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# Writing ethnography. Malinowski's fieldnotes on Baloma

*I think constantly about the shallow optimism of religious beliefs: I'd give anything to believe in the inmortality of the soul . . .*

Bronislaw K. Malinowski, Diary, 27 June 1918

At the end of March 1916, after ten months of fieldwork in the Trobriands, Malinowski went back to Melbourne, where he wrote 'Baloma' (Young 1984: 21).[1] This essay is a key work in understanding Malinowski's training as an ethnographer. It set the bases of the new approach of ethnography that he improved later in writing *Argonauts of the western Pacific* (Young 1979: 5). In this short monograph about Trobriand beliefs, he foreshadowed a new style of writing ethnography. For the first time in British anthropology, an author included the theoretical and practical contexts of his research in an ethnographic text in order to anchor his discourse.

Some authors have tried to analyse ethnographic texts as if they were literary fictions.[2] According to them, ethnographic authority is an intra-textual matter. In the introduction to *Works and lives. The anthropologist as an author*, Clifford Geertz asserts:

> The ability of anthropologists to get us to take what they say seriously has less to do with either a factual look or an air of conceptual elegance than it has with their capacity to convince us that what they say is a result of their having actually penetrated (or, if you prefer, been penetrated by) another form of life, of having, one way or another, truly 'been there'. *And that, persuading us that this offstage miracle has occurred, is where the writing comes in* (Geertz 1988: 4–5. Our emphasis).

And James Clifford claims the same idea in the preface of *Writing Culture*:

> *Literary processes* – metaphor, figuration, narrative – affect the ways cultural phenomena are

1 A preliminary version of this paper entitled 'Writing on the unbelievable immortality of the soul. Malinowski's fieldnotes on Baloma', was presented at the Sixth EASA conference, in Kracow, Poland on July 2000. I am grateful to Michael W. Young, Adam Kuper, Han F. Vermeulen, Ignasi Terrades, Soledad Vieitez, Ana I. Orgaz and Juan Gamella for their comments on the original. I am also grateful to the British Library of Political and Economic Science and the Trinity College Library, Cambridge, for permission to quote from documents preserved in their manuscript collections.

2 See Marcus 1980; Marcus and Cushman 1982; Clifford 1983; 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1988; Van Maanen 1988; Atkinson 1990.

*Social Anthropology* (2002), **10**, 3, 377–393. © 2002 European Association of Social Anthropologists 
DOI: 10.1017/S0964028202000241 Printed in the United Kingdom

> registered, from the first jotted 'observations', to the completed book, to the ways these configurations 'make sense' in determined acts of reading … The maker … of ethnographic texts cannot avoid expressive tropes, figures, and allegories that *select and impose meaning as they translate it* (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 4 and 7. Our emphasis).

Both of them consider ethnography as a writing genre. They affirm that ethnographic authority is based on literary procedures of text construction. I will argue that these interpretations are one-sided, since both kinds of texts have different aims and, what is more important, distinct processes of construction. Literary texts do not have to demonstrate their validity. However, writing an ethnography requires collecting data in the field and analysing them afterwards. There is some distance between doing fieldwork and writing ethnography, but fieldnotes are the bridge which links both sides of the ethnographic research process. Therefore, ethnographic validity is an extra-textual matter which depends on the following issues: how the ethnographer makes fieldwork; what field materials he or she collects; and how he or she uses data together with theory, in order to build reasoning into ethnographic texts.

In this paper I will examine how Malinowski wrote 'Baloma' using his fieldnotes. I will explore the relationship between Malinowski's fieldnotes and the structure and contents of the ethnographic text. Other issues to be discussed in this paper include the use of data for the making of the text, the self description of the ethnographer's research path, and the influence of theoretical inputs in the way of reporting. It is my aim to show that this way of writing up ethnography provides sufficient information to assert the validity of the ethnographic text. I do not think that ethnographic authority depends on the author's capacity to persuade – or to get the complicity of – readers by simply using literary resources.

Twelve of Malinowski's field notebooks, written during his first stay in the Trobriand Islands will be reviewed.[3] Field notebooks and monographs are different types of texts, but they are very much related to each other. Fieldnotes are a continuous and diachronic record of research. Monographs contain descriptions and explanations coming from the analysis of fieldnotes.

I will argue that Malinowski increased the validity of his ethnography by including in the text the following three elements: fieldwork data, information about the research process and theoretical assumptions (see Sanjek 1990). Thus, he inaugurated a new way of writing up ethnography. With 'Baloma', ethnography took the form of a continuous constructive process, involving the tasks of doing fieldwork and writing – two related phases of the ethnographic process. Thanks to his experience in the Trobriands, Malinowski came to revolutionise ethnography, not only as a fieldwork process, but also as a written product (see Alvarez Roldán 1992; 1995; Stocking 1983; 1995).

## From fieldnotes to the ethnographic text

If one compares Malinowski's fieldnotes with 'Baloma', one will see that there is a close relationship between the two documents. The narrative structure of 'Baloma'

3 These field notebooks survive in the Manuscripts Room of the British Library of Political and Economic Science, London. They contain entries from the end of June 1915 until the middle of February 1916. The notes on Baloma appear in all the notebooks.

(how the paper is divided into different sections and how each section is organised) results from Malinowski's analysis of his fieldnotes. It is hard to imagine Malinowski writing up a different essay with the materials that he had collected and analysed in a particular way.[4]

'Baloma' is divided into eight sections, as a result of sorting his notes. First, Malinowski indexed his fieldnotes by writing the subjects down on the margins with a red pencil. Then, he put together all the references to the *baloma* and related subjects, and read them again. These tasks provided him with an outline of the sections to be considered in the monograph.

