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Baloma

The Spirits of the Kula in the Trobriand Islands

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> In general the spirits do not influence human beings very much, for better or worse.
> —Bronisław Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*

> As it turns out, the ancestors are indispensable agents in all varieties of human endeavor, risky or not.
> —Marshall Sahlins, *The New Science of the Enchanted Universe*

Few works in anthropology rival the influence of Bronisław Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922). Its publication established the modern standards for ethnographic research, launched the subfield of economic anthropology, reshaped the discipline's early grasp of premodern societies generally, and, supplemented by later works, enshrined the Trobriand Islands as emblematic of Melanesia as a culture area.

In this chapter, grounded on fieldwork conducted over sixteen years from 2006 at Omarakana where Malinowski initiated his pathbreaking studies, I reexamine certain ethnographic anomalies and misinterpretations of Indigenous Trobriand magico-religious practices as reported in *Argonauts* that have resulted in an impoverished view of the scope of economics as conceptualized by subsequent generations of scholars within and beyond anthropology. First, I challenge Malinowski's conclusion that, in islanders' understanding, *baloma* spirits of the dead do not play the principal agentive role in the Kula-associated magical spells (*megwa*, *yopu*) in which they are invoked. Second, I argue that this dismissal of spirits' participation in magic mistakenly restricted the scope of Massim Kula practice to relations between living people and between them and the material "things"

physically exchanged or otherwise utilized in facilitating such exchanges (e.g., transacted shell valuables, canoes, and items of bodily decoration and hospitality). Third, I offer a new, ethnographically based interpretation of Trobrianders' Kula magic as instances of sacrificial reciprocity, termed *bwekasa,* between living people and spirits of the dead. Fourth, from that vantage I reanalyze certain long-standing anomalous comparative distinctions between the Trobriand Islands and other Massim societies: chieftainship versus egalitarian leadership; differential ranking of Kula magical spells, shell valuables, and exchange "roads"; variations in Kula players' access to *vaigua* ("wealth") and *butula* ("fame"); discrepant ideologies of procreation and the afterlife (i.e., spirit immortality versus reincarnation); and variations in players' motivations for entering the Kula. Finally, fifth, I examine critically Marcel Mauss's (2016) analytical reduction of precapitalist economics to the three classic obligations (i.e., giving, receiving, and returning) as an unwarranted consequence of his acceptance of Malinowski's pragmatic view of Kula magic.

The Magical Agency of Spirits

In Chapter 17 of *Argonauts* (1922: 392–427), Malinowski analyzed the magical spells and successive rites of Kula: canoe manufacture, sailing and captaincy, weather control, protection from witch attack and shipwreck, the courting of trading partners, the elicitation of valuables, and, upon arrival at home, their ceremonial distribution. Despite highly equivocal evidence, he concluded that the "magical force" of Kula *megwa* spells resided in the enunciated words themselves rather than with the agency of the ancestral *baloma* spirits invoked in them.

> [W]e see that the spirits act as advisors and helpers. They fill the role of guardian of the traditions when they get angry because of a bad performance, or as associates and sympathizers when they share the magician's [payment for services]. But they are not agencies which get to work directly. In the Trobriand demonology, the magician does not command the spirits to go and set to work. The work is done by the agency of the spell, assisted by the accompanying ritual, and performed by the proper magician. The spirits stand in the same relation, as the performer does, to the magical force, which alone is active. They can help him to wield it properly, but they can never become his instruments. (Ibid.: 423) [1]

Malinowski's theoretical pragmatism here followed directly from James Frazer's (1922) categorical distinction between "magic," which is basically mechanistic, and "religion," which relies on interventions of transcendental supernatural beings. Subsequent ethnographers of the Massim have mostly

confined their investigations of Kula magic, and thus Kula itself, to the Frazerian parameters accepted by Malinowski.[2]

My recent consultations with the Omarakana Tabalu Paramount Chief, Pulayasi Daniel, and other acknowledged ritual authorities across northern Kiriwina, supplemented by archival study, point to the exact opposite conclusion. *Megwa* spells are a type of sacrificial gift reciprocity (*bwekasa*) between living people inhabiting the visible, material world (Boyowa) and ancestral *baloma* residing in the immaterial, invisible spirit world of the dead (Tuma). Thus, as Marshall Sahlins (2017: 54; 2022: 18–19, 63–66, 94) recently noted, the failure to address ancestral *baloma* participation in Kula and other Indigenous "magic" has excluded the very agents deemed critical by native practitioners. This omission has reduced anthropologists' grasp of economics to acts of production, exchange, and consumption *between strictly living people*.

