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COLLOQUIUM

## Where are our ancestors? Rethinking Trobriand cosmology

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Reincarnation has been a fundamental tenet of anthropologists' representations of Trobriand cosmology since Bronislaw Malinowski published "Baloma; The spirits of the dead in the Trobriand Islands" in 1916. Yet, during recent ethnographic fieldwork, many Trobrianders repeatedly denied the possibility of rebirth. Faced with a potential major shift in this fundamental belief, we used a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods to assess current Trobriand cosmological views. Drawing on a combination of structured and semi-structured interviews and focus groups, we tested the current validity of prior cosmological representations as found in the literature. In this article, we first analyze the results of the questionnaires. Second, we examine some of the implications that current beliefs have for Trobriand kinship and cosmology. And third, in light of the observed near universal negation of reincarnation, we discuss whether Trobrianders' reported assumptions about the afterlife changed drastically in the last century or if Malinowski misrepresented them at the outset.

Keywords: Trobriand Islands, Malinowski, cosmology, kinship, reincarnation, Massim

### Trobriand reincarnation, from Malinowski to Mosko

Reincarnation has been a fundamental tenet of anthropologists' representations of Trobriand cosmology since Bronislaw Malinowski's 1916 publication of his seminal "Baloma; The spirits of the dead in the Trobriand Islands." Malinowski asserted that Trobrianders universally believed that following death, their spirits travel to an underworld located inside Tuma Island, some 20 km northeast of Kiriwina.<sup>1</sup> The spirits of the dead, known as

*baloma* in Kilivila, were said to lead a hedonistic afterlife in Tuma until they travel back to the Trobriands, where they impregnate women of their *dala* (matrilineage) and are reborn in what amounts to endless cycles of death and rebirth within a given *dala*. Malinowski also maintained that Trobrianders ignored key biological aspects of reproduction, negating male contributions and reducing motherhood to something akin to surrogacy. This alleged procreative nescience formed the base of Malinowski's "firm conviction that the ignorance of paternity is an original feature of primitive psychology"

1. Locals also use "Trobriand" to refer to their island complex of Kiriwina (the main island), Kaileuna, Vakuta, Kuyawa, Munuwata, Tuma, and Simsimla. Yet Bweyowa

(also spelled Boyowa or Bweyowa) is how Trobrianders call their home island in Kilivila, the local language.



([1927] 1966: 95).<sup>2</sup> In linking animistic beliefs in reincarnation to physiological facts, Malinowski affirmed the former's function as a mythological mask preserving matrilineality by preventing otherwise-intelligent beings from apprehending the latter ([1929] 1987: lxvi, 155–57).

“Baloma” (1916), often credited as the result of the first long-term intensive study of a restricted area, was supported with an abundance of first-hand observations. It launched Malinowski as an “ambitious and up-and-coming anthropologist,” the “first truly modern” ethnographer (Young 2004: 162, 428). Michael Young, Malinowski's prodigious biographer, calls it a “brilliant performance” which followed from his previous “preoccupations” with magic, religion, and the “teasing topic” of reproductive ignorance, which established his new and unique “ethnographic voice” (427–28). Malinowski had previously dealt with this “teasing topic” of procreative nescience to acclaim in his first major English publication, *The family among the Australian Aborigines* (1913). With “Baloma” as an encore, Malinowski was able to expand the geographical scope of “primitive man's” intertwined doctrines of reproductive ignorance and reincarnation with compelling first-hand observations. Reincarnation became one of Malinowski's most lasting and potent representations, a brain worm propelled to paradigmatic stature with the power to mold the thoughts of those who immersed themselves in his voluminous works ([1929] 1987: 146).

In contrast, reincarnation beliefs have been found absent in Trobriand Kula ring neighbors. The people of Dobu (Fortune 1932), Gawa (Munn 1986), and Muyuw (Damon 1990), as well as those of Iwa and Budibudi, do not believe in rebirth, despite sharing with Trobrianders the belief that the spirits of their dead also reside in Tuma Island (see Damon 1989: 76; Munn 1986: 286, 300). Ann Chowning, who worked on neighboring Fergusson Island, reported that “some Molima do believe that reincarnation may occur” as replacement of a previously deceased child within the same family, but not necessarily born to the same parents who lost the child

(Chowning 1989: 112). Clearly, the Molima regard reincarnation as an exception rather than the rule. Yet, Trobriand rebirth has not received any comparative studies, and Massim scholars have done little else other than noting it, falling short of questioning its prevalence and persistence.

While challenges to Malinowski's findings of procreative ignorance have emerged (Leach 1966; Mosko 1998), his position on reincarnation has largely been taken as a given (but see Obeyesekere 2002). For over one hundred years, reincarnation has occupied a central position in discussions of Trobriand personhood, kinship, and cosmology. For Annette Weiner, who did periodic fieldwork in Kiriwina from 1971 into the 1980s, reincarnation was the “cosmic” mechanism for the transmission of kinship over time. Membership in a particular *dala* matrilineage, a fundamental aspect of Trobriand social identity, situated the individual as yet another node in a continuum that encompasses all the ancestors, past and future. Weiner's work on women's position in Trobriand society reaffirmed Malinowski's accounts of rebirth:

... conception requires a spirit child (*waiwaia*) to enter a woman's body . . . [This spirit] is reincarnated from an ancestral being called *baloma* . . . *Only as baloma transmit dala substance in the form of a new child through its mother is the dala maintained* (see Malinowski 1916, pp. 215–20). Thus, the ahistorical (i.e., cosmic) cycling of *dala* through unmarked time, that is, *dala* “as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,” is created and maintained by the blood which unites the reincarnation of *baloma*, woman, and child (Weiner 1976: 39, emphasis added).

Most subsequent first-hand observers have concurred with Malinowski and Weiner (Powell 1956: 98; Montague 1971: 354; 2016: 144; Leach 1983: 12; Scoditti 1983: 272; 2012: 119; Pöschl and Pöschl 1985: 138; Malnic 1998: 189; Fellows 2001: 1; Lepani 2001: 27; Campbell 2002: 118–19; Mosko 2014, 2017). Senft, a seasoned Trobriand fieldworker, recently claimed that the belief in Trobriand reincarnation cycles is an assumption held by himself and “all more recent ethnographers” (2011: 33).<sup>3</sup> Foremost among recent proponents is Mark Mosko

2. Procreative nescience, a hot topic in anthropological circles at the close of the nineteenth century, continued to be vigorously debated through the ensuing century, labeled for variety as “ignorance of physiological paternity,” “reproductive ignorance,” “ignorance of facts of paternal procreation,” and “the doctrine of the virgin birth” (Young 2004: 181).

3. Interlocutors of Senft, who worked on Kaileuna Island, immediately adjacent to Kiriwina and Tuma, reported two options for *baloma* “tired” of the afterlife: reincarnation and abandoning their identity to become a cowry shell or a star (2011: 31). Similarly, Scoditti reports that



who, in his major “reconceptualization of the nature of Trobriand sociality” (2017: 16), has embraced Malinowski’s position on rebirth by proposing “two countervailing cycles of reincarnation between Boyowa and Tuma” (2017: 386).

Yet support for axiomatic reincarnation has shown occasional inroads of doubt over time. Leo Austen, a Resident Assistant Magistrate stationed in the Trobriand Islands in the 1930s, reported that belief in reincarnation was declining under the influence of Christianity, adding that “To-day the average native . . . says he does not know whence his spirit came nor of what it is made” (1945: 29). Anthropologist Harry Powell, who, like Malinowski, worked with the Tabalu *dala* of Omarakana Village, reported in 1950 that the rain disrupting Milamala harvest celebrations was the result of the *baloma* being displeased with offerings made to them. When Powell asked then Paramount Chief Mitakata why he did not make magic to end the rain, he was told repeatedly that such efforts would be to no avail, as the *baloma* included “all the dead and gone magicians of the past” against whom his mortal magic would be to no avail (1950: 11–12). Obviously, Mitakata did not believe at least in the possibility of rain magicians reincarnating. More recently, Reverend Ignatius Ketobwau—a Trobriand Islander—has also questioned the dogma of universal reincarnation, stating that the “*baloma* live eternally in Tuma;” he also reported his father’s observation that “the belief of a mature man reincarnating was not as strong as the belief in children who were born dead [reincarnating]” (1994: 23, 54–55).

It then may come as somewhat of a surprise to Trobriand scholars, as it did to the Euro-American authors of this paper, that contemporary Trobriand Islanders almost uniformly reject reincarnation, save for exceptional cases. While in Kiriwina in 2016, one of the authors was repeatedly told that *baloma* were never reborn. Trobriand interlocutors further rejected the possibility that rebirth had ever been widely accepted owing to the “logic of magical agency”: spirits dwelling in Tuma are the main agents of all magic endeavors carried out through *megwa* magic spells (see Darrah 1972; Jarillo 2013: 110, 114, 171; Mosko 2014, 2017). Any *baloma* brought back to life would be unavailable when called for help through

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on neighboring Kitava Island, men who gained great fame in Kula would ascend into the sky after death, accompanied by thunder and lightning, and live there eternally, escaping the cycles of reincarnation (1983: 272).

magic. Additionally, some Trobrianders were perplexed by the logic of constant rebirth: if this were the case, how could some *dala* have gone extinct (*wokosi*)? This negation of reincarnation was re-affirmed by many Trobrianders during subsequent visits in 2017 and 2018, leading the authors of this paper to formally design and collect quantitative and qualitative data employing a convergent mixed methods research design (Creswell 2014), in order to provide a more representative account of current Trobriand eschatology.

## Methodology

The combination of methods—or “controlled ways of gaining knowledge” (Bollig and Finke 2014: 42)—upon which this study relies is uncommon in social anthropology. Since Boas and Malinowski, ethnographic fieldwork has been the methodological mainstay of socio-cultural anthropology, with directed one-on-one interviews and participant observation being the preferred methods of data collection. However, ethnographic theory has undergone a conceptual rethinking aimed at enhancing the quality of human social research and its different modes of enquiry (Agar 1980), affecting who does research and how.

First, the figure of the anthropologist as a “lone stranger” (Salzman 1994) has been called into question, pointing to the fact that participant observation is not so much an act of detached scrutiny as it is a process of co-learning (Hockey and Forsey 2012; Ingold 2014, 2017), where the subjects of inquiry are increasingly involved in the research process, to the point where they become agents in the co-production of knowledge (Holmes and Marcus 2008; Rappaport 2008; Sluka and Robben 2012; Medin and Bang 2014). This call for inclusive collaboration in the social sciences has also resulted in an increase in multidisciplinary research, involving social scientists from different fields. Anthropologists, social psychologists, sociologists and human geographers among others often look at similar issues; working in multidisciplinary teams helps them avoid the biases and expectations implicit in every research tradition.