In the introduction to 'Baloma' (Section 1), Malinowski makes some general remarks concerning the independence of mortuary practices and the welfare of the spirit. Besides, he writes about three different kinds of spiritual beings: the *baloma*, the *kosi* and the *mulukuausi*.[5] Sections 2–4 describe several places and situations where the *baloma* are present: Tuma, the island of spirits (2); meetings, dreams and visions (3); the annual feast *milamala*, in which the *baloma* return to their villages (4); and magical spells, that include references to ancestors (5). Sections 6 and 7 deal with two specific subjects: beliefs in reincarnation and ignorance of the physiology of reproduction. The last section (8) makes some general statements on the sociology of belief. In order to write each section of the paper, Malinowski underwent two narrative strategies: to transcribe directly his fieldnotes, on the one hand, and to turn his notes into ethnographic reasoning on the other.

Some of the referred sections are just a 'transcription' of information reported by his informants, which had been recorded in his notebooks.[6] For instance, the events narrated in the second part of the paper coincide with his fieldnotes, and they were reported by his informants in the same order: the journey of the *baloma* to Tuma, the scene that takes place in the stone *modawosi*, the role played by the *vaigu'a* in the meeting of the *baloma* with Topileta,[7] the reference to the three villages in Tuma, and the details of the reception in Tuma.

> The spirits walks at once to TÚMA after death …
>
> A man going to Tuma would not go straight there at once. The is a reef in the sea, between Kiriwina and Tuma. On this the Balóm sits and cries. All the time his people are crying, he also cries on the salt water. Then plenty // BALÓM' he (sic) come and sit round him. They perform a mortuary song – the same as people sing during the wailing practices. After that the other BALÓM' take him & bring him to TUMA. Supposing a brother or other relative of the boy lives in T. before, the boy goes to this house & there he cries again. The BALÓM' marry. They have sexual intercourse, and they make children (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 8: 808–809, in MP).

> When a man dies his Balom goes to Tuma Island. From Omarakana the road goes via Kuaibuola[,] then they walk over the sea.

4 This is some evidence for the internal reliability of his research (see Goetz and LeCompte 1984).

5 The *kosi* is the frivolous and harmless ghost of the decesased, who vanishes after a few days of existence. The *mulukuausi* are invisible sorceresses who feed on carrion and attack people.

6 He used this strategy widely in his previous monograph, *Natives of Mailu*. As Michael Young has shown, Malinowski transcribed whole sections of his fieldnotes almost word for word in his Mailu report (Young 1988: 27ff.).

7 The headman of the villages of the dead.

In Tuma, // the B. stands on a stone, called // MODAWO'SI. There B. looks back to Boiowa and cries, & speaks with regret: (Gomaia & party when on an excursion to Tuma saw a man (GILOPEULO) who recently there standing on M[odawosi]. When Gom. approached G[i'iopeulo] disappeared & cried a Good bye. Bagidou heard BUAVÁU LAGIM a girl in Tuma Island cry out of a water well) 'Goodbye; I die I leave you I am sorry'. Then the B. goes to a well in the Tuma Raibuág, called GILA'LA. The B. washes its eyes in the water – then nobody sees it (only Gomaia's interpretation). – There are two stones in the Tuma Raibuág (you can see pieces of leaves near the Gilala well, covered with blood and [?], washed off from the face of the Balom P.T O], called DIKUMAIÓ'I and DUKUPUÁLA. These the Balom hits with the leg (IVALÍSE). The stone gives a loud sound (KAKUPUÁNA) – This is the Dukupuala stone. Then DUKUMAIÓLO – and the soil trembles (ÍOIU). The Balom hear this sound – //

TOPILETA has enormous ears [.] He lives in a village called MADAWUÓSI – close to the landing places. The Balom takes with him some VAIGU'A in a small basket. When the Balom comes Topileta asks him what was the causes of his death. The man says KABLIA (war) or else 'IBUGUAUSÚSI (a Bwaugáu killed me) or else I committed suicide (VITÚVA)'. There are 3 roads leading to Tuma, according to the cause of death. TOPILETA shows the way. The woman have also 3 roads: the road of TÚVA (poison)[,] the road of LO'U or suicide by jumping from a tree (a man who commits his suicide goes also that way) //

Women are shown by Mrs. Topileta, called BOMIAMÚIA. – Topileta gets some Vaigúa as payment for showing the way. If a man is not able to pay to him he is turned out into the sea [?] & is turned into a VAIÁBA: head & tail of shark, middle of VÁI.

The man takes with him the spirit or shadow of his vaigua (KAIKUABÚLA). –

The real name of 3 villages on TUMA is: WALÍSIGA, WABWAÍMA, TUMA. – Topileta is the boss of all of them

The villages of Tuma are all invisible, they are on top of the island, not inside (acc[ording] to Toulu, Bagidou & Gomaia).

When the Balom hear the sounds of the two stones, they [?] sagali round him. There is a [?] especially among women, when man – Balom comes. [Gomaia thinks there are plenty women & not plenty men in Tuma]. The relatives (Baloms) of the deceased say: 'wait, let him have a few days spell': Espe[cially] if a man is married he waits for a longer time. A widow or widows might remarry or might wait for his partner in Tuma.

The weeding is done by means of an offering: a NABUODA'U basket is filled with betel nut, MOI (ginger root?) & scented herbs. This is offered 'KAM PÁKU' (PÁKU – name applied to the offerings at the katuyansi custom). Once accepted, the two are married.

There is a song:

'DÚMA VÁNA BUBUAIAÍTO' – This song is sang by girls & boys on the beach in TUMA.

If a man is to faithful to his memories from the world, a TUMA belle would give him some scanted herbs to smell & he would forget all his // former loves. The same method is of course applied on the upper world (Malinowski's Field Notebooks: 10: 1041–4 and 1916, in MP).

