



## *Bomiyoyeva and bomduvadova*

### Two Rare Structures on the Trobriand Islands Exclusively Reserved for Tabalu Chiefs

Fred Gerrits, Gunter Senft, and Désirée Wisse

**Abstract.** – This article presents information about two so far undescribed buildings made by the Trobriand Islanders, the *bomiyoyeva* and the *bomduvadova*. These structures are connected to the highest-ranking chiefs living in Labai and Omarakana on Kiriwina Island. They highlight the power and eminence of these chiefs. After a brief report on the history of this project, the structure of the two houses, their function, and their use is described and information on their construction and their mythical background is provided. Finally, everyday as well as ritual, social, and political functions of both buildings are discussed. [*Melanesia, Trobriand Islands, Tabalu chiefs, yams houses, bomiyoyeva, bomduvadova, authoritative capacities*]

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### 1 Introduction

The Trobriand Islands are well known within anthropological studies on the social structure of ethnical groups in the Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea for their specific form of hierarchy and chieftainship.<sup>1</sup> Less discussed in these studies are various objects and constructions connected to, and expressing, a chief’s position. Some of the most eye-catching and prominent representations of rank in the village centre are the structures of various kinds like the decorated yam houses (*liku*) of the highest ranking chiefs of the Malasi clan and the houses of these chiefs. This article focuses on two specific buildings connected to the highest-ranking subclan of the Malasi clan, the Tabalu of the villages Labai and Omarakana, the so-called *bomiyoyeva* and *bomduvadova*.<sup>2</sup> Only one of these structures, the *bomiyoyeva*, was mentioned before in an M. S. thesis of

1 Malinowski (1922, 1935), Bradfield (1964), Brunton (1975), Weiner (1976, 1988), Powell (1957, 1960, 1969). – Note also that in 2009 Mark Mosko started a project on “Chieftainship and Social Change in the Trobriand Islands” which is funded by the Australian Research Council.

2 The orthography of Kilivila is based on Senft (1986: 14 ff.).

an American architect (Costigan 1995).<sup>3</sup> The article is based on observations made and on photographs and data collected by Fred Gerrits, who was a Government medical officer in the Trobriands from 1968 to 1971 and on extensive follow-up field research conducted in 2012 by Gunter Senft. The article was written in close cooperation with Désirée Wisse<sup>4</sup> who has been involved with this project since 2009, when she introduced Fred Gerrits to Gunter Senft.

During his medical patrols between 1968 and 1971, Gerrits visited Kaile’una Island and its main village Kaduwaga on several occasions (see Fig. K1). During these visits, the medical officer and his staff worked in a small building which was conveniently located in the centre of the village, close to the main yam house of chief Katubai<sup>5</sup> (see Figs. K1, K2, K3, K4). The construction and decoration of this small building was unlike any other that Gerrits had ever seen before (see Figs. K1, K4, K5, K6, K11, K12). During an overnight stay in Kaduwaga in 1971 he had the opportunity to obtain extensive information about it. People told him that this house was called a *bomiyoyeva* and provided him with details of its history, construction, and functions. Shortly after, Gerrits visited the village of Labai on Kiriwina Island and documented

another house, which he assumed to be a variant of a *bomiyoyeva*.

During the following years, Gerrits tried in vain to find more information about this construction in the literature. However, in 2009 Gerrits’ friend, Chris Davenport, a Scottish architect, drew his attention to a 1995 M. S. thesis by the architect K. R. Costigan with the title “The Patterns of Structures in the Trobriand Islands” which mentions a *bomiyoyeva*. Unfortunately, Gerrits’ repeated efforts to contact Costigan remained unsuccessful. He then discussed his data with Désirée Wisse.

Wisse had not seen such a yam house before, but she managed to get hold of a copy of Costigan’s thesis in which he describes among other structures 5 different styles of yam houses found on Kiriwina Island. One of these was called a *bomiyoyeva* and is described as “a yam store featuring a single post supporting a rotating roof.” Unfortunately, Costigan never saw an example of this yam store causing him to write: “The sketch of the *bomiyoyeva* ... is based on a verbal description. The device – the roof of which is reported to rotate in the wind – belongs to the Tabalu subclan of Labai village and the Tabalu of Omarakana. No example of this structure has been built for many years and information on the post socket detail was not available” (Costigan 1995: 61)

As Gerrits’ photos show, the house described and sketched by Costigan is slightly different from the *bomiyoyeva* documented by Gerrits. Gunter Senft who did field research during 16 long- and short-term fieldtrips to the Trobriand Islands between 1982 and 2012 followed up the case of the *bomiyoyeva* during his last trip to Tauwema, the neighbouring village of Kaduwaga on Kaile’una Island. Tauwema was Senft’s place of residence during his field research over the years.

3 With the exception of Costigan’s 1995 thesis we were unable to find any mention of the *bomiyoyeva* or of the *bomduvadova* in the publications of Malinowski or anywhere else in the literature. However, Senft was able to photograph a *bomiyoyeva* in Omarakana in 1996 and another *bomiyoyeva* was built at Pulayasi Terminal on Kiriwina Airport in 1998/1999 (see below).

4 She contacted Gerrits while working on the decorated Trobriand and yam-house held by the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam which Gerrits had acquired for the museum. She wrote her M. A. (Wisse 2006) on Trobriand yam houses.

5 Katubai’s second name was Tokumakesa.

c. The [rare] special display yam-store called *bomiyoyewa* is located on the *bukubaku* and is comprised of a single post supporting a rotating roof embellished with elaborate decoration [*bomlelai*].

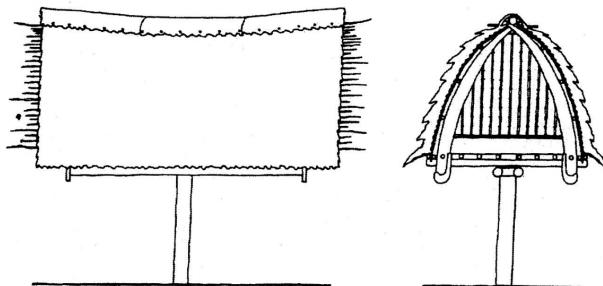


Fig. 24. Conjectural illustration of a single-posted yam-store [*bomiyoyewa*]. [Scale, 1:50]

Fig. 1: Sketch of a *bomiyoyeva* (Costigan 1995: 56); *bukubaku* = village square (G. S.).



**Fig. K1:** View of Chief Katubai's *bomiyoyeva* in the center (*baku*) of Kaduwaga village. Two horizontal boards (*tataba*) decorate the plaited front (*ninwa*). At the right is Katubai's main yam-house (*liku*) (Kaduwaga, Kaileu'na Island, 1971).



**Fig. K2:** Right frontal view of the *bomiyoyeva*. Note the large single central post (*kokola bwala*) which supports the horizontal canoe-shaped beam (*waga*) on which the entire loft (*tatom*) consisting of the roof (*katua*) and the floor (*bomakau*) rests.



