

# The Presentation of Self in Touristic Encounters

## A Case Study from the Trobriand Islands

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**Abstract.** – Visiting the Trobriand Islands is advertized as being the highlight of a trip for tourists in Papua New Guinea who want, and can afford, to experience this “ultimate adventure” with “expeditionary cruises aboard the luxurious Melanesian Discoverer.” The advertizement also promises that the tourists can “meet the friendly people” and “observe their unique culture, dances, and art.” This paper presents an encounter of such tourists with Trobriand Islanders, who sing and dance for the Europeans in Kaibola, a village on Kiriwina Island. The texts of these songs are presented, and their analysis reveals that the Trobriand Islanders, with their indigenous humour, use this encounter for various forms of self-presentation, including ridiculing their visitors. It turns out that this encounter is another manifestation of the Trobriand Islanders’ self-consciousness and pride with which they manage to protect core aspects of their cultural identity, while at the same time using and “selling” parts of their culture as a kind of commodity to tourists. [*Trobriand Islands, tourism*]

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All the world’s a stage  
And all the men and women merely players  
They have their exits and their entrances  
Shakespeare, *As You Like It* (II/7)

### 1. Introduction

For years the Papua New Guinea Tourism Promotion Authority has proudly and rightly advertized its country as “the land of the unexpected.”<sup>1</sup> In one of its many brochures, for example, this Tourism Promotion Authority addresses its target group as follows: “For those of you who think you’ve seen the South Pacific . . . been there, done that . . . rest assured that until you have seen Papua New Guinea, “Land of the Unexpected,” you definitely have not seen it all, for this is

a land where the earth is still at peace with the sky.”<sup>2</sup> There are, indeed, many ways to see PNG, both for travellers and tourists. For the well-to-do tourists, however, “Papua New Guinea’s Ultimate Adventure” – advertized as: “Impressive! Exotic! Extraordinary!” – is certainly to participate in one of the “Expeditionary Cruises aboard the luxurious Melanesian Discoverer”<sup>3</sup> – a “cruising hotel” that “has an 800 km view that changes every day.” The owners of this ship emphasize that a “highlight” of such a cruise “is a visit to the outer islands of the Trobriand Group consisting of Kitava, Kiriwina, Kaile’una, and Kuyawa Islands.” The tourists “will meet the friendly people, observe their unique culture, dances, and art.”

The mentioning of the Trobriand Islands may ring a bell in a number of tourists interested in the South Seas in general and in Papua New Guinea in particular. As I have shown elsewhere (Senft 1995a, 1998), the Trobriand Islands are presented in popular publications as, and are thus famous for being, “The Islands of Love” – and many writers point out that the “yam harvest” there “is still enthusiastically celebrated between June and August every year. Accompanied by explicit singing (known as *mweki-mweki*) and even more explicit dancing (yam and tapioca dance), it is

1 This paper is based on 30 months of field research on the Trobriand Islands in 1982/83, 1989, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997. It especially refers to observations I made in 1993.

2 This quote can be found on page 1 of the *Papua New Guinea Tourism Promotion Authority* (n.d.).

3 This quote as well as the following one can be found in the tourist brochure: “Melanesian Discoverer. Niugini Exploration Cruises – Papua New Guinea’s Ultimate Adventure. Expeditionary Cruises aboard the luxurious Melanesian Discoverer.” In Kley (1996) prizes for a cruise that is comparable to the cruise to which this paper refers are given as follows: Cruise Madang-Alotau 8 days / 7 nights, 2 berth cabin, including meals, excursions, dances, transfers: per person 2,259 U.S. dollars. In Germany the cruise can be booked as part of a package tour departing from Frankfurt with organisations like Marco Polo, Ikarus, and Franktours. The prize for this tour with Ikarus is 8,990 DM.

one of the islands major tourist attractions" (Allen 1988: 54).

On the 8th of July, at the end of my 1993 field trip to the Trobriand Islands, the "Melanesian Discoverer" anchored in front of Tauwema, the village on Kaile'una Island that has been my place of residence on the Trobriands ever since 1982. Like the "Melanesian Explorer" which it replaced in 1989, the "Melanesian Discoverer" can carry 32 tourists. During its cruise the ship regularly anchors before the reef in front of Tauwema (every six weeks or so), and tourists visit the village for about one to two hours. The villagers usually sing and dance for the tourists in the evening aboard the ship and remain there for about 3 hours.<sup>4</sup> Almost all the tourists that visited Tauwema this time came from Germany. They had boarded the ship in Alotau, and were to visit Kitava and Kiriwina before heading for Madang. Jan Barter invited me to join the group. Together with these tourists I visited Kumwageya village on Kitava Island and the villages Kaibola and Nuwebila on Kiriwina Island. During our visit in Kaibola and Nuwebila, adolescent villagers and children sang and danced for us. In what follows I will describe the dances and present and translate the songs that accompanied them. I will then analyse this performance and show that the Trobriand Islanders, with their indigenous humour, use this encounter for various forms of self-presentation, including confusing, puzzling, and ridiculing their visitors.

## 2. A Touristic Encounter: Songs and Dances in Kaibola and Nuwebila

On the morning of the 10th of July 1993, shortly after breakfast the tourists, their guide, Jan Barter, and I are transferred by dinghy from the Melanesian Discoverer to the beach of Kaibola where a

big group of carvers is waiting for us – trying to sell the tourists their artefacts. After a 15 minutes' walk we reach the village of Kaibola.<sup>5</sup> Chief Tomdava welcomes us and accepts from Mrs. Barter the fee for the songs and dances his villagers are about to perform. In the meantime the tourists walk around, observe how the boys and girls and the young men and women dress up in the traditional Trobriand way, and then gather at the centre of the village close to the group of young men with guitars who are to accompany the dancers. After a few instructions from the dance master Venama the dancers line up for their dance. With a whistle Venama then signals the dancers to start – and the show begins.