In *Argonauts*, Malinowski makes passing reference to several examples of *bwekasa* using different rubrics. During the concluding ceremonies of *milamala* harvest ceremonies, community members' current hoard of Kula valuables and other permanent wealth (axe blades, body ornaments and decorations) are formally presented (*yolova*) to departing ancestral *baloma*, who extract from them their inner "shadows" (*kekwabu*) to carry back to the underworld, Tuma. Of these, the Kula shells "represent the most effective offering to be given to the spirits, through which they can be put into a pleasant state of mind" (Malinowski 1922: 512).[3] Also during *milamala*, neighboring households exchange bowls of cooked food that have been "ceremoniously exposed in houses for the use of the spirits, after these have consumed the spiritual substance" (ibid.: 184; see below). *Pokala* "solicitory offerings" to "mythical" (i.e., spiritual) persons, "Kultur-heroes," and ancestral spirits are given to elicit their benefits and blessings (ibid.: 332–34, 378). Malinowski uses the same term, *pokala*, when describing the solicitory gifts and offerings presented by Kula players to their exchange partners when seeking to obtain a specific shell valuable from them (ibid.: 99, 205, 354–55, 360). He mentions *yolova* presentations of crewmen's acquired shells to accompanying spirits as "sacrifices" in *tanarere* ceremonies performed at the conclusion of Kula voyages (ibid.: 512). Receiving these gifts, *baloma* perform their own *tanerere* ceremonies on the beach of Tuma Island (ibid.: 374, 375, 391, 512) and thereafter engage in Kula exchanges of their own. Both of those activities, as *bwekasa*, reinvigorate the shells and fame of the spirits and their descendants.[4]

Trobrianders are not alone in formally seeking to elicit benefits and blessings from *baloma* through the offering of *bwekasa*-like sacrifices. Upon return from voyaging to Sinaketa and Vakua, Dobuans staged *tanarere* offerings of collectively acquired Kula wealth to the assisting ances-

tral spirits who had been invited to accompany them (Malinowski 1922: 375, 393). My Omarakana interlocutors insist that sacrificial practices like *bwekasa* are performed in all Kula communities, wherever magical spells are addressed to local spirits.

Bwekasa: Sacrificial Reciprocity

The labors involved in the production, exchange, and consumption of daily family meals usefully illustrate the intimate link between human–human "exchange" and human–spirit *bwekasa* sacrifice that is characteristic of Kula and other transactional contexts. Cutting and boiling raw plant and meat staples "kills" them, rendering them "dirty" and inimical to or disharmonious with villager life and thereby "sacred" or "tabooed" (*bomaboma*). Once cooked, the food is placed in bowls and briefly set aside while family members reflect upon all the "blessings" (*bobwelila*) they have received from their ancestors, including the meal set before them. During these moments, the spirts consume the food's inner shadows, depositing invisible bits of their watery "saliva" (*bubwalua*) that miraculously transform the dead meal into a taboo-free, "open," "harmonious," "clean," and, therefore, life-giving state for family members to eat.[5] Additional bowls of desanctified food are often prepared for reciprocal exchange between related households (and not just during *milamala* festivities, as claimed by Malinowski).

The term *bubwalua* is used to denote all fluids (*sopi*, "water") of the body, particularly when expelled, not just as saliva, but as "sweat" (*kapwe'isi*), "blood" (*buyai*), and genital secretions (*momona*). The examples given above, where Malinowski alluded to several instances of essentially *bwekasa* offerings as "*bubwalua*," affirm *baloma* spirits' sacrificially transformative nature and powers.

In their initial raw state, food staples are ambiguously inedible to both human and spirit persons since they embody the "dead" and "dirty" "sweat" excreted by the parties that worked jointly in their production. The killing effect of cooking converts food further to being unambiguously dead as far as living people are concerned, but unambiguously open, clean, harmonious, and supportive of the spiritual being of deceased *baloma* spirits. Analogously, the spirits' potent excreted saliva, which is dead and thus dirty and inimical to their Tuman life, is clean, open, harmonious, and life-giving to people of Boyowa. Omarakanans maintain that if they ate their foods raw or even cooked but untransformed by spirits' saliva, they would starve. And in the absence of *bwekasa* offerings of food, spirits in Tuma would be deprived of the sustenance required for their spirit lives.

Through these and analogous *bwekasa* reciprocities, humans and spirits provision each other with "life" (*momova*).[6] They can do this because the refracted human Boyowa and spirit Tuma realms both mirror and invert each other. What is dead to the dead is living to the living, and what is living to the dead is dead to the living.

The bodily and magical exertions collaboratively undertaken by people and ancestral spirits during all phases of food production and distribution (Malinowski 1935a, 1935b) and in other culturally sanctioned enterprises (fishing, house building, canoe and artifact carving, dancing, feasting, copulation, Kula exchange and hospitalities, sorcery, etc.) are classified as instances of *paisewa* ("labor" or "work"). In other words, goal-directed "mental activity" or "thought" (*nano*) qualifies as transactable mind-to-mind *paisewa* labor no less than skin-to-skin physical effort. Indeed, peoples' thoughts are frequently referred to as *sopi*, the generic term for water, in view of the manner in which thoughts are experienced as flowing through one's mind.[7] Accordingly, products generated through human agency incorporate both the liquid physical and the fluid mental *bubwalua* sweat of their respective creators' persons. In this way, the bodily and mental *kekwabu* images of a working person are transferred to the items created through those efforts or to the person(s) to whom they are directed (or both). Virtually all types of exchange in Trobriand sociality consist of transactions involving personal tokens of *bubwalua*. Parents wishing to instill in their children an appreciation of the life they have received, for example, commonly refer to the "sweat" that they have bestowed upon them.

