtue of ties through their fathers, and the *papie ngaunga* or “women’s children” given birth by female *inangome* (Mosko 1985: chs. 6–8).

the perspective of the male, according to Malinowski, the term *tabu* “extends over three clans, and embraces roughly three-quarters of female humanity, in contrast to the one-quarter which are forbidden” (ibid.: 451).

As mentioned above, Malinowski (ibid.: 70–71) records that there are restrictions on marriage additional to those cast in terms of kin relationship: sex and particularly marriage should be between coresidents of the same geographical cluster of villages and, within that grouping, persons of the same rank. While Malinowski provides little additional information about these practices, he does go into considerable detail regarding the arrangement of infant betrothal, which “is always associated with cross-cousin marriage” (ibid.: 80; fig. 8.1). In his view, the betrothal of a man’s son with the daughter of his sister expressed the “compromise between “father-love and matriliney” (ibid.: 81). Significantly, the examples he provides deal with men such as chiefs, village leaders, renowned sorcerers, or others in possession of uncommon high rank, wealth, and/or power. By marrying his son to his own niece, such a father safely favors the son at the expense of his nephews and heirs (ibid.: 81–84, 88–92, 451).

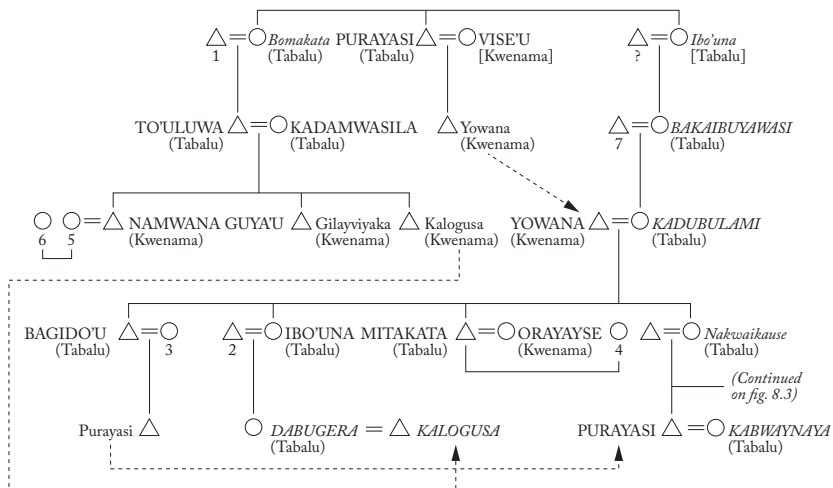


**Figure 8.1.** Diagrammatic genealogy of cross-cousin marriage (after Malinowski 1932: 82).

Of particular relevance to the present work, among the items of wealth that a man of influence can pass to his son rather than his matrilineal heirs is his *megwa* magical spells (see below). Malinowski notes, however, that “such privileged positions are invidious and insecure, even while they last; as the rightful heirs and owners in matriliney resent being pushed aside during the

lifetime of the chief; and, in any case, all such benefits cease with the father's death" (ibid.: 82).

Connected with the practice of infant betrothal in arranged cross-cousin marriage, Malinowski outlines what he terms "matrilineal alliances in a chief's family" (ibid.: 84–88; fig. 8.2). He provides details of three examples, all of which involved the wedding of high-ranking Omarakana Tabalu men's sisters' daughters to sons who belonged exclusively to the coresident chiefly Osapola-Bwaydaga branch of Kwenama *dala*, Lukwasisiga *kumila* (see below). All three of these arrangements conform with the expressed ideal of *tabu-tabu* marriage.



**Figure 8.2.** Pedigrees showing alliances and cross-cousin marriages between Tabalu *dala* of Malasi *kumila* and Osapola-Bwaydaga branch (*nunu*) of Kwenama *dala*, Lukwasisiga *kumila* (amended after Malinowski 1932: 85). The cross-cousin marriages marked in CAPS are those indicated by Malinowski. Additional cross-cousin unions, whether patri- or matrilineal, are noted among persons identified by Arabic numbers 1–7, as follows: 1. Takai (Lukwasisiga); 2. Monakeywa (Kwenama Osapola-Bwaydaga/Lukwasisiga); 3. Inoisi (Kwenama Osapola-Bwaydaga/Lukwasisiga); 4. Geumgwara (Kwenama Osapola-Bwaydaga/Lukwasisiga); 5. Douwadala (Malasi); 6. Ibomala (Tabalu/Malasi); 7. Gumadobuguyau (Kwenama Osapola-Bwaydaga/Lukwasisiga).

However, there are at least three additional chiefly Tabalu/Osapola-Bwaydaga marriages in Malinowski's diagram (ibid.: 85) that are not marked as such: that between To'uluwa's eventual successor, Mitakata of Tabalu, and Orayayse, a woman of Osapola-Bwaydaga whose father was also Tabalu, making their marriage one of a classificatory *father* and *daughter*; between the Tabalu daughter of

Yowana of Osapola-Bwaydaga, Ibo'una, and Monakewa of Osapola-Bwaydaga (i.e., her classificatory *father*); and that between Dabugera, a Tabalu woman, whose father was the same Monakewa of Osapola-Bwaydaga, and her classificatory Osapola-Bwaydaga *father*, Kalogusa (see Malinowski 1935a: 417; E. Leach 1958: 138–39). There is, in other words, a pattern of *reciprocal* intermarriage between these two high-ranking *dalas* which, I argue, is critical to the understanding of the traditional social organization of Omarakana and the rest of Northern Kiriwinan society.

It is worthwhile to note at this stage Malinowski's remarks regarding one of the three marriages depicted as illustrative of the others which happened to involve his key informant, Bagido'u.

The Kwoynama, a subclan of the Lukwasisiga, whose village is Osapola, is the most suitable for supplying *husbands and wives* to the Tabalu. Sons from such a marriage would usually have a special place in the capital and would often carry out among other important offices that of the garden magician. Thus Bagido'u's predecessor was his own father, Yowana, who was the son of Purayasi, a Tabalu chief, and of Vise'u, a woman of the Kwoynama subclan, and therefore belonging to the latter subclan. He [Yowana] in turn married Kadubulami, a Tabalu woman, so that his sons became heirs to the chieftainship. He had taught the magic of gardens to Bagido'u, who with the consent of his maternal uncle was carrying it out in Omarakana. (1935a: 85, emphasis added; see also 86)

Malinowski's treatment of cross-cousin marriage in terms of a conflict between "mother-right" and "father-love," as outlined above, does not account for the empirical "exceptions" where Tabalu and Osapola-Bwaydaga women are marrying their classificatory fathers and where those women's brothers are marrying their classificatory daughters.

It is clear, therefore, that the compromise between "the two ill-adjusted principles" is Malinowski's own interpretation and not necessarily one shared by villagers. Moreover, his elaboration on the logic of this practice becomes critical below when I return momentarily to the topic of the preference for marriage between persons of high rank, particularly at Omarakana:

Let us make clear one more point: among all the marriages possible between cousins, only one is lawful and desirable for the Trobriander. Two young people of opposite sex, whose mothers are sisters, are, of course, subject to the strict

sexual taboo which obtains between brother and sister. *A boy and a girl who are the children of two brothers stand in no special relation to each other. They may marry if they like, but there is no reason why they should; no special custom or institution is connected with such a relationship, since in a matrilineal society it is irrelevant. Only a boy and a girl, descendants of a brother and sister respectively, can conclude a marriage which is lawful and which, at the same time, stands out from mere haphazard alliances; for here, as we have seen, a man gives his own kinswoman to his son for a wife. But an important point must here be noted: the man's son has to marry the woman's daughter, and not the man's daughter the woman's son. Only in the former combination do the two people call each other tabugu, a term which implies lawfulness of sexual intercourse.* (1932: 86–87, emphases added)

## POLYGYNOUS MARRIAGE

A further aspect of sexuality and marriage in the case of chiefs and other men of great authority and renown is the practice of polygyny (*vilayarwa*). In Malinowski's view, polygyny's function is at base economic:

In order to wield his power and to fulfil the obligations of his position, he must possess wealth, and this in Trobriand social conditions is possible only through plurality of wives.

It is a very remarkable fact in the constitution of the tribe of which we are speaking, that the source of power is principally economic, and that the chief is able to carry out many of his executive functions and to claim certain of his privileges only because he is the wealthiest man in the community. For his real income he has to rely entirely on his annual marriage contribution. This, however, in his case, is very large, for he has many wives, and each of them is far more richly dowered than if she had married a commoner. (1932: 111)

In simple outline, a powerful chief will take a wife from every land-owning *dala* of his domain. The headman (*tolivalu*) of that group is obliged to provide the wife from one of the women of his *dala*, nominally his own "sister" (*luta*) or another woman of the same *dala*. In any case, again, in Malinowski's report of local organization, the core of each hamlet consists of the adult *dala* males who have relocated avunculocally with their families. A wife-taking chief in this view thus stands as a "glorified brother-in-law" of his village and chiefdom (Malinowski

1935a: 192). The men of each affinally connected *dala* are therefore collectively responsible for subsidizing the marriage of their *dala* sister or niece with annual prestations of *urigubu* garden "tribute." A chiefly wife's father would also contribute substantially to his [sic] daughter's *urigubu* payments.<sup>3</sup> It is expected that the summary payment accompanying a single chiefly wife would be at least four times that of the annual gift given by another man to his sister's husband. Thus a chief with numerous wives is regularly provided with considerable amounts of wealth with which he could underwrite a wide range of collective activities in validation of his rank and influence.

As already outlined, however, hamlets and villages are not populated ideally or otherwise by majorities of adult male members sharing *dala* identity. Instead, most men continue to reside patrivoril locally in the community of their fathers unless they happen to be successors to the headmanship of their *dala*. In that event, they alone return to their maternal homeland upon reaching late adolescence and marriageability. As a result, across generations the composition of a given local group in matrilineal terms is subject to regular flux or fluidity, as the sons who replace their fathers as residents are going to be of different *dala* identities depending on the affiliations of their in-marrying mothers.<sup>4</sup> Even so, there is some validity to Malinowski's assertion that the contractual obligations of hamlet and village groups through their leaders to contribute wives and wealth to their chief added stability across generations to the intervillage relations under his authority.

But it should be noted that if, as is typically the case, every headman is himself a "son" of the chief who married his mother and raised him as a member of his household, any one of his *dala* "sisters" stands as a "daughter" to the same

3. Elsewhere I have demonstrated that the annual payments described by Malinowski as "*urigubu*" moving from the wife's brothers and/or other same-*dala* adult males are in the first instance categorically payments from a father to daughter as an expression of the father's (*burwala*) obligations toward his wife. A woman's brothers and other maternal relations become principal providers of these payments when they "take the place of the father" (see Mosko 1995: 771; A. Weiner 1976: 196–97, 204–6; 1988: 91; but see also A. Weiner 1978: 174, 182, 184, where it is claimed that daughters may also take the place of their fathers). Consistent with this, the *tama* fathers of a groom and bride are the designated authorities (*tokarewaga*) of their children's bridewealth exchanges (Malinowski 1932: 72–73).
4. If a village's personnel is conceived in terms of the *dala* blood identities of its members, over generations those bloods flow in and out of the community, the only stable or fixed blood being that of the *guyau* or *tolivalu* "father."



dignitary. Accordingly, the latter woman's chiefly marriage is effectively to a classificatory *tama* "father." I shall return to this critical point below.

Malinowski notes the exceptional status of the Tabalu of Omarakana as compared with rival chiefdoms of Northern Kiriwina and other districts of Boyowa, not only in the number of wives and amounts of wealth received but in terms of his personal qualifications of a magical or religious nature:

Thus wealth emphatically forms the basis of power, though in the case of the supreme chief of Omarakana, it is reinforced by personal prestige, by the respect due to his tabooed or holy character, and by his possession of the dreaded weather magic through which he can make or mar the prosperity of the whole country. (1932: 113)

The question thus becomes: Does this "reinforcement" indicate that there is a further connection between the Omarakana Tabalu's ritual status—his "tabooed or holy character" and his possession of the potent *ilamalial/molu* magic of agricultural abundance and scarcity—and the strictly economic functions of his marriage alliances and the wealth that they generate?

Again, Malinowski was struck by the fact that violations of the taboos against sibling incest, intermarriage between persons sharing matrilineal *kumila* identity, and marriage between classificatory fathers and daughters were concentrated in the Malasi *kumila*, with Tabalu people, including Omarakana chiefs, among the most frequent offenders (ibid.: 423, 430–32, 445–47, 449, 459–60). He noted also that while the condition of something, someone, or some activity being *bomala* tabooed has strong implications of *suvasova* incest, sexual relations and intermarriage between distant same-*kumila* kin, on the one hand, and classificatory *tama* fathers and *latu* daughters (i.e., marriage reversing the direction of patrilateral cross-cousin marriage, male Ego speaking), on the other, are viewed ambiguously. Perpetrators are assessed positively as exhibiting a certain derring-do or "jauntiness" (ibid.: 432), enjoying "a desirable and interesting form of erotic experience" (ibid.: 430) considered to be "an enviable" (ibid.: 429) and "daring achievement . . . that is everywhere committed" (ibid.: 431). These anomalous infractions of marital taboos, moreover, are not restricted to Tabalu or Malasi. As already noted, there are a few indications in Malinowski's writings that other non-Malasi violators were also of chiefly status (ibid.: 445).

Rather than pursuing further the possibility that there might be a deeper cultural or social justification for these seeming irregularities, Malinowski

explained them away in terms that resonated with the Eurocentric rationalities of human motivation intuited by his readership:

It is as important to bear in mind, however, that the limitations, taboos, and moral rules are by no means absolutely rigid, slavishly obeyed or automatic in their action. As we have seen again and again the rules of sex are followed only in an approximate manner, leaving a generous margin for infringements; and the forces which make for law and order show a great deal of elasticity. Thus the savage, measured by standards of aesthetics, morality, and manners, displays the same human frailties, imperfections, and strivings as a member of any civilised community. (1932: 453)

Among those ethnographers who have followed in Malinowski's wake, there are two—Harry Powell and Annette Weiner—along with Edmund Leach, who stand out in uncovering additional critical details of the patterning of Trobriand marriage practices that tie into the *bomaboma* sanctity of Tabalu and other chiefs and thereby point to additional dimensions of the indigenous magic-kinship complex.

### *Powell*

Harry Powell conducted his field inquiries at Tilakaiwa, a satellite village of Omarakana. Aiming initially to document the extent of social transformation since Malinowski's time, he found there had been "little apparent change in the Omarakana district," and that Malinowski's ethnographic reports were "entirely reliable, with the exception of some details in the matters he dealt with. It was however increasingly borne in upon me that his accounts did not deal fully with the structural aspect of social relations, in particular with the structural significance of kinship" (1956: xiii–ix).

By Powell's time, the chiefly system of Northern Kiriwina had been significantly changed in response to earlier Administration and mission policies. Even so, the Tabalu chieftainship at Omarakana, particularly under Mitakata's leadership, still manifested "the indigenous social organisation of northern Kiriwina, in so far as this consists in the characteristic pattern of dyadic interaction as explained by the structural significance of the formal system of kinship and rank" (ibid.: 13).

Two overlapping areas of particular interest in the present context are Powell's elaborations upon Malinowski's data regarding anomalous chiefly marriages, and finer details of the character of the Omarakana Tabalu's relations with his principal supporters and rivals.

Powell records that "marriages set up no permanent special relations between sub-clans [i.e., *dala*] unless they are repeated in successive generations, and where this is the case the relationships with which the living are concerned are those that result from the later, not the earlier, marriages" (ibid.: 99). This implies first of all that there are marriages between *dala* that are repeated in successive generations, as illustrated above by the several bilateral unions between Tabalu and Osapola-Bwaydaga. The three noted by Malinowski involved Tabalu men marrying women of their own father's *dala*, Osapola-Bwaydaga. As Powell affirms and as Malinowski observed, the Osapola-Bwaydaga branch of Kwenama *dala* are the "Tabalu's closest rivals" (ibid.: 65; see Malinowski 1935a: 220).

Powell notes also a number of other anomalous marriages in the Omarakana cluster of villages conforming to the pattern of unions between classificatory fathers and daughters (see fig. 8.2). One involved To'uluwa, the Tabalu chief in Malinowski's time, who married two women of Osapola-Bwaydaga who were *ina* "mother" and *latu* "daughter" to each other, making the tie between the latter woman and To'uluwa equivalent to "daughter" with "father."<sup>5</sup> When Mitakata succeeded To'uluwa, he married a woman, Kadumiyu, a classificatory daughter of his father's *dala* (Osapola-Bwaydaga). His father, Yowana, as I describe below, achieved a renown in his lifetime matched only by that of his chiefly Tabalu contemporaries.

Powell emphasizes that these specific marriages—not the oft-stated idealized union of a man with his patrilateral cross-cousin marriage but that between a man and his classificatory mother's brother's daughter (i.e., a *latu* "daughter")—have to do with the way relationships between chiefly *dalas* are renewed from one generation to the next:

A new Chief upon his succession sets about obtaining wives from the subclans of his predecessors' affines, if he has none already; there is no apparent tendency

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5. Neither Malinowski nor Powell records To'uluwa's father's *dala*, but Pulayasi indicates that he was of Lukwasisiga *kumila* and thus probably of Bwaydaga-Osapola, in which case both of his own Bwaydaga-Osapola wives were his *latu* "daughters."

to prefer lineal descendants of his predecessor's wives, and any woman of the subclans concerned is eligible in this respect. (1956: 101)

The indigenous terminology of kin classification is consistent with this. A man's mother's brother's wife is tagged *ina* "mother," making her *dala* daughters his *latu* "daughters." It is through following this specific polygynous course that successors to the Omarakana Tabalu and other chieftainships partly validate their claims (Malinowski 1932: 114–17; Powell 1956: 288–89).

The obvious implication of these and additional data from Powell points well away from Malinowski's presuppositions of a generalized "elasticity" in villagers' conformity to the stated rules of marriage. Clearly something more systemic is involved.

The existence of such coherency is, perhaps, most directly challenged, at least initially, by the concentration of breaches of *kumila* exogamy committed most particularly by persons of Malasi membership and, amongst them, those of the preeminent Tabalu *dala*. Malinowski had been told that all acknowledged *kumila*-incestuous marriages had occurred within Malasi and that such unions were not tolerated in other *kumila* (1932: 432, 447). Powell recorded eight instances of *kumila*-endogamous marriages during the period of his fieldwork. Six of those involved Malasi endogamous marriages, two of them entangling Tabalu men. But the two non-Malasi cases concerned persons of the other chiefly representatives at Omarakana, the Osapola-Bwaydaga branch of Kweynama *dala* in Lukwasisiga *kumila* which supplies the Vila Bogwa and Katayuvisa functionaries:

One of the Mailasi endogamous marriages was that of Vanoi the present heir designate to the Tabalu Guyau. . . . Another of these marriages involved a woman of the Tabalu clan, and the other four, members of other Mailasi owning subclans in the Omarakana cluster. According to Mitakata no Tabalu Guyau would ever marry a Mailasi woman, and there is no tradition of such a marriage [but see above]; a Chief would be "shamed" by such a marriage. But the procedure whereby Mailasi village or cluster headmen can be counted as affines of the Chief in order to reinforce the clan by a fictitious affinal tributary relationship might serve as a precedent for actual marriages between members of Mailasi subclans in other cases to achieve similar results as e.g. between the two Mailasi owning subclans of Yolawotu joint village; and this in turn might lead to a weakening of the rule of exogamy within the clan in general. *The two marriages between members*

*of the Lukwasisiga clan both involve men of the Bwaydaga (Kwoynama) subclan's cadet branch at Omarakana, and it will be recalled that this is the highest ranking and most important subclan in Kiriwina district after the Tabalu;* thus these may also be interpreted as evidence and results of the relative inadequacy of clan kinship in structuring inter-local group relations. (Powell 1956: 527, emphasis added)

Powell speculated that the two endogamous Osapola-Bwaydaga marriages were the result of European influences imposed since the time of Malinowski (*ibid.*). The fact, however, that these two non-Malasi *kumila*-endogamous marriages and the six Malasi ones all involve inter-*dala* relations among either chiefly or land-owning commoner headmen within the Omarakana cluster suggests that the pattern of intra-*kumila* marriages is connected with the prerogatives of community leaders allied in some way with one another.

In the above passage, for example, Powell alludes to the procedure whereby the Yolawotu-Malasi *tolivalu* leaders of the Omarakana cluster "can be counted as affines of the Chief." This refers to a relationship known as *gubwatau* where the leader of a lower-ranking *dala* of the same *kumila* as a given chief is included among the *kaibasi*, *bopokala*, and *guyapokala* providers of what Malinowski and Powell labeled *urigubu* "tribute" (Malinowski 1932: 69, Powell 1969; A. Weiner 1976: 206–7; see above). Thus same-*kumila* *gubwatau* affiliates relate to their chief *as though* they have provided wives to him along with leaders of *dala* of different *kumila* identities, thereby enabling them to maintain ongoing relations with a superior *tama* chief who in some fashion is "looking after them."

The Tabalu of Omarakana have fellow-Malasi *gubwatau* and *wosa* relations dispersed across Boyowa, not just in the local village cluster. It is these people, along with hereditary in-laws of Tabalu, who host Omarakana Tabalu members when the latter visit their communities as they possess the knowledge and equipment on hand for servicing the visitors' *kikila* food and other restrictions. Powell's reference above to *wosa* (more accurately, *gubwatau*) being fictionally counted as among a chief's "tributary affines" is based on the fact that they are regular contributors of wealth much in manner of those non-Malasi *dalas* based in the cluster who contribute wives, even though in the vast majority of cases of *gubwatau* they are not actually tied to the chief through *kumila*-endogamous marriage. In other publications, Powell (1969a, 1969b) refers to *wosa* as "pseudo-affines," arguing that this mechanism "constitutes a much more effective mechanism of tributary alliance" (1969b: 588).

*Leach*

Although he did not conduct fieldwork in the Trobriands himself, in his essay on Trobriand kinship mentioned above relying on material from Powell as well as Malinowski, Edmund Leach arrived at deductions suggesting that the rule of cross-cousin marriage played a particularly important role in relation to chiefly politics. He noted evidence that such unions were potentially bilateral, involving either the patrilineal or matrilineal cross-cousin for a man or a woman (1958: 138–39). Such marriages were “nearly incestuous” and, consistent with that, in his view, “sacred” (ibid.: 121, 27, 41). He recognized that at Omarakana the bilateral character of exogamous intermarriage was salient in relations between chiefly Tabalu and Bwaydaga-Osapola *dalas* (ibid.: 139). And citing Malinowski 1935a: 385–87), he noted that the rank ordering of Malasi and Kwenama *dalas* at chiefly Yolumgwa village was the reverse of that at Omarakana yet to the same effect:

The Kwoynama sub-clan itself possibly has a similar arrangement with their political inferiors of the Malasi clan in the village of Yalumugwa. Malinowski shows the Kwoynama village headman Yovisi marrying off his sister Aykare'i to his own wife's brother who is a member of the inferior Malasi sub-clan in the same village as Yovisi himself. Cf. also Seligman (1910: 718) where it is noted that *for chiefs only* the father, the children and the sisters' husbands fall into one ritual category; this would be a logical consequence of *bilateral* cross-cousin marriage. (139, emphasis added, original reference deleted)

Despite the shortcomings of Leach's analysis of indigenous marriage regulation noted above, these points anticipate the conclusions I reach below.