The Kaibola people present 4 songs and dances. The first dance is a stepping dance that is performed by boys and young men who range in age from about 4 to 24 years. The dance starts with the dance master blowing the whistle and then the conch shell. The dancers are dressed in the traditional Trobriand way, i.e., they wear a loin-cloth (*mwebua*) made out of the bark of a betel palm that is fastened with a red piece of cloth. Their bodies are anointed with coconut oil and an essence made out of fragrant herbs, some of them have sprinkled their torsos with yellow leaves taken from the blossom of a certain tree. They all wear armlets made of natural fibres on their upper arms which emphasize the men's muscles. Some of the dancers also wear necklaces – the so-called *bagi* made out of the red parts of the spondylus shell –, tortoiseshell earrings (*paya*), and boars' tusks (*doga*). Moreover, some men also wear belts made of small white cowrie shells around their waists, knees, and/or ankles (*bunadoga*, *luluboda*, *kwepitapatila*). Most of these adornments mark the wealth and the status of their bearers within the highly stratified Trobriand society with its clans and subclans (see Weiner 1976: 237 f.; Senft 1996: 385 f.). The dancers leave their meeting place, start their stepping dance, and sing a song which is accompanied and structured by Venama blowing

4 I want to emphasize here that the owners of these ships, Jan and Peter Barter, who also run the Melanesian Resort Hotel in Madang, have been extremely careful from the very beginning of their tourist business activities in PNG to not influence and disturb the villages and the people they visit with tourist groups in Milne Bay, in the Highlands, and in the Sepik. I actually think the Barters have established an exemplary way to run a tourist business in a developing country. They cannot be made responsible for the strange ideas some of their customers may utter about Melanesia in general and PNG in particular – such as ideas very ironically documented in Dennis O'Rourke's film "Cannibal Tours" (1987). For further information on tourism with the Melanesian Explorer see Errington and Gewertz (1989). For an overview on tourism research see Crick (1989). For an early discussion on tourism on the Trobriands see Leach (1973).

5 Kley (1996) describes his Kaibola experience as follows: "In Kaibola fällt sofort die Eigenart der Dorfkultur ins Auge: Kreisförmig errichtete Yamshäuser, die wie kunstvoll aufgeschichtete, mit reichverzierten Giebeln und Palmstroh-dächern bedeckte Holzstöße aussehen. In den pittoresken Pfahlbauten werden Yamsknollen aufbewahrt. Anbau und Ernte dieses Hauptnahrungsmittels sind mit kultischen Handlungen, orgiastischen Tänzen und erotischen Anspielungen verbunden – immer noch ein Alptraum für christliche Missionare, die vergebens Enthaltensamkeit vor der Hochzeit und eheliche Treue predigen."

the whistle. The dancers have lined up in two rows. They are carrying sticks decorated with feathers as well as plastic and pandanus streamers. These sticks resemble paddles. The dancers are guided by a leader who indicates how the two rows of dancers are to move. They first dance in two rows – moving their sticks like paddles. Each row then separates itself from the other one, then the dancers meet in a circle, sit down, move their sticks as if they were steering paddles that are used as rudders. Then they squat, stand up, line up in two rows again, and continue their stepping dance with some additional jumps. From the beginning of the dance to its end the men move the sticks as if they were paddles and shout before and after singing the two verses *mitaga baivora* (but no, I will paddle). The dancers in the two rows then face one another, moving towards and then away from each other. During these moves they lean back as far as they can, simultaneously protruding their pelvises. Then they line up again, stride up and down, walking twice away from and then towards their audience, and finally return to their starting point.

The dance lasts for about 5 minutes. It is accompanied by the song *Taikurasi*.<sup>6</sup> *Taikurasi* is the name of both a canoe and a man from Kaibola. The song runs as follows:

<i>Taikurasi</i>	<i>Taikurasi</i>
<i>Mina Kaibola,</i>	People from Kaibola, people
<i>mina Kaibola</i>	from Kaibola,
<i>utusa miwega</i>	rise your [steering] paddles,
<i>talibita okobununa</i>	we two are fondling the front
<i>Taikurasi</i>	of <i>Taikurasi</i> .
<i>Taga baivora, taga</i>	But I will paddle, but I will
<i>baivora</i>	paddle
<i>mitaga baivora</i>	but no, I will paddle, indeed.
<i>Ekatuvisi – Rabau</i>	It comes in sight at the ho-
	rizon – [in the direction of]
	Rabaul,
<i>la kabokota sitima.</i>	the anchoring place of the
	steamer.
<i>Kalikeda beya, bekeni</i>	[The] reef-channel [is] here,
<i>beya</i>	[the] marking-posts [are]
	here,
<i>mamala beya, talia beya</i>	low tide here, high tide here,
<i>tirigogwau, tirigogwau,</i>	spring tide, spring tide,
<i>taga baivola</i>	but I will paddle.

6 The Austronesian language of the Trobriand Islanders is called Kilivila. For a grammatical description and a dictionary of this language see Senft (1986). The orthography of the Kilivila songs presented here is based on Senft (1986: 14–16). The songs often use archaic variants of Kilivila words. Moreover, the pronunciation and stress pattern of words in song texts often follow the rhythm of the music and thus differ sometimes from the pronunciation and the stress pattern of words in ordinary speech.

This song is very similar to verses that accompany a string figure (cat's cradle) my wife and I documented in 1983 (Senft und Senft 1986: 135 f.).<sup>7</sup> As already indicated in the first line the song is from and about Kaibola – and the Kaibola people may have started their performance with it to point out to their audience that they are watching the people of Kaibola. Unlike the reader of this paper the tourists listened to this and all the other songs without having a translation of the texts at hand. The Trobriand Islanders are aware of the fact that the tourists do not understand their language (the people from Kaibola were actually surprised to see me amongst the group of tourists) – and this awareness is a central aspect for one of the arguments I want to put forward with this paper. The dance – as well as the song – is certainly a proud display of the men, but first of all parts of the text and some of the dancers' movements are in their explicitness more than just sexual innuendos – although some of the Kaibola people told me – with a grin, however, – that the verses only refer to the beautiful and famous canoe, an anchoring place, and paddling . . . But – as I already pointed out – the tourists do not understand the verses of this song. Thus, despite the rather unequivocal movements of the dancers, most tourists took this first performance as a display of proud men with clear features of “native” machismo, but with an emphasis on the self-presentation of the village – Jan Barter (rightly) told them that this song was the village song of Kaibola – and that every Trobriand Islander knows this.

