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THE POWER OF TRANSCENDENCE;  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE ON IBAN SHAMANISM

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the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the  
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Faculty of Arts  
Australian National University  
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I certify that this thesis is all my  
own work and that the sources used have  
been appropriately acknowledged.

..Plyham.....

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## Introduction

This thesis explores the cultural logic of Iban shamanism. To introduce the study, I discuss the concept of shamanism, summarize some basic ethnographic data on the Iban and comment on the nature of the source materials and my use of them. I then examine, in Chapter 1, the definitions and interpretive accounts of shamanism offered, to date, in the literature on the Iban. In Chapter 2, I discuss the ritual language chants, which form part of shamanic rites. In Chapter 3, I analyse the actions of the Iban shaman (*manang*) in a range of ceremonies, including those for the initiation of a shaman (*bebangun*). This is followed, in Chapter 4, by an enquiry into the symbolic significance of the transvestism of the transformed shaman (*manang bali*). In the final chapter, I discuss the social and cultural context of Iban shamanism and endeavour to explicate the relationship between shamanism and, what I see as, certain features, characteristic of Iban culture.

### I

In its most general usage, the word shaman denotes a specialist in healing, who is thought to have direct intercourse with the gods and spirits and access to the spirit world (Firth 1964:638-639; MacCulloch 1920:441). The term shaman, introduced to Western literature from Russian sources, is said to be derived from the Tungus or Evenk *saman*, although other etymologies have also been proposed (Firth 1964:638; Siikala 1978:14). In modern ethnography, the terms shaman and shamanism are used to cover

a range of phenomena, reported from many parts of the world, but there is little agreement as to the scope of these terms. Some authors stress spirit possession, 'the seizure of man by divinity' (Findeisen 1957:15; Lewis 1971:18), while others emphasise 'mystical journeys', in which the soul of the shaman can 'abandon his body and ... penetrate the underworld and rise to the sky' (Eliade 1964:174, 182). One study sees these as 'different forms of communication between the shaman and the supernatural' and suggests analysis of the ways in which they 'appear side by side or as alternatives and why' (Siikala 1978:322). Another sees possession — the descent of the gods on man — and shamanism — the ascent of man to the gods — as antithetical processes, with markedly different connotations (de Heusch 1962).

Given these various phenomena do not always appear together, it seems essential to differentiate between them, as is now commonly done, using the following terms:

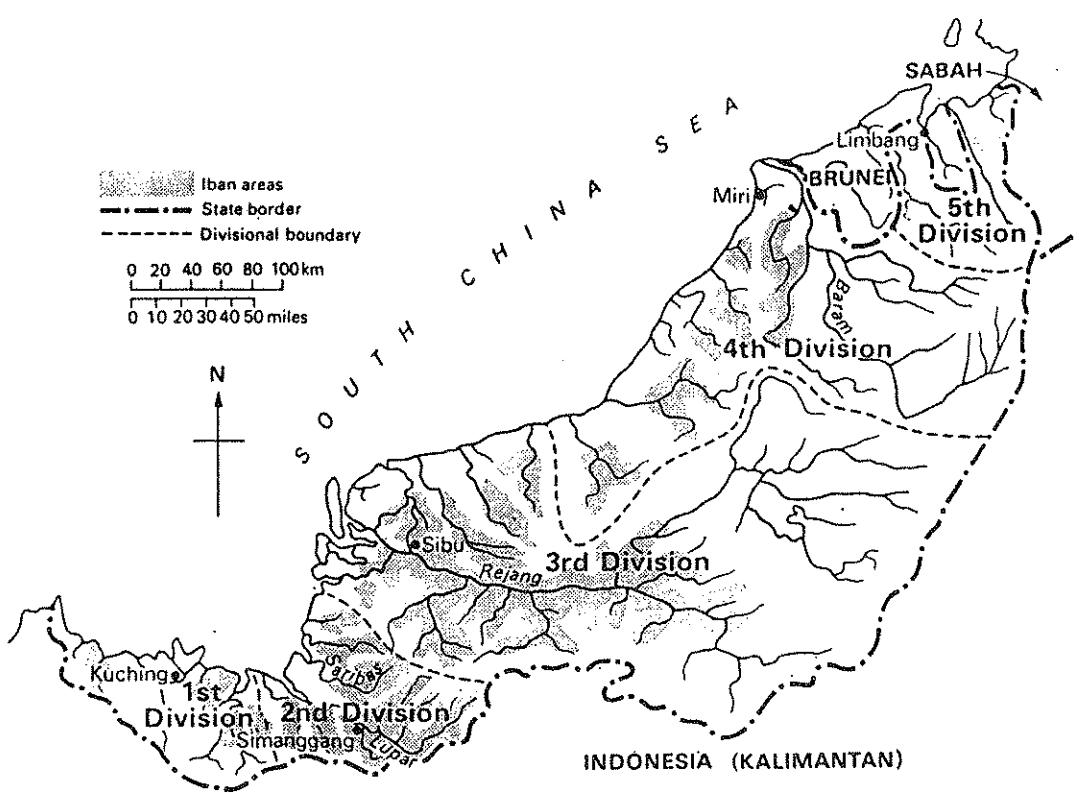
- (1) spirit possession: 'a set of practices and ideas based upon belief in the entry of a spirit into the body of a human being ... so that the actions of the person affected are thought to be either those of the spirit, or to be immediately dictated by the spirit' (Firth 1964:689);
- (2) spirit mediumship: 'a set of practices and ideas based upon belief that a specific human being possessed by a spirit ... can serve as a means of communication between other human beings and the spirit world' (Firth 1964:689);
- (3) shamanism: a set of practices and ideas based upon the belief that certain human beings can pass, at will, 'from one cosmic region to another' (Eliade 1964:259).

These distinctions are vitally important in the case of the Iban, for whom shamanism entails neither spirit possession nor spirit mediumship. The very notion of spirit possession is one the Iban found both foreign and puzzling, when it was put to them by the anthropologist, J.D. Freeman (Freeman, pers. comm., 15 December 1982). It is not surprising, then, that the only etymology given in the literature for the Iban term *manang* is consistent with this concept of a shaman as an actor, rather than a medium. Kern (1920:347) says *manang* is 'a word properly meaning "one who exercises power"'. I translate *manang*, following Freeman (1967), as shaman, using that term in the restricted sense defined above.

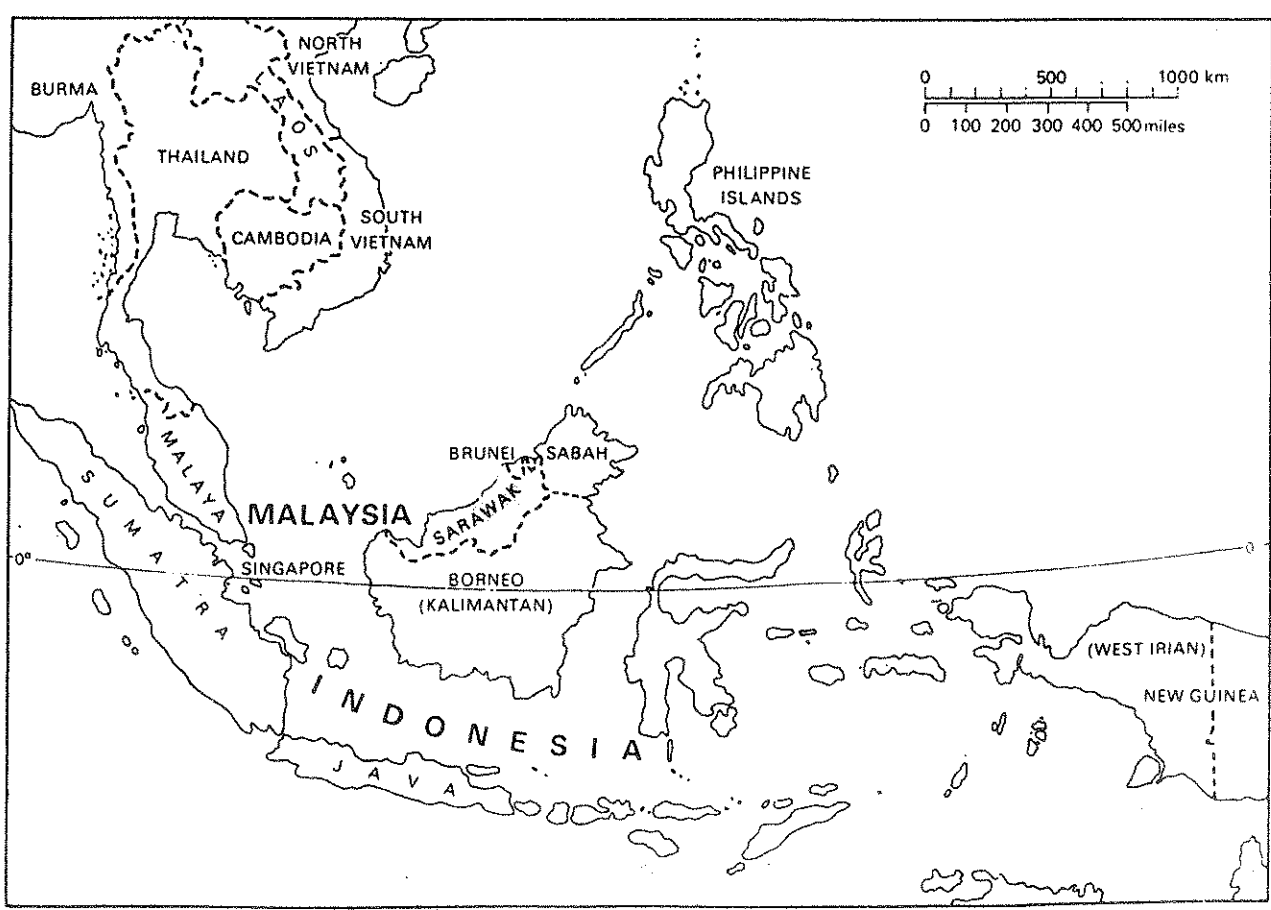
## II

The Iban are a people of the north western region of the island of Borneo. Some genealogies (*tusut*) and origin myths suggest, that ancestors of the Iban migrated from the Middle East to Sumatra and thence to the Kapuas River basin in western Borneo (Sandin 1967:2). It is likely, however, that these sources indicate significant cultural influences, rather than population movements (Freeman 1981:10; Jensen 1974:18). From the headwaters of the Kapuas (in what is now Kalimantan Barat, a province of the Republic of Indonesia), the Iban spread into Sarawak in a series of irregular migrations, which ceased about the beginning of the eighteenth century (Sandin 1967:1-28). Further expansion across Sarawak and into the adjoining states of Brunei and, to a lesser extent, Sabah, took place during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Pringle 1970:247-276; Black 1969).

The traditional subsistence economy of the Iban was based on the shifting cultivation of hill rice (Freeman 1955). This was supplemented by hunting, fishing, gathering wild vegetables and cultivating tubers,



Map 1. Distribution of the Iban in Sarawak



Map 2. Southeast Asia

(Source: Jensen 1974)

and by collecting forest products for trade (Sutlive 1978:21). During the past century, some Iban have moved into the deltaic plains, where they grow wet rice, rubber and pepper, and into the towns of Sarawak, where they work for wages (Sutlive 1978:2).