A particular dynamic of "life" (*momova*) and "death" (*kaliga*) is central to the link between *paisewa* labor and *bwekasa* sacrifice.[8] Any act of work is understood to engender in the laborer the feeling of "pain" (*gidageda*) that is construed as a kind or expression of death. The experiences of "pleasure" or "happiness" (*mwasila*) in the absence of work and pain are indicative of or consonant with life. Even so, villagers view labor as essential for life's sustenance. Garden labor, for example, while painful and deathlike, is a necessity for the provision of the foods required for human (and spirit) existence. By the same token, for human beings to be capable of deathlike laboring, they must be alive. Additionally, the hot *bubwalua* sweat of laboring humans, transferred to the skins of co-laboring spirits, enables the latter to cool and revive their spirit bodies so that they can return to deathlike labors; and reciprocally the sweat resulting from *baloma* labor revivifies people at rest sufficiently for them eventually to resume their exertions. In this way, humans and spirits enable each other to undertake and complete arduous projects without killing themselves, which would be the result if they endeavored to labor ceaselessly. This explains how and why *bubwalua*

excretions that are dead and dirty to one party in contexts of *bwekasa* sacrifice are clean and life-giving to the other. *Bwekasa* labors conducted for the life of others incur death to oneself. Death is a prerequisite to life, just as life is to death. Accordingly, ancestral *baloma* are mythically the "source" or "origin" (*u'ula*) of living Trobrianders' lives, just as living people's death-like labors are necessary for the continuance of their deceased ancestors' Tuman existence. Through *bwekasa*, the living and dead provide life to each other.

These new data illustrate the radical disparity between Trobrianders' ritualistic cosmology and Malinowski's pragmatic perspective on the formal meaning of "labor" and his untenable dichotomization of the "economic" versus the "non-economic." Recall, for example, Malinowski's (1918: 89; 1921; 1935a: 17, 435; 1992b: 30–31: 1992c: 139) accounts of villagers' felt needs for magical support in high-risk, dangerous or highly uncertain shark and mullet (*kalala*) fishing and the absence of any need for magic in the supposedly low-risk, safe, and predictable fishing on reefs of the shallow lagoon. In fact, according to fishers I have interviewed, successful lagoon fishing involves complex magico-religious *bwekasa*-type transactions of labor-sweat with spirit beings analogous to those employed in shark and mullet fishing, gardening, canoe carving, sorcery, curing, and Kula, whether in the form of traditional *megwa* or, nowadays, introduced Christian prayers (Mosko 2017: 397–411; cf. Gregory, this volume).[9]

Just how the verbal utterance of a *megwa* magical spell in Kula or other contexts qualifies as *bubwalua* sweat- or saliva-generating labor (or both) analogous to other physical *paisewa* exertions, as outlined above, requires additional explication. First, the recital of *megwa* spells is regarded as "hot" (*gasisi, yuviyavi*) or effective in producing the magician's desired result, like every other type of labor. The mere voicing of spells thus involves the oral discharge of dead, dirty saliva and breath containing the images or shadows referenced by the words of the spell, which ordinarily, once learned by the magician, are dispersed throughout their body (*wowola*) and mind (*nanola*).[10] The externalized complex of images that *is* the spell is thus a *bwekasa* offering to the magician's invisibly-attending *baloma* predecessors who, during their material Boyowan lifetimes, also embodied and vocalized it. The acting magician and associated spirits thus amount to a single "person" (*tomota*). Once invoked, through the invisible transference of the magician's oral *bubwalua*, his allied spirits invisibly affect the changes stipulated in the spell so as to transform the target's or patient's previous dispositions to align with the magician's desires (e.g., light to heavy, slow to fast, repulsive to attractive, dirty to clean, greedy to generous, living to dead, and so on, or the reverse of these), just as they had accomplished during their earlier Boyowan careers.

Kula Exchange as *Bwekasa*

Via *bubwalua* transfers of sweat and saliva between persons (living and deceased) implicated in the manufacture, handling, exchange, and magical treatment of armshells (*mwali*) and necklaces (*soulava*), Kula valuables come to incorporate the detached *kekwabu*, personal images, of their current and previous possessors. This is a clear ethnographic illustration of Marilyn Strathern's (1988, 2018) basic model of Melanesian dividuality, which expands the concept of personhood to encompass the kinds of material "objects" routinely transacted by people in systems of elicitive gift exchange epitomized by Kula. However, the Trobriand view of *baloma* spirits' participation in sacrificial *bwekasa* reciprocities (including Kula) broadens this idea of the dividual or partible person to include the sorts of nonhuman spiritual or sacred beings—"*divine* dividuals"—with whom Melanesians and other peoples commonly interact in accord with the econo-magico-religious contexts of their cosmologies and cultures.[11]

That Kula consists in life–death *bwekasa* conversions for inhabitants of both Boyowa and Tuma is exemplified when, in presenting an armshell or necklace to his partner, the host forcefully throws it (i.e., an act of vigorous, laboriously generated sweat) to the ground. This is effectively to kill and sacrifice his relation to it, which his affiliated ancestors, being dead, experience as *bubwalua* that gives them new Kula life.[12] While momentarily resting there, the giver's *baloma* allies simultaneously coordinate their labors with his so as to deposit their sweat on the armshell or necklace, thereby reinvigorating it for attachment to, and to the benefit of, the new owners—the receiving partner and his *baloma* allies. When the object is next sacrificed by that first recipient to his partner, the original giver and his ancestors are revived as the sweat of that transaction is communicated to them via the images of their persons still attached to the shell. Through these embodiments and disembodiments of the shadowy images of participating *baloma* spirits, the roads of Kula exchange that Malinowski described as circulating through Boyowa are invisibly extended to and duplicated across Tuma. When living people transact Kula, ancestral *baloma* are thereby equipped to engage in shell exchanges of their own (see below).

