

Trobriand Health and the Cosmetics of Cyclical Ontology

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Alternative Names:

Bweyowa, Kiriwinian, Kilivilan, Bowoyan, Trobrianders, Trobriand Islanders.

Location and Linguistic Affiliation:

The Trobriand Islands are located in the Massim region of Melanesia 120 miles north of the eastern tip of New Guinea (approximately Lat: 8.30S, Long: 151E). The Trobriand archipelago, consisting of some 22 flat and partially raised coral atolls, sits at the intersection of the Coral and Solomon Seas and is politically situated within the Milne Bay Province of the Republic of Papua New Guinea. The population is centered in the larger islands of Kiriwina (Bowoya), Vakuta, Kaile'una and Kitava. Bowoya's population, exceeding 26,000, is located in some 60 villages (Lepani 2001; see also Weiner 1987:11). The language of the Trobriands is Kilivila (Kiriwinan). Lawton (1993:6) lists eleven dialects. Five of these are spoken on Bowoya proper, three on each of the remaining large islands and the last three in culturally-related Luscancy Island (Simsila), the Marshall Bennet group (Iwa, Gawa, and Egum Atoll). Milke (1965:330) suggests putting Kilivila in the Oceanic subgroup of Austronesian. Senft (1986) treats Kilivila as a language family within the Austronesian "Papua-Tip-Cluster" defined by Capell (1976) and identifies three languages: 1) Budibud (Nada) on the Laughlan Islands, 2) Muyuw (Murua) on the Woodlark and Marshall Bennet Islands, and 3) Kilivila on the Luscancy Islands and Trobriand Islands (Kiriwina, Vakuta, Kitava, Kaile'una, Kuaiwa and Munuwata). Based on forms of expressing negation, Trobriand Kilivila speakers identify four varieties of their language: 1) *Biga galagoki/Biga galagola* (Kavataria village, Kiriwina Island), 2) *Biga besagala* (Kiriwina Island except Kavataria village), *Biga galanani* (Kuiua village on Kuiawa Island, Kaduwaga village on Kaile'una Island, and Sinsim and Munuwata Islands) and *Biga galawala* (Kaile'una Island except Kaduwaga village) (Senft 1986). Senft (1986) treats Kilivila as a language family within the Austronesian "Papua-Tip-Cluster" defined by Capell (1976:6,9).

Overview of the Culture:

Trobriand cultural institutions share the forms of cultural practice which are characteristic of many Melanesian societies: religious concepts focus on the processes of growth and decay; male sorcery involves powers of life and death; magic controls food production; rank is asserted

pro forma, but in reality is contingent on elaborate exchanges during birth, mortuary and harvesting rites and, to a lesser extent, in association with *kula* exchanges (Young 1983). Men are defined by their success in gardening and exchanges of yams and *kula* shells while women are distinguished through mortuary exchanges of skirts and leaf bundles (Weiner 1976). Trobrianders are also defined by a system of rank tied to the alimentary history of their direct matrilineal ancestors, transmitted through mother's milk (Montague personal communication). Differences in rank are articulated through violations of food prohibitions that adversely effect magic stored in the stomach.

Trobriand social life has been described as being organized around sub-clans (*dala*) each of which is assigned to one of four clans (*kumila*). Malinowski (1929) and to some extent, those who have followed, treated Trobriand kinship as exclusively matrilineal, viewing fathers as merely affines. Recently Montague (2001) has argued that Trobriand kinship has bilateral characteristics and that Trobrianders define their relationships in terms of dietary history and exchanges.

Bweyowa subsistence is based on agriculture and fishing. The main crops are yams, sweet potatoes, taro, bananas and coconuts. A food surplus is produced in normal years; however periodic droughts, attributed to the magic of Tabalu chiefs, result in famine (Digim'Rina, 1998). Young's observations that Goodenough Islanders' preoccupation with food dominates their symbolic idioms, and cannot be completely explained by ecological exigencies, also holds for Trobrianders (Young 1986). Trobrianders have gone to inordinate lengths to make food the measure of all things, particularly health and well being.

Evidence for the initial occupation of the Massim, in the form of pottery deposits, suggests widespread settlement by Austronesian speakers about 2,000 BP (Bickler 1988:6). Burenhult and Digim'Rina (2000) have recently found evidence of occupation of Kiriwinia dating back 900 years. Inter-island group trade in the form of *kula* may date from around 500 BP (Egloff 1978). In 1793 French explorer Bruny D'Entrecasteux named the group after his lieutenant, Denis de Trobriand and in the century that followed there were occasional visits by traders and whalers. By 1894 pearl traders and Wesleyan Missionaries were living permanently on Boyowa (Campbell 1984:2). Australian colonial officials set up a government station at Losuia in 1904. One year later a hospital was built in response to reports that there had been a serious population decline due to the spread of venereal diseases (Black 1957).¹ In 1936-7, a mission and primary school were set up by the Sacred Heart Catholic Mission. During the Pacific War, Australian and American forces were stationed at two airstrips constructed on Boyowa. In the 1950's, a high school, local government and various business ventures were established. National independence and inclusion into Milne Bay Province took place in the 1970's (Young 1983).

Bronislaw Malinowski's pioneering and widely influential works on Trobriand society made the islander's lives accessible to readers around the world. Trobriand society has been the focus of considerable ethnographic field research and the descriptions and analyses derived from

¹Montague has collected oral histories that indicate that there was a severe population decline during the early 19th century due to post-contact diseases (personal communication).

these studies have themselves been the subject of voluminous debate and re-analysis. Each generation of scholars have brought to the Trobriand materials the insights and biases of their own training.² The corpus of Trobriand literature is enormous and, in an appropriate analogy for a work in medical anthropology, it resembles nothing less than the thick chart of a chronic patient: a series of not clearly connected narratives written at different times by different clinicians, ostensibly about the same person. What follows is a synthesis of this huge literature that focuses on the visual aspects of health.³ However we recognize that such a synthesis is just that, synthetic.

The Context of Health: Environmental, Economic, Social and Political Factors

The islands have undergone sustained population growth. Pöschul and Pöschul estimate that between 1913 and 1985 the population of Boyowa grew exponentially (Pöschul & Pöschul 1985). They also report that pregnancy in younger girls is increasing in frequency and that family size is expanding (1985; see also Lepani 2001). Darrah and Crain (personal communication) found the population still expanding in 2001.