*Weiner*

The evidence presented thus far from Malinowski and Powell of seemingly anomalous marriages as gauged in relation to explicitly voiced *kikila* restrictions focuses upon relations between Tabalu and other *dala* groupings both internal and external to Malasi *kumila*. Both kinds of such irregularities, I suggest, can best be comprehended by reference to additional ethnographic details concerning the relation of every villager to his or her father's *dala*. At the time of her writing, Annette Weiner's book *Women of value, men of renown* (1976) had yielded the richest source of information on the character of paternal ties and

their relevance to the choice of marital partners, including the significance of the incest taboo. But there is considerably more to report concerning the magical basis of these findings.

Among other points of interest is the common practice whereby fathers pass freely the supposedly hereditary *megwa* magical spells comprising the critical *tukwa* possessions of their own *dala* to their sons in preference over their own heirs and successors: namely, sisters' sons. In order to acquire that knowledge, the sisters' sons must initiate a long series of *pokala* payments either to their uncle when he is alive or, after his death, to his son. It will be recalled that this practice, so seemingly out of place in a matrilineal context, greatly puzzled Malinowski and figured centrally in his theorizing over the tension between father-love and mother-right (1927; 1932: 2–7, 10–14, 81, 17–18, 173–78).

Readers familiar with the enormous contribution that Weiner has made to the Trobriand ethnographic corpus will no doubt be aware of a detectable shift of conceptual emphasis between her earlier and later works that led eventually to publication of *Inalienable possessions* (Weiner 1992). As discussed in the previous chapter, the latter work includes an extended treatment of the Trobriand brother–sister incest taboo (ibid.: 73–77) viewed from the perspective of her theory of “keeping-while-giving.” No doubt, certain data in the earlier book, *Women of value*, served as seeds for her later thoughts, just as her insights, contra Malinowski, on the importance of fathers as kin rather than strangers have proven to be inspirational for me.

Many of Weiner's earlier representations, however—both those which can be accepted and others which I think can be legitimately challenged—also help to sustain the interpretations I have presented in this and earlier chapters in ways that her later arguments do not. In *Women of value*, Weiner reports the interesting circumstance that she was “told the same thing that Malinowski was told: ‘A person should marry his *or her tabu*,’” by which she means “*women and men marry someone who is a member of their father's clan*” (1976: 185, emphases added; see also 52; cf. Lepani 2012: 71). There appear to be two substantive confusions here. First, Weiner represents only one of the two contradictory positions that Malinowski maintained as regarding cross-cousin marriage—that which excluded marriage of a man to his mother's brother's daughter (see above). What Weiner claims as regards the acceptance and/or tolerance of bilateral cross-cousin marriage was noted in some contexts by Malinowski also (see above).

Second, a woman's father's sister's son and other adult males of her father's *dala* and *kumila* are not terminologically *tabu* but *tama* “father” to her as *latu*



*vivila* “daughter” (see above). Thus Weiner has effectively collapsed the two marriage alternatives that Malinowski and Powell differentiated as the ideal case (i.e., patrilateral cross-cousin marriage, male Ego speaking) versus that which is permitted but also modestly censured (i.e., matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, male Ego speaking, or patrilateral cross-cousin marriage, female Ego speaking). Only the former conforms to the oft-stated *tabu-tabu* preference.<sup>6</sup>

In another context Weiner notes again that “the incest taboo between fathers and daughters is far less rigid than that between a sister and brother” (1988: 76), without illuminating the facts that men of a woman’s father’s *dala* are terminologically *tama* fathers to her, and that supposedly there is a categorical difference between the *suvasova* incest taboo between same-*dala* or same-*kumila* siblings or kin, on the one hand, and that (i.e., non-*suvasova*) between actual and classificatory fathers and daughters on the other. These clarifications, however, do not necessarily invalidate Weiner’s additional report that at Kwebaga marriages ideally and actually involve *both* women and men marrying someone of their respective father’s *kumila* “clan” (1976: 185). In 1972, 55 percent of Kwebagan men and 52 percent of Kwebagan women were married to persons of their fathers’ *kumilas* (ibid.: 187).<sup>7</sup>

6. There is a third point of possible confusion where Weiner claims that the “brother-sister taboo” is not extended to relations between a mother’s brother (*kada*) and his sister’s child (*kada*) (1976: 175). This would imply that intra-*dala* incest is not prohibited. In this context she must be referring only to the prohibition mentioned by Malinowski that a mother’s brother, along with her brother and father, should have no knowledge or other participation in the sexual life of his niece prior to her marriage. In any case, she does note that there are a few cases of clan-endogamous marriages, although she does not provide details as to whether rank or chiefly status has been a relevant factor (ibid.: 176).
7. Comparable numbers of cross-cousin marriage at Omarakana (inclusive of Kasanai) in 2016 closely approximate those reported by Weiner for Kwebaga. Of seventy-five current marriages where at least one spouse is living, thirty-nine men (52 percent) were married to a woman (*tabu*) of their father’s *kumila*, and twenty-nine women (39 percent) were married to a man (*tama*) of their father’s *kumila*. In addition, twenty of these seventy-five marriages (27 percent) were between couples whose fathers were of the same *kumila*, making them on that basis siblings (*luta*). Also, of all marriages contracted among living people and their parents, there were eight Tabalu/Osapola-Bwaydaga marriages and fourteen *kumila*-endogamous unions, eleven of which involved couples of Malasi *dala*. There was only marriage joining persons of Kwenama *dala*.

These figures, it seems to me, underscore the necessity in those small-scale societies wherein endogamy at some inclusive societal scale is positively sanctioned

Weiner analyzes this marital pattern in terms of what was presented to her as the “trick of marrying *tabu*” (ibid.: 59). By means of this “trick,” such unions between members of two *dalas* of the same *kumila* strive to create or perpetuate an alliance between them by arranging marriages through exogamic patrilineal ties. This way, the members of one *dala* effectively recruit distant same-*kumila* (i.e., *keyawa*) kin as supporters in large-scale exchanges—for example, those involving mortuary *sagali* (1988: 75). To achieve this, a man would seek to secure a spouse *for a daughter as well as a son* from a *dala* of his own *kumila* identity. At Kwebaga and presumably in other communities, such agreements tend to be confined to persons of the same village or neighboring villages (ibid.: 187–88), consistent to that extent with the preference noted by Malinowski and Powell for local endogamy. But also, through the trick of marrying *tabu*, such relations are stabilized.<sup>8</sup>

The rationale for these arrangements, according to Weiner, is actually not altogether dissimilar to that suggested by Malinowski, Powell, or Leach, at least as concerns a man’s marriage to a woman of his father’s *dala* (i.e., *tabu*). For Weiner, the marriage of a man’s children to persons of his own *kumila* but different *dala*—whether to *tabu* or *tamallatu*—creates mutual support *keyawa* relations between the two *dala* of the same *kumila*. In contradistinction to Malinowski, Powell, and others but consistent with Leach, however, Weiner’s report of *women’s as well as men’s marital preferences for persons of their respective fathers’ kumilas* implies that Trobriand marriage conforms structurally to the formal case of *bilateral* cross-cousin marriage between exchanging *dalas*, keeping in mind that the principals in such unions are distantly related kin.

Weiner provides a few additional details relevant to the marriages of chiefs. She refers to “a few men, who live in Omarakana and are identified as members of a particular *dala*, [and who] act as bodyguards or messengers for the Tabalu” (ibid.: 201). She notes also that it is these men who arrange for all of the chief’s marriages excepting his first one, which he himself would have chosen before

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for there to be formal mechanisms such as mortuary de-conception for undoing and uncomplicating earlier generations of marital union. Otherwise, the tracing of heavily compounded relationships becomes exponentially complex and nonsensical.

8. It must be remembered from my treatment of *lusaladabu* mortuary feasting in chapter 6 that relations through *tama* fathers and spouses are de-conceived or severed upon the demise of the fathers children. So rather than merely continuing the links between separate *dalas*, marriages by women and men with persons of their fathers *dalas* recreate marriages and alliances which had been ritually extinguished.

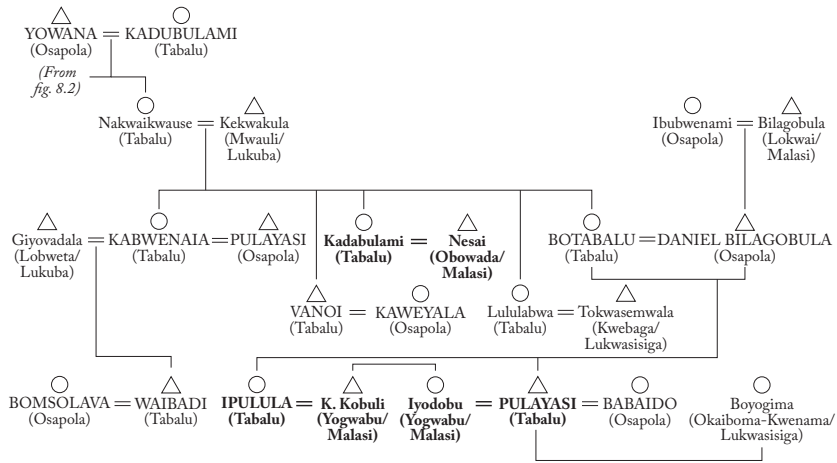
his succession to the chieftainship. There are two resident *dalas* to whom Weiner could be referring in this passage, likely both. There are the representatives of chiefly Osapola-Bwaydaga branch of Kwenama *dala*, with whom, according to Malinowski and Powell, Tabalu routinely intermarry and share diarchic authority (see below). The only other men to whom Weiner could be referring are resident members of the Malasi *dala*, Yogwabu, whose chiefly ancestors, before they were deposed upon the first arrival of Tabalu, were the original owners of most Omarakana land and whose headman currently cooperates with the Tabalu chief in wielding the powerful *gubugwabu* and *tourikuna* magic of sun and rain. Yogwabu men are also the Tabalu's soldiers (*tokabilia*).<sup>9</sup>

In another context, Weiner notes that chiefs such as the Omarakana Tabalu are adept at breaking rules (i.e., *kikila*) but “knowing how to make their ‘mistake’ work in their favor” (ibid.: 78). The last few generations of bilateral intermarriage would also qualify as instances of this: that is, those unions between Tabalu and Osapola-Bwaydaga, and in the reported cases of Malasi–Malasi and Kwenama–Kwenama endogamy (fig. 8.3).<sup>10</sup>

Weiner also notes that persons of high-ranking chiefly *dalas* adhere to “hereditary taboos that keep them socially and spatially isolated from others” (ibid.: 86).

In short, her representation of the generalized pattern of *dala* and *kumila* intermarriage based on her Kwebaga observations affirm the tendencies implied in Malinowski's, Powell's, and Leach's assessments for chiefly persons to prosecute marriage alliances that are anomalous with respect to the publicly stated marital restrictions.

9. This is one of the *dala* groups where Tabalu have married endogamously as to same *kumila*. For example, as already mentioned, the current Paramount Chief, Pulayasi Daniel, took his first wife from Yogwabu *dala* of Malasi *kumila*, and that wife's full brother, the Yogwabu headman, Kevin Kobuli, married Pulayasi's full sister. Pulayasi explains that the function of such marriages is basically the same as that between Tabalu and Osapola-Bwaydaga.
10. There are several significant demographics related to these marriage patterns at Omarakana and, I suspect, elsewhere in Boyowa. Malasi *kumila* is historically dominant in terms of population. In Powell's (1956: 47) time in the early 1950s, 46 percent of the Omarakana cluster population identified (matrilineally) as Malasi. In 2016, sixty (43 percent) of 139 married persons were Malasi by virtue of *veyalela* affiliation; seventy-five (54 percent) were *litulela* “men's children” of Malasi *dalas*. These figures provide a possible explanation for at least some intra-Malasi marriages: namely, the simple fact that there are not sufficient numbers of eligible youths available for all to marry exogamously as to *kumila* once they reach early adulthood.



**Figure 8.3.** Recent Tabalu/Kwenama (Osapola-Bwaydaga) alliance intermarriages, including those of Paramount Chiefs Vanoi, Waibadi, and Pulayasi, marked in CAPS. The three endogamous Malasi *kumila* marriages are marked in **bold**.

#### LITULELA-TUBULELA RELATIONS AS “SAME *DALA*”

These data gathered from several sources affirm the presence of something very distinctive in the patterning of chiefly marriages. The tendency thus far has been to account for the perceived irregularities through reference to the stated rules of incest, exogamy, and endogamy as defined in terms of conventional descent affiliations. Such views, however, have left relatively unexamined the nature of the social units between which marital unions are either prescribed or proscribed. In other words, ethnographic treatments of Trobriand marriage regulation have presupposed *dala* and *kumila* as being unilinear (i.e., matrilineal) in recruitment and composition. But if there is any merit to my earlier evidence and claims that neither *dala* nor *kumila* are strictly speaking “matrilineal groups”—i.e., *not* solely limited to unambiguous connections through women—then the perceived anomalies of chiefly marriages might not be all that irregular. To clarify the issue of legitimate chiefly and nonchiefly marriage, therefore, it will be necessary to reconsider the boundaries of “matrilineal” *dala* and *kumila* relationship.

In my summary above of Powell’s discussion of marital restrictions concerning persons sharing matrilineal identity, I described the exchange relations termed *gub-watau* whereby commoner *dalas* regularly gardened for and contributed *urigubu* (properly labeled) wealth to their same-*kumila* chief as “fictive” or “pseudo-affines.”

The most obvious instance of this relationship is that between the many Malasi *dalas* on Kiriwina and the local Tabalu chiefs who look after them (figs. 8.4–5).



**Figure 8.4.** Upon arrival at Omarakana, *gubwatau* affiliates of Tabalu circle the village bearing their gifts. Omarakana village (2013).



**Figure 8.5.** George Mwasaluwa, *wosa* to Tabalu, presenting *urigubu* to the ethnographer. Omarakana (2007).



However, it is not only with regard to chiefly *dalas* that commoners sustain important relations with their intra-*kumila* kin. In *Women of value*, Weiner (1976) has written extensively of the significance of these latter *keyawa* relations, of which *gubwatau* is merely a special case, in connection with the wider classification of Trobriand kin categories. She concentrates on the functions *keyawa* relatives fulfill in marriage and mortuary ceremonies, and in particular the “trick of marrying *tabu*,” whereby, as noted above, a man arranges the marriage of his male and female children to persons belonging to another *dala* of his own *kumila*. So the alliance here is between two *dalas* of the father’s *kumila*, not that between the father’s *dala* and that of his son or daughter, the marital principals. In Weiner’s representation of this scheme, the son and daughter, whoever they end up marrying, are still *tomakava* as per maternal *dala* identity to their spouses at the outset of their relationship. They thus fall outside Weiner’s four-fold classification of persons who are included in the category *veyo* or *veyola* (or *veyalela*) “clansperson” or “kin.”<sup>11</sup>

The issue again concerns the question of just who is regarded as being of or sharing “same” or “one *dala*,” and who therefore is seen as *tomakava*. With reference to the material presented in chapters 4 and 6 concerning *litulela*–*tubulela* relations in the context of *lisaladabu*, Weiner asserted that it is same-*kumila* *keyawa* kin of the deceased who dominate the proceedings with transactions *between themselves* of the numerous *keymelu* reciprocities of *doba* bundles and skirts for yams. However, as I argued, the significance of *kemelu* transactions is greatly overshadowed by the exchanges between “owners” (*toliu’ula*) and “workers” (*toliyauwa*), or between persons identified through maternal links to *dalas* of different *kumilas*.

Now *keyawa* kin do offer their support when the deceased’s *dala* owners present their *sepwana*, *deli*, and other gifts to the two main categories of “workers”—i.e., people of the deceased’s father’s *dala* and those of his/her surviving spouse. But a careful reading even of Weiner’s own description of the intra- and inter-*kumila* transactions at *lisaladabu* and other mortuary *sagali* reveals the adult *litulela* sons and daughters of the male members of the deceased’s *dala*, albeit without labeling them as such, to be more centrally involved as “owners”

11. The distinctions that Weiner draws between categories of kin internal to *kumila*—*veyola tatola* “same blood,” *veyola* “same place of origin,” *keyawa* “same affinal relationship to other clans,” and *kakaveyola* “no special exchange relationship” (1976: 54–60)—are not directly relevant to my point here as to the status of a man’s children in relation to his *dala* and *kumila* relatives.

than the *keyawa* same-*kumila* kin whose roles as supporters she struggles to emphasize (ibid.: 63).<sup>12</sup> She notes, for example, that the daughters of male owners are positioned at the center of the activities alongside *veyola tatola* female owners (ibid.: 104). And the only contexts in which *litulela* are not included centrally among the owners is when they themselves are direct gift recipients in their capacities as *kapu* or *kakau* “workers” through other connections. This latter situation arises when a “man’s child” of the *dala* of the deceased happens to be a *veyalela* affiliate of either of the maternal *dalas* of the principal workers or *sagali* recipients—i.e., a *veyalela* member in his/her own right of either the deceased’s father’s *dala* (*kapu*) or spouse’s *dala* (*kakau*) (ibid.: 105, 112). This is relatively straightforward when owners’ *litulela* affiliates happen to be included among the recipients involving inter-*dala*, inter-*kumila* exchanges. But with intra-*dala* *kemelu* gifts of bundles and skirts, which Weiner characterizes as “the most important exchange involving bundles” (ibid.: 110), “owner” women, including female “men’s children,” present “large amounts of wealth” to the sons of a male owner if they (the sons) have contributed yams to the owners (ibid.: 112). Therefore, in such instances, even supposedly endogenous *kemelu* exchanges are transacted between persons who identify matrilineally with different *dalas* and *kumilas*.

My point, very simply, is that boundaries distinguishing “same-” and “different-*dala*” and (*kumila*) are not consistently matrilineal.

Weiner explains these anomalous participations of owners’ *litulela* as taking “the place of their father,” meaning that they are “not changing *dala* identity” but are “temporarily on loan to another *dala* from another clan. Thus when a woman dies the married children of her brothers play this dual role” (ibid.: 63).

12. See Weiner’s account of *selubulabu*, *ligabwa*, *tadabali*, *vabusi*, *wolela kaladibukula*, *kalakatusunapula*, *kalitabali*, and *karwelua* exchanges performed in the immediate aftermath of the deceased’s death and burial (ibid.: 72–76). In her description of the second major *sagali* (*lisaladabu*) that is typically performed months after the burial, “men’s children” are noted as being included alongside the formal “owners” in the intra-*kumila* exchanges that temporally dominate the day’s activities (ibid.: 105). She notes that these and essentially all inter-*dala* transactions feature “men’s children” as key participants as “owners”: *iwoulasi seprwana*, *uwisalarwaga*, *bubu*, *kalimapuyoyu*, *lisaladabu nakakau*, *lisaladabu tomakapa*, *lisaladabu*, *karwelurwa*, *kaymelu*, *kapipewalela kabeyamila*, *kalilakuvili*, *kalakeyala*, and the two *deli* exchanges (*kalakeyala kakau* and *kalakeyala kapu*) and *ligwaba* (ibid.: 107–15). The only exception, again, is when particular *litulela* kin are also related to the deceased as members of his/her father’s or spouse’s *dala*.



According to my interlocutors, *litulela* children of a *dala* at *lusaladabu* are not in any sense “on loan” to others, and their relations with their *tubulela* relatives are not temporary but ongoing and life-long. Indeed, through *litulela*–*tubulela* connections, they are “*dala*,” to the extent that it consists of group identity, bilateral or cognatically conceived.

Every Trobriand Ego (except those born fatherless or through intra-*kumila suvasova*) therefore possesses essentially same-*dala* identity with *two* distinct *dalas*, each part of a different *kumila*: *veyalela* (or *veyola*) kin in the maternal *dala* of his/her mother, and *tubulela* kin in the maternal *dala* of his/her father. In many contexts when asked directly, villagers affirm that they are “one (*kwetala*) *dala*” or “true (*mokwita*) *dala*” with *tubulela* and *litulela* kin as well as maternal *veyalela*. The full scope of *dala*, in other words, includes the children whom *male as well as female members procreate*.<sup>13</sup>

After all, the images and powers that feed and form a man’s children from conception onward are those which emerged (*sunapula*) initially in the cosmic generation of his maternal *dala*. To this extent, the *litulela* of a given *dala* share the same *kekwebu* and *peu’ula* as animate their *tubulela*, the people of their father’s *dala*. The only difference, though an extremely consequential one, is that those images and associated capacities are inversely marked as to the gender of the persons—i.e., father versus mother—from whom they were detached and then embodied.

Given this prominence of the *litulela*–*tubulela* relationship in funerary rites and other contexts, it must be wondered why Malinowski and other observers have failed to credit it. The case of patrilineal-parallel cousins is perhaps illustrative. As Lounsbury (1965: 161) noted in his detailed reanalysis of Trobriand kin terminology, Malinowski never provided the terms of reference or address used between two persons who are the offspring of two brothers connected through their fathers with the same maternal *dala*, except that they are “not relatives” (1932: 86). Formal recognition of such a relationship would have challenged his stance on the “stranger” characterization of fatherhood. As it turns out, however, Powell (1956: diagram 6) documented that the children of two

13. For another detailed account of relations analogous to those of Trobriand *litulela*–*tubulela* in a related but “patrilineal” society, see my analysis of *papie ngaunga* “women’s children”—the relation between the members of a “patrilineal” clan (*ikupu*) and the children of female members among North Mekeo (Mosko 1985: chs. 7–8). The roles of *papie ngaunga* in North Mekeo mortuary rites and other contexts nearly perfectly duplicate those of Trobriand *litulela*–*tubulela*.

brothers, real and classificatory, are terminologically classed as “siblings”—*luta* “brothers” and “sisters, and *tuwa/bwada* between elder/younger same-sex siblings, respectively.<sup>14</sup> According to my sources, a man and woman who trace their relationship to each other through their respective fathers stand as *tuwa* brother/sister and are prohibited from sexual intercourse and marriage in exactly the same way as intra-*dala* and intra-*kumila* classificatory siblings, except that the violation is apparently not considered to be *suvasova*.

