

“Control your emotions!  
If teasing provokes you, you’ve lost your face”

The Trobriand Islanders’ control of their  
public display of emotions



I will start this talk

- with 4 observations I made in my 1982/83 field trip.

Then I introduce

- the concept of “ritual communication” and elaborate on the role it plays for emotion control in the Trobriand Islanders’ public behavior.

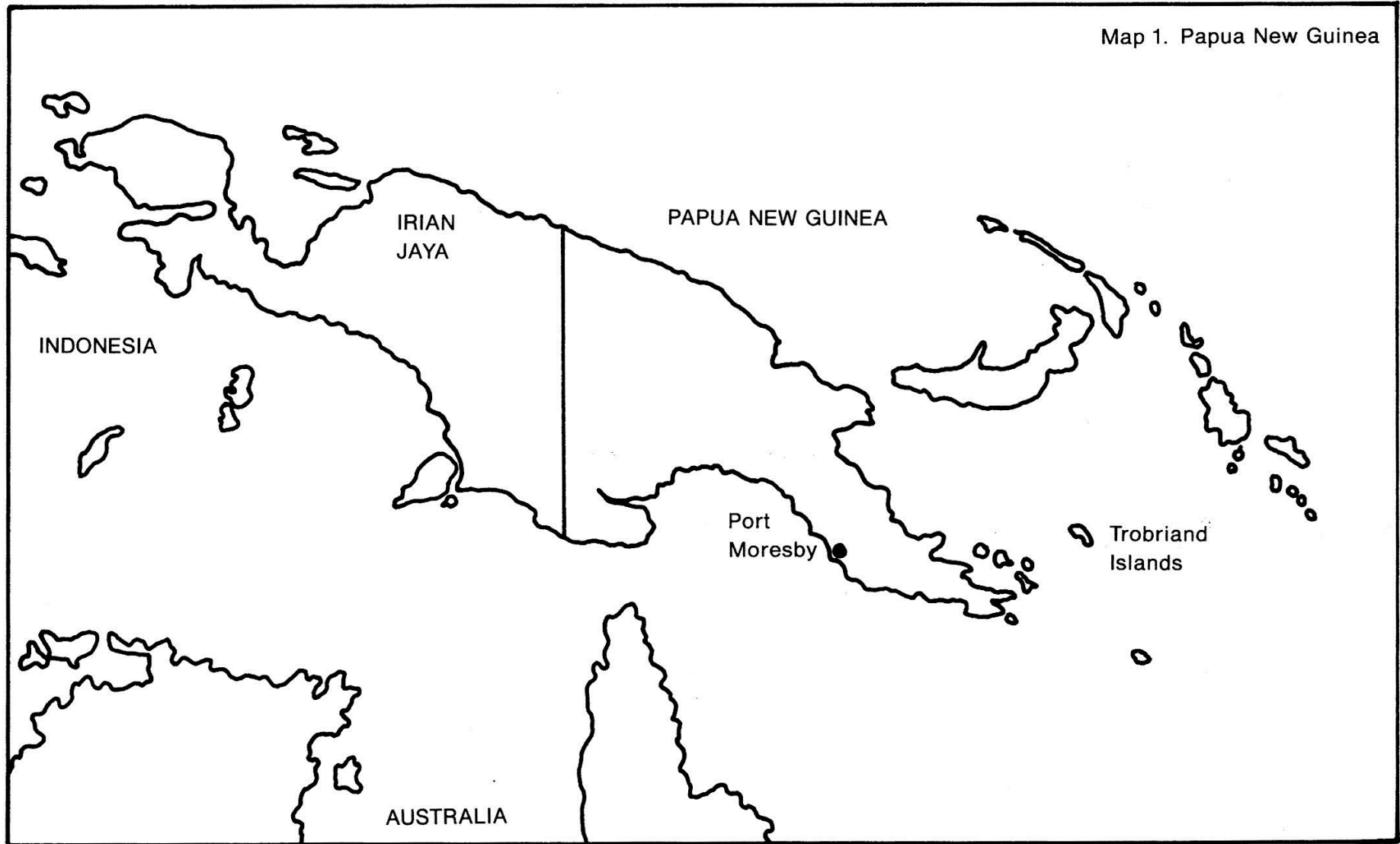
On the basis of these insights I deal with

- the social obligation to weep for a deceased person,
- morals and manners prevailing for unmarried adolescents,
- morals and manners prevailing for a married couple’s emotion control, highlighting the importance of the Trobrianders’ concept of “*biga sopa*”,
- and I explain why Trobrianders lose face when teasing provokes them.

I end the talk pointing out that

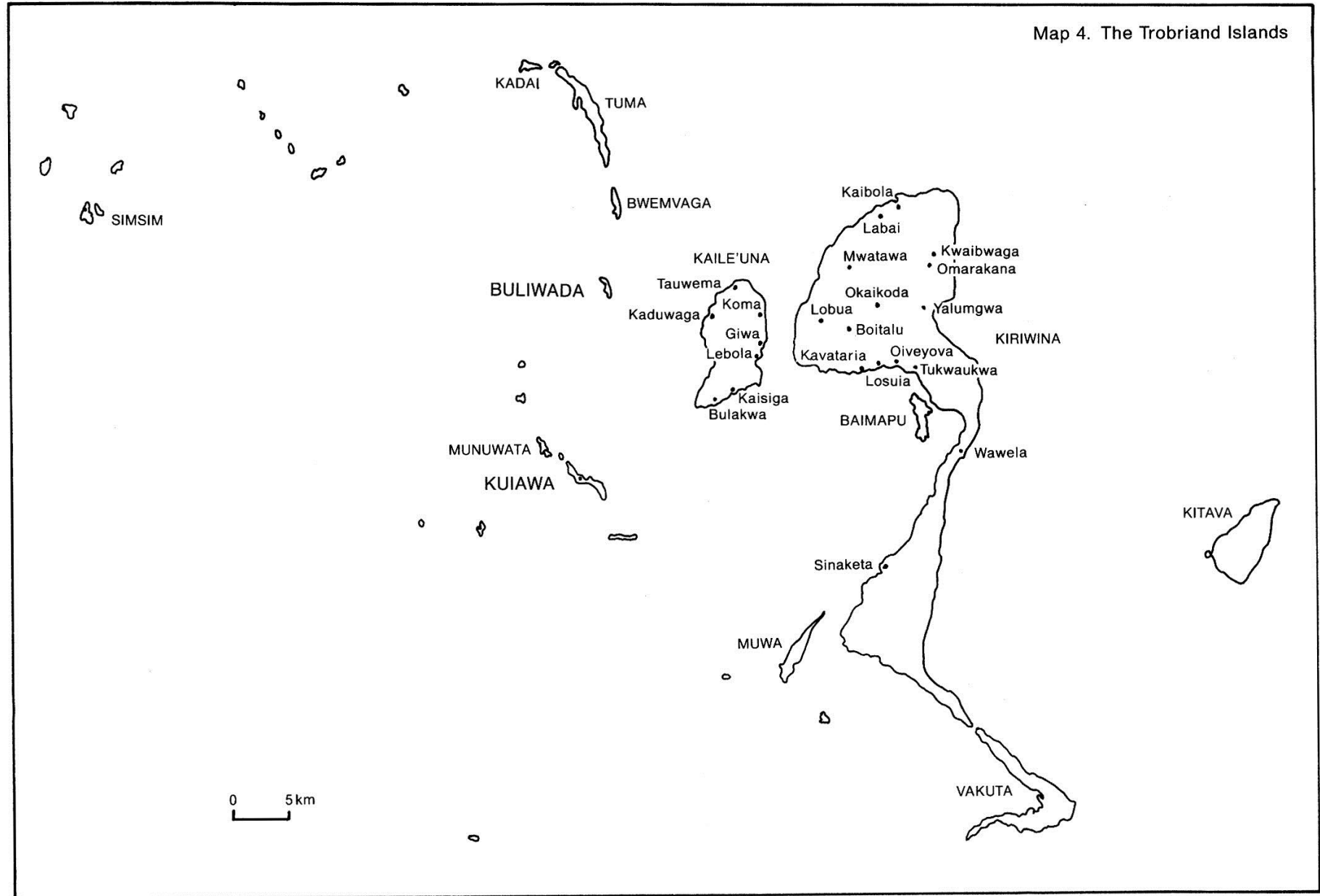
- “Control your emotions!” is a crucial maxim for Trobrianders.