The scarcity of arable land has led to a reduction in the yam planting cycle from seven to three years. Pöschul and Pöschul report an increase in deficiency diseases and malnutrition even in years with a good harvest. They also found tuberculosis in malnourished children and underweight adults and suggest that enteric diseases were to be found in larger villages with poor sanitation and inadequate water supplies (Pöschul & Pöschul 1985). Lepani (2001) reports that malaria, skin disease and pneumonia are the leading causes of morbidity, while perinatal conditions, meningitis, malaria, and tuberculosis are leading causes of mortality. However, Montague (1985) notes that the risk assessment for the effects of malaria, made by people in Kaduwaga, tends to be lower than those of health officers. Annual sprayings of DDT to control mosquitoes are opposed locally and available malaria drugs are used for treatment rather than prevention. Montague also found no evidence of children frequently being ill from malaria.

²The major ethnographers of the Trobriand and related Massim cultures include: C.G. Seligman, Bronislaw Malinowski, Henry Powell, Annette Weiner, Shirley Campbell, Ann Chowning (Fergusson), Debra Battaglia (Port Moresby and Sabral), Fredrick Damon (Woodlark Island), Linus Digm'Rina (Trobriands and Fergusson), Reo Fortune (Fergusson and Dobu), Edwin Hutchins, Susanne Kuehling (Dobu), Jerry Leach, Maria Lepowsky (Sudest), Luciana Lussu, Martha Macintyre, Susan Montague, Nancy Munn (Gawa), Giancarlo Scoditti, Carl Thune (Normanby), Karin Grossman, Stuart Berde (Panaeiti) and Michael Young.
Medically-trained observers include: R. L. Bellamy, R. H. Black, R. Pöschl and U. Pöschl, Wolf Schiefenhövel, and S. Lindeburg.

Other relevant views of Trobriand life have been written by: Tom'Tavala, John Kasaipwalova, Chief Naributal, Juta Malnic (photographer and author), Leo Austen (Magistrate), Rev. Ralph Lawton (missionary-linguist), Father Bernard Baldwin (missionary), Kenneth Costigan (architect), and Ellis Silas (artist).

³This work employed the DEPTH Database, a compilation of 8,000 pages of digital texts on Massim cultures, which is a greatly expanded version of the HRAF Trobriand Collection (www.csus.edu/anth/trobriand/depth). The authors wish to acknowledge the assistance of Caroline Gardner, Andy Connaly, Erin Caddy, and Sebastian Barbosa of the DEPTH team.

Diet and Health: Food consumption is central to Bweyowa thought about society and the body. Eating articulates social divisions of rank (Malinowski 1929:86), kinship (Montague 2001:2), age, states of being, and definitions of self. Pre-colonial Trobrianders contrasted themselves with neighboring cannibals. Tudava, the great culture hero, eliminated cannibalism substituting yams for humans and lessened the effect of garden magic to make room for individual achievement. This magic provides a lattice of inferences that yam and human life cycles mirror each other (Brindley 1984; see also Darrah 1972). Now Trobrianders, raise and exchange yams, which are metaphorical humans.

Malinowski's Trobrianders assumed that people ate for pleasure rather than to sustain the body (1929:441, 1935 I:227). However, Malinowski also notes famine was thought to produce a variety of illnesses which could lead to death (1929:441). Montague reports that death ultimately results from consumption of food that has lost its nourishment due to adulteration by a sorcerer (1989:36-8). Humans require a steady intake of yams or taro (*kaula* or *kauna*) to build their bodies and confer the hardness essential to withstand sorcery (Montague 1989).⁴ Trobrianders, particularly during mourning, stress the obligatory side of ingestion making it a moral duty to eat food provided by others. Annual gifts of yams, totaling more than half a man's production, result in people being food dependent.⁵

A powerful expression of the obligation to 'eat for others' was the former reciprocal obligation of the *kopoi* relationship where fathers pre-masticated food for their infants, and were repaid after death when son's symbolically ate from their father's bodies and vomited. This exchange should be viewed in the context of food prohibitions. Sons are responsible for their father's well-being and go to great lengths to show that they did not cause their deaths. A son refrained from eating his father's totems so that the father would not get sick when the son used his food utensils (Seligman 1910:683). Alternately, fathers also had to maintain their children's food taboos.

Coupled with the obligation to eat with appreciation and share prohibitions is a public reticence to eat at all. Restraint in eating, particularly *kaula*, is a civic virtue. The intent of harvest magic was to control people's appetites so that yams rotted in storehouses rather than stomachs. The famous Trobriand magic of prosperity [*vilamalia*] worked directly on people's appetites (Malinowski 1935 I:227).⁶ Obesity, which is evidence of the failure of magic to restrain

⁴*Kaula*, 'animate human body substance building food' (Montague's *kauna*) consists of gardenized yam tubers and taro corm. (Montague 1988:3).

⁵Dependency requires demonstrations of appreciation lest patrons be offended. Eating with appreciation treats consumption as duty rather than personal gain. People at a feast eat until they vomit.(Malinowski 1922:171) Vomiting highlights the generosity of the donor while denying benefit to the recipient. Persons suspicious of the food they have eaten quickly take emetics; thus vomiting couched as appreciation may also be protective.(Lawton 1999:101)

⁶Gawans have magic to make food hard to swallow; a person's throat, the locus of their mind, is made to reject food by vomiting. (Munn 1989:85) Selfish Gawan's are given food that cannot be eliminated. (Munn 1986:49)

appetite, as well as a sign of selfishness, is not desirable. Nutrition surveys have generally found the Trobriand diet to be a healthy one. (Hipsley and Clements, 1950: see also Lindeberg *et al.*, 1994)⁷

Wives maintain their husbands' food taboos to protect the magic stored in their husbands' stomachs (Montague 1974:94-95). Foods, mentioned in magical formula and/or which share defining characteristics with the magic's intent, are avoided to preserve the effectiveness of spells (Munn 1989:290). Violation of a food taboo would be to 'eat one's ancestor' (Munn 1986:290). Spells list the ancestors who held the magic in their own bellies. 'Eating one's ancestors' is to ingest and then eliminate the ancestor laden spells; magic should be ingested and then brought back up.⁸

Hot Words:

Kayga'u magic, which protects against witches, requires sub-vocalizing spells while chewing hot ginger.⁹ The mixture is spat creating a protective fog. Magical utterances are given physical form which Scoditti calls 'sound dust', i.e. 'a myriad of luminous, dust-like sound particles, enchanted by the voice and, in turn, enchanting all that they touch.'¹⁰(Scoditti 1996:190) This 'sound dust' incorporates the sound force of spells with the benefits of chewed hot food that is not digested. The heat/sound relationship, encapsulated in *kayga'u*, finds expression in the homonym *polu* which means 'to boil' or 'foam' and also 'to create noise'.¹¹ In a rare bit of hermeneutics Malinowski noted that, in the context of producing coconut oil for

⁷The earliest nutrition survey of Kiriwina, conducted by in 1947 by Hipsley and Clements, found the diet of the inhabitants of Kavataria, in contrast to most other areas surveyed in New Guinea, to be adequate except for some deficiency in calcium. (Black 1957) More recently Lindburg examined diet and risk factors for ischemic heart disease and stroke (Lindburg, *et al.* 1994:331).

⁸For magic to live in the belly, it must continually be retrieved by sub-vocalization; thus, spells recorded by anthropologists are no longer active. The usual expression for a man who has completely learned all of his father's magical knowledge would be 'Your father (his name) died empty handed, you have completely taken all of his stomach's contents.' This is a direct reference to the man's magical knowledge and its transmission, whilst adding praise for the competence of the heir.

⁹Gawan magicians increase soil fertility by heating the soil with ginger.(Munn 1986:82) War magicians spat ginger on soldiers to make them fierce; the word for ginger also means fury. (Malinowski 1920)

¹⁰The mind (*nanola*), with the capacity to learn spells, resides in throat/larynx. (Malinowski 1922:408-9 & 1935:340, Senft 1998: 42) The voice force, which carries the magic's power, is focused intensely on the object, which will carry the magic's force. Objects mixed with the spell in the mouth/mind are powerful delivery vehicles.

¹¹Malinowski treatment of Kilivilian homonym was to argue that they were not a symptom of confused thinking. (1935 II:21, 28-9, 68, 124) Edmund Leach revisited homonyms in his work on the *tabu* kinship category.(1958) In the contexts of poetry and ritual homonyms can bring two separate domains into metaphoric comparison. Baldwin has observed 'Word play to the Boyowan poet is the very stuff of poetry.He works with homophones like a musician with counterpoint.' (1945:215)

seduction magic, *polu* brings together noise/spell and the foam of the boiling coconut oil, and concludes ‘...the magical concatenation of magical ideas consists in just such connections of words and their meanings.’ (1922:442-3)

Medical Practitioners:

The literature makes no note of specialized traditional positions or offices for medical practitioners. However, there are individuals in each village who have knowledge of curative spells and magic-producing materials. Malinowski noted that magic to prevent dangers in childbirth, to cause abortion, treat genital discharge, swellings of the limbs and toothache was controlled by women but men also possess spells to control various aspects of reproduction (Malinowski 1929:36).

Noting that Trobrianders lack a tradition of local midwives Pöschul and Pöschul (1985) called for the training of women birth attendants. Lepani (2001) indicates that 126 women have been trained as Village Birth Attendants. There is also a health center in Losuia and more than a dozen local aid posts, with the actual count of functioning sites varying due to staffing problems.

Classification of Illness: Theories of Illness and Treatment of Illness

Classifications of Illness

Bweyowa notions of the body, the beginning and ending of life, the nature of disease and the various stages of life involve a complex assemblage of assertions and practices that are not easily, nor perhaps properly, separable from other aspects of life. Linking these, and used here as a guide through a brief discussion of Tobweyowa views of biology, are local notions of agency elaborated through overlapping classificatory schemes involving properties of color (white/red/black), hot/cold, hard/soft, shiny/dull, wrapped/unwrapped, and mobile/anchored.

Agency and Illness: As in other areas of Melanesia, the body is mediated through a complex web of social relationships; its condition is enhanced, sustained or endangered through a carefully monitored series of social and economic exchanges (Knauff 1999:21ff). Bweyowa attribute most illness to four kinds of agency: *bwaga'u* (sorcerers), *mulukwausi* (witches), *tauva'u* (malignant spirits), and *gaga* (offenses against customary exogamy rules). Secondary forms of agency include *kosi*, a spiritual essence of recently deceased sorcerers, and *tokwai*, tree spirits who work in conjunction with sorcerers.

Sorcery: Illness (*silami*) results from the introduction of magically treated objects into the body. Vectors include, tobacco, food, betel, smoke and charmed stones (Malinowski 1929:305). The object is wrapped to preserve the magic's force. Feeling heavy, the recipient retires to his/her home to heal over the family hearth. In the dead of night the sorcerer attempts to intensify the illness by depositing herbs in the protective fire. The third, projective, phase of sorcery employs metaphors of spearing, stabbing or otherwise piercing the body with a magical implement.

Tauva'u: Epidemics are attributed to the agency of *tauva'u*, spirits with the power to assume the shape of men, as well as crabs, snakes, and lizards, all of whom emerged from underground, in the mythic past, with the ability to rejuvenate by sloughing their integuments. A *tauva'u* taught sorcery to a man who then killed his benefactor. *Tauva'u* come to the Trobriands

from the south, at the change of seasons, a time when people become ill from eating the first, unhealthy, 'black' yams of the new garden. The yams are made unwholesome by Kitavan magic, which banishes evil influences, via the trade winds blowing towards the Trobriands (Malinowski 1935:238).¹² The invisible *tauva'u* kill people in epidemic proportions by striking each with a club. Not only are *tauva'u* the source of sorcery but they also are responsible for teaching witches, their consorts, how to kill people (Malinowski 1929:39).

Flying Witches: Witches remove internal organs, particularly those associated with ingestion and speech, and eat them causing sudden death. Most witches live on other islands, but Trobrianders identify some local women as witches and are quick to include them in food distributions when a relative is close to giving birth. The actions of witches, including their rituals of parturition, are the inverse of proper Trobriand women. Witches are greedy for food, and eat raw meat. Witches are strongly associated with fire, heat and hyper sexuality. At night their inner spirit, *sans* clothes and skin, takes the shape of a flying animal and moves through the sky emanating fire.