It may be speculated also why, given their prominence in *sagali* exchanges, *litulela* men's children were not more definitively characterized in Weiner's analysis, particularly in light of the significance she accorded to the centrality of the father and his *dala* and kin as the critical mediators for all of a child's extra-*dala* relations. The only answers that come to me are, perhaps: acknowledgment of *dala* essence transmitted intergenerationally *by men* and not just women conflicted with her view of women's exclusive ahistorical control of pure *dala* essence; or attention to the role of men's children in mortuary *sagali*, similar to her exaggeration of women's transactions to the relative neglect of men's,

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14. Because he was dealing with Malinowski's incomplete data on this point, Lounsbury (1965: 169) incorrectly lists persons who are effectively *litulela* in common to the same paternal *dala* as “non-relatives.” His reasoning is as follows:

But there is an asymmetry in the Trobriand treatment of parallel cousins as [Malinowski] reports it. Thus, although one's father's brother (FB) is terminologically equated with one's father (F), and one's father's brother's wife (FBW) is terminologically equated with one's mother (M)—these being recognized in the merging rule as we have written it—one's father's brother's children (FBs, FBd) are not equated terminologically with one's siblings (B, S) as one might have expected and as is the case in numerous other Crow-type terminologies that are more or less similar to the Trobriand. The parallel cousins on the father's side are not included under the sibling categories (*tuwa*, *bwada*, *luta*) in Malinowski's table of relationship terms (1929a: 515–16; 1932: 434), nor are these positions filled on the genealogical diagram that follows the table. We are left to conclude that these omissions were not fortuitous and that one's father's brother's children, in Trobriand ideology, are not relatives. Moreover, in one instance Malinowski specifically denies that one's father's brother's children are considered as “relatives” by the Trobrianders (1929a: 101; 1932: 86). The matter is quite different with the uterine parallel cousins, however. Their parents too, i.e., Ego's mother's sister and mother's sister's husband (MS, MSH), are terminologically equated with Ego's own parents (M, F), and the parallel cousins through them (MSs, MSd) are indeed relatives and are—as one would expect—given the classification of “siblings” (*tuwa*, *bwada*, *luta*). (1965: 161–62)

complicated her view of *lialadabu* as efforts at extending rather than attenuating extra-*dala* relations.

In any case, there are other anomalous ethnographic conundrums regarding Trobriand kinship that can be easily explained by reference to the *litulela-tubulela* relationship. For instance, the notion reported by Malinowski (1932: 173–76; see also Weiner 1976: 123) and practically every other Trobriands ethnographer that persons should have the same physical appearance (*kekwebu*) as their fathers but not of any of their mothers *veyola* kin is an expression of this very *dala*-specific tie between a father and his offspring. The *litulela-tubulela* relationship has everything to do with the rationale by which a man passes freely his magic and other *dala* wealth to his sons in preference to his seemingly legitimate maternal heirs. Sharing the *kekwebu* images and *peu'ula* powers distinctive to their father's maternal *dala*, a man's sons are no less customized to receive and practice his magic in the appropriate circumstances than are his nephews.

Nonetheless, there is one critical difference between the affiliation of *veyalela* members born of women and that of *litulela* born of men: only the former women and men are capacitated to convey their own maternal *dala* identities to their human children through procreative processes. However, *litulela* men and women are not capable of transmitting to their offspring through procreation the images and powers of their *fathers' dalas*; rather, they give to them the components of their own uterine *dala* identities. This elision of the *kekwebu* and *peu'ula* continuities effectively from grandfathers to their grandchildren is, of course, completely compatible with the notion that inter-*dala* exchanges at *lialadabu* and other mortuary *sagali* are expressly oriented to the eventual severing or de-conception of procreant relations and *not* their extension as posited by Weiner. Thus in the short run, say, the boundaries of *dala* include the children of all living members regardless of gender, but in the long term it is only the ties extended through women's capacities of giving birth to *human* children that the *dala's* personnel continues.

## MAGICAL INHERITANCE

These reconfigurations of the boundaries of *dala* in light of the inclusion of *litulela-tubulela* affiliates reinforce my argument that the longstanding characterizations of the Trobriands as a "matrilineal society" are seriously inaccurate or incomplete. And lest it be overlooked, male magicians, whether they stand in

*veyalela* or *litulela* relationship to the *tukwa* of a given *dala*, are equipped over the long term (i.e., “ahistorically”) also for giving quasi-birth to “children” in the form of the magical spells that they regenerate orally. For this very reason, the names of possessors of *megwa*, whether they receive the spells from uncles, fathers, or others, are not culled even after their own physical deaths. Once one’s name becomes enshrined in *megwa*, it is presumably kept and remembered there for ever (but see chapter 6).

The relevance of this as regards the relation of magic to kinship is that it broadens the scope not only of *bilubaloma* who are included as magic predecessors of the *tukwa* spells of a given *dala* but also of those who in future are eligible to receive them through inheritance and succession. Acknowledgment of the ties between *litulela* and *tubulela* kin similarly expands the range of spirit participants in other ritual and/or sacrificial contexts where *dala* identities are featured. Thus, for example, ancestral *baloma* of a person’s father’s as well as mother’s *dala* can be appealed to in *bwekasa* offerings for their *bobwelila* blessings.

On this point, I can return to the puzzle that distracted Malinowski (1922: 185; 1926: 109–11; 1932: 178; see chapter 6), as it has others, and led him to formulate his theory of Trobriand sociality as a compromise between father-love and mother-right. The key question is: Why should a son receive “freely” from his father the magic of the father’s *dala*, when supposedly the legitimate owners of that magic such as the father’s sister’s sons have to make substantial *pokala* payments to the father, or to his son if the father is deceased and that son has already been given it? Shedding light on this enigma will have important further implications regarding the *kikila* ritual restrictions associated with men’s performance of magical spells and chiefly dimensions of social organization.

Growing up in one’s parents’ household, a man’s children are the ultimate recipients of innumerable inalienable sacrificial *burwala* gifts of food, shelter, clothing, knowledge, and so on, construed as “return payments”—specifically, *burwala*—for his enjoyment of the mother’s body and other services she renders. Accordingly, as children mature, it is incumbent upon them to reciprocate (*mapula*) with “sweat” of their own: that is, return gifts presented through *bwekasa* offerings that people expect to be ongoing and life-long. Only those sons who have impressed their fathers with the genuine love and sympathy they hold for them through *kaivatam* or *kipatu* giving can expect to be given magic that might enhance their adult careers. In this sense, it is a man’s sons who are the principal rivals for their father’s magical and other blessings. And

ideally only one of them will succeed, but even he cannot use the magic until after his father dies.<sup>15</sup>

The situation with a magician's supposedly legitimate potential heirs to his *megwa*—other adult males of his own maternal *dala*, such as sisters' sons or other juniors—is quite different to that of his sons. Given the normal pattern of patrivorilocal postmarital residence, there is no customary context for sororal nephews to engage in intense reciprocities with their uncles as are routinely enjoyed by the uncle's sons. Nephews may live in the same community as their mothers' brothers, but this is normally a result of the happenstance of where their mothers relocated upon marrying. In general, then, it is typically a man's sisters' sons who are personally "strange" to him, and vice versa. As Powell, Weiner, and Hutchins have noted, only when nephews or other junior *dala* males in adolescence come to appreciate the advantages that their uncle's or other senior male's *megwa* might render them in their own courting and other careers do they seek out his patronage, and I mean that term literally. By this point, an uncle's favorite son would have a considerable advantage. The nephews' gifts of *pokala* are basically efforts on their part to catch up. Sharing the same *tukwa* images and powers of their uncle by birth, they are of course qualified to use his *megwa*, but if only they can elicit them from him.

Powell (1956: 416–21), most clearly of all, has described how the inheritance of magic by a magician's sons and his nephews consists of a political competition (see also A. Weiner 1976: 56–67, 213; Hutchins 1980: 36–38) instead of the tension between a father's emotional ties and a nephew's legal rights as formulated by Malinowski. What I do not think has been adequately

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15. These conventions supposedly apply strictly only to *megwa* that originated from the *tosunapula* emergence ancestors of a given *dala* and which are included in the *dala*'s *tukwa* possessions. As I have described elsewhere (Mosko 2014a), there is another category of *megwa* (*sosewa*, literally "collected") which consists of spells which have passed beyond the boundaries of *dala*. In the view of some informants, spells passed to sons are by definition *sosewa* to them as they are of different maternal *dala* identity from their fathers; yet they share the father's *kekwebu* and *peu'ula* and thus are to that extent customized to possess them. Other authorities assert that, as *litulela* affiliates of a father's *dala*, the *megwa* that a son receives qualify as his personal *tukwa* too. With other *sosewa* spells that have been widely distributed beyond their original *dala* through other mechanisms of gift exchange, "purchase," and so on, it is likely that there will be multiple authorized possessors of the same *megwa* who are otherwise unrelated to each other except that they can claim a kind of magical kinship through common acknowledgment of the same *megwa* predecessors.

appreciated is that, through *pokala*, a nephew is basically seeking to have himself “adopted” (*vakalova*) by his uncle as a “son” (*latu tau*). As Weiner (1976: 157, 213) and Hutchins (1980: 37) have noted, *pokala* gifts are normally presented to the uncle without their being formally recognized as such and without the giver’s intention in offering the gifts being expressly noted. The nephew should not indicate his objective until well along in developing his relationship with his uncle and only at the stage where he feels confident that he has secured the uncle’s affection and support. It is bad form and shameful for the nephew’s desires to be openly stated. Instead, the *pokala* gifts are presented as expressions of the nephew’s authentic love for his uncle, very much along the lines routinely established by the uncle’s sons toward their father from the time of their birth. In this regard, nephews are seeking to endear themselves as “fictive sons” similarly to how *gubwatau* same-*kumila* supporters of chiefs act as “fictive affines.”

#### *Vakalova: adoption*

Since the payment of *pokala* by nephews for magic and other wealth is not the only instance of “adoption” that is relevant to the transmission of *megwa* along kinship lines, it will be helpful to dwell briefly on the basic cultural assumptions of *vakalova* (literally “released” or “let-go-of feeding”; cf. Malinowski 1932: 167; Powell 1956: 124–26, 373–74; A. Weiner 1976: 123–24). Every Trobriand infant is initially born to two birth parents (*toliuma’i*). At the moment when they reach the stage of weaning from their mothers’ milk, they must be adopted by another married couple. At least one of the adoptive parents (*tolivakalova*) must be a close *dala* relative of either of the natal parents.<sup>16</sup> However, as Powell (1956: 374, 376, 382) notes, girls may not be adopted by a given married couple if neither of them is of the same maternal *dala* as she. This ensures that one of the girl’s adoptive parents is knowledgeable of and observes the *kikila* of her uterine *dala*.

The child joins the household of the new parents, who typically look after him/her in the same manner that they look after their natal offspring for as long as the adopted child remains with them. Often the child returns to his/her natal parents once the natal mother’s flow of milk has subsided, but it is not uncommon for the child to remain in the household of his/her adoptive

16. As noted earlier, if the child is adopted when it is still nursing, the adoptive mother must be of the child’s maternal *dala*.

parents indefinitely. Powell (ibid.: 128) observed that roughly half of children remain with their adoptive families throughout their youths. In such cases, the child will take on the *kikila* food and other restrictions of its adoptive parents if either of them identifies with a *dala* different from those of the child's *toluuna'i* parents. This creates in the person of the child constellations of *kekwebu* images and *peu'ula* powers in harmony with those of the adoptive parents' respective *dala* identities. Although people will be able to differentiate adopted from natal children when pressed, life continues in most respects as though adopted children are equivalent to natal ones (but see below). The adopted child becomes younger/elder same-sex sibling (*bwadal/tuwa*) or opposite-sex sibling (*luta*) to the natal children of the adoptive parents.

Regardless of whether the adopted child remains in his/her new household or returns to his/her original one, the relations established between the child and his/her adopted kin are often life-long. Adopted cross-sex siblings as *luta* are prohibited from marriage, and whenever someone in either of the adoptive parents' *dalas* dies, the adopted children can participate in the appropriate mortuary role as owner or worker according to the same kin, *dala*, and *kumila* designations as natal-born children, particularly if they remain in the adoptive household beyond the time the natal mother recovered from the ordeal of breast-feeding.

Thus far I have outlined at least three contexts of *vakalova* adoption or practices that closely approximate it: the adoption of children initiated at the time of weaning; the affiliation of *dala* junior males with their seniors through the formal proceedings of *pokala*; and the convention that the *tolivalu* leader or chief of a hamlet, village, or cluster of villages stands as an adoptive *tama* father of the resident adult males and their family members. Of these, customarily only that of children adopted at weaning and remaining with their adoptive parents can expect to receive, on either a temporary or permanent basis, donations of magic or other *tukwa* wealth of the adoptive father's *dala* without the requirement of paying *pokala* or making payments of an analogous sort.

In the last of these examples, adult men resident in a given hamlet or village are obliged to cultivate annually a major *kemata* (*keymata*) garden presented at harvest time to their *tolivalu* leader or chief as community *tama* father on the grounds specified above. These are the "*urigubu*" payments as labeled by Malinowski, falling into exactly the same class of annual gifts that every adult male is obliged to make prototypically to his natal father. But as Weiner has noted (1976: 140, 145–53), if a young man resides and gardens on land managed by a



senior male other than or additional to his father—an elder brother, an uncle, a wife's father, etc.—he is obligated in the same way to garden annually for that person. My point is that all of these critical payments by junior to senior males amount basically to the creation and sustenance of “adoptive” or “fictive” paternal ties as per “sons” and “fathers.”

Even in the case where junior males reside with and garden for their same-*dala* seniors (e.g., elder brothers, uncles, *dala* headman), it is understood that they have entered into adoptive relations modeled on that of the *latu tau* son to *tama* father. Weiner (ibid.: 152) also refers to how residence rights can be acquired through the creation of “fictive relationships.” I am suggesting that even those between men sharing *dala* identity are presumed to evoke attitudes and obligations approximating those of natal fathers and sons. In this respect, the paternal tie is extended even between a hamlet, village, or cluster leader or chief and any of his same-*dala* coresidents, more or less as modeling *litulela*–*tubulela* ties. Many times I have witnessed Pulayasi coming to the rescue of otherwise unrelated *ilomgwa* “vassals” on grounds that they are his “sons” or “daughters.”

It is relevant to note here that the supposedly “*urigubu*” payments that Malinowski and others have characterized as principally between a woman's brother and husband are technically transactions between the woman's father and her and/or her husband (Mosko 1995; see also A. Weiner 1976: 196–97). When brothers garden for their natal *luta* sisters, they are doing so by means of “taking the place of their fathers,” as discussed above. Moreover, when a man gardens for some other classificatory *dala* sister, he does so in taking the place of yet another *tama* father, that of his *dala* headman (*wosimwaya*), who, upon succession to that position, becomes “father” to all those who share *dala* identity with him, including his *veyalela* as well as his *tubulela* kin.

I stress this latter point for later reference so as not to be misunderstood. When a person's senior male *dala* relative dies (e.g., an elder *luta* cross-sex brother, a *tuwa* elder brother, a *kada* mother's brother), the man who succeeds him to that position assumes the mantle, until he also dies, of being a *tama* “father” to his juniors, accompanied by all the analogous prerogatives, responsibilities, and authorities (*karewaga*) of natal fathers. According to the same logic, when a *dala* elder succeeds a deceased headman or chief, he also becomes a *tama* “father” to his same-*dala* kin, whether *veyalela* or *litulela*, who follow and expect to be looked after by him.

*Magical inheritance as quasi-suvasova incest*

In these contexts of pronounced *litulela*–*tubulela* relationship, there exists a persistent logical tension between, on the one hand, acts of implicit *suvasova* quasi-incest and, on the other, *kikila* restrictions that circumvent them. The payment of *pokala*, perhaps, best encapsulates this as an expression of the relation between magic and kinship. Were a man to pass his *megwa* directly to a sister's son, say, without going through the process of modifying the *kekwebu* components of their persons and relations—that is, of conveying from the uncle to the nephew potent *kekwebu* that they already share as *veyalela*—the transfer would amount to an act of *suvasova* transfer. By the nephew's payments of *pokala* to his uncle as though that man is a *tama* father, he effectively reverses the gendering signs by which he and his uncle can both internalize the same *kekwebu* of the spell without it being “incestuous” or “endogamous.” Through the giving of *pokala* to his uncle, the nephew as adopted son kills or de-conceives their prior maternal relation as a necessary preliminary to engendering in its place a relationship of fictive paternity. With the expedient of giving *pokala*, therefore, any *dala* junior can potentially receive items of magical or other *tukwa* wealth endogenously from his *veyalela* senior *as though doing it exogamously* (in sole reference to *dala* as “matrilineal”) as between a father and son.<sup>17</sup>

There are three principal categories of *tukwa* wealth over which *veyalela* men *pokala*. The first two are magical knowledge and land, the third one is their own persons and relations as defined by their shared *dala* identities. By the latter, I refer to the persons, spirits, and species of both the *dala*'s living, deceased, and immortal *veyalela* and *tubulela* members in both Boyowa and Tuma who are imbued with the same *kekwebu* and associated *peu'ula* powers as contained in the *dala*'s magical spells and ancestral lands. For living humans, all those items are *bomaboma* sacred and thus must be respected to the extent that, before they can be internalized, utilized, received, and so on, in the aftermath of conception and birth, they must be made free and open (*itugwali*). The exchange of

17. This account of magical inheritance via *pokala* applies only to spells transacted between men. The transfer of women's *megwa* is much less formalized than in the case of men's inheritance of either *megwa* or land. Women are not normally possessors of men's *tukwa* spells or “owners” of specific plots of land and so do not *pokala*. The daughter or niece who “looks after” her mother or auntie through *kaivatam* or *kipatu* gifting, particularly in the elder woman's old age, can expect to be given her knowledge of spells similarly to the bequests of elderly fathers to attentive sons.

*pokala* over magic and land achieves just this end; and because *pokala* involves issues over land and magic that are by definition *tukwa*, the participation of ancestral spirits is more or less automatically presumed. Yet, in part, *pokala* and the analogous devices I have outlined (e.g., residential patterns, *litulela*–*tubulela* relations, adoption, inheritance) achieve this in a way that is decidedly supra-sensible by activating the endogenous capacities of creating life as personified mythically in the exploits of *tosunapula* emergent spirits while simultaneously doing so through the feigned mediation of exogenous transmissions.

This more or less follows the same path of *baloma* agency as outlined in my discussion of *bwekasa* sacrifice: that is, of eliciting blessings from same-*dala* ancestors that, coming from Tuma beyond the bounds of Boyowa, enable living humans to avoid the deleterious consequences otherwise of *suvaso*—for example, eating the detachments of your own dead bodily labors independent of their having received Tuman spirits' blessings. Seen in this light, the patterning of interaction between persons located in distinct *dalas* and *kumilas* more or less parallels that between the inhabitants of Boyowa and Tuma.

### *SUVASOVA AND QUASI-SUVASOVA*

To reach this stage of comprehension, I have had to pursue an admittedly circuitous route touching upon and untangling many of the complicated and often countervailing implications of incest-endogamy and exogamy as expressed in a wide diversity of social arrangements. With most of these—taboo observance, the trick of marrying *tabu*, infant betrothal, marriage alliances in chiefs' families, adoption, *pokala*, and so on—the boundaries dividing the endogenous from the exogenous cross-cut the parameters marking the internal and external dimensions of persons' matrilineal identities: namely, *dala* and *kumila*. In some of these discussions, however, aspects of endogamy and exogamy pertaining to distinctions of rank (*ketota*) have also been mentioned, many of them implicating kin relationship and magical agency. Discriminations of rank such as those separating chiefly from commoner persons are of course partly expressions of kinship insofar as it is entire *dalas* as units that are so distinguished, whether matrilineally or otherwise. And in the case of paternal leaders and chiefs, metaphors of kinship encompass relations of rank. Consequently, magical knowledge and competence are unevenly distributed throughout the society in tight coordination with both rank and kinship divisions.

Ketota: *rank endogamy*

The interplay among these numerous factors of endogamy/exogamy is not linearly structured. Here I refer to how marital endogamy *as per rank* (combined with marital exogamy as per maternal *dala*) is most strictly focused at both the uppermost and lowest echelons of the social order. Excepting the polygynous political alliances arranged for cluster chiefs such as the Tabalu at Omarakana, there exists a strong preference for chiefly *guyau* men and women to intermarry. Previously this “preference” was more of the order of a requirement, at least for any person of *guyau* status who wanted to preserve his or her rank and that of his/her descendants. Then also, through history, the “outcaste” residents of Boitalu (Boytalu, Bwetalu) and Bau villages in the Kuboma district have supposedly for the most part married exogamously among resident *dalas* but endogamously within their local membership (Malinowski 1922: 67, 71, 411; 1932: 385, 420–21).

Neither of these cases is coincidental. The greater share of the archipelago’s most powerful and feared magic is concentrated in these two populations. The Tabalu are renowned as monopolizing the *ilamalia* and *molu* spells controlling agricultural abundance, droughts, famines, epidemics, and the *gubugwabu* and *tourikuna* magic over sun and rain. The peoples of Bau and Boitalu are notorious for being in traditional possession of the strongest *bwagau* sorcery (Malinowski 1932: 385, 420–21). In pre- and early postcolonial times, the Bau and Boitalu sorcery *torwosi* provided their deadly services so as to support the social order overseen by Tabalu and other chiefs. Accordingly, these two populations are similarly marked culturally through the observance of the most distinctive *kikila* food restrictions. Tabalu and the other high-ranking chiefs adhere to *kikila* taboos protecting their purity and cleanliness and avoid precisely those abominated foods which the residents of Bau and Boitalu are famed for consuming as *kikila* prescriptions (e.g., wild pig, stagnant water, bony fish, bush tulip, and, most particularly, stingray).<sup>18</sup> On these grounds, the Trobriand system of rank has been sometimes characterized as one of “caste” (Malinowski 1922: 41, 54, 62ff.; 1932: 68, 70; 1935a: 15–16; Campbell 2002: 42; cf. Uberoi 1962: 47). Beyond that, however, only the scarcest fragments of ethnographic

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18. All Kiriwinans other than the people of these two villages abominate the stingray (*va’i*, “stingaree”) as food. Bau and Boitalu peoples, however, reportedly distinguish themselves from other Islanders by their catching and eating of this delicacy (Malinowski 1922: 67, 1935a: 16, 34).

information pertaining to both of those arrangements have become available thus far.

As I have concentrated my field studies in villages of Northern Kiriwina, my knowledge of the Bau-Boitalu situation is very limited. I do have much new data to present regarding the circumstances at Omarakana, however, and I would not be surprised if similar arrangements obtained at Bau-Boitalu.<sup>19</sup> Regardless, what I have learned concerning the nature of chieftainship at Omarakana in both its magical and kinship dimensions as documented in the following pages constitutes a fundamentally different view of Trobriand social organization from that recorded by Malinowski and those who have come after him.