Second, the benefits of a multidisciplinary approach notwithstanding, anthropology is still a predominantly qualitative enterprise. While structured and unstructured interviews are part of the researcher’s toolkit, socio-cultural anthropologists tend to favor the latter over the former when it comes to collecting data, and usually prefer interpretative analyses over statistical



ones (Chibnik 1985; Hockey 2002; Skinner 2012). Anthropologists often eschew triangulation techniques that enhance the quality of research designs, data collection, and interpretation of findings (Flick 2018). Despite the fact that qualitative researchers tend to treat triangulation as a validation strategy, it can offer benefits in securing additional depth and breadth of knowledge (Fielding and Fielding 1986). Yet anthropology is no total stranger to the use of integrative frameworks that incorporate qualitative and quantitative research and data. At the time of his death in 1942, Malinowski himself was working on a study of commodities and markets in Oaxaca (Mexico) for which he collected quantitative data on production costs, market prices, and weights and measures (Cook 2017).

The ontological and methodological synergies that inclusive, multidisciplinary teams and mixed methods research bring to the table offer promising ways to balance the more hermeneutic thread of anthropology commonly associated to one type of qualitative research (Burgess 1984; Chibnik 1999; Onwuegbuzie et al. 2009; Bollig and Finke 2014; Bernard 2018). Having already successfully experimented with researcher and methodological diversity (Crivelli et al. 2016), we decided to apply a quantitative test to reincarnation beliefs to assess current views of Trobriand cosmology. Five Trobriand colleagues, Camillus Mlabwema, Nagia Toyagena, Kenneth Kalubaku, Gumwemwata Okwala and Justin Gumwemwata helped design a structured interview schedule (a comprehensive account of the methodology and materials used in the study, as well as a full review of the results, can be found in the supplemental materials of this article, see Appendix). All the questions were posed in the Kilivila language and were couched as neutrally as foreseeable so as to avoid leading interviewees' responses. Our sample included women and men of all ages (except minors) representing thirty *dala* matrilineages, including so-called commoners (*tokai*) and *gumgweguya* (chiefly *dala*, Malinowski 1922: 62ff.), from all over the Trobriand Islands. Although the interviews were structured in nature, additional open questions were included to further explore answers given to forced-choice questions (e.g., "When the *baloma* spirit of a dead person goes to the Tuma underworld/afterlife, does it stay there?" Was followed by "If the spirit of a dead person does not stay in Tuma, where else does it go?"). Despite the structured nature of the interviews, participants were allowed to elaborate on all their answers, with their narratives and examples being recorded as support of their views.

The questions inquired about individuals' beliefs regarding death, the presence of *baloma* spirits in daily activities, the possibility of reincarnation, and Trobrianders' thoughts about what the afterlife in Tuma is like. Prior to obtaining consent from each individual, the interviewers made it clear that there were no "right" or "wrong" answers. The anonymous questionnaires were trying to ascertain peoples' beliefs (*dubumi*) about a place that the living cannot see (except in dreams), and invisible ancestors who rarely communicate directly with the living. After informed prior consent was obtained from interviewees, the fieldworkers administering the questionnaire stressed that answers needed to be based on the participant's own thoughts (*avaka nanom titolem*, your own ideas). People were interviewed privately, to encourage openness and avoid influences on their or other participants' responses.

In addition to the questionnaires, we conducted a series of semi-structured focus groups. Some of those were with high-ranked representatives of the Tabalu *dala* matrilineage from Omarakana Village with whom we discussed eschatology at length. Some of the literature seems to imply, if not a homogeneous Tabalu cosmovision, at least an Omarakana-centric view of Trobriand custom as emanating from an accepted and exclusive center of knowledge (Mosko 2014: 11; 2017: 19–20, 40–41). This alleged cultural preeminence of the Tabalu of Omarakana was disputed by our Trobriand research associates and interview participants. Furthermore, three of our Omarakana Tabalu interlocutors rejected the models of reincarnation which were supported by Mosko's Tabalu associates, evidencing a lack of a unified Tabalu view on the matter.

Since many participants observed that some of the survey questions could only be answered with certainty by those who have been in Tuma, we also carried out focus groups with *kasivila* and *vaori*, recognized as legitimate mediums, able to visit the world of the dead in their dreams. Although their responses offered some degree of variation, their views appeared to be generally consistent with each other.

While qualitative research was at the base of our hypothesis—reincarnation is not the rule, something that was ascertained throughout a series of long conversations with individuals throughout 2017 and 2018—the validity and range of that affirmation also needed to be confirmed through different methods (e.g. quantitative methods). Likewise, the triangulation of methods (e.g. focus groups, semi-structured interviews, examination



of the literature and personal correspondence) helped us elucidate convergent and divergent stances and add both a synchronic and diachronic perspective to our analysis, enhancing the quality and robustness of our investigation. The large number of people surveyed ( $N = 92$ ) and its representativeness of the Trobriand population (e.g. age range, gender distribution, diversity of clan affiliation, and hierarchy within the Trobriand social system) supports the generalization of the findings. Furthermore, the structured questionnaires allowed us to assess the views of more than a selected few Trobrianders without influencing the responses of other participants. We offset the standard rigidity of structured and semi-structured interviews by letting participants expand on their answers in open-ended questions. This strategy allowed us to gather a number of details that contextualized further the participants' eschatological beliefs. Likewise, the triangulation techniques added depth to our understanding of Trobriand cosmology and brought to the table further considerations that were then discussed with our Trobriand co-authors in focus groups.

Last, the multidisciplinary nature of our investigation favored the collaborative effort to integrate diverse but complementary research skills. The research team included experts with a thorough knowledge of the Kilivila language and culture acquired over a period of ten years of intensive fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands, with an exhaustive command of the Trobriand and Massim published and unpublished literature, and with a methodological expertise in qualitative and quantitative methods. More importantly, these advantageous research skills were developed in the Trobriand context through past collaborative efforts under long periods of fieldwork that included all the inhabited islands of the Trobriand archipelago. However, none of these individual skills would have been sufficient to accomplish the present investigation without the participation of Trobriand co-authors throughout the research process. The willing and ongoing collaboration of a group of Trobriand intellectuals helped shape research questions, formulate hypotheses, put these to the test, and discuss the following conclusions using a Trobriand frame of reference.

### ***Baloma are not wewaia, wewaia are not baloma***

Before presenting our data, it is important to clarify the use of *baloma*, a term used indiscriminately in the lit-

erature to refer to any human spirits, irrespective of their age, stage, and residence (Malinowski 1916; Weiner 1976; Mosko 2017). Our Trobriand co-authors, as well as a number of participants interviewed in the focus groups, insisted that, strictly speaking, *baloma* are only the spirits of deceased adults who reside in Tuma. In Trobriand cosmology, admission to Tuma is the crucial distinction between *baloma* and other human spirits. Newly deceased adult spirits transitioning from Bweyova to Tuma are called *yaluwa* and unlike *baloma* cannot be summoned through magic. Similarly, *kosi* (commonly translated as "ghost") are spirit beings that have been denied entry to Tuma.

Likewise, the term *wewaia* (infant) deserves careful consideration. It has been applied indistinctly to living infants and deceased spirits which are capable of reincarnating. Both living and dead infants are referred to as *wewaia*, as the name denotes a state of development, rather than any particular spiritual condition or place of residence. Confusion can arise when anthropologists persist in conflating *wewaia* with a reincarnating *baloma*.<sup>4</sup> Our interlocutors insist that *wewaia* (the correct spelling according to them) are infants whereas *baloma* are adults. Most of the minority of Trobrianders who believe reincarnation is possible assert that only infants can be reborn, and only in exceptional cases.

Our Trobriand co-authors insist that *yaluwa*, *kosi*, or *wewaia* are not *baloma*. However, people still commonly use *baloma* as a catchall term for spirit, occasionally using *yaluwa* and *baloma* indiscriminately. Since Kilivila lacks a separate term for a living person's indwelling spirit, people are prone to use *baloma* for spirit of a living person, even though *baloma* technically only applies to dead adults resident in Tuma. Although people's usages do not always maintain the distinction between *baloma* and *yaluwa*, when the distinction was mentioned, people embraced it.

4. The confusion in the literature begins with an inconsistent orthography: Malinowski initially used *waiwaia* (1916) but then switched to *waywaya* ([1927] 1966, [1929] 1987). Austen (1934), Campbell (2002), Weiner (1976, 1988), Ketobwau (1994), Senft (2011), Montague (2016) and Mosko (2014, 2017) follow Malinowski's earlier usage of *waiwaia* for *baloma* traveling to Bweyova to reincarnate. To most present-day Trobrianders, *wewaia* simply means newly-born baby or infant, glosses also given by Lawton, who spells it as *weiwaya* in his Dictionary (see Lawton 1998: 1818).



## The spirits of the dead go to Tuma (and stay there)

When queried about where people go when they die, eight-five percent of participants stated that the dead go to Tuma. When asked what people believed in the past, ninety-seven percent replied that Tuma was the final destination before foreigners arrived, indicating that the marginally lower current belief in Tuma as the location of the afterlife may be due to the influence of Christianity. Likewise, a majority of participants (seventy-eight percent) stated that once in Tuma the dead stay there for good, a response that was consistent across respondents' age groups (young adults, adults, and elders) and gender.

Respondents indicated their knowledge of Tuma came from *kasivila*, mediums who travel to Tuma in their dreams.<sup>5</sup> *Kasivila* reported that Tuma is the mirror image of Bweyova, with the dead residing in villages with similar names and relationships to those of the living. But they also noted a major difference: the living work hard while the dead devote most of their time to play. A few people offered alternate names for Tuma, with Budibudi and Omyuwa (a generic term indicating all the islands to the east of Iwa: Gawa, Muyuw, and Budibudi) being the most common. Tuma, Budibudi, Demwana, and Upawapa are all synonyms for the underworld.<sup>6</sup> Only fifteen percent replied "*labuma*," the term used for "heaven" in Bible translations, as a destination for the dead. Yet all of them answered Tuma (or an equivalent) when asked where people went in pre-

contact times, making it clear that Tuma is the traditional abode of the dead. Most telling, only two respondents of the survey (both Western-educated chiefs fluent in English) stated that *baloma* are reborn in Bweyova when asked where the dead go after Tuma. They used the English word "reincarnation" despite the interviews being conducted in Kilivila and both reported having read Malinowski.

## Interactions between the living and the dead

When asked if *baloma* attended certain important activities of the living, all participants but one agreed. *Baloma* are at hand when summoned by *megwa* magic, during *sagali* (mortuary) ceremonies and when they are offered *bwekasa* (gifts of food, tobacco and betel nut). There was a consensus that *baloma* are present during Milamala yam harvest celebrations, as well as for Kula exchanges.