Anomalies

Recognition that *baloma* and other spirits are traditionally recognized as the crucial agents of Trobriand Kula magic presents an opportunity for reexamining certain long-recognized contrasts between the Trobriand Islands and most other Massim societies, which till now have been either

poorly explained or left as anomalous. These include variations in leadership patterns; the ranking of Kula spells, shells, and roads; the factors underpinning the achievement of "fame" and "renown" (*butula*); and understandings of the afterlife and procreative process. The last of these have triggered some of the most animated disputes of modern anthropology's history.

The Trobriand system of hierarchically ranked, hereditary "chiefs" (*guyau)* has been recognized as distinct from more "egalitarian" Massim polities (approximating the Melanesian "big men" model) since before Malinowski's time (cf. Liang, Steinmüller, this volume). On the basis of hereditary succession and traditional entitlement, certain high-ranking Tabalu and other official chiefs of the Trobriands have monopolized the shells that flow through the archipelago. These men have enjoyed near absolute access to the highest-ranked (*tukwa*) shells circulating on the highest-ranked Kula roads. As items of durable wealth, such shells and roads are regarded as effectively permanent or eternal, immune to the possibilities of shell loss or road corruption. Lower-ranking "commoner" (*tokay*) Trobrianders who serve as their chiefly captains' crewmen are limited to the trade of fewer and lower-ranked (*sosewa*) shells flowing on lower-ranked roads, which are much more vulnerable to rerouting, theft, loss, and disappearance.

Such hereditary disparities in social standing and access to Kula valuables and renown are largely absent elsewhere in the Massim. Although some local leaders may be accorded the title of *guyau*, they realize and hold their positions on mostly performative criteria that are nominally open to others—notably the achievement of Kula renown. The competition for large numbers of shells and for high-ranking ones is thus relatively open to all competent adult men, with the support of industrious wives.

The inherent temporal durability and spatial transportability of Kula shell valuables distinguishes them from other items of material wealth traditionally encountered in the economies of the societies of the Kula ring (Malinowski 1922: 357–58). As such, Kula shells serve as unique imperishable vehicles for the achievement of widespread, lasting personal fame for Kula participants. However, those capacities are not uniform for the differently ranked shells that travel along differently ranked *keda* roads. Personal histories of the manufacturing, possession, and exchange of armshells and necklaces serve as matchless indices of players' fame (but see below). Compared with neighboring regions, these capacities play out differently in the Trobriands. The chiefs' heritable monopoly of the most renowned shells and the most stable roads on which they travel effectively guarantees that their fame will resound in perpetuity, or as long as Kula continues to function. Few Kula masters elsewhere in the Massim can match this control over the highest-ranked shells and roads. The fame of commoner Trobrianders, however, is curbed because their participation in Kula is limited to

lower-ranking *sosewa* shells associated with comparatively mobile *sosewa* magical spells and roads.

The *megwa* spells of Trobriand magic in Kula and other contexts, which function as *bwekasa* sacrifice, as outlined above, are also culturally distinguished as *tukwa* or *sosewa*. In *Argonauts*, Malinowski glossed these terms as "systematic" and "independent," respectively.

> The [independent, *sosewa*] incantation is a free, individual act, which may be performed and is performed in any of the circumstances which require it. It is quite another matter with the spells belonging to what I have called here *systematic magic.* Such magic consists of a connected and consecutive body of incantation and concomitant rites, not one of which can be torn out of its sequence and performed by itself . . . *in this book almost all the rites and spells described belong to this* [tukwa] *class*. (1922: 413, emphasis added)

Tukwa spells are tied to specific *dala* matrilineages. They require the correct invocation by name of the ancestral *baloma* who previously possessed them and who are identified as their agents. When a *tukwa* magician dies, his name is added to the list of spirits to be invoked by his successors. *Tukwa* spells are thus inherited within the *dala*, and to that extent they and the names and fame of their possessors are perpetual and only members are qualified to recite and use them effectively.[13] *Tukwa* spells typically target whole groups of people rather than single persons (i.e., hamlets, villages, gardening parties, canoe crews, etc.) as patients or beneficiaries. By that measure, *tukwa* are considerably more powerful than *sosewa* spells. Most of the Kula magic described is *Argonauts* is *tukwa*, as Malinowski noted. While *tolivalu* headmen of commoner *dala* and villages transact heritable *tukwa* spells transacted along *tukwa* roads, those spells tend to be collectively subsidiary or tied to the *tukwa* spells and powers of the locally preeminent chief's *dala*.[14] In the Trobriands, the *tukwa* spells pertaining to Kula are overwhelmingly chiefly possessions.