After this dance young girls and women of about the same age as the men join the group of dancers. They, too, wear their traditional clothes, the so-called “grass-skirts” (*doba*) that are made out of fibres of banana leaves. Some of them have decorated their faces with asymmetrical designs in red, white, and black colours which are made out of betel nuts, chalk, and charcoal. They have anointed their bodies in the same way as the boys and men and many of the dancers now wear white feathers of cockatoos in their neatly combed hair. Like the men the girls and women also wear armlets made of natural fibres on their upper arms to

7 The verses accompanying the string figure *Kaikela boala* (I will stick in his paddle) run:

<i>Mina Kaibolo, mina</i>	People from Kaibola, people
<i>Kaibolo</i>	from Kaibola,
<i>utusa mivega</i>	rise your paddles.
<i>talibita okobununa</i>	We two are fondling the front of
<i>Taikulasi</i>	<i>Taikulasi</i> .
<i>mitaga baivola kupsi</i>	But no, I want to paddle – splash.
<i>mitaga baivola kupsi</i>	But no, I want to paddle – splash.

frame their breasts – thus increasing their physical beauty. In these armllets the dancers also wear fragrant herbs. Like the boys and men, the girls and women also wear other body decorations like those already mentioned above. These preparations take about 10 minutes. Then the guitar players, who have squatted down close to the center of the village, start to sing a song while the dancers line up in three rows consisting of boys and girls, men and women. At the front of these three rows dance two men, Kabalaki (a member of the Lukwasisiga clan) and Nubava (a member of the Lukulabuta clan); they kind of frame Inumwala, a young woman from the Lukuba clan of about 22 years of age. Most of the girls and young women dance in Inumwala's row. All performers dance in their row, swaying their hips and slowly turning around. Gentle movements of the hands accompany the rhythm of the song that is, in fact, a church song (*vosi tapwaroro*). The performance of this song and dance lasts for about two and a half minutes. The verses of the sung run as follows:

<i>vosi tapwaroro</i>	Church Song
<i>Maria Maria e Maria e avaka peila kovalam</i>	Mary, oh Mary, oh Mary, why do you cry?
<i>Maria Maria e Maria e avaka peila kovalam</i>	Mary, oh Mary, oh Mary, why do you cry?
<i>eya iya ei ulu Yesu – eya iya ei ulu Yesu – eya iya ei ulu Yesu – itokaya</i>	Eya, iya, ei, my Jesus – Eya, iya, ei, my Jesus – Eya, iya, ei, my Jesus – he rose to heaven.
<i>Parisi ilukwesi tommota</i>	In the parish they say – the people:
<i>gala bukudousi osanna</i>	do not shout hosanna!
<i>Parisi ilukwesi tommota</i>	In the parish they say – the people:
<i>gala bukudousi osanna</i>	do not shout hosanna!
<i>eya iya ei ulu Yesu – eya iya ei ulu Yesu – eya iya ei ulu Yesu – itokaya</i>	Eya, iya, ei, my Jesus – Eya, iya, ei, my Jesus – Eya, iya, ei, my Jesus – he rose to heaven.
<i>Maria Maria e Maria e avaka peila kovalam</i>	Mary, oh Mary, oh Mary, why do you cry?
<i>Maria Maria e Maria e avaka peila kovalam</i>	Mary, oh Mary, oh Mary, why do you cry?
<i>eya iya ei ulu Yesu – eya iya ei ulu Yesu – eya iya ei ulu Yesu – itokaya</i>	Eya, iya, ei, my Jesus – Eya, iya, ei, my Jesus – Eya, iya, ei, my Jesus – he rose to heaven.

With this song the tourists can understand the names “Maria (= Mary), Yesu (= Jesus)” and the expression “Hosanna.” Thus it was not too difficult for them to infer that this song is a Christian hymn.

What puzzled them, however, was the obvious erotic component in the highly graceful movement of the dancers that clearly contradicted the pious tone of the song.

However, they did not have much time to wonder about this discrepancy. After a short pause another song and dance is performed. This time the dance is a mixture between a stepping dance and a dance in a row. The dancers of the two outer rows first move forward and then return back to from where they have started. Then the middle row with Inumwala as the leading dancer moves, circles around the row of the dancers at their left, and then returns back again to the position from which it had started this stepping dance part of the performance. This dance lasts for about two and a half minutes. The tourists are informed that the song is a typical local pop song that unmarried boys and girls sing and accompany with this dance in their village centre in the evenings especially at moonlit nights. The verses of this song – a *vosi gita* (song for guitars) – run as follows:

<i>E segwaya ulu biga balukemi paila bulogala</i>	Yes my friends, my speech, I will tell you, for [there are] news:
<i>ulu sisu tuta baisa saina mwau sainela</i>	my living [this] time, this [is] very hard indeed.
<i>Biga vesiya ilukwedasi</i>	[The] speech [of] their relatives, they tell us,
<i>pela bulogala</i>	for [there are] news:
<i>ulu sisu tuta baisa saina mwau sainela</i>	my living [this] time, this [is] very hard indeed.
<i>E sekwaya ulu biga balukwemi paila bulogala wosi</i>	Yes my friends, my speech, I will tell you, for [there are] news [in this] song,
<i>ulu sisu a ve yaigu saina mwau sainela</i>	my living, ah, oh [dear] me, [it is] very hard indeed.

This song is typical of the many schmalzty songs that are sung on the Trobriands and elsewhere in Papua New Guinea (Tokwebasi 1995; Webb and Niles 1996). Nevertheless, it was not the text that mattered for the tourists, but the dancers' beautiful and graceful movements – and thus the audience applauded appropriately.