Prohibitions: Breaches of exogamy [*suvasova*] result in skin disease, swelling and wasting. The body swells, the skin turns white and breaks out into sores. A small snake-like creature appears and moves about in the body causing symptoms of swelling and wasting (Malinowski 1929:433).

Theories of Illness:

The natural state of a person is health. Theoretically people die from old age; however, usually one of the above agencies is blamed. Weiner has argued that magic comes to the forefront, not because of risk, as Malinowski suggested, but rather when the outcome of an exchange is imperative. In Weiner's view, magic is about controlling men through exchanges rather than control of nature; control over natural forces, such as the wind and rain, is proof that one has the power to dominate others (1987:8). Weiner's starting point is different from that of Weber, who places the source of meaning in the crises of illness. Weiner's perspective does not focus on misfortune or its remediation, and tends to ignore revenge, the other half of reciprocity. It is also a top-down view of society given that magic is such a limited resource, a prerogative of rank, while suffering is the great common denominator.¹³

Magic originated in Tuma, the underworld where the ancestors live, and was brought to this world along with yams, and personal decorations, two categories of objects closely tied to

¹²Dobuans claim that sorcery and the *tauva'u* originated with them. The *tauva'u* arrive in Kiriwinia with the Dobuan kula fleet seeking arm shells and the favors of Trobriand women. Trobrianders are singularly impressed with the independence of the aloof Dobouan women, who take an active part in the kula, practice garden magic, and are dangerous witches. *Tauva'u* may be a projection of the potential of Dobuan men for teaching their Trobriand lovers to be as powerful and dangerous as the women in Dobu.

¹³Malinowski provides accounts of ancestor's possession of a man to complain about the quantity of food distributed. (1916:165).

magic and rank. Over time losses of spells resulted from conflicts between heirs.¹⁴ The effects of magic, once quick and complete, now work with lessened effect through accretions. The most important component of successful magic may be the cooperation of the chain of ancestors who have passed a system of spells to its present owner. This chain of succession, under the influence of Trobriand vertical conceptualization of rank, has been visualized as a spiral, which enables the magician to move people back in forth in time.¹⁵ (Malnic 1998:142)

Both illness and senescence are associated with blackening and also with heat/fire. Malinowski observed that magic which effects health comes in paired sets of spells, called *vivisa* for therapeutic magic and *silami* for magic of affliction (Malinowski 1916:197). A sorcerer without the perceived capacity to heal would be deemed incompetent. *Vivisa* refers to the defensive or healing portion of magical formulae.¹⁶ It means to untie the knot of offensive magic which has the patient tied up in illness. The *-visi* suffix is also associated with peeling with the hands and to cool by fanning. Transformations of the skin are closely connected to health and therapeutics. The process of aging, visualized as darkening skin, results from accretions of black magic; *vivisa* and beauty magic reverse this process.

The general term for illness is *katoula* (e.g., *to-katoula*, "sick person", *eweya katoula* " he caught an illness"; *I kapilakeigu kala katoula*, "he gave me his sickness.") (Baldwin 1937).¹⁷ Specific Tobweyowa disease categories include *kaivatokula* (wasting disease), *diega*, *bwawa*, *pwawa* (elephantiasis of the leg, arm, testicles, respectively), *kweyagola* (disease of the bones; rheumatism; tertiary yaws), *popoma* (disease causing swollen belly), *silaipwasa* (disease of stricture of the bowels), *lelia* (swellings; plague), *tobudawa* (abscess) and *silami* (incurable internal abscess) (Baldwin).

Fires of Life: Momova is life, and *mova* is life/alive; humans are *tomomova* [*to-* prefix for

¹⁴One of the great themes of Trobriand mythology is the deterioration of magic resulting from conflict between owners and heirs. Myths warn that community welfare depends upon the harmonious transfers of magical heritages. Included in this loss was the magic of full rejuvenation.

¹⁵Malinowski initially asserted that the *ancestors* were not agents of magic. (1916:214, 1922:407-8). Later he expressed uncertainty. (1935 I:468). Others have suggested a more active role for the ancestors. (Munn 1986:290, Weiner 1987:55). Kasapailova states that without help from ancestors magic will not work. (Malnic 1998:144)

¹⁶*Vivisa* is magical cooling of a fever. *Ta-visi* is to cool or dry by fanning. Scoditti points out that *vivisa* may be connected to *visi*, which Baldwin lists as to open like a fan, in an allusion which compares the voice to a fan. (1996:211). Munn notes that *taavisi*, which means bursting open, is used in spells associated with the removal of dirt in order to reveal a persons white skin. *Visi* is used for the removal of the dark/dirty skin of a vegetable, prior to its being served (1986:100) *Visi* connotes both the cooling properties of a fan but also revealing something hidden by a dark covering; *novisi* is to break out. Transformations of the skin are closely connected to health and therapeutics. The process of aging, visualized as darkening skin, results from accretions of black magic; *vivisa* and beauty magic reverse this process.

¹⁷*Weya* is to strike, hit, beat or kill but also to cause illness. *I weya lula*, 'hit the insides' is a bellyache. *I weya nanola*, intoxicate, 'hit the mind'. *I weya lopola*, 'hit the stomach' is constipation.

man].¹⁸ *Yomova* and *yomovi*, literally ‘to cause life’, means to heal. *Tokatumova* is healer. Scoditti translates *momova* as vital force (1996:184). *Mo-* or *mwa-* are prefixes which impart maleness or humanity while Lawton notes that *-va* is a gentle, intimate action done with fire.¹⁹ *Mova* can be glossed as human fire.²⁰ On the other hand *mata* is both death and a dormant fire; *kimati* is both ‘to kill someone’ and ‘extinguish a fire’. The life as flame metaphor is elaborated through analogies between fire making and intercourse. The traditional form of starting a fire was rubbing a small pointed stick, on another stick, fire plough fashion (Silas 1926:144; see also Fortune 1932:296). The rubbing stick was called *kaikwila*; *kai* means wooden and *kwila* is penis.²¹ On neighboring Dobu the fire stick is called *kekusi*, and the act of rubbing is *kusi* or *usi*, terms for the penis. Sexual intercourse is sometimes spoken of as ‘...we copulate and it flames up’ (Fortune 1932).