*The Tabalu/Osapola-Bwayadanga chiefly alliance*

What I have to report that is new focuses on the relations between the *two* highly ranked chiefs of Omarakana and the institutionalized relations between their respective *dalas*—the Tabalu of Malasi *kumila* and the Osapola-Bwaydaga *dala* of Lukwasisiga *kumila*, which I have had occasion to introduce already at several junctures. I expect it will come as a surprise to many anthropologists of Melanesia, Oceania, and elsewhere to learn that there is a dual chieftainship at Omarakana which predates the establishment of colonial domination. It is my hope that the following account of the structure of the Tabalu/Osapola-Bwaydaga alliance will shed new light not only on the nuances of endogamy and exogamy and their relevance to Trobriand leadership with its magical underpinnings, but also on analogous diarchic systems encountered elsewhere in the Austronesian sphere, most famously of course in Polynesia.<sup>20</sup>

As already summarized, Osapola-Bwaydaga's elevated rank is superseded in Boyowa only by the Tabalu, making it the second most high-ranking and important *dala* of Northern Kiriwina. Members of the two have been characterized

19. In colonial times, however, the site of Bau village, previously composed of two hamlets, was abandoned. Boitalu remains a robust community in its own right.

20. Many of the Austronesian-speaking societies scattered along the southeast coast of Papua New Guinea, at least those including the Motu-Koita peoples of the Port Moresby region and others to the northwest (e.g., Mekeo, Roro, Kuni, Kaebada), are traditionally organized in accordance with a division of chiefly authority between "peace" and "war." I interpret these to be culturally analogous also to the sacred versus profane connotations of the relation between Tabalu and Osapola-Bwaydaga, respectively.

as the most suitable for supplying each other's husbands and wives through arrangement by either *tabu-tabu* or *tama-latu* (i.e., bilateral cross-cousin) marriage. This special form of marital alliance (*veva'i*) is institutionalized as *gulangula* "sacred tradition."<sup>21</sup> The sons of marriages between senior Tabalu women and senior Osapola-Bwaydaga men can expectably be contenders for succeeding to the Tabalu chieftainship. Sons of Osapola-Bwaydaga women married to Tabalu men are likely to be principal candidates for becoming the next chief of their maternal *dala*, as is the case typically with other chiefly and commoner sons of the Tabalu chief's wives. And consistent also with the prejudice toward local endogamy, the Osapola-Bwaydaga sons of the Omarakana Tabalu occupy a special place in the village and perform various special offices on behalf of their father and their *tubulela* Tabalu kin led by their own Osapola-Bwaydaga *dala* headman.

Many of these factors were directly implicated in what was by far the most dramatic event to occur during Malinowski's stay: the quarrel in December 1915–January 1916 between To'uluwa's favoured Osapola-Bwaydaga son, Namwanaguyau, and To'uluwa's classificatory nephew and eventual Tabalu successor, Mitakata. At the time, Mitakata's Osapola-Bwaydaga wife, Orayayse, was To'uluwa's "daughter," Namwanaguyau's "sister," and Mitakata's father's sister's daughter (*tabu*) (Malinowski 1915–1918: 2/17: loose sheets; 1926: 102–5; 1932: 10–13, 85, 123; 1935a: 417; see fig. 8.2). Namwanaguyau accused Mitakata of committing incestuous adultery with his wife, Ibomala, a Tabalu woman raised in Omarakana and thus a closely related "sister" to Mitakata. Taking his complaint to the white Magistrate, Mitakata was jailed. In response, Mitakata's Tabalu brothers and others effectively banished Namwanaguyau and his Osapola-Bwaydaga cohort from Omarakana. They returned to their *dala* homeland at Liluta, some five kilometers to Omarakana's north, where Namwanaguyau eventually became the resident Osapola *guyau*.<sup>22</sup>

21. Evidently, there is no specific indigenous term to distinguish marriages of cross-cousins from other marital unions.

22. Malinowski's fieldnotes regarding the expulsion of Namwanaguyau read as follows, with the benefit of current Omarakana transcriptions of difficult/illegible entries:

Observations. Mitakata and Namuana Guyau). N.G.s wife had an intrigue, same lineage with Mit. N.G. was at that time in jail. A few days ago M. made attempts to have another connection with Ibomala. or as Aukai [?] thinks, Ibomala made attempts asking him for tobacco etc. N.G. summoned M. for adultery and M. got one month in jail. M. veiola [Tabalu kin] got very excited.

When Ibomala returned Bagid. made an impassioned speech: “N.G. your Iobala [*Iubola* brother-in-law] with your luboula taloula [*toliiu’ula* true brother-in-law] . . . M. has gone in the jail. Never mind that. You tell us: eat shit. It never happened before that a tokay has said that [N.G. said this to Mitakata, koma kam popu, your food is popu] this is very bad. “he did not actually iabi [send him away].” Uluweyaga, shrieked: “They push my husband into jail; we should do like them to send them into their own village osapola; let them get away from here.”

Nakaikuase [Mitakata’s sister] V, addressing Ibomala [N.G.’s Tabalu wife], said (with a fairly venomous voice): “Toulu is like your tamata taloula [*tama toliu’ula* true father, he could have adopted her, he was village father]. He gives you kuria [cooking pot] full of food. He gives you the Tabululu [*tabululu* best bits of pig]. You kusipuagega [?] widen spread your legs apart) over your kumkumla [earth] oven [commit *suvasova*]. Kula kukuam pualela [go eat wild fruits of the] weika [grove] umi [of your own] valu/village.”

Next morning N.G. took all his gugua [possessions] and he and his wife went away. It would be just out of the question for him to remain. Natives are unable to answer, “what would happen if he remained?” He could not remain [there would be a fight]. Toulu would not and could not get up and contradict Uruwaiaga [Mitakata’s brother], when this beabaged/kepabaped[?]. (other conflict before xxx pers. feelings which were with N.G. and bonds of kinship). [they have been doing this since, like his enemy]

N.G. was twice before i’ioba’d by the tabalus. One it was Kwaiwaia. There was a dispute about the canoe. Kwaiwaia have his opinion, which was contradicted by N.G. and Kwaiwaia i’ioba’ed [not i’abi’ed technically, but meaning telling him to go]. N.G. wanted a long canoe—pride in the carving and handling a long canoe? Kwaiwaia and Tokalibeku wanted, for technical reasons [they were suspected by the sons of Toulu of jealousy] a short [?]. [NG wanted the canoe to be big in size, Kwewaia didn’t want the big tree or canoe, the tree has holes in it and they wanted to make it a shorter sailing canoe. They could still decorate it. That was an earlier quarrel—Kwewaia and Tokalibeku both Tabalus]

In another case a baleku [garden] was cause of dispute. Babubulu cut his baleko previously. At the kaiaku [meeting], B. asked for his baleko, “bela i’amala bag i’iemi basise puaia” [avela bilai yamala meaning whoever puts his hand on the garden, bakikidemi I will damage his puwana penis, tear it apart]. [this man thought that this garden was his land, so he was expressing his anger at who tried to garden on his land]. Because his hand worked this ground”. [He is saying also that he and his *dala* had cleared land before, he’d been gardening on this land, he cleaned it, it had stones in it and bush trees, so no one else had gardened on this land. Whether he is an outsider or not, he did clearing so he has claim on it, so now he is complaining, regardless of land owners, they don’t have right to take this land]. Muaidailu Mwedeli [man of Lukwasisi *kumila*, kapwaini *dala*, the brother of one of the chief’s wives] wanted also this baleko [Toulu being the owner]. N.G. got it. Tubulibebu Tokwalibeba [a Tabalu man] heard it and got wild and he iabu’ed all the sons of Toulu. N.G. did not go to Liluta. (1915–18, 2/17: 1717–19)



This incident so deeply impressed Malinowski that it became the centerpiece of his exposition of the tension between father-love and mother-right. Even so, he was aware that the matter was equally political at base: “22.x.15 Namwanaguyau says that if he married Ibouma, he would share the rule with Bagidou—but this seems doubtful” (1915–18: 2/13: 1364).

Other investigators have provided additional comments (Baldwin 1949; Powell 1956: 94; Young 2004: 402), and the whole saga is still vividly remembered by senior Omarakana residents. For my purposes, the relationship between Namwanaguyau and Mitakata rather perfectly illustrates the special tie between Tabalu and Osapola-Bwaydaga in broader context, including that of the structural potential of rivalry and usurpation (*kobala*). In taking his first wife, Orayayse, from Osapola-Bwayada, his own father's sister's daughter as well as his mother's brother's daughter, Mitakata was practicing the special bilateral marriage relationship that is the basis of the Tabalu/Osapola-Bwadaga dyad. The ideal (i.e., official or principal) wife of the Tabalu chief is a woman of Osapola-Bwaydaga, just as the resident *guyau* of the latter *dala* should take his principal spouse from that of his father's *dala*, Tabalu. Thus Namwanaguyau's marriage to Ibomala conformed to the ideal pattern as well. This works out formally such that marriages between Tabalu and Osapola-Bwaydaga are at once between *tabu-tabu* cross-cousins and *tama-latu* fathers and daughters (i.e., both conforming to bilateral cross-cousin marriage). In the ideal case, moreover, the Tabalu chief is a son of the Osapola-Bwaydaga chief just as he is ideally a son of the Tabalu.

In the view of current Tabalu and Osapola-Bwagada residents of Omarakana, the dispute arose chiefly from Namwanaguyau's ambitions with his father's support to assume the Paramount Chieftainship in replacement of a Tabalu successor upon the death of To'uluwa, which did not eventuate until a decade later. It is claimed that To'uluwa passed on to his favorite son the full content of his magical knowledge, which was appropriate, but gave no signs for the eventual conveyance of that information to any of his potential Tabalu heirs. And Namwanaguyau, it is alleged, expressed no willingness to pass those *megwa* on to either Mitakata or any of his brothers, whether by *pokala* or other means.<sup>23</sup> Fearing that To'uluwa would have him killed by sorcery, Mitakata divorced his

23. The standard way for *veyalela* kin to retrieve magic from a *litulela* recipient of their *tukwa* spells who does not wish to give it up is to have him or his close relatives killed by *bwagau*. It is the threat of this eventuality which apparently leads magicians' sons to pass their fathers' spells along to their legitimate heirs once the latter have properly paid *pokala*.

first Osapola-Bwaydaga wife, Orayayse, whom To'uluwa had raised as daughter, fearing that she might poison him (i.e., Mitakata). By arranging to have Namwanaguyau banished and by marrying another woman of Osapola-Bwaydaga not closely tied to To'uluwa, Mitakata placed Namwanaguyau and his brothers in the position of *kaibasi*, requiring them annually to garden directly for him, thereby conceding Mitakata's and the Tabalus' ascendancy.

Father Bernard Baldwin, who established the first Catholic mission on the island a few years after To'uluwa's death and Mitakata's succession, has provided information given to him by Namwanaguyau well after the fact, which clearly verifies the main outlines of the current Omarakana account of Namwanaguyau's attempted *kobala* usurpation. Baldwin was plainly enchanted by Numwanaguyau's personal qualities and fitness to rule. Even so, interviewing Namwanaguyau, he observed,

Namwana Guyau was to the natives of the Trobriand Islands the typical grand seigneur. Tall, straight, with a striking and commanding countenance, his every waking thought seemed impregnated with the consciousness of his exalted position. No royal person in any civilized country could ever be so born up, with pride and personal consequence as was he. He lived in a world all his own, and none of the folk with whom he mingled would dream of saying a word to shatter that illusion. (1949: 8)

Two decades after the initial dispute, Baldwin recorded,

It is a matrilineal society and the succession is not to the son, but to the nephew, the chief's sister's son. This is the point of interest about Namwana Guyau. As a king disinherited he was more kingly than the holder of the office. All his pride and personal consequence froze, as it were, upon him, his conceit crystalized and became permanent and indestructible. . . . But he did not lose any time getting down to the great preoccupation of his life, the forlorn subject of what might have been. (1949: 8)

He had been at pains to ascertain that the great world outside was patrilineal, and had lived in lively expectation for years, that in his case at least, the white authority would step in and reduce to order, what a blind following of tribal tradition had reduced to chaos. . . . According to himself he did plead with the white magistrate to step in and decide the succession. The way the Trobriands are

today, this is quite unbelievable. But in the exceptional case of Namwana Guyau and for these times I can and do believe it. (1949: 8)

For the chieftaincy of Omarakana, Namwana Guyau was a monarchist as fanatical as there ever was. No one knew and appreciated more than he the powers and the prerogatives of that office. Claims by the way which outdo those of the Kings of Siam, and which they closely resemble. Claims, too, that must strain the credulity of the most devout believer, but which he believed passionately. It was a concept of something bigger and beyond Himself, his life's devotion, his very religion. . . . To Namwana Guyau's way of thinking, all this misery and loss of face could have been avoided by a declaration from the white magistrate, that the son of the chief shared the same blood as the chief equally with the children of the chief's sisters. And Malinowsky [*sic*] wondered why there were seethings when he brought up the question of physiological paternity. Obviously it was no less a political question then than it is now. (1949: 8)

There are other important structural dimensions to these relations between Omarakana's two chiefly *dalas*. The Tabalu's Osapola-Bwaydaga wife formally occupies a dual office herself. She is the chief's Vila Bogwa or "principal wife" (literally "old/great woman or wife") and thus is responsible for looking after her husband's other wives and their children, who are her *gwadi* children too. She is also titled and renowned as Inala Kilivila or "Mother of Kiriwina," the feminine counterpart to the Tabalu himself as Tamala Kilivila or "Father of Kiriwina." In olden times, she would sit as the lone female on the Omarakana cluster council and "council of allies" (*keyaku, kaidalala valu*), represented otherwise by the leaders and headmen falling under the Tabalu's authority (see below). If at the time he succeeds to the Tabalu chieftainship a prospective heir has not already married a woman of Osapola/Bwayada, this becomes his first priority. For if a contender to the Tabalu position is unable to secure a wife from Osapola-Bwaydaga owing to resistance on the part of the elders of that *dala*, he will normally be disregarded. The same requirement holds for the successor to the Osapola-Bwaydaga chieftainship based at Omarakana. He is expected to have as his principal wife an Omarakana Tabalu woman.

The Omarakana Tabalu chieftainship is premised ideally, however, upon reciprocal *bilateral* cross-cousin marriages with Osapola-Bwaydaga where successors take as their wives women who qualify as either father's sister's daughters, mother's brother's daughters, or both, whether actual or classificatory. This

special affinal tie between the Omarakana branches (*nunu*) of the two highest-ranking *dalas* of Northern Kiriwina forms the basis of the diarchic chiefly system mentioned above and in earlier chapters. Malinowski's, Powell's, and Weiner's ethnographies contain scattered references to this relationship at the core of the alliance, which Leach suspected and which I have summarized elsewhere (Mosko 2013b; see also Malinowski 1932: 84; 1935a: 85, 362, 364; Powell 1956: 50–51, 65, 69, 201, 496–99, 527–28, 561–62; 1960: 130–31; A. Weiner 1976: 201, 204; Darrah n.d.).<sup>24</sup> There is a span of residential space in the circular layout of Omarakana that is dedicated traditionally to and owned by Osapola-Bwaydaga and occupied by several of its male adult members and their families. The Osapola-Bwaydaga sons of Tabalu men reside in that section of the village away from the Tabalu's sons by other wives.

Omarakana's Osapola-Bwaydaga contingent is led by their genealogically senior male, the *luta* "brother" of the Vila Bogwa. He as well as other resident men share with the Vila Bogwa the title of Inala Kilivila "Mother of Kiriwina," even though they are males. The resident leader of the Osapola-Bwaydaga contingent, however, also holds in his own right the formal chiefly title of Katayuvisa "political" or "orator chief" (see chapter 6). Where the Tabalu is traditionally surrounded by numerous *kikila* restrictions which effectively sequester him most of the time on his ceremonial *ligisa* personal dwelling away from his following—e.g., his head must remain higher than others; he observes a much more rigorous dietary regimen than others; he eats in seclusion fed by ritual retainers; he has in his possession the most dangerous *megwa* of weather and

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24. Young (1971) and Damon (1990) have also presented data pointing to faint indications of a similar patterning of chiefly hierarchy on Goodenough and Muyuw (Woodlark) Islands, respectively. Liep (1991) and Young (1994) have argued that such cases are evidence of the "devolution" of Austronesian systems of rank in the Massim. Others (e.g., Macintyre 1994; Persson 1999), however, have suggested on other grounds that the emergence of chiefly hierarchy not only in the special case of Northern Kiriwina and particularly with Tabalu Omarakana but elsewhere in the Massim can be attributed to more recent influences of contact with Europeans. I have discussed similar historical developments among North Mekeo with respect to an inflation of chiefly and sorcery authority in connection with Western influences in the early phases of exogenous penetration (Mosko 1999, 2005a). Those influences alone, I argue, and ones which appear to have occurred similarly in the Trobriands, cannot explain the specific diarchic forms of chiefly ascendance which have undoubtedly emerged along convergent lines. One can only presume until demonstrated otherwise that there must have been cultural proclivities in place pointing in those directions from the start.

epidemic sickness; and so on—the Katayuvisa serves as a mediator between the Tabalu and the people. It is he who is entitled to communicate the Tabalu's wishes and directives to the rest of the community and to relay the concerns of the latter back to the Tabalu.

Where the Tabalu's sacred ritual status requires him to be accordingly passive in relation to other living humans—though he is decidedly active in relation to sacred beings of Tuma, the spiritual world, as he is the principal *towosi* magician acting on the local population's behalf—the Katayuvisa is comparatively active and secular. He is the Tabalu's principal advisor. Much of his responsibility involves leadership in the implementation as well as communication of the instructions given by the Tabalu. He is the Tabalu's official spokesman since the Tabalu rarely speaks in public, at least formally. Also, the Katayuvisa takes administrative and political charge of the affairs involving the village council, the Tabalu's "sons" and their families resident in Omarakana village, other villages of the cluster, and the rest of the island, all coming under the Tabalu's and his paired authorities (*karewaga*).

As I have suggested elsewhere, it is not too amiss to characterize the functions of the two resident chiefs of Omarakana as approximating those distinguishing the *ali'i* "sacred" and *tulāfale* "political" or "orator" chiefs of Sāmoa (Mosko 2013b; see also Shore 1982: 241–46; Tcherkézoff 2017). The division of ritual and political labor between the Tabalu and his Osapola-Bwaydaga-Katayuvisa counterpart, therefore, approximates the distinction between the sacred (*bomaboma*) and the relatively profane (*itugwali*).

While Malinowski and Powell recognized the high chiefly rank of Osapola-Bwaydaga, they tended in many contexts to lump the Osapola-Bwaydaga delegation at Omarakana with the Tabalu's other "retainers," "servants," and "vassals," who are generally of commoner (*tokai*) status, thereby eliding the Katayuvisa's distinctive and critical chiefly role.

However, there are a few passages in Malinowski's, Powell's, and Darrah's writings which do hint at a much more robust traditional politico-ritual organization surrounding the two chiefs that had diminished under colonial administration, or at least remained largely invisible to the exogenous government and mission authorities. Powell comes closest to an appreciation of the role of the Katayuvisa formal head of the permanently residing "cadet branch" of Osapola-Bwaydaga and thereby as official convenor of what Powell calls the Omarakana "Council of Allies." He writes,

The resident members of the Bwaydaga subclan together with one man who has been allowed by Mitakata as his personal retainer to build a house in the part of the village reserved for his affinal allies represent all that remains today of a body of resident representatives of the local groups of the Chief's affinal allies who, together with the headmen of the other villages of the Omarakana cluster, constituted in olden times a sort of semipermanent resident council which acted as a more or less informal advisory body to the [Tabalu] Chief, who had to consult it before he could initiate any major enterprise especially war, with any degree of certainty that his allies would support him in it. Its members also kept in close touch with developments in the relations between the Chief and other allied local groups by participation in or observation of events in the Chief's village, and could keep the headmen of the local groups represented by them informed of matters of interest, or summon them to participate in events of importance in which their presence was not required by the Chief, but by which their interests as his allies might be affected.

This body of resident affinal representatives of other village clusters than the Chief's had however no formal rights to intervene as a body in the internal affairs of the Chief's village cluster, though its members, like all wives' brothers, had individual claims upon the Chief personally. Its presence in the Chief's village, however, together with that of other persons, including his sons, who were dependent for their position upon him individually and could therefore be expected to take his part in possible divergences between himself and other residents in the cluster, was probably no less important, and may have been more so in practice, than the Chief's control of magic or sorcery in strengthening his personal power. This appears indeed in olden times, as Malinowski's and Seligman's accounts indicate to have been so great as to make his position in effect that of a more or less benevolent autocrat so far as the internal organisation of the relationships of the population of his cluster was concerned; nor was this apparently resented provided that he was a "good" Chief, provided that is that he employed his powers for the benefit of the group as much as for his own, keeping good order, settling disputes fairly and justly according to native views, using his wealth to help his followers in times of hardship and to underwrite or organise the public festivities and enterprises, e.g. Kula fleet expeditions, as was expected of him in normal times, and refraining from harsh extortion of wealth or services from them. If he was not a good Chief in these senses, sooner or later someone among his allies, perhaps at the instigation and certainly with the support of members of his cluster, would try to organise an armed revolt, or preferably to

arrange to have him poisoned or otherwise disposed of. Thus the presence of the representatives of the Chief's allies affected in practice the internal relationships at the political level of the cluster population, while in turn their leading subclan's affinal relation with the Chief affected the internal relationships of the clusters of his wives because of the importance of his marriages in the external relationships of the village cluster of which he was the leader. Nowadays, although the effect of European administration has lessened the advantages of having resident representatives in the Chief's village, the head and senior men of the clusters represented in his marriages still act as a council to some extent, meeting in his village where necessary to consider matters of importance in their economic and other relations with one another, and on some occasions in their relations with the Administration or the Missions. With the important difference of the absence of organised warfare, therefore, the structural significance of the Chief's affinal relationships remains. (1956: 496–99; see also Malinowski 1935a: 88; Lawton 1993: 98–99, 103)

The role of Katayuvisa, however, is not restricted to Omarakana village or cluster, for the resident *gumgweguya* chiefs and *tolivalu* leaders of many other communities are traditionally complemented by such a figure, nominally in the capacity of the headman of the *dala* from which the local chief or leader takes his wife or, in the case of polygynous chiefs, his principal wife.

The procedure at such a cluster council is essentially the same as at a village kayaku. Those primarily involved in the matter under consideration express their views or put their cases, others comment upon it, adduce evidence, quote precedents or traditions and myths of origin etc. wherever appropriate, according to the nature of the matter under deliberation, and finally the Chief, *traditionally through a spokesman*, calls upon the other headmen present to express their views in order of seniority, starting with the more junior and finally giving his own views which have the force of a decision or judgment. (Powell 1956: 488, emphasis added; see also E. Leach 1958: 145n)

As Darrah (n.d.) estimated, present-day Tabalu and Osapola-Bwadaga elders acknowledge that one of the ostensible purposes of the exceptional *veva'i* relationship between Tabalu and Osapola-Bwaydaga is to ensure that the knowledge of the Tabalu's distinctive magical lore is protected from obvious threats: for example, from being altogether lost in the event of a Tabalu chief failing to



pass it along to a successor, and from being diluted or contaminated by coming into the possession of persons whose *kekota* rank as conceived in terms of personal *kekwebu* images and powers fail to match the custom-tailoring shared by highest-ranking Tabalu and Osapola-Bwaydaga men.