The idea that the dead are frequently present among the living is widespread, especially in the case of a recent death. *Baloma* travel to Bweyova to make sure their wishes have been observed and important activities are performed correctly, and at times they communicate with the living. *Kabaloma* (spirit possession) occurs when *baloma* return to deliver messages or give advice (*guguya*) to a person or a group. However, the most common reason given for *baloma* visits is to ensure that gardens are well tended and living relatives have enough food to eat and exchange. Key in that respect is the widespread belief (ninety-two percent) that *baloma* come to help the living when the latter perform *megwa* magic to summon the *bilubaloma* (lit. "many *baloma*"), all the previous owners of the spell, in chronological order. *Baloma* presence is also inferred by the living's rigorous observance of taboos (*kikila*) associated with magic. Violations of taboos cause the *baloma* to ignore the living, whereas adherence insures the *baloma* are literally at a person's back, ready to assist. People use the phrase *baloma osikirisi otubologu*, "the spirits of my ancestors are sitting behind me" when they describe the practice of magic. People interpret this expression as signifying that they have real-time magical support from their ancestors to carry out important endeavors such as causing yam gardens to flourish. The *baloma* interlocutors are visualized as a chain of ancestors steering the magician from behind, with the *bilumavau* (the newest *baloma*) next to the performer followed by a line of *bilumabogwa* (the old *baloma*, those who died a long time ago). *Baloma* also appear in dreams to impart

5. The root of the word, *sivila*, literally means "to overturn." The beds of the *kasivila* are said to magically "capsize," throwing the dreaming medium into Tuma. Similarly, *vaori* also travel to Tuma in their dreams, although unlike *kasivila* their beds don't capsize and they do not interact with *baloma*; they only observe them from the shores of Tuma. *Vaori* usually accompany newly deceased relatives to a Tuma beach called Kowalawa.

6. Budibudi is both an ideal and an existing place, a remote atoll located in the distant Laughlan Islands, at the far east end of the northern side of the Kula ring. Traditional Trobriand songs and poems talk of Budibudi as "the last village," the place where the world ends and therefore an appropriate abode for the spirits of the dead. Budibudi is also a type of cloud formation usually seen in the distant horizon and as such is related to Upawapa, another cloud formation associated with the afterlife (Mosuwadoga and Beran 2006: 22).



key information to relatives, such as the location of important valuables, to reveal who was responsible for their death and, on rare occasions, to reveal the missing parts of a spell.

### ***Baloma* do not reincarnate, children do**

Contrary to Malinowski and others, the dead are not automatically reborn after a period of time in Tuma. Sixty-two percent of our sample rejected the possibility that the dead can be born again into the world of the living outright.<sup>7</sup> Many of those who answered “no” to this question did so with an emphatic *gala* (no), delivered without deliberation or hesitation, with others specifying “that’s not possible” for emphasis. All the participants but one claimed their beliefs also reflect those of their ancestors in “olden times” (*omitibogwa*), in a denial that modernity may have changed people’s views on this point.

Thirty-three respondents out of ninety-two allowed the possibility that dead spirits could be reborn. This subgroup was further queried about the ages of those spirits subject to rebirth, and given a choice between children, adults, elderly, or a combination of them. Only six participants out of thirty-three thought individuals from any age group can reincarnate and one reserved this likelihood for the elderly. The other twenty-six respondents claimed only *wewaia* (those who died as infants) can be reborn. Thus, ninety percent of all the respondents rejected the possibility of adults reincarnating.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike *baloma*, who are named spirits that can be either summoned to Bweyova or visit it on their own initiative, these *wewaia* are anonymous infants who float aimlessly in the sea scum near Tuma Island in an area known as *kabilabala* or *popewa*. This area is outside but adjacent to the underworld and sometimes generically referred to as *wapolu* (inside the foam or bubbles, from the belief that dead *wewaia* dwell on the surf near the beaches of Tuma). Malinowski claimed *wewaia* were thought to impregnate women bathing in the sea, a belief that caused some women to avoid bathing during high tides (1916: 404).

In order to indirectly assess the consistency of reincarnation beliefs, we asked whether the recently deceased could see the *baloma* who died a long time ago in Tuma.<sup>9</sup> Most Trobrianders (eight-four percent) say that *bilumavau* (newly deceased *baloma*) will live side by side with the ancient dead (*bilumabogwa*), confirming that the latter have not reincarnated. The minority who claimed the recently deceased could not see old *baloma* in Tuma gave different explanations, all of them linked to the new *baloma* not seeing/recognizing the old ones, rather than the latter having reincarnated. Only two respondents posited further partitions of the underworld, with one mentioning Tumitilawa (the Tuma below or the Tuma underneath Tuma), as a reason for *bilumavau* not living with *bilumabogwa*.

### **Rare returns**

Far from being automatic, the rebirth of dead infants is an exception to the rule that the dead reside in or near Tuma forever. Those admitting the possibility of *wewaia* being born again in Bweyova were asked how often this happens. All but four respondents (eight-nine percent) believed this happens very rarely (*kalayamtala*).

When asked about the reasons for rebirth, those allowing that possibility gave three interlinked explanations for the exceptional return to life of a dead *wewaia*. The first one comes under the Kilivila term *nigada* (to petition, to beg for something); in this case, an infertile woman requesting a child. When a woman in Bweyova is unable to conceive (or if she and her husband have recently lost an infant), somebody, such as a *kasivila* medium, can ask a *baloma* to bring her a *wewaia*, so that she can have a child. People make it clear that dead *wewaia* cannot come back to Bweyova alone but need a *baloma* to “lift them up” (*bilupisi gwadi*) and carry them to the world of the living, where they are inserted inside a woman’s body by a *baloma* agent—usually a related female. Such requests carry an implicit moral obligation for a *baloma* to assist the petitioner who is unable to conceive. *Nigada* obligations are well known among the living who say that, when relatives ask for help, they should not be denied.

7. This phrasing reflects the lack of a Kilivila word that translates exactly as “reincarnation.” Interviewers added the coda “as real people, not as spirits” to the question so as to exclude temporary visits of *baloma* in spirit form.

8. This figure is comprised of sixty-two percent who denied all reincarnation, and twenty-eight percent who limited it to infants.

9. In order to avoid influencing answers based on the sequence of questions, we asked if the newly deceased can see those who died a long time ago after a series of questions unrelated to this matter (control of order effects). The presence in Tuma of *baloma* who died a long time ago indirectly gainsays their having been reincarnated.



The second explanation revolves around issues of *dala* growth (*bidala*, literally “it makes/increases *dala*”). In Trobriand society, the danger of *wokosi* (the extinction of a *dala* matrilineage) is a real concern and people readily name examples. To prevent this, people sometimes petition a *baloma* relative for a baby, linking matrilineage growth to a special case of *nigada*.

Finally, participants suggested that *wewaia* can act as “replacements” (*kemapu*): when couples lose a child, they can petition a *baloma* to bring them one from the pool of *wewaia* outside Tuma to make their family whole again. Our collaborators explained that babies who die at an early age are unable to complete the journey to Tuma for a number of reasons: they cannot walk, they are ignorant of the way there, and/or lacking speech, they cannot ask Topileta, the supernatural being who decides on who enters the underworld, for admission. Furthermore, *wewaia* cannot state their name and *dala* affiliation so as to be directed to their village in Tuma. Owing to this, prematurely dead babies are considered incomplete, liminal beings.

Malinowski indicated that admission to Tuma was predicated on the applicant’s ability to pay Topileta who, if dissatisfied, turned them out into the sea where they would lose their human identity (1916: 359–60). Contemporary Trobrianders concur with Malinowski that without admission to Tuma a spirit becomes unstable and eventually disintegrates (Malinowski 1916: 357, 368). They therefore go to great lengths to insure that their dead are well provisioned (*katubayasi*) with emblems of rank (*koni*) or items of wealth (*veiguwa*) for entry into Tuma. Much to the shame of the deceased’s kin, rejection by Topileta causes a *yaluwa*’s transformation into a *kosi* ghost, a rapidly degrading spirit headed for obliteration. When infants die, *sagali* funerary cycles are much abbreviated, with even *katubayasi* provisions omitted, an implicit acknowledgment of the futility of preparing unviable babies for an afterlife they cannot attain.

## Modernity and Tuma

It was hypothesized that the contemporary absence of reincarnation beliefs could be linked to outside influences, such as Austen’s postulated effects of Christianity. Therefore, three questions were set to probe how Tuma has been affected by modernity. As it turns out, opinions on this matter are evenly split; there was no significant difference in the numbers between those envisioning a modern versus an unchanged Tuma. For example, forty-four percent of interviewees stated that

Tuma has not changed versus forty-five percent who believe it has. Likewise, forty-four percent of Trobrianders noted that *baloma* do not use money in Tuma versus forty-one percent who reckoned they do. Respondents who answered “not sure” to these questions were twelve percent and fifteen percent respectively. Some people convey the vision of an ideal modern life where money is readily available along with all the manufactured things that money affords. Irrespective of what things can be found in Tuma, the afterlife is still labeled as Demwana, a place where one lives in a state of permanent happiness, often equated to the English word “paradise.” In Tuma/Demwana, the main activity of the *baloma* is to *kemwana* (i.e., to have fun, enjoyment, excitement).

Similar percentages were obtained when people were asked about modern manufactured goods in Tuma. Although a majority have a view of Tuma as a “traditional” place, many reported that *baloma* possess radios (forty-six percent), phones (forty-seven percent), stores (forty-seven percent), or lamps (forty-eight percent). Some respondents indicated that those who had modern goods in life could take them to Tuma, while others specified that Tuma has only changed for those who witnessed modernity first-hand in Bweyova. Commodities or not, all agree Tuma is a place of abundance in stark contrast with Bweyova, something previously reported by Malinowski (1916: 364–65).

This affluence appears to fall under the general conviction that the *baloma* do not have to work in the afterlife. The few Trobrianders who thought *baloma* worked (thirty-four percent), indicated that they did so for enjoyment rather than necessity. In line with beliefs in the *baloma*’s access to superior magic, participants think that gardens in Tuma magically produce large amounts of food in a small space, and report that *baloma* throw a few pig’s bristles and yam leaves into a cooking pot to shortly produce enough pork and yams for all to feast. It should be noted that, despite common uses of the English “paradise” to explain Tuma to foreigners, respondents do not conflate Tuma with Christian heaven. Collaborators attested to this distinction by noting that *kasivila* do not report the presence of Jesus or the apostles in Tuma.

## Births, rejuvenation, and re-death

Sixty-seven percent of respondents say that *baloma* can give birth in Tuma. Some explain this by noting a pattern of reversals between conditions in Tuma and Bweyova (Mosko 2017: 122), whereby hard becomes easy, the old



get young, and women who suffered from infertility in Bweyova can have babies in Tuma, while those fertile in life do not. Some extended parturition in Tuma to women who died young before having a chance to give birth.

There is high consensus among respondents (eighty percent) that a newly dead spirit rejuvenates between its death and entry into Tuma. Evidence of imperfections are erased to provide a more beautiful, youthful self. *Baloma* have whiter, shinier skins, and unusual eyes, said variously to be larger or whiter. *Kasivila* offer more details from their first-hand sightings, noting that a *baloma*'s skin is oily as if bathed in coconut oil (*bulami*).

