

I,

THE *MILAMALA* AND FALLING STARS:  
ASPECTS OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION  
IN THE TROBRIANDS

by  
GILBERT H. HERDT  
25 September 1972

Recent analyses of the Trobriand social organization have dealt with aspects of ritual, cosmology and symbolism in relation to other institutional spheres. These investigations of the symbolic ordering of social experience have not so much focused on the religious institutional order, as to stress synthetic bifurcations with other features of Trobriand social life. However, the treatment of Trobriand religious behavior in terms of the symbolic level of explanation is surely large, firstly, because the wealth of data now available enables us to see what hope stems from this "doomsday book" for the understanding of the religious element in the social organization of the Trobriands. Secondly, there would seem to exist some general significance of the Trobriand case for the development of a religious anthropology which Levi-Strauss (1962), among others, has argued for.

In this essay I will take up a symbolic approach in the study of the *milamala*, the return of the spirits of the dead (*baloma*) to the Trobriands. My concern with this liminal period is that the behavior within it expresses and gives clues to an increased understanding of Trobriand social organization.

It is my contention that in Omarakana, at least, the *milamala* can best be understood as a period when the conflict between persons as members of corporate subclan *dalas* working towards *urigubu* obligations, and persons as residents and members of gardening team units, is given

expression (Powell 1960:125). Moreover, this is a time of important structural and status change, involving the movement of residence for some individuals, and the vying for control, of strategic marriages and garden lands by subclans. It is also postulated that the exchange of food in transactions between persons and groups can most usefully be seen as a way of expressing (making statements about) these differences and conflicts between categories of people.

The argument thus stated stems from insights of Malinowski (1965), but it is most concisely stated (*vis-a-vis* Leach) by Powell (1969b:581) who notes:

In the making of gardens, whole villages, or sections of compound villages where there are more than one owning subclan, operate as organized corporate bodies under the direction of subclan leaders and garden magicians. In the matter of *urigubu* prestations, however, it is corporate subclans, irrespective in many situations of the actual residence of their members, which operate as corporate units both in giving and receiving *urigubu*.

If we follow this argument, we arrive at the construction of two "ideal types" of the social composition of Trobriand villages, a "simple" and a "complex" type (Powell 1960:124). Omarakana is clearly a complex type in which the singular political unit is comprised of four clans, 39 subclan dalas, and five villages (Powell 1960:121-124). Leadership in many areas is competitive, Powell advises us, and institutionalized competition insures intracluster cooperation. My understanding of the Trobriand social system leads me to postulate that it is noticeably in the realm of "religious facts"--as denoted in the "cosmic renewal" (Eliade 1970:142) of the *milamala*--that subclans, villages, and finally village clusters, are pitted against one another, reflecting yet challenging magical and religious potency, unity and politico-economic hegemony. Out of the *milamala* come rights and duties (social esteem) which denote the economic "facts" of residence, affinal relationships and gardening team membership, as well as subclan affiliation involving *urigubu* commitments for the coming year.

I believe that an elucidation of the *milamala* as a set of chronological, symbolic, ecological and historical events is worthwhile for several reasons: In the first place, no one has yet looked at Trobriand religious organizations as characterized by the *milanala*, except Lanternari (1955), whose psychological analysis remains unsatisfactory to the social anthropologist. This striking omission is all the more curious, since Malinowski's classic essay, "Baloma the Spirits of the Dead in the Trobriand Islands," was also his first piece of field material to be published (1916). Additionally, Malinowski himself focused on the holistic examination of systems of integrated activities, such as the *kula*, and the gardening cycles (*kweluva*)--and his approach has proven fruitful. Following this latter approach, the rituals and activities of the *milamala* may be viewed as "situated activity systems" (Goffman 1961:95-99), which integrate the interdependent actions of a group of individuals towards some inclusively meaningful purpose. The symbolism and structure of such systems of activity suggest analogous and in some instances homologous features, in regard to their institutionalized performances. For example, the regularities existing between gardening practices, rites and related activities before the *milamala*, and the pregnancy rites and mortuary ritual occurring elsewhere, suggest a common symbolic structure. More importantly, however, is the anomalous

position of the *milamala kweluva* (garden time), coming as it does at the end of one set of harvest activities and a new division of garden plots at the garden council (*kayaku*), with a consequent pause in these activities due to ecological conditions. Time is created or generated during the lull in the form of feasting and dancing, and these activities point to the coming "New Year s" celebration.

Before turning to the data, a word about Van Gennep's insights regarding the *rites de passage* is relevant to a discussion of the *milamala*. Gluckman (1962) points out that the significance of Van Gennep's scheme rests in the demonstration of relatively constant social movements which are displayed in ritual form in small societies. These constants of social life are therefore movements from one social "state" to another by persons and groups, with a reference to shifting qualities of sacredness and profaneness. These movements involve dislocation of relationships and ideological arrangements, and they can most successfully be dealt with at a religious period like the *milamala*, Trobriand society lacking as it does, a developed governmental structure and processes of litigation of a formal nature. By drawing upon "multivocal" symbols and multiplex relationships, an individual can generate support and esteem, and, of course, fail to do so.

In looking at the events occurring on the *baku*--the central place of a village--both mythically and behaviorally, such possibilities as discussed above are actualized in the spatial and temporal metaphors of Trobriand religious culture. Sexual license is greater than usual--being legitimized by the return of the *baloma*--which opposes strategically-existent marriages and intended prearranged (infantile) ones. The competition for *butura* (renown) and *malia* (prosperity) is heightened at the time of the harvest and *urigubu* exchanges, and it is in the latter institution, incidentally, that a "closure" of the matrilineal cycle is augmented. The participation for the first time (or possibly the last) of a male in these rituals becomes exceedingly important when considered in this light. In a "complex" cluster like Omarakana, for example, "impression management" becomes very difficult at these times for a man, his own matrilineal *dala*, his father's *dala*, and his prospective partner's subclan as well. As Gluckman notes, "Every activity is charged with complex moral evaluations, and default strikes not at isolated roles but at the integral relations which contain many roles" (1962:29). The relevant prescriptions of everyday behavior in interaction are not enough at these liminal times to guide action, for the definition of the situation may challenge codes and values that underlie the very prescriptive rules upon which the behavior is based. Through the guise of sacred action and ritual potency, the drama of everyday conflicts take on symbolic form on the *baku*. The *milamala* is therefore a liminal period, being chronologically and cosmologically "betwixt and between" as we shall see.

A study of the *milamala* must commence with the garden council (*kayaku*), which precedes a series of harvest rites accompanying the harvest of yams and their display, first in the gardens, and then on the *baku*. The next activity system comprises the *urigubu* exchanges, repair of the open yam house (*bwayma*) and the rites of "magic of plenty" (*vilamalia*). Following these events, I have sketched a brief analysis of the symbolic contrasts encompassing the open and the enclosed yam houses. The focus on the observable transformations in the village just prior to the return of the *baloma* will be set forth as clearly as possible in a middle section, the left-hand side of the paper presenting the data, while symbolic interpretations will accompany the text on the right. Finally, the summary is intended to deal with the meaning of the key "multivocal" terms that have emerged as important in the essay. These will be discussed with respect to the structural conflict between

membership in the corporate dala and gardening teams.

\*\*\* \* \* \* \* \*

In Omarakana, the opening of the gardening magic occurs at the *kayaku* council (Malinowski 1965:278), which is also the initial act of the magical system of *kaylu ebila*. This system is wielded by the garden magician (*towosi*)--a senior member of the *Tabalu dala* -who in Malinowski's time was Bagidou. He leads gardening activities corresponding to the sister village of Kasana i that wields the *silakwa* magical system for village gardening (including *Osapola*). Thus, on the lands surrounding the village cluster, two different magicians practice two magical systems in conjunction with the work of the gardening teams which are comprised of the residents in these villages. Now the magical system that a subclan uses is supposed to have sprung from the land which is being gardened; otherwise myth states that it will be impotent (Malinowski 1965:348-349). There exist a number of inequities in this dogma on the ground, as a glance at Malinowski's chart of magical systems and practicing villages shows (1965:423). The discontinuities between myth and fact of residence are clearly brought out in Malinowski's statement that whenever he pointed out that a subclan's emergence hole and the magical system it used could not have arisen from the same lands, his informants expressed surprise. They seemed to have been unaware of the discrepancies.

It appears that the garden council, which is called *o kayaku*, is largely a ceremonious occasion in Omarakana, known to all to be a formal "front staging" activity (Malinowski 1965:88; Powell 1960: 132). According to Malinowski, men would gather on the front of Touluwa's house and be given food and make speeches about the allotment of garden lands. "Such speeches, telling to all what everyone knows and to which everyone has to consent, are a feature of Trobriand public life" (1965:348) (emphasis added). However, Powell (1969:589) has emphasized "that the urigubu needs of the husbands of the women of the subclan are all met" on this occasion. Here it is important to note that the indigenous *kadala*, or lineage elder, is formally asked for the right of use of these garden lands (Malinowski 1965:348).<sup>1</sup> Such occasions are mostly peaceful, but following them, when the gardens themselves are divided up into plots (*baleko*), disputes often develop. These may turn into *yakala*, long native litigations or "shaming techniques" (Powell 1960:133) which Malinowski mentions nothing more about (1965:103). It does appear that out of the *kayaku* comes competition between garden teams and challenges of competitive food exchanges (*buritilaulo*) for "competitive renown." Exactly what role the autochthonous subclans play in this drama is uncertain. One conclusion we can draw is that the principle of rank is not completely successful in the allocation of lands, and consequent conflict over those resident as strangers (*tomakava*) working in the gardens, and those indigenous to the land, is probable (Powell 1969:186, 199).