Equally critical, the magical knowledge mainly at issue—the *ilamalia* and *molu* spells of agricultural abundance, drought, famines, and epidemics—is understood to lose its powers or efficacy (*peu'ula*) if passed to a Tabalu or Osapola-Bwaydaga man whose father did not identify also with either *dala* of highest rank. Such a man would lack the full custom-tailoring of the composition of his person that is required for him to utilize the chiefly *megwa* effectively. For this reason, I was told, the *tukwa* magical spells of a Tabalu or other chief are ordinarily never passed to a son or nephew whose mother or father, respectively, is not him- or herself of appropriate chiefly status.

*Chiefly suvasova and quasi-suvasova*

Now this specific manner of exchanging magical inheritance patrilineally in the first instance between Tabalu and Osapola-Bwaydaga directly parallels the ways discussed above by which villagers and especially chiefs reciprocally transmit the images and powers of their parental pedigrees; that is, to consolidate the advantages of quasi-incestuous or quasi-endogamous alliances while avoiding the ill consequences of *suvasova*. When a Tabalu chief passes his secret spells to a son of his own father's *dala* (i.e., Osapola-Bwaydaga), he not only secures economic advantages for him; he also safeguards his magical lore in the only person exogenous to his own maternally defined *dala* who is at once qualified to receive it and obliged to return it to the chief's successor upon his demise.<sup>25</sup> And as noted above, *pokala* given to a chief by a sister's son is a viable alternative for the chief to pass his magical legacy on to an adopted "son" as presumed successor.

But as Powell's account of the role of village and cluster councils implies, the choice of a dead Tabalu's successor is made by the collectivity of leaders headed by the Katayuvisa. It is he, under the advice of other council members, who arranges the polygynous marriages of the new chief, including that to the Vila Bogwa hailing from his own *dala*. And who other than he, as son of and *litulela*

25. This rationale does not contradict that proposed by Edmund Leach (1958: 139), wherein neither the chief's son nor his heirs become political subordinates to each other through "*urigubu*" exchange.

to a recently deceased Tabalu, is better qualified to have in his temporary trust the sacred magical knowledge on which the survival of the total society, indeed the cosmos as Trobrianders understand it, depends?

Of course, as Malinowski and Powell have remarked (see also Lawton 1993: 99, 100, 104, 105; Darrah n.d.), Osapola-Bwaydaga have proved to be not only the closest allies of the Omarakana Tabalus, but at several historical junctures their fiercest rivals, having in several instances attempted to usurp Tabalu predominance by *kobala*. And sharing in the knowledge of the sacred *tukwa* of Tabalu *dala*, they have been ideally positioned to do just that. According to current Omarakana elders, as summarized above, the cause (*u'ula*) of the dispute between Namwanaguyau and Mitakata during Malinowski's time was To'uluwa's desire to position his son as his successor as Paramount Chief. To block that enterprise from eventuating, Mitakata intentionally committed adultery with Namwanaguyau's wife, thereby forcing him to relocate in shame to his home village, Liluta. Although Namwanaguyau had obtained To'uluwa's magic, so had Mitakata from his own Osapola-Bwaydaga father, Yowana (along with Tabalu elders besides To'uluwa), who was To'uluwa's Katayuvisa. Appropriately, Yowana is still remembered as the most accomplished Katayuvisa in postcontact times.

Additional relevant instances of *kobala* usurpation involving Osapola-Bwaydaga attempts at subverting Tabalu chieftainship transpired in connection with the Kabisawali Movement of the 1970s (Beier 1975; Jerry Leach 1978, 1982; Gerritsen 1979; May 1982). Key leaders of Kabisawali in league with the Tabalu's traditional Toliwaga rivals were the highly accomplished Tubwana-Kwenama chief, Narabutau, of Yolumgwa village and his Western-educated sister's son, John Kasaipwalova. At the time, the Omarakana Tabalu chieftainship was in a weakened condition—Mitakata's initially chosen successor, Vanoi, was challenged by his Tabalu nephew junior in rank, Waibadi, the son of a *tokai* commoner father, seeking to become a second "Paramount Chief" on grounds of possessing superior force (see chapter 7). That was an act of *kobala* on its own. According to current Tabalu, Osapola-Bwaydaga, and other witnesses, Narabutau's and Kasaipwalova's efforts constituted a double *kobala* aimed at arrogating the position of their superior-ranking fellow Kwenama *dala* kinsmen based at Omarakana (i.e., Osapola-Bwaydaga) as well as the Omarakana Tabalu chiefs. Lacking access to the superior weather magic of their Omarakana rivals (among other reasons), however, Kabisawali eventually collapsed, leaving its Kwenama leaders defeated and failing to unseat Daniel, the Osapola-Bwaydaga Katayuvisa at Omarakana. When Narabutau eventually paid customary compensation

for the confusion he had wrought, he declared publicly that never again would his branch of Kwenama seek to overtake his Omarakana superiors.

*Chiefly quasi-endogamy*

For those readers conversant with the political dynamics of chieftainship in Polynesian societies and other divine chiefdoms and kingdoms as famously described by Hocart, Goldman, Valeri, Sahlins, and others, many of the nuances in the relations between Tabalu and Osapola-Bwaydaga that I have described should seem more than vaguely familiar. I am primarily interested here at the close of this chapter, however, in commenting on the ways that Trobriand kinship, specifically the management of chiefly maternal and patrilineal *dala* affiliations and the *kikila* restrictions upon recursive intermarriage according to rank, articulate both with the structuring of endogamous and exogamous transmission of magic and with the performance of magic itself. By the various devices I have outlined thus far, it is as though chiefs, in seeking to avoid *suv-asova* incest and endogamy as defined in the terms of their culture, have settled upon seemingly paradoxical arrangements that are themselves quasi-incestuous or quasi-endogamous and thereby to that extent *bomaboma* or sacred in character. Of particular note, the *megwa* intended for inheritance as *tukwa* within a *dala* must be first passed to a relation *beyond it* before the magic can reenter, but he who first receives it is a partial *dala* affiliate (i.e., *litulela* “man’s child”) in any case. This is a consequence of the joint transmission of *both* parents’ maternally identified *dala* images and powers to each of their children. The marriages of a Tabalu man to an Osapola-Bwaydaga woman or a Tabalu woman to an Osapola-Bwaydaga man produce children whose *kekwebu* images and *peu’ula* powers are duplicated or compounded. This would amount to sibling incest *except* that the redoubled personal components of each child are conceived as not being the result of intra-*dala* transmission along matrilineal lines of connection. They have been acquired by inverse pedigrees. What one child has taken from its mother the other has received from its father, and vice versa. The resulting relations between the marital couple in terms either of *tabu-tabu* or *tama-latu* as regards sexual intimacy and marriage thus mirror *suv-asova* while at the same time avoiding it—an arrangement not structurally dissimilar to that between Boyowa and Tuma.

One of Malinowski’s more famous and perduring theoretical insights was that a people’s mythological traditions provide ideological charters for their

ritual activities. In light of the pervasiveness of the themes of both the avoidance of and near indulgence in incest and endogamy in the realms of indigenous magic and kinship most explicitly expressed in the Tabalu/Osapola-Bwaydaga alliance, it seems appropriate to reflect back on the myth of the creation of the Trobriand cosmos. All began with an androgynous divinity of dual personhood, a male and female who were both brother and sister and husband and wife. From their sexual congress *and* their separation, the rest of the universe and all its inhabitants were born. The time in which their sentient human offspring have lived since then has been marked by eras best typified as extrapolations of the opposed relations between the primordial divinities. In the initial phase immediately following the moment of *bubuli* creation, immortal *tosunapula* ancestors generated children quasi- or asexually: that is, orally. Afterwards, given the inevitability of death, human males retained those capacities of quasi-sexually recreating *megwa* children while women acquired the substitute way of reproducing human offspring in the alternate manner of the primal gods: that is, sexually. In their magical, ritual, kin, and marital arrangements as living embodiments of Topileta and Tugilupalupa, therefore, Tabalu and Osapola-Bwaydaga together personify the multifarious ways of life obtaining between the *baloma* of material Boyowa and those of spiritual Tuma.

Viewed in the abstract from this perspective, the patterning of exchange that typifies the relations between Tabalu and Osapola-Bwaydaga as simultaneous kin and affines replicates those predicated in magical performances and other modes of *bwekasa* sacrifice between living humans and *baloma* spirits. In each case, on the one hand, paired exogenous realms are poised *against* each other—as per Malasi versus Lukwasisiga *kumilas*, or sacred Tuma versus profane Boyowa. On the other, members of any of these spheres are simultaneously constituted through endogenous, quasi-incestuous identities and interdependences *with* its opposite. The two Omarakana chiefly *dalas*' magical and marital reciprocities as between distinct (i.e., matrilineally) unrelated *kumilas*, in other words, are the visible analogues of the invisible life- and death-giving transactions between the mirrored, separated realms of Boyowa and Tuma. This is so even while Boyowan Tabalu and Osapola-Bwaydaga persons are as mutually constituting of each other as living humans are with their coparticipating *baloma* ancestors of Tuma. The ways of *baloma* spirits, *sikedakeda baloma*, are no less than the ways of living people, and vice versa.



## CHAPTER NINE

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### Conclusion

#### *Analogy, homology, and changing ways of baloma*

In light of the previous chapter's final assertion, my selection of the two anomalies in Trobriand ethnography that have animated this work—the puzzles over magical efficacy and kin relationship—have proven to be neither arbitrary nor coincidental. The ingredients and efficacies of *megwa* and the composition, constraints, and capacities of kin relations are fundamentally the same, modeled on each other: namely, *kekwebu* images and associated *peu'ula* powers of which villagers, *baloma* and other spirits, and all the other death- and life-forms of the imagined cosmos are composed. It is in terms of differing constellations of *kekwebu* and *peu'ula* that relations among animate beings are predicated and shaped. Prior reports of the relatively autonomous existence of *baloma* spirits and of their living *dala* human descendants in magical and other ritual contexts, on the one hand, and blanket characterizations of the Trobriands as a “matrilineal society,” on the other, have been rooted in the same complex of ethnographic misrecognitions—basically, the elisions of the partible character of personhood as pertaining to both humans and spirits; of the detachability and transactability of the components/relations of those persons; of the critical marking of the parts of persons in terms of their sacred and nonsacred inflections additional to their gendered male and female identities; of the coparticipation of humans and spirits in each other's lives; of the recurrent interpenetrations of Boyowa and Tuma; and so on.

Recognition of the composite character of Trobriand persons, however, has facilitated a radical ethnographic reconfiguration of numerous dimensions of Trobriand thought and sociality, many of which have long been taken to be unproblematic, others of which have been perceived as anomalous. The most prominent of these would include: the logic of magical performance; the ubiquity of the base-body-tip-fruit scenario of ritual agency and reproduction; the resolution to the quandary over paternal versus spirit involvement (i.e., “virgin birth”) in procreation; the pervasive sacrificial character of human-spirit, Boyowan-Tuman interactions, sexual intimacies, and familial interdependences; the logic of totemic affiliations; the patrifilial composition of political organization at village and regional scales of community; the paternal character of local and chiefly leadership; the dual constitution of *dala* identity via *veyalela* and *litulela/tubulela* affiliation; the abrogation rather than the extension of kin and affinal relationships through mortuary de-conception; the presence of two countervailing cycles of reincarnation between Boyowa and Tuma involving masculine- as well as feminine-marked components of deceased persons; the reciprocal sacrificial provision of life between ancestral *baloma* and humans mediated by death; the logic underpinning *bomala* taboos, *kikila* restrictions, and *suvasova* incest prohibitions as well as the nature of their violation; the tendency for magical spells and other wealth nominally identified with *dala* to be transmitted patrifilially to men’s sons in preference to rightful maternal heirs; the logic of rank and hierarchy; the patterning of exogamous intermarriage; the diarchic structure of Omarakana politico-ritual organization; and the quasi-incestuous, divine character of chiefly marriage and alliance.

I take these insights into Trobriand culture and sociality to be so many indices of the substantial theoretical advance that anthropology has achieved since Malinowski’s pioneering efforts a century ago. However, I use that term “advance” guardedly. The chief innovation that I have implemented is grounded, first, in the adoption of the NME perspective on personal partibility and sociality, which is of relatively recent vintage. But, secondly, I have expanded the range of dividuality to incorporate elements additional to gendered male and female: namely, those marked in the indigenous magico-religious and kinship realms as the sacred and the nonsacred, secular, or profane, which have long figured centrally in much anthropological theorizing. By this latter measure, the range of “persons” accredited with agentive capacities is extended to *bilubaloma* spirits, a cultural premise in accord with Lévy-Bruhl’s revised and long-neglected theory of participation. Thus in the numerous ritual and other interactive contexts I



have described, Trobriand Islanders, along with their *baloma* ancestors and the other spirits of their traditional pantheon, qualify as *divine* individuals.

In the view of many anthropologists, Durkheim's treatise on religion premised on the sacred/profane opposition has been regularly singled out as the foundational text of our discipline. Whether or not the sacred/profane divide is accepted as of universal applicability, it is certainly relevant that the publication of *The elementary forms of the religious life* ([1912] 1915), which Malinowski (1914) reviewed shortly before initiating his Trobriand fieldwork and which specifically outlined Durkheim's orientation to social as opposed to psychological facts, provided him (i.e., Malinowski) with one of his perduring theoretical foils (e.g., [1916] 1992: 274; [1925] 1992: 54, 57; 1935b: 236; 1939). On this evidence, it is not too extreme to suggest that Malinowski's critique of Durkheim's strongly society-focused thesis of collective representations significantly influenced his contrarian methodological allegiance to individualist pragmatism (see, e.g., Young 2004: 140, 238–41). If anything, therefore, I present the analysis of Trobriand customary life contained in this volume as a (partly) Durkheimian-inspired rejoinder to Malinowski and other "individualism-thinkers" as much as a demonstration of the benefits of the theoretical premises of the Newborn Melanesian Ethnography.<sup>1</sup>

On the point of theoretical novelty when viewed from this angle, Viveiros de Castro's (2009) intuiting of connections between magic and kinship strikes me as not too far afield from Durkheim's original postulation of the mutually constitutive relationship between "religion" and "society." Magic and religion, of course, have as much to do with the sacred as kinship and society have with the social. But also, I think, the exposition of an intrinsic connectedness between Trobriand kinship and magic exemplifies Marilyn Strathern's (2014) more contemporary discussion of how kinship "relations" themselves are recapitulated in the relations of kinship to the "conceptual worlds" (inclusive, that is, of magic and religion) with which they coexist.

Given the extent globally of anthropologists' longstanding and detailed familiarity with Trobriand ethnography, I trust that the ethnographic

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1. I am fully aware of the antithetical posture of Strathern's (1988: 3–4, 12–15, 66–70, *passim*) modeling of Melanesian sociality as opposed to conceptions of "society" in the manner of classic Durkheimian sociology, as well as to the sort of "individualism" espoused by Malinowski. However, given her inspiration in the Maussian theory of gift exchange and for other reasons, in my view her theorizing shares vastly more in common with the former than the latter (and see below).

reinterpretations that I have offered will be sufficiently convincing that they will draw some readers closer toward the theoretical perspectives on which this investigation has been based. If a culture as thoroughly studied and described as the Trobriands can yield substantially different and hopefully plausible new understandings, this ought to lend credence to the synthesis of partibility and participation that I have recommended.

By now there have been numerous reports of personal partibility in a wide selection of societies worldwide, including some dimensions of Western culture.<sup>2</sup> Already there are many Melanesianists and others who have moved in this direction, going so far, at least, to concede the relevance of the “relational” dimension of indigenous sociality, if not going the full distance of acknowledging the applicability of partibility and/or participation. More problematic, it seems to me, there are many more who remain strongly resistant to analytical challenges to the contrary premise of indigenous Melanesian personal “autonomy” and “individuality” discussed in chapter 2. One of the more egregious elisions of NME partibility theory and that of human-spirit participation in contemporary scholarship of the region, I suggest, is encapsulated in the concept of the “relational-individual,” as has sometimes been applied to indigenous modes of personhood (e.g., A. Strathern and Stewart 1998, 2000, 2008b; LiPuma 2000; Robbins 2004, 2007; Sykes 2007). The alternations between states of “individuality” and “relationality” posited by this notion basically reinscribe the conventional contrast between the “individual” and “society” that features as Strathern’s principal target of critique in *GOG*, while eliding any consideration of the dividuality and transactability of Melanesian persons and their parts. But if seemingly self-evident instances of individual “autonomy” in the Trobriand case as posited by Malinowski, Weiner, and others have been shown to entail, instead, systemic dynamics of personal partibility, then what of other societies in Melanesia and other parts of the Pacific or beyond which have been similarly construed as either “individualist,” “relational,” or both without further conceptual elaboration?

At several junctures, I have been led to posit comparative similarities between the cosmological, ritual, and social universe of Trobriand Islanders and

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2. Personal partibility has been reported from numerous regions beyond Melanesia: e.g., India (Marriott 1976), Native Alaska (Fienup-Riordan 1994), Africa (Bastide 1973; Coleman 2011; Daswani 2011, 2015; Klaitis 2011; Werbner 2011a, 2011b), Amazonia (Vilaça 2011), Europe (Coleman 2004, 2006; Formenti 2004), Aboriginal Australia (Keen 2006), and Polynesia (Mosko 1992). Sahlin (2013: 10) has himself also conceded partibility’s prominence in kinship generally.

that of two Austronesian populations: North Mekeo and Polynesia. I can write with greater confidence about parallels to North Mekeo because of my experiences in conducting ethnographic research there on similar topics. Some of the correspondences are probably not all that surprising, such as the intimate connections between magic and kinship through the coparticipation of villagers, ancestral spirits, and deities. Others, though, are for me particularly striking. Views of procreation, despite superficial appearances of difference, are remarkably similar. North Mekeo is no more flatly a “patrilineal society” than the Trobriands is a “matrilineal” one. There are clans and lineages (*ikupu*) to which persons are recruited at birth through affiliation through their fathers, but during their lifetimes people are identified with the same class of units on complementary matrilineal “women’s children” (*papie ngaunga*) grounds in exact mirror reflection of Trobriand “men’s children” (*litulela/tubulela*) affiliation. In the course of life, North Mekeo engage intensively in relations of both sorts, and in the event of death they, like Trobrianders, are ritually de-conceived from their cognatic pedigrees. By these mechanisms, patrilans and patrilineages momentarily recapture or return to the autochthonous powers of their initial spirit ancestors (see Wagner 1974), who, incidentally, also mythically emerged from a precultural, strictly masculine, patrilineal underground (cf. Scott 2007a, 2007b). North Mekeo have their own mythical counterpart to Topileta and/or Ikali’i Tudava in the demigod Akaisa, who bequeathed to the people their customs, including the rituals of death that reinvigorate life and the dual chiefly structure of sacred “peace chiefs” (*lopia*) and political or profane “war chiefs” (*iso*) (Mosko 1985). North Mekeo rituals incorporate elements of sacrificial exchanges with ancestral spirits closely approximating Trobriand *bwekasa*, and their marital arrangements possess implications of exogamic and endogamic relationship simultaneously. Moreover, in numerous contexts of postcontact change, I have tried to demonstrate how the partibility and transactability of North Mekeo persons, human and spirit, have been pivotal (Mosko 1999, 2001, 2002, 2005a, 2010b, 2013a, 2015b). Seen in this perspective, the trope of mirror imaging is one not limited to comparisons internal to the Trobriand cosmos but may well be characteristic of many cross-cultural differences across the wider region.

Similar correspondences and differences possibly arising from ancient ancestral connections between the Trobriands and Polynesia have long been suspected without consensus as to their significance. As evidence: the Austronesian botanical metaphor of base–body–tip–fruit; the operation of Trobriand analogues to Polynesian *mana*, *tabu*, and *noa* (i.e., *momova*, *bomala*, *itugwali*);

the cognatic structure of social organization; the divine character of chieftainship; and accordingly the tendency toward chiefly endogamous or incestuous marriage. The mythical origin of the cosmos in the copulation of the primal gods and the diarchic character of the Tabalu/Osapola-Bwaydaga alliance at Omarakana paralleling that of sacred and political chiefdoms of Sāmoa and other archipelagos can now be added to that list. And at a number of junctures, I have noted parallels between the Trobriand and Polynesian elaborations of kin classification whereby nonagnatic kin are classified as “fathers” and “sons” and “daughters,” and where “husbands” and “wives” comport themselves as “brothers” and “sisters.” Following from the latter arrangements, Trobriand and Sāmoan sociality exhibit features of “quasi-incest” and/or “quasi-endogamy,” particularly in reconciling genealogical with residential entitlements. The division of Sāmoan *’āiga* membership into *tamatāne* (“descendants of founding ancestors’ brothers and sons”) and *tamafafine* (“descendants of founding ancestors’ sisters and daughters”) finds analogous expression in the complementary *veyalela* and *litulela* affiliations of Trobriand *dalas* and, I suggest, both in the pattern of intermarriage between Tabalu and Osapola-Bwaydaga and in the division of ritual labor between the authority (*karewaga*) of *gumgweguya* chiefs and the counseling function of their Katayuvisa advisors. On these and additional grounds, it seems to me difficult to draw a line separating the two regions aside from the matter of language difference (cf. Sahlin 1989; Thomas 1989).

The correspondences between *bwekasa* rites and the complex of ritual transformations between “purity” and “impurity” identified by Valeri (1985) in ancient Hawaiian kingly and other sacrificial rites is to me the most unanticipated connection between the Trobriands and Polynesia. Although Valeri described the lineaments of Hawaiian sacrifice before the NME had congealed, it takes little imagination to see in the sacrificial participations between the people and their divinities the contours of divine individuals and the reciprocal giving of life and death. Valeri’s model of Hawaiian sacrifice involves a dynamic where persons, groups, and gods alternate between conditions of “lack” or “incompleteness” and “completeness.” The state of lack is one of imperfection or disorder (i.e., “impurity,” “taboo”) which in partibility terms would translate as the loss or detachment of some integral part of the person. The person in such a condition is specifically lacking “communion” with his group or god. Through his/her offering, its incorporation in the god and the receipt of the god’s reciprocation, the sacrificer is “purified, or “[made] into a new person. . . . The part that is detached

from the god” and consumed by the sacrificer and his fellows restores communal relations between them (ibid.: 70–72, 87–88).

The Hawaiian case parallels the Trobriand in one key respect particularly. Valeri focused upon Hawaiian sacrificial dynamics centered on the offerings presented by divine kings and chiefs, but he also outlined how sacrifice was an essential component of virtually all contexts of sociality (ibid.: 37–83), much as I have reported for Trobriand reciprocities, whether involving living people, *baloma*, or both, most notably in the sharing of daily meals and the new year celebrations of *milamala* and *makahiki*.

To the extent, therefore, that the Trobriands as described by Malinowski and amended by others have stood as a kind of benchmark for assessing similarities and differences within Melanesia and across the Pacific, I am hopeful that the revisions of that body of ethnography contained in this volume will assist future investigators in their comparative deliberations.