Fifty-three percent of respondents think that *baloma* do not age versus thirty percent who believe they do. Respondents in this latter group say that *baloma* maintain a stable youthful appearance by quickly reversing evidence of age with magic. More importantly, all but five participants (eighty-eight percent) think the spirits of the dead do not die in Tuma. This belief is a logical precursor to denials of reincarnation, and is supported by a widespread belief that sorcery does not exist in Tuma. Ellis Silas, an artist who spent a year in Kiriwina in 1922, made this latter point previously. Silas made no mention of reincarnation, but one can infer the nonexistence of death in the afterlife and ensuing rebirth to Bweyova from his reports of an absence of *bwagau* and *yoyowa* sorcerers in Tuma (1926: 106). *Bwagau* or *toginuvayu*, sorcerers who cast evil spells known as *silami*, and *yoyowa* or *mulukwausi* flying enchanters (usually female, hence the translation as “witches” in most of the literature) are the agents of the majority of deaths in Bweyova. Bokasivi, a *nakasivila* medium from Kabwaku Village, said she found no evidence of sorcery in Tuma and our Trobriand collaborators concur, noting that Topileta sanctioned (*ikaili*) there should be none. Negative emotions (*lumkola gaga*), including jealousy—the trigger for most deaths in the Kula ring area (e.g. Damon 1990: 90)—are said to be banned from the afterlife. In any case, the idea that *baloma* might “disappear” altogether once they enter Tuma is not supported.

### Trobriand kinship and *dala* identity

What are the implications for previous and current anthropological conceptions of Trobriand sociality and cosmology in light of the contemporary rejection of reincarnation? One proposition worthy of consideration, the immutability of *dala* matrilineage identity, was put forward by the other great figure of twentieth-century Trobriand studies, Annette Weiner, whose explorations

of individual and communal identities had reincarnation at its core. In Young's opinion, Weiner's work was an “ideological reading of Trobriand culture that owed everything to the doctrine of the reincarnation of *baloma*” (2004: 432). In *Women of value, men of renown*, Weiner distinguishes between the fleeting personal identities of men, built on ephemeral fame achieved through exchanges, and the perduring cosmic identity of women who preserve *dala* by reincarnating lineal ancestors through their bodies. Each *dala* matrilineage is reproduced *ad infinitum* as a coherent communal entity, while the identity of the individual is doomed to be “erased” as it joins the anonymous pool of reincarnating *wewaia*. Each reincarnation is a return of that same *dala* essence, regenerated through birth.

Instead of Weiner's perpetual cycle Bweyova—Tuma—Bweyova, our findings invite a rethinking of *dala* identity as a path beginning in Bweyova with a destination in Tuma. From this vantage, women initiate rather than regenerate the matrilineage's identity. Trobrianders' have been noted for their tenacious adherence to their *gulagula* customs in the face of the onslaught of behaviors and forms of thought introduced from without (Weiner 1982; 1987: xxxvii–xxxviii; Mosko 2017: 41). This persistence has been linked in the literature to Trobrianders' relationships with their dead, as noted from Malinowski to Mosko, with both authors highlighting how the *baloma* enforce *gulagula* customs such as *kikila* taboos (Malinowski [1929] 1987: 329; Mosko 2017: 58–59). *Gulagula* customs are at the core of Trobriand sociality. They are a series of prescribed practices laid down in the past by the fiat (*kaila*) of the *tosunapula* (original ancestors), who monitor and reward the orthodoxy of people's behaviors.<sup>10</sup> Practices

10. *Tosunapula* literally means “those who came out,” conveying the common Trobriand belief that the first ancestors emerged from the ground and imposed *kaila*, a set of rules, customs, and behaviors established to govern the living in perpetuity. The identities of these first ancestors are preserved in recitations of land rights, Kula deeds, and magic spells. Obeyesekere suggests that *tosunapula* reincarnate (2002: 35) while Weiner excludes them by insisting that only those spirits whose identity has been forgotten by the living do so, as if remembrance somehow sustained their existence in Tuma (1976: 23). Mosko says that *baloma* are dependent on the living for gifts, without which they tire of their existence in Tuma, expire and are reborn (2017: 268–69).



set as *kaila* link dead and living through a continuum of observances, a chain of right behaviors and customs. *Baloma* preserve their collective identity in peoples' memories by requiring adherence to *kaila* in exchange for their magical assistance in daily endeavors. These endeavors sustain the collective and simultaneously memorialize individuals with coveted fame (e.g. as proficient gardeners or as prominent makers and exchangers of *doba* wealth; see Mosko 2017: 203; Weiner 1976: 116–17). Successful practice, therefore, is taken as the endorsement of the *baloma*. And for all of these endeavors to be successful, the *baloma* must stay put in Tuma, awaiting people's summons and keeping the link between past and present intact.

In rejecting the reincarnation of adults, contemporary Trobriand society also admits to a less coherent understanding of *dala* identity than indicated by Weiner. In her model, where only *dala* identity survives reincarnation, rebirth requires that *baloma* lose their memories and personhood, so that both can be re-imposed by the living's re-ordering of the reincarnated being's material and immaterial aspects. However, in present-day Bweyova, life is teleologically directed towards the attainment of an identity that survives death. Personhood in Tuma becomes immutable, while reincarnation may only be granted to those without identity. Stillborns and prematurely deceased infants, having failed to acquire language and knowledge of the world, adjourn to a liminal space at a beach outside Tuma. Lacking memories, speech and personhood, they are undetermined encapsulations of lifeforce (*momova*).<sup>11</sup>

What then of *dala* immutability in the absence of reincarnation? Trobriand interlocutors state that when a *baloma* “lifts up” a *wewaia* from the *kabilabala* shores of Tuma, they are ignorant of its previous *dala*, which means that it is usually given to a woman from a different matrilineage. Thus, the one exception for reincarnation allowed by contemporary Trobrianders is one which challenges rather than reinforces Weiner's doctrine of

*dala* immutability. What is brought back is not a “person” in itself, but the undifferentiated substance or *momova* life force with which to make one. This *wewaia*, regardless of the *dala* in its previous life, will be born into its new mother's *dala* matrilineage and later on *ikuli* (to be “shaped, imprinted, molded, formed”) by its mother and father through a long process that includes the teaching of *kikila* (taboos) and *simuli* (techniques). Since the original *dala* identity of a twice born child is unknown and it must acquire a new *dala* from its second mother, this makes its *dala* identity a social construct rather than the quasi-natural axiomatic proposition favored by Weiner.

If the matrilineage is not an endless continuum, transmitted uninterruptedly through recycling *baloma*, but rather a socio-cultural construct, then when, and how, does a child receive its *dala* identity? The answers to these questions depend on assumptions and inferences which are subjects of contention, the flavor of which we will now share. Responses given to the issue of *dala* inception vary from some unspecified point in the womb, to the moment of birth, to when the child begins to nurse. Discussions of *dala* inception revolve around ideas associated with blood, milk, and *koni*, hereditary emblems of *dala* identity which are the jealously-guarded propriety of certain ranking *dala* (*gumgweguya* or “chiefly” *dala*). Blood and milk, ascribed to the category of feminine fluids, are associated with nurturance and reproduction. Montague has said that *dala* identity results from ingestion of milk (2001: 174), a proposition supported by some Trobrianders, while others link it to the mother's blood. In the southern Massim, specifically Tubetube, Lobada, and Dobu, the term for milk also refers to lineage (Damon and Wagner 1989: 13). Weiner says *nunu* (milk, breast) can be used in place of *dala* to signify matrilineage (1976: 92). According to Montague (personal communication), Katubai, the Tabalu chief of Kaduwaga Village in Kaileuna Island, said that lineage was transmitted via milk, and emphatically argued that the link of lineage and blood was a notion fostered by the missionaries.

In any case, both milk and blood are material substances resident in Bweyova, rather than spirit substances from Tuma, belying the notion that *dala* transitions from Tuma. The argument for milk is connected to the notion that *dala* identity is forged by its members' dietary histories. The consumption of *bwelapwasa*, certain foods forbidden to people of high rank by the ancestors, has indelibly marked descendants in ways that

11. The concept of *momova*, a lifeforce or vital essence that permeates all the living things in the Trobriand universe, is a fascinating one. Although not entirely absent from anthropological accounts (most notably Scoditti 1996: 68–72; 2012: 69; see also Jarillo 2013; Mosko 2017: 112ff.), we believe, from conversations with our Trobriand interlocutors, that its full implications have yet to be analyzed, especially when it comes to understanding the links between the living and the dead.



circumscribe their rank and their entitlements to *koni* emblems, as well as the use of *tukwa* (important inherited systems of magic). All of these factors combine to form crucial observable expressions of *dala* identity. Some of our Trobriand co-authors state that a child who does not nurse from its birth mother will take the *dala* of the woman who feeds it and assume her limitations and privileges. The inherited principle of *dala* resides in women's bodies in Bweyova, rather than being transferred from Tuma. Those who attribute *dala* to nurturance note that when a woman adopts an orphaned infant from another *dala*, the baby will take her *dala* and use her *koni*, rather than those of the biological mother. The *dala* grows within the *wewaia*, rather than the reverse, and this position is further supported by observations that the absence of *koni* emblems in infant burials, in contrast to their prominence in those of adults, is evidence that *dala* identity has yet to be fully established. On the other hand, those who favor *dala* immutability, insisting that it is ascribed before birth by reincarnation or at birth, reason that the *wewaia* grows into the *dala*. They concur that an orphaned child will take its adoptive mother's *koni* and assume her *dala* identity, but they point out that this assumption is a fiction: when the adoptive mother dies, the child must revert to use of its birth mother's *koni*.

### The here and now of then

Trobriand scholars will be quick to note some of the implications of our findings for Mark Mosko's brilliant twenty-first-century rethinking of Trobriand ethnography, *Ways of baloma* (2017). Mosko presents his findings as both an "authentic" and "current" view "which closely approximates the corpus of traditional cultural intelligence and wisdom that was current in Malinowski's time" (2017: 41, 60). He writes: "the information which has been provided to me during my field visits captures much of what can be considered authentically 'traditional Trobriand culture' (*gulagula*), despite the changes in the aftermath of the arrival of Europeans" (41). To lend more weight to his position, Mosko's work is heavily grounded in highly esoteric knowledge of the Tabalu *dala* residents of Omarakana Village.<sup>12</sup>

12. Omarakana is of course the home of the Paramount Chief and the village where Malinowski famously settled. Mosko's choice is no coincidence, as he acknowledges how this decision was favored by the Paramount Chief, so as to "augment or expand his personal fame

Although Mosko's masterpiece deserves careful consideration and analysis—something to be done at another juncture—we should point out here that our co-authors and interlocutors contest a major premise based on *baloma* death and reincarnation, i.e. that transactions between the living and dead are governed by a mutual dependency. Central to Mosko's work is an eschatology driven by mirroring reincarnation cycles between Boyowa and Tuma (2017: 386). However, it should be noted that some members of the Tabalu *dala* disagree about reincarnation and death in Tuma: when we queried them about it, two senior Tabalu chiefs rejected death and universal reincarnation of *baloma* in response to our questionnaire, and two others (one of them from a coastal village far from Omarakana) did so in focused interviews. Mosko describes interactions between the living and *baloma* as a "relationship of mutual, reciprocal interdependence between the two realms that constitutes the broader context through which Islanders' *megwa* [magic] and other ritual practices are understood to acquire their efficacy" (2017: 124, emphasis added). Time and again, when approached from a variety of vantages, employing over a dozen interlocutors (including four Tabalu chiefs), this proposition was categorically rejected with phrases like "the *baloma* require nothing from us, it is we who need them." Along this line, it was further stipulated that the *baloma* have all the food they need, which makes food offerings to the *baloma* a sharing of remembrances rather than a necessity.