The term *Iban* is said to mean 'roving stranger' (Richards 1981:111). It is thought to be a borrowing from the Kayan *ivan*: immigrant or wanderer (Hose and McDougall 1912:ii. 250), or the Kayan *divan*: son-in-law or any younger person not related by blood to the speaker (Richards 1981:111). Jensen (1974:17) says that, among the Iban themselves, the word can be used in three ways: first, to distinguish an Iban from a member of any other ethnic category, such as Kayan, Land Dayak, Chinese; second, to mean 'anyone/someone' in conversation; and third, to mean an ordinary Iban, as opposed to a shaman (*manang*). The Iban first became known to Europeans as Sea Dayak, a term attributed to the Malays (St. John 1863:i. 4), with whom certain Iban were engaged in coastal piracy at the time of the first British contact with them in the 1840s. This term was used by the Brooke Raj and later by the British colonial administration in Sarawak. It is, however, misleading, as 'the vast majority of the Iban have always been a hill people living many miles from the coast with an economy based on the cultivation of dry rice' (Freeman 1960:160 n.1).

The Sarawak census for 1960 recorded approximately 240,000 Iban, forming the largest single ethnic group and making up about one-third of the total population (McKinley 1978:16-17). Iban in Kalimantan number approximately 7,000 (King 1979:24). Ethnic classification of Bornean peoples is notoriously difficult, given the historical processes of cultural interpenetration and differentiation among them. These processes stem from 'indigenous movements in the context of swidden agriculture, trading contacts, differential population growth and inter-group feuding and

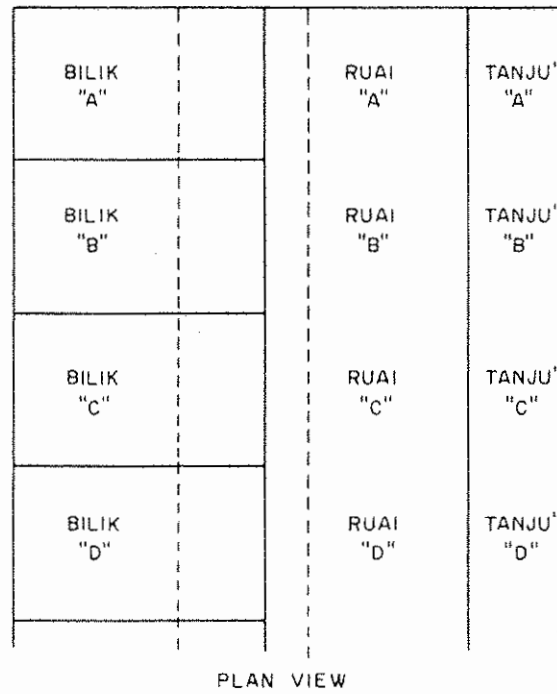
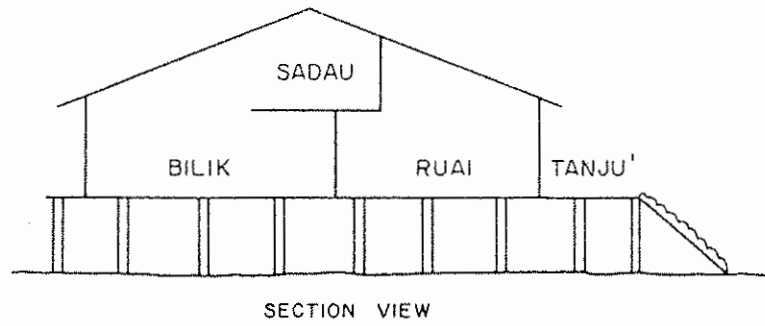


Figure 1. The traditional longhouse

(Source: Sutlive 1978)

warfare', as well as 'the spread of Islam and Malay culture' (King 1979: 2). This problem of identification is less marked with the Iban, whose language — described as 'a Malay dialect' which differs considerably in certain respects from the others spoken in Borneo (Cense and Uhlenbeck 1958:7) — and social organisation — characterised as 'endogamous personal kindred, exogamous house group, absence of rigid class stratification' (Leach 1950:68-69) — set them apart from their neighbours (Leach 1950:54). Furthermore, Iban culture and social institutions have not been 'appreciably affected by Islam' (Freeman 1958:15). Nevertheless, this relatively clear ethnic identity masks an extensive history of incorporation of non-Iban peoples through their assimilation to Iban culture (McKinley 1978).

The traditional social organisation of the Iban has been documented and analysed by J.D. Freeman (1958, 1960, 1970). Each Iban community resides in a single longhouse, consisting of a series of separate family apartments (*bilek*: living room), each owned and occupied by a family group (*bilek*-family). The *bilek*-family typically consists of three generations — grandparents, a son or daughter and his/her spouse and their children — and membership may be by birth, marriage or adoption. The *bilek*-family is perpetuated by one child of each generation remaining in the natal *bilek* after marriage. Virilocal residence and uxori-local residence occur with almost equal frequency. The *bilek*-family is the basic social and economic unit of Iban society: it owns and occupies a single longhouse apartment; it cultivates land to provide for the subsistence of its members; it owns heirloom and ritual property, including its own special strain of sacred rice. It is also a distinct ritual group, performing its own rites (*gawai*) and following its own set of ritual prohibitions (*pemali*).

The longhouse community is an autonomous entity, not subject to any higher authority. It is an open group, whose families are joined

in free association and a good deal of movement occurs, year by year, from one longhouse to another. Each longhouse community contains a core-group of *bilek*-families linked by close cognatic ties, generally descended from the founders of the community, and other *bilek*-families related cognatically to this core-group or, at least, to one other family in the community. The Iban term *kaban* refers, not only to an individual's cognates and affines, but also to all of his/her friends and acquaintances. Within this broad category, the Iban distinguish cognatic kin (*kaban mandal*), affinal kin (*kaban tampil*) and other people (*orang bukal*). The *kaban mandal* is identical with the individual's personal kindred: all those persons to whom relationship can be traced consanguineally through both male and female links.

An interlocking aggregation of such kindreds was formally the basis of the tribe — a diffuse territorial grouping of longhouse communities dispersed along the banks of a major river and its tributaries. Although this tribe entirely lacked any overall political organisation, it was a grouping within which disputes could usually be settled, through the mechanisms of kinship, and within which individuals did not take one another's heads. Under the colonial government, this diffuse grouping was largely superseded by a series of administrative districts, under officially appointed Iban leaders called *penghulu*.

The Iban are this-worldly people, whose religion 'is oriented towards the enhancement of the good things in their present mode of existence' (Uchibori 1978:299-300). Their conception of the spirit world is contained in a rich oral tradition. Jensen (1974:64-71) describes this tradition as falling into two parts, one of which concerns 'the origins of Iban custom, the rice cult, augury and social organisation', while the other consists mainly of legends from the heroic past, which serve to

entertain, but whose primary purpose is to explain 'Iban behaviour and the potential consequences of wrong behaviour'.

Iban religious functionaries are those individuals, who have specific roles in relation to rice cultivation, augury, social order and ritual life (Jensen 1974:59-64). They include the *tuai burong* (augur), the *tuai rumah* (house headman), the *lemambang* (bard) and the *manang* (shaman). More than one of these functions may be vested in the same person. The *tuai burong* is called on to guide the community, through seeking and interpreting omens, especially those concerning rice cultivation. The *tuai rumah* administers *adat* (customary law). The *lemambang* intones the ritual invocations (*timbang* or *pengap*), which form a central part of major ceremonies (*gawai*). The *manang*, a healer of individuals, is the subject of this thesis and his/her role is explored in the chapters that follow.

The Iban concept of *petara* (gods) is one of benevolent supernatural beings: '*petara nadai enda manah; bisi utai ditulong sida*' (*petara* cannot fail to be good; they are helpful in many ways) (Jensen 1974:101). Some of these named gods appear as remote ancestors in Iban myths and putative genealogies (Jensen 1974:83-86; Uchibori 1978:284). The mythical heroes (*orang Panggau*), to whom supernatural powers are attributed, are also thought to use their powers, 'even if selectively, for the benefit of mankind' (Masing 1981:31). While *petara* (gods) are, thus, thought to be well disposed towards men, *antu* (spirits) can be benevolent or malevolent, so evil or unfriendly spirits are always termed *antu* (Jensen 1974:100-103).

All life, or rather, as Jensen (1974:106-109) notes, all life which is 'significant in Iban experience', be it human, animal or vegetable, is credited with a physical and a spirit side: the physical, mortal, visible body (*tuboh*) and the spirit counterpart or soul (*semengat*). The Iban

theory of *semengat* is summarized by Uchibori (1978:296) as follows:

As long as a person is alive, the *semengat* works as a live principle and, being combined with the physical aspect (body), constitutes the person's totality. Its separability from the person as a physical and visible entity is the most important attribute of the *semengat*, originating in dream experiences and shamanic trances. In this sphere of psychic experiences the *semengat* assumes the role of the second-self of the person, though it is distinguished from the conscious self while the person is still alive. Death is regarded by the Iban as the permanent departure of the *semengat* from the physical person.

The *semengat* of the dead spend an indefinite period in the land of the dead, before they are 'extinguished and dispersed in the end to become dew or mist', the destiny of which is 'transformation (or absorption) into rice plants' (Uchibori 1978:250-253). The *semengat*, as a separable soul, is intimately tied up with shamanism. Only the initiated shaman is deemed able to see and recognise individual *semengat* and to have control over his own *semengat*, such that he can set it abroad in the spirit realm at will (Uchibori 1978:15).

These shamanic states are considered homologous with dreams, except that, where the shamans exercise control, the ordinary Iban have no control over their *semengat*, when it 'enters directly into the realm of spirits' (Freeman 1967:317). It is in this way, that revelation is thought to be communicated by means of dreams, which are interpreted 'as oracles from the gods' (Howell 1909:14). As a result the Iban 'in all their pursuits... are guided by dreams' (Howell 1909:14). Freeman (1975:284) has described how, 'among pagan Iban, there can be seen at day-break, groupings of individuals, dispersed along the gallery of the longhouse, talking together with rapt attention. They are discussing their dreams of the night just ended, interpreting them and deciding how to be guided by them'. He (1975: 280, 284-285) gives examples of ritual variants and new conceptions of the spirit order, which stemmed from the dream experiences of individual

Iban, in order to indicate, 'the fundamental importance of the dream in the religious life of the Iban, and the remarkable extent to which dreams produce not "ordered pattern", but innovation and change'. Masing (1981:86) also cites examples, which attest to a pragmatic and innovative approach to ritual by Iban, who may, and do, 'either alter the well-established rites or simply ignore their performance'. This historical and regional variability in the Iban ritual corpus is unevenly documented in the literature. It must, however, be kept in mind in any analysis, such as the present one, which seeks to delineate the underlying assumptions, that inform the way individual Iban elaborate their religious beliefs and practices.

### III

Just as it is difficult to give due weight to both the variability in and the assumptions underlying Iban ritual, so it is difficult to depict what is uniquely Iban, without considering similarities of cultural form or content, which are reported from other societies in the Austronesian-speaking world. It is, however, quite beyond the scope of this thesis to do so. Shamanism, head-hunting, ritual language, hot/cool symbolism and botanic metaphors for the human person all appear in the literature on other Austronesian peoples (see, for example, Benjamin 1979; Rosaldo 1980; Fox 1971a; Forth 1981; Fox 1971b). In this discussion, however, I am limiting myself to the Iban, following the principle, that detailed analysis of individual societies must precede comparative studies of the common cultural heritage within a 'field of ethnological study' (see Fox 1980).

