

"Masawa - bogeokwa si tuta!" - Cultural and Cognitive Implications of Trobriand Islanders' Losing Their Knowledge of How to Make a "masawa" Canoe

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This paper describes how the Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea used to make their big seagoing "*masawa*" canoes and their sails, what forms of different knowledge and expertise they needed to do this during various stages of the construction processes, how this knowledge was socially distributed, and the social implications of all the joint communal activities that were necessary until a new canoe could be launched.

In the last 25 years cultural and social change, initiated by missionaries and then catalyzed first by a growing capitalist economy and finally by globalization effects have resulted in a situation where the complex distributed knowledge of how to make a "*masawa*" canoe and its sails is gradually getting lost in most of the village communities on the Trobriand Islands.

The implications of this loss for the Trobriand Islanders' culture, for their social construction of reality, and for their indigenous cognitive capacities are outlined and critically discussed.