**Fig. K3:** Right rear view. There are floors at 2 levels: a lower platform (*kebila*) and the floor (*bomakau*) of the loft (*tatom*). The horizontal beam (*waga*), the upper floor (*bomakau*) as well as the roof (*katua*) rest on the central post (*kokola bwala*). Four thin vertical sticks (*kainubiluma*) placed near the corners stabilize the loft. The roof shows ornamental sticks (*kaduguwaya*) attached to the ridgepole.



**Fig. K4:** Left rear side view, showing the decorated side of the horizontal beam (*waga*) and its rear canoe-prow with a carved tip (*pusa*), a transverse canoe-board (*lagim*) and a very unusual sagittal canoe-board (*tabuya*). At the left one of the two outriggers of the canoe supporting the upper floor (*bomakau*) of the loft (*tatom*).



**Fig. K5:** Right rear side view. The horizontal beam (*waga*) is supported by the square central post (*kokola bwala*). The *waga* shows carved decorations (*tarapapa*) over its full length. The only access (*kaukweda*) to the loft (*tatom*) is just visible at the proximal corner of the building.



**Fig. K6:** Full rear view of the floor (*bomakau*) of the loft (*tatom*). Note the two outriggers supporting the floor, the access (*kaukweda*) to the loft and the four vertical sticks (*kainubiluma*) which stabilize the floor of the loft.



**Fig. K7:** Close-up of the joint where the vertical post (*kokola bwala*) carries the horizontal central canoe-shaped beam (*waga*). Note that both the post and the hole in the *waga* are square, preventing any rotation of the roof (*katua*) of this *bomiyoyeva*, of its floor (*bomakau*) or canoe-shaped beam.

Based on Gerrits' and Senft's data and on Wisse's expertise on Trobriand yam houses the following sections first describe the structure, the function, and the use of the *bomiyoyeva* in Kaduwaga. Then the structure, the function, and the use of the yam house which Gerrits documented in Labai – a structure which (as Senft learned in 2012) is called *bomduvadova* – is described and discussed for the first time. This subsection is followed by a description of the proper construction of both the *bomiyoyeva* and the *bomduvadova* and by some information on the mythical background that may go with these two structures. Based on this additional cultural information, the everyday and the possible ritual and political function of both constructions are discussed. The article ends with a summarising conclusion.

## 2 The *bomiyoyeva* in Kaduwaga Village on Kaile'una Island

The building documented in 1971 in Kaduwaga is called a *bomiyoyeva*. It features a single vertical post (king post), a long horizontal beam, and floors at two levels.

The single central vertical post – called *kokola bwala* – supports a long horizontal beam – the *waga* – which runs over the full length of the building (see Figs. K5, K6). *Waga* is the noun that is used in everyday discourse to refer to a canoe, and indeed, the *waga* beam is carved like a canoe and both its front and rear ends feature a canoe-washboard (*lagim*) and a canoe-cutwater or wave-splitter (*tabuya*) – the canoe prow-boards that are typical for the Trobrianders' large *masawa*-type canoes

which they used for doing the famous *kula* (Malinowski 1922). Moreover, at both ends of the canoe there is the carved canoe-prow (*pusa*) decoration. While the *pusa* and the *lagim* appear to be of the type normally found on the Kiriwina *masawa*-canoes, both the front (see Figs. K8, K9, K10, K11, K12) and the rear *tabuya* (see Figs. K3, K13, K14) are unusual in that they flare up very high, just like the large *tabuya* of the *nagega*-canoes from the Marshall Bennett and Woodlark Islands. However, there is no facility to attach a canoe-finial (*sikusaku* or *maan*-carving) to the top of it.<sup>6</sup>

Both sides of the canoe are decorated over its full length with a so-called *tarapapa* or *papa*-design (see Figs. K5, K7). Unlike the everyday canoes of the Trobrianders the *waga* of the *Bomiyoyeva* has – for architectonical reasons and to increase stability – not one but two outriggers which consist, from bottom to top (Figs. K4, K5, K6, K7) of:

- four short, slightly bent beams – the *geli* – which rest directly on the *waga* and run parallel to the front of the building;
- four long beams – the *kesuya* – which run over

<sup>6</sup> Gerrits' informants were neither able to explain the presence of this unusual *tabuya* nor to tell if it was merely a copy of the *tabuya* of a *nagega*-canoe or if it refers to the *tabuya* of a now extinct type of canoe, called *bwadila*. The *bwadila* was formerly in use by the ancestors of the current inhabitants of Kiriwina, Kitava, and Iwa Islands but was later replaced with the *masawa* (Malinowski 1922: 144 f.; Gerrits 1974: 230). In 1971, Paramount Chief Vanoi's personal house (*ligisa*) in Omarakana featured a canoe-front with a *lagim*, a *tabuya*, and a *sikusaku* as used in a *nagega* canoe. For pictures of *masawa* canoes see Senft (2016) and the cover of Senft and Basso (2009).



**Fig. K8:** Right front of the *bomiyoyeva*, decorated with two horizontal boards (*tataba*) mounted against the plaited front (*ninwa*).

the full length of the building. The two central *kesuya* rest on the four *geliu*; and

- five medium length beams – the *giyelu* or *liyu* – which run parallel to the front of the building. The *giyelu* lay on top of the four *kesuya*, but only

the two central *kesuya* support them directly. The two outer *kesuya* are tied to the underside of the *giyelu* (see Figs. K4, K5, K6, K7).

Four thin vertical sticks – *kainubiluma* – running from the ground upward, immobilise the two outer *kesuya* but are far too thin to provide firm support (see Figs. K4, K6). The top floor – the *bomakau* or *kebila* – of the *bomiyoyeva* is the floor of the loft – the *tatom* – which consists of the roof construction – *katua* – and the *kebila* platform. The *kebila* rests directly on the five *giyelu* (see Figs. K6, K7). In the left back corner of the floor of the loft is a square opening – the *kaukweda* – which provides the only access to the loft (see Fig. K6).

At a much lower level of the building one finds a plateau for sitting – the *kebila* – which rests on three horizontal beams, each of which is supported by two short vertical posts – the *kokola kebila* (see Figs. K2, K3). Note that Costigan (1995) neither mentions nor indicates in his drawings that a *bomiyoyeva* has such a *kebila* and that it also does not appear in photographs of a *bomiyoyeva* taken by Senft (see Figs. GS96\_1, GS96\_2). A *kebila* is a platform which is typical for the ordinary smaller yam houses – the *bwema*; it is used by the Trobrianders to sit down and relax.