Other sections of 'Baloma' are, however, much more elaborated. Part 6, devoted to indigenous beliefs in reincarnation, offers a good example of how Malinowski transformed his fieldnotes into ethnographic reasoning. This section deals with a set of beliefs widely shared by the Trobrianders: the baloma changes into a spirit child; spirit children come into the sea; when a woman bathes, the spirit child enters her body and she becomes pregnant; a person is always reincarnated within his or her relatives' group. In order to affirm these general statements, Malinowski used three analytic procedures: triangulation or comparison of distinct data sources (several informants) and different methods (interviews with observations); a constant validity check by looking for consistencies and inconsistencies in data reported by his informants, and by seeking alternative descriptions and explanations; and analytic induction or acknowledgment of negative evidences in order to generalise by means of inductive

reasoning.[8] Malinowski also utilised two other mechanisms in order to develope his arguments in the text: he introduced specific cases as descriptions of typical or rare beliefs; and he reconstructed situations starting from incomplete but congruent and verified evidences. Let us see it.

Section 4 begins with Gomaia's version (one of his informants) of how the *baloma* becomes a *waiwaia* (a spirit child) and how it is introduced later into the womb of a woman who thus becomes pregnant.

> The Balom goes to Tuma – he goes to Tuma immediately after death; there he lives, he gets old; he throws his skin away (BINÍLÔVA) like a snake. Then he becomes a very young child (WAIWAÍA) – This // is the name applied to unborn children only. A child *in utero* is called PWAPAWÁU.
>
> The balom gets very old, his teeth fall out (*ikasámolu*); his skin becomes WAIWAÍA. A Balom woman sees the child, she takes & puts it into a basket (PUÁTAI). This Balom woman brings the child in the basket & inserts it into her daughter or niece. This goes to the sea, to bathe. Then the child gets into her *per vaginam*. Often a girl will feel, when bathing, that something has touched her there. She will say – 'a fish has bitten me'. In fact it is a child that entered her. *Waiwaia isuvi wawila vivila* (A child come in *per vulvam* woman) – *isibalutuva* (This is not an expression for conception)[:] woman jumps up
>
> Gomaia says that the Balom woman inserts the *waiwaia in vulvam* of the girl.
>
> The menses then stop (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 9: 947–948, in MP. Probably written at the beginning of August 1915).
>
> When the *baloma* has grown old, his teeth fall out, his skin gets loose and wrinkled; he goes to the beach and bathes in the salt water; then he throws off his skin just as a snake would do, and becomes a young chid again; really an embryo, a *waiwaia* – a term applied to children *in utero* and immediately after birth. A *baloma* woman sees this *waiwaia*; she takes it up, and puts it in a basket or a plaited and folded coconut leaf (*puatai*). She carries the small being to Kiriwina, and places it in the womb of some woman, inserting it *per vaginam*. Then that woman becomes pregnant (*nasusuma*) (Malinowski 1916: 403).

Gomaia's version was shared by many Trobrianders. Malinowski recorded this story in several occasions, and from different informants.[9] He chose Gomaia's version as an example of what he considered a general set of beliefs in reincarnation:[10]

8 I do not intend to say that Malinowski used analytic induction as I understand this method today. He only followed the logic of this method in order to give consistency to his generalisations. Analytic induction was formulated for the first time in 1934 by Znaniecki in his work *The method of sociology*. In 1951, Robinson published a paper in the *American Sociological Review* describing the logical structure of this method.

9 There seems to be a belief in reincarnation. When a male or female has been for a long time in T. and he dies again there, he comes back to 'belly belong a woman'. //

After the BALÓM in Tuma dies, he goes to big salt water and there he stops. Supposing a woman goes to // 'swim' in salt water, the being (PAPÁO) gets into her and is born again. 'No Papao means child!'.

The version is confirmed by Toúlu – apparently. Asked in what manner a woman gets a big belly without going to 'swim', Tom recites a long story about some women going to Tuma & other sleeping in their bed – in which manner 'spirit children' enter the belly. The 'spirit child' would

> Everybody in Kiriwina knows, and has not the slightest doubt about, the following propositions. The real cause of pregnancy is always a *baloma*, who is inserted into or enters the body of a woman, and without whose existence a woman could not become pregnant, all babies are made or come into existence (*ibubulisi*) in Tuma (Malinowski 1916: 403).

It is worth noticing that in order to generalise, Malinowski skipped some details of Gomaia's version which he considered personal speculations added by his informant (see Malinowski 1916: 404).

Malinowski continues his account by pointing to other ideas widely shared by the Trobrianders, such as the association between the sea and the spirit children, and the belief that women got pregnant when bathing. He argues that this belief is corroborated by certain precautions observed by unmarried girls when they went into the sea. Married women who wanted to conceive would behave in the opposite way. Again, Malinowski emphasises the difference between the general belief about a connection between the conception and the presence of the *waiwaia* in the sea, and the particular interpretations of his informants.

> In all the coastal villages on the western shore (where this information was collected) mature unmarried girls observe certain precautions when bathing. The spirit children are supposed to be concealed in the *popewo*, the floating sea scum; also in some stones called *dukupi*. They come along on large tree trunks (*kaibilabala*), and they may be attached to dead leaves (*libulibu*) floating on the surface. Thus when at certain times the wind and tide blow plenty of this stuff towards the shore, the girls are afraid of bathing in the sea, especially at high tide. Again, if a married woman wants to conceive, she may hit the dukupi stones in order to induce a concealed *waiwaia* to enter her womb. But this is not a ceremonial action (Malinowski 1916: 404).

He collected this information from Cyril Cameron, a trader of Kitava, around the 20 August 1915 (see Young 1998: 115):[11]

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seek for his mother or sister: or some near relative. He would never enter into a woman of another totem (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 8: 810–811, written 6 July 1915).

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

Note. Tokolikebe again informs me (without being screwed up) that the people are reincarnated[.] They go to Tuma, remain then, return through the sea & get into a woman's womb. The small beings are called PÓPEU'A (this is the name of the stuff floating on the waves?). Tokolikebe is quite emphatic that the cause of pregnancy is the Balóm (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 11: 1167, probably written 12 September 1915).