Austin (1938:242) states that in Kiriwina the *milamala* is called *kabuma* (*kaboma*), which means "tabooed gardens" (Malinowski: 1965:125). This statement simply underscores what Malinowski touches on when he discusses the place of the *kayaku* as the opening event in the magical system's operation. In other words, the *milamala* in Omarakana is more closely tied to the gardening cycle than elsewhere in the Trobriands, coming at the time of a pause in activities. The importance of this will become clearer as the nature of the incongruities between the *Tabalu* claims of control over the garden lands and their own lack of mythical emergence from these same lands is symbolically

dramatized as the ritual of the *milamala* unfolds.

Following the *kayaku*, there occurs an extensive series of gardening practices and rituals that denote later activities which are post-*milamala*; e.g., the burning, cleaning and planting of the main gardens (*kaymata*). Some taro and other lesser crops may be planted after the main crop of *taytu* and before the *milamala* commences, but the garden generally falls under a taboo lasting until the full moon of the *milamala*, after which the burning (*gabu*) takes place. It is at this point that the *taytu* is harvested and displayed initially in the gardens. For each *urigubu* prestation represented in a heap, a man will construct an arbor (*kalimomio*) to temporarily house it. Everyone admires the beautiful arrangement of the heaps and renown is gained by virtue of being a "perfect gardener" (*tokwaybagula*). There is danger in this, however, for one may only reasonably produce so much without incurring the jealousy of others, particularly the chief. In fact, Malinowski (1965:175) mentions that right before his stay, To'uluwa had reputedly had two men done in by sorcery for the accumulation and display of too much *taytu*.

At the time of harvest and only then, the competitive exchange of raw food between close villages is held. In former times, such exchanges might possibly have led to war (Malinowski 1965:176, 182). An example of such an exchange is discussed in *Coral Gardens*, which involves the villages of Wakayse and Kabwaku. It is significant and bears momentary consideration. First, the conditions of the exchange were such that a quarrel already existed between the villages. Since both villages are in the district of Tilataula (and owed their allegiance to Moliassi), they could not go to war, and so they would periodically quarrel through a "garden challenge" or *buritila'ulo* (1965:348, 127, 184). In these exchanges certain amounts of *kuvi* or long yams built in structures called *yadavi*, along with other raw foods, are exchanged in exacting amounts. The competition is offered in terms of as much food as can be mustered without the assistance of one's affines (*dodige bwala*). The first village A will bring its food over to the challenging village B, and the latter will reciprocate on the following day; thus:

And now comes the dramatic moment. Community B have been straining all their resources not only to repay the full quantity but to provide a surplus. The strict return measure is called *kalamelu*, which might perhaps be translated 'its equivalent,' the 'equivalent of the gift received.' If they can offer an extra quantity, this will be put on the ground and declared to be *kalamata*, 'its eye. The word 'eye' is here used in the figurative sense of some thing which is ahead of, which overtakes, goes beyond. (1965:185)

If an "eye" is not presented, the disagreement terminates at this last ceremony.<sup>2</sup> If it is, fighting may result. This will be taken up later. The bringing in of the *taytu* from the gardens to the baku to be stacked in front of a man's yam house as an *urigubu* prestation, or else to be concealed away in one's own "enclosed" yam house, is the next state in the activities. Prestations of cooked food, fish and vegetables (*kaulo*), or perhaps pig or taro pudding, would be given in the village, either before or after the return of the *urigubu* carriers, while such raw food as betel nut, tobacco or sugar cane might be given en passant (Malinowski 1965:177).

The results of the harvest can be defined in terms of several kinds (categories) of yams. The *taytumwala*, the self-produced and consumed "own *taytu*," is composed of *yagogu* (seed yam), *unasu*

(inferior yam) and *ulumdala* (gleaning after harvest), and, of course, whatever else can be kept back from the *urigubu* crop, as mentioned above.<sup>3</sup> The smaller crops: such as taro, pumpkin and squash, also come under this heading. In the same manner, a distinction between *urigubu* and *taytu inwala* is paralleled in the garden plots called *urigubu* and *gubakayeki* (own crop), respectively. The work of the transfer of heaps from the gardens to the *baku* is repaid through *sagali* for those involved. The handling of both the *urigubu* crop and the "own *taytu*" thereby generates a great difference in terms of the movement of individuals. Whereas, one action is largely a ceremonial and public event, the other is obliquely private (Malinowski 1965:473-475). Where one is well defined as a public gift, the other can only be guessed at. Not so the plots of land themselves, for it stands to reason that the *urigubu baleko* would be just as available to inspection as would the *gubakayeki* plots, which in some instances are mostly comprised of taro. This could possibly explain why there is such a wealth of magic surrounding the taro crop, since, paradoxically, this is supposed to be of much less importance than the *urigubu* crop that has little magic performed over it. Another explanation might be that the taro and *kuvi* yams, being heartier than the *taytu* and capable of taking root most anywhere--even in the "untamed" jungle (*odela*)--are boundary transgressors. In fact, the boundary poles or *tula*, which for the *taytu* are just a frill, actually help to keep the creeping taro vines restrained, although the plants sometimes grow from the garden through the *tula* stakes into the jungle anyway.

Having arrived at the village with the transfer of the *taytu*, several days of events yet precede the *milamala*. The heaps of *urigubu* are sitting on the *baku*, many ready to be stacked away into the *bwayma* of a chiefly class (*guya'u*) by those offering the prestations. The same men who are doing the offering must come beforehand to repair or do any necessary construction on the open yam houses, since they service them as an additional obligation. Such a period of construction or repair would vary according to whether only a new roof was needed (approximately every ten years), as was the case in 1919, or longer if something like a log cabin is to be built (possibly every 30-50 years; Malinowski 1965:245-247). In the case of an open *bwayma*, which must be built up from its foundation stones (*ulilaguva*), these are almost always found *in situ*, Malinowski comments, since these are supposedly anchored to the bedrock (1965:247). As a consequence, these stones "determine the length of the *kaytaulo*, foundation beams, the length and width of the log cabin, and consequently the height of the *bwayma*" (emphasis added). The foundation stones therefore determine the relative size of the open *bwayma* which the *urigubu* offerers must fill. Such *urigubu* prestations rest, moreover, on the size of the foundation beams (*kaytaulo*: *kayta* = intercourse, *ulo* = mine; Fellows 1901:173; Malinowski 1929:56). This term will take on increased meaning as its symbolic polysemic correlates are discussed later.

Following the repair of the open *bwayma*, the acts of *vilamalia* magic are performed by the *tovilamalia* (magician of prosperity of the village), who was, again, Bagido'u (Malinowski 1965: 246-247). The first act is carried out in the *bwayma* before daybreak, "at the wail of the melodious *saka'u* bird" (1965:220) over the sacred *binabina* stones that rest on the wood floor. The objects used in this rite include leaves of the *setagava*--a tough weed, *kakemna* -a dwarf tree with powerful roots, and the extremely hard wood of the *kayaulo* (compare *kaytaulo*), which is also the totemic tree of the Malasi clan. This rite is purported to make the *bwayma* anchored to the village, and paradoxically, to keep the yams in the *bwayma* from being used up.

At daybreak the yam house is filled, *dodige bwayma*. The best yams are displayed outwardly. If there

are multiple donors, each man will have a boy or man inside who will put away his *urigubu* gift. The compartments inside run all the way to the top of the *bwayma*, and even though a man may have several heaps outside, he may have only one compartment inside. In good years, it is said that the yams overflow these compartments to combine at the top. Afterwards refreshments are taken with one's kinswoman in the village; this consists of raw and cooked food (Malinowski 1965:222- 223). Sometimes pig is distributed in this counterprestation. When the strangers are gone, some of the yams are taken out of the structures into which they have just been stored and return gifts called *kovisi* are given. The *taytupeta* gift is also presented, possibly to one's maternal aunt or uncle (Malinowski 1965:423 424)

The same evening of the day of this first rite, one other thing occurs: The magician (*tovilamalia*) "spits over them (closed *bwayma*) with medicated ginger root, and he performs a rite over all the roads entering into the village, and over the central place" (Malinowski 1961:169; 1965:225). This action parallels a similar one which will occur in a day or two at the opening of the *milamala*, and at its close.

Before going further, it should be pointed out that the *vilamalia* magic is not only performed at harvest times, but at several other sociologically "dangerous" occasions. In Oburuku, for example, Malinowski states that the magician might be called upon if sickness or serious hunger (*molu*) threatens the community. Curiously, when a falling star drops near the village, these "adverse *vilamalia*" rites are also performed. Such an oddity of a thought-system yet unexposed will become more meaningful in a moment.