Fire originated through human reproduction.²² Malinowski provides a myth about the origins of fire in which a woman gives birth to fire, followed by the sun and moon. She conceals fire in her vagina bringing it out only to secretly cook her food (1929). Intercourse produces heat that, at birth, ignites into the flame of life. Rituals that attempt to regulate the problematics of reproduction draw upon the quotidian acts of cooking. Trobrianders metaphorize alimentation as reproduction. Elements from the culinary domain are used to build scenarios for the manipulation of analogous aspects of reproduction thereby reinforcing the assumption that life is a fire.

Treatment of Illness:

Blood letting is an important therapeutic practice in the Massim (Baldwin 1937; see also Senft 1986; Munn 1986; Villeminot 1967). Blood, produced by eating heavy *kaula*, is itself heavy, and its removal has the effect of lightening a person in terms of both color and weight. Gawan dancers are bled to lighten themselves. In the Trobrianders, cuts or scratches are made with

¹⁸On the other hand *mata* is both death or a dormant fire. The expression *kova I mata*, the fire has died, alludes to embers below the ash which await being brought back to life. [Scoditti 1996:184]

¹⁹Fortune reports a constellation of Dobuan beliefs related to sorcery, witchcraft, and health centering around heat and fire. [1932] Sorcerers consume salt water, and hot ginger to keep their bodies parched and hot. Heat deficiency causes ill health; patients are bathed in water treated, *kagayu* fashion, with magically treated ginger. Dobuan sorcerers preserve their body heat by refraining from intercourse.

²⁰Scoditti records exegesis of the act of blowing on embers to revive them, which is compared to a son’s revival of his father’s memory by repeating magic inherited from him. [1996: 214] Life is a fire that is lit, extinguished and then relit by the breath of magic.

²¹Trobriand associations of life with fire can be inferred from their use of the same term *kimati* for ‘to kill someone’ or ‘extinguish a fire’. On Dobu the fire stick is called *kekusi*, and the act of rubbing is *kusi* or *usi*, terms for the penis. Sexual intercourse is sometimes spoken of as ‘...we copulate and it flames up.’ [Fortune 1932 296]

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a sharp stone in order to remove blood or relieve pain, headaches, lassitude, chills, hematoma and bruises (Villeminot 1967:205-8). Bruises which produce a discoloration, likened to those suffered by pigs when clubbed to death, are lacerated to remove the blackness. Blood once released from the body, is dangerous to matrilineal kin, but can be a gift that can establish exchange relationships.²³ Gawan fathers put blood on their children to inaugurate exchanges of betel and other edibles with them (Munn 1986:144).

Sexuality and Reproduction:

Malinowski's (1929) discussion of the sexual freedom enjoyed by young Trobrianders has led to a distortion of Trobriand sexual ideologies and practices. The popular appellation of "Isles of Love," and the mind-set which is attracted by this term, ignores the extensive limits to sexual expression which were also documented by Malinowski. Prior to marriage, adolescents enjoy great latitude so long as their actions are private and within the confines of exogamy as well as peer pressures to restrict their choices to local candidates. It is commonly believed that sexually transmitted diseases are usually contracted from individuals from outside the local community (Lepani 2001).

Marriage, which is bound by strong expectations of monogamy, does not legitimize sexual relations; on the contrary, marriage requires the couple to maintain a public fiction that intimacy is non-existent. It is a grave insult for someone to suggest to a married person's face that he or she is sexually active with their spouse. The Trobriand ideology of asexual reproduction furthers this fiction; otherwise children would be public evidence of their parent's private actions. However, Malinowski also observed that, during the harvest season, there were occasions when the strict norms of marital monogamy were relaxed (1929). This was also a time when young people engaged in organized public competitions and dances, which were expected to lead to liaisons. Bellamy reported a large increase in births occurred nine months following the harvest season (Black 1957).

Instead of sex, marriage legitimizes alimentary behaviors. The first, trial phase of marriage, is marked by the couple sharing food in public, an activity that lasts for only the first year of marriage. During this period the couple consume food prepared by others as the bride is taught, by a woman from the husband's home, how to maintain his dietary restrictions. Phase two begins at the end of the first year when the wife is given her own hearth; after this time the couple will separately eat her cooking. Divorce is signaled by either party throwing the hearth stones out of their house (Montague 2001).

Health through the Life Cycle:

Pregnancy and Birth: It has been frequently reported, and contested, that Trobrianders believe that human conception is asexual, yet it is also clear that intercourse plays a part in reproduction (Malinowski 1929: see also Austen 1934-5; Weiner 1976; Powell 1968; Leach 1966 & 1968; Montague 1971 & 1973; Spiro 1968, 1972, & 1973). Montague (personal communication) reports that the hammering of intercourse closes the cervix, staunching the

²³A corpse is also dangerous to its kin who pay affines to bury it. In principle both sexual intercourse and blood are dangerous when shared by kin because their bodies, which have the same dietary history, are too similar.

menstrual flow, thereby facilitating pregnancy.²⁴ Fertility is also aided by attachment to a particular partner. Conception occurs when a *waiwaia* [spirit child] is deposited on a woman's head by a deceased relative (Austen 1934-5:108-109). Shortly after the *waiwaia* is deposited an embryo [*veguvegu*] is brought into existence [*ebubuli*] (Austen 1934-5:109-112). Blood and water from the uterus moves to the woman's head, collects the *veguvegu*, and descends again, causing dizziness, headaches and vomiting. At about three months the *veguvegu* turns into a rat-like object rolled up in a mat-like membrane.

Malinowski (1929) reports that *waiwaia* are reincarnations of ancestral spirits, created when rejuvenation, under the influence of magic, reverses spirits back to their pre-embryonic state. In 1918, Billy Hancock, Malinowski's expatriate friend in the Trobriand Islands, advised Malinowski that Trobrianders did not believe in re-incarnation, having said so only to agree with Malinowski (Stocking 1977:11-12). Montague (1971:245), Austen (1945:29), Campbell (personal communication) and Digim'Rina (personal communication) all report beliefs in reincarnation.²⁵

If we examine *ebubuli* we find a variety of usages for its root *bubula*, the noun form. It is the initial state in carving, when order is imposed (Senft 1986). It also means to shine, and to adorn. *Bububula* refers to the process of creation and manufacturing (Lawton 1993). In his transcription of the great creation myth of Tudava, Malinowski records a passage describing Tudava's creation of fine gardens with the phrase '*valu i-bubuli*, the countryside was made bright' (Malinowski 1935 II:205). *Ebubuli* is a construct of Trobriand ideas of order and the initial stage of a transformation. The highly valued condition of brightness is linked to transformations of age, beauty and health. One of the more compelling themes in Trobriand ritual is the use of magic to contravene the visual effects of aging, brought about by black magic, by restoring lightness and a beautiful bright sheen to the body's surface.