After a short pause of about three minutes the guitar players start with the last song and dance to be performed in Kaibola. The dance is again a stepping and row dance. The dancers have gathered in three rows again, and they move slightly forwards, backwards, and sideways, while they are slowly turning around. The dance and the song last for about 3 minutes. The text and

the music of this *vosi gita* was composed by the guitar players of Kavataria village. The verses run as follows:

(1)  
*lubaigu lubaigu* My friend, my friend,  
*bigatona bwekwanela* [the] speech [was] lovely,  
*ilagoki kwaitala* but [there is] only one thing:  
*migim gala agisi* your face – I do not see [it  
 any more].

[(1) is repeated twice]

(2)  
*igaisi vili* she sees [the] place,  
*igisi vilaigu* she sees me, indeed.  
*adoku yegu* I think [of] you,  
*pela yoki lubaigu* because you are my friend.

(3)  
*Akaulo buki* I take the book,  
*aulaim kekobuda,* I open it, the photo of us.  
*adoki mokwita* I think – really –  
*okusividulaigu* you are staying with me.

(4)  
*Amokaya gala okwa* I see nothing, [it is] empty,  
*amokaya sopaokwa* I see [the] illusion is gone.  
*mavilamla goki* I cried only,  
*bwena bauvalamu* good, I will keep on crying.

(5)  
*A ga makwewela* Ah, nothing [more of] those  
 things.  
*vi goki dosilagi* Girl, only our hearing [= girl,  
 we only hear]:  
*lubaigu dataloi* my friend, one [has to] say  
 good-bye,  
*kayoni kayoni* farewell, farewell!

[(5) is repeated once, then (3) is repeated twice, then (4) is repeated once, and finally the last two lines of (4) are repeated once]

With this sentimental love song – and its appropriate “farewell” lines (in (5)) – the performance of the Kaibola people comes to an end. After a final applause and some last snapshots, Jan Barter guides the tourists to Nuwebila, a village northwest of Kaibola.

After a walk of about 10 minutes the group of *dimdim* – as the Trobriand Islanders refer to white people – reaches Nuwebila and chief Mokilavala bids them his welcome. After he has accepted from Mrs. Barter the fee for the songs and dances his villagers are about to perform, a group of young men – all wearing their traditional dresses with their various decorations – slowly gathers at one end of the village. All dancers have a pandanus leaf in their hands. After a sign of the dance master Kalumokayola the men move forward towards the

centre of the village. The dancers have formed two rows led by Toilo’umgwa and Mwano’u (both are members of the Lukulabuta clan). All of them let the pandanus leaves tremble in their hands. The tourists do not know that this play with the pandanus leaf is meant to indicate the swiftness, alertness, and smoothness of the indefatigable dancers. Moreover, the tourists do not know, either, that the rather wild stepping and row dance with some occasional jumps and side-turns is the dance the cricket team “Tomorokata” dances when in the Trobriand version of cricket (see Leach 1976) the ball hits the wicket and the batsman is out. The dance is accompanied by a song that can be compared to the cheers of football fans (though in this case it is the players themselves who produce the cheers). The song praises the quality of the team and derides the opponents. It claims that the chances to win against this team are comparable to the chances of a sea eagle to catch the small swift lungfish and that the players of this swift and smart team have the power to even “shoot” teams that may regard themselves as being the “eagles” of cricket. Before, during, and after singing the song, the dancers (or cricket players) shout “hei, hei, hei,” they groan and moan, and whistles set the rhythm of the dance. When they reach the centre of the village, the two rows of dancers face each other. They move to and fro, towards and away from each other – and whenever they meet, the dancers take up their pandanus leaves, lean back, protrude their pelvises, and move away from each other again. During the dance one of the dancers – Togayoni (Tolukuba clan) occupies a location between the two rows in the middle, announces further stanzas, and then goes back into his row. At the appropriate part of the dance – i.e., when the singers mention the white sea eagle – the dancers put down their pandanus leaves, the two rows separate and, in a squatting position, the dancers move their arms like wings and jump in line towards each other. The dance and the singing of the song, the *vosi gilikiti* (cricket song) called *vinavina* (= mocking song [of]) Tomorokata (the name of the cricket team) lasts for about 7 minutes. The verses of the *vinavina* are as follows:

*Ulu mwasawa Tomorokata* Our game Tomorokata:  
*Tuada Moki kwarewagegu* Our older brother Moki, tell  
 me what to do.  
*bavabusi Dukubava* I will walk down to the  
 beach Dukubava.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> This is the name of a beach close to Kaibola.

<i>batodeli o kwadeva</i>	I will walk in line at the beach.	<i>kara mbeya kau be miti-korona</i>	Like [this it is] here: [all have] blind red eyes. <sup>11</sup>
<i>edoyesa wagela Katusodia</i>	They sail the canoe Katusodia.	<i>basukweuya</i>	I will stagger around,
<i>ulu mwasawa Tomorokata</i>	Our game Tomorokata,	<i>basukweuya</i>	I will stagger around.
<i>bamwasawa Tomorokata</i>	I will play Tomorokata.	<i>uhu uhu kavala pwado-kwau</i>	uhu uhu – the speech of a Pwadokwau <sup>12</sup>
<i>Tuada Moki</i>	Our older brother Moki,	<i>hi hi hi</i>	hi hi hi.
<i>ulo mwasawa Tomorokata</i>	our game Tomorokata –	<i>aha ha e hu agu salau</i>	Aha ha e hu – my smart
<i>hi hi hi hi</i>	hi hi hi hi.	<i>agu salau</i>	busy work, my smart busy
<i>bamwasawa Tomorokata</i>	I will play Tomorokata.	<i>agu salau agu salau</i>	work,
<i>bila kabuito'ula</i>	It will go [like this]: one starts.	<i>agu salau agu salau</i>	my smart busy work, my smart busy work,
<i>remanegu mwanamanegu</i>	My love, my desire [is that]	<i>bamwasawa Tomorokata</i>	I will play Tomorokata;
<i>lepayapaya o wikipiti</i>	it resounds at the wicket.	<i>bamwasawa Tomorokata</i>	I will play Tomorokata.
<i>ulo mwasawa Tomorokata</i>	My game Tomorokata.		
<i>Yauvada kwamwanegu</i>	Father in law, you make me feel happy,		
<i>bamwasawa Tomorokata</i>	I will play Tomorokata,		
<i>repayapaya o wikipiti</i>	it resounds at the wicket.		
<i>Tombweligu Tomorokata</i>	My beloved Tomorokata –		
<i>su su su</i>	su su su –		
<i>repayapaya o wikipiti</i>	it resounds at the wicket.		
<i>Isabwena repiso</i>	Very good – it flashes,		
<i>ketotosi bomatu</i>	the torch in the north, <sup>9</sup>		
<i>kepipisi kepiiso</i>	it keeps on flashing.		
<i>Ave mauna yokwa</i>	What animal are you?		
<i>yegu munuveaka</i>	I am a white sea eagle.		
<i>revegu va lusa Kavabwela</i>	He shoot me with the gun, [he] Kavabwela <sup>10</sup>		
<i>bakoyoba</i>	I will slowly decline to the ground, dying;		
<i>bakoyoba</i>	I will slowly decline to the ground, dying;		
<i>bakoyobe</i>	I will slowly decline to the ground, dying;		
<i>bakoyo</i>	I will slowly decline to the ground, dying.		
<i>Isakoyogwe isakeyogu</i>	It comes down, it comes down to me;		
<i>isakweyobe</i>	it will slowly decline to the ground, dying;		
<i>isakweyoba</i>	it will slowly decline to the ground, dying;		
<i>isakweyoba</i>	it will slowly decline to the ground, dying.		