10 On 29 September 1918, the pearl trader Billy Hancock wrote a letter to Malinowski contradicting his view about the baloma. 'I have been gathering a lot of information since you went away about conception, birth etc. … I got a rude shock when they upset the Baloma–Waiwaia business the other evening … They stopped me then & said, no the Baloma is not *waiwaia*. He becomes young again & goes back to the 'village' & lives another life in Tuma, becomes old again washes etc & becomes young again & so on *ad infinitum*[.] A baloma's life in Tuma never ceases … The information I got from Togugua's wife and Kaikoba's wife, [and] not being satisfied with them I got 'Auntie' on the job & she tells practically the same story, then to make doubly sure I got a bush woman from Obweria & her yarn is the same' (Stocking 1977: 7). However, later ethnographic research seems to confirm Malinowski's account (Weiner 1976).

11 Malinowski collected information on the topics covered by 'Baloma' from local Europeans. There is information in his field notebooks from missionary Gilmour and traders Rafael Brudo and Cyril Cameron (quoted above). He also spoke on these subjects with Dr Bellamy, the ARM, and traders

> All children are created (BUBULI) in Tuma & they come into sea. They are found in the PÓPEUWO (some sea weed[)] and some stones (DUKÚPI) – If a woman wants to conceive she hits those stones & the WAIWAIA enter her[.]
>
> KABILABÁLA snags
>
> LIBULIBU dead leaves flouting about.
>
> Unmarried girls are afraid of bathing at hide tide, [?] if there are lots of stuffs floating about (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 10: 1002, in MP).

Malinowski goes on with his narration by showing the relationship between these beliefs and an indigenous ceremony connected with pregnancy. The description of the ceremony is not any of those he had recorded in his fieldnotes, but a synthesis of them all. First, Malinowski separates the main elements of the ceremony from different versions, and afterwards joins them again to describe the essentials of the ceremony. In his final account, he leaves out some contradictions and details that he could not check in the field.

Around the 28 July 1915, he wrote in his field notebook:

> Customs in connection with first pregnancy. Called IKÓKUWÁSI. It is in connection with the belief that the dead are reincarnated. The man goes to Tuma. Then he goes into the sea. He wavers on the foamy crests of the sea. And then he enters into the womb. When the woman becomes pregnant, she performs this ceremony and then the child gets a soul. All BALOMS return. They return to the sea shore.
>
> The inland women come to the seaside & perform the ceremony in order not to bear a child without a soul. The Omarakana, Liluba, M'tava women go to the E[ast] shore. The western villages to the W[est] shore (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 9: 926, in MP).

> When the woman is in the water, the women of the village wash her. Then the women carry her back to the village. Walking is taboo. In the village a Kubudoga is made (Earth is tabu to her, she cannot speak, unless to ask for food & drink). She sits on the Kubudogo the whole day. / After she has been washed, on the sea shore they make the megua. Ginger root is chewed and the they spit ceremonially (to prevent the BWAGÁU to kill her). Then some *munamuna* (herbs) are taken // and the woman is beaten. Some *megua* is spoken over them.
>
> This *megua* is made only for the first time. It is good for all the other children.
>
> The clans and dignities (totemic birds and social rank) are kept through the whole transaction.
>
> After the ceremony there is a *sagali* made by the family of the woman, to all the women who made the *megua*. This *sagali* is called (SUSÚMA – pregnancy – SAGALI). After the birth (VALÚLU) of the child another *sagali* is made[,] the *valulu sagali* (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 9: 928–929, in MP).

In these early notes, the child got a soul during the ceremonial bathing. A few days later he collected another version from his informant Gomaia – also included in his monograph. According to the later, the aim of the ceremonial bathing was to make easier the birth of the baby.

> G[omaia] denies the connection, put down on p. 926. between the washing ceremony (IKOKUWA'SI) & the incarnation of the Baloma . . .

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Harrison and Hancock (Stocking 1977; 1996; and M. W. Young, personal communication). However, he was very cautious with some of this information, and he tried to check it with native informants or personal observations. For instance, he crossed out the information collected from Revd. Gilmour on p. 764 of his field notebook, and wrote in the margin the word 'nonsense'.

> Tom confirms G[omaia's] view: The Balom he comes in first time inside cunt [Malinoski joined with an arrow Tom and Gomaia's opinions]. //
>
> The custom is made, because they want the child to be born soon. The child, when the woman is thrown into the water gets up & down & gets lively. If the child is not stirred up this way it grows to big & cannot go out. [A native teacher's wife who omitted to do the ceremony encountered great difficulties at childbirth – so far that the G.M.O. had to go & tray the child out].
>
> A second ceremony is not necessary: she had born once, 'hole be too big'.
>
> The ceremony (comp[are] p. 926) is done early in the morning (EABOGE). From Omarakana carry the girl on sticks to the sea, to the E. shore. From Obweria to the W. shore. Only *guyan* girls would be carried on sticks. A *bokay* girl would go close up to the sea, then she would // be lifted on hands an taken to the sea. She would be carried back all the way, on 'horseback' by one woman (the women changing of course) (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 9: 950–952, in MP).

He finished his account about Trobrianders' beliefs in reincarnation with another general statement; namely, that the social organisation was preserved through all the process of reincarnation. 'It was considered absolutely impossible that any exception to this rule could happen, or that an individual could change his or her subclan in the cycle of reincarnation (Malinowski 1916: 406).

All his informants agreed upon that statement. There are many other passages in his fieldnotes that confirm the extent of this belief. When a *baloma* appears to the future mother in her dreams introducing the child into her body, he or she was always believed to be a maternal relative.