In contrast, there is no requirement to invoke by name a spell's previous possessors in the case of the less powerful independent spells deployed by Kula traders in seeking to elicit specific low-ranking shells from their partners. However, *sosewa* too rely on *baloma* agency insofar as *sosewa* magicians identify personally with their predecessors through the strict observance of the "taboos" (*kikila*) that they in their lifetimes had observed. *Sosewa* spells are not associated with particular *dala*s and are transmitted through diverse relations and exchange processes. Thus, the magical knowledge of most commoner Kula players in the Trobriands consists of *sosewa* spells that typically mark singular persons as patients, such as one's Kula partner. Insofar as the names of the previous owners of *sosewa* spells are *not* voiced, the spatio-temporal quotient of their possessors' fame is

considerably less than that attributed to the possessors of *tukwa* spells, past and present.

Analogues of both *tukwa* and *sosewa* spells appear to exist in the magical repertoires of non-Trobriand Kula communities of the Massim. Given the more open big-man styles of leadership encountered throughout the region, active Kula players there are not categorically denied access to the most powerful spells because of birthright discriminations.

The achievement of personal fame or renown (*butula*) is, of course, the prime motivating factor for all participating men in Kula and their wives in lending support. As argued by Munn, Damon, and others, Massim fame consists in the extent to which a person's name is spread spatially and temporally: that is, detached from his person and incorporated in the knowledge tied to the inalienable material tokens (i.e., *vaigua* shells) that he has formally transacted through exchange. By receiving and giving away a specific shell, a Kula player includes his name in its lore as far and as long as it circulates along its appointed road. The cumulative extent of a man's (and wife's) Kula fame thus correlates with the overall volume of the shells transacted over his career; the rank of shells transacted, whether *tukwa* or *sosewa*; the rank of the magic, *tukwa* or *sosewa*, identified with his person and the potency of the spirits included in it; and the extent of hospitality that they as a couple are known to have extended to the man's Kula partners.

On the basis of these criteria, Trobriand chiefs active in the Kula nominally enjoy perpetual fame and renown on a scale vastly exceeding that of the men and women of their local commoner followings. Historically there have been Kula masters elsewhere in the Kula ring whose fame has rivaled or even exceeded that of Trobriand chiefs, but no analogous categorical impediment blocks other Massim players in the way that *tokai* Trobrianders are unable to rival their chiefs. Returning from Kula expeditions with significantly more renowned and greater numbers of shells received from their more numerous trade partners, Trobriand chiefs are equipped to sponsor the most generous and impressive *yolova* (i.e., *bwekasa*) "offering" to spirits "of what is most valued by the living" (Malinowski 1922: 512) at key moments of the Kiriwinan calendar (for example, at the conclusion of *milamala* festivities noted above, when *baloma* spirits upon departure for Tuma are formally presented Kula shells). Similarly, the wives of Kula-active chiefs have greater access than other women to a wider range of other wealth items through *valova* exchange and are thereby in privileged positions for accumulating large quantities of *doba* bundles and skirts to distribute at sacrificial *lisaladabu* mortuary distributions (Lepani 2012: 91). This is a distinctive Trobriand practice and key source of the inflated "fame" of chiefs' wives.[15]

Trobriand chiefs' advantages in generating Kula fame are amplified through their role in staging consolidated offerings of shell valuables (*tanarere)* acquired on overseas *uvalaku* voyages. As Malinowski (1922: 375) described, upon landing the shells obtained by the men of a given canoe are grouped together and sacrificially displayed in the name of their "captain" (*toliwaga)*, typically one of the local chiefs. But the shells of all the canoes comprising the whole flotilla are also presented simultaneously in the name of the one "fleet master" (*toli'uvalaku*) who, throughout Omarakana history, has always been the Tabalu Paramount Chief. Thus his name becomes attached to each shell included in the fleet's entire hoard, and his fame is magnified proportionately. According to Malinowski (ibid.: 374–75, 512), these displays were *yolova* offerings to the *baloma* who had joined the voyage. My Omarakana sources affirm that *tanarere*, like *yolova* at the conclusion of *milamala* festivities, qualify as *bwekasa* obligations, but of a greatly enhanced order. Given that Kula fame is achieved largely through the number and quality of shells transacted by each Kula player, the name and recognition of Trobriand chiefs in the Kula system is greatly magnified by comparison with that of their commoner followings.[16] The postmortem dividend of Kula fame achievable by commoner men and women is comparatively limited; their renown, unlikely to be transmitted to future generations, will eventually be forgotten.

Kula and the Afterlife: Spirit Reincarnation versus Immortality

Throughout the Massim, among various competitive activities (gardening, fishing, canoe carving, *doba* mortuary distribution, dancing, singing, sorcery, etc.), Kula is by far the most effective means for the spreading of a person's *butula*. The fact that fame, once achieved, can and often does resound long after a person's death confirms that *butula*, by its very nature, possesses distinctive eschatological properties that transcend the gulf between Boyowa (in the Trobriand case) and the Tuman afterworld.