This volume’s traversing of the connections between Trobriand magic and kinship has made possible the integration of a large range of additional indigenous conceptualizations, practices, and relations, as listed above. It seems appropriate at this stage to reflect upon the coherencies of the total exercise. The common denominator of Trobriand thought and sociality is clearly the notion of *kekwebu* “image” with *peu’ula* “powers” or “capacities” that attend every instance of it. On that count alone, as Viveiros de Castro has posited for magic and kinship generally, Trobriand procreation ideas, sacrifice, taboo observance, marriage regulation, mortuary practice, chiefly organization, and all the rest, can be viewed as analogues or models of one another. As villagers move from one context of activity to another—i.e., from one act of giving to receiving or to returning—the unfolding of social life, I suggest, amounts to a string of enacted analogies mutually propelling each other. If so, then the vitalities intrinsic to the NBME synthesis of partibility and participation are of an order that belies the criticism that has been routinely leveled against the NME: namely, its supposedly inherent synchrony and absence of dynamism.

## ON CHANGE AND ITS PART(ICIPATIONS)

This last point begs the questions of the relevance of partibility and participation to poststructuralist theory and the topic of social change. I address these briefly in turn.

In my own view, if *kekwebu* and *peu'ula* are the elementary units of Trobriand thought and sociality, then it is *bwekasa* as “sacrifice” which ultimately impels their articulations and transformations in any number of contexts. I take *bwekasa*, in short, to be decisive for the present exercise, just as I think it is in Trobriand social life and, yes, indigenous ontology. The stream of sacrificial analogies that I have traced through the dynamics of personhood, participation, agency, exchange, reciprocity, recursion, and so on, exemplify, for example, numerous dimensions of Viveiros de Castro’s broad formulation of poststructuralist anthropology in his essay “The metaphysics of predation” (2014: 139–49). There he frames his concept of perspectivism as an expansion or extension of Lévi-Strauss’ (1966: 223–28) classic structuralism; in particular, the paradigmatic contrast between “totemism” and “sacrifice” as expressive of the distinction between metaphor and metonymy, respectively.

Viveiros de Castro adduces the difference between the two as follows:

Totemism postulates the existence of a homology between two parallel series—natural species and social groups—and does so by establishing a formal, reversible correlation between them qua two systems of globally isomorphic differences. Sacrifice postulates the existence of a single, at once continuous and directional series through which a real, irreversible mediation between two opposed, nonhomologous terms (humans and divinities) is carried out; the contiguity between the series is established through identification or successive analogical approximations. Totemism is metaphor, and sacrifice metonymic, the first being “an interpretive system of references,” and the second “a technical system of operations.” One belongs to language, and the other to speech. (2014: 144–45; see Lévi-Strauss 1966: 224–25; cf. Mayblin and Course 2014)

According to these definitions, both totemistic and sacrificial series figure prominently in Trobriand thought and action, but not in my view exactly in the manner postulated by either Lévi-Strauss or Viveiros de Castro. On the one hand, while there is a “totemic” scheme of classifying distinctions among non-human animal (and plant and other natural) species in parallel with *dala* and *kumila* divisions, the homologous patterning of the mirror worlds of Boyowan humans and Tuman spirits itself qualifies, at least in strictly formal terms, as being “totemic,” even in the substantive absence of coordinate animal species differentiations. The two realms are paradigmatic, *reversible* metaphors of each other. Although these two parallel, mirroring series of differentiation are

occupied by beings mutually defined as “human,” their respective characteristics are systematically distinguished as inverses of each other (visible/invisible, material/immaterial, above/below, hot/cold, outside/inside, etc.).

Yet, on the other hand, it is those very totemic discontinuities separating Boyowa from Tuma that also facilitate the syntagmatic mediating acts of *bwekasa* sacrificial exchange in all their variety so as to bind the two together. But does this relationship of Trobriand spirit totemism and sacrifice not also capture the logic of the chiasmatic structure through which Wagner links magic and kinship: that is, magic granting people the illusion of control in areas that are beyond their normal means of control; kinship providing the illusion of uncontrollability in areas that are normally assumed to be under strict control (see chapter 1)? Appropriate metonymic tokens of the persons of Boyowa are given as elicitation for the reciprocation of corresponding *but inverted* components of the sentient beings of Tuma. For without either, *momova* in all its richness in both realms, as Trobrianders understand them, would cease.

Now Viveiros de Castro concludes his exegesis of totemism and sacrifice noting that the latter awaits a “deconstruction” analogous to that which Lévi-Strauss performed with respect to the former.

The story of how totemism was unmade by Lévi-Strauss is well known: it ceased to be an institution to become a method of classification and system of signification referring to natural and contingent series. Would it be possible to rethink sacrifice along similar lines? Would it be possible, in short, to see the divinities functioning as the terms of the sacrificial relation as being as contingent as the natural species of totemism? What would a generic schema of sacrifice resemble if its typical institutional crystallizations are only one of its particular cases? Or, to formulate the problem in language more sacrificial than totemic, what would a field of dynamic virtualities be if sacrifice was just a singular actualization of it? What forces are mobilized by sacrifice? (2014: 148)<sup>3</sup>

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3. In his Marett Memorial Lecture, Adam Kuper (2012) goes even further:

The anthropology of religion: a sacred space, occupied by myths, taboos, idols, and sacrifice. Even the most secular and skeptical anthropologists accepted the parameters. They might argue about whether the distinctive feature of religion was belief or ritual, and what, if anything, distinguished religion from magic, but despite a succession of paradigm changes, the field—and its subject-matter—remained remarkably stable for 150 years. Yet surely its analytical core, the very notion of religion, is ripe for deconstruction .



The theoretical approach to the Trobriand case that I have pursued here may well provide tentative answers to these questions. First of all, the very sequential ordering of the reciprocities of generic Maussian gift exchange, through the detachments and transfers of the tokens of transactors' persons, is premised on the metonymic logic of sacrifice. This is formally true also of the dynamic of specifically gendered agency in Marilyn Strathern's model of Melanesian dividuality. By expanding the scope of components constitutive of indigenous Trobriand personhood to include relative divinity, the full range of transactions between partible persons residing in both Boyowa and Tuma through *bwekasa* add up to nothing less than so many instances of sacrifice in the classical sense. Any one occurrence of *bwekasa*, in other words—meal sharing, magical enactment, sexual intercourse, laboring, *milamala* performance, personal correctness, exogamous or endogamous intermarriage, etc.—is just one of its “typical institutional crystallizations” enchaind with others over the course of extended social interaction. And to the extent that each instance of such activity unfolds according to basically the same scenario of *u'ula*, *tapwala*, *doginala*, *keuwela*, together they trace out an extended process of fractal recursion or self-scaling.

Following this reasoning, Trobriand culture and sociality can be seen as a *totality*, with *bwekasa* sacrifice as its *undeconstructed* master trope.

There is another way of conceptualizing all that has been covered when viewed from an alternative perspective, however. Reflecting back on Lévi-Strauss' juxtaposition of totemism and sacrifice, the former consists in an homology between two series of differences—for the Trobriands, between the Tuman spirit world of *bilubaloma* and the human world of Boyowa—whereas the latter involves a series of acts premised on analogies connecting the agents and patients residing separately in the two realms. In this perspective, the stream of actions which constitute movement from one *bwekasa* event to another add up essentially to what Wagner has characterized as “analogical flow” or the “flow of analogies.” Here, “all modes of ‘relating’ are basically analogical” (1986b: 34).

The flow of analogy [read “*bwekasa*”], the interrelation among known, conventional relationships, articulates their sequentiality and significance in terms of cultural conceptions of generation, nurturance, or whatever other terms the myth of life might assume. The flow itself may be dealt with, in part, through the modes and protocols in which people relate to one another—taboos, avoidances, joking, reciprocity—but its major symbols are usually those of bodily substance, spirit, or lineality. Understood as a native model of analogic flow, these symbols

have less the character of “beliefs” or supports of a “structure” than that of motifs of a myth. (1986b: 34–35)

It is through sequences of such operations, both metaphorically modeling and metonymically instigating each other, I suggest, that the continuities and discontinuities between the two realms of Boyowa and Tuma are motivated, established, and maintained. The force propelling that flow, in Trobriand terms, is nothing less than *movova* “life” inclusive of the living and the dead.<sup>4</sup>

As regards the possible deconstruction of sacrifice, I suggest, on the basis of the ubiquity of *bwekasa* in Trobriand social life, that Wagner’s notion of analogic flow achieves just this. As he has recently put it, “Would not the wizards of the *Année Sociologique* be surprised to discover that all of their favorite conceptual glosses like ‘sacrifice,’ ‘prestation,’ ‘ritual,’ and ‘symbol’ could all be covered by a single broad-scale analogy?” (pers. comm.).

## PARTIBILITY, PARTICIPATION, AND POSTSTRUCTURALISM

As for the dynamic roles of partibility and participation which have dominated this exercise and the question of social change, I return to a point raised briefly in chapter 1—the abiding criticisms leveled against the NME as to its perceived applicability to synchronic, nonchanging systems only and its consequent inability to address processes of sociocultural transformation. For some (e.g., Robbins 2007), the NME personifies the sort of “continuity-thinking” that has dogged the profession since its founding.

After having reinterpreted Trobriand culture and sociality with the aid of the NBME, I formulate the issue this way: Which ethnographic beginning point for the Trobriands—the one currently enshrined in anthropology’s disciplinary paradigm more or less along the parameters set in Malinowski’s views of magic and matrilineal kinship, or the one outlined here through the lenses of partibility and participation—is likely to provide clear reference points for discriminating phenomena of “change” from those of “continuity” in the

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4. Scoditti’s (2012) analysis of the aesthetics of canoe carving on Kitava Island in terms of logarithmic “spirality” can be provisionally interpreted as a further instance of the analogical flow from which, as I have outlined, other dimensions of indigenous sociality spring.

first place? And secondly, which ethnographic theory of the endogenous dynamics of Trobriand culture is likely to prove most apropos for retracing the routes of social transformation that Trobrianders have traversed over the past century-and-a-half?

Before any instance or degree of change can be comprehended, it seems to me simply logical that the nature or state of that which is undergoing the change *at the outset of its unfolding* be understood as completely as possible. Only then, I argue, is it possible to discriminate between phenomena manifesting either “continuity” or “change” and to assess the theoretical concepts that will appropriately account for both. But even then, exactly as Sahlins (1985, 1993) has long argued, it is typically through the reproduction of continuities that historical changes are effected, and similarly how transformations inevitably map out reproductions. If there is any empirical merit to be found in the conceptualizations of Trobriand personhood and sociality that I have outlined, then those readings have everything to do with efforts to comprehend the character of social and culture life in the Trobriands today. As I have argued elsewhere in relation to numerous contexts of North Mekeo and Trobriand change and other Melanesians’ conversions to Christianity, the dynamics of NME personal partibility and NBME divine dividuality can profitably be seen as central axes to processes of social transformation (see Mosko 1999, 2001, 2002, 2010b, 2014a, 2015b, 2015c).

## CHRISTIANITY AND *BILUBALOMA*

The conversion by now of most Trobrianders from their indigenous magico-religious orientations to various sects of Christianity in the aftermath of contact with the West can be taken as illustrative of this claim.<sup>5</sup> Traditional *megwa*

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5. It should be noted that members of my research team participate in community-based church activities, although they profess and exhibit in behavior different degrees of allegiance. I have come to take their knowledge of *gulagula* as giving them an exceptionally keen sense of the similarities and differences characterizing the two religions. However, their grasps of the ideological tenets of Christianity, as impressive as they are, tend to be less complete than those of some local converts, and particularly church leaders. On the other hand, many persons in the latter category at Omarakana and elsewhere in Northern Kiriwina, especially among the youth, by now lack deep knowledge of their cultural traditions. I am currently conducting a new research project focused on Christian conversion as a transformation of the indigenous system of magic and kinship as outlined in this volume.

practices and the cosmological understandings that underpin them, along with their counterparts in Christian ritual and dogma that have seemingly replaced them, can, I trust, be taken as parallel manifestations of “sacredness,” if not also of “religion.” And in not altogether dissimilar ways, both Trobriand and Christian communities provide clear examples of “kinship” inclusive of spiritual as well as human beings and relations. The assessment of the changes that Trobrianders have experienced over the course of converting to Christianity, in other words, is thus most suitable for assessing the relevance of the portraits of the previous and ongoing situations that I have presented in preceding chapters.

By the time of Malinowski’s arrival in 1915, Trobrianders had been subjected to Christian missionization for more than two decades. Soon after the first Methodist station was founded at Losuia in 1894 on the southern lagoon, led by Rev. Samuel Fellows, a second station had been established in the outskirts of Omarakana, staffed initially by Fijian missionaries.<sup>6</sup> So Christianity, or *tapwaroro* as it is still known today, was not an entirely new phenomenon to villagers even in Malinowski’s time.

Malinowski’s first impression was that Christianity was generally antithetical to Trobriand culture:

As to the danger of their views being modified by missionary teaching, well, I can only say that I was amazed at the absolute impermeability of the native mind to those things. The very small amount of our creed and ideas they acquire remains in a watertight compartment of their mind. ([1916] 1992: 252)

On the assumption that Trobriand society was distinctly “matrilineal,” Malinowski later speculated that Christianity’s intrinsic emphasis upon God the Father made the two fundamentally irreconcilable.

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6. As Young (1998: 266) remarks, Malinowski mentioned only once and in passing (1922: 302) that there was a Fijian mission teacher based at Omarakana during his residence. The “despised [water]hole” from which Malinowski obtained his fresh water for drinking and cooking (1935b: 433; see Chapter 1) was in fact the one dug by Fijian missionaries just outside the village perimeter less than 50 meters from Malinowski’s tent. It is of interest as well that the land on which the Mission was established is named after a Boitalu sorcerer, Mogiyoisi, who was killed there. This land, as well as that where Malinowski pitched his tent while living in Omarakana, is associated with sorcery (see Mosko 2013b).

We must realise that the cardinal dogma of God the Father and God the Son, the sacrifice of the only Son and the filial love of man to his Maker would completely miss fire in a matrilineal society, where the relation between father and son is decreed by tribal law to be that of two strangers; where all personal unity between them is denied, and where all family obligations are associated with motherline. We cannot then wonder that Paternity must be among the principal truths to be inculcated by proselytizing Christians. Otherwise the dogma of the Trinity would have to be translated into matrilineal terms, and we would have to speak of a God-*kadala* (mother's brother), a God-sister's son, and a divine *baloma* (spirit). . . . The whole Christian morality, moreover, is strongly associated with the institution of a patrilineal and patriarchal family, with the father as progenitor and master of the household. In short, a relation whose dogmatic essence is based on the sacredness of the father to son relationship, and whose morals stand or fall by a strong patriarchal family, must obviously proceed by confirming the paternal relation, by showing that it has a natural foundation. Only during my third [i.e., his second to Kiriwina] expedition to New Guinea did I discover that the natives had been somewhat exasperated by having an "absurdity" preached at them, and by finding me, so "unmissionary" as a rule, engaged in the same futile argument. (1932: 159; see also Austen 1945: 34)

But elsewhere Malinowski observed that even in his time converted teachers were recruiting local *torwosi* magicians to perform the magic of gardening for the sake of their agricultural fertility (1935a: 63).

Several previous ethnographers have provided brief commentaries on various details concerning the general progress of Christian conversion since Malinowski's time, but none have pursued the topic in depth or the implications of conflicting principles of descent (with one exception; see below). Even so, some of these reports are revealing of ways in which elements of Christianity have been adopted by Islanders.

Austen reported that before World War II, the missionaries were encouraging converts

to forgo the employment of the *torwosi* (garden magician) as the outward expression of their acknowledgment of God's rule in this sphere. If the *torwosi* can, in carrying out his duties, acknowledge the rule of God, we would welcome his activities. To this end we have urged Our people to choose leaders who, working with the village chiefs, should conduct some form of worship in the gardens in

connection with the various gardening operations. It is very necessary that there should be a leader, and as far as I can gather this dual leadership is workable, the chief calling in selected Lay Preachers, or if the latter are not available, the native mission teacher, to carry out some form of worship, while he (the chief) directs operations. In some cases, the offices would both be held by the same man, who would be the chief of the village. (1945: 46–47; and see below)

From this and other evidence, it is clear that the early missionaries were quite aware of the indigenous view that *bilubaloma* were regarded as the chief agents of gardening and other *megwa*. If the power of magic was supposedly derived simply from the words of spells, indigenous ritual experts would not have posed quite the challenge to conversion that the missionaries perceived. It is interesting also that at this fairly early stage, the missionaries' proposal of substituting preachers for *torwosi* to work with chiefs reproduced some elements of the diarchic pattern of local chiefly authority (see chapter 8).

As of 1950, Powell noted that Christianity was “a phenomenon unrelated in native eyes to real life, *except insofar as it has become the focus of exchanges in the typical Kiriwinian manner*” (1950b: 12, emphasis added).

When it came to more expressly religious attitudes, Powell represented a more complicated situation:

The Mission Church has become merely another sphere within which traditional Kiriwinian social mechanisms operate. At the same time, the beliefs and interest in the traditional indigenous mythology has [sic] been largely lost through derision and ridicule in the Churches, and to some extent, replaced by more or less garbled version of *Biblical myths, which are regarded in much the same way as were the native*—interesting fables which serve to explain origins of unusual objects or phenomena and so on, and which pleasantly while away a tired evening, but of no very great relevance to daily living. It is significant, I think, that *myths, which have a direct bearing on affairs, such as the myths of first emergence, are as alive as ever, and that comparable tales in the bible are often compared with and explained in terms of these, both in and out of the pulpit*. (1950b: 14, emphases added)

Rev. Ralph Lawton, a long-time Superintendent Minister in charge of the United Methodist Church on Kiriwina beginning in 1961, observed more than four decades after Powell the continuation of the arrangement noted by Malinowski. He is more explicit on points of religious syncretism, however:

Magic holds a strong place in Kiriwinan culture, being employed at all stages of the gardening cycle to promote garden fertility and reduce theft, and also in connection with sickness and its cure, success of fishing and trading expeditions, and in the daily concerns of birth, community relationships and death. Its hold is not as strong today, and in some places the village pastor has taken the place of the *towosi* “garden magician”, holding a ritual Christian act of worship in the garden at the beginning of clearing activity. There are some interesting instances of syncretism between the old and new ways. Black magic, or death sorcery, still holds considerable power and is concerned with manipulating the dreaded *bogau* spirits and the *mlukwausi* “flying witches”; supreme power in this area is the traditional preserve of the *Tabalu* chiefs. (1993: 4; see also Austen 1945: 46–47; Campbell 2002: 179)

Conducting fieldwork in the early 1970s, Susan Montague was surprised by the extent to which Kaileuna Islanders had professed to embrace Christianity along with other tokens of modernity—more so by that time, in fact, than among Kiriwinans. But she was equally struck by how the converts had so seriously “misunderstood the basics of Christian theology,” construing it along with Western culture generally “in Trobriand terms” and deploying it “as a new arena for playing Trobriand games of life” (Montague 1981: 19). For example, Kaduwagan converts attained inner strength through engaging in personal relations with God as substitutes for the traditional procedures of performing *meguwa* magical spells (see below).

From Kitava Island, Giancarlo Scoditti reported in the same period that Christian prayers were being enveloped in the manner of ceremonial *wosi* singing previously performed in celebration of renowned *baloma* spirit ancestors. Here, interestingly, “it is the style of performance that predominates, producing its fascination and magical effect. The [Christian] ‘content’ of the prayer is forgotten” (1996: 48).

More recently still, Katherine Lepani observed on Kiriwina, “For more than 150 years, Trobriand society has mediated and absorbed the Western influences of colonization, Christianity and the cash economy with remarkable resilience” (2012: 4).

The church has a central presence in Trobriand villages and provides an important organizational framework for numerous community endeavors. The majority of Trobriand villages are member congregations for the United Methodist



Church. Several villages are solely or predominantly Catholic, while two villages are Seventh-Day Adventist. Over the last two decades, Pentecostalism has been introduced in some villages by Trobrianders returning home from urban centers, but the initial popularity of evangelical forms of worship has not had a lasting appeal for most people. *Christianity has syncretized with Trobriand cosmology, including beliefs about the supernatural powers of witchcraft and sorcery. While the church holds a moral authority in the lives of the people, Christian doctrine has not suppressed customary practices or supplanted cultural ideas of sexuality, nor has it generated a repressive attitude to sexuality.* (2012: 6, emphasis added)

The linguist Gunter Senft, who has had a long career of Trobriand research and thus far studied local Christianity most closely, noted, similarly to others, that on Kaileuna Island in 1983, “Christians still lived in an interesting form of syncretism that combined traditional belief in magic and Trobriand Island eschatology with Christian ideas” (2010a: 89, reference removed). On a second visit in 1989, though, he reported that a bifurcation had developed between the traditional religion and Christianity. The split was not absolute, however. Church leaders, mostly of low traditional rank, had come to usurp the ritual functions previously monopolized by respected *torwosi* magicians, who in the past, at least in chiefly villages, were typically *gumgweguya* chiefs.

Senft’s assessment of the predicament faced by the missionaries is virtually the same as Malinowski’s:

The insightful master of Trobriand ethnography was completely aware of the processes of culture change the missionaries had to induce in Trobriand society to achieve rank—and thus power. Probably the most important problem for Christian missionaries was to introduce and explain the concept of Jesus Christ being God’s son to members of a matrilineal society, in which a father is by no means related to his children. (1997a: 48)

And with this view of pre-Christian kinship in mind, Senft has described what he has taken to be a transformation among converts from matrilineality to patrilineality (ibid.: 48–49). He bases this claim on his observation in 1989 that school children were using their father’s personal names as “surnames” rather than drawing upon pools of hereditary (i.e., maternal) *dala* names. However, this pattern of appending one’s father’s personal moniker from the hereditary names of *his dala* in line with patrifilial *litulela*–*tubulela* affiliation long predates

the arrival of Europeans (see also A. Weiner 1976: 126). To take the example of the Omarakana Paramount Chief, Pulayasi Daniel, “Daniel” is the personal name by which his father was widely known and hence was transmitted to him soon after his birth in the late 1940s.<sup>7</sup> Senft’s diagnosis of this practice as indicative of a major change simply follows from his preconception of local social organization in terms of strict matrilineality, following Malinowski—that children’s fathers are “strangers” to them and share “neither kin nor clan relation with, and thus no direct control over, their children” (1997a: 48–49; see also 1992: 74–75).

So which of the two ethnographic baselines at issue are going to be the most illuminating for analyzing local processes of Christian conversion? Those pre-NBME premises concerning intrinsically matrilineal indigenous sociality where fathers are *tomakava* to their children, or one where fathers and paternal kin viewed through the lens of partibility and participation are seen as critical sources of children’s social and spiritual identities and powers? Where preexisting magical spells and associated rites are efficacious independently of *baloma* or other spirit involvement, or where virtually every interaction in a society largely governed by gift exchange is construed as reciprocal sacrifice with the life-giving participation of spirits?