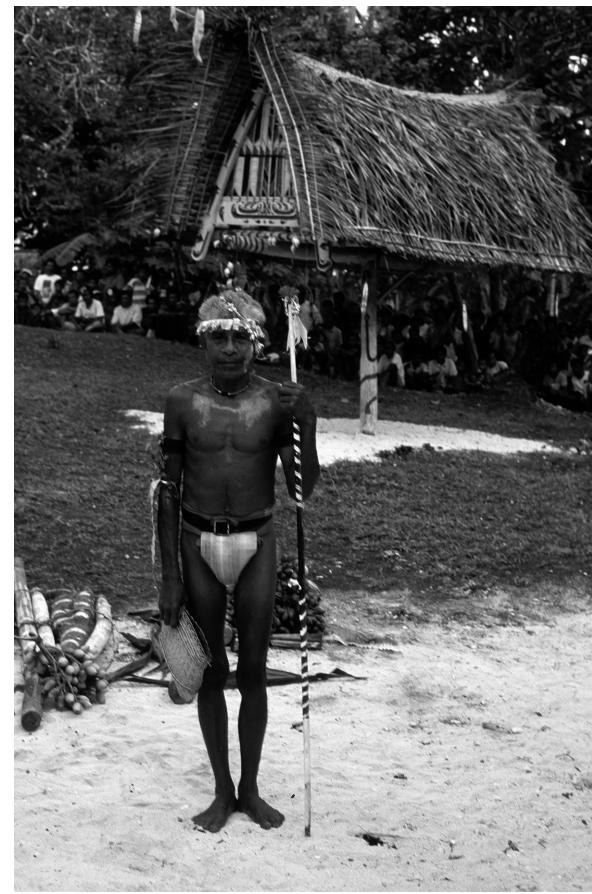
Unlike the *bwema*, the *bomiyoyeva* has a central post – the *kokola bwala* – which provides support for the *waga*-beam and its outriggers whereupon the floor of the loft of the building rests. Costigan's description of the *bomiyoyeva* points out that the *waga* with the floor of the loft on top of it just rests on this one central post – and Senft's consultant, Chief Vapalaguyau, himself a Malasi chief of Tauwema village – confirmed this, pointing out that with the true



**Fig. K9:** As K 8: close-up of the right side of the decorated front of the *bomiyoyeva*.



**Fig. GS96\_1:** Paramount Chief Pulayasa's *bomiyoyeva*, erected in 1996 on the occasion of the Melanesian Spearhead Group meeting on Kiriwina Island.



**Fig. GS96\_2:** Paramount Chief Pulayasa's *bomiyoyeva*, erected in 1996 on the occasion of the Melanesian Spearhead Group meeting on Kiriwina Island with one of Pulayasa's warriors.

*bomiyoyeva* the roof – the *katua* constructed above the floor (*kebila*) of the *waga* – is built in such a way that the *katua* rotates with the wind:

*Katua bila deli yagila – ika'ila.*

The roof it will go with the wind – it is turning.

In his sketch of the *bomiyoyeva* Costigan (1995: Fig. 24) indicates that the construction of the roof rests on what he sketches as two poles in the middle of the *kebila*. Chief Vapalaguyau of Tauwema village reported that the loft rests on a strong wooden board called *keta'ula*. To support the rotation of the roof construction the Tabalu chiefs used the fat of pigs as a kind of lubricant. *Keta'ula*, *keto'ula*, *kai-touwla*, and *kaitouwala* are all orthographic variants of one and the same word. This strong wooden board of the *bomiyoyeva* has the same name in Kilivila as the big horizontal beam of the *bomduvadova* described below and as the two horizontal foundation beams which support and are part of a chief's *liku*.

Vapalaguyau pointed out that Katubai's *bomiyoyeva* in Kaduwaga was not built as it should be. The *kokola bwala* in Kaduwaga is a square beam – not a round one as is with a proper *bomiyoyeva* (see Figs. GS96\_1, GS96\_2) – and in the middle of the underside of the *waga* is a square (not a round) hole, neatly fitting the *kokola bwala*. This construction makes any rotation of the *waga* with the *katua* of course impossible (see Fig. K7). The decoration on the sides of the *kokola bwala* is limited to a zigzag greyish-red line (see Figs. K6, K7) and a few other rough orange-red drawings all said to represent snakes – *ke'una*.<sup>7</sup>

The facade at the front (see Figs. K8, K9, K10, K11, K12) features one or two horizontally placed well-ornamented boards – the *tataba* – or, at another occasion, a horizontal and a short vertical carved board. Two obliquely placed carved boards – the

<sup>7</sup> *Ke'una* is also the name of posts decorated with carved snakes as a design; these snakes are called *mwata*.



**Fig. K10:** Close-up of the left side of the decorated front of the *bomiyoyeva*. Note the unusual sagittal canoe-board (*tabuya*).

*kaiwalapu* – support and board the plaited front called *ninwa*. At the very top of the front facade an extension of the roof protects a carved ridgepole ornament – *mamwala* (see Fig. K2). The rear facade (see Figs. K3, K5, K13, K14) is not ornamented and does not feature a door, thus limiting access to the loft to the *kaukweda*. The rear of the roof features a decoration with *kaduguwaya* or *kadugwa'i* sticks (see Figs. K2, K3).

In the interior of the loft (*tatom*) Katubai stored two large wooden plates (*kaidadodiga*), an adze (*ligogu*), a few coconuts, a model canoe (*kewou*), native rope, a woven mat (*moi*), and some other, unidentified objects. Unfortunately, no further information on these items could be obtained. It is conceivable that the *waga* represents a *guluwaga*-canoe or, alternatively, the flying canoe of Mokatuboda in the Kudayuri-myth (see section 5 below) – but this is mere speculation and no evidence was found to verify this hypothesis.

It was briefly mentioned above that – according to Chief Vapalaguyau – Katubai's *bomiyoyeva* in Kaduwaga was not built properly. Vapalaguyau thereby confirmed what Chief Tolosi of Labai had told Gerrits in 1971. Vapalaguyau pointed out that the right to build a *bomiyoyeva* or to allow other chiefs belonging to the Tabalu subclan of the Malasi clan to build one lies solely in the hands of the chiefs of Labai.<sup>8</sup> Only Tabalu chiefs can own a *bomiyoyeva* and Vapalaguyau confirmed the information Gerrits received from Chief Tolosi of Labai and some of his commoner (*tokai*) Kaduwaga con-

<sup>8</sup> The Malasi clan (*kumila*) is divided into three subclans (*dala*): Tabalu, Kalagawa, and Vevitu.



**Fig. K11:** Left frontal view of fully decorated front of the *bomiyoyeva* (July 1971). At this occasion, the front had been decorated with both a horizontal and a vertical carved board. The canoe-prow (the *lagim*, *tabuya* as well as the *pusa*) of the *waga* had all been ornamented with white cowry shells (*buna* = *ovula ovum*).

sultants that the timber used for building a *bomiyoyeva* must come from the vicinity of the cave near Labai village on Kiriwina Island. The timber for Katubai's *bomiyoyeva*, however, came from the bush near Kaduwaga village. Vapalaguyau reported that at the time when Katubai had his version of a *bomiyoyeva* built, it was only Tolosi, the chief of Labai, and Vanoi and his successor Waibadi of Omarakana who had the right – *karewaga* – to build a *bomiyoyeva*.<sup>9</sup> These three mighty chiefs knew of Katubai's "illegal" construction and were rather annoyed by the fact. Many Trobrianders speculated that what prevented them to come to Kaduwaga to burn down Katubai's *bomiyoyeva* was their fear of Katubai's strong black magic for which he was notorious in the North Massim region.