Nonetheless, visions of the hereafter across the Massim are far from uniform. As reported by Malinowski (1932: 145–52; 1992a) and affirmed by nearly all subsequent investigators, Trobriand notions of spirit reincarnation (*no'isi*) are unique. At death, the *baloma* leaves the body and ventures to Tuma where it enjoys a blissful existence as a *baloma* spirit undergoing a series of cyclical agings and rejuvenations—sloughing off old skin, teeth, and hair and donning a new youthful body. Eventually, however, the *baloma* tires, weakens, or becomes bored with its repetitive spirit lifestyle, especially when distant descendants neglect to acknowledge it in *bwekasa* offerings. At this point the *baloma* dies as a spirit, shedding its aged spirit

body to become a *waiwaia* ("foetus" or "spirit child"). Following transportation to the womb of a Boyowan woman of the same matrilineal *dala* identity, the *waiwaia* conceives a human infant, consistent with Trobrianders' supposed "ignorance of physiological paternity."[17]

Analogous notions of spirit rebirth, however, are absent in other Kula-participating societies. There, upon dying, deceased people's souls pass to locally recognized Tuma-like realms to remain forever as immortal ancestral spirits.

What can explain this difference? The above outline of the differential scopes of Trobriand chiefly and commoner participation in sacrificial Kula exchange and magic offers a plausible answer. Given the distinctive heritable durability of chiefly *tukwa* shells, spells, and roads and the near certainty that chiefs' names will be indefinitely recalled through magical invocations and other modes of life-giving *bwekasa* offerings, Trobriand chiefs' local domination of Kula effectively guarantees that they will not reincarnate. Their fame will resound forever, just as the fame of major Kula players does elsewhere, or at least as long as the Kula system itself persists.

Commoner Trobrianders, however, are effectively denied the prospect of *baloma* immortality that is potentially available to virtually all of the adult male residents of neighboring egalitarian Massim communities. However, this does not necessarily deter *tokai* Trobrianders from participating enthusiastically in Kula or seeking fame in other contexts. On the contrary, it motivates them all the more stridently. Despite the limited durability and longevity of *sosewa*-classified shells, spells, and roads, compared with other, more mundane spheres of competition, even limited Kula success offers the most effective road or pathway for prolonging Tuma's posthumous pleasures.

The diversity of Massim views of the afterlife was recognized in the "Virgin Birth" debate of the 1960s and 1970s, but that and subsequent discussions tended to focus primarily on Indigenous ideas about procreation, while details concerning the afterlife itself attracted less interest.[18]

The controversy was recently reopened in a colloquium in the journal *Hau*. Based on survey research, Jarillo et al. (2020a, 2020b) contend that Malinowski and others who have documented Trobriand beliefs in reincarnation have been wrong; that once *baloma* pass from Boyowa to Tuma, they stay there forever in accord with the views elsewhere in the Massim. The lead authors claim that they were led to question the doctrine of reincarnation because of a fatal contradiction they perceived in my own recent treatment of Trobriand magic and kinship (Mosko 2017): "Any *baloma* brought back to life [through reincarnation] would be unavailable when called for help through magic" (Jarillo et al. 2020a: 368–69; see also MacCarthy 2020). In my published response (Mosko 2020: 401), I noted that,

if people lovingly celebrate a specific *baloma* through *bwekasa* offerings—*megwa*, food, tobacco, labor, *yolova*, *pokala*, *tanerere*, etc.—that ancestor's Tuman life will be sustained, potentially forever. Over generations, as the names and exploits of other *baloma* are eventually forgotten, they will die as spirits and reincarnate.

More recently, I came across Jerry Leach's and Shirley Campbell's report of an early-1970s study where some twenty Trobriand Islanders, after reading *Argonauts*, voiced a common criticism: missing from Malinowski's account was the understanding "that men whose names are preserved by the [Kula] system break out of the cycle of reincarnation through Tuma, to live above ground forever" (Leach 1983: 12); that is, as celestial stars, as Campbell (1983: 204–5) and Scoditti (1983: 272) separately reported.[19]

I take these data to confirm my account of there being two traditional roads to the Trobriand afterlife, with Kula participation as a key determining factor: reincarnation for those *baloma* spirits whose *butula* fame among the living of Boyowa is relatively limited; and celestial immortality for those spirits whose earthly fame is effectively everlasting.

This finding is directly relevant to questions in Massim prehistory and history: namely, whether Trobriand chiefly inequality is an "evolutionary" product of early European influences upon a previously egalitarian population, or whether the larger region's egalitarian polities are the consequence of "devolution" from previously hierarchical systems (see e.g., Macintyre 1994; Young 1994; Bickler 2006; cf. Steinmüller, this volume). The correspondence of Trobriand chiefly immortality with Massim eschatologies elsewhere would seem to support the latter hypothesis. And if that is the case, it could be argued that the cultural anomaly that Trobriand society presents for the wider region is not so much the presence of ranked *guyau* chieftainship but that of *tokai* commonership.

Malinowski, *Megwa*, and Mauss

By way of conclusion, I suggest that Malinowski's dismissal of *baloma* spirits' agentive participations in Trobriand magic and Kula has had a misleading influence upon economic anthropology because of Marcel Mauss's (2016) appropriation of Malinowski's account of Kula.[20] As Jane Guyer (2016: 5) recently noted, for Mauss, "the '*spiritual* character' of exchange" (my emphasis) was a "fundamental point of the whole argument of *The Gift*," well exemplified by Mauss's two other major illustrations of total prestation.[21] For Mauss (2016: 62, 79, 116–17n141, 119–20n152), northwest American potlatches highlighted the "worship of the great gods, totems, or the collective or individual ancestors of the clan" and the sacrifices directed toward

them. With respect to the Maori notion of *hau*, he argued that "the most important amongst these *spiritual* mechanisms is evidently that which obliges the return on the present received" (ibid.: 64, emphasis added).[22]

