

The Teachings of Tokunupei

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In February 1983 the most popular song of the adolescents of Tauwema³⁴ was 'Imdeduyo'. It is a rather schmaltzy song with four stanzas, a refrain, a lovely melody, and the following lyrics:

1.)

When the moon rises from the east

I had a dream of you my love:

Labi gibobwaili,

I spoke words of love

Please remember me!

Take me down to Vau,

let me travel along the coast,

come along with me tonight

before you change your mind.

Refrain (repeated after every stanza)

*Imdeduyo, Imdeduyo,
kwanvedi, bakenu.*

Yegu Yolina.

Levavegu kesa'i,

nemtamata vovogu.

Imdeduyo, Imdeduyo,

kwanvedi, bakenu.

Imdeduyo, Imdeduyo,
move a bit, I will lie down.

I am Yolina.

They hit me the waves,
tiredness (is in my) body

Imdeduyo, Imdeduyo,
move a bit, I will lie down.

2.)

Kalasila isalili -

niva'ila wa idamu

Ikeboku ula simla -

The sun goes down -

calm sea only smooth sea.

It is calm (not windy) my island -

³⁴ Tauwema is a village on Kaile'una Island; it has been my place of residence on the Trobriand Islands for 25 years now. I would like to express my great gratitude to the people of the Trobriand Islands, especially to the inhabitants of Tauwema; I thank them for their hospitality, friendship, and patient cooperation.

deli wala kayoyugu. with (me there's) only my sorrow,

3.)

*Tubukona iyuvola
mapilana obomatu -
madagila visigala -
iomau ninamaisi.*

The moon rises
at this side of the east -
very nice it shines -
it is sad for their minds.

4.)

*Yum yam, wiki wiki,
tubukona - taitu taitu.
Akayoyu ulu valu -
avaituta bagisi?*

Day (after) day, week (after) week,
month - year (after) year.
I fly to my village -
when will I see you (again)?

I liked the song, transcribed it, and sang it accompanying myself with my accordion.

The people of Tauwema enjoyed my playing their song, and one evening after I had finished my 'performance', Gerubara, one of chief Kilagola's sons, came to me and told me a 20 minute long version of the story of Imdeduya and Yolina. Thus I learned that the lyrics of the song which was classified as a '*wosi tauwau topaisewa*' - a 'song about migrant workers (from the Trobriands)' refers with the protagonists' names and in its refrain to one of the most important myths of the Trobriand Islands. In the song Yolina has turned into a worker who lives far away from the Trobriands in another part of Papua New Guinea but hopes to fly back one day to see his sweetheart Imdeduya again. In the myth, however, Imdeduya is a beautiful girl who later turns into the moon; Yolina is a handsome young man who later turns into the sun. All singers of the song did not know this myth any more. I was fascinated by Gerubara's narration and immediately started to transcribe and translate it.

Word spread around that I was working on these data with much enthusiasm, and a few days later, just after I had finished the transcription and the glossing of the myth, Gerubara's mother Sipwesa came to our house and introduced her younger brother Mokopei to me and my wife. Mokopei, a man in his late fifties who lived in Kaduwaga, a neighboring village, asked me whether I would like to hear

the real Imdeduya myth, politely hinting that the version of the myth Gerubara told me was far from representing the text of the myth in full. I was more than eager to document his version of 'Imdeduya'. Because he had announced that his narration would be longer than the one of his nephew I prepared two recorders for tape-recording his narration without any interruption. At that time I had learned that the Trobriand Islanders remember long texts as one piece of 'chunk', so to speak; interruptions had the potential to endanger the continuation of the narration of texts recited from memory. When he realized that I was ready for recording he started his narration and finished it after about 90 minutes. His recitation of the myth was very lively and interspersed with the recurrent singing of a slightly elaborated version of the lines that constitute the refrain of the schmaltzy song of our village band, and of a number of stanzas of a '*wosi milamala*' – a harvest festival song. When he had finished his narration a big crowd had gathered around our house. All the people, young and old, had as enchantedly listened to Mokopei as we had.³⁵ He asked for some tobacco which I gave him with sincere thanks for his great gift for us and my research. As soon as Mokopei had left Tauwema, I started transcribing the tapes.