Mosko's codifications of officially-sanctioned findings describe a reality in Tuma in which death and subsequent *sagali* practices of mourning also exist. From this perspective, the spirit portions of *doba* banana leaf bundles, made and presented by living women in *sagali* to repay debts incurred by the recently deceased, are taken up by the *baloma* for use in their own *sagali* mortuary ceremonies. These conditions would be logical extensions of the commonly heard dictum that Tuma is a replica of Bweyova, if it were not for the major caveat, made by the majority of respondents, of the absence of death in Tuma.<sup>13</sup> If we take into consideration

(*butula*), if not also his political influence" (2017: 41). It likewise invests Mosko's portrayals of Trobriand cosmology with a similar anthropological "paramountcy."

13. Lack of death among the *baloma* is the main difference between Tuma and Bweyova but it is far from being the only one. Most interviewees also pointed to the absence of pain,



the widespread rejection of death in Tuma and the possibility of adults reincarnating, Mosko's representations of the exchanges between living and dead reflect a minority view. According to all our interlocutors, the *baloma*'s independence in the afterlife is unquestioned: they require nothing from the living aside from acts of remembrance and cultural fidelity for them to reciprocate with gifts of agency through magic.

### Reincarnation *redux*

It now remains to take up consideration of whether our findings reflect a change in beliefs or earlier misrepresentation which then went unquestioned. There are certain indications of the latter. In "Baloma," Malinowski wrote: "Everybody in Kiriwina knows, and has not the slightest doubt . . . that . . . the real cause of pregnancy is always a *baloma*," and describes how the *baloma* rejuvenate into infants for reincarnation while stating that "this is the story as I obtained it from the *first informant who mentioned the subject to me*" (1916: 403, emphasis added). This characterization of reincarnation as a serendipitous finding is suspect, given Malinowski's early push to explore the twin topics of virgin birth and reincarnation. Well aware of the limits of pidgin as a research tool (1922: 5), Malinowski depicts his early contacts as directed at collection of "concrete data." Yet, Young reports that his early field notes, full of mangled pidgin, show "active pursuit" of complex topics, including reincarnation (Young 2004: 394). Within three months of arrival he proposed to Seligman, his mentor, an article on "reincarnation, [and] ideas about conception and pregnancy" (2004: 388, 407); in short, the article that became "Baloma." Malinowski's boldness in publishing sweeping assertions about reincarnation is underscored by his own admission that he was not fluent until his second Trobriand expedition in 1917 (Malinowski 1935: 453).

Two of Malinowski's favored informants from his first fieldwork stint provided contradictions prior to his publishing. One of them was Gomaia from Sinaketa, who Malinowski described as "my interpreter," "one of my best informants," and "very intelligent" (1916: 368–69). Gomaia has been credited as the likely source for

Malinowski's generalized summary of reincarnation (Roldán 2002: 381). Yet Malinowski omits from publication Gomaia's following remark, recorded in his field notes: "The *BALOM* [*baloma*] gets very old, his teeth fall out (*ikasámolu*); his skin becomes *WAIWAIA*" (Roldán 2002: 382). What Gomaia's statement indicates is not the return of the *baloma* but rather that a detachment from their bodies (their skin) is the source of babies (*wewaia*).

But even more telling is Malinowski's failure to get confirmation of reincarnation from Bagidou, who Malinowski introduces as "an exceptionally intelligent man of the Tabalu subclan, the garden magician of Omara-kana, and my best informant on all matters of ancient lore and tradition" (1916: 363). Malinowski recorded in his notes:

Bagido'u is positive that the *WAIWAIA* are made in Tuma & inserted into women; but I am unable to *squeeze out of him the details about how the Balom are made, whether it is real reincarnation* (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 10: 1046, probably written August 28, 1915; see Roldán 2002: 382, emphasis added).

The use of the term "squeeze," as in a purposeful application of pressure, appears to be indicative of Malinowski's forceful methods of interrogation, as well as of the intensity of Bagidou's resistance to the notion of "real reincarnation." The fact that Bagidou demurred should have given Malinowski cause to qualify his representation, let alone rush a potentially flawed assertion into publication in 1916.

In light of the doubts raised by his favored informants, it appears that one of Malinowski's goals for his second trip was to shore up his now published positions. Prior to his return to the Trobriands, Malinowski and Elsie (his future wife, "chief editor" and "muse")<sup>14</sup> co-authored a document, referred to as "plans and

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suffering, and other negative emotions, as well as the exertions to sustain life in Tuma, all of which are associated with mourning and *sagali* mortuary practices.

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14. In a review of the publication of their correspondence, Stocking summarizes their relationship: "But more than audience and conscience, she was an acknowledged co-worker in his three major ethnographic productions: her copy of *Argonauts* was inscribed to "my collaborator" from "its nominal author" (2: 26); *Sexual life of savages* was "in a way as much ours" as *Argonauts* had been (2: 118); *Coral gardens* seems to have derived from a manuscript dating from 1916–17, "over which we really met, got intimate, fell in love and became as one (2: 140)" (1996: 164).



problems,” which listed questions and goals to be pursued in a more systematic manner than he had in his first trip (Young 2004: 467). On January 1, 1918, Malinowski wrote to Elsie that he had approached Billy Hancock about securing “information about intimate feminine subjects through his [Hancock’s] wife” and notes in his diary that he had asked him about “menstruation, conception, birth” (Wayne 1995: 89; Malinowski [1967] 1989: 170). Two days later he wrote to Elsie: “This morning work about *Baloma*, reincarnation, conception (immaculate). Got lots of new stuff, but main outline of my previous knowledge stands firm as a rock: definite reincarnation, no knowledge of physiology in this matter” (Wayne 1995: 90).

It is therefore likely that Hancock’s wife was the source of the certainty Malinowski reported to Elsie. Hancock, an English-Australian trader, shared with Malinowski his ethnographic observations gained during his long residence in Kiriwina and guided his photographic efforts, among other things (Young 2004: 496). For such services and “many acts of friendship,” Malinowski acknowledged Billy in *Argonauts* and again in *The sexual life of savages* as “a trader of exceptional intelligence and one of the finest men I have known,” and again with “a real friend” and “excellent informant and helpmate” (Malinowski [1929] 1987: lxxxvii, 247). Hancock was Malinowski’s de facto assistant in his ethnographic research, so it is not surprising that he continued investigating some of the “Doctor’s” favored topics after Malinowski’s abrupt final departure from Kiriwina. Hancock’s further discoveries seriously undermined Malinowski’s position on reincarnation. Billy writes to Malinowski on September 29, 1918 (just thirteen days after his departure from the field), to tell him that he had gotten Trobrianders’ ideas on reincarnation wrong:

I got a rude shock when they upset the *Baloma-Waiwaia* business the other evening. I was taking notes about conception, & wanting to start them right at the beginning I said, “Now when the *baloma* become old etc etc. he goes to the salt water & bathes etc etc. & becomes young again a *waiwaia* & is taken up by a *baloma* woman etc etc.” They stopped me then & said, no, the *Baloma* is not *waiwaia*. He becomes young again & goes back to the ‘village’ & lives another life in Tuma, becomes old again washes etc & becomes young again & so on ad infinitum[.] A *baloma*’s life in Tuma never ceases. But I said to them you told the Doctor that it was so. They say no the Doctor told us it was like that & we were afraid to contradict

him.<sup>15</sup> “Kaus” aint they? All babies come into existence in Tuma, but as it[’s] a long story I’ll tell you all about it in my notes later. The information I got from Togugua’s wife and Kaikoba’s wife [and] not being satisfied with them I got “Auntie” on the job & she tells practically the same story, then to make doubly sure I got a bush woman from Obweria & her yarn is the same (Stocking 1977: 6).

The use of the expression “*Baloma-Waiwaia* business” indicates that Malinowski’s discussions with Hancock’s wife sought confirmation that *baloma* became the impregnating *wewaia*, while the phrase “start them right at the beginning” points to an impression, from previous sessions with Malinowski, that immaculate conception, via reincarnating *baloma*, was a fundamental principle from which to start his questions. Yet Hancock’s findings not only call into question Malinowski’s representation; they also suggest that women’s views on the issue may have differed from men’s. As they do today: currently, there is a gender disparity in reincarnation beliefs observable in our surveys, with sixty-five percent of female respondents rejecting reincarnation as opposed to thirty-five percent males (see Appendix).

### Plausible deniability and the elusive *wewaia*

Despite Hancock’s cautions, first in *The father in primitive psychology* ([1927] 1966) and then again in *The sexual life of savages* (1929), Malinowski reiterates essentially the same position set forth in *Baloma*, with a few more details, while doubling down on universality:

But that all spirits have ultimately to end their life in Tuma and turn into unborn infants; that every child born in this world has first come into existence (*ibubuli*) in Tuma through the metamorphosis of a spirit; that the only reason and real cause of every birth is spirit activity, *are facts known to everybody and firmly believed by all* ([1929] 1987: 146 emphasis added)

15. Young contrasts the “subtle and sophisticated” analysis Malinowski employed in *Baloma* with what had preceded (2004: 429). In his interviews, he used leading questions, cross examined and pointed out informants’ contradictions in their beliefs, while self-admittedly employing aggressive techniques of interrogation to force his informants “against a metaphysical wall.” However, sometimes aggressiveness can backfire as appears to be the case here.



In a *mea culpa* of sorts, he recast his 1916 statements as preliminary: “most of what I said there was plausible but as a field-worker I should have made my theoretical conjectures entirely distinct from my descriptions of fact” ([1929] 1987: lx). Plausible is less than faint reaffirmation of previous assertions of certitude. In lawyerly fashion, Malinowski also proceeded to protect the whole from the vulnerability of a part, exercising severability by downplaying reincarnation as a passive belief “that does not exercise a great influence over custom and social organization” ([1929] 1987: 152), a position later challenged by Obeyesekere (2002).

Obeyesekere’s singular rethinking of Trobriand eschatology, based on a detailed analysis of Malinowski’s and Austen’s descriptions, suggests that some Trobriand women, while asserting their roles in physiological maternity, rejected the notion that conception resulted from a reincarnating *baloma*. Obeyesekere recasts the data from Austen’s female informants to argue that, due to the confines of Austen’s *a priori* assumption that *wewaia* were reincarnating *baloma*, his informants were forced to concede that a *wewaia* enters the mother after conception. But we must wonder what those women’s understanding of the meaning of *wewaia* were. Were they reincarnating *baloma*, or were they merely the precursor to a new social being (an infant, the literal translation of the Kilivila word)? Similarly, Trobrianders nowadays insist that the term *wewaia* is not a reborn *baloma* but is rather a descriptor for an undifferentiated encapsulation of *momova* lifeforce, and as such is the precursor to a social being who does not have personhood yet. Recall that it was Austen who concluded in 1945 that the average Trobriander expressed ignorance of the source of his spirit and “of what it is made” (1945: 29). Apparently unaware of the input from Hancock’s wife, Obeyesekere concluded:

[Malinowski was] trapped in his own imprisoning theoretical frame such that he had to convert that conception into a native “dogma,” refusing to recognize alternative views. Moreover, virtually all of his informants were male, thereby silencing the powerful contradictory views of females, who, by his own thinking, were a strong force in this matrilineal society (2002: 330).