Map 1. Papua New Guinea



Thanks to Barbara Senft for drawing this and the next map.

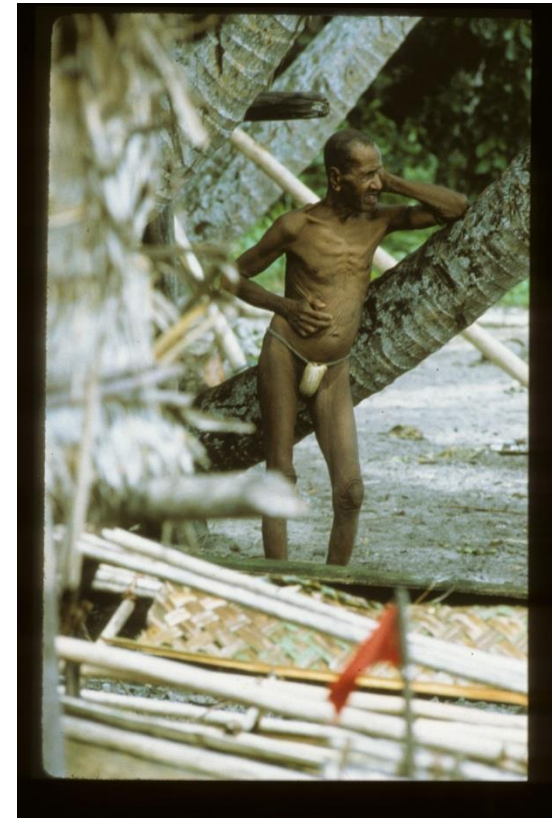
# The Trobriand Islands, Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea.



# Trobriand Islanders and their language:

**North-Massim**; gardeners, slash and burn cultivation; excellent carvers, canoe builders and navigators; matrilineal, but virilocal;

**Language:** Kilivila: Austronesian, West-Melanesian Oceanic  
Papuan Tip Cluster





Tauwema





1.)

May 28th, 1983

Gionavana's death.

Walking to Koma: joking & gossiping. In Koma the corpse was publicly displayed with valuables at his side. Close to the platform people stopped joking & started to weep barrels. After a few minutes of uncontrolled crying they retreated, dried their tears, went to friends and started gossiping with them.



2.)

Open secret: Imdeduya and Yolina had been very fond of each other for weeks, dancing & eating betelnuts together & suddenly vanishing late at night... *Milamala* had started – a visiting party from Kaduwaga arrived in Tauwema – all dressed “to kill”. In the evening they joined the dancers of Tauwema.



One man was flirting with Imdeduya and sharing a betelnut with her. Then they went to the beach...

Yolina observed this with anger and bewilderment, but he remained with the singers and dancers all night long.





I had observed all this and the next day I asked Weyei how Yolina managed to control his jealousy, his emotions in this situation.



He laughed and just said: *Ekokola baloma!*

He is afraid of the spirits of the dead!

3.)

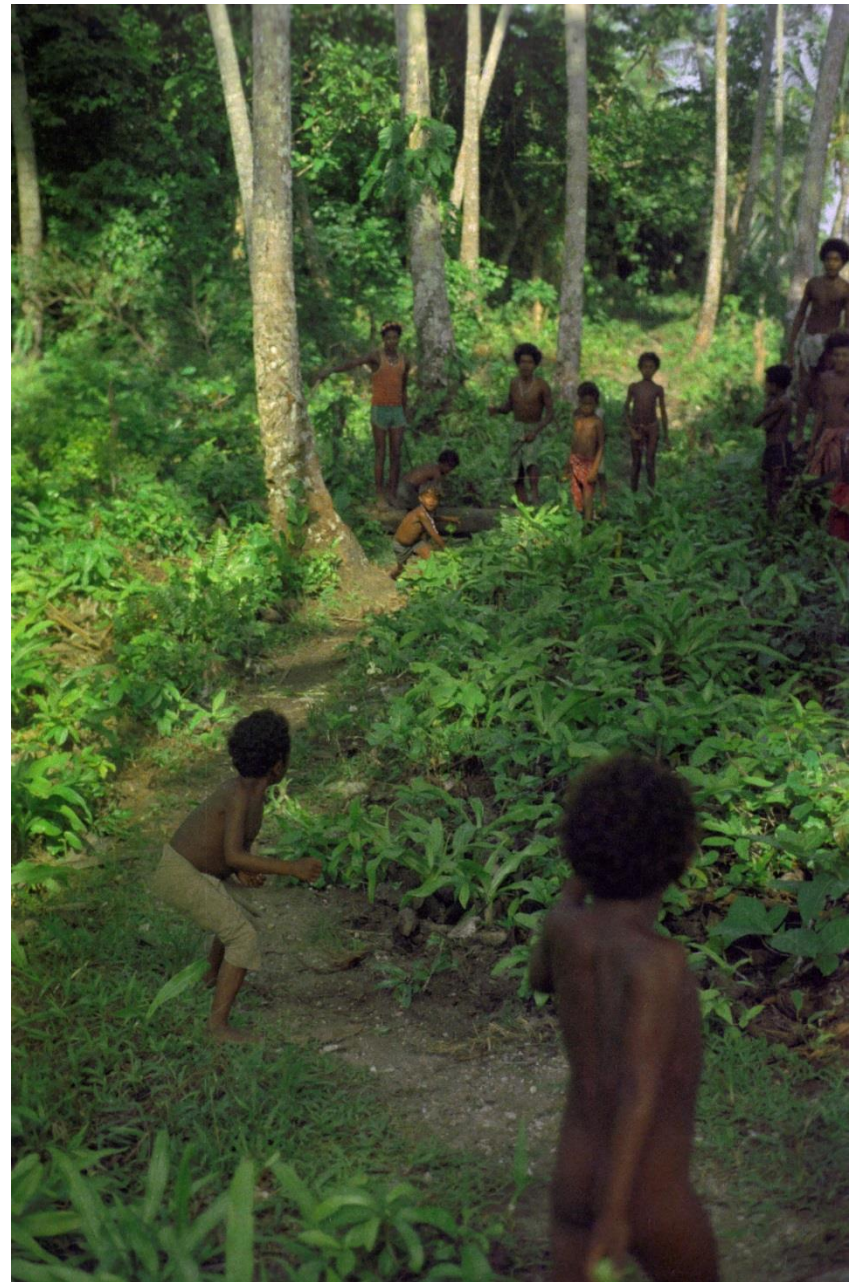
Vapalaguyau returned from a two months trip to the Amphletts with his *masawa* canoe loaded with clay pots. He landed the canoe close to his wife who was cleaning stained aluminium pots. The couple did not greet each other, they hardly deigned to look at each other. After a while V's wife approached her husband sitting at his veranda and gave him a cup of tea without much ado and then prepared their meal for dinner.





4.)

In April 83 Dokonikani teased Tudava so severely that he lost his temper, ran to his house & fetched his bush-knife & fighting sticks to attack D. D had also grabbed his weapons and his brothers had armed themselves, too, to protect him. One of T's neighbors embraced him from behind and hindered him to storm towards his offender. He shouted at D, but after some five long minutes he calmed down.



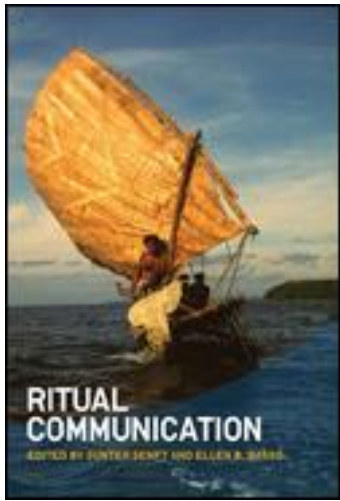
Children fighting



T realized that he had wounded his neighbor. He vanished into his house & was not seen any more for 6 weeks or so. He went to his gardens before dawn & returned after sunset. In May during a village meeting he surfaced again, distributing heaps of betelnuts – also to D & his brothers who accepted the gift nonchalantly. This settled the case and T had regained his face again.