Mauss was considerably more circumspect when drawing upon Malinowski's materials, cautiously eliding personified spirits' analogous participation in Kula and other contexts of Trobriand gifting. This has served to differentiate the economies of the Massim and Melanesia generally from premodern societies elsewhere, at least on this score. While dealing with *baloma* spirits' supposed lack of magical agency, Mauss noted that Kula contained

> its mythical, religious, and magical aspect . . . It is not possible to say that [Kula valuables] are really the objects of a cult, *since the Trobrianders are positivists in their own way*. But it is impossible not to recognize their eminent and sacred nature. Contact alone is enough to transfer their virtues. . . .
>
> But there is more. The contract itself is affected by this nature of the *vaygu'a*. Not only the armshells and the necklaces, but all the goods, decorations, and weapons as well, everything that belongs to the partner is thus *animated, by sentiment at least, if not by a personal soul*, so that they themselves take part in the contract. (Mauss 2016: 94–95, emphases added, footnotes deleted)

It would seem that Mauss was warily weighing factors that inhibited any direct calling out of Malinowski on his disclaimers of *baloma* magical agency. No doubt *Argonauts* justifiably steered Mauss toward his formulation of the three core obligations: to give, to receive, and to return (Mauss 2016: 73–76). But, as Maurice Godelier (1999: 29–31) has reminded us, Mauss also noted a fourth obligation, missing from the well-known trilogy, namely, "the gift (*cadeau*) made to men, in sight of the gods and of nature . . . The exchanges of gifts (*cadeaux*) between men, 'namesakes,' homonyms of the spirits, incite the spirits of the dead, the gods, things, animals, nature to be 'generous towards them'" (Mauss 2016: 76–77)—that is, to offer sacrifices in the expectation that the sacred recipients will reciprocate with blessings of their own.

Mauss flagged his reservations pertaining to Malinowski's disenchanted view of Trobriand magic with these words:

> *We have not conducted the general study necessary to bring out the importance of [the obligation to sacrifice]*. Moreover, the facts available do not all relate to those areas to which we have limited ourselves. Finally, *the mythological element, which we still understand poorly, is too strong on this point for us to omit it*. So we limit ourselves to a few remarks. (2016: 76, emphasis added)

This seems absurd. As early as 1899, Mauss and Henri Hubert had published *Sacrifice* (Hubert and Mauss 1964)—the foundation text for virtually all later anthropological treatments of the subject—specifically to

document the cross-cultural imbrication of religion and magic, and the widespread attribution of *magical* efficacy to spirit-like beings (ibid.: 7–10). In their subsequent *A General Theory of Magic* (Mauss and Hubert 1972), they roundly demolished Frazer's differentiation of "magic" from "religion," upon which Malinowski premised his claims regarding magical agency.

Mauss's caution is all the stranger because he does in fact distil from *Argonauts* several unambiguous instances of Trobriand sacrificial practice (those that Malinowski termed "bubwalu'a," as noted above) in which Kula valuables are proffered to *baloma* to "render their spirits good" (Mauss 2016: 80). He gently chides Malinowski's (1922: 513) claim near the end of *Argonauts* that "in several respects, the Kula presents to us a new type of phenomenon." He remarks, "Malinowski exaggerates a little. . . , the novelty of these facts which are identical to those of the Tlingit potlatch and the Haida potlatch" (Mauss 2016: 80).

Additionally, Mauss certainly knew that prior to undertaking fieldwork in the Trobriands, Malinowski (1913) had reviewed Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912) in highly critical terms—flatly rejecting the author's methodology and core ideas concerning the universality of the sacred versus profane opposition and religion's base in society and collective representations. In opening that review, Malinowski (1913: 525) had offered thanks to Mauss and Hubert for their essays on sacrifice and magic; yet ironically, their work on those topics is entirely overlooked in *Argonauts*.

I can only surmise that Mauss chose to temper these and possibly other qualms for fear that denting Malinowski's authority on this point might undercut his use of Malinowski's ethnographic material in theorizing gift exchange more generally. After all, Malinowski's strident denials of *baloma* magical agency, based on the authority of his unprecedented field experience, left few grounds on which Mauss could confidently test him.[23]

Finally, it is perhaps worthwhile to reflect upon the effect that Mauss's reticence in critiquing Malinowski's pragmatism has had on economic anthropology more generally. How might the subdiscipline have developed had Mauss formulated precapitalist gift exchange in terms of four rather than three canonical obligations?

Acknowledgments

I am greatly indebted to key members of my Omarakana collaborators—Tabalu Pulayasi Daniel, Molubabeba Daniel, Pakalaki Tokulupai, and Yogaru Vincent—and many other northern Kiriwina elders for so generously sharing their knowledge of Indigenous traditions. The Australian Research

Council and the Wenner-Gren Foundation liberally funded my field and archival investigations. I have benefited particularly from Allan Darrah's sharing of the DEPTH database of Massim ethnography. Discussions with Marilyn Strathern, Fred Damon, and Cassandra Mosko have added greatly to the arguments, both theoretical and substantive, underpinning this chapter. I take responsibility for all errors and omissions.