> First a woman dream of a *balom* (her father, mother *kadala* [brother] [?]) Thus Bwoilagesi was given Tubulubakiki by Tomnavabu, her *kadala*. Kuwoigu [Tukulubakiki's wife] dreamt of her mother. Toúlu [the chief of Omarakana] was given to his mother by Buguabuaga [her mother's mother's brother] (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 15: 1584, in MP). [Written 20 November 1915]

> Many know who brought them to their mother. Thus To'uluwa, the chief of Omarakana, was given to his mother (Bomakata) by Buguabuaga, one of her *tabula* ('grandfathers' – in this case her mother's mother's brother). Again, Bwoilagesi, the woman mentioned on page 364, who goes to Tuma, had her son,Tukulubakiki, given her by Tomnavabu, her *kadala* (mother's brother). Tukulubakiki's wife, Kuwo'igu, knows that her mother came to her, and gave her the baby, a girl now about twelve months old (Malinowski 1916: 405–6).

Tom asserts, in a note dated on 6 July: 'The "spirit child" would seek for his mother or sister: or some near relative. He would never enter into a woman of another totem' (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 8: 811, in MP). Later, at the beginning of August, the same informant says:

> That if the child is similar to the father, it is the sign that the man´s mother (or any other deceased female relative[)] has brought the child. If the child is like the mother it means that the mother's mother or grammy has brought the WAIWAI'A (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 9: 950, in MP).

In the same page of his field notebook, Malinowski gathered Gomaia's opinion:

> G. is quite positive that the clan is not changed: a Malasi *balom*, would yield a Malasi *wawaia* which would never enter any other woman who takes it would be undoubtedly a Imalasi // woman & would insert her burden into a ragnative relative (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 9: 949–950, in MP).

Thus, we can see that there is a narrow relationship between Malinowski's fieldnotes

and the structure and contents of the monograph. 'Baloma' was the result of a careful analysis of his data. It was the product of reading, checking, coding, indexing, sorting, rearranging, selecting and merging the information of his fieldnotes, in order to understand the indigenous system of beliefs.

## The ethnographer's research path

Malinowski provides in 'Baloma' many accounts of how he conducted his fieldwork. He begins the paper with a note where he mentions three of the main traits of his fieldwork in Kiriwina: he spent ten months in the field; he lived with the indigenous; and he learnt the vernacular.[12] But there are references to his fieldwork spread all over the essay. Particularly interesting is what he mentions regarding his oral and observational data sources.

As he admits in the paper, most of his informants were male (Malinowski 1916: 362). He describes some of them in the following terms:

> Bagido'u, an exceptionally intelligent man of the Tabalu subclan, the garden magician of Omarakana, and my best informant on all matters of ancient lore and tradition (Malinowski 1916: 363).
>
> Tokulubakiki, one of the most friendly, decent and intelligent natives I met (Malinowski 1916: 364).
>
> Gomaia one of my best informants … He is a very intelligent native and his father was a great wizard and *bwoga'u* [a man who knows any of the evil spells] and his *kadala* (maternal uncle) is also a sorcerer (Malinowski 1916: 368–69).

By giving this information, Malinowski reveals to the readers significant features of his data sources. These profiles describe some of the characteristics of good informants. They know their culture well, are reliable, willing to communicate or cooperate, and very active (are in a key position) in the social networks they belong to (see Bernard 1994: 166–71; Johnson 1990: 27–39).

He distinguished very clearly, both in the paper and in the fieldnotes, how the particular versions of his informants differed from the Trobrianders' general ideas and opinions. He systematically checked the consistency of folk descriptions and explanations given by his informants. Instead of throwing away the ethnographic data that did not fit into his argument, he attempted to explain why informants disagreed about some points. This certainly enriches the ethnographic description, and elucidates intra-cultural variation.

Some of Malinowski's informants were sceptical about the existence of spirits. However, he included their testimonies in this monograph. Gomaia, for instance, did not believe what people said to happen in Tuma.

> Gomaia says that no one really know what happens in Tuma. One Mitakai'io used to boasting going to Tuma. He used to say: 'Me now want to kaikai [eat]; I kaikai along Tuma; ripe banana he stop, ripe betel nut; fish and pigs; all time I kaikai' //
>
> Gomaia adds[:] 'He Giemaman!' G. told him: 'I'll give you one pound, if you make me go to Tuma'. M. told him[:] 'Your father & mother cry for you all time, want to see; more better you

12 By learning the vernacular he could gather many magical spells that he analysed in section five of the essay.

> give me 2 stick[s] tobacco & I go & see them & give them. Your father told me to ask you that'. G. gave him the 2 sticks & then he says, M. smoked them themselves. G. promised him 1 pound. M. gave him 3 kinds of leaves, to rub his body all over & to eat some. Then he laid down, but he did not go to Tuma. //
>
> One man TOMUAIA LAKUABÚLA from Obulaku also said. Mitakaio used to say that T.L. was a liar. Again T.L said same of M.
>
> M. said to RL.: 'you go to Tuma & bring a betel nut to show you have been there.' T.L. went to the garden & stole a betel nut, belonging to MOURA'DA, Tokaraiwaga [headman] of Oburaku & come back to sleep T.L. ate plenty of the bunch, but kept one. He said to his wife[:] 'Make my bed, Balom he come, he make dance'. T.L. 'danced' the whole time (sang) in his house & all men they said: Why Why (sic) is it only T.L. who dances? T.L.: You no hear plenty Balom have dance, you no have hear him'.
>
> Close up day time, he put betel nut our his mouth & cried: 'I have been in Tuma, I have brought the betel nut from there! All men & women & girls said "True"[,] but M. said: this big – nut, you // steel him from my tree' . . .
>
> From that time T.L. does not talk about TUMA (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 10:1019–1022, in MP. Malinowski 1916: 364–5).