While the literature on the Iban is extensive, it is by no means of uniform quality, ranging from the observations of European missionaries

and administrators in the nineteenth century, through to the detailed analyses of trained anthropologists in the period since the late 1940s. Although the literature spans the last one hundred and thirty-five years of socio-cultural change, in general, it provides a series of pictures taken at different times in different places, and only rarely, do the authors seek to place the synchronic image in diachronic perspective (but see Freeman 1970, 1975; Uchibori 1978; Sutlive 1978; and, of course, the historian Pringle 1970). There is, then, a real problem in the use of this wide range of source materials, which span time and space, but which are not adequate for 'an historical approach' (Freeman 1975:276) to the study of Iban shamanism. I have, therefore, transgressed against this principle, at least in Chapters 2 and 3, to the extent that I have drawn on all the available materials in my analysis of the Iban shaman (*manang*), placing reports from different periods and different regions alongside one another. While such an account, written in the essentially fictional ethnographic present, has obvious weaknesses, it is reassuring to note how often the different sources both reinforce and illuminate one another, when it comes to explicating the ideological features of Iban shamanism. At the same time, I have sought to bring out historical and regional developments, where these can be deduced from a comparative study of the literature on the subject.

Finally, I have chosen a style of exposition, which is intended to distinguish clearly the data and interpretations given in the sources, from my analysis of that material. With this in mind, I have, especially in Chapters 2 and 3, not so much propounded an argument with supporting evidence, as critically reviewed the source materials, deducing my argument from them as I do so.

## Chapter 1

Analyses of shamanism in the literature on the Iban

## I

The Iban term *manang* has been variously rendered into English as priest (St. John 1863), soothsayer (Brooke 1866), witch-doctor (Gomes 1910, 1911), native healer (Schmidt 1964) and shaman (Freeman 1967; Jensen 1974). In a style more exuberant than accurate, Tom Harrisson (1965: 33) has even suggested 'it would be nice if we could call him "Doctor" and use this as a name prefix, leaving obscure ... whether he is medico, philosopher, ethnobotanist or abortionist'. I turn, therefore, to the entries in the three published dictionaries of Iban, which may serve as a starting point to clarify the meaning of the term and the nature of the social status to which it applies.

Howell and Bailey's pioneering *Sea Dyak dictionary* (1900:98) gives the basic translation 'a medicine man or woman' and provides the following account:

There are both terrestrial and celestial *manang*. The terrestrial *manang* exorcises evil spirits which are supposed to be the cause of illness among the Dyaks. He generally possesses some little knowledge of the medicinal effects of certain roots and herbs, but he depends for his cures on his incantations in which he calls upon the gods of the hills and forests to come and help him to drive away the evil spirits. He is not above using deceit to improve the occasion and pretends, when attending a sick man, to catch his soul (*semengat*) which is just leaving the body, and to put it back into the man and thus prevent his death ....

A man becomes a *manang* in obedience to the command of the spirits conveyed to him in a dream. To disregard such a command would mean the punishment of death or madness inflicted by the enraged spirits.

Scott's *Dictionary of Sea Dayak* (1956:112) merely repeats the basic translation 'a medicine-man, -woman' without further elaboration.

Richards' recent *Iban-English dictionary* (1981:204) begins a long entry with the description:

Kind of "shaman" or exorcist, healer of the sick in spirit and restorer of souls; one able to enter trance to free his own soul to fight evil powers possessing a patient and to seek out and bring back a soul that has left the body and started the journey to the land of the dead.

As to their methods of treatment, Richards reports:

*Manang* generally possess some knowledge of herbal medicine but details are not known; except that they chew certain leaves for external application (*retat*) to the patient. They depend mainly on their rituals and invocations, and on a collection (*rajut*) of amulets (*batu*) which they carry in a bag (*puntil*) and keep in a box (*lipong*). The amulets protect their bodies when in trance (*liput*) and their souls when away searching, give them clear sight and make them invisible to evil beings. When a *manang* visits a house for the first time he is given beads to be "eyes" (*mata manang*) to see with in the other worlds his soul visits. As a preliminary to treatment, a *manang* examines his patient by palpation (*besudi*): minimal treatment may consist only of this. Before further treatment, he may consult (*betabas*) with other *manang*, as to proper procedures. *Manang* treat one patient at a time, either briefly and informally for minor ills or with full rites (*pelian*, *saut*).

Howell and Bailey (1900:98-99) describe three grades of *manang* as follows:

I. *Manang Bali*. This is the highest rank to which a *manang* can attain. The word *bali* means to change and the *Manang Bali* is supposed to be a man who has changed his sex and become a woman. Even to the Dyak mind such a process is unnatural, and it is only undergone because of the command of the spirits who must be obeyed ....

II. *Manang Mansau*, the second grade. The word *mansau* means ripe and the name *Manang Mansau* is given in distinction to the *Manang Mata*, *mata* meaning unripe. The *Manang Mansau* is one who has gone through all the required ceremony necessary to make him a perfect *manang* ....

III. *Manang Mata*, the lowest grade. The word *mata* means unripe and the *Manang Mata* is one who though he assists in curing the sick, has not yet been initiated into all the mysteries of the *manang*'s profession. He has not yet undergone the process necessary to the *manang mansau*. He can repeat many of the incantations used and he assists others in their cures.

Regarding the personality and disposition of *manang* in general, Richards (1981:204) comments:

The existence of *manang bali'* led at one time to all *manang* being socially despised for lack of manliness, e.g.: *nadai asai di' - ila' nyadi manang*, you're no good at the game — you'll be a *manang* yet. But most are normal and some are known for great strength. They need to be fit for the frequent journeys they must make when called to distant houses. Generally, both *manang* and *lemambang* [bard] live and work as other men do, although they often have a quietness and sobriety about them which mark them as possessed of unusual knowledge and powers.

## II

Accounts of Iban society and culture generally draw attention to the *manang* role, particularly the *manang bali* phenomenon. Some authors relate the existence of *manang* to a particular aspect of Iban culture, as, for example, the prestige system. Other analysts draw on comparative studies of shamanism, in their attempt to shed light on the activities and attributes of the Iban *manang*. Here, I discuss a number of these accounts, to indicate the types of explanation offered in the literature on the Iban. It is my contention that these accounts are, at best, partial, at worst, seriously misleading and that a more coherent, comprehensive analysis is called for, both of the *manang* role in general and of the *manang bali* status in particular.

Early European commentaries present the *manang* as a charlatan, 'whose superior cunning enables him to practise upon the credulity of the people' (Brooke Low in Ling Roth 1896:i. 265). On this view, the *manang* are simply rogues, who exploit their more gullible fellows. Brooke Low (Ling Roth 1896:i. 265) dismisses the *manang*'s cures as 'trickeries' and the 'entire system' as one of 'superstition and imposture supplemented with a smattering of herbalism'. Perham (1887:87) also reports 'the belief of the Dayaks generally' in the 'mysterious powers' of the *manang*. He suggests, that where 'all rational conception of the causes of disease ... is entirely absent ... fear and anxiety in cases of illness lead to an

eager credulity which clutches at any projected means of cure, however absurd in themselves'. Gomes (1911:175), likewise, sees 'a good deal of deceit and humbug and a little clumsy sleight-of-hand on the part of the *manang*, and an unlimited amount of faith on the part of the patient'. St. John (1863:i. 72), however, suggests that it is cultural conservatism, rather than naivety, which supports the institution of the *manang*, for 'when the Dayaks are questioned as to their belief in these easily-exposed deceits they say no; but the custom has descended to them from their ancestors, and they still pay these priests large sums to perform the ancient rites'.

Such accounts depict a gullible, superstitious public, exploited by the cunning opportunists in their midst. Some reflect the paternalism of nineteenth century administrators and missionaries, who sought to emancipate indigenes from the shackles of tradition, disparaging those aspects of the tradition, which they could not understand. Others, however, while stressing the 'absurd' activities of the *manang*, nevertheless, present the institution as a 'superstition', which must be recognised, in order to be understood. Perham, whose work (1887) falls into this category, provides a useful account of late nineteenth century shamanic healing rites, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 3.

The genuineness of shamanic activities was explored by the Dutch scholar, Wilken, who posed the question: 'To what extent is the shaman acting in good faith or consciously a fraud?' (Wilken 1887:492). In his comparative study of 'shamanism' among the peoples of the Indonesian archipelago, Wilken is, however, dealing primarily with spirit possession/mediumship and only secondarily with shamanism in the restricted sense of one who can send his own soul to the spirit realm. What might be relevant, nevertheless, is his central thesis concerning the nature of trance experience, since Iban

*manang*: 'are believed to have the power, when in "trance", to confront and overcome malevolent demons' (Freeman 1967:317).

Wilken does not dismiss claims to see spirits and other invisible beings as deliberate deception. Rather, he likens the trance experience to states characterised by hallucinations, such that the 'shaman' is not so much a deceiver, as himself one of the deceived. It is, he concludes, precisely those people disposed to such ecstatic states, who usually become 'shamans' (Wilken 1887:492-496). Thus, Wilken traces the origins of 'shamanism' to the revelations of individuals suffering mental and nervous disorders. As their personal disability is converted to a social asset, others of appropriate disposition—'sickly, weak and excitable, particularly neuropathic individuals'—are encouraged to follow suit (Wilken 1887:438).

Now, although the Iban *manang* is thought to exercise his greatest power in trance, this state is indicated, when the *manang* 'falls on the floor and remains motionless' (Perham 1887:91). It entails little physiological elaboration. Freeman (pers. comm., 15 December 1982) points out, that this 'trance' state is based on cataleptic, rather than ecstatic, trance. Furthermore, 'in the great majority of cases the "trance" of an Iban *manang* is of a simulated kind, being merely part of a ritual procedure and involving no significant change in his psychological state' (Freeman 1967:316). It is, then, not the physiological nature of the trance state, but rather, its culturally prescribed meaning, which is of significance for the Iban. Finally, in some healing rites the *manang* calls up the offending spirit (*antu buyu*) and attacks its physical manifestation, a procedure which, given its this-worldly location, does not require a trance state at all (Freeman 1967).

Nor is Wilken's emphasis on mental and nervous disorders echoed in Richards' description (1981:204) of the Iban *manang* as men of 'quietness

and sobriety'. An unstable temperament is not a prerequisite for the vocation among the Iban, as '*manang* are appointed by command of a spirit, deity or ancestor appearing in terrestrial form in vision or dream (*mimpi*): disobedience of the call will result in madness or death' (Richards 1981:204). The dream revelation, an intrapsychic experience, disregard of which is thought to entail madness or death, suggests that significant, possibly traumatic, psychic experiences are involved in the transition to *manang* status. Nevertheless, insanity, here, threatens those who refuse the call, rather than publicly marking out candidates for the role. Only one writer, Brooke Low (Ling Roth 1896:i. 266), reports that an aspirant, in proof of his calling, 'will occasionally abstain from food and indulge in trances'. Most writers report that knowledge of shamanic techniques, including trance, is attained through instruction by an established shaman. It is not so much natural proclivity as apprenticeship, followed by initiation, which validates the aspirant's calling (Sutlive 1976:67).