This dance is certainly a unique display of Trobriand machismo and male pride – but even this dance is going to be surpassed by the next and last presentation of the young men of Nuwebila. They dance the so-called *tapiokwa*- or *mweki*-dance.<sup>13</sup> On the Trobriands this dance is performed by bachelors (and sometimes also unmarried young women) during and after the men carrying the yam-tubers from the gardens to the village where the tubers are piled up again in conical heaps in front of the small and big yam-houses (*bwema* and *liku*). The young men of Nuwebila gather again in the background of their village. They once more form two rows and on the sign of the dance master start to whistle, shout, groan, and moan. They are standing with their legs far apart, they are leaning back and then move their pelvises back and forth and clap with their hands on their buttocks to emphasize the force of their forward pushing pelvis movements. Then they start stepping forward, pause once more, get instructions by their dance master and move forward, towards, and away from each other till they reach the village center. There they remain standing in two rows, and with the pelvis movements and the hand clappings, they slowly turn round on their respective spots. With the rhythm of the whistle and the moaning and groaning of the performers the dance is accompanied by songs with rather blunt sexual allusions. At the end of the dance that lasts for about 4 minutes the two rows start walking again, turn round, and return to the place from where they have started. The five stanzas

9 This refers to a fire signal for ships in the north of Kaibola.  
10 "Kavabwela" is the name of a man from Yuvada village southeast of Kaibola, but still on the northern tip of Kiriwina Island. He was a famous member of the Tomorokata cricket team.

11 This refers to the fact that they are sick with conjunctivitis – like small children.

12 "Pwadokwau" is the name of a small swift lungfish.

13 The verbal expression *-mweki* translates as "to move to and fro, up and down."

of the *mweki*-song that accompanied this dance run as follows (– again please remember that the tourists as well as their guide cannot understand Kilivila):

(1)  
*Adoki ravakaka* I think I stand on the tip of  
 my toes,  
*bogwa lebanegu* already she found me,  
*suvi tapiokwa* go inside Tapioca,<sup>14</sup>  
*mweki mweki mweki* move to and fro, to and fro,  
 to and fro.

(2)  
*Remamata kuvaligu* It wakes up my hip,  
*mweki mweki mweki* move to and fro, to and fro,  
 to and fro,  
*mweki mweki mweki* move to and fro, to and fro,  
 to and fro,  
*su su su* su su su.

(3)  
*Numwaya tomwaya* Old woman, old man,  
*ikatusolia o kwakwa'i* he is on top of the woman  
 lying down in the  
 direction where the legs point  
 to when they sleep,  
*kavara kaidomesi* he says they fuck very fast  
*o la bwala* in the house,  
*kwemorokata kwemoro-* Kwemorokata-cunt, Kwemo-  
*kata* rokata-cunt,  
*hi hi hi* hi, hi, hi.

(4)  
*Iwai yagila bulubwelima* It starts, the wind, the South-  
 Easterly,<sup>15</sup>  
*baikuiuku nupisi beya* I will caress the full beautiful  
 breasts here,  
*nupisi beya akeya vila* the full beautiful breasts here,  
 I fuck cunts.

(5)  
*Iutu beya akeya vila* It pokes inside, I fuck cunts,  
*nupisivau iutu beya ake-* new full beautiful breasts, it  
*ya vila* pokes inside here,  
 I fuck cunts,  
*ipaisewa nupisivau ake-* it works, new full beautiful  
*ya vila* breasts,  
 I fuck cunts.

After the (rather phallic) presentation of this dance the show for the tourists is over. Some of the villagers offer their visitors more artefacts, and many artists wanting to sell their carvings accompany the tourists on their way back to the shore, where they are picked up by dinghies and transferred back to the Melanesian Discoverer

anchoring in front of the reef. The songs and dances certainly had satisfied the tourists' "desire for the exotic" (see Jebens 1989: 89) – as I could easily infer from the comments of my fellow countryman. They all regarded this performance as the highlight of their trip so far. However, I do not want to report (and comment on) their comments about what they had experienced in Kaibola and Nuwebila here. In what follows I want to analyse this encounter of Trobriand Islanders with visiting tourists, and I will try to answer the question, "What is it that's going on here?" (Goffman 1974: 8)?

### 3. "What Does It All Mean?"<sup>16</sup>

In his classic study "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" Erving Goffman analyses the structures of social encounters from the perspective of the dramatic performance. This approach seems to thrust itself on anyone who wants to analyse the encounter between tourists and Trobriand Islanders described above, and thus in what follows I will try to use some of Goffman's ideas in my analysis of this interaction.