Children fighting



## RITUAL COMMUNICATION (RC) AND IST ROLE FOR EMOTION CONTROL IN THE TROBRIAND ISLANDERS' PUBLIC BEHAVIOR (Senft 2009)

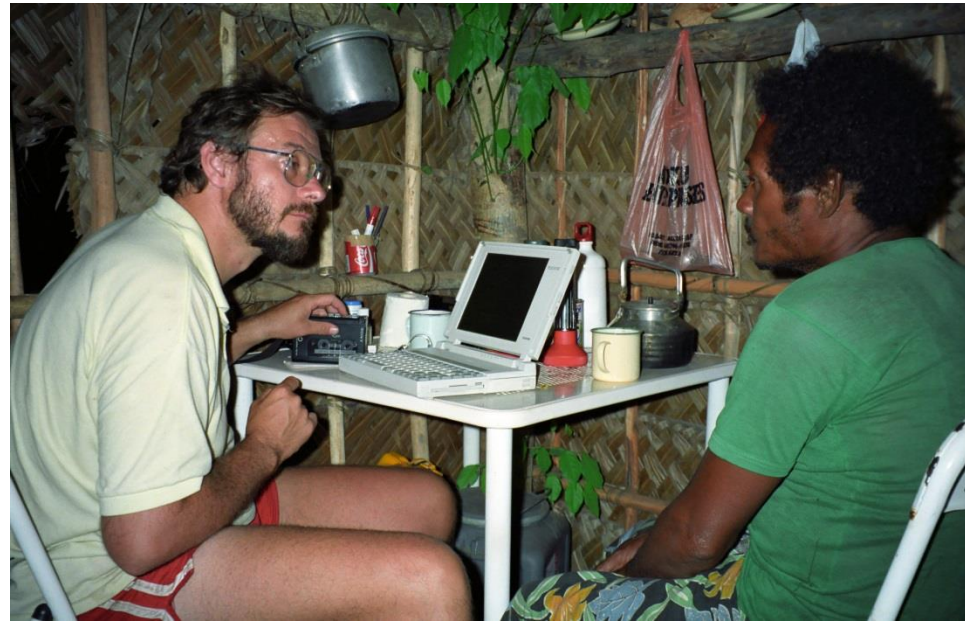
Forms of RC are pervasive throughout the Trobrianders verbal and nonverbal behavior.

An important function of rituals is to create & stabilize social relations. Social rites that serve the function of bonding and aggression-blocking are central wrt human interaction.

With humans we observe ritualized patterns and forms of both non-verbal & verbal communication.

The term RC subsumes both patterns of behavior that function as signals which originate and have been generated in processes of ritualization.

Anyone who wants to research the role of language, culture & cognition in social interaction must know how the researched society constructs its reality. S/he must be on common grounds with the researched community!



Thus, every speaker of a natural language must learn the rules of verbal and non-verbal behavior valid for her/his speech community, s/he has to understand and duplicate the construction of the speech community's common social reality. The patterns and modes of behavior must be coordinated and harmonized, too.



The duplicated social construction of reality must be secured & safeguarded wrt possible sites of fracture such as competition, cooperation and conflict within the community.

This is partly achieved through the ritualization of communication which can contribute to

- relieving tension in critical situations and to
- regulating social differences & dissensions by increasing the harmonizing function of speech, by creating & stabilizing social relations and by distancing emotions, impulses & intentions.

Ritualization of communication can increase the predictability of human behavior and open up space where behavior can be tried out without fear of social sanctions.

Therefore, one can broadly characterize RC as a type of strategic action that, among many other things

- helps promote social bonding,
- blocks aggression &
- dispels elements of danger that might affect a community's social harmony.



It acts within the verbal domain by enabling people to voice these elements and bring them up for discussion  
(Eibl-Eibesfeldt & Senft 1987: 75ff).

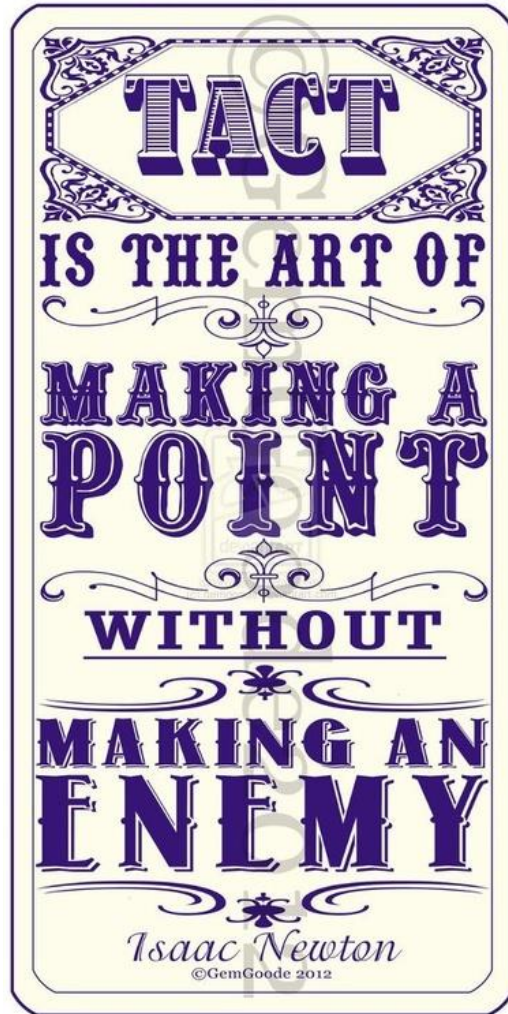
However, this does not always work! The duplication of the social truth of a locution does not always accord with either the speaker's or the listener's experiencing of that situation or one alluded to in the locution.



Aggression that might result from this failure is usually suppressed because of the strong societal requirement to “be nice!” even when people do not feel that way. Thus, emotions can be calmed and voicing can be repressed



A society as open as the Trobriand one - which offers few closed personal spaces to ensure privacy - depends on its members' having a strong sense of tact!



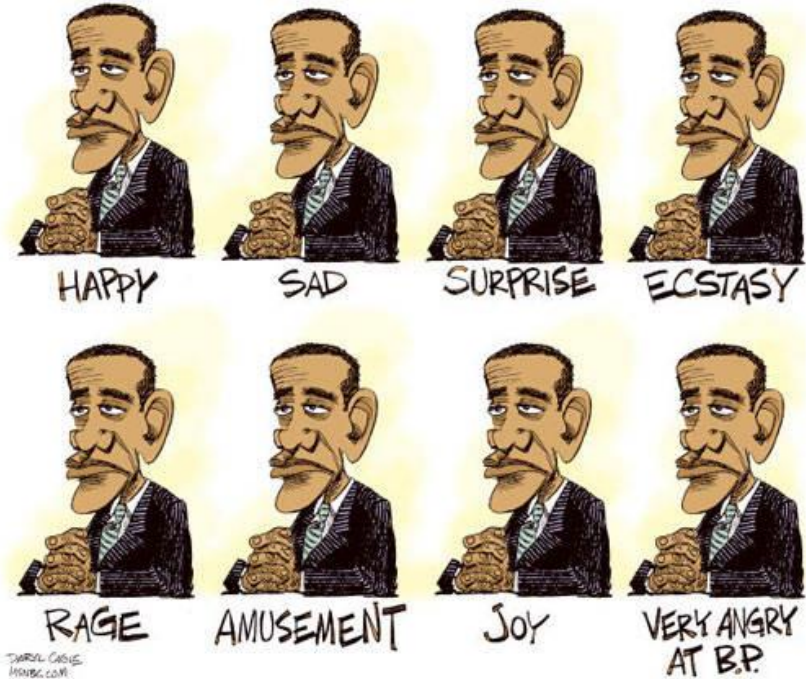
Sometimes one has to pretend not to hear & not to note things, and one must learn at an early age that one does not talk about these things – so the atmosphere is often tense...