The second rite of *vilamalia* occurs in the next couple of days as performed by the magician. It is called "the piercing of the village" (*basi valu*). The wild ginger root *leya*, the hard tree *lewo*, and the *kayaulo* totemic tree are all manipulated by Bagido'u at noon in his house. He utters a spell analogous to that used in the *kamkokola* ceremony in the gardens earlier. This spell (Malinowski 1965:223 224) will be seen to affirm the foundation (*u'ula*) of the village structure, and to make the food resistant to decay and consumption. Every structural feature of the *bwayma* is enumerated in the rite, except for the *kaytaulo*, which is curiously omitted. Later Malinowski (1965:254-255) mentions the discrepancy and states that the term was left out of the litany (*tapwana*). Old Bagido'u had no more "than a lapse of memory or attention" here. No doubt, but it seems odd that in a spell affirming the *u'ula* of the village yam house and *malia*, the magician would fail to recount the *u'ula kaytaulo* (foundation beams) of the *bwayma*. Or perhaps in Trobriand religious organization it does make sense.

In commenting on the function of the *vilamalia* magic, Malinowski notes that everyone believes that the "magic of plenty" is meant to prevent hunger:

But whereas the objective facts reveal to us that the whole performance is directed at the yam house, at the food accumulated there, the comments of the natives make the human organism the real subject matter of the magical influence. (1965:226 227)

Furthermore:

"Supposing the *vilamalia* were not made," I was told by Bagido'u, "men and

women would want to eat all the time, morning, noon and evening. Their bellies would grow big, they would swell all the time, they would want more and more food. A man takes half a *taytu* and leaves the other half. A woman cooks the food, she calls her husband and her children they do not come. They want to eat pig, they want to eat food from the bush, and the fruits of trees, *kaulo* (yam food). They do not want. The food in the *bwayma* rots in the *liku* (log cabin) till next harvest. Nothing is eaten." (1965:227)

I have quoted this passage at length because the ideological stance of the speaker, Bagido'u --a Tabalu *guya'u* of Omarakana--is revealing for its "message." This position complements a related belief that the Trobrianders dogmatically assert, ergo, an ignorance of the physiological necessity for food. Malinowski states: "They believe that food is transformed in the stomach (*lulo*) to excrement (*popu*)." (1965:227). One may question the idea of a group of human beings anywhere being ignorant of the physiological need for food, just as the famous question of the Trobriander's reputed ignorance of physiological paternity has arisen.

The difficulties here may be that Malinowski has taken what his informant (Bagido'u) has said as being "all" of the Trobriand "true facts" (Powell 1968:652)--and the only version. In both cases the "ignorance" of the location of one's sources of information is crucial, and both Montague (1971:339) and Leach (1969) have pointed out that this controversial Trobriand procreative belief is "men's talk," valid on formal occasions dealing with subclan affairs. Therefore, just as we would expect a lineage elder to deny the necessity for a genitor in procreating children (who belong, along with their inheritable property, to his *dala*, so we would expect him to deny the need for a kind of food (*urigubu* yams) which should not be grown on the *dala's* own plots, which legitimizes marriage contracts annually with strangers (*tomakava*) and which is the source of his villages's *malia*.

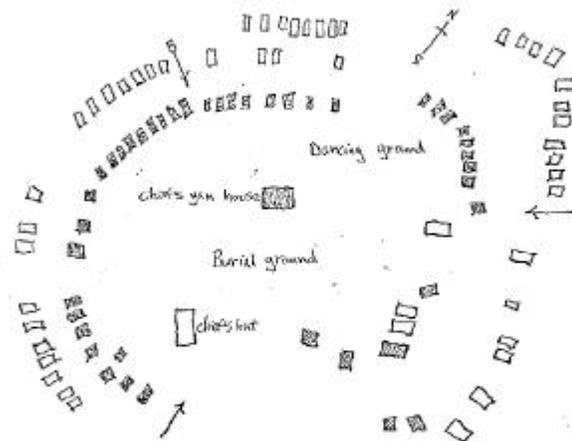
The notion of this denial of the necessity for food and its linkage to *malia* must be examined in the context of such an attitude comprising part of a "thought system." The statement may be viewed as being one piece of a symbolic code of "cipher" that allows for the elaboration and expression of cosmological statements regarding an activity that is not simple as "natural fact," but which is also the focus of complex collective representations. Nourishment, as Eliade comments (1962:157), "as a purely physiological act or economic activity is an abstraction. To feed oneself is a cultural action, not an organic process." Thus, a central problem is to discover the religious ideology that underlies such a view.

In order to view these statements about food in their proper social context, it is necessary to look at the arrangement of the *bwayma* on the *baku*, both before and during the festivities of the *milamala*. While the return of the spirits is occurring in belief, important physical changes are transforming the face of the village, and it is the latter that will now be examined.

At various places (1929:10, 71 and 1965:*passim*) Malinowski comments on the *baku* of the village. In *Coral Gardens* (1965:431), he remarks that the *baku* of Omarakana is very anomalous, in that the chief's house and *bwayma* are located on it.

Apparently the power of To'uluwa as a Tabalu chief of Omarakana enables him to do this. (Because the *baku* has been the focus of so many of the activities described thus far, and since it will be even more important in the remaining discussion of *rnilamala* ritual, the map of this area taken from Malinowski (1965) has been presented to enable the reader to work with the symbolic contrasts discussed below.) (See Figure 1 on next page.)

Figure 1  
OMARAKANA VILLAGE PLAN



(adopted from Malinowski 1965: Figure 1)

The following contrasts may be observed between the open/ uncovered *bwayma* and the enclosed *bwayma* (*sokwaypa*) (Malinowski 1965:242) and the surrounding *baku*:

*Bwayma* (open)

1. Near chief s house
2. Near bachelor s house (*bukumatula*)
3. Near burial ground; dead displayed
4. *Vilamalia* magic performed
5. Ritual spitting of ginger harvest, dancing (danger?) and funerals
6. No eating/cooking allowed; taboo
7. *Bwayma* "off limits"
8. Only *taytu* stored
9. *Bwayma* cared for by *urigubu* offerers, 'strangers"
10. *Bwayma/baku* – male portion
11. *Bwayma* associated with a darkness, hence To uluwa s *bwayma* "darkness of the eve"
12. Yams are obtained by climbing to top and reaching down
13. *Bwayma* associated with *malia*, prosperity, success of *Tabalu*
14. *Baloma* chiefs sit on platforms otherwise, *kosi* here?

*Sokwaypa Bwayma* (enclosed)

1. Near married commoners houses (*bulaviyaka*)
2. Near widow s house (*bwala nakaka'u*)
3. Regeneration implied; marriage, seed yams
4. No magic
5. No spitting (no danger?)
6. Cooking tenaciously avoided
7. Public place; lovers meet for intrigues
8. Other food, raw and cooked, seed yams, daily food
9. *Sokwaypa* cared for by owners, residents
10. *Sokwaypa*/streets -- female
11. *Sokwaypa*, actually more public, more activity
12. Yams obtained by reaching up through ceiling/roof
13. *Sokwaypa* associated with everyday lives of *tokay* who know *molu*
14. *Baloma* (commoners?) live with *veyola* at *milamala*

These contrasts may be summarized in the form of a syntagmatic linear chain which reveals the following oppositions:

OPEN <i>BWAYNA</i>		CLOSED <i>BWAYMA</i>
CHIEF		COMMONER
BACHELOR		WIDOW
DEATH		LIFE
MAGIC	DANCING	PROFANE
DANGER		SAFETY
RAW	COOKING	COOKED
DARK		LIGHT
FORMAL		ILLICIT/BACKSTAGE
STRANGERS - THEM		RESIDENTS - US
MALE		FEMALE
DOWN		UP
<i>MALIA</i>	<i>BUTURA</i>	<i>MOLU</i>
<i>KOSI</i>		BALOMA
<i>TAYTU</i>		TARO

Taking these oppositions as being symbolic of contrastive features of Trobriand religious organization and cosmology, we may now argue that the mediation and regeneration of such divergent "facts" occur at times of great liminality and ritual activity. Such a time exists in the *milamala*, and it is this series of rituals to which we now turn.

The *milamala* begins between August 14th or 15th and ends on September 11th or 12th in Kiriwina (Austin 1938:245; Malinowski 1948:180181). The *baloma* return to the houses of their *veyola*, falling--as they may or may not--on the land of the origin of their indigenous *dala*. I believe that the *milamala* (*mila* = to simulate, *mala* = prosperity; Fellows 1901:191; Austin 1938) is most usefully viewed as a New Year s period, when the harvest collection is celebrated along with the consequent *malia*. Baldwin (1945), Malinowski (1965:86) and Lanternari (1955) argue this, while Austin (1938:245) refers to it.

