



Baloma; the Spirits of the Dead in the Trobriand Islands

Bronislaw Malinowski

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Among the natives of Kiriwina, death is the starting point of two series of events which run almost independently of each other. Death affects the deceased individual; his soul (baloma or balom) leaves the body and goes to another world, there to lead a shadowy existence. His passing is also a matter of concern to the bereft community. Its members wail for him, mourn for him, and celebrate an endless series of feasts. These festivities consist, as a rule, in the distribution of uncooked food; while less frequently they are actual feasts in which cooked food is eaten on the spot. They center around the dead man's body, and are closely connected with the duties of mourning, wailing and sorrowing for the dead individual. But—and this is the important point for the present description—these social activities and ceremonies have no connection with the spirit. They are not performed, either to send a message of love and regret to the baloma (spirit), or to deter him from returning; they do not influence his welfare, nor do they affect his relation to the survivors.

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