Gerrits' and Senft's consultants reported that the *bomiyoyeva* was used for various purposes. While the loft was used for the storing of some (probably special) yam tubers and some other items like the ones mentioned above, its lower platform was used by all villagers as a place to sit and talk. The floor of the loft of the *bomiyoyeva*, however, was restricted to use by Tabalu chiefs only. Both Gerrits' Kaduwaga consultants and Chief Vapalaguyau report that it was used by the Tabalu chiefs as a place to discuss the use of black magic as a possible punishment for anybody who broke taboos and other traditional rules and regulations. Chief Vapalaguyau said:



Fig. K12: As K 11. Close-up from right.

<sup>9</sup> This confirmed the information Gerrits obtained in 1971 from Chief Tolosi himself.



Fig. K13: Left rear view of the *bomiyoyeva*, showing the left rear end of the canoe-shaped beam (*waga*) with its rear canoe-prow consisting of the canoe-tip (*pusa*), a transverse board (*lagim*) and an – again unusually high – sagittal board (*tabuya*).



**Fig. K14:** Right rear view of the rear end of the canoe-shaped beam (*waga*) and its canoe-prow.



**Fig. K15:** A view inside the loft (*tatom*) of Chief Katubai's *bomiyoyeva*.

*E-sisu-si e-paisewa-si pela si karewaga,  
3.-be-Pl 3.-work-Pl for their power  
bi-megwa-si,  
3.Fut-perform.magic-Pl*

*bi-wai-si bagula, e bwagau  
3.Fut-decide garden and black magicians  
e-paisewa-si si paisewa.  
3.-work-Pl their work*

They [the Tabalu chiefs] are there working for their power, they would make magic, they would decide on and distribute garden plots and the black magicians did their work there.

Additional information on the existence of more recent *bomiyoyeva* was collected by Wisse on Kiri-

wina in 2013. She showed one of Gerrits' pictures of the *bomiyoyeva* to a number of informants along with some of his other photographs. The building was, not always, but quite frequently, recognized as a *bomiyoyeva*. When asking about its function, one respondent gave an immediate and clear answer that it was the place where the chiefs did their magic. The general recognition may have been due to the mention by several informants of a *bomiyoyeva* that had stood at the airport,<sup>10</sup> at the time called Pulaya-si Terminal, after the present *tabalu* chief at Oma-

<sup>10</sup> The consultant showed Wisse the spot where it had stood. Linus S. Digim'Rina (p. c. 2013) also confirmed the existence of the building.

rakana, Pulayasi Daniel. Morris of Yalumgwa village<sup>11</sup> said that it had been placed there to mark the chief's and the *tabalu* clan's presence. He also remarked: "The one [*bomiyoyeva*] at the airport kept swinging in the wind like a compass" (Wissem interview, 18.08.2013, in English). This suggests the construction at the airport to have been relatively light, and presumably not used as an actual place to enact sorcery, but indeed to signal *tabalu* presence and authority. The *bomiyoyeva*, specifically associated with the chief's power to control the weather through his knowledge of weather magic, was a strong statement at the airport claiming control over flight connections to Kiriwina. Collin Togumagoma, Wissem's interpreter and assistant, also confirmed that a *bomiyoyeva* stood at the airport. According to him it was dismantled because the building (and the name of the airport, which has since also been removed) was too prominent a presence of *tabalu* power for some other clans. Unfortunately, the exact period of its presence could not be established. We will come back to this information below. In the next subsection the structure, the function, and the use of the *bomduvadova* which Gerrits documented in Labai is described and discussed.

### 3 The *bomduvadova* in Labai Village on Kiriwina Island

Following up on the information obtained in Kaduwaga and in an effort to obtain more details on the *bomiyoyeva*, Gerrits visited Tolosi, the blind but nevertheless extremely influential and powerful Tabalu chief of Labai. In those days, Chief Tolosi was the chief weather magician of the paramount Chief Vanoi and the owner of another specific kind of yam house (see Figs. L1, L2). Until his death at the end of the last century, he was also the protector and guardian – the *toyamata Lagi* – of the famous cave called *Lagi* near Labai which contains important ancient pottery as well as many human bones and skulls. Malinowski (1932: 83 f.) points out that it was from this cave that first the totems and later the human representatives of the four Trobriand clans emerged and where the problem of rank was settled (see Senft 2011: 11 ff.). Before Gerrits contacted Tolosi about his special yam house, he had already collaborated with him to provide improved

11 Morris is one of John Kasaipwalova's elder brothers. John Kasaipwalova is a famous poet from the Trobriand Islands. He played an important role during the Kabisawali movement in the early 1970s which threatened the power and influence of the traditional Tabalu chiefs (see J. W. Leach 1982; Weiner 1982: 68; see also footnote 16).

security for this cave. Gerrits assumed that Tolosi's house was a variant of a *bomiyoyeva*, however, Senft's consultant Vapalaguyau pointed out that this construction was actually a *bomduvadova*. The *bomduvadova* differs from a *bomiyoyeva* in that it has two instead of only one post which supports the loft and the roof; this construction makes any rotation of the loft and roof impossible. Tolosi provided Gerrits with the following information about his special yam house (*bomduvadova*) in Labai and about the *bomiyoyeva* in Kaduwaga:<sup>12</sup> The first man to build a *bomiyoyeva* was Chief Dowana of Labai village, who was a Tabalu and an ancestor of Tolosi. Dowana built his first *bomiyoyeva* on top of a hill called Odubekoya, which is situated near La-

12 The fact that Tolosi did not point out that his house was a *bomduvadova* and not a *bomiyoyeva* reveals how hesitant these mighty Tabalu chiefs were to leak information about their privileges, their power, and the instruments of their power. See also footnote 16.



**Fig. L1:** Frontal view of Chief Tolosi's dilapidated *bomduvadova* in the center (*baku*) of Labai village. Note the remnants of the lower platform (*kobudaga*) (Labai, Kiriwina Island, 1971).



**Fig. L2:** As L1, rear view. There are 2 large central posts (*kokola*) supporting the canoe-shaped horizontal beam (*keta'ula*). The building features a lower platform (*kabodaga*) as well as an upper platform (*kebila*) which is the floor of the loft (*tatom*). To the left and right of the *keta'ula* six vertical posts (*kainubiluma*) – which are much smaller than the *kokola* – stabilize the ends of 3 horizontal beams (*pou*) which rest on the *keta'ula* and which support the floor of the loft (*tatom*).



**Fig. L3:** Details of the front end of the horizontal canoe-shaped beam (*keta'ula*) resting on the frontal post (*kokola*) which features a carved canoe-tip (*pusa*) and a small (undecorated) sagittal canoe-board (*tabuya*), but no transverse board (*lagim*).

bai, close to the local Wai'isi beach. During a storm, his *bomiyoyeva* fell down and Dowana subsequently built a *bomduvadova* in the centre of Labai village. He proceeded to put yams (*tetu*) in its loft, cooked some of them and then gave them to the Labai villagers to eat. Over the generations the guardianship of the *bomduvadova* was handed down from Dowana to Kulawa'iba, then to Kotokwati, and via Mokutubasi, Mwasopi, Mokwana, and Mualibu, to Mudurata who handed it to Tolosi. Tolosi was to hand it over to his successor, Dubaveaka, who is also named Makwana.<sup>13</sup>

13 However, it seems that with Tolosi's death the times of the *bomduvadova* have gone, too. There are no plans whatsoever in Labai these days to build a new *bomduvadova* – and

Tolosi then proceeded to show the remnants of his dilapidated *bomduvadova* (see Figs. L1, L2) in the centre (*baku*) of Labai. It consisted of two large vertical posts – the *kokola* – one at the front and one at the back of the building, on which a large horizontal beam – *keta'ula* (also: *keto'ula*, *kaitouwla*, *kaitouwala*) – rested. The name of this horizontal beam is the same as the name for the “strong wooden board” described by Chief Vapalaguyau in connection with the faulty construction of the *bomiyoyeva* in Kaduwaga. The frontal end of the *keta'ula* was carved like the end of a canoe and on the top of the *keta'ula*, parallel to the front of the building,

it seems that the younger generation does not know anymore how to build such a construction.