When viewed in a comparative light, Eliade (1970:142) cites the *milamala* as containing all of the major elements of the "great agrarian festival of the New Year" that occurs in various parts of Melanesia. In this "New Year" celebration, a ritualized adjustment of Trobriand social life commences, in which a cyclical concept of time denying death and outlining patterns of economic activity, like the harvest (Malinowski 1927:209-210) and *urigubu* exchanges, comes around full swing in the *milamala* garden time (*kweluva*). The fruitfulness of this approach is that it lends itself to the processual model of Van Gennep's *rites de passage*, which Leach (1961:133) has drawn attention to in this respect.

In order to understand the Trobriand concept of time as it relates to the

*milamala*, we may draw upon Austin (1938) where an association can be discovered between the various "garden times" (*kweluva*) and the movement of the moon and stars. Though most Trobrianders cannot enumerate more than about ten moons, Austin states a good astronomer (*towosi*) can count twelve. Malinowski (1927:209) indicates that people can generally enumerate ten, eleven or twelve moons, and sometimes thirteen "under pressure." It is indeed this thirteenth moon that is of predominant interest.

If one is to believe Malinowski, the last moon is the *kuluwasasa* and the first is the *milamala*.<sup>4</sup> Austin, however, lists the last moon as *kuluwalasi*, the first as *kuluwasasa*, and the second moon as *milamala*. Neither is actually wrong. What is out of place is the *milamala*, or rather the Trobriand social calendar, based as it is on cycles of structured social activities which are supposed to match natural cycles but probably rarely do. The *milamala* cannot be considered a "garden time" because it does not generate garden activities--or any activities for that matter--except the rituals of the period (see Malinowski's "Chart of Time Reckoning," 1965:50-51). What Leach says about society "creating" time (by structuring activities) is exactly right here. Contrarily, *kuluwasasa*, which Austin (1938: 240) says is a corruption of the term *kwelugasasasa*, "passageway between the old and new garden periods" can be recognized as that transitional period that leads into the *milamala* when the garden harvest is in and a taboo is placed on gardening activity.

The latter point Lanternari (1955:414) emphasizes in the *tabu di lavoro* or "work taboo." Thus, the *kuluwasasa* is a pre-liminal stage, whereas the *milamala* can most usefully be understood as a liminal period of shifting formality, role-reversal and masquerade, as Leach (1961:132-136) defines these behaviors. In reference to the symbolism of the *bwayma* illustrated above, this transitional period replicates cleavages and conflicts of Trobriand social organization as these have been revealed in the earlier "garden challenges," *urigubu* exchanges, garden council and other harvest activities. Furthermore, the *milamala* is a time which bridges differing notions of cosmology, representations of which are postulated in the syntagmatic chain of concepts revolving around the *baku*. (See also Kessing 1971:223, concerning the "frame of symbolic polarities.") The changes which immediately begin to transform the *baku* into a stage of dancing, food exchanges and eating therefore, scenes of shifting sacredness and profaneness (recall that these activities are normally tabooed on the *baku*) can be observed in the construction of several new structures on the central place.

In Omarakana (because it is a "chiefly village"), special very high platforms are built for the *baloma guya'u*, called *tokaykaya*. These are five to seven meters in height (Malinowski 1948:180). In addition, "there is a great display of food" on long specially-built scaffoldings of wood called *lalogua*, approximately two to three meters high. On such platforms are placed raw food. "Such structures run around the central place, but in good years they might extend round the circular street which runs concentrically with the *baku* and even outside the village into the 'highroad, that is the path leading to another village.'" (Malinowski 1948:181). It is important to recall that only recently has the *urigubu* been put away and the vilarnalia magic performed. Now the state is set for the *balorna* to appear off the water from the Northwest to inaugurate

the first day of a activities:

### MILAMALA RITUAL

The first day of the milamala begins by the acts of the magician of renown, *touributu*. The magic of the conch shell *ta'uya* is conducted and the conch shell is blown. This announces "the coming displays with the thrilling ostentation of magical power" (Malinowski 1929:348). After this the magician goes to each road which enters Omarakana and buries food. "The burial of food expresses the desire for plenty within the village, is a symbol of it, and is believed to effect it." (1929:348). During this time cooked food is being prepared in each house, to be exposed in wooden dishes to the *baloma*, after which it is always given to "some friend or relative" who returns the prestation (Malinowski 1961:184; 1948:182).

Following these first events, people begin to gather in the village. There is "learning, training and preliminary contests" (Malinowski 1929:348 349) to attend to. Before dancing can begin, however, the taboo on drums existent throughout the year must be broken. This is called *katuvivisa kasausa'u* "consecration of drums" (Malinowski 1948:175; 1929:38). The drummers intone a chant in a circle in the *baku*, dancers moving slowly. Malinowski states: "But they are not allowed to proceed; almost at the first throb of the drums, there breaks forth from inside the huts the wailing of those who are still in mourning; from behind the inner row of houses, a

### *INTERPRETATION*

It is significant to note that the name for the magician at this period is *touributu*, which is magician of renown through the *milamala*. This initial act of burying food is unique. as far as I can determine. Its only parallel is the burial of a man on the *baku*, since both of these acts return the cooked to nature (raw) and both affirm group (viz. *dala*) strength via *malia*. The exchange of cooked or raw food between neighbors and affines does the same.

These taboos establish the close connection between mortuary and *milamala* from the start.

This constitutes an act of role-reversal and a feigned hostility between the mourners and village men. It is important because the end of the *inilamala* will cause the break of certain ties (e.g., a widow will return to her own village) and the establishment of new ones through residence changes.

crowd of shrieking, agitated females rush out, and attack the dancers, beat them with sticks and throw coconuts, stones and pieces of wood at them." (1929:38). These actions succeed in stopping the activities, but the taboo is broken and the ritualized events proceed.

### *Katukuala*

Around noon the *katukuala sagali* is to be held. This ritual like the earlier events occurs on the *baku*. For the purposes of the feast, a "moiety" division of the clans and subclans is made. According to Malinowski (1929:262), this division was: *MALASI, LUKULA-BUTA, LUKWASISIGA* and *LUKUBA*. Powell (1969:603, n.7) was told by informants that it is: *MALASI, LUKULA-BUTA* and *LUKUBA, LUKWASISIGA*. In this ceremony, in which the *Malasi sagali*, the following occurs:

1. Food is prepared in common and brought by all clan members to the *baku* in heaps on "tabooed wooden dishes" (*kaboma*); such food is cooked (1961:171).

2. Food is distributed by the *tolisagali* To'uluwa; the names of all are called out by him and his *veyola*.

3. The men move away; women come into the ring and take *taytu* back to their houses for private consumption (1929:347).

4. Next a *bubuala'u* may be held. This is the exchange of food between the chief (*guya'u*) and so-called commoners (*tokay*). The chief may offer pig and betel nut, while commoners return fish and fruit. This food is all raw.

5. Later the remains of this food (fishtails and pig jaw bones) may be displayed on the yam houses (*bwayma*).

The first real dance begins in the afternoon. The performers, *tokolima tala*, and the dancers, *tokwaypo'u*, (play and intone a chant). These are all paid later by the *tolisagali* (1929:348, plate 58). At sundown, people disperse, men removing their

This division into clans is also parallel at the final *sagali* ending the mourning period (see below, page 20). Such leadership in these religious activities suggests the power of the *Tabalu* in *Omarakana*. As in the case of the assignment of garden plots, the gardening magic, etc., *Tabalu* hold the primordial roles.

It is essential to note that all of the food exchanges during the *milamala* open with the exchange of COOKED food; whereas, other *sagali*s (outside of, or between villages) begin with RAW food being exchanged.

That women take the food is expressive of handling both the cooked and the *taytu* (see above).

At the end of this day's events, food does what Malinowski says it does: it affirms and defines social status and classes of status. Most importantly, it does so in an articulated idiom of categories of food exchange behavior.

Formality ends and a nighttime of liminality and "communitas" begin. Sundown is, after all, a symbolic juncture, where the public normally gives way to the private and familial. Some of the most important symbolic qualities here concerned

headdresses.

After supper (1929:249), the drums sound again as they will throughout the night. People gather for a different form of dancing in which ornaments are not worn. This is the *karibom*, a slow rhythmic dancing. It assumes a period of fun and games much opposed to the formalism of the daytime activities. Children play about, old men and women lead their grandchildren in endless dancing, while young people carry out amorous advances and excursions between different villages (1929:240 250).

#### *Katumwalela*: Mid month

This day proceeds the initial day of the *milamala*. Food is reciprocated at the beginning of the day; this may be either cooked food or raw scraped coconut. Later, a special *sagali* is held called *kasakasa katukuaka*, that means the "priming of the rank and file" (1929:349). Evidently this term refers to the "moiety" division of the first *sagali*, and such an "inverse social grouping" would be LUKULABUTA, LUKWASISIGA, LUKUBA, MALASI. This occurs in Omarakana only (1948:263).

A special dance occurs, Malinowski states, which may be either the *rogayewo* or the *inuvayla'u*. The *karibom* follows as before.

#### Yoyova Period

This time is alternatively called *kovayse* or "winding up" (1929:349). It is described as the "main activity" by the Trobrianders themselves. Some additional building occurs at this time: around the *baku* the *buneiova* platforms are constructed in order to display valuables (*vaygu'a*), especially those of the chief.<sup>5</sup> Such valuables are set out in the morning and removed again at night.