The general requirement of tactful behavior, the necessity to be nice, and the positive & successful effects of RC contribute to and create the necessary social harmony in a society such as the one of the Trobrianders

Thus, the Trobriand Islanders' forms of RC, the ways in which they ritualize their communicative behavior play a central role in and for controlling their public display of emotions.

Kilivila has a rich inventory of terms to precisely refer to & to differentiate emotions, and inner feelings.

This reveals that Trobrianders are very much aware of various kinds of emotions and forms of their expressions in social encounters - an observation which both results from and confirms the impact of RC for their social construction of reality.



On the basis of these insights we can now go back to the four observations reported at the beginning of my talk and describe what is actually going on and why the interactants behaved – or misbehaved - in the way described.



# THE SOCIAL OBLIGATION TO WEEP FOR A DECEASED PERSON

Whenever a person in one's village or in a neighboring village dies, the Trobrianders feel obliged to go to the house where the person is lain in state to bewail him/her.



They refer to this behavior with the expression:  
“*bakalosi bakavalamsi* “! (we will go we will cry).

This obligation is even stronger in cases where the deceased person is a young man or woman.

=> younger persons cannot die a natural death!  
In these cases sorcery and black magic  
must have been involved!



The communal crying, displayed in very intensive expressive patterns, has the following important functions on the Trobs:

- The Trobrianders who cry for Gionavana demonstrate that they cannot be blamed for his death; there is the general conviction that somebody who comes to bewail a dead person cannot be involved in black magic that caused the death of this person. Thus, in this case the crying of the people did not only express their sadness but had also self-protective functions in a society that – then - still very much believed in sorcery.
- Every case of death implies a loss for the persons left behind. The smaller the group which is affected, the more serious is this loss, because it disturbs and even endangers the relationships between members of the group within its “social network”. Such a situation easily causes conflicts. The loss of a person implies frustration which results not only in grief but also in rage, fury, anger and aggression. These feelings need to be channeled to prevent even more harm. This is probably one of the reasons why cultures developed mourning rituals.



- Human ethologists and ethnographers have shown that mourning is a universal feature of human behavior. Mourning evokes comfort and support and inhibits aggression.
  - Public mourning with its various forms of verbal and non-verbal behavior and its different levels of complexity does not only express grief but also channels emotions, especially aggression, and thus contributes decisively to social bonding within the group affected by the loss of one of its members.
- The mourners are not left alone – “the group steps in” (Malinowski 1974: 62) – mourning becomes a “shared experience”(Feld 1982: 34) and the danger of destroying the group’s social network is warded off.
- Therefore, mourning not only becomes a social event but also a social duty, an obligation which helps the mourners and the bereaved to finally overcome their loss and their sorrow.

(Senft 1985; 2011)





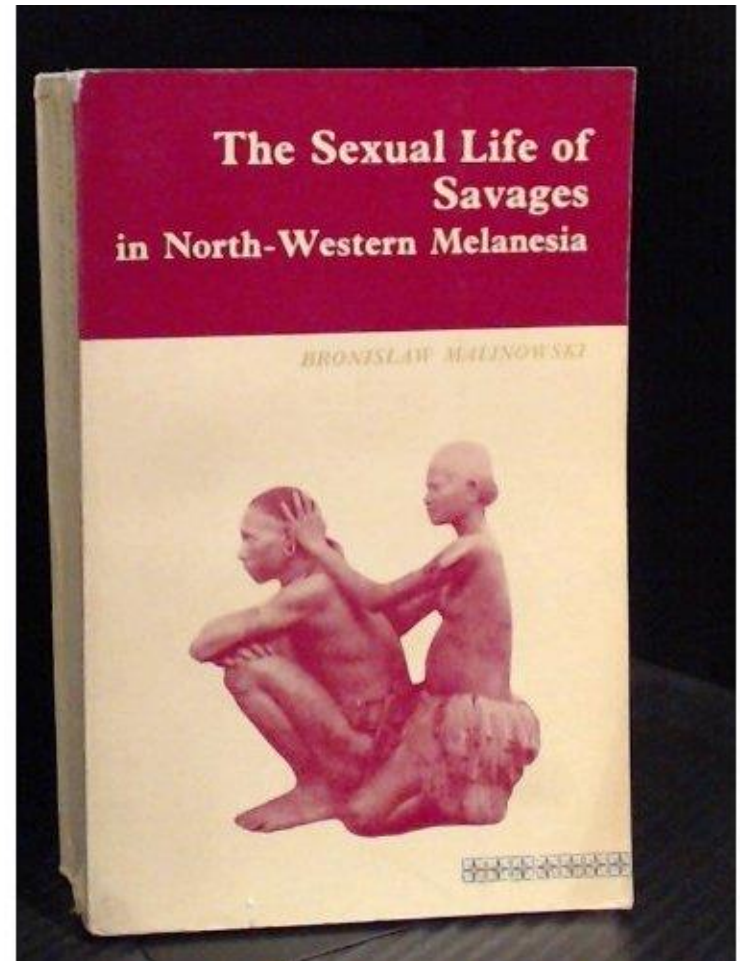
Thus, the ability to consciously "switch on" the expressive behavior of heavy crying (and to "switch it off" again) reveals that the Trobrianders - probably because of the important cultural functions of mourning behavior - obviously control this most extrovert form of expressing the universal emotion of sadness.

This crying for a deceased person is highly ritualized and indeed an important form of RC on the Trobriands.



# MORALS PREVAILING FOR UNMARRIED ADOLESCENTS

In 1929 Malinowski published his volume "The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia". Although many parts of this book present a rather dry sociological account of strict rules that regulate societal life on the Trobriands, those paragraphs that emphasize the sexual freedom and the general promiscuity of young unmarried Trobrianders immediately got a strong public reception.





It is true that compared with European standards of education and morals Trobriand adolescents enjoy an incredible amount of sexual freedom until they decide to marry. After marriage the official ideal for the Trobrianders - as well as for us, the "dimdim" – is for the spouses to live in monogamy and to be true blue to each other. The adolescents seemingly unlimited sexual freedom, however, is governed by the strict maxim:

**"An unmarried person must not be jealous!"**

The Trobriand Islanders are convinced that the keeping of this social commandment is controlled by the immortal spirits of the dead, the so-called *baloma*. After the death of a person his or her *baloma* lives in a land of the dead which is an underworld kind of “paradise” located on (or rather under) Tuma Island.



The spirits of the dead are believed to visit their villages at times, especially during the period of the harvest festival. The *milamala* festival starts with the singing of the "*wosi milamala*", the highly ritualized harvest-festival songs.

These songs are sung in an archaic variety of Kilivila called "*biga baloma*" – the language of the spirits of the dead.

They are a highly ritualized salute to the *baloma* and they are sung throughout the *milamala* period which lasts for a months or so, not only to please the spirits of the dead, but also always reminding the villagers of their presence.