Wilken's disability theory may have more relevance to the Iban, if we shift the focus from nervous disorders to physical handicaps. St. John (1863:i. 73) suggests, that the *manang* role provides a niche for the disabled: 'Many of the priests are the blind and maimed for life, who, by following this profession, are enabled to earn a livelihood'. Another early observer (Crossland in Ling Roth 1896:i. 265n6.) recounts an indigenous response highlighting the connection between blindness and *manang* candidacy:

I have now got a blind man living with me. I heard that the *manangs* or spirit doctors wanted to get hold of him, so one day I asked him if he really was going to become a *manang*? He replied "Yes, I suppose so; but if I only had eyesight catch me becoming a *manang*".

Sutlive (1976) elaborates a psycho-sociological explanation for the *manang* role along these lines: Any physical, psychological or sexual

deviation from the norm, which inhibits an Iban man's attainment of status through fulfilment of the standard male role (warfare, pioneering and successful farming), finds resolution in his becoming a *manang*, thereby embracing a culturally prescribed alternative route to normality. In Sutlive's view, 'the *manang* and his patients share an elaborate social fiction and participate in a ministry of mutuality through which the "physician heals himself"' (Sutlive 1976:65-66). He concludes, that, 'although the Iban traditionally have prescribed adventure and success as means to power and upward mobility, not all males have been able to fulfil these prescriptions. The status of *manang* ... [is one] through which deviant persons have approximated cultural norms through an alternate route' (Sutlive 1976:71).

There are many illuminating points in Sutlive's analysis. He discusses the norms of masculinity, the social processes whereby some Iban males develop a sense of personal inadequacy and the psychological importance of the rites of initiation to *manang* status for such individuals. He stresses the mutually supportive aspects of the *manang* system, which include the *manang*'s reciprocal roles in initiation and strengthening rites, as well as the 'emotional supports', which operate between the *manang* and his community. He argues that the *manang* does have a sphere of authority, albeit a circumscribed one, in which his expertise is recognised (Sutlive 1976:65-71).

Nevertheless, the main thrust of his argument is a very partial account of the *manang* phenomenon. First, his analysis virtually excludes the possibility of female shamans and yet, these do exist. Second, he describes the *manang bali* as 'a socially sanctioned status for the homosexual male who cannot function as a man'. It is 'the most respected grade', he explains, 'precisely because it strikes the Iban as the most

unusual' (Sutlive 1976:68). So, we have the supreme deviant accommodated with the highest fee-for-service, but why? Does 'unusual', here, simply mean rare and, therefore, special, or is the *manang bali* valued as unusually potent in some intrinsic sense? While Iban homosexuals might seek social acceptability as *manang bali*, this is hardly adequate as an account of the value placed on the institution within traditional Iban culture. Third, Sutlive's interpretation rests on his depiction of the *manang* as a psycho-social misfit. He argues, that, 'normal and abnormal Iban recognise material common to a "psychotic core" (Devereux 1956) in the psychopathic tendencies of the shaman' (Sutlive 1976:65). Yet, even his own discussion of 'conflict-ridden' Iban males hardly sustains their description as 'psychotic' or 'psychopathic', while such a view runs quite counter to Richards' estimation (1981:204) of *manang*, that 'most are normal'. Furthermore, Sutlive's interpretation cannot account for those Iban males, who attain status through success in the traditional male pursuits and, yet, are simultaneously *manang*. Asun, for instance, the last great Iban rebel, who enjoyed renown as a formidable warrior and a sometime *penghulu* (district headman), was also a *manang* (Pringle 1968). According to Richards (1949:81), 'in his own country he is always referred to as Manang Adong', although he had a praise-name (*julok*), which celebrated his achievements as the 'Fiery Centipede' (*Nyelipan Api*). It seems unlikely, therefore, that the position of *manang* can be adequately understood, solely in terms of resolving deviation from the standard male role.

Sutlive's account of the Iban *manang* embraces both sociological and psychological factors. Other authors have stressed one or the other of these explanatory frameworks. I.M. Lewis (1971) has explored the sociological 'functions' of spirit possession. In doing so, he

misconstrues the Iban, as a case in support of his theory, that possession is the resort of the weak and humiliated. Lewis argues, that, for women and downtrodden categories of men, possession constitutes an oblique aggressive strategy to achieve ends, which they cannot readily obtain more directly. He distinguishes this 'peripheral possession' from 'main morality possession religions', in which possession has become 'the mystical idiom in terms of which men of substance compete for positions of power and authority in society at large' (Lewis 1971:32-34).

Lewis cites the Iban as an example of peripheral possession exhibiting a common pattern of 'married women's spirit ailments ... attributed in this case to possession by lustful male incubi' (Lewis 1971:85). However, a closer look at both the pattern and at Freeman's article (1967) to which Lewis refers, will show, that this model has little to do with the Iban case. For Lewis, 'married women's spirit ailments' exhibit two standard characteristics. First, the women 'in a sense occupy a peripheral position' and, thus, 'women's possession cults are ... thinly disguised protest movements directed against the dominant sex'. Second, the attacking spirits 'are believed to strike entirely capriciously and without any grounds which can be referred to the moral character or conduct of the victims'. The women are thus 'totally blameless'. Presumably, the shaman who exorcises, or otherwise 'controls', the offending spirit is the victim's unwitting accomplice in using spirit attacks 'to press their claims for attention and respect' (Lewis 1971:31-32).

The problem with this pattern is that it just does not fit the case in hand. Women are far from peripheral in Iban society. Incubus attacks do not constitute spirit possession in the usual sense of that term and do not generate 'possession cults' of the kind Lewis discusses from African ethnography. If the 'sex-war' is to be found amongst the Iban,

it does not take this particular form. For instance, Lewis sees spirit attacks as 'an effective vehicle for manipulating husbands and relatives' (Lewis 1971:31). Perhaps it could be argued that Iban men, who like to make lengthy journeys in search of wealth and adventure (*bejalai*), could be enticed to stay home for fear of being cuckolded by an incubus in their absence. A plausible hypothesis, but Freeman (1967:322, 336) points out, that the husband's absence is not considered a prerequisite for an incubus attack. He cites the case of Rabai, who was thought to be seduced by an incubus, while her husband was fast asleep beside her. Furthermore, while incubi are capricious, women are not considered entirely blameless. Far from providing opportunities to press claims for attention and respect, incubus attacks generate in their victims feelings of embarrassment, shame, anxiety and guilt (Freeman 1967:321-325, 339). Finally, the Iban *manang*, in this instance, does not act as a 'controller of spirits' with the power to exorcise demons, but rather as one whose cunning and ingenuity enable him to slay the creature in mortal combat.

In contrast to Lewis' cross-cultural study, Freeman's own work presents a subtle account of the Iban shaman in socio-cultural context. Unlike Sutlive's view of the physician who heals himself, Freeman (1975: 283) describes the *manang* as oriented to the needs of his clients: as a 'healer of the spiritually afflicted'. He notes the Iban belief that all humans have separable souls (*semengat*), which may wander abroad and become ensnared by a malevolent spirit. Should this happen, 'the owner will become ill and it is with the recovery of souls and the returning of them to their rightful owners that Iban shamans (*manang*) are principally concerned' (Freeman 1979:235). In *Shaman and incubus*, Freeman briefly describes the standard form of diagnosis and ritual performed by the *manang* in order to discern the state and whereabouts of the missing soul

and effect its return (Freeman 1967:316). He then recounts and analyses an instance of a somewhat different *manang* performance, in which the shaman slays an incubus spirit. This spirit (*antu buyu*) is thought to seduce Iban women and later to claim the soul of the woman's offspring, resulting in miscarriage or the death of a child (Freeman 1967:317-318).

Freeman (1967:320) describes Manang Bungai, the shaman concerned, as 'a strongly masculine figure' in both bearing and personality. From the time of his arrival in the longhouse to perform the ritual, he was 'the imperturbable master of the scene' (Freeman 1967:325). Manang Bungai specialised in the slaying of incubi, a most formidable task, which, Freeman says, few shamans were prepared to tackle (Freeman 1967:319-320). From this, it seems that the *manang* role may be interpreted by individual shamans in terms of their own personality and disposition. So Nyala, an aggressively masculine house headman and renowned head-hunter, confided to Freeman that, if in a dream he were ordered to become a shaman, he would, like Bungai, specialise in the slaying of incubi. 'But then', observes Freeman, 'the two pastimes have much in common' (Freeman 1967:340).

Levi-Strauss (1968:186-205) has drawn a parallel between shamanic and psychoanalytic healing as symbolic rites which restructure, or rather, enable the patients to restructure their perception and experience of reality. Psychoanalysis is, for Levi-Strauss, 'the modern version of shamanistic technique' (Levi-Strauss 1968:204). While Freeman would reject this analogy, he presents the Iban shaman as a benign practitioner, whose actions do lessen the patient's guilt and shame, and have a psychotherapeutic effect, if only of a transitory kind (Freeman 1967:343). The simulated slayings are the means, by which the shaman destroys the incubus in the dream world of his patients and so relieves their anxiety. Dealing, thus, 'with the emotional problems of their clientele within the assumptions

of a culturally transmitted, transempirical, symbolic order .... [the shamans play] a vital role in the defense of the psychic integrity both of the individual and of the community' (Freeman 1967:340-343).

The psychotherapeutic effect of the *manang*'s healing rites has been described as part of a system of 'folk psychiatry' among the Iban. Schmidt (1964:139-155) sees the *manang*'s rituals as treatment of the patient's mental illness, treatment, in which, 'the aim is to restore the soul-mind to its place in the body and to reintegrate the patient into the group once the bad spirits have been defeated and new taboos given as safeguards against the relapse'. Unfortunately, Schmidt does not relate his account of native healers to his list of Iban terms for varieties of mental illness, nor to his summary of 'Iban views of the causation of mental illness'. In fact, his sparse and somewhat self-contradictory account of these matters adds little to our understanding of the cognitive domain, in which the *manang* operates. While he states, that 'the *manang* is the one to whom people come with all ills, including mental illness', his account implies that native healers treat only those cases, in which spirits are thought to have affected the soul (*semengat*) of the patient (Schmidt 1964:150). A failure on the part of the *manang* to cure 'mental abnormality' is, he says, attributed to the potency of the spirits attacking the patient or else to insufficient assistance from good spirits to effect a cure (Schmidt 1964:152). Overall, his account is consistent with Freeman's thesis (1967:316), that 'the principal concern [of the *manang*] is the psychic welfare of his clients'.

As well as exploring the psychotherapeutic role of the shaman as a slayer of incubi, Freeman is concerned with the behavioural and ideational context of the incubus belief. On his analysis, sociocultural factors (the social position of Iban women; male values and dominance strivings;

customary law concerning adultery and incest;) combine with psychobiological factors (libidinal impulses; the oedipal situation; processes of projection;) to give rise to the incubus belief and its resolution in ritual (Freeman 1967:334-340). This aspect — the social and ideational context of the incubus belief — is taken up by Sather (1978:318) who sees reflected in such beliefs 'sexual antagonisms and conflicting values relating to marriage and procreation'. His discussion of Iban notions of sexual peril as ideational projections of conflict between the sexes is a theme to which I shall return in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

As this review indicates, there are a number of perceptive, as well as some quite misleading, interpretations of the *manang* role in the literature on the Iban. To date, however, the most persuasive accounts have been partial, in as much as they have concentrated on one type of shamanic performance or focused on one function of the *manang* role. There is no account, for instance, which describes and analyses the range and the nature of the specialisation, which seems to be possible within the fully initiated shaman category (*manang mansau*). Nor is there an account, which deals adequately with the diverse elaborations of the *manang* role across the categories, or grades, defined by Howell and Bailey (1900:98-99). Just what, if anything, for example, does the strongly masculine slayer of incubi have in common with the transvestite healer, such that they are different grades of the same social status? And why is the latter, the *manang bali*, considered the more powerful of the two?