##### A. *Ulakaiwa*

This is the 26th day of the month of *milamala*, and the rites occurring on the day are called alternatively, *itavakayse keudebu* or *itavakay bisila* (1948:263), consisting of:

include what Radcliffe-Brown might have called "the identification of alternating generations" (Leach 1961:131) and a special emphasis put on promiscuous sexual relations, in accordance with Trobriand ideals. The problem is that such behavior works against secular institutions like infant betrothal, and politically arranged marital alliances, as the difficulties with some *Tabalu* marriages may reveal. (Remember that the famous incident between *Namwana Guya'u* and *Mitikata* occurred several months after the *milamala*, when *Mitikata* allegedly committed adultery with the former's wife.)

This is a moiety reversal and a return prestation. It would be interesting to know which chief (*guya'u*) would lead here. A division of dances exists: one type is *bisila* (*pandanus*) and it has three subdivisions: *bisila*, *kitatuva* and *kaydebu*, all of which belong to subclans. The *kasawaga* is commonly shared.

This symbolic division of space is meaningful. The chief's platforms are overshadowed by those of the *baloma guya'u* platforms; such platforms contrast a normal taboo against anyone being elevated above the chief. The valuables may allude to possible *kula* links, in a manner similar to the initial conch shell magic. The long scaffoldings of raw food profane the sacred *baku* by providing a direct link of pollution with the outside.

The communal eating of taro must be noted at this point. *Bwayma* symbolism suggests that taro is associated in thought with one's "own crop," in addition to having a female aspect. Primarily, such an action contradicts the Trobriand belief that food should be taken with one's family. Secondly, the sexual division is an arbitrary "purity division setting up a ritual

1. The "consecration of the *kaydebu*" (*katuvivisa kaydebu*). This dance rite should occur first, and it is apparently homologous in structure to the *katuvivisa kasausa'u*.

2. A "great communal eating of sago or taro pudding," provided for all by the *tolisagali*. This food is cooked in large clay pots tabooed for this very purpose (1929:349, plate 86; 1961:171).

3. People eating in sexually segregated groups in different parts of the *baku*. (1961:171)

4. The food may be taken in family groups which requires that it be taken out of the clay pots and put in wood dishes.

5. This day is also called *itavakayse keydebu*, "preparing of the dancing shield," and *itavakayse bisila*, "the preparing of the pandanus streamer," for the performance of both these dances (1929:349). In addition, the *gumagabu*, "dance of shields," may be held.

#### B. *Yamkevila*

This is the day before the full moon and it is alternatively called *itokolukwa'i* (1929:349). All of the events of the previous day are repeated, including food exchanges in the morning, the eating of taro pudding, and dancing.

#### C. *Yapila/Kaytaulo* The Full Moon

This is the final day of the *milamaIa*, the *larpula*, the "rounding off day" (1929:349) of the full moon (*kaytaulo*).

The following events occur:

1. In the morning the *toliributu* ritually sweeps the *baku* with a "charmed broom," just as a month before he performed the spitting of the ginger, the conch shell magic, and the burial of food (1929:350).

2. Many people gather on the *baku*; large numbers of communities are represented who sit in separate groups and display "serious faces" (1929:349 350). Relatives who are visiting may help in the proceedings.

3. In the morning, the inaugural dance, the *mveli* (a *bisila* type) is performed. The men wear flowers, *vaygu'a*, and grass petticoats.

purity division setting up a ritual reversal, as in the beginning with the breaking of the drum taboo.

Such dances are corporate pro perty, and can be purchased or sold like land.

This day comprises the most extensive period of activities that is held. In Leach's schema, it denotes formalistic behavior first, then role reversal, and at last masquerade. The "charmed broom" envisages the activities of the witch (*mulukwausi*).

This is an inter *dala* and inter village event. Here "formalism" equates with seriousness,

This is the role reversal phase bringing the Old Year to a close. The ritual also is highly contrastive of the nighttime *karibom*.



..  
This dance is both specially conducted and anomalous, for women may participate. However, Malinowski says that he only once saw such

a performance, and this was by a woman of the "highest rank" (1929:39).

4. At noon the *kawawaga* begins. It is a highly ritualized dance by three performers who imitate the movements of animals (1948:264). In 1915, Numwana Guya'u and Mitikata were two of the three dancers, the third remaining unknown (1929: plate 3).

5. Now comes the important *sagali* (*mitalela valu*), "eye of the village." Malinowski explains he could not decipher this (1929:350). This is a prestation of raw and cooked food that appears not to be returned. Each group sits with its back to the others, eating as the food is distributed, ritually washing, dressing and ornamenting themselves. "This is an occasion for much merriment and some horseplay, the givers and receivers exchanging appropriate jokes." (1929:350)

6. Beauty magic is now performed on the three actors of the final dance by the women of the category *tabu* to them. Such magic is homologous to that performed in the pregnancy ritual by such

women outside of the village. A flattery gift is given with the words *agu tilew'i*, "my flattery gift which is wrapped in he." Such an exchange is competitive in nature, implying that the boys' attentions are being sought (1929:353). First a boy removes his valuables, leaving them with his *tabula*, while the appropriate women perform the magic over him. The spell of the rite names the filiation, *dala* membership, and origin hole of the *dala* of the WOMEN (1929:354-355). The colors of the toilet are red, white and black.

7. After the performance of the beauty magic, a *sagali* is held whereby the performers give return gifts to their *tabula*, as repayment for the

Role Reversal. The woman may have been T&uluwa's first wife, Kadamwasila.

The presence of Namwana Guya'u and Mitikata in this picture, knowing what we do about the *kawawaga* being an imitation of totemic animals (clans ranking subclans), leads me to believe that the event is linked to their famous quarrel. The "eyes" metaphor is related to this.

Radcliffe Brown's thesis concerning the function of joking relationships is relevant here. Ego is in a position of potential hostility and advantage, *vis a vis* this group of women, thus friendly and relaxed relations are valuable (see Powell 1969:194-199, esp. 195).

The competition for ego's attentions in the beauty *kayasa* also substantiates this impression. In the case of Mitikata, Namwana Guya'u and Mr. X, other informal aspects of the interaction are being symbolized. These three male *guya,u* are, after all, faced with a set of marital ties and choices involving three different *dala*'s. Again, these three colors appear over and over in Trobriand symbolism.

Such a *sagali* affirms the ties with ego's father's *dala* the magic used is analogous to that of the mortuary and pregnancy rites, which also bring to

beauty magic (1929:350).

8. While the beauty magic is being performed outside the village, the magic of safety and renown (*butura*) is performed on the *baku*. Malinowski vividly describes the scene: "The elaborate ritual preparation of the dancers gives some indication of the tense emotional atmosphere which is characteristic of these big festive assemblies. The whole complex of dangerous passions which at the same time spring from and generate the spirit of emulation, is wrought upon by such a culminating occasion of personal display" (1929:357).

9. There is a belief that black magic is used against all at this ceremony, except the sorcerer and "his friends." To counter this *kaygiauri* sorcery, the magician of the village (here Bagido'u) spits wild ginger root over the aggregate. In addition, herbs (*kwebila*) specially charmed for the purpose, are put into the armbands of the dancers (see 1929:plates 75 77). The *kayma-glauri* and competitive *butura* can most usefully be viewed as "competitive events" (*kayasa*) which in former times might have broken into fighting (1929 :359).

10. While the dancers are preparing, and the *sagali* is in progress, the *to'uributu* is ritually producing renown for the village (cluster) in his own house.

11. The magician's "most important performance" now takes place. On a folded mat is placed a drum, conch shell and some reeds. Into these he chants a magic spell. The objects are then given to the three dancers for the final (*lapula*) dance (1929:plate 79).

12. Dancers, singers, drummers and all are given the signal by the *to'uributu* (and 2 acolytes), and the three begin to run through the village streets into the *baku*, pointing reeds to the ground. At the end, the reed is thrown up and whoever catches it, achieves *butura* throughout the district (1929:260).

gether the "same" three *dala*'s, from ego's standpoint.

The magic of these two ceremonies legitimizes two different principles: *butura*, or individual renown, and *malia*, or village renown. The conflicting rights and obligations of residence and *dala* membership is the central issue.

Fear of sorcery and black magic seem to concomitantly accompany the occasions when the three corporate groups gather for the "life crises" of a person. The mystical unity of a *dala* links sets of persons together in ways antithetical to inter-*dala* alliance and cooperation.

This aspect of Bagido'u's magical repertoire is again focused on. In this, an extension of his position as *tolivilamalia* is occasioned. Such a multivocal performance may mean that in Omarakana, the office Bagido u holds is more important than elsewhere by the fusion of different magical systems.

13. The men of the reed utter screams that, signal the drummers to beat out the *yoba*, tabooed until this time. Conch shells blow and the three performers begin the *kasawaga* the ritualized animal dance mentioned above (1929:260 261; 1948:186). This is the last event of the daytime.

#### *Valaita*

This is the day following the full moon. The activities of the previous days are concluded unless an extension of dancing, the *usigola*, is held.