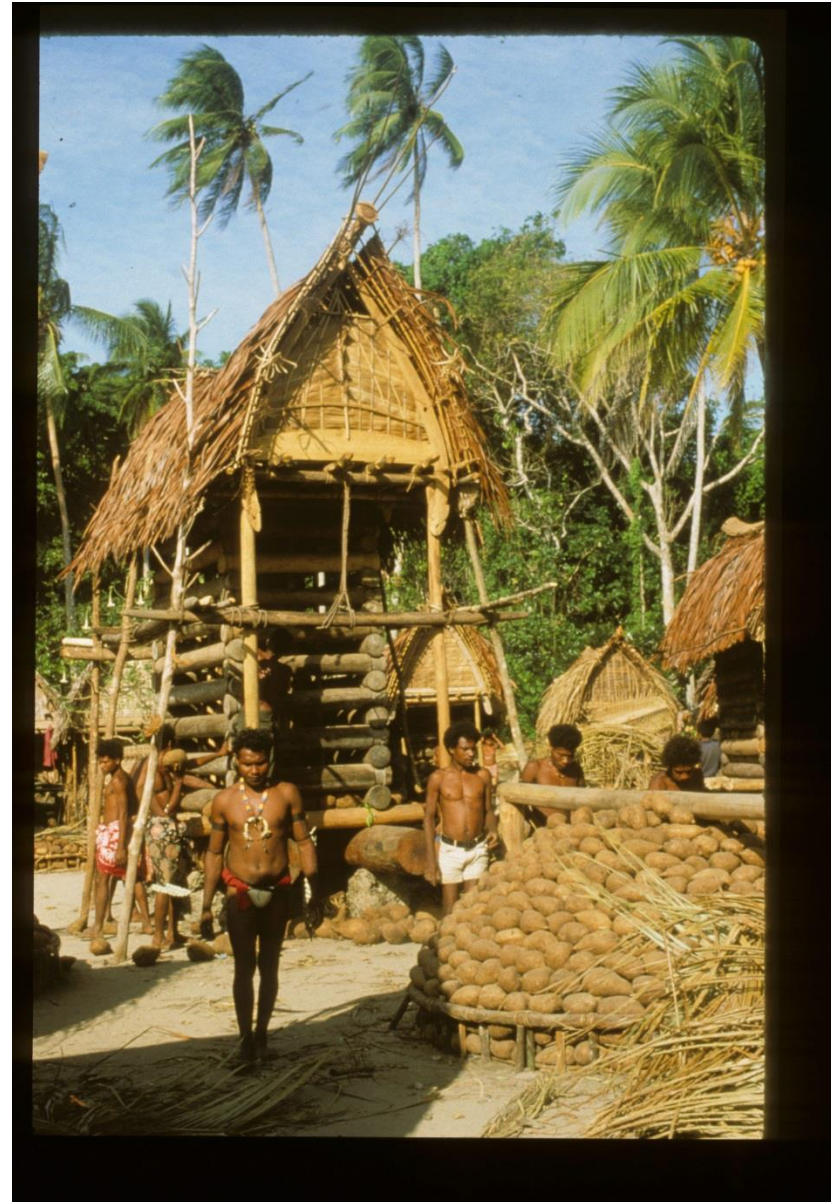


The *milamala* period is characterized by conviviality, flirtation, and amorous adventures of the unmarried adolescents. All harvest customs still “favour erotic pursuits” (Malinowski 1929: 210). It goes without saying that during this festive period, social norms, rules, and regulations are interpreted more liberally and generously than at other times. This might lead to jealousies and rivalries that, in escalation, could threaten the community. However, the presence of the *baloma* prevents any such developments.

The Trobrianders are convinced that the *baloma* control whether the villagers living now still know how to garden, how to celebrate a good harvest, and how to behave properly even while celebrating exuberantly. The *baloma* “keep strict watch over the maintenance of custom, and they punish with their displeasure any infraction of the traditional customary rules...”

(Malinowski 1974: 184).

The most severe punishment is to hinder a person's production of yams in the coming year (see Damon 1982: 231).

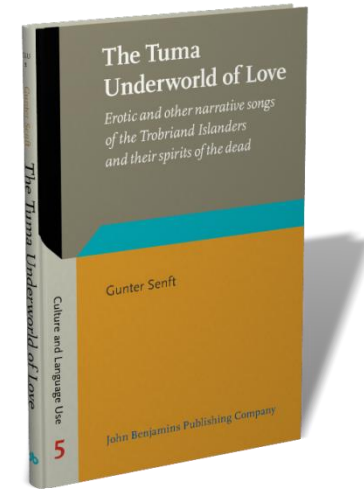
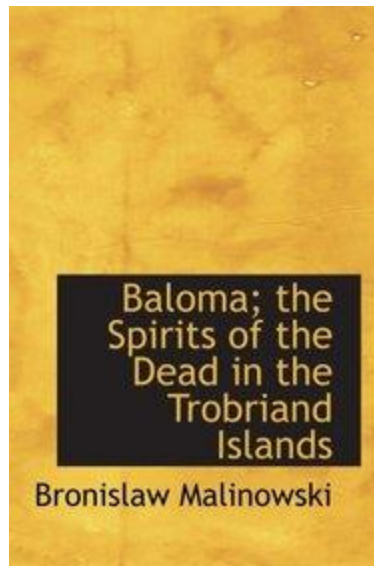






Thus, the Trobrianders know that the guardians of the norms of the past are present during the *milamala*, checking whether that past is still present in their former villages. Although the pleasure, the dancing and the sexual license during the *milamala* also pleases the spirits of the dead, the *baloma* must not be offended by unseemly and indecent behavior, which includes “publicity and lack of decorum in sexual matters” (Malinowski 1929: 382) as well as jealousy among bachelors. Keeping this in mind, Trobrianders must control their behavior, especially their emotions, because no one would dare offend the spirits of the dead (Senft 2011: 29f.).





And this is exactly why Yolina did suppress his emotions of jealousy observing the interaction between Imdeduya and the handsome visitor from Kaduwaga. As Weyei so cryptically remarked, he was indeed afraid of the *baloma*. If he would have attacked his rival, they would have punished him. A young man on the Trobriands can severely impress the girls by being an excellent gardener. This is an important route to status and fame.



Yams is the actual fabric of the Trobriand Islanders' social construction of reality. It plays the most prominent role in food exchange rituals, e.g., in mourning rituals or in communal meals initiated by chiefs or other men of rank as gifts for their fellow villagers or as a payment for their support, e.g., in the construction of a new *kula* canoe. Yams exchanges have important bonding functions not only for kinspeople, but also for fellow-villagers who are members of other clans. Thus, yams is the Trobriand valuta par excellence.

If a young man's production of yams is hindered by the *baloma* as a punishment for indecent behavior like jealousy and possible forms of aggression resulting from him being unable to control his emotions, his chances are severely depreciated to impress girls in such a way that they are not only interested in him as a possible temporary lover, but also as a prospective spouse.



Yolina managed to control his emotions and thus kept face with respect to the spirits of the dead. He may have consoled himself assuming that the young man from Kaduwaga had stronger love-magic than he - betelnuts that young men offer to girls are believed to contain love magic; and the stronger the magic the smaller the girls' chances to resist its owners.





To sum up, this anecdote reports a case of emotion control due to a belief in controlling metaphysical powers, a belief which – during the period of the harvest festival – is reinforced day after day by the singing of the *wosi milamala* in the *biga baloma*.

# MORALS AND MANNERS PREVAILING FOR A MARRIED COUPLE'S EMOTION CONTROL

In public life, the interaction between husband and wife on the Trobs is rather controlled: There is no exchange of signs of tenderness like, e.g.,

- holding hands,
- kissing in public,
- embracing each other –



not even after some time of having been parted from one another. The relationship between a wife and her husband seems to be rather detached, at least in our eyes (see Senft 1995: 220).



Already Malinowski (1929: 95) pointed out that

[t]here is an interesting and, indeed, startling contrast between the free and easy manner which normally obtains between husband and wife, and their rigid propriety in matters of sex, their restraint of any gesture which might suggest the tender relation between them. When they walk, they never take hands or put their arms around each other in the way, called *kaypapa*, which is permitted to lovers and to friends of the same sex ... Ordinarily a married couple walk one behind the other in single file. On public and festival occasions they usually separate, the wife joining a group of other women, the husband going with the men. You will never surprise an exchange of tender looks, loving smiles, or amorous banter between a husband and a wife in the Trobriands.

To quote a terse statement of the case made by one of my informants: "A man who puts his arm around his wife on the *baku* (central place of the village, i.e. in public); a man who lies down beside his wife on his yam-house platform - he is a fool. If we take hold of our wife by the hand - we act as fools..."



The only emotional gesture of tenderness and mutual commitment allowed in public is “lousing each other and eating the catch” (Malinowski 1929: 387).



Why this exception is granted – and why married people have no problems with erotic scratches (*kimali*) on their backs which are “so characteristic of native love-making” (Malinowski 1929: 387) was neither explained by Malinowski’s nor by my consultants.

This strict rule of behavior, this norm of emotion control is in extreme contrast with the many sexual allusions in songs, ditties that accompany games played both by children and adults and even in lullabies, and with the rather blunt bawdy and obscene jokes that permeate everyday interactions on the Trobriands

(Baldwin 1971: 98f.; Senft 2010: 237-243).

The explanation of this fact was given to me when we watched Yau's and Itakeda's marriage:

I was sitting on a veranda near Bomsamesa, Itakeda's best girlfriend – and her brother was sitting beside my wife on the same veranda. I asked Bomsamesa when she will marry – and immediately her mother Ibova came down on me like a fury, scolding me for asking such an indecent question – and made me leave the premises.                      WHAT HAD I DONE?