The methodological weaknesses in Malinowski’s *a priori* focused interrogations raise serious doubts about his objectivity, which, when coupled with his suppression of disconfirming information in his subsequent publications, indicates a greater commitment to his own advancement than to empiricism.

### *Et tu, Annette?*

Malinowski was not alone in facing new information which challenged his published positions on reincarnation. Weiner, under similar circumstances, chose to publish the disconfirming information as an aside and then ignore its implications for the legacy of her previous work. Given Weiner’s early treatments of reincarnation (1976; 1977) and its role at the core of her analysis of Trobriand kinship and identity, one then wonders what to make of this walking back of her 1976 position in her 1988 general ethnography, the import of which has gone unnoted (except for Crain et al. 2003):

For a spirit, however, life on Tuma does not replicate itself without interruption. In time, it too ages and becomes feeble; but by bathing in sea water, its wrinkled skin is sloughed off and *its life continues as before*. When this occurs, however, a spirit child called *waiwaia*, a term that also means “infant” or “fetus,” is created. Although such a spirit child is thought to belong to the matrilineage of its own birth, it is not recognizable by any personal name. Unlike the *baloma*, which continues its presence on Tuma, the spirit child cannot stay on the island but must return to Kiriwina, where it enters a woman’s body and causes her to become pregnant. It is believed to enter a woman who is a member of the same matrilineage to which its original *baloma* spirit also belonged during its life on Kiriwina (Weiner 1988: 54, emphasis added).

Here, similar to Gomaia’s observation that the *baloma*’s sloughed skin becomes a *wewaia*, the impregnating *wewaia*, created during the process of rejuvenation, is a separate entity from the *baloma*. The latter, after being renewed, continues its *perpetual* existence in Tuma. Weiner’s treatment here of the *wewaia*’s *dala* identity is carefully crafted: a spirit child “thought to belong to the matrilineage of its own birth,” which in turn is the same *dala* as the exfoliating progenitor (the *baloma* shedding its skin in Tuma).<sup>16</sup> Reincarnation is out but *dala* immutability is preserved by a new form of cosmic reproduction larded with incestuous connotations, as the detachment from the *baloma*, which impregnates a woman, is from her *dala* matrilineage (essentially a

16. Based on input from our interlocutors, we take this passage to indicate that the personal detachment from the *baloma*, the *wewaia*, which carries new life, is not really an infant but an encapsulation of the life-giving *momova*, the lifeforce with which to make a new being.



sibling). Missing from her account are any qualifiers on her limitation of reincarnation to this new form of *wewaia*. In fact, Weiner goes on to indicate that while there are different views of how inception occurs “there is no disagreement among informants about the traditional idea that *waiwaia* cause conception” (1988: 55). We presume that Weiner is referring here to her repositioning of *wewaia* as a byproduct of rejuvenation, in which case one wonders whether all of her informants shared that presumption, given that thirty years later we found no one who did. In 1977, Weiner reported many believed in *baloma* rebirth and just ten years later it would appear no one did.

There is therefore significant cause to doubt that reincarnation was a uniformly held tenet of Trobriand eschatology at the time of Malinowski, with an added concern that its reported presence was an artifact of Malinowski’s methods of inquiry and his selective omissions. Based on the absence of support from Silas, Austen’s reports of declining pre-World War II support, and Weiner’s own rethinking, not to mention Ketobwau’s caution that few mature men reincarnate, it would appear that belief in reincarnation has either shifted significantly towards the near oblivion of today or never was as widespread or constituted as reported. No matter what their ancestor’s beliefs were, the majority of contemporary Trobrianders insist that their ancestral *baloma* are not now, nor have they ever been, reborn. One final thought on which to reflect: it is ironic for Trobrianders, who revere the past inspired by their *baloma*, that Malinowski, self-entrusted with preserving their history, should have done so poorly by them.

## Appendix

### *Where are our ancestors? Rethinking Trobriand cosmology Questionnaires*

#### *Participants*

Ninety-two Trobriand (45 male) young adults ( $n = 29$ ), adults ( $n = 51$ ), and elders ( $n = 12$ ) were randomly recruited from the many *dala* matrilineages present in the Trobriand Islands. A total of thirty *dala* were involved in the survey (see breakdown of *dala* members). Not everybody was immediately aware of their *dala*, and some gave instead what commentators call “house” (*boala*), the place of origin of their *dala* ances-

tors. Name of *dala* and *boala* can sometimes coincide. These *dala* matrilineages are grouped in four larger clan-like groups known as *kumila*: Lukwasisiga, Lukuba, Malasi, and Lukulabuta. The latter is underrepresented owing to their current low numbers in Bweyova’s four Trobriand clans (Lukwasisiga = 23, Lukuba = 27, Malasi = 39, and Lukulabuta = 3). Participants hailed from 42 villages (see breakdown of villages). The inclusion criterion to participate in the present study was to be old enough to be discerning in Trobriand beliefs regarding the afterlife, hence teenagers (~13- to 17-year-old) were not included.

To ensure that our Trobriand sample was representative enough, we included women and men of all ages (except minors) and *dala* matriclans, including so-called commoners (*tokai*) and *gumgweguya* chiefly *dala*, from all over the Trobriand Islands. Participants’ responses were written on the interview schedule and double-checked with the participants to ensure that the responses were correctly recorded.

#### *Survey*

The questions were agreed upon among all the researchers and co-authors in the team. They reflect both the interests of the anthropologists, as well as those of Camillus Mlabwema, Chief Nagia, Kenneth Kalubaku, Gumwemwata Okwala and Justin Gumwemwata, in trying to elucidate what Trobrianders’ beliefs of the afterlife presently are.

#### *Questionnaire*

Copies of the questionnaire were either printed out and filled out or else typed directly on a laptop by questionnaire administrators. Below is a sample of a blank questionnaire, with English translation between brackets:

KUMILA [clan group]:

DALA [matrilineage]:

TAU/VIVILA [man/woman]

VALU [village]:

TOMWAYABOGWA/TOMWAYA/TOTUBOVAU

[elderly/adult/young adult]

1. AVE TUTA TETALA BIKARIGA, AMBESE BILA? [When a person dies, where do they go?]
2. OMITIBOGWA, GALA SITUTA DIMDIM ESISUSA, AVAKA SINANAMSA TOMOTA BITAKARIGA AMBESA BITALA? [In olden days, before the white people came here, what did the locals think about where one goes after one dies?]
3. AVE TUTA BALOMA BILOSA TUMA, KE BISIVAGASISI WALA TUMA? [When the *baloma*



- spirit of a dead person goes to the Tuma underworld/afterlife, does it stay there?]
4. KIDAMWA BALOMA GALA BISIVAGASISI TUMA, AMBESA TUVELA BILOSA? [If the spirit of a dead person does not stay in Tuma, where else does it go?]
  5. E AVAKA BIVAGISA? [And what does it [the spirit of a dead person] do?]
  6. SITA BALOMA BIKEITASI OBWEYOVA PELA [Do *baloma* come back for]: MEGWA [magic], BWEKASA [offerings], KULA, SAGALI [mortuary ceremonies], MILAMALA [harvest celebrations], POPULA [farewell offerings], BAGULA [garden work], KABALOMA [spirit possession]?
  7. SITA IBWADI BALOMA BIKEITASI OBWEYOVA BIUNIVEWESA? [Can the *baloma* return to the world of the living as born again? As real people, not as spirits]
  8. KIDAMWA BIKEITAVAUSI, AVE BALOMA BIKEITASI? TOMWAYABOGWA TUBOVAU WEWAIA [If yes [if the spirit of the dead can come back and be born again], what *baloma* do come back, is it the spirit of an old person, a young person, or a baby?]
  9. AVAKA UULA BIVIGAKI SIKEITA E BIUNIVEWESA? [If they do come back, what is the reason for them to come back and be born again?]
  10. AMAKALA KALABAWA TUTA? [If they come back, how often does that happen?] TUTATUTA [all the time] MEMILISI OTUTA [sometimes] KALAYAMTALA [rarely]
  11. LAGELA BWEYOWA BOGWA EDAVILA, KE TUMA MAKAWALA EDAVILA? [Today, the Trobriand Islands have already changed, has Tuma also changed?] YES [Yes] GALA [No]
  12. SITA BALOMA WATUMA EYUSIMSI MONEY? [Do the *baloma* spirit of the dead use money in the Tuma underworld?] YES [Yes] GALA [No]
  13. SITA BALOMA BIPAISEWASI PELA SIKESISU YUMYAM? [Do the *baloma* have to work daily for their sustenance in Tuma?] YES [Yes] GALA [No]
  14. SITA BALOMA EYOSISA [Do the *baloma* in Tuma have any of the following]: RADIO TELEPONI [cellphones] STOA [stores] LAMPA [lamps]?
  15. SITANA IBWADI BILUMAVAU BIGISESA BILOMABOGWA WATUMA? [Is it possible for the recently deceased *baloma* to see the *baloma* who died a long time ago in Tuma?] YES [Yes] GALA [No]
  16. SITA BALOMA ISUMASUMASI DERI IVALULUSI WATUMA? [Do the *baloma* get pregnant and give birth in Tuma?] YES [Yes] GALA [No]
  17. BALOMA KASIGIGISA MAKALA WALA IGAU TOMWAMOVA? [Do the *baloma* look the same as they looked when they were alive?] YES [Yes] GALA [No]
  18. SITA BALOMA OKASITUBOVAU ISISUSA ILA IBWADI KASITOMWAYA WATUMA? [Do *baloma* age and become old in Tuma?] YES [Yes] GALA [No]
  19. SITA BALOMA TUMA IGAU BIKARIGASI? [Do the *baloma* die in Tuma?] YES [Yes] GALA [No]