1. In the afternoon, the magician puts coconuts, banana and other raw food together with *vaygu'a* in a basket. Later when he hears the *yoba* beat of the drums, such a basket will be placed outside his house as a parting favor (*taloi*) for the *baloma*. This is called *katubukoni*.
2. Stone tomahawks are placed in front of the chief's house.
3. Private offerings of food by individuals stay inside the house; presumably these are given away as before in exchange.

#### The *Woulo*

The second night after the full moon, the *baloma* must leave their native villages and return to Tuma. Thus, an hour before sunrise, the leatherhead (bird) sings out and the morning star *Kubuana* appears in the sky. Dancing stops and the drums intone the *yoba* beat (1948:185 186). This spell accompanies it:

"BALOMA, 0!	"0 spirits, go
BUKULOVSI, 0!	away; we shall
BAKALOUSI, GA!	not go (we will
YUHUHUUH. . .!"	remain) ."

1. At midday of the *woulo*, the second *yoba* is performed, called *pem yoba*, the chasing away of the lame. It purports to rid the village of the spirits of the women and children, the weak and crippled." (1948:186)

This is actually a public intervillage/subclan performance of the *yoba*. *Gagido'u* initiates it, just as he does the *yoba* of Namwana Guya'u six months later. This masquerade sequence signals the end of the formal public ritual. I believe the three dancers represent the Malasi (Mitikata), Lukuba (Namwana Guya'u) and Lukwasisiga matrilineans.

The conceptual notion of time is well brought out in the *yoba* ideas. Malinowski says in several places he tried to bribe boys to play the *yoba* beat for him, but they refused to do so, the implication being that if they had, the events ushered in by the *yoba* would have directly followed. They are irreversible, and suggest a movement towards some end.

Austin comments on the association between the Trobriand "New Year" and the stars, saying that an identification exists between the *milamala* and the morning and evening appearance of the Pleiades (1938:241). Perhaps the appearance of the morning star might also be associated with the end of the "Old Year" on the night of the *Woulo*, in the same manner that Westerners associate it with partying behavior at 12:00 midnight.

This second *yoba* seems to be more of a private village affair than the previous rite.

2. The dancers start at the end of the village farthest from where the road to Tuma (*kadumalagaga valu*) "strikes the village grove," all the *baku* and related parts are swept (1948:186). "

3. Finally, the *kasawaga* is performed at the end. The elder men don't take part in this dance much, Malinowski states (1948:186-187).

In terms of the Trobriand social calendar, the *milamala* has come and gone. A New Year has begun, yet a final major mortuary *sagali*--called *so'i* in Vakuta, and having "Boyowan counterparts" (Malinowski 1961:490; 1929:158), which I suspect may be present in what Powell (1969:603, n.7) calls the *sigiliveaka* in Kiriwina--are ritually performed right after the final *yoba* of the *milamala* consequently, we may view these transactions as "postliminal" rites. The importance of this final *sagali* for the bereaved is that it concludes a long mourning period by the widow who has been shut away in her husband's house, guarded by the dead man's *veyola* and cared for by hers.<sup>6</sup> During, the *sagali*, the persons involved in exchanging pair off according to a moiety division of clans once again (Powell 1969:603, n.7; Malinowski 1929:134, 262). *Sagali* transactions occur in which a final payment to the widow, her children and *veyola* is given by the deceased man's matrilineal kin (*veyola*).

*So'i* appropriately means "evacuating the bowels" (Fellows 1901:182), for it serves as public recognition of the fact that the man or woman is marriageable again, and that formal ties with the husband or wife's *dala* are ended. Indeed, Powell (1969:178) concludes that the relationship between the widow and her affines becomes one of *tomakava*, or that of strangers again. Scatologically of course, "evacuating the bowels" identifies defecation as a metaphor for the mortuary ritual, which makes sense if we extend the metaphor of yams, both raw and cooked, as being complex representations of categories of persons. The body of the widow or widower surrenders--presumably to its *dala*'s own lands--that which once again belongs to it, since her relatives are now feeding and caring for her (as well as removing her excreta). Alternatively, the *urigubu* payments should now cease. However, our interpretation does not relate the meaning of *so'i* to the religious organization of the preceding *milamala* events, so it is momentarily necessary to return to the symbolic uses of categories of food as a means of "making statements" about people.

Let us examine the recurrent regularities in the use of multifarious categories of food in the Trobriands. Whereas, cooked food opens every day of ritual activity of the *milamala*, raw food is initially given at the pregnancy and mortuary *sagali* as part of the exchange of marriage gifts, and as the *urigubu* prestation. In the sense that a man is buried and exhumed (culture transformed to nature)--he is then eaten as raw food as well--after having been inspected for signs of sorcery. There is a simple explanation for this. Everyone of these ceremonious prestations is composed of the *urigubu* harvest prestation itself, which is raw *taytu*. It is "saved" for just such occasions. Therefore, these "raw" transactions consist of prestations made between different corporate groups (*dalas*) that periodically meet at the liminal times of "crisis" in the lives of its members (property)

and at the milamala. The "raw" is given by one *dala* to another in exchange for something it needs. This "something" is a set of males who can comprise the heads of viable households who will then participate in gardening teams. "Raw" here equates with marriageable male (and his *dala*), as well as *taytu*. "Cooked," on the other hand, denotes actions stemming from within the village cluster unit itself, and therefore represents village residence and group membership, as well as female, and taro. The combined "raw and cooked" gifts are rare. In the table of food transactions carried out during the *milamala* (see below), this category of food transactions occurs only once on the last day (full moon) of the month, during the "eyes of the village" *sagali* (*mitalela valu*).

Figure 2  
FOOD TRANSACTIONS OF MILAMALA

--MONTHLY SEQUENCE--	Burial of Cooked Food	Cooked Food Exchanged	Exchange by "Chief" and "Commoners"
Day 1			
Midmonth		"	
Day 26		"	Taro pudding shared
Day 27		"	Taro pudding shared
Full moon		"	"Raw and cooked" food ( <i>mitalela valu</i> )
----- D A I L Y   S E Q U E N C E -----			

The spatial use of food is represented by the fact that only raw food is elevated (as the chief and *baloma* are); whereas, only cooked food is ever buried, as for example, on the first day (and in the burial of a man on the *baku*). We may postulate at this point that the categories of yams, *taytu* and taro, are the focus of symbolic oppositions such as male/female, stranger/owner, matching categories of garden plots, *urigubu/gubvakaykiki*, and categories of yam crops, *taytu/taytumwala*.

How does this food cycle relate to a human one? The mortuary activities best illustrate the correlations. In the case of a man acting as a father, he handles the excrement of his child which pollutes him. However, a man derives status from being married and being a father, while, incidentally, being given *taytu* by his brother-in-law and other *urigubu* payers. As a son, a man's father will some day die, whereupon he repays his father for the sacrifices which the latter made, by the act of eating some of the decaying flesh of the body after it is exhumed and examined for signs of sorcery. As a result (no doubt!), the man comments: "I have sucked the radius bone of my father; I had to go away and vomit; I came back and went on" (Malinowski 1929: 156). Afterwards in the village, the mouths of the sons are ritually "washed" through gifts of food and oil given by the women of the *dala* of his father who stand in the category *tabu* to them. (On this count, Montague's interpretation (1971:361) of the custom is faulty, since she interprets Malinowski's use of the phrase "dead man's kinswomen," who are most surely *veyola* or "real kinsmen" (1929:150), to mean "sisters," instead of the beforementioned women of *tabu*, which they are most likely to be.) In time, the various bones that were removed will be turned over to his father's matrilineal kin after the danger of pollution has diffused. Nonetheless, these bones can never be used by the dead man's matrilineal kin as utensils as they are by his children and widow--who

regard this as an unpleasant duty- for their stomachs would swell up and death might even result (1929:157).

As for the "state" of the widow, her confinement and care by her matrilineal kin commences a long period of liminality that has become a highly institutionalized aspect of religious organization in the Trobriands. In the *so'i*, one of the things that is being symbolized is that the widow is anomalous because she no longer has a place as a member of a gardening team, and hence must receive food from other (or additional) sources. Moreover, just as the widow's ties with her husband's lands must break off, so must she refrain from eating any food grown underground, as in times of *molu* (famine). The widow is structurally "hungry" in this state (Austin 1945).