**Fig. L4:** As L3. Note the carved decoration on the side of the canoe (*keta'ula*). Three large horizontal beams (*pou*) which rest on the *keta'ula* support the floor (*kebila*) of the loft (*tatom*).



**Fig. L5:** Rear view of Chief Tolosi's *bomduvadova*. The rear end of the central horizontal beam (*keta'ula*) is not carved. The only entrance to the loft (*tatom*) is closed off with a woven mat (*yoyu* = *taluguma*). The roof (*katua*) is badly damaged.

were three middle-sized beams – the *pou* – which supported the floor of the loft as well as the roof of the building. The rear end of the *keta'ula* was not decorated. At the left and right of the building six middle-sized vertical beams (the *kainubiluma*) – three at the left and three at the right – stabilized the ends of the three *pou* (see Fig. L2).

The facade at the front of the *bomduvadova* (see Figs. L2, L5) featured a (decayed) horizontal board – the *kaikudula* – and two obliquely placed boards – the *kaiwalapu* – which formed the sides of the plaited front which is called *ninwa*. At the top of the *ninwa* was a (decayed) carved ridgepole-ornament – *mamwala*. Part of the roof was badly damaged. The facade at the back of the *bomduvadova* (see Figs. L2, L5) consisted of a *ninwa*, again supported and bordered by two *kaiwalapu*. In the middle of the *ninwa* was a large vertical door – actually a mat (*yoyu*) – which provided entry to the loft (see Fig. L5).<sup>14</sup> Here, too, the roof was damaged. At the bottom of the *bomduvadova* (see Figs. L1, L2) there were six small vertical posts, the *warani*, each placed next to one of the six *kainubiluma*. These *warani* supported the low second floor (*ko-budaga*) which originally ran over the full length of the *bomduvadova*. In 1971, only about half of this floor still existed.

Both vertical posts – the *kokola* – featured beautiful carvings: on the front *kokola* a large *kawai-si*-lizard (see Fig. L6) and on the back *kokola* a *kai'una*-snake. According to Tolosi, these designs

14 In 2012, Vapalaguyau reported that this *yoyu* is called *taluguma*. It was woven with magic; the magic got lost with Tolosi's death.



**Fig. L6:** Detail of carved lizard (*kawaiisi*) on frontal central post (*kokola*) of Chief Tolosi's *bomduvadova*.

indicate and are the property and signs of the Tabalu (*Tabalu si koni*). The horizontal beam – the *keta'ula* – was carved like a canoe (see Figs. L3, L4) and its frontal end showed a carved canoe-tip – the *pusa* – as well as a *tabuya* which, unlike the *tabuya* of the Kaduwaga *bomiyoyeva*, was shaped similarly to those used on the prow of a *mwasawa* canoe – but no *lagim*! This caused the front facade to represent the *lagim*, giving the whole upper part of the *bomduvadova* the appearance of a canoe, lifted off the ground.<sup>15</sup> Carvings from the *pusa* extended along the frontal part of both sides of the canoe.

With respect to the function and use of the *bomduvadova* Tolosi told Gerrits that – like with the *bomiyoyeva* – both commoners and chiefs could sit on the lower platform but that access to the loft – used for yam storage as well as for resting – was strictly limited to Tabalu only. Tolosi only agreed to

15 Vapalaguya commented: "... like an airplane" – *makala kawayou*.

the use of the *bomiyoyeva* and the *bomduvadova* for the storage of yams but explicitly denied that it had any other function. In addition, when Gerrits asked Tolosi (being the chief weather magician of the paramount chief) why the *keta'ula* of his *bomduvadova* is carved to represent a canoe, he could not or did not want to explain that. And when Gerrits asked him if there was any connection between his *bomduvadova* and the mythological spirit-canoes (Malinowski 1935: 149) – the *guluwaga* that fly through the sky and are believed to bring yams to the gardens, directly influencing the result of the harvest (see below) – he claimed that "he had never heard of such magic" and politely ended the interview.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4 The Proper Construction of the *bomiyoyeva* and the *bomduvadova*

It is interesting to note that neither the *bomiyoyeva* in Kaduwaga nor the *bomduvadova* in Labai truly matched the description and drawing given by Costigan. While the Kaduwaga *bomiyoyeva* concurs with Costigan's description in having a central supporting post, it has a second lower platform (*kebila*) for sitting, which Costigan does not describe. However, the *bomiyoyeva* photographed by Senft in Oma-rakana during the 1996 Spearhead Group Meeting (Figs. GS96\_1, GS96\_2) also has no *kebila*, making it clear that a *bomiyoyeva* can be constructed with or without a lower platform. Chief Vapalaguyau said that the construction of the *bomiyoyeva* in Kaduwaga village was "faulty," but it is not entirely clear if he said so because the central post (*kokola bwala*) and the hole in the horizontal beam (*waga*) were square and not round, because a "strong wooden board" (*keta'ula*) was missing, or because 4 thin sticks (*kainubiluma*) prevented any rotation.

The roof of Costigan's *bomiyoyeva* is said to "rotate in the wind" but here, too, the *bomiyoyeva* in Kaduwaga does not qualify because, although it features a central post (*kokola bwala*), that post as well as the socket which connects the *kokola* to the *waga* are square, preventing any movement. Note also that, even if the socket that connects the *kokola* and the *waga* would allow a rotating movement,

16 Tolosi did not want to convey the kind of information Vapalaguyau presented Senft 41 years later; in the 1970s, the Tabalu rightly feared to lose some of their political influence – see, for example, the Kabisawali movement that attempted to threaten Waibadi's position (see Weiner 1976: 223 f., 1982: 68; J. W. Leach 1982; see also footnotes 11 and 12). But note that Vapalaguyau could not or did not want to provide additional information about the *bomduvadova* or about its function or the meaning of its name, either.

this would cause the entire canoe together with the floor, the loft and the roof to rotate, not only the roof. The sheer weight of such a construction would make “rotation in the wind” impossible. Senft’s research in 2012 showed that the roof of a properly constructed *bomiyoyeva* did, indeed, rotate in the wind and that this was made possible by having a single vertical post (*kokola bwala*) and by supporting the roof-construction by a large wooden board, the *keta’ula*. Although we now know how a properly constructed *bomiyoyeva* looked like, further research is needed to fully understand how the rotation of its roof was accomplished.