I realized that I had just violated the “brother-sister taboo“

(Malinowski 1929: 433ff)

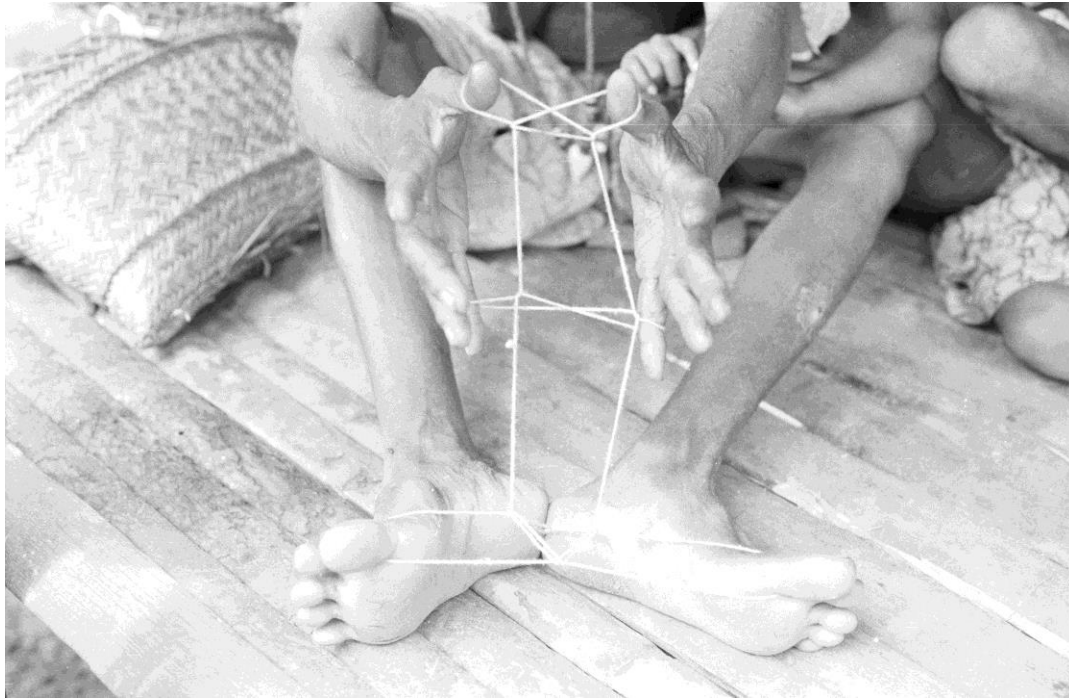
Siblings must not know anything about each other's erotic engagements or love affairs – at least not officially.

I read Malinowski before I went to the Trobriands, I knew about the taboo, but in the actual situation I really behaved like a bull in a china shop.

I tried to regain the friendship of Ibova with much tobacco as a peace offering, until one day I observed the following:



Ibova was sitting with her grandchildren playing cat's cradle – i.e., string figure games which are very popular on the Trobs. She played the figure “Tobabana” reciting the following verses:



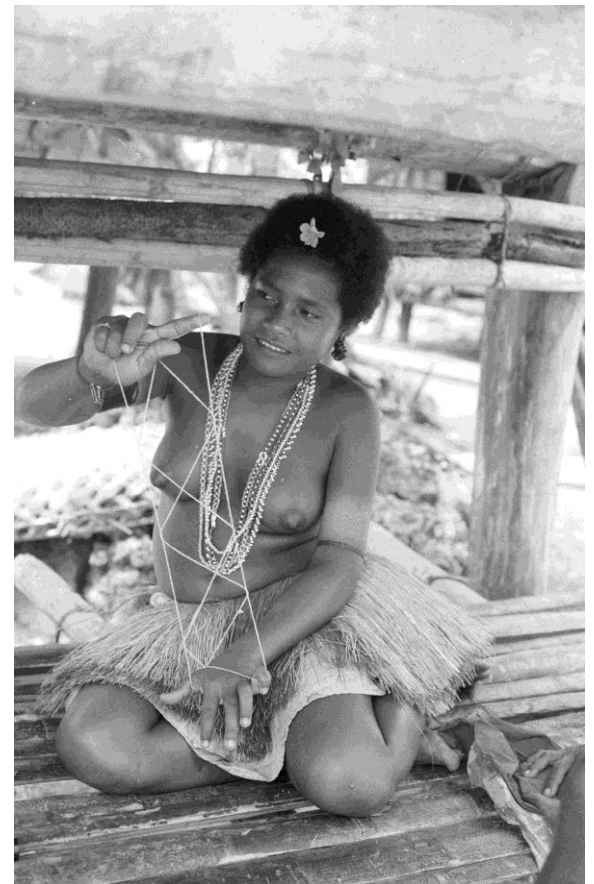
*Tobabane, Tobabane,  
kwakeye lumta!  
Kwalimati.  
Kusivilaga,  
kuyomama.*

I was shocked, because this ditty translates as follows:

Tobabana, Tobabana,  
you are fucking your sister!  
You are fucking her to death.  
You are turning around,  
you are weary and tired.

(Senft and Senft 1986)

Obviously this game refers to a case of incest between brother and sister – the extreme case with respect to the violation of the brother sister taboo (Malinowski 1929: 451).



I asked her why she was reciting these verses to these young children - who had a great time to listen to their grandma - on the one hand, whereas on the other she was so furious with me because of the – for me innocent – question I asked her daughter in the presence of her brother.

She laughed at me for the first time after my faux-pas –

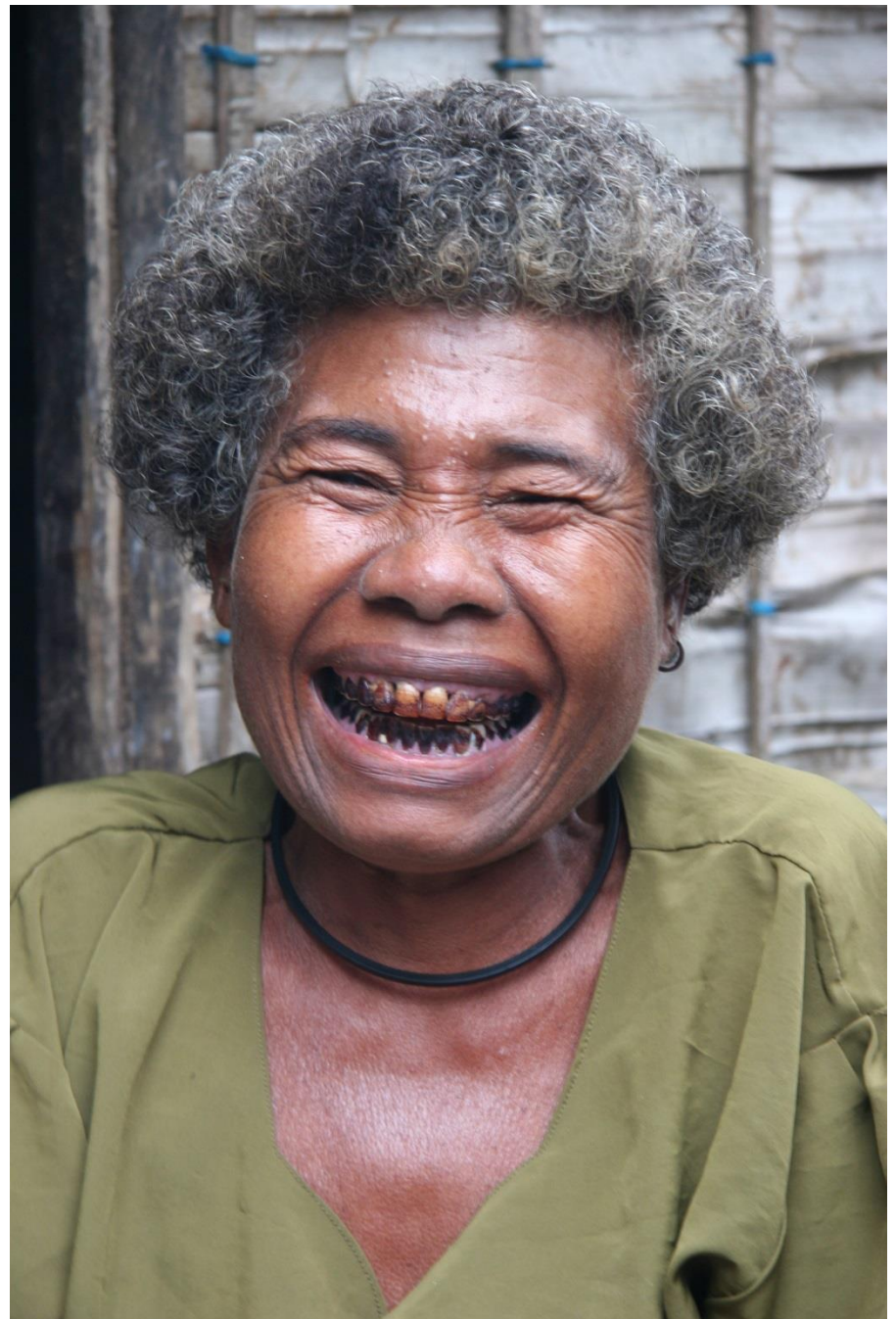
and said that this was sth. completely different.