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Notes

1. See also Malinowski (1922: 407–8; 1935b: 213–50; 1992a: 201; 1992b: 73, 79, 85, 89–90).
2. See Uberoi (1962); Darrah (1972); Powell (1978); Leach and Leach (1983); Perrson (1992); Tambiah (1968, 1990). See also Mosko (2017: 109–218) for discussion of post-Malinowski ethnographers' views of *baloma* participation in further contexts.
3. Malinowski had earlier referred to *yolova* offerings (1992a: 280) as *ioiova*, which I transcribed as *yoyova* (Mosko 2017: 202). According to Hutchins (1980: 35, 140) and affirmed by my Trobriand interlocutors, the correct term is *yolova*. It connotes the general idea of payment or compensation for "care," especially "health care," previously rendered.
4. See below and Malinowski (1925: 44; 1992a: 181–82, 512). Elsewhere, Malinowski discusses additional categories of sacrificial spirit offering: *ula'ula* and *bubwalua*; see Mosko (2017).
5. In these terms, Trobriand *bwekasa* corresponds closely with Polynesian conversions between *tapu*, "sacred, prohibited, restricted" and *noa*, "non-sacred, unrestricted, open" (Hocart 1952, 1970; Shore 1989; Valeri 1985; Panoff 2018).
6. Hocart (1952, 1970) has given the classic statement of this Oceanic logic. Valeri (1985) and Panoff (2018) are elaborations.
7. The directionality of *sopi* water's "flowing" is generally downward or outward (Hutchins and Hutchins n.d.).
8. See Damon (2016); Strathern (2022); Mosko (2022).
9. The principal dangers of lagoon fishing include shark attack and sudden violent storms that can sink fishers' boats or blow them so far out to sea that they and their crews are lost forever.
10. See Mosko (2009, 2017: 144–50) for additional details of these processes.

11. I have elaborated upon this expansion of Strathernian partibility in terms of "divine dividuals" through synthesis with Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's (1973) notion of "participation" in numerous discussions of Mekeo, Polynesian, Christian, and Trobriand ritual and sociality (Mosko 1992, 1995, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2022). Michael Young's (1983) account of Kalauna (Goodenough Island) creation-spirit-impersonating magicians; Nancy Munn's (1983, 1986) discussions of *butula* "fame"; and Fred Damon's (1983, 2002, 2005, 2016, 2021) treatments of *ked* "roads" and Kula players' rank, renown, and experience of shell exchange have helped guide me to the path that I am here treading. Marshall Sahlins's theorizing of the comparative significance of "metapersons" in precapitalist societies converges with my notion of divine dividuality (Sahlins 2017: 54; 2022: 57; Graeber and Sahlins 2017: 3).
12. Despite the absence of ancestral *baloma* spirits as relevant actors in his analysis, Damon must be credited for discerning the basically sacrificial nature of the Kula exchange process when he describes how a player's name, and thus his fame, rises and falls as the valuables he transacts pass through the hands of himself, his partners, and other transactors on the same *ked* road (Damon 2005: 80–81; see also Damon 2016: 60; 2021: 291).
13. Magicians customarily pass *tukwa* spells to their sons as a temporary expedient before they are returned to the legitimate matrilineal heirs (*veyalela*). However, the concept of *dala* is inclusive of the male and female children of matrilineally affiliated male members (*litulela*) (see Mosko 2017: 355–68; see also Liang, this volume).
14. For example, the gardening spells of the various commoner *dala*s residing in Omarakana's village cluster are subsidiary to those of Tabalu *dala* insofar as the Paramount Chief is regarded as the community's *tama* "father."
15. Traditionally, the marriages of chiefly men and women to persons of similar *dala* rank were strongly preferred over unions with persons of commoner status (see Mosko 2017: Chapter 8).
16. This leadership opportunity is open, at least in theory, to all competent adult men in Kula communities other than the Trobriands.
17. For an updated discussion of the controversy surrounding this topic, see Mosko (2017: 152–58, passim; 2020, 2022).
18. The main protagonists in the Virgin Birth debate are listed in Mosko (2017: 13n11). See also Mosko (1995, 1998, 2005, 2017: Chapter 4; 2022).
19. Despite Malinowski's (1922: 322–26) view of reincarnation as the dominant Trobriand understanding, many of the main characters in foundation myths of the Kula, there and elsewhere in the Massim, are stated to exist as stars and constellations. The long-time missionary-linguist Ralph Lawton (1999: 99) also recorded beliefs that "the old Tabalu chiefs . . . controlled the rising and setting of the sun and movements of the moon and stars."
20. Stanley Tambiah's uncritical acceptance of Malinowski's disenchanted view of Trobriand magic (Tambiah 1968) has had a similar effect upon the anthropology of magic: see Mosko 2017: 92-96.
21. Guyer (2016: 17) proceeds to note that "*don* as a noun is mainly used [by Mauss] in contexts where *la force* (the forces *in the spiritual* [my emphasis] and social world) and/or the ancient quality of the practices are explicitly mentioned."

22. Namely, "magical, religious, and spiritual force," "*spiritual* power," "the spirit things," and "*mana* . . . reserved for men and spirits" (Mauss 2016: 69–75).
23 There is just one unrelated passing reference: "The conception of mana, discovered in a small Melanesian community has, by the work of Hubert and Mauss and others, been proved of fundamental importance" (Malinowski 1922: 514).

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