Costigan (1995: 61) mentions that “the roof is reported to rotate in the wind” and “information on the post socket detail were not available.” His drawing shows a single vertical post. Chief Vapalaguyau agrees but adds “a strong wooden board” that supports the rotating roof and that carries the same name (*keta’ula*) as the horizontal canoe-shaped wooden beam shown with the *bomduvadova*. And Chief Tolosi said that there should be two, not only one vertical post. Table 1 summarizes the claims about the features of a *bomiyoyeva* made by Costigan and by Gerrits’ and Senft’s consultants.

On the basis of this table we would like to come up with the following hypothesis: The different features mentioned in Table 1 can be reconciled when we assume that the construction of a *bomiyoyeva* consisted of a vertical post on which a horizontal beam supporting the floor (*kebila*) of the loft was placed. If a “strong wooden board” (*keta’ula*) – as mentioned by Chief Vapalaguyau – with a round hole in its centre was placed on the floor (*kebila*) of the loft (*tatom*) and if another, short but round post

was inserted vertically in the hole of that *keta’ula* and lubricated with pig’s fat, then that short round vertical post could indeed support a roof (*katua*) that could rotate in the wind. Chief Tolosi’s remark that “there should be two posts” would then refer to the long vertical post carrying the horizontal canoe-shaped beam (*waga*) below the floor and the short vertical post carrying the roof (*katua*) above that floor. However, this is just a hypothesis. When Gerrits inspected the inside of the loft of the *bomiyoyeva* in Kaduwaga village, he neither noticed such a strong wooden board (*keta’ula*) nor a short vertical post. Thus, the real design of a *bomiyoyeva* remains to be a secret of the Tabalu.

Tolosi’s *bomduvadova* in Labai was much older than the *bomiyoyeva* in Kaduwaga. There is no suggestion that this *bomduvadova* was not constructed properly. However, by now it is clear that a *bomduvadova* is a structure which is different from a *bomiyoyeva*, because its roof is supported by two instead of by one central post – making it impossible for its roof to rotate. Table 2 summarizes the features of a *bomduvadova* as seen on Gerrits’ photos and mentioned by Gerrits’ and Senft’s consultants.

It was briefly mentioned above that the *bomiyoyeva* and the *bomduvadova* structures both feature a canoe lifted off the ground. Tolosi refused to say anything about possible connections of these houses with the famous *guluwaga* – the mythological spirit-boats that fly through the sky and which are believed to bring yams to the gardens, thus directly influencing the result of the harvest. In what follows we will briefly speculate on such a possible connection.

Table 1: Features of a *bomiyoyeva*.

Features	According to Costigan	As seen in building in Kaduwaga	According to Chief Tolosi of Labai	According to Chief Vapalaguyau of Tauwema
Number of posts ( <i>kokola</i> )	1	1	2	1
Lower platform for sitting ( <i>kebila</i> )	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rotating roof ( <i>katua</i> )	Yes	Indicated but not working	Yes	Yes
A beam carved as complete canoe ( <i>waga</i> ) or a large wooden board ( <i>keta’ula</i> ) under roof	Not mentioned	A <i>waga</i>	Beam carved as body of a canoe but called <i>keta’ula</i>	A <i>waga</i> as well as a <i>keta’ula</i> ?
Access in back	Not mentioned	No	Yes	Yes
Decorations specific for Tabalu	Not mentioned	Yes	Yes	Yes

Features	As seen in building in Labai	According to Chief Tolosi	According to Chief Vapalaguyau
Number of Posts ( <i>kokola</i> )	2	2	2
Plateau for sitting ( <i>kebila</i> )	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rotating roof ( <i>katua</i> )	No	No	No
Beam (carved as canoe) under roof ( <i>kato'ula</i> ; <i>keta'ula</i> )	Yes	Yes	Yes
Access in back ( <i>yoyu</i> , <i>taluguma</i> )	Yes	Yes	Yes
Decorations specific for Tabalu	Yes	Yes	Yes

**Table 2:** Features of a *bomduvadova*.

## 5 Mythological Background

As mentioned above, Tolosi, the owner of the *bomduvadova* (who did not correct Gerrits' misunderstanding of classifying it as a variant of a *bomiyyeva*), was Chief Vanoi's weather magician who claimed to possess magic that regulates the wind, the sunshine, and the rain. The fact that the two houses feature a canoe lifted off the ground reminds one of the famous Kudayuri myth documented by Malinowski (1922: 311 ff.) which tells the story of the origin of the “flying canoe” and the “flying witches.” An extensive analysis of this myth is provided by Tambiah (1983).

The myth tells that when the people from Kitava Island wanted to go on a *kula* expedition, they all prepared their canoes on the beach. However, Mokatuboda of the village of Kudayuri built his canoe in the middle of his village, far away from the sea, using a special creeper (*wayoyu*) for the lashings. When the villagers were ready for the *kula* expedition, all other canoes were launched from the beach, but Mokatuboda instead magically flew his canoe out, hitting it with a magical adze (*ligogu*). Mokatuboda had a younger brother named Toweyre'i as well as three sisters, but when Mokatuboda used his magic (*bulubwalala*) to bring rain to only his own garden, they became jealous and killed him once they thought that they had acquired all of his magic (see Tambiah 1983: 184; Malinowski 1922: 314 f.). When the following year Toweyre'i tried to duplicate Mokatuboda's magic he found that he had learned only a part of the necessary magic, that the *ligogu*-magic was missing and that his canoe would not fly. His three sisters, however, had learned the magic well; they flew away and became “flying witches.”<sup>17</sup>

17 Although both Tolosi and Vapalaguyau claimed that they

It is believed that important parts of Mokatuboda's magic (*wayoyu*, *kunisaleli*, and *bulubwalala*) mentioned in this myth were retained by members of the Lukuba clan and that they later were forced to yield those to the highest ranking members – the Tabalu – of the Malasi clan who still possess them and can use that magic to influence the wind and the weather.

Although the *bomiyyeva* with its rotating roof may very well indicate that power of the Tabalu chiefs, it should be stressed that none of Gerrits' or Senft's consultants ever mentioned this possibility. The *bomduvadova*, on the other hand, clearly indicates something else. Unfortunately, no additional information could be obtained and further research will be needed to discover what its function was. It may well be that the *bomduvadova*, standing in the

have no idea what the name *bomiyyeva* means, we want to present here the following speculation: Malinowski (1922: 315) refers to Mokatuboda's three sisters as “*yoyova*” who could fly through the air; in the index of his volume “Argonauts of the Western Pacific” he equates *yoyova* with *mulukwausi* – the “flying witches.” The -*yoyeva* part of the name *bomiyyeva* may be a variant of *yoyova*, and the morpheme *bomi-* may either be a variant of *bwala* (house) or a shortened form of *bomala* (taboo) – thus, it may either mean “house of the flying witches” or “the taboo of the flying witches.” However, we emphasize once more that this kind of etymology is based on sheer speculation. Linus S. Digim'Rina (p. c.) does not agree with this analysis and mentions that “*yoyewa*” refers to a spinning motion, “*bomiyyeva*” to “yam house spinning” and “*bomduvadova*” to “yam hut paintings.” He points out: “The closest trace of the meaning of *duvadova* would be associated with a particular *dala* group that has a feminine name in *Boiduvadova*.” According to Digim'Rina, the name was derived from an ancestral instance where they open their green betelnuts (*ikivisibuwa*) and produced the red paste to “paint their lips” (*iduvadovasi*) by chewing. An alternative expression would be “*italatalusi*” (Thomas Toyamina, p. c. 2013). But all in all, this seems to be sheer folk-etymological speculation, too.

centre of Labai, quite far away from the beach, represents Mokotuboda's canoe at the moment when it flew out of Kudayuri village.