Malinowski explained Gomaia's attitude in this way:

> I have noted this story exactly as I heard it from Gomaia, and I am telling it in the same form. The natives in their narrative very often do not preserve the right perspective, however. It seems to me probable that my informant has condensed into his account different occurrences; but in this place it is the main fact of the natives' psychological attitude towards "spiritism" that is interesting, I mean the pronounced scepticism of some individuals on this subject and the tenacity of belief among the majority (Malinowski 1916: 365–6).

These comments play an important role in the ethnographic text. They allow to distinguish several levels of generalisation in the ethnographic data. Particular versions, exceptions and opposite cases give more credibility to the ethnographer's general statements about the social actors.

Malinowski not only gathered information about the *baloma* from informants, but also observed the behaviour of the Trobrianders that were related to these beliefs. He checked informants' reports against more objective evidence whenever possible. He witnessed burials and mortuary ceremonies,[13] and watched the *milamala* feast when the *baloma* used to visit the villages on two occasions: one time in Olivilevi, and once again in Omarakana.

First, he collected some information in Omarakana from his informant Gomaia about the role played by the *baloma* during the *milamala*: that is, the arrangements to receive them in the village – such as the exhibition of valuables and the display of food – and the farewell ceremony of the spirits at the end of the *milamala*:

> Preparations: The VAIGÚA is put on the BUNEIÓVA // (a custom IÓIOVA; T'IÓIOVASI). In order to please (.) the BALO'M.
>
> Structures (gallons) (LALÓGUA) are put up in the Baku & hang over with food[.] If any stranger comes into the village he is given food by his friend
>
> ('KAM'MA'ÓTU – same word as above VÁOTU, with the 2nd person prefix).
>
> IÓBA (bidden farewell harshly) – VÍNA VÍNA (bidden farewell)
>
> There are several KUPI drums beating it.
>
> But always only one KATUNÉNIA (small drum). [Description of the drums beating].

13 Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 10: 1032 in MP. Malinowski 1916: 359, n. 3, and 360, n. 1.

They sing (many of them simultaneously). BALÓM Ô BULULOUSI Ô, BAKALÔSE // GÂ. Bukulousi o means: you go! Bakalouse ga means: we not go! (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 10: 1039–1041, in MP).

Some days later, at the end of August, he checked part of this information in Olivilevi, where he witnessed the last five days of the *milamala* ceremonies (Malinowski 1916: 375). For instance, on the 26 August 1915 he wrote in his field notebook the description of the *ioba* ceremonies which concluded the *milamala*:

IÓBA. At ab[out] 4 o'clock – just one hour before dawn, when the leatherhead (SAKA'Ú) sings out and the KUBUÁNA star appears on the heaven, they make the IÓBA. Ceremony, witnessed by me, singularly unimpressive. A handful of youngsters beat 3 drums. Some even smaller ones, address the Balom in the same way as they would scream at me their sometimes friendly, sometimes impudent remarks. They start from one point where the road strikes the village book (KADUMÁLAGA VÁLU). Then they go through the village & give the final adieu at the KADUMÁLAGA VÁLU leading straight to the beach & to Kaibola. The strong *balom* walk to *kaibola* & there embark. The women, children & cripples embark on the beach & sail straight.
[Note: the *balom* do not, therefore, walk over the sea, like Christ over the lake of Galilee; they sail over it.]

The IÓBA text is confirmed to be the same, as the one said in Omarakana.

BALOMA O BULULOUSI OI BAKALOUSI GA! UUGUAU … // *Sunday* after IÓBA. At about 12 o'clock the boys make the PEM IÓBA or the IÓBA for lame crippled, weak, old BALÓM. The drums beat the usual beat & small children run about and scream at the BALÓM. Some of the children are clad in boughs and waving green boughs (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 10: 1059, 1062, in MP).

When I arrived at the *baku* (central place), half an hour before sunrise, the drums were still going on and there were still a few of the dancers sleepily moving round the drummers, not in regular dance, but in the rhythmic walk of the *karibom*. When the *saka'u* was heard, everybody went quietly away – the young people in pairs, and there remained to farewell the *baloma* only five or six urchins with the drums, myself and my informant. We went to the *kadumalagala valu* – the point where the path for the next village leaves the settlement, and we started to chase the *baloma*. A more undignified performance I cannot imagine, bearing in mind that ancestral spirits were addressed! … The boys from six to twelve years of age sounded the beat, and then the smaller ones began to address the spirits in the words I had been previously given by my informants. They spoke with the same characteristic mixture of arrogance and shyness, with which they used to approach me … And so they went through the village, and hardly any grown-up man was to be seen …

Next day, the *pem ioba* was a still more paltry affair: the boys doing their part with laughter and jokes, and the old men looking on with smiles, and making fun of the poor lame spirits, which have to hobble away (Malinowski 1916: 382).

In September 1915 he observed once again the whole *milamala* in Omarakana for a couple of weeks. There he watched some accidental episodes performed by the *baloma* in the village (coconuts falls, bad weather, animal grunts, etc.). He also listened to local interpretations (the *baloma* were angry):

A whole bunch of coconuts have fallen down at this moment. People & even the sceptical Gomaia are unanimous that the BALO'M, who are displeased with Toulu's neglect & avarice, were the cause of this incident. Evidently the Balom are keen on much food being consumed during the Milamala – The same feeling was obvious in Olivilevi and here. –

In spite of the many tokens of their presence (the sand on Vanoi's house – which seems to be conventional sign of their displeasure; the coconuts today, sometimes a pig loud & uncomfortable grunts) – people are not afraid of the Balom, nervously. Gomaia would not walk on the night, a

man died in Omarakana, alone & without light – out even in two without light. But he says he would not be frightened of the BALOM, he is frightened of the KO'SI (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 10: 1133, in MP. See Malinowski 1916: 378–9).

Even the ethnographer's presence did not go unnoticed to the *baloma*. Breaking customary rules, Malinowski persuaded the Trobrianders to perform a *kaidebu* dance.[14] It produced the anger of the *baloma*, which resulted in rain and storm.