However, before I can start with this analysis we need a few definitions of some basic concepts that are relevant for the purposes pursued here. Goffman (1978: 26 f.) defines some of the concepts that are basic for his approach as follows:

An interaction may be defined as all the interaction which occurs throughout any one occasion when a given set of individuals are in one another's continuous presence; the term "an encounter" would do as well. A "performance" may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. Taking a particular participant and his performance as a basic point of reference, we may refer to those who contribute the other performances as the audience, observers, or co-participants. The pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance and which may be presented or played through on other occasions may be called a "part" or "routine."

Tourists visiting villages and villagers on the Trobriand Islands (or elsewhere) certainly find themselves in an "encounter" situation. In the case that is of interest here, this situation is rather clearly defined. Tourists that can afford to visit the

14 Here *tapiokwa* is a kind of "nickname" for "penis."

15 Mentioning the South-Easterly hints at the beginning of the *milamala*-period.

16 See: "The Adventures of Phoebe Zeit-Geist," written by Michael O'Donoghue, drawn by Frank Springer, Episode II – "Signs of Torment."

Trobrianders on board the Melanesian Discoverer are well-to-do; they usually are on an organized tour and get good ethnographic background information if not by their tour guide then by Mrs. Barter or another representative of the Barters' company. Moreover, the excellent library on board the Melanesian Discoverer offers the interested tourist much information on Papua New Guinea, its peoples, and their cultures. This information is not only available in printed form, there is also a good collection of videotapes that present and document aspects of life in PNG. The glossy pictures of Trobriand Islanders in their traditional dresses printed in brochures of the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority or in the "Paradise" inflight magazines of Air Niugini, films like Jerry Leach's "Trobriand Cricket," Malinowski's classic monographs, of course, and – last but not least – the immortal "South Seas myth"<sup>17</sup> evoke certain expectations in the tourists. All this is general knowledge on the Trobrianders, because a number of Trobriand Islanders work on board the ship and/or in Madang at the Melanesian Resort Hotel and usually spend their vacations in their villages on the Trobriand Islands. As already mentioned the Trobrianders get some money for allowing the tourists to visit their villages and for their singing and dancing during these visits – and they certainly do not want to disappoint the tourists in their expectations or to fall short of them. It is the traditional life, the ritual, the special occasions in the life of the visited people the tourists are interested in<sup>18</sup> – and this is something the tourist industry as well as the people visited know and – both – offer and are willing to sell. All parties involved in such an encounter are aware of the fact that this is a commercialized enterprise (it is another question, of course, whether the tourists are really willing to remember this fact during the actual encounter). Thus, we could define the roles of the parties involved in this encounter as follows: The tourists are the customers that buy "traditional, exotic culture," the tourist organization – in our

case the representative of the Melanesian Discoverer – acts as mediator or mediatrix for this deal, selling and buying the expected "exoticism" at one and the same time,<sup>19</sup> and the Trobriand Islanders, finally, sell (aspects of) their traditional culture and the expected images. Thus, the Trobriand Islanders perform the expected "culture" by playing their part for the tourists that act as their audience or their observers.

Within the framework of Goffman's approach to analyse the structures of social encounters the following observation is crucial for an audience:

Once the audience has been admitted to a performance, the necessity of being tactful does not cease. We find that there is an elaborate etiquette by which individuals guide themselves in their capacity as members of the audience. This involves the giving of a proper amount of attention and interest; a willingness to hold in check one's own performance so as not to introduce too many contradictions, interruptions, or demands for attention; the inhibition of all acts or statements that might create a faux pas; the desire, above all else, to avoid a scene. (Goffman 1978: 224)

The tourists in Kaibola and Nuwebila are indeed completely "framed" – if I may allude to another great concept of Goffman's – in their role and position as audience. Before they are actually assigned the role of audience for the performance the villagers will stage for them, they are first of all curious visitors of a foreign culture that they experience in a village full of people they do not know and do not understand at all.<sup>20</sup> They come to the village, taking it for granted that the villagers and their tour organizers have negotiated that they as tourists are allowed to visit and to film and photograph the people and their material culture. Nevertheless, – if they do not (want to) behave like a bull in a china shop<sup>21</sup> – they experience (again) the strange and for some of them certainly embarrassing situation of a personal encounter where they cannot address their vis-a-vis verbally. To avoid such potential embarrassing situations of face-to-face interactions with the people visited, many tourists just stay and walk around with their tour guide or the tour organizer and, if in doubt, ask them for the behavioural appropriateness of

17 For an analysis of such expectations and the role of the "South Sea myth" see Fischer (1984). See also Senft (1995a, 1998).

18 Compare Errington and Gewertz (1989: 42) who report that "the principal lament of those travelers who found aspects of their trip disappointing was that the people had become spoiled. The social relationships between travelers and native people had become, like those in the West, essentially commercialized. The 'primitives' they had expected to engage with had, in other words, become too much like us." Compare also the role of tourism for the history of the Asaro Mudmen in Otto and Verloop (1996).

19 It goes without saying that the middleman invests but also makes more money in this deal than the Trobriand "culture sellers."

20 But note that within Goffman's (1978) framework they are in the position of "the audience" from the very beginning (till the end) of this touristic encounter.

21 Unfortunately I have experienced many such tourists on the Trobriand Islands.

what they want to do, like, for example, of where they may go in the village and of whom and what they may photograph and film there. During the phase in which the villagers prepare for the performing of their songs and dances, the tourists get some information from their tour guide about the places from where they may best watch (and film and photograph) the singers and dancers. It is at this point, at the latest, that the tourists consciously take over the role of an audience (in the general meaning of the term).<sup>22</sup> The “necessity of being tactful” becomes even more important now, and they (in general<sup>23</sup>) show the “proper amount of attention and interest.” Even if some aspects of what they see during this performance may violate their “rules of politeness and decorum” (Goffman 1978: 231),<sup>24</sup> they nevertheless try hard to “not . . . introduce . . . interruptions” and “to avoid a scene.” However, at least in the case that is of interest here, this behaviour may also be the result of the fact that the tourists’ curiosity and “desire for the exotic” implies the license for the performers to violate “rules of politeness and decorum” that are valid in the tourists’ own societies. It is certainly an important aspect of what is referred to as “the exotic experience” that it includes – and thus expects – even shocking features.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, we should not forget that we are dealing here not only with a staged action, but also with an action staged by performers who are aware of the expectations of their audience (but I will come back to this point

below). So far to the audience and its situation in this encounter. Now what about the performers?