## Results

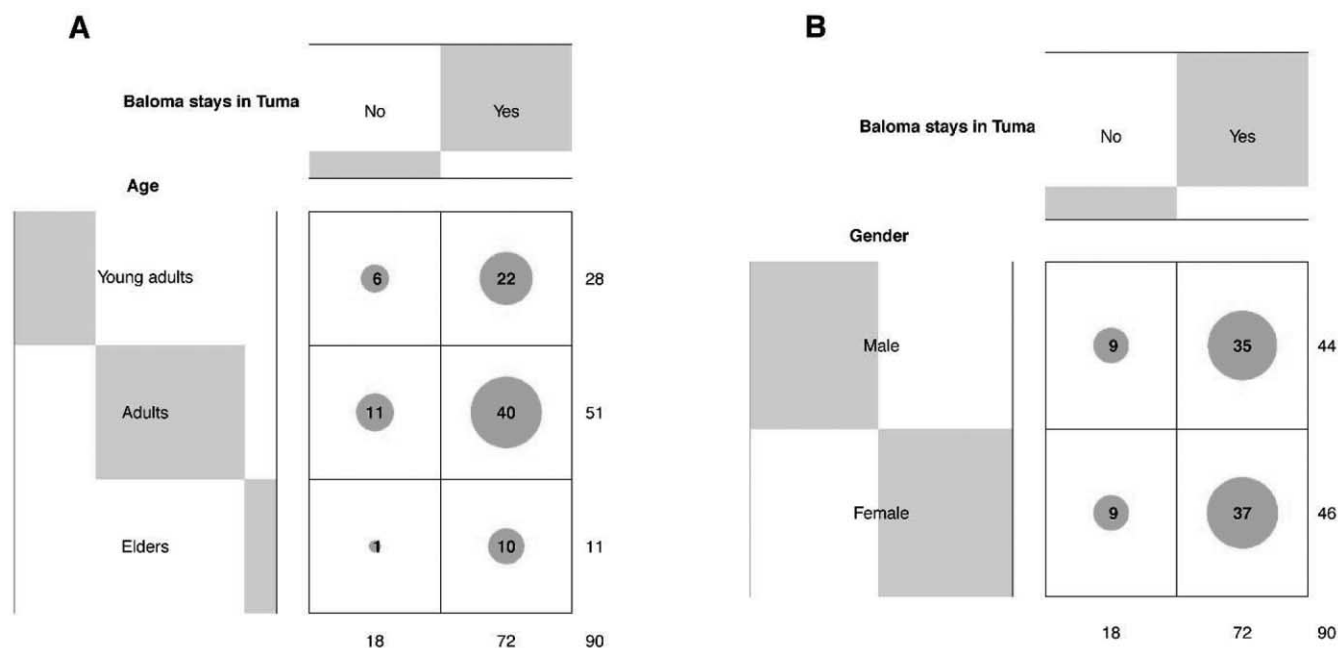
**Question 1** *Ave tuta tetala bikariga, ambese bila?* When a person dies, where do they go?

Trobriand respondents significantly agreed on considering Tuma (85%) over the term used for “heaven” in Bible translations—“labuma”—(15%) as the place where Trobrianders go when they die,  $\chi^2(1, N = 92) = 44.52, p < .001$ . A small percentage of respondents (4%) mentioned Tuma with other places such as Budibudi and Omyuwa (a generic term indicating all the islands to the east of Iwa: Gawa, Muyuw, and Budibudi). Notwithstanding, Tuma, Budibudi, Demwana, or Upawapa are all synonyms for the underworld.

**Question 2** *Omitibogwa, gala situta dimdim esisusa, avaka sinanamsa tomota bitakariga ambesa bitala?* In olden days, before the white people came here, what did the locals think about where one goes after one dies?

Trobrianders’ responses aligned with their current beliefs but showed a stronger belief in Tuma (97%) as the traditional abode of the dead over other alternatives (3%), such as Budibudi, Omyuwa, or Demwana,  $\chi^2(1, N = 92) = 80.39, p < .001$ .

**Question 3** *Ave tuta baloma bilosa Tuma, ke bisivagasisi wala Tuma?* When the *baloma* spirit of a dead person goes to the Tuma underworld/afterlife, does it stay there?



**Figure A1:** Balloon plots displaying the cross tabulation of (A) age or (B) gender and Tuma as the adobe for *baloma*. The area of the balloons is proportional to the number of cases included in each cell.

Most Trobrianders agreed on considering that the *baloma* spirits of the dead, once in Tuma, stayed there (78%). Some respondents believed that *baloma* do not stay in Tuma (20%), whereas only a very small percentage did not know the answer (2%). When only taking into account the Trobrianders providing a positive or negative response to this question, they significantly agreed on considering that the *baloma*, once in Tuma, stayed there (80%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 90) = 32.40, p < .001$ . This finding was consistent across distributions of age,  $\chi^2(2, N = 90) = 0.93, p = .627$ , Cramer's  $V = .10$ ; and gender,  $\chi^2(1, N = 90) = 0.01, p = .999, \phi = .01$  (Figure 1).

**Question 4** *Kidamwa baloma gala bisivagasisi Tuma, ambesa tuvela bilosa?* If the spirit of a dead person does not stay in Tuma, where else does it go?

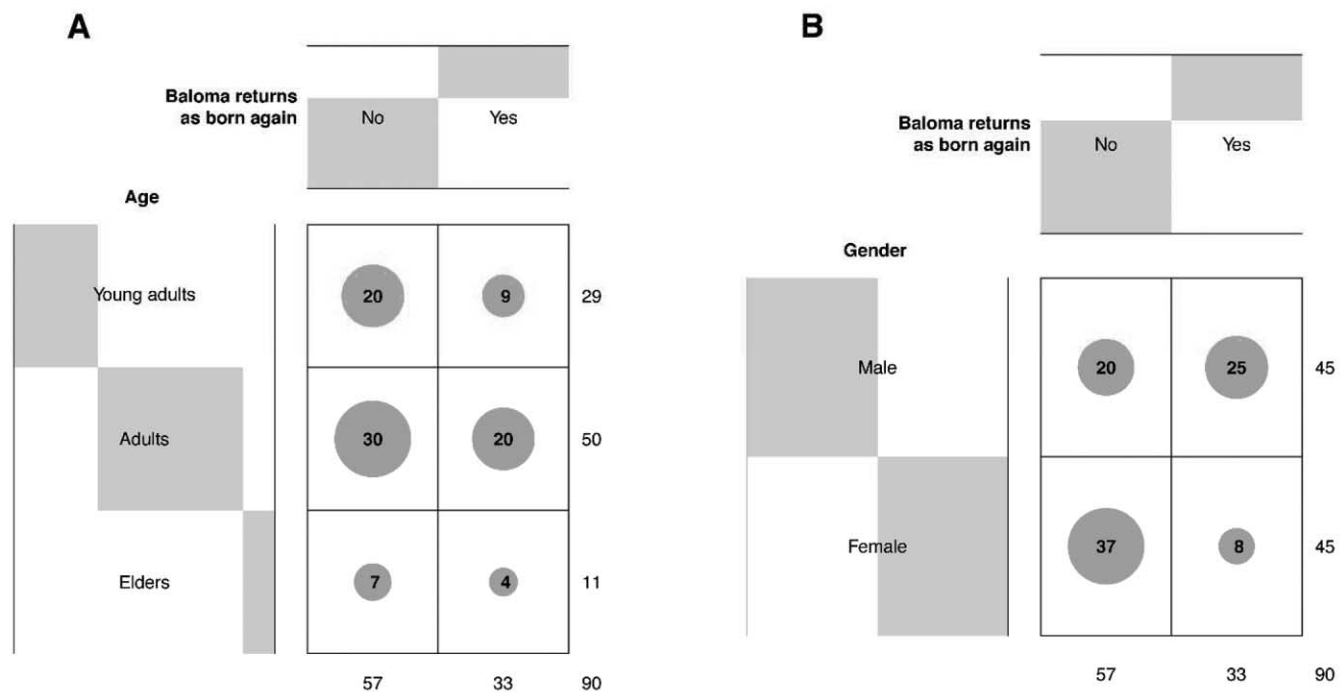
Of the 18 respondents who believed that the spirits of the dead did not stay in Tuma, most stated that the *baloma* move on to another afterlife (41%) or that they visit Bweyova as spirits (32%). Marginally, a small percentage of Trobrianders believed that the spirits of the dead return to the Trobriand Islands as ghosts (*kosi*) and eventually disintegrate (*karigeyai*) (5%). Most telling, only two interviewees (both Western-educated chiefs fluent in English) stated that *baloma* are reborn in Bweyova (9%).

**Question 5** *E avaka bivagisa?* And what does it [the spirit of a dead person] do?

The range of answers to this question makes it difficult to group them into categories and quantify them. Respondents either specified further what they stated in the previous question, giving more details and expanding their answers, or else replied “not sure.” Those who gave details offered that *baloma* can go back to Bweyova as spirits to inform their relatives of who was responsible for their death through sorcery (*bwagau/yoyowa*, one respondent), or else they said the *baloma* await judgment to go to heaven or hell (two respondents). Seven respondents said *baloma* go back to Bweyova in spirit form to visit relatives, anticipating the next question.

**Question 6** *Sita baloma bikeitasi obweyova pela* [Do *baloma* come back for]: *megwa* [magic], *bwekasa* [offerings], *kula*, *sagali* [mortuary ceremonies], *milamala* [harvest celebrations], *popula* [farewell offerings], *bagula* [garden work], *kabaloma* [spirit possession]?

All participants but one stated that the spirits of the dead attend certain important activities of Trobriand life. *Baloma* are at hand when summoned by *megwa* magic (92%), during *sagali* mortuary ceremonies (92%), and for *Kula* exchanges (89%). There was high agreement when considering that *baloma* are present during *Milamala* yam harvest celebrations (97%), when *bwekasa* offerings of food, tobacco, and betel nut are made to them (96%), for *popula* farewell offerings (96%), for garden work (95%), and in cases of spirit possession



**Figure A2:** Balloon plots displaying the cross tabulation of (A) age or (B) gender and *baloma* reincarnation. The area of the balloons is proportional to the number of cases included in each cell.

(97%). Only one person replied “none of the above,” specifying that in cases of spirit possession “it’s not that they are possessed, but their *lumkola* (feelings) make them do things and talk in a certain way, but it’s not real possession.”

**Question 7** *Sita ibwadi baloma bikeitasi obweyova biunivewesa?* Can the *baloma* return to the world of the living as born again? [As real people, not as spirits]

There were more respondents answering that *baloma* do not return to the world of the living as born again (62%) than respondents accepting the possibility of rebirth (36%) or not knowing what to answer (2%). When not taking into account the two Trobrianders that did not know what to answer to this question, we found a similar pattern: 63% claimed *baloma* reincarnation is not possible vs. 37% who admitted to this possibility,  $\chi^2(1, N = 90) = 6.40, p = .011$ .

The rebuttal of the assumption of *baloma* reincarnation was robust and consistent across age distribution,  $\chi^2(2, N = 90) = 0.64, p = .728$ , Cramer’s  $V = .08$ . However, we found a pattern of association between rejecting the reincarnation of *baloma* and gender,  $\chi^2(1, N = 90) = 12.25, p < .001, \phi = .39$  (Figure 2). We found that significantly more female than male respondents tended to reject the possibility of *baloma* reincarnation (*Std. Residual* = 3.72).

**Question 8** *Kidamwa bikeitavausi, ave baloma bikeitasi? Tomwayabogwa? Tubovau? Wewaia?* If yes [if the spirit of the dead can come back and be born again], what *baloma* do come back, is it the spirit of an old person, a young person, or a baby?