Special ceremonies are performed to make a pregnant woman beautiful and white. She is given a special bath, her father's sisters perform beauty magic over her, and her skin is covered with coconut oil. She is covered with a special white cloak and avoids the sun and thoughts about sex, for both would darken her skin. In the third trimester she resides with her own family who protect her with armed guards. At delivery she is placed over a fire to cause her blood to liquefy.²⁶ Magic is performed to prevent sorcerers from darkening her skin, cooling her reproductive organs, and sabotaging her passage towards an uncomplicated delivery. Montague

²⁴Digim'Rina notes that even though the benefits of hammering have been frequently cited in the literature the idea is foreign to him.

²⁵Damon (1982:234) in Muyuw and Munn(1986:286) in Gawa did not find reincarnation. On Kitawa, *kula* players, immortalized by accounts of their achievements, live perpetually in the sky after death, while lesser men go to Tuma and are reincarnated. (Scoditti 1983:249 & 272)

²⁶From the third month of her pregnancy through the first month after parturition a *prima para* must eat hard dry foods [*kaula*], which produce blood. If she eats soft and wet foods, the baby will suffer from a disease called *gwemata*. (Poschul 1985:142) *Gwemata* means cold and damp. (Baldwin 1937)

(1985) noted that a woman was ideally secluded after delivery, for up to six months, so that her skin would match the white color of her child's.

In the *veguvegu*, or nascent embryo stage of existence, the symbolic focus is a house cricket called *vegu*.²⁷ The salient qualities of the *vegu* are its long sensuous feelers, a very beautiful, luscious abdomen, and a sun sensitive skin that causes this nocturnal creature to wrap itself in a leaf (Malnic 1998).²⁸ Used to attract birds, *vegu* also means bait. The characteristics of the *vegu* are dramatized in the rituals that transform a *prima para* into a mother. The equally vulnerable parturient, who also attracts flying predators (*i.e.*, witches) must cloak herself from the sun and wait patiently in her house.

Infancy:

Children are generally welcome additions to the family, however both Austen (1934-35) and Lepani (2001) indicate that abortions, by both herbal and mechanical means, are also an option. Lepani also reports that pregnancy often results in marriage. Powell (1980) mentions the use of traditional forms of contraceptives, called *kaikariga* [*kai-* is a prefix for wood and *kariga* is death]. Austen (1934-5) notes that boiled seawater is drunk as a form of contraception, a practice which no doubts draws meaning from the use of seawater as a medium for conception.

Bellamy (Black 1957), Assistant Resident Magistrate and doctor in the Trobriands, from 1906 to 1915, reports that female infanticide may have been practiced; however, Malinowski rejected this possibility (1929). Montague (1985) reports that Kaduwagans deny practicing infanticide even though it is within a mother's rights up until she has feed her child. A newborn, prior to its first meal, is the property of the woman who did the work of growing it, just as yams are the property of the man who raised them. A genetrix can elect to feed a neonate, give the child to someone else to feed, or the infant can just disappear, without ever entering the kinship system. Once the neonate has been fed it is human, rather than property, and its kinship ties, which follow milk rather than blood, are to the person whose dietary history it shares (Montague, 2001). All newborns have the same kind of undifferentiated blood. It is only when a child drinks milk, which incorporates the nurse's unique dietary history, that it becomes related through these shared differentiations. Weiner notes that wet nurses are given axe blades [*beku*] as repayment for their milk and to reclaim the infant for its natal *dala*.²⁹

From the third month of her pregnancy through the first month after parturition a *prima para* must eat hard dry foods [*kaula*], which produce blood and milk. If she eats soft and wet

²⁷In carving and magic animals represent sets of associations. 'Meaning is built up by layer upon layer of associations which not only cross-reference each other, but also project associations into the wider cultural framework, thus enriching the possibilities for interpretation.' (Campbell 1984)

²⁸Kasaipwalova says this reddish cricket is a primary symbol for the beauty magic of *kula*. In *kula* the *vegu* represents touch and sensuality characterized by its still body and sensuously moving feelers. The *vegu* and *kula* player consciously project their beauty.

²⁹People are said to resemble their fathers rather than their mothers or other matrilineal kin. It is a grave insult to say that blood relatives resemble each other. In this passage beauty refers to the brother's daughter

foods, the baby will suffer from a non-specific disease called *gwemata* (Pöschul, R & U. Pöschul, 1985). *Gwemata* means cold and damp (Baldwin, 1937). As late as the 1970's, women were encouraged to refrain from conjugal relations until their children entered the toddler stage in order to protect the quality of their milk. During post-partum seclusion a major concern is to protect the mother's milk by keeping it warm. Cold or reheated foods are also avoided to prevent damaging fluctuations to the mother's internal temperature. Women also cover their heads at night out of fear that they will lose body heat, thereby cooling their milk (Montague, 1985).

Mothers nurse their infants for periods reported to be in excess of one year or up until the child starts walking. Colostrum may or may not be given. A 1980 Milne Bay weight-by-age nutrition study raised concerns about the diet and feeding practices for children from weaning up until 24 months of age (Nutrition Monitoring Group, 1980). The report found that a starchy diet, low in protein and high-energy foods, combined with a low frequency of food consumption made it difficult for young children to ingest amounts adequate to their energy and nutrient needs. Montague suggests Trobrianders exaggerate their dependence on *kauna* and under-report their consumption of other foods. In any case, Trobrianders of her acquaintance were far more concerned about emergency health care than issues related to child nutrition (1985). In the Trobriand view it is good for babies to be plump but from the toddler stage on the preference is for thinness coupled with sturdy muscle development and high energy.

Any ambiguity surrounding the father's part in conception does not spill over onto his role as nurturer. Fathers have intense physical and emotional contact with their children starting several months after birth (Weiner, 1976). Fathers feed and care for their children even before their abrupt weaning. After this juncture, the child sleeps with its father until age ten or until it is adopted by a family member. Powell suggests that young Trobriand children do not lack for support or guidance when their parents are absent (1969).