she was only playing with her grandchildren and this

PLAY

was just

***!!!SOPA !!!***





The Trobrianders differentiate 8 situational intentional varieties which are constituted by metalinguistically labeled genres or text-categories.



One of these varieties is called  
“*biga sopa*” – the joking or lying language,  
the indirect speech,  
the speech which is not vouched for.

This variety is characteristic for Trobriand forms of talk –  
it constitutes the default register of Trobriand discourse.

It is based on the fact that Kilivila – like any other language – is marked by features that include ‘vagueness’ and ‘ambiguity’.



Both features are used by its speakers as stylistic means to avoid possible distress, confrontation or too much and for a Trobriander too aggressive directness of certain speech situations.

If hearers signal that they may be insulted by a certain speech act, speakers can always recede from what they have said by labeling it as ‘*sopa*’, as something they did not really mean to say.

*Sopa* signals the speakers' unmarked non-commitment to truth!

Trobriand etiquette then prescribes that hearers must not be offended at all by those utterances that were explicitly labeled as *sopa*.

If they feel offended and display this feeling publicly, then they lose face.





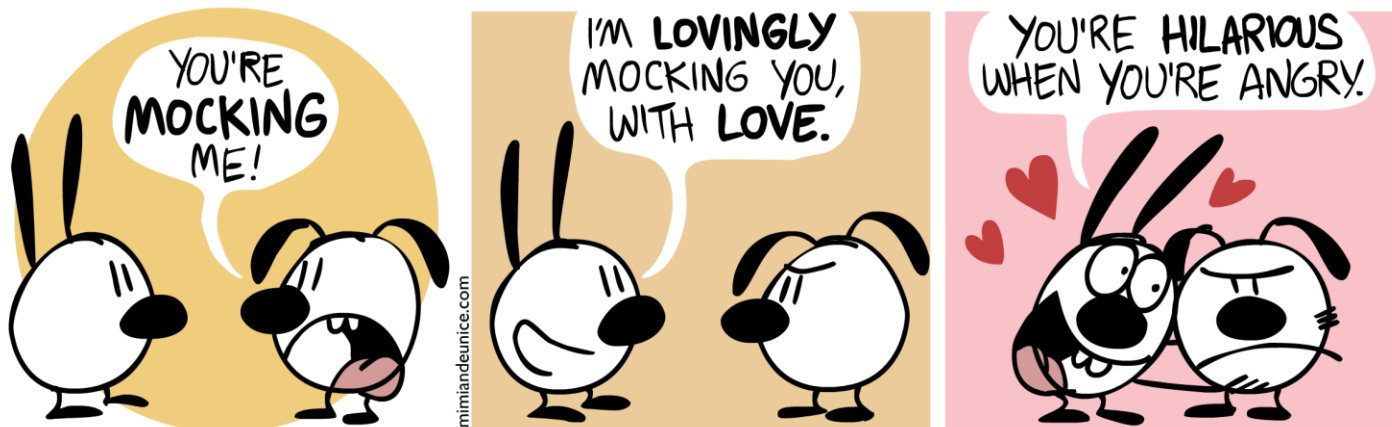


The *biga sopa* is employed in everyday conversation, in small talk, in flirtation, in public debates, in admonitory speeches, in songs and stories as a means of rhetoric to avoid possible conflicts and to relax the atmosphere of the speech situation



The *biga sopa* variety also contributes to put forward arguments because it allows speakers to disguise their thoughts verbally and to disagree in a playful way without the danger of too much personal exposure.

Moreover, the *biga sopa* variety is used for mocking people. As a means of irony and parody it can be used to criticize certain forms of sociologically deviant behavior, relatively mildly asking for immediate correction.



Finally, the *biga sopa* variety offers the only license for the verbal breaking of taboos and thus for the licensed use of the so-called "*biga gaga*" variety, including the use of most insults (excluding the worst ones) and swear words ("*matua*") – not only for adults but also for children.

⇒ This is the reason why Ibova had no problems in reciting the verses that accompany the Tobabana string figure to her little grandchildren.



The *biga gaga* variety refers to the inadequate use of language in a given communicative context. The basically aesthetic label is also used to qualify speakers' utterances with respect to a given standard norm of speech behavior.



The use of this variety generally implies the distancing of speakers from their addressees. It is aggressive and insulting.

Its use is – at least officially – not approved by the speech community and quite often sanctions are imposed against someone who produces such "bad speech".

I want to point out here, that the various genres that constitute the *biga sopa* serve the function of so-called “safety valve customs”

(Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1984: 492 ff; Heymer 1977: 187).

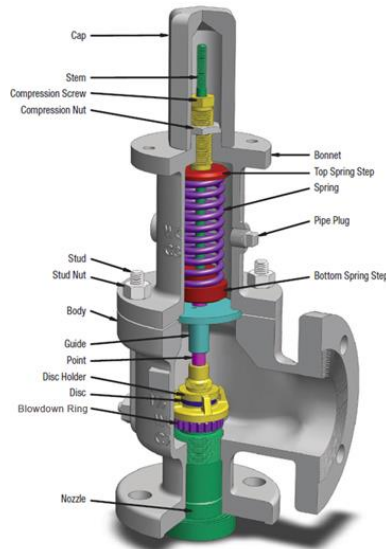
This ethological concept needs some explanation:

Every society puts some of its realms, domains and spheres under certain specific taboos.

However, the stricter the society is in regard to its observance of these taboos, the more these taboos are ignored.



But a society can secure its members' observance of certain taboos, especially of taboos that are important for its social construction of reality, by allowing the discussion of its taboos – especially of the sociologically less important ones – as topics of discourse. It may even allow its members to imagine the ignorance of taboos – in a fictitious way, of course.



And this is exactly how and why **safety valve customs** develop.



Genres of *biga sopa* that clearly show features of *biga gaga* are first of all classified as *sopa* – as play, as something fictitious in Trobriand society. The *biga sopa* thus generates a forum where the breaking of taboos – and thus the use of ‘bad language’ – is allowed, if it is done verbally!

This forum permits a specially marked way of communication about something "one does not talk about" otherwise. Thus, on the Trobriands it is one thing to violate norms or even taboos in reality, but another thing to violate them in a fictitious way.



taboo



just *sopa*

In sum, the *biga sopa* variety

- channels emotions,
- it keeps aggression under control, and
- it keeps possibilities of contact open.

This concept with its tension releasing functions secures harmony in the Trobriand society and contributes to maintaining the Trobriand Islanders' "social construction of reality"  
(Berger & Luckmann 1966).

It provides an important frame and at the same time is an effective and dynamic tool for RC which is so extremely characteristic and - as we have seen - very important for the Trobrianders social interaction.

# CONTROL YOUR EMOTIONS!

## IF TEASING PROVOKES YOU, YOU'VE LOST YOUR FACE...

The concept of *biga sopa* is also important for understanding the fourth anecdotal observation of a quarrel which almost escalated into a fight.