The Trobriand Islanders in this touristic encounter situation certainly are “a team of performers who cooperate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation” (Goffman 1978: 231). They have “many motives for trying to control the impression” their audience receives of this situation (26), and for this end they have developed what Goffman (203) calls “arts of impression management.”

That the performers act as a team is emphasized by the fact that on the one hand both the musicians and the dancers dress up for their performance – final touches that are relevant for this dressing up of the actors are made under the eyes of their audience – and that on the other hand the performers’ actions are coordinated by the dance masters of the two villages who act – so to speak “on stage” – as “masters of ceremony” or directors, ordering the routines or parts of the performance and synchronizing the preestablished pattern of the action unfolded.

The parts of the performance presented in the two villages visited by the tourists seem to follow an inherent structure, indeed, although two teams of performers are involved in it. The overall performance consists of 6 songs and dances.

The first dance is danced by boys and young men. Although the tourists cannot understand the text of the dance-accompanying song, the dancers manage – especially with their pelvis movements – to convey the sexual allusions to their audience. As mentioned above, this first part of the performance can be regarded as an expression of local pride and as a display of proud men with clear features of “native” machismo.

After this first “wild” and “exotic” introduction the second song and dance must puzzle the tourists. With respect to the song they can understand the expression “Hosanna” and the names of Mary and Jesus (as I already mentioned above) and thus rightly infer that this is a local Christian hymn; however, the fact that this dance is performed by men and women whose highly graceful, beautiful, and smooth movements certainly add an obviously erotic component to this part clearly contradicts the pious tone of the song.

The last two parts of the performance in Kai-bola, that is the next two dances that accompany the schmaltzy local pop songs, certainly elaborate on this erotic component of the impression the performers want to transmit to their audience. The dancers “on stage” very “professionally” manage to emphasize the beauty of the exotic. And Mrs.

22 Even most of those tourists that did not feel or show any signs of embarrassment in this visiting situation in the village (that is to say, the people who really behaved like bulls in a china shop) realize at this point that they are expected to behave according to the rules presented in the quote from Goffman (1978: 224) given above.

23 This restriction is – indeed – necessary. In similar such situations my wife and I have experienced tourists that were not at all interested in the village they visited, nor in the villagers, nor in the performances the latter staged for them, but were, for example, highly engaged in a controversial discussion about the problem of dogs and their faeces in Berlin or were exchanging recipes for preparing vegetable and chicken soups.

24 See also Goffman (1978: 237): “Reports by Western travellers are filled with instances in which their dramaturgical sense was offended or surprised.”

25 *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* defines “exotic” not only as “introduced from another country,” but also as “outlandish, alien” and as “strikingly or excitingly different or unusual.” In *Roget's Thesaurus* we find “exotic” listed under “59 Extraneousness” together with adjectives like “foreign, alien, strange, outlandish, barbarian, exceptional, unusual, abnormal” and under “84 Unconformity” together with adjectives like “awkward, unconventional, aberrant, disagreeing, special, bizarre, curious, odd, queer, abnormal, anomalous.”

Barter's additional information to the tourists that the Trobriand Islanders generally sing and dance like this in moonlit nights – especially during the *milamala*, the period of the harvest festival that is characterized by conviviality, flirtation, and amorous adventures<sup>26</sup> – an information which is (thus) also highlighted in almost every information brochure for tourists interested in the Trobriands – certainly invoke in the audience many of the erotic phantasies that go with the Western myth of the South Seas.

After these three elaborate erotic parts of the performance the audience is “granted” a break. Their walk to Nuwebila fills the pause within this overall performance of staged aspects of Trobriand culture.

In Nuwebila the last two parts of the song and dance performance is staged again by male dancers only. The tourists and their guides do not know that the first dance Tomorokata is the dance of the cricket team with the same name. As mentioned above, the cultural context in which this song and dance is performed is clearly defined – when a player has managed to hit the wicket and the batsman of the opposing team is out, the members of the Tomorokata team perform this song and dance to ridicule their opponents. The clear phallic display that goes with this dance is not only a demonstration of native “machismo” and male pride; it is also an act of male imposing behaviour that uses a kind of “phallic threatening” (see Devereux 1981; Eibl-Eibesfeldt und Wickler 1968; Morris 1981: 198 ff.) to impress the team's opponents in the cricket match. Thus, with this dance the performers change the scene completely – after the previous three dances with their soft erotic atmosphere the dancers resume the topic immanent in the sexual allusions within the very first dance, elaborate on it and create and develop a scene of rather explicit and quite aggressive sexual display.

The final *tapiokwa*- or *mweki*-dance and the song that accompanies it even surpasses the previous part of the performance and constitutes the climax of the Trobrianders' show for the tourists. The sexual display with this dance is unequivocal, and the verses of the song that accompany this phallic dance can hardly be exceeded with respect to their sexual explicitness.

I will briefly summarize the structure of this performance with an (admittedly ethnocentric but

quite stunning and at least for me rather convincing) analogy to the structure of a drama (see Tennyson 1967: 24 f.) – that remains within the framework of Goffman's approach for analysing the structure of social encounters:

- The first part of the performance could be compared to the “introduction,” the “exposition,” the “protasis” of a play and thus would constitute Act I of our “drama” on the Trobriand stage.
- The second, third, and fourth part of the performance could be compared with what is called the “complication” or the “situation” of a play. Here, the second and third part would constitute the “epitasis,” the “development” or “rising action,” and the fourth part (with its verbally explicit “farewell” to the audience) would constitute the “catastasis,” the “height” or “crisis” of the play. These three parts would constitute Act II of our “drama.”
- The pause and the audience's change of place could be compared to the importance of the “Second Act Curtain” in modern drama theory.
- Finally, the fifth and sixth part of the performance could be compared to the “resolution,” the “dénouement,” the “catastrophe” of a play. These two parts then would constitute Act III of our “drama.”