Note on Milamala, Balom.
Heavy rain. Balom angry. I gave the Kaidebu [dancing shields] & told them to dance with them – This old dance (GUMAGÁBU) was a dance of NUMAKÁLA. TOÚLU intended it. But if he wanted to make it, he would have to KATUVÍSIA [ceremonially inaugurate] the Kaidebu, the Katuku'ala is connected with the KATUVÍSISA of the drums. As things happened the Bal'om got angry & on the first night the drum – storm burst. Today there is rain (Malinowski's Field Notebooks, 10: 1222, in MP. See Malinowski 1916: 380).

Van Maanen has suggested that ethnographer's methodological confessions are usually decorative elements in realistic etnographies.[15] This does not seem the case in Malinowski's piece; on the contrary, self description of his research path helps to assess the ethnographic validity of the tale.

## Theoretical horizon

'Baloma' does not contain an explicit theory about religious or magical beliefs. However, it offers a number of theoretical inputs. Malinowski went to the field with some theories in mind (Stocking 1986). They influenced his fieldwork and they are present on his monographs. 'Baloma' is a clear example of how theory helps to shape ethnography.

His interest in magico-religious beliefs was already present in his first paper, written in Polish and published in 1911, a critical review of Frazer's book *Totemism and exogamy*. In that paper, Malinowski states that religion is a result of the helplessness of human beings in facing up to nature and destiny. Later, he further developed this thesis in a functionalist theory of magic and religion that he expounded for the first time in his book *Wierzenia pierwotne I formy ustroju spolecznego* [Primitive religion and forms of social organisation], written in Polish and published in 1915.[16] According to Malinowski, the origin of religion lies in individual psychic processes. What compels the human being to grasp religious ideas are certain emotional states (fear, love, anxiety, hope or expectation) derived from his or her struggle for survival, and not from rational or empirical reasons.[17]

14 For a more detailed description of this episode see Young 1998: 92.

15 'Confessionals do not usually replace realist accounts. They typically stand beside them, elaborating extensively on the formal snippets of method description that decorate realist tales' (Van Maanen 1988: 75).

16 See Symmons-Symonolewicz 1960 and Thornton and Skalník 1993. See Tambiah 1990: ch. 4 for a review of Malinowski's functionalist theory on magic and religion.

17 'Man, especially primitive man who lives in a constant struggle for survival . . . is mainly emotional and active . . . and it is easy to show that these very elements lead him to the performance of such acts and activities which constitute a germ of religion'. (Malinowski 1915, quoted by Symmons-Symonolewicz 1960: 5.)

Between these two works, Malinowski published a small paper in English, where he criticises Frazer's interpretation of Australian *intichiuma* ceremonies. He thought that *intichiuma* ceremonies were a good example of how magic and religion sometimes provide the necessary coercive forces to involve the indigenous in a collective and regular system of labour in simple societies, where a division of labour does not exist (Malinowski 1912: 107).

Another focus of theoretical interest in Malinowski's pre-ethnographic phase was family and kinship organisation. In his book, *The family among the Australian aborigines* (published in 1913), Malinowski criticises some evolutionary concepts – such as 'primitive promiscuity', marriage by capture, or Morgan's kinship classificatory system – from a Durkheimian point of view, in order to confirm Westermarck's view of the universality of the individual human family (Malinowski 1913a: 34–5. See also Westermarck 1891; 1913). Following Durkheim,[18] he tries to demonstrate that kinship organisation and family as a social institution are related to the general structure of society (Malinowski 1913a: 300). Despite Durkheim's influence, Malinowski was very critical with some of his concepts and views almost from the beginning. In 1913, when *The family among the Australian aborigines* was published, he also wrote a review of *The elementary forms of religious life* in the journal *Folk-lore*. He then poses two main objections to Durkheim: first, that he makes universal assertions about 'primitive' peoples based only on data about the Australian *arunta* provided by Spencer and Gillen; and secondly that Durkheim's notion of society, conceived as a collective being with a 'collective consciousness', is a metaphysical concept (Malinowski 1913c).[19] This second critique of Durkheim also appears in 'Baloma', when he introduces his notion of 'social ideas' of a community (Malinowski 1916: 423, n. 1).

It is clear that 'Baloma' was conceived and written from a theoretical background, based upon studies on magic and religion which had been carried out by authors like Frazer, Spencer[20] and Durkheim. From that theoretical horizon, Malinowski shows in 'Baloma' both the individual aspects of beliefs, and their social dimension.

Malinowski knew that theory plays a central role in ethnography, and that it is one of the bases of the ethnographic text. According to Malinowski, ethnography is not a collection of 'pure' facts. Empirical data and theory form an inseparable unit.[21] In order to make intelligible the chaos of facts that observation brings to the ethnographer, one has to classify, order and relate them to each other.

18 On the influence of Durkheim over Malinowski's work, see Symmons-Symonolewicz 1959: 29–33.

19 See also 1913a: 308–9. The second critique also appears in Malinowski's correspondence with Frazer:

> 'As fas as native psychology is concerned, it was a great pleasure to see that you approved of my sally against the "collective consciousness". Such metaphysical concepts, shrouded in the worn-out rags of Hegelian pomp, only slightly trimmed and repainted to suit the modern craving after greater sobriety, are bound to play havoc with field work: they obscure the real issues and, if blindly followed, would produce artificial and twisted methods of observation (BM/JF, 25 October 1917, in FP: Add.Ms.b 36$^{175(2)}$. See also BM/JF, 12 September 1920, in FP: 23$^{27(1)}$.

20 The book *Across Australia* by Spencer and Gillen probably awoke his interest in subjects like the 'child spirits' and reincarnation. In his review of this work for the journal *Folk-lore*, Malinowski pointed out the significance of the study of these subjects among the *arunta* in order to elucidate the indigenous mentality and kinship. (Malinowski 1913b).