Childhood:

Children enjoy considerable independence. Malinowski reports that parents are more likely to request favors of their children, sometimes accompanied by threats, than they are to give them commands (1929). They rely on the child's sense of fairness and obligation, which is instilled at a very early age. By age four the child moves into the village play group and increasingly avoids parental discipline and oversight in a process of emancipation which Malinowski judged to be gradual and pleasant (1929). At a point roughly coinciding with menarche, young girls are given a short red skirt symbolic of their capacity to evoke desire from others.

Adolescence:

As a child ages it is expected to explore its sexuality and may receive adult approval and encouragement in this quest. First sexual encounters reportedly occur between the ages of 11 and 16 years and are associated with the onset of puberty (Lepani, 2001). It is commonly believed that the enlargement of a girl's breasts and her menarche result from her being sexual active. Young women have great freedom in choosing their partners but if they have too many partners they run the risk of being labeled 'tasteless'. Young people who do not go out at night may be categorized by peers and adults as worthless. As girls age, they look for longer, monogamous

relationships in preparation for marriage. These steady attachments are thought to enhance the chances of pregnancy, which reportedly occurs at an increasingly earlier age, resulting in growing number of unwed mothers (Lepani 2001). Lepani suggests that the freedom of adolescence, combined with beliefs that liaisons within the community are safe, and expanding contact with people outside the local group, put Trobriand youth at an increasing risk for sexually transmitted diseases.

Adolescence is period devoted to honing skills of seduction which employ decorations and magic provided by the father's family. Weiner notes that adults persuade others with magic and exchanges while the young must rely on their beauty augmented by magic (1976). Mothers take an interest in their daughter's relationships, which they monitor through the gifts provided by the girl's suitors (Lepani, 2001).

In line with the general association of red with adolescence, the letting of blood provided an idiom through which Trobriand girls could communicate about their relationships with a particular boy. A girl could publicly express her interest by wounding a boy at a special harvest competition. During the foreplay, which would ensue, the couple would bite each other's lips to mingle their blood. Sometimes a girl would cut her lover's breast or upper arms as an indication of her commitment to him (Malinowski, 1929). This 'red' period of the life cycle ends with marriage when the girl receives a white skirt with the expectation that pregnancy will follow, her menstrual flow cease, and her skin will be bleached through the rituals surrounding parturition..

Adulthood:

Chromatic Ontology

The emphases on white symbolism, in *prima para* rituals, is best viewed in the broader context of Trobriand efforts to control time with beliefs and practices focusing on the chromatics of ontology. Campbell reports that white is associated with newness, cleanness, purity, immaturity, innocence, but not with semen or milk (1984). It is with experience and history that the skin ages and darkens. As people age their bodies turn from the white of infancy to the sexually active red of youth followed by progressively darkening hues as they gain experience, acquire magic, and are effected by the magic of others. White, black and red have both positive and negative aspects (Tambiah, 1968, 1983). On the positive side a youth's 'red' glossy exterior is highly desirable and allows him/her to influence others. The *prima para* is at the point of exiting the red stage of her development cycle and is entering the black stage of maturity. Young people lack social maturity and the ability to make important exchanges. Mature adults, who have darkened as the result of magic, must use magic to compel others to succumb to their own wills. (Campbell, 1984) At maturity, the jet-black hair of youth turns white, a reversal of the body's progression. White hair, like dark skin, signifies knowledge of life, and either draws fear and respect or ridicule depending on the individuals conduct. Hair, the site of conception, may be a harbinger of reincarnation when it whitens.

Transforming Liquids

Magic, that reverses or speeds the effects of time, whether a complete rejuvenation or less potent beauty magic, follows a common pattern. The person is bathed, exfoliated with leaves to remove the accreted darkening layers of magic, and then anointed [*putuma* or *vaputuma*] with

coconut oil, to give the skin a youthful sheen (Lawton, 1993; see also Senft 1986).³⁰ Tuma Island is not only the residence of the dead but also a place of perpetual youth because the spirits who reside there are able to return to a youthful red stage of existence by bathing in a special brackish spring called *Sopiwina*.³¹ *Sopiwina* is water used to wash off unwanted smells such as meat or fish, or to remove dirt. *Sopi* is water. Malinowski tells us that *wina* is an old form of *wila* [cunnus] (1929). *Sopiwina* may be evocative of the transformative power of semen. Bathing is also associated with pregnancy; bathing in the lagoon can lead to impregnation by the *waiwaia* floating on the water.

Weiner's account of the bathing process in Tuma differs significantly from Malinowski's: '... the wrinkled skin is sloughed off and [the *baloma*'s]... life continues as before. When this occurs, however, a ... *waiwaia*... is created (1987: 54). In Weiner's version, the *waiwaia* is a bye-product of rejuvenation and is either an entirely new entity or something that has broken off from an ancestor spirit, perhaps the sloughed blackened skin.

Dying and Death: Visual aspects of a child's identity are usually regarded as acquired from its father and his sisters as a result of close contact and applications of beauty magic. Baldwin records a passage that suggests that the dead endow the living with aspects of their appearance; he was told that a dying woman would 'endow with her beauty [*bubula*] the child that was coming' (1945).³² Shining beauty, *bubula*, the color and brightness of the skin, is a gift from one generation to the next. When a person dies their major affines, in a reversal of beauty magic, blacken their bodies, cut their hair, wear old dark clothes and forfeit their names. Just as there is a close association between the whiteness of *prima para* and embryo, there is also a close and analogous association between the blackness of deceased and the chief mourner, and to a lesser extent the deceased's other close affines (Weiner, 1987). The principal mourner is confined indoors, thus avoiding the sun but is made black rather than white. The *prima para*'s diet is restricted to dry *kaula* [yams and taro] while the principal mourner avoids *kaula* and consumes wet foods. Cooked over a fire, and shielded from the sun, a *prima para* is made white, dry, and shining, so that her embryo will be white, beautiful and strong. Mourners are denied fire, their transition into the damp blackness of death and decomposition mirror the condition of the deceased.