Erik Jensen (1974) has made some suggestions in this regard, to the effect that disabilities may become assets when dealing with the spiritis. Thus, 'the blind man who cannot see by day is credited with spirit sight', for 'the world of men and the spirit world are associated with certain opposite values: visible and invisible, light and darkness and so forth'

(Jensen 1974:145). Then again, not all shamans are blind, and even those who are must be initiated into the role: *manang* are called to the profession and reborn, rather than born, into it. The *manang bali*, is described by Jensen as, 'neither true man nor true woman, implying that he does not belong fully to the world in which Iban men and women live. While exhibiting some aspects of male and female human behaviour, he also belongs partly to another world, the world of the spirits' (Jensen 1974: 145). But, since the world of the spirits replicates the world of the Iban, the spirits themselves are males, females and celestial *manang*, including transvestite shamans. In what sense, then, does the terrestrial *manang* belong to the world of the spirits?

I propose to examine first the *manang* and then the *manang bali*, in the light of these issues. In the next two chapters, I explore the nature of the *manang*'s power. To do so, I describe and analyse the words and actions, which constitute particular rites; the range and character of ritual activities, at which the *manang* is officiant; and finally, the meaning of the initiation ceremonies, which confer upon the *manang* the special powers attributed to him.

## Chapter 2

The ritual language chants of shamanic healing rites

## I

Communication with the spirits by means of an esoteric ritual language is, in many cultures, one characteristic, which sets shamanic rites apart from everyday experience (Eliade 1964:96-99). It is equally important to note, however, that ritual language forms are not solely the province of the shaman. On the eastern Indonesian island of Roti, for instance, ritual language is used in a range of contexts — 'greetings and farewells, petitions, courtship overtures, preludes to negotiations, and the ceremonies of the life-cycle' — all of which are 'moments of formalized interaction that call for a clear statement of shared premisses' (Fox 1975:128). Similarly, a survey of the use of semantic parallelism in the world's oral traditions indicates, that it is a marked form of speaking reserved for a range of specific purposes: 'in scriptures, in the utterance of sacred words, in the preservation of ancient traditions, in ritual relations, in curing, shamans' journeys, and in other communications with spirits' (Fox 1977:80). Recent studies of the semantics of ritual language texts stress their intelligibility as 'idealized statements of a specific cultural order', which may allow analysis of primary symbols and their relationships within a particular culture (Fox 1975: 99-132). The metaphoric correspondences of semantic parallelism, in particular, aid communication (Forth 1981:19). In some instances, the dyadic structure actually reduces the ambiguity inherent in some of the

constituent ordinary-language elements (Fox 1971a:235).

Following Roman Jakobson, Fox (1977:60) argues that such parallelism has two aspects. At a general level, it is 'an extension of the binary principle of opposition to the phonemic, syntactic, and semantic levels of expression' and, as such, is 'an ever-present aspect of poetic language'. More specifically, it refers to 'manifestations of this binary principle as a strict, consistent, and pervasive means of composition in the traditional oral poetry of a wide variety of peoples of the world'. In this latter, more technical, sense, it describes a dyadic poetic form, which exploits semantic parallels of a synonymous, synthetic and antithetic (complementary, contrary or contradictory) kind (Fox 1971a:248). Fox points out, that parallelism is 'prevalent — often in priestly or esoteric speech forms — among many of the Indonesian peoples' (Fox 1971a:217-219, 1980:16-17). From Borneo, he notes parallel language forms in 'the cosmological speculation of the Ngaju' (1975:128), the 'sacred language' of the Tempasuk Dusun, the ritual texts collected from the Mualang and Kedayan Dayak groups and, finally, in the Iban chants recorded by Harrison and Sandin (1971a:217).

Unfortunately, we have, as yet, no linguistic analyses of the lexicon or the structure of Iban ritual language texts. While Perham (1887:97) noted that 'invocations, song, and enchantment' are common to all '*mancong* performances' (*pelian*), early European observers tended to stress the esoteric nature of the language used (Perham 1887:90; Brooke Low in Ling Roth 1896:i. 269). Brooke Low (Ling Roth 1896:i. 270) characterised it as 'some archaic form of the ordinary spoken language interspersed with cabalistic formulae, spells and charms for different purposes'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the contemporary Iban scholar Benedict Sandin

1978:57) prefaces his translation of a *pelian* text with the comment, that it is 'perhaps the most esoteric and difficult of all forms of Iban ritual language'. Nevertheless, the texts collected and translated by these same authors are ample evidence of the intelligibility and communicative power of the ritual chants. In Iban shamanic healing rites, it is this very potency, which contributes to the intended restructuring of the patient's experienced reality. In the sections that follow, I delineate the powers attributed to the *manang*, as these are represented in a selection of Iban ritual chants which form part of shamanic healing rites (*saut* and *pelian*).

## II

Perham (1882) cites excerpts from a range of ritual invocations, when he endeavours to characterise the Iban conception of the gods (*petara*). He attributes the following chant to a *manang*, during the performance of 'besant' (sic) healing rites. This appears to be an ethnographic error, as, for these rites, properly termed *besaut* or *saut*, 'the *manang* engage *lemambang* to recite the *pengap* invocation' (Richards 1981:326). This text, then, is intoned by a bard (*lemambang*), as part of 'the fullest rites for the sick performed by *manang* when *pelian* rites have failed'<sup>2</sup> (Richards 1981:326).

Kings of Gods all look.

*Seragendah* who has charge of the stiff, clay earth.

*Seragendi* who has charge of the waters of the Hawkbell Island.

*Seleledu* who has charge of the little hills, like topnots of the *bejampong* bird.

*Seleleding* who has charge of the highlands straight and well defined.

*Selingiling* who has charge of the twigs of the *sega* rotan.

*Sengungong* who has charge of the full grown knotted branches.

*Bunsu Rembia Abu* who has charge of the bends of the widespreading *tapang* branches.

*Buisu Kamba* equally looks down, who has charge of the plants of thin *maram*.

*Raja Petara bla ngemata,  
Seragendah bla meda,  
Ngemeran ka subak tanah lang.  
Seragendi bla meda,  
Ngemeran ka ai mesei puloh grunong sanggang.  
Seleledu bla meda,  
Ngemeran ka jumpu mesei jugu bejampong lempang.  
Seleleding bla meda,  
Ngemeran ka tinting lurus mematang.  
Silingiling bla meda,  
Ngemeran ka pating sega nsluang.  
Sengungong bla meda,  
Ngemeran ka bungkong mesei benong balang.  
Buisu Rembia bla meda,  
Ngemeran ka jengka tapang bedindang.  
Buisu Kamba bla meda,  
Ngemeran ka bila maram jarang.*

(Perham 1882:136-137)

As the chant continues, other unnamed *petara* are invoked, grouped according to their location in the cosmos, so that,

Having finished the *Petaras* in mid-heavens,  
We come to the *Petaras* of the tree-tops,

*Pupus Petara kebong langit,  
Niu Petara puchok kaiyu,*

after which,

Having finished the *Petaras* of the tree-tops,  
We mention the *Petaras* in the midst of the earth.

*Pupus Petara puchok kaiyu,  
Nelah Petara tengah tanah.*

(Perham 1882:139)

The intercession of the *petara* is then sought, by means of offerings and a proposed feast. On this occasion, the *petara* are asked to look down and apply their potent medicinal charms; subsequently, they will be entertained at a feast. In anticipation the *petara* respond by saying: 'How shall we not look after and guard the child, for next year you will make us a grand feast of rice and pork, and fish, and venison, cakes and drink' (Perham 1882:138). Meanwhile, they use

their charms for the benefit of the child or sick person concerned:

'Since we have looked down, come now, friends, let us, in a company, wave the medicine charms' (Perham 1882:139).

A chant intoned by *manang*, during a *pelian bejereki* (rite of spiritually fencing an expectant mother), echoes this theme of reciprocity, as the *manang*'s spirit familiars set out to join the *pelian* saying:

And we spirits must bring with us our inherited charms,  
Especially the petrified stalks of the *rajang* orchids.  
Is it not we, who, when we reach there later,  
Are received by the sons of man,  
With *jala* cakes fried in a mixture of *tegelam* and  
illipe-nut oils?

*Kitai lalu mai penchelap ubat kembuan batu gemisan  
tangkai rajang.  
Ukai enda datai kitai din ila,  
Di-inta anak mensia enggau jala piring penganan,  
Ditanak sida enggau minyak ke gegurak tikam tegelam,  
Ke belepan champor engkabang.*

(Sandin 1978:65-66)

Another invocatory chant, which Perham (1882:150), attributes to the *manang*, 'when they wave the sacrificial fowl over the sick', depicts the *petara*'s direct intercession to thwart the threatening *antu* (malevolent spirits):

When the bambu leaf falls,  
And is caught by the *dungan* fish;  
And the *antu* wants to kill,  
*Petara* puts in safe preservation.

When the bambu leaf falls,  
And is caught by the *mplasi* fish;  
And the *antu* wants to kill,  
*Petara* will confess a brother.

When the bambu leaf falls,  
And is caught by the *semah* fish;  
And the *antu* wants to kill,  
*Petara* will claim him as of his household.

When the bambu leaf falls,  
And is caught by the *juak* fish;  
And the *antu* wants to kill,  
*Petara* will confess a child.

*Laboh daun buloh,  
Tangkap ikan dengan;  
Antu kah munoh,  
Petara naroh ngembuan.*

*Laboh daun buloh,  
Tangkap ikan mplasi;  
Antu kah munoh,  
Petara ngaku menyadi.*

*Laboh daun buloh,  
Tangkap ikan semah;  
Antu kah munoh,  
Petara ngambu sa-rumah.*

*Laboh daun buloh,  
Tangkap ikan juak;  
Antu kah munoh,  
Petara ngaku anak.*

(Perham 1882:150-151)

These excerpts illustrate something of the form and the content of those Iban invocatory chants, which are part of shamanic healing rites (*saut* and *pelian*).

The formal features of the passages demonstrate some of the ways Iban ritual language chants convey meaning through their poetic structure. In the first section quoted, certain named *petara* are invoked. They are cited along with their responsibilities in the cosmos, in an itemized list. Closer inspection, however, reveals a patterned list, not of single lines, but of couplets, in which each couplet pairs the responsibilities of the *petara* to suggest a totality. So we have a series of complementaries approximated in the English translation by the sets earth//waters, little hills//highlands, twigs//full-grown branches, widespreading branches//thin plants. The predicative use of these binary opposites implies a sense of completeness: the uniting of complementary forces at each step and the cumulative effect of harnessing all the powers of the cosmos. This effect is echoed in the subsequent directional focusing movement from the outer reaches of the cosmos to the earthly realm, as the

invocation proceeds to call on the unnamed *petara* in, first, the mid-heavens, next, the tree-tops and, then, the midst of the earth.