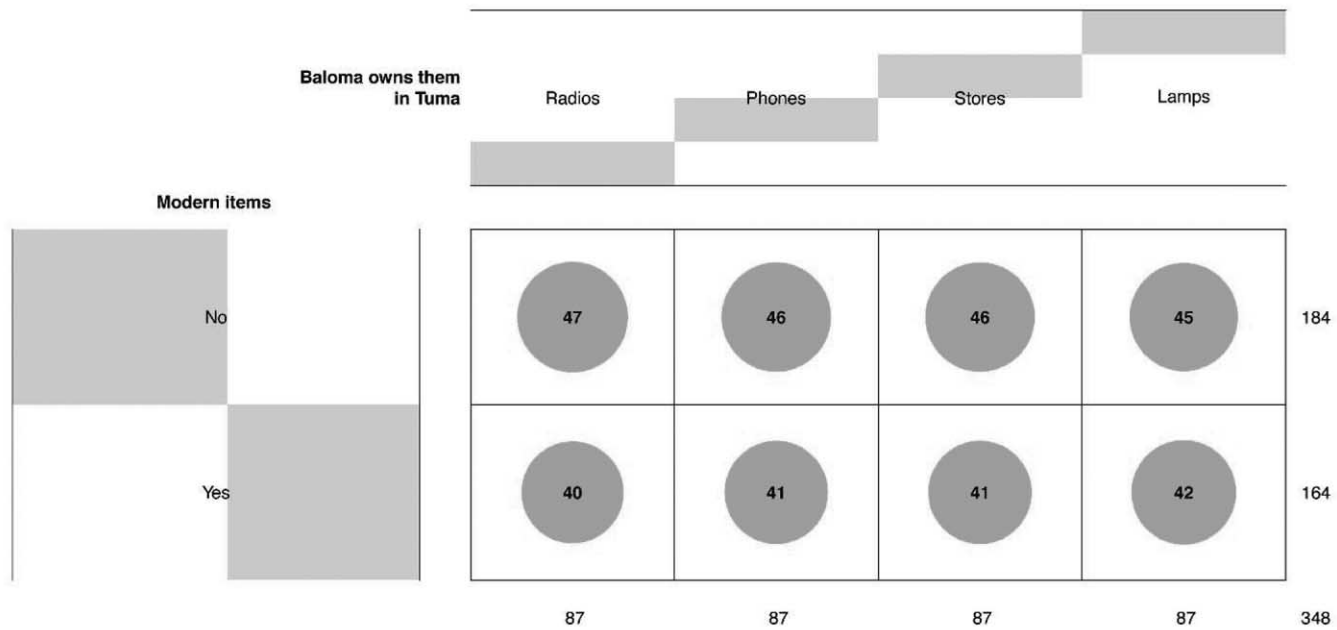
The subgroup endorsing the belief in Trobriand reincarnation was further asked to clarify which dead spirits were able to be reborn in Bweyova. Most of these respondents stated that only those who died as infants (*wewaia*) could reincarnate (79%), as opposed to those who allowed for the rebirth of elders only (3%) or dead spirits of all ages (18%),  $\chi^2(2, N = 35) = 31.82, p < .001$ .

**Question 9** *Avaka uula bivigaki sikeita e biunivewesa?* If they do come back, what is the reason for them to come back and be born again?

Respondents’ replies were varied and can be grouped into three categories accounting for rebirth (see “Rare returns” section above).

**Question 10** *Amakala kalabawa tuta? Tutatuta? Memilisi otuta? Kalayamtala?* If they come back, how often does that happen?

Among those answering that the *baloma* do come back, there was a high agreement considering the reincarnation



**Figure A3:** Balloon plot displaying the cross tabulation of the existence of modern items in Tuma and the type of item. The area of the balloons is proportional to the number of cases included in each cell.

of *baloma* as a “very rare” event (*kalayamtala*, 89%) over other options such as “sometimes” (6%), “every time” (3%), or “not knowing” what to answer (3%). When dropping the only participant not knowing what to answer, we found a similar trend,  $\chi^2(2, N = 34) = 51.24, p < .001$  (for answering “very rare,” Std. Residual = 7.16).

**Question 11** *Lagela bweyowa bogwa edavila, ke Tuma makawala edavila?* Today, the Trobriand Islands have already changed [examples given by interviewers: today there are airplanes, trucks, etc.]. Has Tuma also changed?

Very similar percentages of Trobrianders answered “yes” (45%) or “no” (44%) to this question, whereas a smaller percentage of respondents did not know what to answer (12%). Setting aside respondents not knowing the answer to this question, the percentage of respondents endorsing a similar acculturation process for Tuma and other parts of the Trobriand Islands (51%) was not significantly different than the percentage of Trobrianders believing that Tuma has not undergone the acculturation process influencing the world of the living (49%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 81) = 0.01, p = .912$ .

**Question 12** *Sita baloma watuma eyusimsi money?* Do the *baloma* use money in the Tuma underworld?

Similar to question 11, the respondents answering “yes” to this question (41%) or “no” (44%) did not differ much, with a

smaller percentage of respondents not knowing what to answer (15%). Setting aside respondents not knowing the answer to this question, the percentage of respondents believing that *baloma* use money in Tuma (49%) was not significantly different than the proportion of respondents rejecting this possibility (51%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 78) = 0.05, p = .821$ .

**Question 13** *Sita baloma bipaisewasi pela sikesisu yumyam?* Do the *baloma* have to work daily for their sustenance in Tuma?

We found a significantly higher percentage of Trobriand respondents who believed that *baloma* do not work in Tuma (66%) over the belief that *baloma* do work (34%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 92) = 9.78, p = .002$ . However, those who believed that *baloma* work in Tuma highlighted that if they garden it is only because they derive pleasure from it, more of a hobby than a necessity.

**Question 14** *Sita baloma eyosisa radio, teleponi, stoa, lampa?* Do the *baloma* in Tuma have any of the following: radios, cellphones, stores, lamps?

Trobrianders split evenly their beliefs on whether modern manufactured goods could be present in Tuma nowadays (Figure 3). Although a majority has a view of Tuma as a “traditional” place, many conceive the *baloma* possessing radios (46%), phones (47%), stores (47%), or lamps (48%). Some respondents indicated that those who had modern goods in life could take

them to Tuma, while others specified that Tuma has only changed for those who witnessed modernity firsthand in Bweyova.

**Question 15** *Sitana ibwadi bilumavau bigisesa biloma-bogwa watuma?* Is it possible for the recently deceased *baloma* to see the *baloma* who died a long time ago in Tuma?

Most respondents (84%) believed *bilumavau* (newly deceased *baloma*) will live side by side with the ancient dead (*bilumabogwa*), confirming that the latter have not reincarnated,  $\chi^2(1, N = 92) = 41.78, p < .001$ .

**Question 16** *Sita baloma isumasumasi deri ivalulusi watuma?* Do the *baloma* get pregnant and give birth in Tuma?

More Trobrianders answered “yes” to this question (67%) than answered “no” (24%). A smaller percentage of respondents did not know what to answer (9%). When not considering the Trobrianders not knowing what to answer to this question, we found a significantly higher percentage of Trobriand respondents believing that *baloma* can give birth in Tuma (74%) over the belief that *baloma* cannot give birth in Tuma (26%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 84) = 19.05, p < .001$ .

**Question 17** *Baloma kasigigisa makala wala igau tomwamova?* Do the *baloma* look the same as they looked when they were alive?

A minority of Trobrianders answered “yes” to this question (17%), versus a majority who answered “no” (80%), whereas a very small percentage of respondents did not know what to answer (2%). Subtracting those who did not know, we found a significantly higher percentage of Trobrianders believing that a newly dead spirit rejuvenates between its death and entry into Tuma (82%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 90) = 37.38, p < .001$ .

**Question 18** *Sita baloma okasitubovau isisusa ila ibwadi kasitomwaya watuma?* Do *baloma* age and become old in Tuma?

Consistent with the belief in rejuvenated *baloma*, more respondents believed that *baloma* do not age in Tuma (53%) over other options such as aging as living Trobrianders do (30%) or not being sure on whether *baloma* aged as the living (16%). Among those offering an opinion, significantly more respondents believed that *baloma* do not age in Tuma (64%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 77) = 5.73, p = .017$ .

**Question 19** *Sita baloma Tuma igau bikarigasi?* Do the *baloma* die in Tuma?

*Baloma* death was supported by only 5% of respondents and rejected by 88%, whereas a very small percentage of respondents did not know what to answer (7%). Not considering those who abstained from answering this question, we found that the percentage of respondents claiming that *baloma* do not die (94%) was significantly higher than those respondents assuming that *baloma* die in Tuma (6%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 86) = 67.16, p < .001$ .

#### Breakdown of *dala* members and number of participants from each *dala* in parentheses<sup>17</sup>

- Buduvakaveka (4)
- Bwedala (1)
- Digiagara (1)
- Ibuya (1)
- Kabata (1)
- Kabulula (4)
- Karebida (1)
- Kebola (2)
- Kuwakaya (2)
- Kwebwaga (2)
- Kwenama (7)
- Kweoma (1)
- Liwaga (2)
- Lobweta (3)
- Luwagala (2)
- Luwebila (1)
- Mdakavala (3)
- Minakaibola (1)
- Mlabwema (12)
- Moligilagi (1)
- Mwadoya (7)
- Obowada (1)
- Opusaveka (3)
- Otuwatau Okuvebobu (1)
- Sai (1)
- Sakapu (12)
- Susupa (7)
- Tabalu (5)
- Toliwaga (1)
- Tudava (1)

#### Breakdown of villages and number of participants from each village in parentheses<sup>18</sup>

- Ilalima (1)
- Kabulula (2)

17. Only one of the participants did not know their *dala*.

18. Participants were asked to state the village where they were born. Women in the Trobriand Islands generally observe patrilocality, moving to their husband's village after marriage.



- Kabwaku (3)
- Kanuabasi (2)
- Kapwapu (6)
- Karidakula (1)
- Kaurigova (1)
- Kavataria (3)
- Kuduvakaveka (1)
- Kutoila (5)
- Kwebwaga (2)
- Kwemtula (2)
- Lalakaiva, Kitava Island (1)
- Liwaga (3)
- Losuia (1)
- Lubua (1)
- Luwebila (1)
- Moligilagi (3)
- Mwadaosi (5)
- Obowada (2)
- Obweria (6)
- Odadam (1)
- Oilobogwa (3)
- Okabulula, Kitava Island (1)
- Okaikoda (4)
- Okebobwa (1)
- Olivilevi (1)
- Oluweta (2)
- Omarakana (3)
- Omlamwaluwa (1)
- Osesuya (4)
- Tamure (3)
- Tilakaewa (2)
- Tilikasi (2)
- Tububuna (1)
- Tukwaukwa (1)
- Vakuta, Vakuta Island (1)
- Wagaluma (2)
- Wawela (1)
- Wemwata (3)
- Yalaka (2)
- Youlaotu (1)

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and administration of the questionnaires and the focused interviews, offering their views, thoughts, and considerations, they also assessed the latest drafts of this article in November–December 2018, providing feedback and further clarifications. We would also like to thank the Tabalu chiefs Daniel Pulayasi, Tovesi Toboeta and Tolawayaya for the help provided in the research leading to this article and their useful comments on Trobriand cosmology. We are also most grateful to the Trobrianders who participated in the study, many of whom showed sympathy and support for its purpose of elucidating what is the general consensus when it comes to Trobriand beliefs of the afterlife.

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