³⁰Bathing leads to pregnancy; when young women bathe in the lagoon they are impregnated by the *waiwaia* floating on the water. *Kakaya* is bathing but also means having intercourse. (Baldwin 1937) Gawan bathing spells contain references to breaking open, in an analogy with a yam which must be peeled to reveal the white interior. (Munn 1986:100)

³¹*Tuma* also means to soak (Senft 1983:393)

³²People are said to resemble their fathers rather than their mothers or other matrilineal kin. It is a grave insult to say that blood relatives resemble each other. In this passage beauty refers to the brother's daughter.

Nursing Back from Life:

Pregnant women wear special maternity caps, *togebi* made by forming small grass petticoats into turbans.³³ (Malinowski 1928:197) Women not only cover their heads while pregnant but continue to do so while nursing. *Nugwebi* is a head ring worn by woman carrying loads on her head during her nursing period. *Nugwebi* prevent evil spirits from entering her body and spoiling her milk. (Senft 1986:340) The top of the head is the site of conception. Covering the hair with the *nugwebi* may be a way of blocking access to a second *waiwaia*, which would endanger the first. To protect both infant and parents Tobrianders have pre- and post- postpartum taboo against sexual intercourse. Ideally a child nurses for several years although couples frequently circumvent this restriction. (Lepani 2000) The emphasis on white during pregnancy and nursing carries a number of congruent associations. Lightness and whiteness must be achieved by eliminating skin darkening, thoughts and acts of intercourse. While inside her body she must turn red blood into a white fetus, thereby forestalling a bloody abortion.³⁴ The fetus may consist of the blackened skin shed by an ancestor, which is filled with *dala* blood, bleached by ritual, and then sustained with white milk for several years. To insure that she will be able to nurse a woman must forestall a second pregnancy. The site of inception is blocked with a miniature skirt; skirts, as coverings of the sexually provocative genitals, symbolize controlled desire. After birth a mother covers her head with the *nugwebi*, which protects her from an invasion of another spirit which would spoil her milk. It would appear that second pregnancy and the problematic of the alchemy in a woman's body, which turns blood to milk after parturition, provide ample opportunities for concern.³⁵

Beauty Magic: Weiner indicates that the gifts of *wageva* beauty magic, performed by father's sisters, [*tabu*] for a man's children, are linked to the yams he gives them. Children without father's experience shame because their mother's kin cannot perform this essential rite for them. The ritual, referred to as *talilisi*, which means to wipe away, requires the *tabu* to dress in

³³*Gebi*, a magical term, is to lift or raise and is used in garden magic spells in reference to the belly of the garden rising and may derive from *gabū* which is 'to burn'. (Malinowski 1935 II:287 & 267)

³⁴Blood and milk both represent the bodily essence of matrilineality. Weiner asserts that milk is as much a symbol of kinship as blood. Axe blades are given to wet nurses to cut the ties established by nursing. (Weiner 1976:124)

³⁵ The power of women to make transformations through their fluids is celebrated in Gawan *kula* myth. The first canoe is created by woman, who having recently given birth, smears the feminine canoe hull with her blood and the male outrigger with her white seminal discharge. (1986:139) Her ability to impart lightness to the canoe is said to result from her recently having given birth. (*ibid.* 140-1) Lightness is associated with creative thought as well as the ability to reproduce. (Scoditti 1996:109, 275) Lightness comes when taboo and sorrow are lifted, there is a proper balance in consumption of *kaula*, from a loss of blood, and magic which removes black heaviness and replaces it with white lightness.

mourning skirts when administering this magic to young people (Weiner 1976). Like mourning services the *talilisa* is linked to the yam prestations from a man to his sisters but mourning and *talilisa* are alike in other ways. *Talilisi* is a compound of *tali*, to bid farewell and *lisi*, to lower or knock down or push away. *Lisaladabu* is payment for the mourners having shaved their heads, darkened their bodies and otherwise given up their beauty, acts which are repayments triggered by the deceased gifts of yams. *Dabu* is heaviness and *lisaladabu* is 'pushing away heaviness'. *Lisaladabu* removes the heaviness of grief and the need to act under the heavy strictures of taboo but some of this heaviness is transferred to the individual who did not perform well in the competitive exchanges. Kasaipwalova notes that those who have done well in the exchanges will feel good and light while those who have not will feel heavy (Malnic, 1998).

But *lisaladabu* is not just about skirts, it also is very much about bundles (*nununiga*), which are metaphorical breasts (*nunu*) (Weiner 1987). The visual representation of the heaviness of grief is the black skins of the mourners and their dark attire. To be light at a time of grief would be tantamount to claiming responsibility for the death. Instead kinswomen set about the task of creating thousands of bundles, the distribution of which, if successful, will remove their own heaviness, and which will pay others for assuming heavy tasks. Appropriately the creation of bundles involves a transformation from black to white which mirrors the hoped for change from heavy to light. After a death occurs the women of the *dala* are conspicuously busy creating pseudo breasts, symbols of youth and whiteness, by a process that peels away the dark surface to reveal a white interior. The meaning of bundles lies, in part, in the details of their manufacture. The removal of the dark integument to expose a white interior is the very transformation that takes place in Tuma when a *baloma* sheds its darkened, aged skin to be reborn white and young again. White breasts are associated with nursing while black breasts mark the end of nursing; women will paint their breasts black to deter a child from nursing (Schiefenhövel and Schiefenhövel 1996). In making and distributing symbolic breasts, women of the *dala* manipulate the chromatics of their cyclical model of ontology, to nurture the transfer of the *baloma* from life in this world to life in Tuma.

Ignorance speaks when those in the know are silent. Malinowski wrote his future wife of his reluctance to say anything about *kula* due to the fact that any Trobriander might know a great deal more than he (Wayne, 1995). As members of the initial culture to "benefit" from first-hand, in-depth, descriptions of their institutions, Trobrianders have, for the most part, silently suffered more than their share of mis-conceptualizations at the hands of anthropologists casting them in the role of definitive, and thus static, 'other'. Malinowski's descriptions of the great complexity of their society helped dispel ethnocentric notions of primitive simplicity but in revealing his 'discovery' of an underlying order, and thereby testifying to his own understanding, he also inaugurated the facile process of essentialization which masks the great diversity of their often closely held opinions. Montague, who achieved a singular vantage of intimacy, was told by Trobrianders, who are generally careful to avoid offence, that they go along with the 'tourist's' view of their reality (personal communication). We therefore offer the above discussion of the

esoteric, 'withheld other', situated in the highly private context suffering, as invitation for those who know to speak.

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