21 See Malinowski 1911b: 26; 1913a: 30; 1916: 418–9; 1922: Introduction; 1926: 282–3; 1935: I, 335–6, 339–40, 322; 1944: 13, 17–18.

> General sociological laws … have to be grasped and framed in the field, in order that the material, which observations brings in a chaotic and unintelligible form, may be understood by the observer and recorded in a scientifically useful form … There is a form of interpretation of facts without which no scientific observation can possibly be carried on – I mean the interpretation which sees in the endless diversity of facts general laws; which severs the essential from the irrelevant; which classifies and orders phenomena, and puts them into mutual reltionship. Without such interpretation all scientific work in the field must degenerate into pure 'collectioneering' of data; at its best it may give odds and ends without inner connection. But it never will be able to lay bare the sociological structure of a people, or to give an organic account of their beliefs, or to render the picture of the world from the native perspective. The often fragmentary, incoherent, non-organic nature of much of the present ethnological material is due to the cult of 'pure fact'. As if it were possible to wrap up in a blanket a certain number of 'facts as you find them' and bring them all back for the home student to generalize upon and to build up his theoretical constructions upon … In the field one has to face a chaos of facts, some of which are so small that they seem insignificant; others loom so large that they are not scientific facts at all; they are absolutely elusive, and can be fixed only by interpretation, by seeing the *sub specie aeternitatis*, by grasping what is essential in them and fixing this. *Only laws and generalisations are scientific facts*, and field work consists only and exclusively in the interpretation of the chaotic social reality, in subordinating it to general rules (Malinowski 1916: 418–19).

## Conclusion. Validity of the ethnographic text

Writing ethnography is different to writing history, literary fictions or reports from laboratory experiments. The difference between ethnography and other types of writing is that the ethnographer bases his or her descriptions, interpretations and explanations on doing continuous references to fieldwork, field materials and theories.[22] In order to write ethnography, the anthropologist has first to gather information by speaking, observing and interacting with other people. Afterwards, he or she has to analyse this information, and then write his or her monograph.

Malinowski reports his experiences in an understandable way for his readers. He presents his findings as a result of the analysis of his field data. Materials and descriptions of his fieldwork included in his monographs together with references to his theoretical point of view allow one to assess the apparent instrumental and theoretical validity of his ethnography.

As is well known, the concept of validity was first used in psychometrics (the field of tests and measurements). It refers to the goodness of fit between an operational definition and the concept it is purported to measure. A concept can be measured by using different instruments or indicators. A measurement is valid, when the instrument used is also valid. A valid instrument must be reliable (stable and consistent), but a reliable instrument may or may not be valid. A measuring instrument is apparently valid when it is so closely linked to the phenomena under observation that is obviously providing valid data.[23] However, apparent validity presupposes instrumental and theoretical validity. It has no sense without them. A measurement procedure has instrumental validity if it can be shown that observations match those generated by an

22 Of course, these types of writing have some similarities. However, history is rarely based on primary data sources, literary fictions do not have to represent the real world, and laboratory experiments are conducted in artificial environments.

23 For instance, undernourished children are smaller than those who are well nourished, and their arm perimeter is also shorter. These indicators have apparent validity when used as measurements of a child's undernourishment.

alternative process that is itself accepted as valid. Finally, an instrument is seen to exhibit theoretical validity if there is substantial evidence that the theoretical paradigm rightly corresponds to observations (Kirk and Miller 1986: 22).

The validity of research data, instruments, findings and conclusions can be assessed. Findings are the result of data management and data analysis. They will therefore be valid if analysis procedures are valid. A valid explanation also needs to be based on a theory accepted by the scientific community.[24] Research will only get valid descriptions and explanations of the studied phenomena when data collection and data-analysis procedures are valid. However, data do not have to be taken uncritically by their appearance. They are a source of inferences which may or may not make sense for current theories. For this reason, ethnographers should be explicit about their theories and document their research processes.

Malinowski began to write ethnography in this way up to 'Baloma'. In this essay, sometimes considered a minor work, he changed his way of writing ethnography. 'Natives of Mailu', his first field monograph (published in 1915), was a pre-ethnographic work both from the point of view of doing fieldwork and reporting. In Mailu he did not do participant observation.[25] And in writing his report on Mailu, Malinowski did not try to anchor his discourse in the way he did later in 'Baloma': by using valid data, explaining how he has collected and analysed them, and basing his findings and conclusions on theoretical ideas.

According to some authors, both ethnographic texts are realistic reports: 'the author is absent from most segments of the finished text'; they are written in a 'documentary style focused on minute … mundane details of everyday life among the people he studies'; they 'offer the perspective as well as practices of the member of the culture'; and 'the ethnographer has the final word on how the culture is to be interpreted and presented' (Van Maanen 1988, ch. 3).

However, these two 'realistic' monographs are very different to each other. They have different contents, they were written to produce different effects and to reach distinct audiences, and they were constructed in a very different way. Malinowski's report on Mailu was written following the *Notes and Queries* – a fieldwork guide that he also used in order to gather his field data by doing survey work. The result was an inventory of miscellaneous etnographic facts. On the contrary, 'Baloma' was his first ethnography focused on an anthropological subject, and he wrote it with field data collected during his intensive fieldwork at the Trobriands.

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24 In Mailu, Malinowski interviewed informants in the mission only with the assistance of an interpreter who spoke a Motu dialect. See Young 1988; Alvarez Roldán 1992; 1995.

25 Other anthropological reports of that time lack the same foundations. For instance, the *Reports of the Cambridge anthropological expedition to the Torres Straits*, edited by Haddon (1901–35), *The Melanesians of British New Guinea* by Seligman (1910); *The Veddahs* by Seligman and Seligman (1911); or *The history of Melanesian society* by Rivers (1914).

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