The content of these invocatory verses highlights the significance of the individual's illness, by locating it in a wider socio-cosmic context. A cure is sought in the benevolent and powerful intercession of the gods. The actions, which accompany the first chant — preparation of offerings and feast foods — are designed to oblige reciprocal acts of goodwill from the *petara*, who have potent medicinal charms at their disposal. The last chant portrays the *petara*, as ready to intervene by claiming kinship with the patient and thereby intimidating the *antu*. The invocations, thus, extend the range of those concerned to alleviate the patient's suffering, as the highest spiritual powers are now involved — incorporated through an idiom of reciprocity and kinship.

### III

When the *manang* diagnoses soul loss as the cause of illness, the *pelian* chant provides a commentary on the *manang*'s pursuit of the patient's soul:

The dove flies and lights on the *kitap* sapling,  
The soul escapes along the hollow valley,  
The demon pursues in dishevelled haste.

The dove flies and lights on the *medong* sapling,  
The soul escapes through the ravine,  
The demon pursues through the ravine.

The dove flies and lights on the *pulu* sapling,  
The soul escapes along the hill,  
As the demon pursues, let him stumble.

The dove flies and lights on the *jita* sapling,  
The soul runs to climb the ladder (of house),  
The pursuing demon sees it no more.

*Trebai puna nepan di lamba kitap,  
Semengat lari nengah lengkap,  
Antu ngagai jaya jayap.*

*Trebai puna nepan di lamba midong,  
Semengat lari nengah darong,  
Antu ngagai nengah darong.*

*Trebai puna nepan di lamba pulu,  
Semengat lari nengah mungu,  
Antu ngagai ambis teransu.*

*Trebai puna nepan di lamba jita,  
Semengat lari niki tangga,  
Antu ngagai nyau nda meda.*

(Perham 1887:91-92)

Here, the soul escapes the pursuing demon and eagerly returns to the safety of the longhouse, where it will be reunited with its rightful owner. The dove, I suggest, is a metaphor for the soul of the shaman, guiding and shepherding the errant soul to safety. Eliade (1964:400-403, 477-482) has shown, that shamans in many cultures image the soul as a bird, symbolising 'celestial ascent' and 'magical flight'. It is also relevant to note Eliade's interpretation of this symbolism, that 'the mythology and the rites of magical flight peculiar to shamans and sorcerers confirm and proclaim their transcendence in respect to the human condition' (Eliade 1964:480).

Once the soul reaches the longhouse, the chant describes how:

It is met by Grandmother Betik,<sup>3</sup>  
With a long stick of big knotted bambu,  
It is met by Grandmother Jurei,<sup>3</sup>  
With finely powdered *lukai* bark,<sup>4</sup>  
It is met by Grandmother Menyaia,<sup>3</sup>  
With the acrid smelling *tuba*.<sup>4</sup>  
It is met by Grandmother Mampu,<sup>3</sup>  
With the gum of the bone like gharu,  
It is inclosed by Grandmother Impong,<sup>3</sup>  
In a brightly shining jar.  
It is covered with a round brass gong  
It is tied with wire of many circles.  
It is secured with a chain fastened at the ends.  
It ascends to the top Rabong looming grand in the  
distance.

*Nyau dialu Ini Betik enggo rarik pulong temiang.*  
*Nyau dialu Ini Jurei enggo lukai redak tenchang.*  
*Nyau dialu Ini Menyaia enggo tuba bau sinang.*  
*Nyau dialu Ini Mampu enggo resu garu tulang.*  
*Dikurong Ini Impong di benong tajau bujang.*  
*Ditutup enggo Keliling gong selang.*  
*Dikungkong enggo Kawat panjai Kelingkang.*  
*Ditambit enggo sabit bekait punggang.*  
*Niki ka tuchong Rabong rarengang.*

(Perham 1887:92-93)

These lines bring out clearly the metaphorical form of expression, by which the chant conveys to the participants the significance of unseen actions. While the shaman acts out clasping the soul in his clenched fist and reintroducing it to the patient's body through the crown of the head, the chant describes the treatment of the soul by the celestial *manang*: how they receive it; how they defend it, by driving off any pursuing demons; and, finally, how they secure it by various means, so it should not escape again.

Similarly, the last line, in which the soul is said to ascend Mount Rabong,<sup>5</sup> is a metaphorical allusion. It does not imply that the soul is already on the move again. Rather, it suggests the ongoing protection the soul will enjoy, from all those *manang*, who reside atop this mountain.

As one *pelian* concludes:

So now we have nothing to hurt us, nothing wrong;  
 We are in health, we are in comfort;  
 We are long-lived and strong-lived,  
 Hard as stone, hard of head;  
 Long as the waters, long of life.  
 Like the waters of Ini Inda,  
 Like the stones of the Dewata,  
 Like a pool five (fathoms) deep;  
 Like a stretch of river beyond eyeshot,  
 Like the land turtle's burrowed bed,  
 Like the waterfall of Telanjing Dara,  
 Like the land of Pulang Gana  
 Like the cave bed of Raja Sua  
 Like hills fixed by the gods.  
 Like the moon at its full,  
 Like the cluster of three stars;  
 As high as heaven, as high as the firmament.

There is nothing wrong, nothing to hurt;  
 When sleeping have dreams of strings of fish;  
 Lying down, dream of bathing in the shallow pebbly  
 streams;  
 When dosing, dream of a branch of *rambutans*;  
 Dream of *langsats*, squeezed in the hand;  
 Dream of Ini Impong inclosing you in a *pelawan* jar;  
 Dream of Ini Sayoh keeping you safe for ever;  
 Dream of living in the heart of the moon;  
 Dream of gazing up into the heights above;  
 Dream of the summit of the eternal Rabong.

(Perham 1887:96-97 does not include Iban text)

Here, images of health and long-life, prosperity and plenty, safety and security culminate in the dream of Mount Rabong.

These excerpts suggest that the *manang* operates in both the world of human beings and the world of the spirits. Yet, although there is an element of separation involved here, there is also, at least at a poetic metaphorical level, an interpenetration of realms. The *manang*'s pursuit of the errant soul takes place in the realm of the spirits, but it is described in terms of the natural Iban landscape. It is the familiar movement from jungle to longhouse, which symbolises the move from danger to security. While the pursuing demon sees it no more, celestial *manang* await its return to the quintessentially human environment of the longhouse. Mount Rabong is at once a natural landmark in the world of man; the site of the celestial Manang Raja Menjaya's consecration as the first *manang bali*; and the abode of the souls of deceased *manang*, in effect, their own special land of the dead. This superimposition of realms, allowing a metaphorical interplay of associations, is a typical feature of *pelian* chants.

Perham (1887:90) noted caustically, that the *manang* 'begin by describing in prolix and grandiose language all the parts of a Dyak house; but how such an irrelevant descant can effect the cure of a fever or a diarrhoea is a mystery to all but themselves'. Uchibori (1978) has

clarified this issue, elucidating, in his discussion of the Iban notions of '*semengat*' and 'shamanic visions', the nature of the shaman's journey and its depiction in these *pelian* chants.

As noted in the Introduction, 'Iban conceptions about human existence are built on the notion of two distinct personal entities': *tuboh* (the body, including both physical and mental personality) and *semengat* (the soul or subconscious self, distinct from the owner's conscious personality and moral character) (Uchibori 1978:12-19). The *semengat* 'ensures the life of its owner, not merely reflects his state of health', and, as Uchibori puts it, 'the peculiar ability of shamans consists in the supposed use of this second self' (Uchibori 1978:18-19). The *semengat* leaves the body in dreams, the shaman's trance, serious sickness and death. These states are 'homologous in terms of the condition of the *semengat*', except that, in death, the departure of the *semengat* is permanent, rather than temporary (Uchibori 1978:33).

The shamanic view of 'the way from this world to the other world ... consists of the symbolic equation of the significant points on the itinerary with particular parts of the longhouse as a physical structure'<sup>6</sup> (Uchibori 1978:208). When a *semengat* leaves the body, in cases of illness or death, it moves through the longhouse, but the scenery as viewed by the *semengat*, differs from what is seen by ordinary people. As Uchibori (1978:210-211) explains the analogy:

The mortars placed along the *tempuan*-passage are seen by the *semengat* as single rocks or boulders (*batu tunggal*). The main part of the gallery (*ruai*) is seen as a vast sea shore (*tebing tasik*). The main pillars standing between the *tempuan* and the *ruai* appear as *nibong* palms, whose upper parts are swaying beautifully to please the passing *semengat* .... The end of the *tempuan*-passage, which forms an entrance of the longhouse, leads to a ladder made of a notched log. Here the *semengat* sees a rapid or a waterfall in a river, over which the Bridge of Fright (*Titi Rawan*) crosses.

A shaman is thought to 'pursue and catch an errant *semengat* as long as it remains on this side of the Bridge of Fright, that is to say, inside the longhouse in terms of real space'. In the words of Uchibori's Iban informants, any shaman who claimed to be able to search beyond this point would be a liar, for beyond the Bridge of Fright, they said, 'it is already the realm of the dead, to which the ablest shaman dare not go without risking his own life' (Uchibori 1978:212).

## IV

The final segment of a *pelian* involves the sacrifice of a fowl. Prior to the sacrifice, the fowl is waved over the patient, as 'the *manang* ... sings a special invocation':

The speckled fowl for sacrificial waving and  
cleansing.  
For doctoring for resisting,  
For sweeping for atoning,  
For exchanging for buying,  
A substitute for the feet, substitute for the  
hands,  
A substitute for the face, substitute for  
the life.

Ye fowls enable us to escape the curse muttered  
unheard:  
To neutralize the spittle (of the enemy);  
To correct the speech of the angry despiser;  
To make nought the visions of half waking  
moments;  
To scare away evil dreams for ever;  
To make harmless one's ghost passing the farm;  
To neutralize the ill omen bird flying across the  
path;  
To cut off the *katupong*'s flight coming from  
the left;  
To cover its screeching; — a bird of dread effect;  
To make harmless the *pangkas*, a hot tempered bird;  
To counteract the omen of the low voiced deer.  
Hence ye fowls are for waving and for offering.

(Perham 1887:93-94 does not  
include Iban text)

These two verses clearly depict the *manang*'s sacrificial fowl as an offering to the *antu* in place of the life of the patient. The fowl also bears the brunt of ill omens of all kinds, absorbing and neutralizing them. The poetic structure — a pairing of terms within each line in the first verse and a pairing of descriptive phrases into couplets in the second verse — arrays subtle variations on the theme expressed. This synthetic form of semantic parallelism does not merely reiterate the message in a redundant fashion. Rather it both extends and consolidates the overall image as near synonymous terms and phrases pile up different nuances of meaning.<sup>7</sup>

The *manang*'s choice of a fowl for sacrifice is not insignificant. The chant goes on to describe many other birds, but the *manang* asserts they are all ineffectual as sacrifice:

They are not worth a fowl as big as the fingers.  
That is the thing for waving and for offering.

He then explains the fowl's particular appropriateness:

Ye fowls were ever the race ever the seed (for  
sacrifice),  
From our grandfathers and grandmothers,  
From ancient times, from chiefs of old,  
Down to your fathers and mothers:  
Because we give you rice, we breed you,  
We give you food, give you nourishment,  
We hang for you nests, we make for you roosts;  
We make you coops, we make you baskets:  
Hence ye fowls are used for substituting for buying,  
Substitutes for the face, substitutes for the life.