The myth describes the journey of Yolina who paddles through the Trobriand archipelago in search of Imdeduya. He had heard of her extraordinary beauty and wants to find and marry her. Wherever he lands and goes ashore the chief of the respective village organizes a big feast and offers him his daughter for marriage. He declines all these offers continuing his journey until he reaches the village where Imdeduya lives. After some complications and with the help of some magic he finally manages to marry her and stays with her and her parents in her village. Imdeduya gives birth to a boy and a girl. After some time Yolina and Imdeduya quarrel about their children. Yolina decides to leave her. One night he takes his magic canoe and starts paddling home to his village. Imdeduya notices him leaving and tries to call him back with a magic spell, but he reacts with countermagic. She climbs up a tree to see him better. When he has vanished at the

³⁵ The houses of the Trobriand Islanders are build out of bush materials. The walls consist of woven palm tree leaves. Therefore it was easy for this crowd of people to overhear Mokopei's narration.

horizon she falls down, breaks her neck and dies. Yolina returns home to his village and stays there.

Gerubara had already told me that after her death Imdeduya metamorphosed into the sun and that Yolina after his death metamorphosed into the moon. When I returned to the Trobriands in 1989 Tokunupei, one of my best consultants in Tauwema, remembered my interest in the myth and provided me with further information which is highly interesting with respect to the Trobriand Islanders' eschatology. Imdeduya and Yolina were actually siblings. They are the ancestor parents of all human beings, and their children went to Kiriwina. Imdeduya's and Yolina's parents are Tudava and his wife Moyetukwa. They had two more children, Topilata and Nabwakesa. These two men became the headmen of the underground villages of the dead on the islands Tuma (Topileta) and Bomatu (Nabwakesa) and the guardians of the entrances to these villages.³⁶ The four children of Tudava and Moyetukwa brought yams to the Trobriand Islanders; therefore they are also called 'Gulagula' – the basic morpheme of this expression is a classifier that is used to refer to 'heaps of yam' (e.g., 'gulayu tetu' – 'two heaps of yams'). During our discussion of these matters I asked Tokunupei whether he also knew the present day names of the villages or at least their former locations where Yolina went ashore and whether he even knew the names of the chiefs who hosted him during his search for Imdeduya? Tokunupei said yes and told me to write down all the place names and to bring them with me on my next visit to the Trobriands. And indeed, when I returned to the Islands three years later he could answer all my questions; sometimes he could even provide further information on places and protagonists in the myth.

Tokunupei's 'teachings' about Mokopei's recitation of the myth (not to forget Gerubara and the anonymous author of the lyrics of the Imdeduya song who started it all) opened up an important access to Trobriand eschatology. Together with Malinowski's (1916) and Baldwin's (1945) publications the two versions of the Imdeduya myth and the cycles of the '*wosi milamala*', the harvest festival songs which I collected and which describe very poetically and quite erotically the

³⁶ For information on Topileta see Malinowski 1916.

'life' of the spirits of the dead in their Tuma Island 'paradise' will allow me to document this by now moribund cultural knowledge of the Trobriand Islanders. This knowledge is inevitably superseded by the Christian understanding of eschatological matters. The documentation of Trobriand concepts of eschatology is one of my future research projects. I hope that its result may serve the basis for teaching future generations of Trobriand Islanders what their great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers and their other ancestors once thought about these last things.

The success of every fieldresearch within the social sciences completely depends on the cooperation of the people whose language, culture, behavior, social organization and cognitive style is the target of the respective research. If the people who host fieldworkers are not willing to teach them the aspects of their life in which the researchers are interested, their fieldresearch will fail. However, once fieldresearchers are accepted by the community, they have the opportunity to experience what Agar (1995: 587) in connection with ethnography has called 'rich points':

When a rich point occurs, an ethnographer learns that his or her assumptions about how the world works [...] are inadequate to understand something that happened. A gap, a distance between two worlds has just surfaced [...] [and] it is this distance between two worlds of experience that is exactly the problem that ethnographic research is designed to locate and resolve.

How this gap is located and resolved, that this work implies a continuous process of give and take, of mutual learning and teaching between fieldworkers and their hosts and consultants, and that this is one of the reasons why fieldworkers are so enthusiastic about their research – both in the field and at home in their studies – is exemplarily described in Ad Borsboom's (1996) monograph *De clan van de Wilde Honing*. We all can but hope that we may be able, or have been able, to give at least a tiny equivalent of that back to our consultants what they gave us with respect to our interests, our careers, and our lives.

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