Some of the oddities of the *milamala* complex are now comprehensible. The tensions of the final day of the *milamala*--the *kaytaulo*--are multifarious but capable of understanding. For the most part, they stem from the competitive gardening activities, food exchanges and the division of the garden plots that generates disputes, both within and between *dala*. Again, problems emerge out of the dual facts of living in Omarakana: residing there, irrespective of *dala* membership or legitimized status, while having to garden *urigubu* plots for fulfillment of one's *urigubu* and other *dala* obligations. In this light, Malinowski's famous incident involving the expulsion of Numwana Guya'u from the village cluster may not be quite so extraordinary (Powell 1960:130) as it seems, particularly since we noticed the roles which both of these men took in the final formalized ritual of the *milamala*. Moreover, it seems likely that the entire period of the *milamala*, with its numerous opportunities for amorous activities, imposes an important structural stress on marriages and alliances in the Omarakana cluster. Given that, *urigubu* does legitimize the marriage contract--more possibly is the marriage contract (Powell 1969:592)--that organization of the *urigubu* payments as a whole represents corporate unity of the subclan, and symbolizes a latent subordination of donor to recipient, it is likely that more emphasis is placed on the "right kind" of marriage than Powell indicates in his article on "Genealogy and Residence" (1969:197-198). In fact, Fortune (1963:279) has commented that Malinowski's work makes it appear as though these "amorous occasions" are secular, continuous through the year, and constituted premarital courtship, when more importance should be placed on arranged marriages. Granting this, it may be assumed that the special dangers and opportunities of the *milamala* condition an awareness that brings the symbolism of the *urigubu* into preeminence in the relationships and institutions which organize the activities of people throughout the month. The symbolic importance of Tabalu leadership in *milamala* ritual, together with its political and economic effects upon other spheres of social life, now draws our attention.

The position of the Tabalu in traditional land tenure around the Omarakana village cluster may be noted as one area of necessary religious leadership and mythical legitimization. According to Malinowski, the Tabalu own 80% of the lands strategically surrounding the village cluster (1965:Document 8). In addition, this *dala* wields the *towosi* and *vilamalia* magic, and the sunshine and rain magic also. As I earlier indicated, the Tabalu cannot, by virtue of mystical domain, "own" the rain or sunshine magic, and yet they do (Malinowski 1965:430-431). Both Malinowski (1927:205) and Powell (1960:134) have attested to the very real potency that attaches to this magic in native thought, while yet noting that the origin hole of the Tabalu is inconveniently out of place. Mythically, the anomalous burial of (cooked) food at the entrances to the village therefore draws attention to the success (cultural inventiveness) of the Tabalu, by mythically affirming a ground to

cosmos claim of legitimacy of leadership in religious organization, *vis-a-vis*, the ritual ownership of their magical systems. The only *dalas* who can compete with the Tabalu in this respect are the Toliwaga and Kwoynama, who are both apparently positioned on good garden lands. The Toliwaga area traditional enemy--and not unexpectedly; the Kwoynama have formed an alliance with the Tabalu through institutionalized bilateral cross cousin marriages (Leach 1958:139).

Several of the significant ritual metaphors that have been noted throughout our investigation must now be understood in this context. The symbol, *rnitalela valu*, or "eyes of the village," has multivocal correlates meaning "eye of *taytu*," "face," "point" or "tip," and penis (*matala*)<sup>7</sup> In this ritual transaction, as noted above, a gift of raw and cooked food is presented to the attending *dalas* on the final day of the *milamala* by the Tabalu, and it is not reciprocated. Such an anomalous category of food represents an "offering up" of the most eligible males of the village cluster (i.e., those of the Tabalu) *vis-a-vis*, the most eligible preferential females, those of the *tabu* category. These are the women with whom the men joked and who performed beauty magic over the dances toward the end. Therefore, the "eyes of the village" metaphor may be viewed as symbolizing, on the one hand, the fact that the Tabalu are a wife-taking and an *urigubu* taking *dala*, in contrast to the other assembled subclans. Such a transaction between these groups may simply legitimize this arrangement, as it were, on the final day of the "Old Year." It follows, of course, the legitimization of marriage contracts through the *urigubu* before the *milamala*. On the other hand, this ritual transaction serves as a model of the social esteem or mystical "aristocratic power" that the Tabalu possess, and which will consequently allow for the holding of "power positions" in the coming "New Year."

Another important ritual symbol exists in the term *kaytaulo*. It has taken on the variable meanings of "my intercourse," *bwayma* foundation (beams), the full moon of the *milarnala*, and may be related to the incomplete *kayaulo*, the Malasi totemic tree. In this sense, *kaytaulo* can be noted as buttressing the mystical foundation of the Tabalu *dala*, because it represents the size of its yam houses (in Omarakana) by specifying the amount of *urigubu* necessary to fill them, which is another way of "saying" how "good" the marriages are that it contracts. It is therefore through the polygamous marriages of the Tabalu, which the men of other subclans are competing to contract their women into, that Tabalu hegemony in the Omarakana village cluster and beyond is maintained. Not just any intercourse will do for the parties involved, but only those which produce *malia* and *butura*. Old Bagido'u knows that only some *dalas* can *milamala* (e.g., simulate prosperity) in this way, and that *milamala* is therefore a derivative of *kaytaulo* in some of its here-named multivocal aspects.

Why, then, omit *kaytaulo* from the *vilamala* spell mentioned above? Why not subsist on excrement, produce one's own *urigubu* and *malia*, or endogamously father the children of one's own sub- clan? These are my last points.

## CONCLUSION

Social esteem in the Trobriands is based upon many ideological and mystical codes of conduct which should, in an "ideal model" of social organization, be adhered to. As an esteemed member of Omarakana, therefore, a man faces the social contingencies of residing somewhere, earning a living, and marrying and rearing a family. In addition, however, the obligations of subclan membership must also be met, irrespective of any of the foregoing bases of social organization. A central concern in this essay has been the attempt to understand how the secular conflicts of institutionalized gardening activities and *urigubu* exchanges are symbolized and dealt with in the religious organization and culture of the *milamala*.

My contention is that in certain religious events preceding, contemporaneous with, and antedating the *milamala*, the social relationships of participants are structured through an elaborate ritual "language" of categories of food exchange. This system of ritualized food exchange is articulated with a "thought system" containing verbal categories and ritual symbols paralleling a cyclical model of time that sees its annual closure in the *milamala*. It is further argued that such a ritual "language" allows statements to be made concerning the "state" of participants, *vis-a-vis*, their esteem position relative to the contingencies (outlined above), of social life in Omarakana.

In the articulation of a ritual "language" of food exchanges, and a parallel "thought system," we might expect to be able to identify certain forms of symbolic action which are connective of the two classes of events. As these are identified, it might be possible, furthermore, to construct an elementary "observer's model" that renders understanding of some symbols that have become pervasive and essential features of a limited set of Trobriand "social facts." We believe this to be possible because certain symbols have not only become pervasive, but are also identified in thought by Trobrianders themselves; e.g., the use of yams as a ritual metaphor for people.

I would now like to briefly examine three key aspects of Trobriand religious organization: If we accept the beliefs underlying these institutional complexes as data, and focus on understanding their functioning in thought and behavior, more generalized statements concerning the forms of symbolic action that emerge in certain contexts may be possible. The first such aspect is *malia*: *Malia* appears to be a general condition surrounding villages after *urigubu* exchanges. It is consequently the village cluster which exhibits or displays *malia*, since *dala* yam houses are anchored on village grounds. Yet *dalas* produce *malia*, by virtue of their *urigubu* income, which is, of course, contingent on several factors.

A second fascinating aspect is *urigubu*: *Urigubu* is linked symbolically and politically to *malia* in several ways. *Urigubu* is most importantly a behavioral-attitudinal category that may be used to denote the process of how yam houses are filled and maintained, and how one's *dala* obligations are met. Additionally, it is primarily through institutionalized *urigubu* exchanges that a man formally, interacts with the members of other *dalas* with whom he associates, and with the elders of his own *dala* on formal occasions. Fundamentally it appears that it is the *dala*, and not individuals, as Powell (1969:592) has remarked, which consumes and fulfills *urigubu* prestations. However, clusters like Omarakana are comprised of *dalas* competing for the best garden plots and marriages. The structure of sets of social relationships seems to necessitate that others, perhaps

inside the village cluster but outside of one's *dala*, produce the *urigubu*, since one of its primary functions is the annual legitimization of marriage contracts. The ubiquitous *urigubu* symbolism in the *milamala* is expressive of such a special concern.

*Butura* is a third aspect of the *milamala* that requires study: As another behavioral-attitudinal category, *butura* is perhaps best described as a condition of individual renown (though Malinowski is vague on this point). Individual subclan members generate *butura* for themselves, for example, in the performance of magic which they gain by right of filiation from their fathers. It is through the collective efforts of the men of a *dala*, on the other hand, that *malia* is produced for their *dala* within the village cluster.

Examining these "social facts" in the light of several forms of symbolic action--consuming and vomiting--we discover some new and interesting insights into certain social processes in Omarakana.<sup>8</sup> Whereas, in the first place, one might incorporate *butura* into one's social personality, in the second, one vomits at the presence of *malia* as an esteemed *dala* member, since such collective renown is built upon the yams produced by another *dala* that sanctions the legitimacy of a sister's (or other matrilineal kinswoman's) marriage into this subclan. In the widest sense, a man should never consume the food of another except on ritual occasions anyway, and this is done in segregated corninensal units. In a more symbolic way, it is of interest to examine the notion of *kaytaulo* in this context. We may postulate that Bagido'u's omission of this term from the *vilamala* spell has an ideologically founded one (conscious or not), since to claim *kaytaulo* would be like claiming *malia*. *Kaytaulo* legitimizes a man's status as an *urigubu* receiver, as a brother-in-law or maternal uncle, etc., and yet, to claim as much (or to claim *malia*) as one's sister's marriage ("my intercourse"), is an obscene indiscretion confounding the rigid taboo that surrounds brother-sister interaction.