(Perham 1887:94 does not  
include Iban text)

Fowls are sacrificial substitutes for Iban, precisely because the Iban breed, nourish and nurture them. The fowls, thus, partake of Iban society, rather than the kingdom of the wild. The *manang* exploit this marginal status of domestic fowls<sup>8</sup> — between man and animal — to bring them into human society, load them with ill omens, debts and sicknesses

incurred by the Iban and sacrificially despatch the lot. There is a suggestion here, that the Iban's crimes and debts (violations of taboos and transgressions against *adat* customary law) bring down supernatural retribution in the form of sickness.<sup>9</sup> The fowls, described in human terms as foolish and mischievous, are depicted as appropriating the crimes and, with them, the sicknesses of the Iban:

The *ubah* tree falls upon the *kumpang* sapling.  
 Ye fowls have many crimes and many debts;  
 Ye bear the spirits of sickness, spirits of illness;  
 The spirits of fever and ague, spirits of cold and  
 headache;  
 The spirits of cold, the spirits of the forest;  
 Ye bear them, ye are filled with them;  
 Ye pile them up, ye put them in a basket;  
 Ye carry them, ye take them clear away;  
 Ye conduct them oft, ye gather them;  
 Ye drag them along, ye lift them up;  
 Ye embrace them, ye carry them in your bosom;  
 (Perham 1887:85 does not  
 include Iban text)

V

The final *pelian* text to be considered here is that of the *pelian bejereki*, a rite conducted by the *manang* to protect a pregnant woman from possible miscarriage. The text was collected from a *manang* in the Saribas area and was published with translation and commentary by Benedict Sandin (1978). There are two aspects to the ceremony. First, as Sandin explains:

The term *bejereki* means literally "to fence", or "to enclose", and the intended purpose of the rite is for the shaman to construct an unseen spiritual fence around the patient to protect her from the approach of malevolent spirits seeking to harm the child she carries in her body. During the performance of the *pelian*, this fence is given a material representation. Just before the rite begins, three nails are set in the gallery floor and cords are run between them. These support a circular enclosure made of mats inside of which the woman sits during the night while the shaman sings the verses of the *pelian*.

(Sandin 1978:58)

Second, during the ceremony, the *manang* interrupts his chant,

to place an upright cordyline plant in an *irun* jar near the centre of the gallery where he performs his *pelian*. This cordyline is called a *sabang ayu*, a "cordyline of longevity", and represents a ladder of gods (*tangga petara*) by which the deities and spirits may descend to earth in order to take part in the work of the *pelian*.

(Sandin 1978:59)

On the following morning 'the *sabang* plant used in the ceremony is planted outside the longhouse. It must not be disturbed after this is done, as it is thought to confer longevity (*gayu*) on the child in the woman's womb' (Sandin 1978:78). At the same time, the shaman applies taboos, adherence to which is essential to the efficacy of the ritual: no strangers may enter the woman's *bilek* apartment for three days and three nights and none of the people of the longhouse may work outside during the same period (Sandin 1978:78).

The chant begins by invoking the spirits of the famous *manang* of the past, as well as Manang Raja Menjaya, the patron of Iban *manang*.

These celestial *manang* assemble and plan to join the festival:

Then a group of *manang* assemble themselves under  
 Gepi whose title is Empong,  
 Like the *lempaong* trees that shed their bark.  
 Then the *manang* throng themselves under Gepi whose  
 title is Usam,  
 Like a group of *dungan* fish coming to spawn at the  
 Sandau Miang gravel bed.  
 Oh, if it is so, let us leave out these words,  
 Which are too numerous to mention like the countless  
 blowpipe darts.

*Lalu betugong bala Gepi bali Empong,  
 Baka lempaong ngambong dibatang.  
 Lalu betatam bali Gepi bali Usam,  
 Baka ikan dungan ngempas ngaban,  
 Di kerangan Sandau Miang.  
 O, enti munyi tu lengka ka genteran jako nya,  
 Enda ulih kitai tesa,  
 Nonda ke nesa laja atong pematang.*

(Sandin 1978:59)

They are joined by the local household creatures, the upriver and downriver fish and then the fish from the sea:

The house lizard also rushes to catch up,  
Wishing to join the shamans in blessing the twin  
areca palm buds,<sup>10</sup>  
Creeping out from the hole of a post.

*Bunsu tichak pen sama gaga ria angkat besak,  
Deka enggau bala manang betimang ka mayang pinang  
besapak,  
Datai ari selepak lubang tiang.*

....  
Oh, the number of ordinary things is already sufficient,  
To accompany the venerable Manang Nyara,  
Who goes to bless the palm bud with songs.  
The number is already sufficient to join Manang Matai,  
Who goes to attend the festival.

*O nya pen naka bunsu utai ngapa,  
Dibai Gelanyang Manang Nyara,  
Ke berumba betimang mayang.  
Nya pen naka gelai bala Matai,  
Dibai betandai mansang ngabang.*

....  
Even the chief of the *dungan* fish,  
Has come to join those who attend the festival.  
Even the *enseriban padi* fish come,  
Pleased in their hearts,  
To join the company of *manang* in blessing the sacred  
(areca) palm bud.

*Datai ka bunsu ikan dungan pen sama uddh datai nuntong  
betatan,  
Deka enggau betandan mansang ngabang.  
Datai ka jeliu ikan enseriban padi pen,  
Sama gaga didada luak ati,  
Deka enggau bala manang betimang ka takang mayang  
jengkani.*

....  
Those are all of the upriver fish,  
Who go in throngs to attend the festival.  
Those are all of the downriver fish,  
Who are invited to attend the celebration.

*Nya meh naka kaban ikan ulu,  
Ke selabubu mansang ngabang.  
Nya meh naka kaban ikan ili,  
Ke dibai mansang masang.*

....  
Even the *jaan* fish arrive,  
Pleased to join the *manang's* festival,  
And bless the stalk of the areca bud;

They come from the Samarahan river,  
 And swim behind the Meluan trading vessel,  
 Skirting along the right-hand shore of the  
 Sarawak river,  
 There to await their cousin the porpoise,  
 Because the porpoise can dive to the bottom of  
 the still *limban* pool,  
 These are the varieties of sea fish invited to  
 attend the festival.

*Datai ka Petutu ikan jaan,  
 Pen gaga ngabang gawai manang,  
 Nimang takang mayang satandan,  
 Datai ari nanga Batang Samarahan,  
 Betunda udi enggau jenuar kapal Meluan,  
 Datai ari silak awak nanga Sarawak nebing kanan,  
 Laban iya nyuong isan iya Wak Lungkam,  
 Ke tau nyelam limban dalam genenang,  
 Nya naka bunsu ikan dibai betandan mansang ngabang.*  
 (Sandin 1978:60-64)

The *manang*'s spirit familiars are concerned at the seriousness of the shaman's task; they come from afar, bringing with them potent charms for health and prosperity:

Then the familiar spirits of the *manang*,  
 Walk forward to peep down from the sky,  
 Speckled like the spots on a sword blade.  
 Rise up carefully, the spirit familiar of  
 transformed Manang Usam,  
 Towards a beautifully carved bedstead.  
 The head of the spirit familiar of Manang Nyara is  
 poised gracefully, looking towards the light  
 of the full moon.  
 Oh, no wonder I am sad and feeling unwell,  
 For the sons of man are celebrating a festival under  
 the bright light of the full moon,  
 Because the sons of the Dayak have an important  
 thing to celebrate under the light of the stars;  
 They fence a happy unborn child.  
 Therefore let all of us spirit familiars join the  
 festival,  
 Bringing with us precious charms, such as the  
 petrified white gourd,  
 That causes the womb to develop satisfactorily.  
 Is it not we, who, when we are received by the sons  
 of man,  
 Are given offerings of popped rice,  
 Which explodes like flames consuming the dry remains  
 of bush along the embankment of the padi fields?  
 It is mixed with the delicious hot milk of the  
 coconut.

Nya baru semang bala manang deka nyingkang ati nilik,  
 Ari perintik langit burik,  
 Neladan pantik mata pedang.  
 Lalu angkat gadai-gadai iyang Manang Gendai,  
 Angkat nyingkang petara manang ke bulang kaki bejalai,  
 Lalu nepan iyang Manang Bali Usam,  
 Ngagai seram papan pengalai.  
 Keba iyang Manang Nyara tak linga-linga nengkadah kela  
 bulan mingkai.  
 O patut ati aku merai enda nyamai,  
 Laban anak mensia bisi kereja baroh kela tarang bintang,  
 Laban orang deka nyereki lantang anak kemilai.  
 Nya alai anang enda ngabang bala iyang Manang Matai,  
 Kitai lalu mai penchelap ubat tuai, batu janggalat gemalai  
 belang,  
 Awak ka kandong beripai nyurong mansang.  
 Ukai enda datai kitai din ila,  
 Kena inta anak mensia enggau ja piring rendai,  
 Mnyai api makai rebaan rangkai,  
 Nyererai melai ngimbai pematang.

....

Then a group of spirit familiars,  
 Look toward the light of the moon,  
 Where they see the sons of man busily at work below  
 the halo of moonlight.  
 Oh, it is with reason that we worry in our heart,  
 For the sons of the Dayak undertake an important task  
 beneath the light of the waning moon;  
 They fence a happy unborn babe whom they cherish.  
 Therefore the spirit of Manang Usam must not fail to  
 join the festival.  
 And we spirits must bring with us our inherited charms,  
 Especially the petrified stalks of the *rajang* orchids.

Lalu nentang bala iyang ka baroh randang tarang bulan,  
 Lalu tepeda ka kereja anak mensia baroh singka miga  
 begeman.  
 O patut kitai merai terunti diati kandang dalam,  
 Laban anak Dayak bisi pengawa baroh kela bulan engkeleman.  
 Orang ga deka nyereki lantang buah timang anak pangkuan.  
 Nya alai anang enda ngabang bala iyang Manang Usam,  
 Kitai lalu mai penchelap ubat kembuan batu gemisan  
 tangkai rajang.

(Sandin 1978:64-66)

They arrive at the longhouse and partake of the offerings prepared for them:

Then fell the *beleti* tree up on its trunk,  
 The divine hosts have arrived at the landing place,  
 Whose landing place is this, asks Sada, the younger  
 brother of Jelapi?  
 It is the landing place of the sons of man,  
 Who live below the light of the full moon;

*Nya baru terbang beleti tundan tinggi,  
Bala petara sereta nuntong di pendai.  
Pendai sapa tu ko Sada adi Jelapi?  
Tu meh pendai anak mensia,  
Ke diau ari baroh peramana bulan sigi,*

....

Then fell the *gemb*i tree which falls upon the  
*beleti* tree,  
For all the spirit familiars ascend the steps to  
the house.

*Nya baru terbang gemb*i nuju *beleti*,  
*Bala iyang manang nyingkang bati niki.*

....

Then the tail of the cock sways down,  
As it sits at a corner of its empty perching place.  
Then the spirit helpers take their seats,  
Beside the stalk of the *manang*'s cordyline plant  
Then *Manang Matai* leans forward,  
While eating the delicious popped rice.  
*Manang Jarah* sits upright,  
While eating the offering of fruit and dried bananas.  
Then he begs that he be waved with a stout cock,  
Whose colouration is grey like the *semah* and  
*bangkas entabalang* fishes.