So far to the structure of the “encounter” that is staged by the Trobriand team of performers for their Western tourist audience. Now what about the motives of the performers and their “arts of impression management” (Goffman 1978: 203 ff.) with which they try to control the impression their audience receives of this situation?

As mentioned above the Trobriand Islanders are aware, and know of, the tourists expectations and the connotations their name and culture has for these short-term visitors. The “wild,” the exotic, and the erotic is expected – and the “natives” keep their “customers” satisfied. They sell aspects of their culture, commercializing their rituals, their games, their songs, and dances and with it parts of their identity, their beauty, their eroticism, and even aspects of their sexual behaviour.<sup>27</sup> However, they are always completely aware of the fact that

27 That this is also true for other cultures in the South Seas see, for example, the quote from a Maori song in Ngahua Te Awekotuku (1980: 158):  
Maori maiden, oh  
how beautiful you are.  
Watching you now  
are the Pakehas.  
So make your hips move ...  
So make your hips move ...

26 For a description of the *milamala* festival see Senft (1996: 385–388).

they are “performing” for an audience – and that the performed actions are, of course, “staged” out of their actual cultural context. This is an important aspect for the “arts of impression management” the Trobrianders employ during this kind of touristic encounter. In his characterization of “performers” Goffman (1978: 231) emphasizes among other things that they have to have “assumptions concerning the ethos that is to be maintained by rules of politeness and decorum.” However, the fact that Western “rules of politeness and decorum” are violated by the Trobriand Islanders in the first and in the last two parts of their performance is central for the performers’ impression management. Besides all their pride with which they display their beauty, their power, and their aesthetics – especially in the second, third, and fourth part of their performance – the Trobrianders use this moment of conscious violation of foreign conventions and rules of politeness and decorum for selling their customers in this staged “illusion” the expected images of the “... Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia” (Malinowski 1929). With this conscious realization of the part they as performers play in this encounter, the Trobriand Islanders are in a position that is superior to that of their audience. Their “merchandise” or “commodity” is “not real,” because it is sold “out of its true cultural context,” it is staged – and thus cannot be taken by any customer whatsoever because it (re)presents just an “illusion.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, the Trobriand Islanders know that neither they nor the core aspects of their culture will suffer any damage within a touristic encounter that they define by the structure and the kind of their performance anyhow. On the contrary, their pride and self-confidence enables them to bring their superior position into play in their deal with the tourists.

Another advantage the Trobrianders as performers have is that they know that neither the tourists nor their guide(s) will have any competence in Kilivila. It was again Goffman (1974: 363) who emphasized that “Language competence involves the ability to closely assess the formality and delicacy of a scene or setting and to censor . . . language from minute to minute accordingly.” If an audience does not have this language competence, it is unable to do all this. Therefore, there is no need for the performers to control or even to censor

their language. Thus, the Trobriand performers can exploit this language barrier situation to make fun of, and even to tease and ridicule, their visitors verbally. And this is exactly what happens if we look at the first and especially at the last two songs they present in this touristic encounter: Sexual allusions in the first song followed by the puzzling and quite contradictory presentation of a Christian hymn that goes together with a rather erotic dance are presented to make the audience feel somewhat insecure; male pride and self-consciousness is transmitted by the cricket team’s song and dance to ridicule their opponents – it is both verbally and nonverbally a display of the performers’ power and fitness that – usually – highly contrasts with the fitness and the appearance (especially) of the (male) members in the audience; and the obscene verses of the final *mweki*-song are a direct affront to, and an outspoken aggressive verbal insult of the audience.<sup>29</sup> This last song belongs to a category of songs that are called *vinavina*, they are mocking and ridiculing songs and they develop on an important concept of the Kilivila language and its speakers, namely the concept of the *biga sopa*. *Biga sopa* can be glossed as the “joking or lying language,” the “indirect language”; it is highly characteristic for Trobriand discourse and communication. If hearers signal that they may be insulted by a certain speech act, speakers can always recede from what they have said by labelling it as *sopa*, as something they did not really mean to say. Thus this concept provides a forum where speakers can test out playfully how far they can go in their mutual interactions (see Senft 1986: 125; 1991; 1995b: 219 f.). Trobrianders just love to engage in verbal fights and to compose and invent mocking and ridiculing songs that target real people and real events – and it is an important feature of their indigenous humour (see Senft 1985a, 1985b). The better the repartee to a verbal aggression, the better the interaction between two mock-fighting parties. If one party cannot come up with an adequate repartee any more, this party has lost the mock-fight. This indigenous concept of humour is superimposed on the performance that stages “Trobriand culture.” With the last song the Trobriand performers verbally insult their audience and challenge them into a verbal mock-fight. The audience, however, has no language competence in Kilivila and, therefore, no chance to come up

28 This is also true for the Trobrianders themselves, if we argue that they are actually staging themselves as “Trobriand characters,” because, as Goffman (1978: 246) pointed out, a “character staged . . . is not in some ways real. . .” See also Crick (1989: 336).

29 . . . which surpasses almost all similar instances of insulting audiences so popular in European theatre performances at the end of the 60s and in the early 70s; see, e.g., Handke 1966.

with an adequate repartee – and thus no chance to even engage in, or to win, this mock-fighting contest. The Trobrianders have structured their performance in such a way that the tourists as their audience are doomed to leave their village as the losers.

#### 4. In Lieu of Concluding Remarks

“The claim that all the world’s a stage is sufficiently commonplace for readers to be familiar with its limitations and tolerant of its presentation, knowing that at any time they will easily be able to demonstrate to themselves that it is not to be taken too seriously. An action staged in a theatre is a relative contrived illusion and an admitted one.” (Goffman 1978: 246).

“Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas”  
(Ecclesiastes 1.2).

I want to thank the German Research Society and the Max-Planck-Society for their support in realizing my field research. I also thank the National and Provincial Governments in Papua New Guinea, the Institute for PNG Studies, and the National Research Institute for their assistance with, and permission for, my research projects. I 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. Finally, I thank Jan Barter for her invitation to visit Kitava Island and Kaibola with the Melanesian Discoverer and for her generous hospitality on board the ship.

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