The concept of the “flying canoe” is still very much alive and it is still mentioned in magical formulae used for the building of a new canoe. In that magic the canoe is addressed as a female and told “to bind [its] grass skirt together” – this may also relate to Mokotuboda's three sisters who retained their power to become flying witches (see Malinowski 1922: 132; Tambiah: 1983: 172, 190f.).

Besides the *kudayuri* myth there is also the belief that yams are brought into a new garden by the mythical spirit-canoes of the ancestors (Malinowski 1935: 149). While the yield of the garden depends greatly on the magic of the Tabalu chiefs to influence the wind and the rain, which enable the yams to grow, it depends also on the number of the *guluwaga* that the ancestors send to and land in a garden. It may well be that the Tabalu chiefs are also in possession of the magic to influence the path and direction of the *guluwaga* or politically control magicians who have this magic in the repertoire of their magical formulae and that the canoes which are a feature of both the *bomiyoyeva* and the *bomduvadova* refer to this power. However, it should be stressed again that none of Gerrits' or Senft's consultants ever mentioned this possibility and that all these theories remain speculation only.

## 6 Some More Speculations about the Primary Functions of the *bomiyoyeva* and the *bomduvadova*

Costigan and our consultants from Kaduwaga, Labai, and Tauwema agree that the loft of the *bomiyoyeva* is for Tabalu only and that it is used for storing some special yam tubers. However, all agree that both structures were not “real” store houses. Thus, it may well be that the (few) yam tubers stored there had magical meaning and power and were used for magical purposes. Chief Vapalaguyau was very evasive when he was confronted with such questions.

Gerrits' Kaduwaga commoner (*tokai*) consultants clearly indicated in 1971 that they saw the loft of the *bomiyoyeva* as the place where two or more Tabalu would meet to discuss cases where someone had broken traditional taboos and custom laws and to decide what kind of punishment should be meted out. Their information that “*bwagau* (black magicians) would follow” indicates that they, at least, saw it as a place from where the Tabalu enforced their authority by punishing individual members of the community.

The design of both the Kaduwaga *bomiyoyeva* and the Labai *bomduvadova* consists of an upper loft where some yams can be stored which is supported by a large horizontally placed carved canoe which is clearly lifted off the ground by one central king post or by two posts. As pointed out above, any presumption that the canoes of the *bomiyoyeva* and/or the *bomduvadova* could represent either the *guluwaga*-canoe of the ancestors or the “flying canoe” of the Kudayuri myth and remind the Trobriand Islanders of the famous magical powers of the Tabalu to regulate the wind and weather remains speculation.

In the case of the “faulty” *bomiyoyeva* of Kaduwaga, Costigan's mentioning of a “rotating roof” may be somewhat misleading in that not only the roof (*katua*) but the entire canoe (*waga*) – on which the floor (*kebila*), the loft (*tatom*), and the roof (*katua*) had been built – would be expected to rotate, because not only the roof but the entire canoe and the floor built on top of it are supported by the *kokola bwala*! If, in a properly constructed *bomiyoyeva*, the movement of the roof would be independent of the movement – if any – of the canoe (*waga*) or board (*kata'ula*) above that, the clockwise or anti-clockwise rotating roof would still indicate the direction in which the wind blows and, therefore, the direction where the rain is going to fall.

Costigan's sources as well as the Kaduwaga consultants, Chief Tolosi and Chief Vapalaguyau all agreed that the only people who were allowed to have and use a *bomiyoyeva* were the Tabalu chiefs. Moreover, Tolosi and Vapalaguyau clearly specified that, in fact, only three of these chiefs were qualified for that; interestingly enough all three chiefs were famous for their powerful magic. The paramount chief especially was feared because the Trobrianders still believe that he himself or his chief magician has the power to influence wind and weather. The people are convinced that he can cause famine by keeping the rain away from selected villages. Famine is thus seen as a form of collective punishment of one or more villages that somehow displeased the paramount chief. Weiner (1976: 223f.) actually provides a report on how Waibadi made use of this magic to get acknowledged by all the people of Kiriwina as their paramount chief.

On the basis of these considerations we understand the *bomiyoyeva* and the *bomduvadova* to be monuments indicating the power of the highest ranking Tabalu chiefs. For us these constructions document yet another important aspect of how the Tabalu chiefs managed to keep up their authority, power, and influence in a matrilineal society and how they used all kinds of semiotic systems to (re)present their power to the outside world.

In the final months of his stay in the Trobriand Islands, Gerrits recorded a number of magical formulae, one of which is called *bamomla*. *Bamomla* refers to a magical activity in the garden whereby, in the months before harvest, the yams are “thinned out” to improve the quality and the quantity of that harvest (Malinowski 1935: 152). Austen (1939: 250) mentions that the timing of this thinning out is very important because disobeying the garden magician by digging up the tubers too early could cause scarcity of food later in the year. Malinowski also recorded the text of this magic which invokes the spirits of the ancestors to help and to make the gardens to swell with the bodies of all the yams to be harvested. He also mentions that there are many private variations of this text. In the version that Gerrits recorded,<sup>18</sup> the magical formula mentions *guluwaga* – spirit canoes – which, loaded with yams, magically fly through the air from an area near the Amphlett Islands to Kiriwina to offload those yams in the gardens of the Kiriwina planters. As mentioned above, in 1971, Tolosi denied any knowledge about such magic and about the concept of the *guluwaga*; however, in 2012, Vapalaguyau confirmed that Tolosi knew this magic. Thus, it could also be that the canoe structure of the *bomiyoyeva* and/or the *bomduvadova* represents these mythological spirit-canoes, lifted off the ground as they fly through the sky. If the highest ranking Tabalu chiefs also possessed the magic to influence the direction in which the *guluwaga* would fly and in which gardens they would land to offload their yams, or if they controlled the magicians who had this knowledge, this would have created another way to control the yearly yams harvests.

## 7 The *bomiyoyeva* and *bomduvadova* in the Context of (Chiefly) Yam Stores (*liku*)

The *bomiyoyeva* and *bomduvadova* then signalled a chief’s power and provided a disclosed space for specific, authority enforcing activities. Our primary focus in this article was a description of the two constructions and to provide tentative information about their functions and mythical associations. As they are chiefly buildings, some contextual information on Trobriand chieftainship and other (chiefly) buildings, particularly yam stores may contribute to their assessment. Mark Mosko (1995: 765) gives an overview of different perspectives taken on Trobriand chieftainship by different authors. These need

not be repeated here. Based on a discussion about a Trobriand father’s role in feeding and forming his children and analogies between the reciprocity between fathers and their children and various leaders and their constituency, Mosko<sup>19</sup> concludes Trobriand chiefs, as well as hamlet leaders, to be “like fathers to their people.” Through the demonstrated analogies between fathers and various leaders, Mosko can further conclude Trobriand chieftainship to be something different from either the “entrepreneurial personal power of particular individual big men” or, the “hierarchical hereditary authority of sacred chiefs,” or some combination of the two (1995: 780). Due to these analogies, Mosko perceives differences between the processes between fathers and their children on the one hand, and commoner headmen or various levels of *guyau* chiefs and their villagers on the other hand, as “mainly matters of scale” (1995: 781).