As already pointed out, the *biga sopa* is the default variety for verbal interactions on the Trobriand Islands. Speakers can always recede from what they have said by labeling it as *sopa*, as something they did not really mean to say, if their interactants signal that they may be insulted by a certain speech act.

Trobriand etiquette then prescribes that hearers must not be offended at all by those utterances that were explicitly labeled as *sopa*.

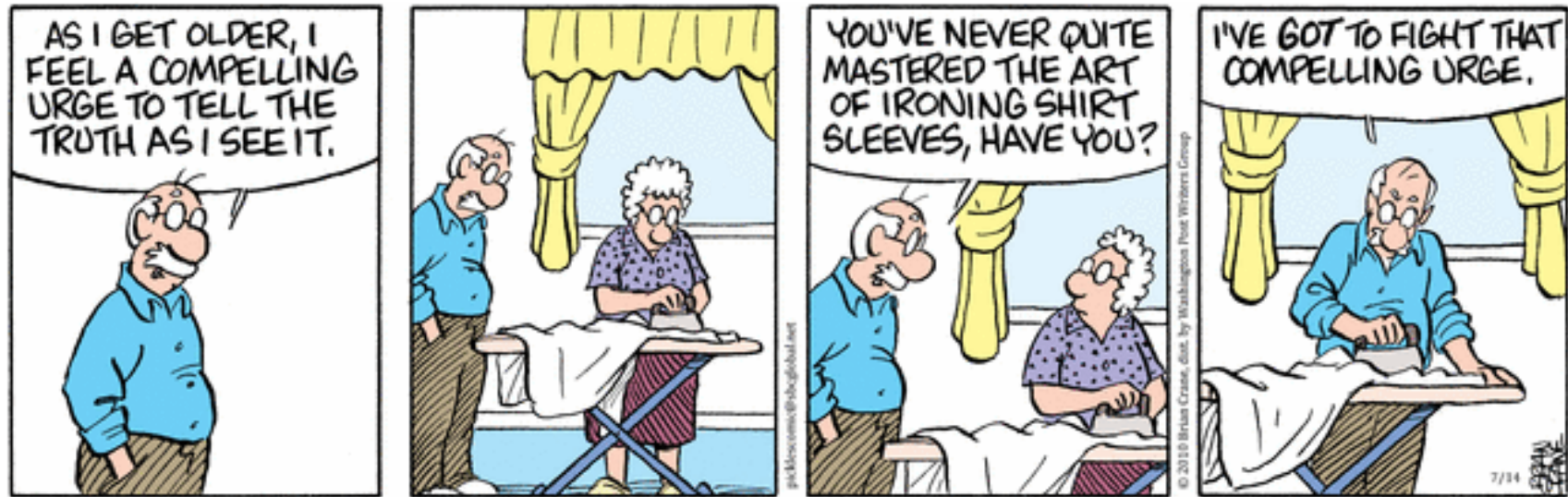


The opposite of the *biga sopa* variety is the rather rarely used "*biga pe'ula*" or "*biga mokwita*" variety - the "heavy speech, the hard words, the true - direct – speech" (see Senft: 2010: 13; also Weiner 1983).

If speakers use this register, the directness of the speakers indicate that they are completely aware of the fact that they have to take all risks of stripping away ambiguity and vagueness with which speakers normally can disguise their own thoughts – a feature so characteristic for the *biga sopa* variety – and that they can stand to argue publicly in terms of the heavy (*pe'ula*) dimension of truth (*mokwita*).



Thus, the use of this variety implies an important personal and social impact of what is said; moreover, its use is - and even requires to be - explicitly marked by speakers declaring that what they are going to say now or what they have said is not *sopa* but *biga pe'ula* or *biga mokwita*.



The speakers' commitment in the marked sense finds its expressions in ritualized formulae, like, for example, '*Besatuta balivala biga mokwita!*' – 'Now I will talk true language!'

What happened in the interaction between Tudava and Dokonikani described in the introduction above was the following:

Dokonikani, a well known jester who likes to provoke people, started a kind of mock fight with Tudava.

A few weeks ago Tudava had announced that he wanted to organize a *kayasa* - a harvest competition - next year.

Such an announcement presupposes that the organizer of the harvest competition has access to many resources, including all kinds of food, especially yams, the highly valued long *kuv*i-yams, pigs, betelnuts and other goods and valuables which he offers the best gardeners in that competition as prizes.

In the mock fight Dokonikani had not only questioned Tudava's skills and his competence as a *tokwaibagula* - a master gardener - but also his ability to access to the resources which are necessary for organizing a *kayasa*.

Both these topics are extremely critical and delicate, because the title "master gardener" is very prestigious and organizing a *kayasa* implies that the organizer is a man of high status and political impact within the village community.





During this public mock fight - which got louder and louder and thus attracted more and more people - Dokonikani managed to provoke Tudava in such a way that he could no longer control his emotions.



Thus, this incident reports a case in which forms and tools of RC could not achieve their crucial functions of bonding and aggression-blocking.



Although Dokonikani had never claimed to be serious – which would have required that he announced his use of the *biga mokwita* instead of the *biga sopa* – Tudava could not stand Dokonikani's teasing any more.

Unable to control his emotions any longer, he rushed in a frenzy for his weapons to fight his opponent who obviously had severely insulted him.

Tudava was lucky that his neighbor managed to prevent him from fighting and to calm him down a bit.

Having regained his countenance, he realized immediately that he had lost his face in this incident.

(Goffmann 1967)

This insight resulted in Tudava's avoidance behavior towards the villagers of Tauwema - and especially towards Dokonikani and his brothers in the weeks to come.



Almost 6 weeks after his uncontrolled emotional and aggressive behavior, Tudava dared to appear in public again - but only by displaying his wealth in betelnuts and his generosity towards the village community as a whole and especially towards his offender and his brothers.



The fact that both the villagers and Dokonikani and his brothers accepted Tudava's general gift of betelnuts revealed that they had forgiven him his timely inability to control his emotions, an inability which could have easily led to deadly fights between two groups of villagers within Tauwema and thus to a severe destruction of the village community's social harmony and its construction of social reality.



*KUVAKULATI AM LUMKOLA!* –

A MAXIM CRUCIAL FOR THE TROBRIAND ISLANDERS'  
CONSTRUCTION OF THEIR SOCIAL REALITY

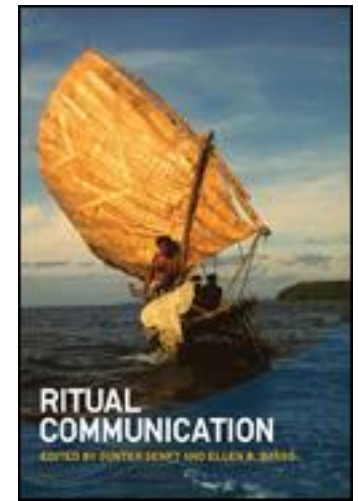
Control your emotions! This maxim has turned out to be crucial  
for the Trobriand Islanders.



In this presentation I have shown that forms of RC are pervasive throughout the Trobriand Islanders' verbal and non-verbal behavior.

I have pointed out that some of the most important functions of RC are

- the creation and stabilization of social relations,
- the blocking of aggression and bonding,
- the safeguarding and securing of the social construction of the reality of a community,
- the controlling of emotions and their public display, and
- the distancing of emotions, impulses and intentions in order to relieve tensions, to regulate social dissensions and thus to dispel elements that may turn out to be dangerous for the community.



And I have emphasized the special role of the concept of *biga sopa* and its important role for emotion control in encounters that may easily escalate from argument & conflict to aggression & violence.

I hope that I could also illustrate that despite the sophisticated forms of RC and its tools, all these unwritten rules and tools for regulating and maintaining the Trobriand Islanders' construction of their social reality are in the end dependant on the discipline of the members of this society and their willingness to realize and accept the necessity to follow maxims like *Kuvakulati am lumkola!* - "Control your emotions!"

And I dare to claim (on the basis of publications like Senft and Basso 2009) that this is not only the case for the Trobriand Islanders ...





Communal meal after a mourning ritual (*sagali*)

Thank you!



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