To be clear, I am in no way denying the extent to which Trobrianders’ lives have changed as a result not only of Christian missionization but also of colonialism, capitalism, commodification, electoral politics, formal education, and so on. It is just that efforts to document the character and scope of those changes must be informed by the most credible accounts available of the preexisting ethnographic circumstances as well as the subsequent historical developments. Only then can the magnitude and content of the transformations be accurately gauged.

In support of this claim, I submit the following materials gathered from a variety of contemporary sources pertaining to Trobrianders’ conversions to Christianity as appraised against the account of the indigenous magico-religious system portrayed in previous chapters. The overwhelming majority of

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7. This practice is additional to that mentioned by Weiner where persons take on personal names from the *dalas* of both mothers and fathers. It is noteworthy that among the “patrilineal” North Mekeo, personal names are not considered to be possessions analogous to *tukwa* among Trobrianders; however, everybody’s second name or “surname” is the personal name of his/her mother. If, for example, my name is Maka (Mark) born of Mangemange, I am known as Maka Mangemange—a mirror image of the Trobriand pattern.

Northern Kiriwina villagers today profess to be Christian. Their conversion from the old to the new religion is described in the same terms of *vakalova* adoption as between families, extended kin, and *dalas*. And similar to the pattern of indigenous *vakalova* described in the previous chapter, for many Islanders (i.e., mainly non-Pentecostals), they do not see this shift as amounting to a complete break or rupture with the past.<sup>8</sup> As with the personal adoptions made at weaning, whether involving persons of the same or distinct *dala* identities, converts maintain relations with both their natal and adopted orientations and/or churches. Kin belonging to different congregations support each other in formal annual competitive *semakai* “tithing” responsibilities. *Semakai* collective donations are organized for all denominations in the aftermath of harvest, which is precisely the time that villagers traditionally paid their annual garden “tribute” to their local leaders and chiefs. *Semakai* gifting to Yaubada (God) is nowadays done in the name of the church, closely aligned with the person of the local pastor and/or minister. And perhaps most noteworthy of all, the extent to which the indigenous religion and Christianity are similarly premised on principles of systematic sacrificial reciprocity with ancestrally related divinities affirms the profound continuities attending the historical facts of conversion, regardless of the unequivocal pronouncements of some believers.<sup>9</sup>

One of my Christian interlocutors elaborated on his views of the dynamics of sin, confession, and redemption in terms that closely approximate those of indigenous *bwekasa*.

Sins [*mitugaga*] are dirty [*pupagatu*] to us, but clean [*migile'u*] to Yaubada [God].  
If we give Him our sins, it means we have come to Him, accept Him. This way

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8. This is not to deny that interfaith relations are sometimes as fraught as those between people of different families and kindreds.
  9. Robbins (2010: 243), among others, has disputed my claims (Mosko 2010b; see also 2015b, 2015c) on this point as pertaining to the nature of cultural and social changes typically involved in Melanesians' conversions to Christianity. In his view, if converts testify that their personal experience of conversion has involved a complete rupture with the past, their views must be respected as being analytically sufficient. But certainly there must be allowance for a distinction between the views of our anthropological subjects as ethnographic *data* and what the ethnographer makes of those facts *analytically*. Americans, for example, typically characterize their way of life in terms of “equality,” “freedom,” “individuality,” and so on, but do such pronouncements qualify as adequate social-scientific portrayals of the nature of their society and citizens' actual circumstances?

God and people are harmonious with each other. In return for giving our sins to God, He *seki* (gives) us blessings [*bobwelila*]. He forgets [*ilumwela*] the sins, He cleans them away. To forget, that means they are gone. (Fieldnotes extract, August 25, 2013)

This exchange between sinners and their deity is not merely one between individual actors, but recapitulates several dimensions of collective agency in the traditional system:

[During services], everyone must put their thoughts [*nanamsa*] and feelings [*lumkola*] together to make an *ikuli* [single form], put their faith (*dubumi*) together to make the Holy Spirit make an *ikuli* to come down upon them. The power of the Holy Spirit descends as an *ikuli* when the group is united [*komomla boda*]. If some are thinking or feeling other things, the Holy Spirit won't come, just wasting time. The joining of the meditation song ["quiet" or "soft hymn"] which is soft [*manu'm*] and the words of the preacher which are loud [*tiganini*], it is like male and female compatibility (*iwaki*). They are harmonious to each other, and that is an *ikuli* that will go to God. This is a *kaliai* too, an *ikuli* that has *peu'ula*. So this pattern of singing and praising and praying fits with the idea of *dubumi* (belief, faith) being unified thought and feeling, but for the group of people, as well as each individual. If one person is not unified, then there is no *iwaki*, no *kaliai*, it is *kaligeya'i*, and God will turn His back or not listen, no *ikuli* to come from God to the people of Holy Spirit. (Fieldnotes extract, August 25, 2013)

It is widely accepted as a noncontroversial fact that the historical arrivals of the missionaries amount to acts of *kobala* "usurpation" introducing change into villagers' lives. *Kobala* attempts by rival leaders to abrogate the powers and authorities of their superiors, however, have figured importantly in indigenous sociopolitical processes and organization independent of contact with Western outsiders. Numerous villagers nowadays acknowledge that the pastors of many churches—the overwhelming majority are men coming from commoner *tokai* stock—have effectively assumed positions in relation to their followings modeled in many respect on that of *gumgweguya*.<sup>10</sup> The one woman pastor of whom

10. By way of comparison, both of the Catholic catechists who have served their village over the course of my North Mekeo fieldwork are installed local land-owning peace chiefs. In Sāmoan villages studied by Tcherkézoff (2017: 22, 30), Protestant

I am aware—the unmarried, middle-aged head of an Omarakana Pentacostal congregation—identifies herself as like a *tama* father to her following.

Whether or not converts consciously recognize the fact, their Christianities are strongly inflected by and syncretized with the preexisting understandings as regards ancestral and other spirits' participation in the people's indigenous activities and relations. None of the local Christians or even their leaders with whom I have consulted, including the local "fundamentalist" Pentecostal pastors, deny the ontological existence of *baloma* and other indigenous spirits as powerful beings, albeit there are various opinions as to whether or not they are entirely "evil" (*gaga*), malevolent "devils." It is frequently argued that the larger share of the magical lore appealing to *baloma* in the past that is condemned by some church leaders was morally positive or good (*bwena*) in supporting the lives of the people—*megwa* for gardening, fishing, good weather, childbirth, curing, courting, protection against sorcery, and so on.

Virtually all Kiriwinan deaths that take place nowadays continue to be interpreted by devout Christians and others as the result of "sorcery" (*bwagau*) produced by magicians' manipulation of evil *baloma* spirits, now often identified with "Satan" and "devils" of the Christian pantheon. In cases of serious illness caused by suspected sorcery at Omarakana and other villages, patients and their families typically first consult local "curers" (*toyuvisa*), whose efficacy is attributed to spells and other practices oriented toward *baloma* spirits. Only later do villagers tend to consult church deacons and pastors for spiritual healing purposes, and typically those are conducted much along the lines of indigenous curing rites with prayers substituting for *megwa*. Typically, only as a last resort do patients present at the Island's health centers.

Men from across the island who nominally affiliate with one another church still regularly visit the current Paramount Chief with requests for traditional magical assistance. When in 2010 the critical burnings of the gardens that

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pastors are normally appointed to serve in communities where they are recognized as outsiders. It is unclear, however, whether pastors typically hail from low- or high-ranking families ('*āiga*). Most interestingly, though, Sāmoan male clergy are ceremonially granted the honorific *feagaiga* or "sister" to the village in complement to the local *matai* "father" chief(s)—a Polynesian arrangement similar to that between local Trobriand chiefs and their "orator" or "political chiefs" (*katayuvisa*) identified as "father" and "mother", respectively, of their communities (see chapter 8). Interesting as well, female *matai*, while few in number, stand as "fathers" to their family members.

initiate the annual agricultural cycle across Northern Kiriwina were delayed for well over two months owing to unrelenting rain, on September 13 the men of Kabwaku village led by their Toliwaga chief, Toguguwa, came en masse to Omarakana with a substantial payment (*sosula*) to induce Pulayasi to use his traditional *gububwabu* and *tourikuna* spells to bring the sun to dry out their gardens.

Sergio Jarillo (pers. comm., 2013), who has recently conducted field inquiries in the vicinity of Yalumgwa village, reports that the modern-day carvers of utilitarian and decorative wooden objects for sale to tourists, even when they entreat Christian spirits, employ traditional magical techniques of attraction to seduce potential buyers, including European tourists, into purchasing their wares. He also describes the practice of reciprocally exchanging between congregations sermons based on biblical scripture (*katupela guguya*) as a transformation of the traditional system of exchanging *kula* wealth: “Local ministers are the ones who tend to highlight the identification between *kula* and *katupela guguya*. To do so, they use metaphors and reify the word of God by comparing the passages of the Bible to *kula* valuables” (2015).

According to one of my knowledgeable informants, with *katupela guguya* and sermonizing generally,

The purpose of the preaching is to form an *ikuli* in a person’s [i.e., listener’s] mind so that with the *ikuli* there also in his/her feelings or emotions (*lumkola*), he/she will act the new way. So the preaching is just like a *megwa*. And the *guguya* [advice, sermon] as *megwa* has the words of God Himself, but also the words of the Bible have the words of ancient people dead now, so they are like *tosunapula* . . . people with the power of words only. But the New Testament is about Jesus who had a human father, so there was intermarriage going on, so that is like the stories of *bilubaloma* after settlement. The idea of Mary being opened by Holy Spirit would correspond with her body being opened enough to conceive a child. Jesus or Mary conceived the child from Holy Spirit, so that is why we have Tudava who killed Dokanikani, so Tudava’s mother conceived the child from the dripping in the cave, that is, without sex, so that makes sense. So the dripping water was like the Holy Spirit. (Fieldnotes extract, August 25, 2013)

As noted in chapter 3, during the 2007 and 2012 national elections, several leading political candidates confided to me that they regularly use traditional courting and attraction *megwa* (*kemwasila*) when seeking the favor (i.e., votes) of voters. As I have recently described also (Mosko 2014a), cultural innovations

such as men's gambling with cards beginning early in the colonial era have adapted indigenous magical practices of courting, *kula* exchange, and warfare in appeals to ancestral and Christian spirits for support in winning, despite the objections of church leaders.

For several years earlier this decade, male and female Omarakana youths ("prayer warriors") adopted all-night versions of the rites of warfare previously conducted by village soldiers in preparation for the next day's battles.<sup>11</sup>

Sunday services of the dominant United and Catholic churches and most Pentecostal gatherings are attended overwhelmingly by women and children, while the men who continue to monopolize traditional *megwa* tend to stay away. Not coincidentally, male gardeners and fishermen who profess to be nominally Christian, and even a few pastors and deacons, tell me they still practice their private spells appealing for *baloma* aid, sometimes also petitioning Yaubada (the Christian God), Jesus, or other figures of the Christian pantheon with *megwa*-like "prayer" (*nigada* "begging").

The decoration of the dominant United Methodist Church and Catholic Church buildings across the Island typically incorporate symbols representing traditional institutions and practices. Images representative of *gumgweguya* chieftainship are particularly pronounced (fig. 9.1).

The words of the Bible are regarded as the words of God Himself and thereby analogous to the creative verbalizations of the *tubu daiasa* and *tosunapula* of indigenous cosmogony. Those words and pastors' and penitents' prayers are seen as possessing *peu'ula* powers of the same nature as magical spells—the effective ones are *yuviyavi* "hot," the ineffective ones *tula* "cold." Similarly to *megwa*, pastors' sermons are "hot" or effective if enunciated correctly and "cold" and ineffective if poorly delivered. The potent sermons are understood to change people's minds in much the same manner as *megwa*: that is, by instilling new *ikuli* forms and images in hearers' thoughts so as to steer them away from their sinful ways and toward new Christian paths.

My collaborators Pakalaki and Molubabeba are quite confident about the roughly parallel mechanics of indigenous *megwa* and Christian prayer. Quoting from my fieldnotes of a conversation with them together,

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11. These warrior rites were suspended once it discovered that some of the mixed adolescent participants sharing sleeping quarters in the United Methodist church building were availing themselves of the interludes between praying to court and, in some instances, engage in sexual relations.





**Figure 9.1.** United Methodist Church Sunday prayer service. The ornate carvings are those traditionally used for decorating the personal dwellings and yamhouses of installed *gumgweguya* chiefs only. In several Roman Catholic churches I have visited on the Island, miniature versions of these chiefly insignia (*koni*) are used to decorate the tabernacle containing the Holy Eucharist. Omarkana village (2010).

So the *baloma* of *gulangula* is the same thing as *baloma* to the Christians. In both cases they live forever, except for *kosi*.<sup>12</sup> And with *pupagatu* (“dirtiness”), it can spoil the *baloma*. When you are living, you get *pupagatu*, you are *komsugwaia* (“polluted”). It is the same with Christians. When they sin *mitugaga*, they are *pupagatu* and *komsugwaia* because their prayers won’t work; they are *tula* (“cold”). So for our prayers to be *yiviyavi* (“hot”), you have to be *migiel’u* (“clean”) and then your words will be *yuviyavi*. With *megwa*, you have to have the words exact. With praying you can make up your own words. But the idea in prayer (*nigada*), you first call God, that is *u’ula*, but you must follow the procedures how you are going to *nigada*. First you call God, that is *u’ula*, then is adoration, confession, thanksgiving. These are three main steps. Sorry, there is a fourth step in the *nigada*, sacrifice, sacrifice. Adoration you express your praise of God. Then second you confess, *kamatula*, admit of your wrongdoings, breaking of your *kikila*. Then comes thanksgiving, you thank God for His kindness, what He has given you, like food, your life. Last one is supplication (the real request, the *nigada* to God). You ask God to help you to supply you more, asking God to do something good for your future. Those are the four main principles of praying, like steps (*kedakeda*).

So using *u’ula*, *tapwala*, *doginala*, and *keurwela*, adoration is *u’ula* when you call God and acknowledge Him, praise Him. That is *u’ula*. Then there is *kamatula* “confession.” Confession is like *bwekasa*, because you are trying to win their hearts, and you have done wrong, and you are asking them to assist you. Even though He did the thing, He broke *kikila*, He still remembers us so we will listen to Him with *bwekasa*, and leave our *bubwalua* on the food.

[Pakalaki:] Sometimes Christians confess from the very beginning of the process through worship and praise, this is part of the *u’ula* and part of the adoration. Confession and adoration can go together.

[Molubabeba]: Not many people are doing these steps. Each will come up with his own steps, *simuli* (“plan,” “strategy”). It still covers the same ideas as *megwa*. Each prayer puts in his own words, but should follow the steps. They don’t go in the same sequence as *megwa*, but if you look at them, calling God, adoration, *kamatula*, thanksgiving, and the supplication. (Fieldnotes extract, August 25, 2013)

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12. *Kosi* are the *baloma* spirits of recently deceased evil persons such as sorcerers who are rejected by Topileta from entry into Tuma. In most accounts, they are transformed into large fish which eventually die and rot, preventing their reincarnation back into Boyowa.

In another conversation with my team members, it was remarked that Christian repentance over sins that results in one's rebirth in this life is like the way *bilubaloma* spirits in Tuma periodically shed their aged skins either to become youthful and clean (*migile'u*) or to turn into *waiwaia* spirit children.

In sermons, the Old Testament prophets and kings are often likened to the mythical *tosunapula*, and ancestral *baloma* to angels and devils, although this is recognized as posing a perplexing dilemma. On the one hand, where the biblical patriarchs reproduced sexually, the *tosunapula* did so asexually; on the other, it was the Holy Family of the New Testament of Jesus, Virgin Mary, and Joseph who were chaste in their relations, unlike postsettlement ancestors and Islanders. And in that context God's Holy Spirit is seen as the Christian counterpart to cave water that dripped onto Marita's womb and opened it up for the Ikuli Tudava's conception. Contradictions in Islanders' beliefs about Tuma and Heaven have been another source of puzzlement.

The United Methodist Church minister and theologian Rev. Ignatius Ketobwau (1994), seeking to resolve these enigmas, argues that their solution lines in his deduction that Jesus must have been a Trobriander. And if that is taken as true, then Trobrianders have always been living at least partly in the light.

Finally, the sacrificial character of much Christian ritual with its reliance upon notions of the partibility and transactability of the components of persons, both human and divine (see Mosko 2010b), has not been lost on Islanders. In one conversation among many on this topic with my team members, I asked if Christians do anything like *bwekasa*. Molubabeba answered,

When you choose a paragraph [of the Bible] to preach on, you offer it to God to give you back wisdom for when you preach. So that the wisdom He gives back is His *bubwalua* with His *bobwelila*, and then you share that with others. This will widen your knowledge when you ask God to give you wisdom, to be fed good words to preach to the people. So it is not just your own words but God's words through the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit is God's *bubwalua*. And that *bubwalua* has God's *peu'ula*, just like with *bwekasa*, *bubwalua* of the *bwekasa*.

When God forgets your sins, they are *pupagatu* to you, but when they go to God in Heaven, they are *migile'u* to Him, He wants them, and then as *migile'u* they don't spoil Him, like they do humans in Boyowa, they are pleasing to God, God *magila* ["likes"] the sins, they are pleasing acceptable to Him. That is why God did not punish you when you sin, He is waiting for you to confess and repent, then He can get the sins that He wants. He doesn't want to kill you right

away, He wants to give you the opportunity to confess to Him because then it is *sekiseki* [reciprocity] with His sacrifice of giving His son to bear the sins. That is the blood of Jesus to wash away the sins. (Fieldnotes extract, August 25, 2013)

In view of the several correspondences that I have listed, and particularly this last one, I suggest, first, that the Christian innovations that Trobrianders have fitted into their contemporary experience are best seen as further enhancements to or enchainments in the analogical flows that have characterized their indigenous relations and lives. And I suggest, second, that other dimensions of postcontact transformation which have accompanied Islanders' conversions to Christianity—commodification, colonialism, electoral politics, formal education, egalitarian gender ideologies, Western medicine and legal institutions, and so on—cannot be accurately gauged without a sound grasp of the dynamics of partibility and participation inherent in their indigenous sociocultural precursors, where concerns over magic (or religion) and kinship have been predominant.

Of course, this is not all that is required to account for the course of change in any specific context. But neither can the attentiveness to endogenous understandings of personhood, sociality, and cosmology be dismissed as items of merely antiquarian ethnographic interest or as irrelevant to Islanders' contemporary lives. Even in their currently transformed guise, the ways of *baloma* remain as pertinent today as they were in Malinowski's time, and most assuredly before.



## Glossary

*Bagila*: shelf of a domestic house (*bwala*, *bwema*) used for sleeping, storage, and ritual offering.

*Baloma*: “soul” of a living human being, and the “spirit” of a deceased person released from the body at the moment of corporeal death.

*Bam*: womb, female genitals.

*Beku tabula*: stone axe-blade manufactured by *tosunapula* emergence ancestors and identified with their *dala*.

*Besobesa*: crazy, insane.

*Biga*: term for spoken word images.

*Bikai'isi*: to turn one's back on another; to ignore.

*Bila*, *bilabala*: labia, lips.

*Bilubaloma*: plural for ancestral *baloma* “spirits,” and in some contexts used to refer to the category inclusive of both human ancestral and nonhuman “spirits.”

*Binabina*: magically enchanted stones deposited in the bottom of a yam storehouse imbuing the yams with powers to suppress the hunger of the people who eat them.

*Bitawai* (or *waiwai*) *kebila*: literally, construct platform for building a relationship; a subtype of *bwekasa* “sacrifice.”

*Bobwelila*: life-giving blessings given by persons of superior ritual status and power.

*Boda*: group, grouping.

*Bomaboma*: sacred; set apart from profane (i.e., *itugwali* “free,” “open”).

*Bomala*: taboo, forbidden; see *kikila*.

*Boyowa*: the name for the island of Kiriwina, originally Kilivila; also used to refer the visible, material world in general as distinct from the invisible spirit world to Tuma.

*Bubu*: affectionate term for father’s sister, grandmother, ancestors.

*Bubuli*: cosmic creation; existence; mythical time beginning with the mystical creation of the universe until the time when origin or emergence ancestors (*tosunapula*) finally settled on allocated portions of the land of Boyowa.

*Bubwaluwa*: literally, saliva; also, sexual fluid, sweat, bodily fluids of any nature; life-giving blessings left or smeared upon material residues of sacrifices given *bilubaloma* spirits.

*Bukubaku, baku*: central, mostly cleared space of a village.

*Buneova*: covered ceremonial platform for entertaining visitors.

*Butula*: noise, sound, fame.

*Buwala, sebuwala*: gift of appreciation for sexual and other favors repaid (*mapula*) by a man to his paramour or wife and/or children.

*Buyai*: blood

*Bwagau*: sorcery, sorcerer.

*Bwala, bwema*: house; place or “hole” of emergence for *dala* ancestral emergence spirits.

*Bwalodila*: wild; specifically wild pig, bush pig.

*Bwegima*: removal of impurities.

*Bwekasa*: sacrificial exchange between living humans of Boyowa and *bilubaloma* spirits of Tuma.

*Bwema* (or *bwaima, bwayma, bweyima*): house, building of any kind; yamhouse for storing *taitu* yams; see also *liku*.

*Bwemaveka*: men’s meeting house.

*Bwena*: good.

*Daba*: head, brain.

*Dala*: a category of beings and entities existing in either Boyowa or Tuma who share distinctive identifying *kekwebu* images with associated *peu’ula* powers. In most anthropological literature, *dala* has been defined as a “matrilineage” grouping of living people and ancestral *baloma* spirits. Among humans, persons sharing *dala* membership through maternal ties are classed as *veyalela*;



those connected through paternal connections are *litulela* (i.e., children of male *veyalela*) or *tubulela* (i.e., *veyalela* of one's *tama* father).

*Delī*: gifts of male wealth (*veigua*) by feast “owners” (*tolīu'ula*) to principal “workers” or mourners (*tolīyouwa*) at conclusion of *lisaladabu* funerary rite.

*Dimdim*: foreigner.

*Doba*: decorated ceremonial skirt (*doba*) manufactured from dried banana (*wakaia*) leaves; tied exchange bundles of banana leaves (*nununiga*).

*Doginala*: tip, end, or terminal point; metaphorical of the leaves and branches of a plant extending from a major middle part (*tapwala*) supported by a “base” (*u'ula*); in magical performances, the third portion of a *megwa* spell where the results desired by the magician are enunciated.

*Gaga*: bad, evil.

*Gubwataw*: same-*kumila* relationship between members of specific chiefly and commoner *dala* groupings whose *tosunapula* emergence ancestors migrated together; same-*kumila dala* groupings who continue to engage in pseudo-affinal exchange relationships despite observing *kumila* exogamy.