There is another context in which the symbolic contracts between consuming and vomiting are meaningful. This is the occasion of the exhumation of a man's father's body, whereupon the son customarily eats some of the decaying flesh. Malinowski's account of this symbolic complex, described above, relegates the actions of the actors to the purely sentimental level, with a vomiting reaction presumably physiological in nature. Yet at the symbolic level we may again emphasize that it is through this institutionalized symbolic action of the sons that several different things are ritually "said" and affirmed: First, by their actions (of consuming the flesh), the sons are denying their part in any suspected sorcery, while reaffirming their mystical ties with their father's *dala* (which, among other things, plays a role in the selection of their wives). Second, by vomiting, these men are identifying their social positions as siblings and as *dala* members in a "thought system" whose recent schism may be bridged by actions of reaggregation with their subclan. The actions of the widow throughout her mourning period and in the *so'i* seem to similarly establish lines of separation and aggregation, innocence and guilt, purity and pollution, as her food taboos and the special handling--actually a reclaiming--of her excrement reveal; her subclan is once again claiming her as part of its own perpetual cycle.

In an essay dealing with religious organization and ideology in the Trobriands, it hardly needs to be stressed that a large influence is exercised through the "nature" of the kinship ideology possessed. A matrilineal ideology stressing avunculo- virilocal residence and ranked matrisubclans is part of this. Certain beliefs that have been encountered throughout our investigation, such as

the denial of genitor in procreation and of a need for food, as well as certain forms of action, such as eating and vomiting, are also to be explained in reference to ideological office, role, social esteem or "state," and something else which we have called a "thought system." Nonetheless, whether we regard this set of "social facts" as being "formal talk" or "men's talk" (Powell 195,6:277 278), seems to obscure the fact that in all social systems there is such an order of action; it belongs to what Turner has broadly called "structure" (1971). Its importance is that it is a powerful stimulus to action because it organizes institutional grouping, ritual, thought and symbolism in relation to a metaphysically-shared system of "truths." In Omarakana, the value of such "truths" is that it both divides and unifies people during a month of milamala activity that sets the tempo of social life for the coming year.

Trobriand religious organization encompasses a ritual "language" of food exchange and a parallel "thought system" which are chronologically integrated by means of a linked set of behavioral-attitudinal and verbal categories. The lines of cognitive linkage between such structured events are lines of ideological and categorical purity and pollution which are metaphorically expressed. Death and destruction are attached to a confusion of categories, and since events are linked together, partly through the means of a set of key "multivocal" symbols, it is particularly important that the lines of juncture and cleavage be observed. Thus it was that Malinowski's drummers were reluctant to beat out the *yoba* pattern early, because it signals the end of the *milamala*. And so it is that a falling star offends the normal scheme of things; its natural displacement demands human explanation, since the natural order is so closely tied to the social one. Perhaps this explains why falling stars are associated with the sorcerer in myth (1961:322-324). Perhaps; in addition, this is why excrement, which is both a natural and a cultural product, is so carefully dealt with. A society can claim both its own excrement and falling stars, for where the one seems to promise self-regeneration, the other begs pardon for its demise. In the annual renewal of Trobriand structure, "societas"- the process whereby symbols of antistructure are converted to structure--has become an institutionalized aspect of the *milarnala*, thus promising that religious symbols that articulate a viable "thought system" may prevail upon the organization of things on the ground.

#### FOOTNOTES

I would like to thank Dr. Jay B. Crain for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

<sup>1</sup>These indigenous *dalas*, according to Malinowski (1965:430 431), are the Kaluva u which reside in the Yogwabu section of Omarakana, and the Buryama whose members now reside in Kwaybwaga. However, Powell's account (1960:120-121) curiously, omits a mention of these.

<sup>2</sup>This is a functioning, viable institution, as Powell (1960: 140) reveals in his discussion of three separate buritilaulo that occurred during his field work in 1950-51 in three separate village clusters.

<sup>3</sup>Powell (1969:581-583) generally agrees with Malinowski's approximation that

three-quarters of the crop of a main garden is given away in a normal year as *urigubu*. While this is not the place to discuss the *urigubu* institution at length, Powell's conclusions that *urigubu* payments are basically made within a village cluster, irrespective of the needs of the domestic households, in accordance with the status in local affairs of the involved parties, are in line with the arguments of this paper.

<sup>4</sup>This is the reverse of Malinowski's account in 1927 (p.21), which indicates that he had changed his interpretations by the time *Coral Gardens* was published (1935).

<sup>5</sup>Powell (1969:602,n.2) remarks that Mitakata, *guyau* of Omarakana in 1950, was blamed for the poor harvest of that year "on the grounds that he had failed at the previous harvest to put out an adequate supply of valuables (*vaygu'a*) for the spiritual enjoyment of the dead revisiting Omarakana at the *milamala*."

<sup>6</sup>There are apparently wide differences which exist for the mourning periods of "chiefs" and the so-called "commoners." Though Powell (1969:197) states that he doubts that "true widow inheritance" exists, Malinowski (1929:136) indicates that To'uluwa did inherit one class of his wives from his predecessor, and that this act, along with his leadership in organizing the man's funeral, legitimized his claim to office. Thus, it would seem that To'uluwa's mourning period was greatly altered or nonexistent in terms of the norm.

<sup>7</sup>Other meanings may also exist, but these appear to be the "dominant" ones.

<sup>8</sup>We have already noted some of the symbolic aspects of the action of defecation. Other symbolic modes, such as the symbolism surrounding swelling, could be investigated in a similar manner.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Austin, Leo. "The Seasonal Gardening Calendar of Kiriwina," *Oceania* 9:237-253, 1938-1939.

Austin, Leo. "Cultural Changes in Kiriwina," *Oceania* 16:15-60, 1945.

Baldwin, B. "Usituma! Song of 'Heaven,'" *Oceania* 15:201-238, 1945.

Eliade, M. *The Two and the One*. Trans. J.M. Cohen. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962.

Eliade, M. "Cargo Cults and Cosmic Regeneration," *Millennial Dreams in Action, Studies in Revolutionary Religious Movements*, Sylvia L. Thrupp (ed.). New York: Schocken Books, 1970.

- Fellows, S.B. *Grammar of the Kiriwina Dialect and Kiriwina Vocabulary*. Brisbane, Australia: Government Printer, 1901.
- Fortune, R.F. *Sorcerers of Dobu: The Social Anthropology of the Dobu Islanders of the Western Pacific*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1963.
- Gluckman, Max "Les Rites de Passage," In Max Gluckman (ed.) *The Ritual of Social Relations*. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1962.
- Goffman, Erving. *Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1961.
- Keessing, Roger M. *New Perspectives in Cultural Anthropology*. New York: Holt, Rhinehart, 1971.
- Lanternari, Vittorio. "L'annua Festa 'Milamala Dei Trobriandesi: Interpretazione Psicologica e Functionale," *Revista di Anthropologia*. Vol. XLII, 3-24, 1955.
- Leach, E.R. "Concerning Trobriand Clans and the Kinship Category 'Tabu,'" *In: Jack Goody (ed.). The Developmental Cycle in Domestic Groups*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958.
- Leach, E.R. *Rethinking Anthropology*. London: Monographs on Social Anthropology, 1961.
- Leach, E.R. *Genesis as Myth, and Other Essays*. London: Grossman Publishers, 1969.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Totemism*. Trans. Rodney Needham. Boston: Beacon Press, 1961.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. "Lunar and Seasonal Calendar in the Trobriands," *Journal of the Royal Anthropology Institute*. Vol. LVII, pp. 203-215, 1927.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. *The Sexual Life of Savages in Northwestern Melanesia*. New York: Harvest Books, 1929.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. "Introduction" in: H. Ian Hogbin. *Law and Order in Polynesia*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1934.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Magic, Science and Religion*. New York: Beacon Press, 1948.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. New York: Dutton & Co., Inc., 1961.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1965.
- Montague, Susan. "Trobriand Kinship and the Virgin Birth Controversy," *Man (N.S.)* . Vol. 6, pp.353-368, 1971.

- Powell, H.A. Trobriand Social Structure. Thesis. London: University of London, 1956.
- Powell, H.A. "Competitive Leadership in Trobriand Political Organization," *Journal of the Royal Anthropology Institute*. Vol. 90, pp. 118-145, 1960.
- Powell, H.A. "Correspondence: Virgin Birth," *Man* (N.S.). Vol. 3, pp. 651-652, 1968.
- Powell, H.A. "Genealogy, Residence and Kinship in Kiriwina," *Man* (N.S.). Vol. 4, pp. 177-202, 1969a.
- Powell, H.A. "Territory, Hierarchy and Kinship in Kiriwina," *Man* (N.S.). Vol. 4, pp. 580-604, 1969b.
- Turner, Victor W. "Metaphors of Anti-Structure in Religious Culture." Unpublished paper delivered to American Anthropological Association, 1971.

~

A Falling Star. Screenshots. Videos. Add to list Links. A Falling Star. Find the Mysterious Lightbound Object. Take Khadgar's Gryphon to Suramar. Search the Crash Site.