In 2013, Wisse found Mosko’s perspective confirmed when speaking to the sons of Chief Malua of Olivilevi and other Olivilevi villagers about the yam house Chief Malua had sold to Gerrits around 1970.<sup>20</sup> One man in the group spontaneously explained the yam house to have been like a good father to them, who had always fed them well. This man, however, was talking about the yam house, not (directly) about Chief Malua.

None of the authors mentioned in Mosko (1995), nor Mosko himself incorporates considerations about buildings linked to hierarchical differences into their analysis.<sup>21</sup> Analyzing different kinds of Trobriand yam houses as they complement and underscore their various owners (from commoner fathers to *guyau* chiefs) and village communities (Wisse 2006),<sup>22</sup> yam houses could indeed be placed on a scale with analogue relationships between them and their different owners and their relationships to people. Yet, on this scale, the different kinds of yam houses mark points on which the possibilities of their owners to exercise authority change. Married men (which are by general implication fathers), have smaller yam houses (*bwema*) with their walls covered with mats, thus not allowing the yams to be exhibited. Commoner headmen and leaders have possibly larger, but importantly, open, yet undecorated yam houses. Only *guyau* chiefs have open

19 As Mosko notes (1995: 779), he expands on a suggestion originally made by E. R. Leach (1961).

20 The yam store (*liku*) is now held at the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam (see footnote 4).

21 Weiner (1976: 214) characterizes the yam houses as status symbols for chiefs.

22 Wisse was not in particular looking into chieftainship and unaware of Mosko’s article at the time.

18 This magical formula is presented in the appendix with a few notes and comments.

and decorated yam houses, usually larger than the others, but varying in size. How well the houses are filled after the annual yams harvest and how well their condition is kept reflects their owners' success in building relationships, essentially in "feeding and forming" as pointed out by Mosko. This applies to all yam stores, thus underscoring Mosko's analogies between fathers and chiefs. The varying sizes of these yam houses show differences between them and their owners which indeed are "a matter of scale." Yet, the differences between being open or closed – thus exhibiting their content or not – and being decorated or not, mark qualitative and not merely scale differences in the ways their owners can and cannot exercise authority.

One may now expand this scale of yam houses to include other chiefly buildings, here the *bomiyoyeva* and *bomduvadova*. Mosko understands the "chiefs' abilities to inflict powerful, destructive garden and weather magic upon their subjects" (1995: 778) and their "monopoly of death-dealing powers of sorcery" (1995: 779) also as "analogues of paternal capacities" in that fathers and leaders feed their children and people with elements of magical knowledge (1995: 778). Yam houses embody a man's relational and caring (feeding) capacities. The painted yam store's gable-front, revered to as *matala* (eye) additionally stands for the chief's "watchful eye," his potency and authority over his people (Wisse 2006: 44, 48). The decorated yam houses thus combine *guyau* chiefs' caring capacities with their authoritative capacities.

Owning a *bomiyoyeva* or *bomduvadova* is a privilege of Tabalu chiefs. These buildings thus underscore a difference in authority between chiefs from different *guyau* clans. In contrast to the yam houses, they embody the chiefs' capabilities to inflict powerful magic, particularly weather magic and death-dealing sorcery and provide an exclusive space to do so. They thus embody an added dimension to a man's power, which is not embodied by yam houses. As these chiefs own yam stores as well as a *bomiyoyeva* or *bomduvadova* they complement the capacities embodied by a chiefly yam house, rather than overrule them. They may, however, be taken as an extension on the scale, marking yet another point of the extension of power. Further analysis of differences and analogies between *bomiyoyeva*, *bomduvadova* as well as *bwema* and *liku* yam houses and their relationships to their owners could possibly contribute to a better understanding of Trobriand chieftainship; however, this is out of the scope of this article.

To sum up, we can note that *bomiyoyeva* and *bomduvadova* were (are?) rare structures, partly because a very select group of chiefs had the privilege

of owning them. Yet we know too little about the history of these buildings and their owners to have any idea about how frequently, by whom, and why, they were – or were not – erected. Throughout contact history with Westerners we do not seem to have any kind of record of these constructions. Were they (simply) overlooked – and if so, why?

## 8 Conclusion

In the past there have been (at least) two types of unusual and rare constructions on Kiriwina, the building and use of which was restricted – at least in the late 1960s and early 1970s – to the three highest ranking and most powerful Tabalu chiefs in Oma-rakana and Labai on Kiriwina Island. We have good reasons to assume that the real function of the *bomiyoyeva* and *bomduvadova* was not to be an unusual storage-place for yams but rather to be the symbol of the supreme power of the Tabalu chiefs and to help maintain respect for them. Chief Vapalaguyau pointed out that these constructions were:

Koni pela Tabalu si karewaga pela  
Sign for Tabalu their power for  
tommota Boyowa –  
people Boyowa  
koni kwe-tubwabogwa pela Tabalu.  
sign classifier.thing-time.of.old for Tabalu  
A sign for the Tabalu's power over the people of  
Boyowa [= Kiriwina Island] – a sign of old for the  
Tabalu.

This seems to, at least, partly support some of the hypotheses presented here. The authors of this article do not expect to be able to visit Kiriwina again but hope that the data presented will enable future researchers to gain more knowledge on the true function of both the *bomiyoyeva* and the *bomduvadova*.

## Appendix: The *bamomla* Magic

This magical formula was performed by Mateiyeku, a garden magician from Kuluwa village on Kiriwina Island and recorded by Gerrits in April 1971. Vapalaguyau knows that this magic exists, however, according to him it is nothing special, just an ordinary garden magic formula – despite the fact that it mentions the *guluwaga*. It was performed in the garden. A certain leaf is tied around the top of the digging stick (*dema*) and then the magic is whispered over it. Then the stick with the leaf are wrapped and tied into a banana leaf and it is only then that the gardener starts to work with the *dema*.

Mateiyeku provided the following information about this magical formula: The spirits of the dead – the *baloma* or the ancestors – will fill the spirit canoes with yams and unload them into the garden, where the yam tubers bury themselves in the garden in order to grow. The spirits tie the canoes full of yams together and send them from the big and very fertile mountains not far from Gumasila, a village on the Amphlett Islands. The spirit canoe comes out of the water and goes up into the sky to fly to the garden. The formula ends with a sound that imitates the cry of a bush fowl. The bush fowl (*geruna, kwarota*) “is making its garden” (in reality: is looking for food) by scraping the ground with its legs. It is considered to be a “good bird” that will help to cause the yams to grow in abundance.

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