*Gugula*: conical display heaps of yams in garden or village.

*Gugurwa*: property, material wealth, possessions.

*Guguya*, *sikatayuvisa*: advice, Christian sermon.

*Gulagula*: sacred tradition, custom, or knowledge established at the time of cosmic creation.

*Gumgweguya*: plural of *guyau* “chief.”

*Guyau*: chief; the occupant of a named chiefly office. Also, all persons, male and female, maternally identified with specifically designated chiefly *dala* groupings.

*Gwadi*: child, offspring.

*Ibubulisi* (see also *bubuli*): existence.

*Ika'ili*: the capacity whereby the speaking or saying of things makes them come into material existence.

*Ika'u nanola*: to change the mind.

*Ikuli*: form, shape, configuration; actions of forming, shaping, configuring, congealing.

*Ilamalia*: agricultural and marine plenty; also the categories of magic used to produce this result; opposite of *molu*.

*Ilemwa* (also *itugwali*, *ulusi*, *katuyewa*): free, open, profane.

*Iloguyau*: literally, “of the chiefly place”; refers to *olokaiwa* population.

*Ilongwa*: the body of commoners residing in a village under the *karewaga* “authority” of a *tolivalu* “village leader.”

*Ilotokai*: literally, “of the commoner place”; refers to *otilarwa* population.

*Ina*: mother.

*Ioba*: the rite of escorting visiting *bilubaloma* spirits from the village at conclusion of *milamala* harvest festival.

*Itona*: war-like anthropomorphic but nonhuman *tokwai* “nature sprites” responsible for bringing epidemic diseases in accompaniment with periodic droughts, famines.

*Itugwali* (also *ilemwa*): profane, “open” or “free” of restriction (*kikila*) or sacredness (*bomaboma*)

*Kabitam*: knowledge; ritual expertise. Most accounts of *kabitam* have focused on expert canoe carvers, but the ritual expert of any activity that is utilized for the sake of public benefit (e.g., garden and fishing magician, sorcerer, weather magician, etc.) is *tokabitam* “man of knowledge”; “woman of knowledge” is *nakabitam*.

*Kaboma*: literally, “tabooed/sacred wood”; large wooden serving platters used primarily on sacrificial or other ritual occasions.

*Kada*: term of reference and address for mother’s brother(s), sister’s son(s) or daughters; also used reciprocally as a term of affection between elder men and otherwise unrelated juniors.

*Kailagila*: cooking hearth.

*Kaivatam*, *kipatu*: gifts and services presented out of kindness, sympathy.

*Kakau*: deceased’s surviving spouse and others of his/her *dala*.

*Kaliai*: enhancing, compounding, building up; specifically, the enhancement of the powers and processes of “life” (*momova*) through the receipt of gifts.

*Kaliga*: death; dying as evidenced in numerous processes (e.g., laboring, sexual climax, cooking, sleep) and acts of giving.

*Kaligeya’i*: decomposition, disintegration, dismantle, rot; spread out as result of *kaliga* “death”.

*Kamkokola*: wooden pole structure erected at corners of gardens as sites of magical performance.

*Kapopo*: sacred grove.

*Kapu*: deceased’s father and others of his *dala*.

*Karewaga*: authority, law, pre-eminence.

*Kasai*: hard, solid.

*Kasali*: to elicit, urge on, incite; root of *bwekasa*.

*Kasesa*: clitoris, uvula.

*Katakaila*: “many-boned fish”; one of the foods freely consumed by commoners but traditionally forbidden to chiefs.

*Katayuvisa*: titled “political” or “orator chief,” “chiefly advisor”; ideally brother of the Vila Bogwa.

*Katuboda*: closed, closed off, restricted.

*Katukwala*, *katukuala*: concluding four days of the *milamala* harvest festival when food and wealth items are given as *bwekasa* sacrifices to attending *baloma* spirits.

*Katuyumali*: see *pokala*.

*Kaukweda*: veranda or entry of a house; nuclear family group.

*Kaula*: life-sustaining vegetable food crops, mainly yams and taro.

*Kavagina*: respectful ritual bowing by persons of low rank in presence of Tabalu persons.

*Kavila*: the status of persons and *dala* established during the period of cosmic creation and migration prior to the settlement of *tosunapula* emergence ancestors on the land; ritual demotion; demoted, fallen, disgraced owing to ancestors’ violation of hereditary *kikila* ritual restrictions.

*Karwelua*, *karwenua*: non-*kaula*, non-bodily-building plant foods (e.g., rice, pineapple, papaya, sweet potato, cassava, tomato, ripe banana, etc.) Also the name of a specific postburial exchange between mortuary owners and workers.

*Kayaku*: village council meeting of elders.

*Kayola*: throat, delivery tube.

*Kevasi*, *kaibasi*: inlaws to a *guyau* chief who annually garden for him.

*Kabila*: platform.

*Keda*: road, path, way.

*Kedakeda*: life-ways.

*Kekwabu*, *kaikwabu*, *kaikobu*, *kaykwabu*: image, shadow, reflection, spirit substance, characteristic. All beings and entities of the cosmos are distinguished and classed into *dala* and *kumila* groupings on the basis of shared or different constellations of *kekwabu*. A given *kekwabu* image is understood to be associated with one or more specific *peu’ula* powers or capacities.

*Kemapu*: substitute, replace.

*Kemata*, *keymata*: principal exchange garden.

*Kemelu*: the two categories of exchange performed during *lisaladabu* mortuary rites involving reciprocities exclusively between men and women of the *tolii'uula* "owner" category (i.e., *kemelu doba* involving gifts of banana-leaf bundles and skirts from owner women to owner men in reciprocation for men's gifts of yams; and *kemelu kaula* involving cooked yams, pork, areca nut, and money given by owner men to owner women in reciprocation for women's gifts of *doba*).

*Kemwasila*: magic practiced in courting, *kula*, and other activities where the agent seeks to present him/herself to patients as attractive, beautiful, and desirable.

*Keꞑwe'isi*: sweat.

*Ketota*: rank, status, relational position, action appropriate to status.

*Keuwela*, *keyuwela*: fruit, offspring; the final product of some process which typically possesses the capacity for reproduction (e.g., the *baloma* soul of a recently deceased human which has the capacity of becoming a *baloma* spirit in Tuma).

*Keveka nona*: "big head," "determined mind"; inappropriately ambitious according to traditional rank.

*Keyawa*: same-*kumila* kin identifying with a different *dalas*.

*Kibobuta*: personal correctness; extent of one's observance of *kikila* ritual restrictions according to *dala* and *ketota* status.

*Kikila*: ritual restriction, whether proscriptive (e.g., "taboo") or prescriptive.

*Kobala*: usurpation; subversion of traditional high-ranking persons by those of loweor, inappropriate rank on the basis of demonstrated *peu'uula* strength or forcefulness.

*Kobwaga*: material leftovers of *bwekasa* sacrifices bearing spirits' blessings; the practice whereby spirits' blessings are sequentially relayed from person to person in order of eating and rank.

*Koni*: hereditary decorations and ornaments as part of the *tukwa* of a given *dala*; also refers to "burdens" or "obligations" associated with a given *dala* identity.

*Kopatu*: the theft of food (see also *libulebu*)

*Kopoi*: literally, "carrying," inclusive metaphorically of the attentions of parents to newborn infants and the ritual treatment performed by father's sisters upon the recently deceased.

*Kosi*: *baloma* spirit of a recently deceased human who, in life, was regarded as an evil person; *baloma* spirit denied entry to Tuma, the land of the dead,

returned instead temporarily to Boyowa to witness survivors' hatred toward him/her.

*Kubwarwala*: potent invisible vapors emanating from something (e.g., steam from cooked foods, vapors exiting a rotting corpse).

*Kula*: ritual exchange system of shell valuables circulating throughout islands of the Massim off the eastern tip of the island of New Guinea. Northern Kiriwina including Omarakana men exchange directly with partners at Sinaketa, Vakuta, and Kitava Island.

*Kulututu*: homicide compensation.

*Kumila*: one of four categories (i.e., "clans") of beings and entities existing in Boyowa or Tuma who share distinctive *kekwebu* images with associated *peu'ula* powers: Malasi, Lukwasisiga, Lukuba, Lukulabuta. Each of the four *kumilas* encompasses a large number of *dala* subcategories, often referred to as "subclans." Except in special circumstances connected with chiefly *dalas*, *kumilas* are exogamous.

*Kuvi*: long yams (*Dioscorea alata*).

*Kwava*: wife.

*Kwematala*: "eye" half of a split coconut.

*Kwesibu'ula*, *kwesibula*: base or bottom half of a split coconut (i.e., lacking eyes).

*Kwetala*: one.

*Kwetala valu*: literally "one village/place"; the cosmic universe.

*Labuma*: sky, the Christian Heaven.

*Lamila*: canoe outrigger.

*Latu*: child, offspring (i.e., son or daughter); also a child of a classificatory brother or sister except (male speaking) father's sister's daughter or (female speaking) mother's brother's son.

*Libu*: dirge sung by women.

*Libulebu* (also *vela'u*, *kaugaga*): theft, stealing.

*Ligisa*: sacred personal dwelling of a chief, typically located in the central space (*bukubaku*) of a village.

*Liku*, *bwaima*: yamhouse.

*Lili'u*: sacred stories, myths, legends.

*Lisaladabu*: literally, "removal of mourning"; name for the major *sagali* distribution whereby principal mourners are freed of funerary obligations.

*Litulela*: "men's children" of a *dala*; children of male members of a *dala*; auxiliary *dala* members.

*Lokwai*: “bush tulip”; one of the foods freely consumed by commoners but tabooed to chiefs.

*Lopola*: innards, abdomen, belly.

*Lubegu* (sing.), *lubesi* (pl.): friend, friendship.

*Luta*: cross-sex sibling (brother, sister).

*Lukuba*: one of the four matrilineal *kumila* “clans.”

*Lukulubuta*: one of the four matrilineal *kumila* “clans.”

*Lukwasisiga*: one of the four matrilineal *kumila* “clans.”

*Lumkola*: feeling, emotion, desire, sentiment.

*Magila*: desire, wish.

*Malasi*: one of the four matrilineal *kumila* “clans”; Tabalu *dala* identifies with Malasi.

*Mama*: weak, soft.

*Mapula* (also *kemapu*): payment, compensation.

*Masisi*: sleep.

*Matala*: eye, face.

*Mauna*: animal, bird.

*Megwa*, *meguwa*, *miegawa*: magic, magical spell.

*Migile’u*: clean, pure.

*Migugaga*: impure, dirty.

*Milabova*: surviving children of a male deceased.

*Milamala*: fertility festival staged in the aftermath of particularly abundant annual agricultural harvests. At such times, ancestral *baloma* spirits return to the Boyowan villages to be celebrated by their living descendants. The interactions of the living and the dead are understood to terminate mourning and death and to generate new life in both Tuman and Boyowan realms.

*Mimi*: dream, dreaming.

*Mokwita*: true, real.

*Molu*: periodic drought, famine, epidemic disease produced through ritual or magical agency; opposite of *ilamalia*.

*Momona*: sexual fluids, semen, womb-blood.

*Momova*: life, vitality, vital spirit, vital essence; the animating capacity through which all beings and entities of the cosmos exist.

*Momova*: life, alive

*Mona*: a pudding of mashed taro or yam cooked by men in clay pots with boiled coconut oil and served in various forms on ceremonial occasions.

*Mosila*: shame.

*Mulukwausi*: flying witches.

*Mwala*: husband.

*Mwali*: arm shells.

*Mweburwa*: the inner fiber of the leaf stalks of areca palms, used for the manufacture of *napweya* men's pubic coverings; traditionally, an important *koni* emblem and *guguwa* possession of *gumgweguya* chiefs, particularly those of Tabalu *dala*.

*Nagoo*: crazy, insane.

*Nanamsa*: thought, thoughts, thinking.

*Nano, nona*: mind.

*Nasusuma*: pregnancy.

*Ngaka*: vital essence (North Mekeo).

*Nigada*: requesting, begging.

*Ninabwela, ninabwena*: sympathy, pity.

*Nunu*: breast, milk; matrilineal "branch" of a given *dala* group.

*Nununiga*: tied bundles of banana leaves exchanged ritually at *lisaladabu* mortuary feasts.

Obukula: cave near Labai village in the north of Kiriwina island regarded as the hole of emergence from which all beings and entities of the cosmos mythically were born into Boyowa; vaginal opening of the primal goddess Tugilupalupa.

*Olakaiwa*: northernmost region of the island of Kiriwina/Boyowa and its inhabitants; traditional domain of the Omarakana Tabalu chief.

*Olumwela, olumoulela*: inside, inner.

*Opapala, kaukweda*: outside.

Osapola-Bwaydaga: *nunu* "branch" of chiefly Kwenama *dala* of Lukwasisiga *kumila*, based at the Osapola hamlet of Liluta village. Osapola-Bwaydaga residents at Omarakana village have a special relationship with the Tabalu "Paramount Chief's" *dala* involving reciprocal bilateral cross-cousin, "quasi-endogamous" intermarriage.

*Osisuna* (also *opapala*): outside, outer.

*Otilawa*: southern, or lower portion of Northern Kiriwina and its inhabitants; customary dominion of the Toliwaga chiefs of Wakaisa and Kabwaku villages.



*Paiseʻwa*: work, labor, bodily and/or mental exertion.

*Pange*: feast foods (North Mekeo).

*Peuʻula*, *peula*: power, capacity, strength, hardness; a distinctive power or capacity for producing a specific result. *Peuʻula* powers are allocated among beings and entities of the cosmos in accordance with identifying *kerwabu* images of distinctive *dala* and *kumila* groupings.

*Pokala*: payment for the purpose of acquiring valuables from another person (e.g., *megwa*, land, coconut or areca palms)

*Popula*: shit, excreta; food offering to *baloma* spirits.

*Posuʻula*, *posula*: a part of some being or entity.

*Pupagatu*: dirty, unclean, polluting.

*Pwapwasa*: soft, weak, quasi-liquid.

*Pwatai* (also *lagogu*): upright display scaffolding containing garden produce for ceremonial exchange; basket manufactured from coconut leaves.

*Sagali*: distribution of any kind; division of prestation from givers to receivers.

*Saribu*: reflection, mirror- or self-similar image.

*Sasopa*: lie, false.

*Semakai*: annual tithing to regional church bodies.

*Sepwana*: large heaps of *nununiga* banana-leaf bundles given by women “owners” to principal male and female “workers” (*kapu* and *kakau*) at *lisaladabu* mortuary ceremonies; the elaborate skirt worn by the principal female “owner(s)” at a *lisaladabu* performance.

*Sibuʻula*: bottom part, base.

*Simuli*: structured plan, scheme.

*Sipusipu*: tying together, joining.

*Sisuna*, *papala*: outside, outer

*Sopi*: water, fluids of any nature (e.g., blood, semen, vaginal discharge, saliva, urine); *nanamsa* “thought” and specifically magical knowledge.

*Sosewa*: items of private or collected personal “property,” especially magical spells (*megwa*) or other ritual knowledge, which are acquired through means other than matrilineal *dala* identity and inheritance.

*Sosula*, *sosuʻula*: gift to magician to produce good weather; see also *ulaʻula*.

*Soulava*: shell necklace.

*Sunapula*, *sunapuʻula*: place of emergence or emerging.

*Suvvasova*: incest; sexual relations between persons maternally identified with the same *dala* or *kumila*; the sickness resulting from illicit same-*dala*, same-*kumila* incest.

*Tabalu*: chiefly *dala* of Malasi *kumila*; the title for the official chiefs of *Tabalu dala* resident in several villages of the Trobriand Islands.

*Tabu*: relationship term for father's sister(s), father's sister's daughter(s), grandparents grandchildren; also used in reference to *tosunapu'ula* emergence ancestors.

*Taitu*, *taytu*: the main ceremonial yam crop (*Dioscorea esculenta*) of Trobriand subsistence and ceremonial exchange.

*Tama*: father, man of father's *dala* regardless of generation.

*Tanarere*: display of *kula* wealth items upon from overseas voyage.

*Tapwala*: literally "trunk" as of a tree; the middle part of anything supported by an *u'ula* "base" and leading to a *doginala* "tip" or "end point." In magical performance, the portion of *megwa* spells which outline the mystical instructions given to *bilubaloma* spirits.

*Tapwaroro*: Christianity.

*Tau*: male, man.

*Tauva'u*: term used by Malinowski for *itona* spirits; personal name of a renowned *itona* spirit leader.

*Tiliala*: oceanic tides, the periodic circulation of fluids in or through the human body, for example.

*Tokabilia*: warriors.

*Tokai*: persons and *dala* groupings of "commoner" rank.

*Tokaisivila*: seer, medium.

*Tokwai*, *tokway*: nonhuman but sentient "spirits," often referred to in the literature as "nature sprites." *Tokwai* typically inhabit physical features of the land, sea, and sky.

*Tolibulebu*: thief.

*Toliuna'i*: birth mother or father.

*Toliu'ula dala*: principal (i.e., matrilineal) *dala* members or "owners" at mortuary exchanges.

*Tolivakalova*: adoptive mother or father.

*Tolivalu*: village leader, whether of commoner or chiefly status.

*Toliwaga*: literally, "boss" or "owner/leader of the canoe"; the title for "chiefs" (equivalent to *guyau*) for high-ranking leaders and their *dala* members in the

Tilataula district of Northern Kiriwina; the name of the chiefly (*toliwaga*) *dala* also known as Wabali of Lukwasisiga *kumula* with contemporary village bases at Kabwaku and Wakaisa in Northern Kiriwina.

*Toliyouwa*: “workers” or principal non-*dala* (i.e., nonmatrilineal) recipients at mortuary exchanges.

*Tomakava*: unrelated person; stranger; person of a *kumula* identity different from that of one’s mother or father.

*Tomota*: human being possessive of *nona* “mind,” whether living in Boyowa or deceased in Tuma.

*Tomwaya*: respected male elder; *namwaya* is female counterpart.

*Tomwaya dala*: designated head or leader of a *dala* grouping.

*Topileta*: male creator god of the cosmos; brother and spouse of his female counterpart, Tugilupalupa; *guyau* “chief” and *tama* “father” of Tuma, the spirit world.

*Tosibogwa*: nonhuman but sentient spirit beings of old who settled upon specific lands of Boyowa after migrating from Obukula emergence (i.e., *tokwai* “nature sprites” and *itona* “warrior spirits”).

*Tosunapula*, *tosunapu’ula*: original emergence ancestors, typically a brother–sister pair, of a given *dala* who migrated together mystically creating “children” (*gwadi*) beings and entities sharing *kekwebu* images and *peu’ula* powers during the time of migration following cosmic creation.

*Tourikuna*, *urikuna*: magic controlling sun and rain.

*Tova*: coconut oil squeezed from coconut scrapings; ideal accompaniment of every cooked meal.

*Towosi*: literally, “male singer, chanter”; commonly used to refer to magicians. *Nawosi* would be “female singer” or magician.

*Toyuvisa*: curer.

*Tabu daiasa*: the initial collection of mythical creator deities; first offspring of the primal gods, Topileta and Tugilupalupa.

*Tubulela*: kin or relatives of one’s father’s *dala*.

Tugilupalupa: creator goddess, sister, and paramour of the primal god, Topileta; mother of Tuma, the spirit world.

*Tukwa*: the body of material and immaterial “property” associated with a given *dala* category of beings and persons (e.g., magical spells, songs, lands, decorations, rank). As such, *dala* members share amongst themselves and with items of their *tukwa* the *kekwebu* images and *peu’ula* powers that distinguish

them from beings and entities associated with other *dala* categories and groupings.

*Tula*: cold, inert, lacking transformative capacity.

*Tuma*: the invisible world inhabited by spirits; the “land of the dead.”

*Ula’ula, u’ulau’ula*: ceremonial payments presented by communities collectively to magical specialists for ritual services rendered, subsequently distributed to persons (living humans and *baloma* spirits) who share entitlement to the same ritual capacities.

*Ulemwa*: clean.

*Urigubu* (literally /uri- “taro” + /gubu/ “garden division”): obligatory gift of a tree, fruit (e.g., coconut, betel palm) or pork from a commoner person (*wosa*) to a chiefly (*guyau*) person sharing *kumila* “clan” identity.

*U’ula*: base, source, origin, cause, reason, foundation; in magical performance, the opening invocation to magical predecessors.

*Va’i*: stingray; food emblem of the people of Boitalu, abominated by other Kiriwinans.

*Vakalova*: adopt, adoption by feeding.

*Vakam*: feed, feeding.

*Valova*: informal exchange of store-bought petty commodities in exchange for small quantities of banana-leaf bundles.

*Valu*: village, place.

*Vatuvu*: name for the garden magic of agricultural fertility of Tabalu *dala*.

*Veguwa, veigua, veiguwa*: valuable, (mainly male) wealth.

*Veva’i*: marriage, arranged marriage.

*Veyalela, veyola*: persons who identify with the same *dala* via matrilineal connections.

*Vila Bogwa*: literally, “great woman”; the formal title of the senior wife of the Tabalu chief at Omarakana or any other installed chief; ideally, the sister of the Katayuvisa.

*Vilayawa*: polygyny.

*Vivila*: female, woman.

*Wadola*: mouth.

*Waga*: canoe; canoe hull; any dynamic entity that carries contents or cargo (e.g., vehicle, human body, building, village)

*Waiwai, wawai*: platform for building relationship.

*Waiwaia*: a *baloma* spirit after it has “died” a spirit death in Tuma and lost its spirit body in readiness for being transported as a spirit child back to Boyowa for conceiving a new human being; a human fetus.

*Wakeya, wakaia, wakaiya, wakaya*: large type of banana plant. *Wakeya* leaves are used in manufacture of tied *nununiga* bundles and *doba* skirts and in garden ritual; a significant *koni* emblem and *guguwa* possession of Tabalu *dala* signifying fertility.

*Wila, bulabola*: vagina.

*Wosa*: personal supporters of same-*kumila* chiefs obliged to present the fruit of dedicated trees; specific portions of pork, large fish (swordfish, sharks), etc.

*Wosi*: song, poem.

*Wotunu*: veins, tubules.

*Wo'uya*: confusion.

*Yagila*: wind, breath.

*Yagogu*: seed for planting.

*Yaiyana*: sour, disagreeable.

*Yamata*: look after, take care of.

*Yawa*: affinally connected relatives.

*Yawali*: *sagali* mortuary feast performed immediately after the burial of the deceased.

*Yebweli*: love, affection.

*Yo'udila*: outside material form or expression.

*Yoyova*: the presentation of *veguwa* valuables in reciprocation for receipt of bestowal of substantial garden produce.

*Yoyowa*: witchcraft, a subcategory of *bwagau* sorcery; human, mostly female witches whose *baloma* souls are capable leaving their bodies during sleep to become *mulukwausi* flying witches.

*Yopu'oi wodila*: literally, “put into something with mouth”; the action of embedding the words of a magical spell into a material object.

*Yuviyavi*: heat, hot; potent; possessing transformative capacity.

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