*Nya baru lentok-lentok langgai manok,  
Nepan di telok gelanggang puang.  
Nya baru bala iyang ati berasok dudok,  
Mangkang sumbok sabang manang,  
Dudok nyuntai Manang Matai,  
Bepakai ka rendai nyamai,  
Digulai santan udah didiang.  
Dudok jejangah Manang Jarah,  
Bepakai ka piring buah, lintin pisang.  
Nya baru iya minta biau enggau selanjau manok pagah,  
Kelabu semah bangkas entabalang.*

(Sandin 1978:72-74)

Finally, the chant describes a series of plantings: *nanam limbu*  
(planting the *limbu*), *nanam tangga petara* (planting the ladder of the gods)  
and *nanam sabang ayu* (planting the cordyline of longevity):

Then fell the dead trunk of the *melebu* tree,  
For *Menani* tries with his powerful hands to plant  
the *limbu* tree.  
He plants the *limbu* in accordance with the practice  
established by *Gelanyang Manang Bidu*,<sup>11</sup>  
Who, when sick, can never die,  
For he possesses a cooling *idu* creeper stone,  
Which can cause the womb to grow.

*Nya baru tebang melebu lentur punggu,  
Menani nguji ke penyidi jari diri nanam limbu.  
Nunda limbu Gelanyang Manang Bidu,  
Ke enda kala lesi bebadi ilang lalu,  
Laban iya ngembuan penchelap batu idu,  
Ngasoh isi ke bebali kandong mansang.*

....

Then the flowers of the *raba* tree bloom,  
The shaman Menani tries with the effectiveness of  
his hands to plant the ladder of the gods.

*Nya baru ruya-ruya bunga raba,  
Menani nguji ke penyidi jari nanam tangga petara.*

....

The *reribu* tree looks graceful,  
As the shaman hastens to plant the cordyline of  
longevity.

Then all the shamans led by Manang Lansu gather themselves,  
Like the old seeds of the *bindang* palm,  
Then all of those led by Empong assemble,  
Like the *lempaong* trees which shed their bark,  
The cordyline of longevity looks so beautiful,  
As if it grows from a huge *galang* boulder.  
The stalk of the *tawai* cordyline plant stands upright,  
As if to reach the house of Selampandai, the chief of  
the shamans.

The *bakong* cordyline grows luxuriously,  
As if its top reaches to the summit of holy Rabong  
mountain.

*Nya baru ritu-ritu reribu antu,  
Matai beguai betanam ayu.  
Lalu begelumu Manang Lansu,  
Nunda tematu kerang bindang,  
Lalu betugong bala Empong,  
Baka lempaong ngambong ka batang.  
Tak ritu-ritu batang sabang ayu,  
Baka ke lekat di batu galang melintang.  
Tak gelai-gelai batang sabang tawai,  
Baka ke manggai ngagai rumah Selampandai tuai manang,  
Tak renjong-renjong ayu sabang bakong,  
Baka ke manggai di tuchong Rabong reringang.*

(Sandin 1978:74-78)

These plantings are, on my interpretation, three aspects of the same symbolic event, actualised by the *manang* on the morning following the *pelian*, when he plants the cordyline palm lily, used throughout the ritual, outside the longhouse. Each 'planting' forges a beneficial link across the human and spirit realms. The *manang* is depicted as replicating

the past actions of now celestial *manang* for the benefit of his patient in the real world; in so doing, he creates a direct link between the unborn child and the benevolent spirits; and, finally, he establishes a visible this-worldly counterpart of the child's vital principle (*semengat*). Furthermore, he forges these connections at the same time as he erects a protective barrier around the mother and unborn child to thwart any malign activity on the part of the less benevolent spirits. The cordyline remains, after the ritual performance, as a condensed symbol: a representation of the unborn child's vitality and longevity and a channel of power bearing all the authority of the *manang* tradition. This polysemic character also adheres to the rite itself: described, even named, as a 'fencing' and 'enclosing', it is simultaneously, and just as clearly, a 'bridging' and 'embedding'. This chant, indeed this whole ritual, is an excellent example of the Iban use of botanic metaphors and symbols to represent aspects of the person. Not only do the celestial *manang*, assist in the series of plantings, which culminate in establishing the unborn child's cordyline of longevity, but they are themselves depicted in the pervasive botanic idiom.

## VI

The *pelian* chants examined here depict the *manang* as one whose special expertise is the manipulation of boundaries. The invocations acknowledge the benevolent intercession of the *petara* in the life of man. They call forth the celestial *manang* for assistance in healing rites. But against this background the *manang* is portrayed as essentially an actor, rather than a medium. The pursuit of errant souls entails a volitional crossing into the spirit realm. The sacrifice of a fowl exploits the cultural categorisation of living things, as a borderline creature is

incorporated into the human sphere, then despatched, in order to satisfy the *antu* without loss of 'real' life. Finally, the *pelian bejereki* involves the construction of barriers, the bridging of realms and the physical representation of the intangible.

From this image of the *manang*, as portrayed in indigenous oral sources, I now turn to ethnographic accounts for further data on the rites performed by the *manang* in traditional Iban society.

Footnotes to Chapter 2

1. This characterisation, while perhaps overemphasising the archaic and esoteric elements, is relatively consistent with descriptions of the ritual languages of other Bornean peoples. Compare Fox's summary (1971a:234-235 n.19) of the views of Evans on Dusun and Hardeland on Ngaju ritual language lexicons:

In his study of Dusun "sacred language", Evans (1953, pp.495-496) distinguished five classes of words that made up this sacred language: (1) "ordinary Dusun words"; (2) "special but easily recognisable forms of ordinary words — poetic forms — derived from ordinary Dusun words"; (3) "words not usually current in the village .... but found in other villages, near or far away"; (4) "loan words from Malay"; and (5) "words used, as far as known, only in the 'sacred language', for which derivations are not obtainable." This classification resembles that of Hardeland (1858, pp.4-5). He distinguished: (1) Ordinary or slightly altered Dayak words; (2) Malay words, also slightly altered; and (3) special words, whose meaning or form, confined them to sacred language.

2. It is possible that Perham is, here, reporting an instance, in which the *manang* concerned was also a *lemambang*.
3. Perham (1887:93 n.1) comments: 'Names of ancient *Manangs*, or of *Manang* tutelary deities'. Komanyi (1972:99) says *ini* is the term for female shaman. The word literally means 'grandmother, term of address for a woman much older than the speaker' and 'title of respect for certain dwellers in *langit* (heavens), e.g. Ini Manang ...' (Richards 1981:116). In a note to his translation of the sung legendary account (*kana*) of Kling's war raid to the skies, Perham (1886:276n.) describes Ini Manang as 'an old medicine woman who is supposed to live in the skies and to have in her keeping the "door of heaven", through which the rain falls to the earth'. He (1887:102) suggests this use of the term *ini* may indicate, that 'all the special deities of the *Manang* world are supposed to be of the female sex'. However, Masing (1981:94) points out, that the grandfathers of the omen birds (*aki burong*) are all shamans, so it seems to be the grandparent relationship, which is the significant factor here. Uchibori (1978:284) says the gods (*petara*) are often referred to in prayers (*sampi*) as grandfathers (*aki*) and grandmothers, (*ini*), implying they are 'intimate with and kind to humans'. Sather (1978:321-322) reports an apparently heterodox view from the Saribas area, where elderly post-menopausal women are somewhat anomalous socially, and are thought to be potentially threatening spiritually, especially to the souls of the young. I return to some of these points in Chapter 4.
4. Perham (1887:93n.2) notes that 'the "*lukai*" bark, when burnt emits a very pungent smell, and the root of the "*tuba*" (*Derris eliptica*) possesses well known poisonous properties, and evil spirits are thought to have a wholesome dread of both'.
5. A reference to Mount Rabong — located on the true left bank of the Ketungau River in the Indonesian province of West Kalimantan — marks the end of every *pelian*. It is considered sacred to Iban *manang*

as the place where 'the first transformed *manang*, Raja Menjaya, was consecrated by his sister, the supreme healer, Ini Inda. In addition, the souls of the *manang*, unlike those of ordinary people, journey to Rabong mountain, where they dwell after death' (Sandin 1978:80 n.26).

6. Similar symbolic equations characterise shamanic healing chants in many cultures. See, for instance, Lévi-Strauss' discussion (1968: 186-205) of a South American Cuna Indian shamanic incantation in which the real world analogue of the shaman's journey is the patient's body -- those internal organs involved in the female patient's struggle to give birth.
7. This formal fusion of separate images has been described as 'carefully calibrated stereoscopy' after the Chinese scholar Peter Boodberg who observed: 'Indeed parallelism is not merely a stylistic device of formularistic syntactical duplication; it is intended to achieve a result reminiscent of binocular vision; the superimposition of two syntactical images in order to endow them with solidity and depth' (Boodberg 1954 discussed and quoted in Fox 1974:80, 455-456 n.5).
8. Masing (1981:37) suggests the sacrifice of a four-footed animal (a pig or two chickens) is considered necessary to secure a human life by satisfying the malevolent spirits. Here the analogy between Iban and sacrificial domesticated animal is extended to a particular physical feature. The logic of the symbolic equation is, however, the same, as Perham (1882-85:226) makes clear:
 

For all ordinary sacrifices, a fowl suffices; but a pig, being the largest animal which the Dyak domesticates, is naturally selected as the highest victim: should pigs, however, not be procurable at the time, two fowls can be substituted. And why? I asked. Because the legs of two fowls are equal to those of a pig!
9. According to Schmidt (1964:143), 'the commonest cause of mental illness [among the Iban] is *gila laban muli penti pemali*, violation of a taboo'. Heppell (1975:126-128) explains how the transgression of customary law (*adat*) is thought to result in sickness or other misfortunes:
 

There is one act which the Iban consider brings upon a person the wrath of the gods. Because it is believed their *adat* was given them by the gods, a person who repudiates the *adat* repudiates the gods. The gods are the keepers of the *adat* and are believed to right all injustices, so that any person committing a breach of the *adat* can expect something detrimental to be visited on himself by the gods at some future date .... After a serious transgression like an intragroup homicide, serious misfortunes would befall the culprit such as the total failure of all his ventures, lingering sickness and an early and unnatural death.
10. Sandin (1978:78-79 n.6) notes, that,
 

the flower bud, or *mayang*, of the areca blossom is highly important to the shaman and has a diagnostic or divining use very much like that of the pig's liver (*atau babi*) used by the bards and expert augurs. It is employed in many *pelian* and is placed close to the

*manang* during his performance, usually in a tray covered by a *pua* blanket. At the conclusion of the *pelian*, the *pua* is removed and the shaman cuts open the bud and examines the blossoms inside for indications regarding the patient's condition and the probable success of the *pelian*. The meaning of these indications he explains to the patient's family and others who have gathered to witness the rite.

11. 'Manang Bidu is believed to be one of the first of the human shamans' (Sandin 1978:79 n.22).

## Chapter 3

The shaman (*manang*) in Iban ritual: healing rites  
(*pelian*, *saut*) and initiation rites (*bebangun*)

In this chapter, I explore the activities of the *manang* in Iban ritual. By way of introduction, I note the range of Iban healing practices and mention some aspects of *manang* performances, after which I comment on the *manang*'s role in the neutralization of inauspicious omens and dreams. I then examine the tasks a *manang* undertakes in *pelian* rites, delineating the cultural logic, which ascribes efficacy to his or her actions. Following this, I consider the content and meaning of *saut* rites. Finally, I conclude this chapter with an examination of the initiation rites (*bebangun*), which are thought to confer on the *manang* the special skills attributed to him or her.

## I

When an Iban is ill, the first thing the family will do, in their endeavour to effect a cure, is celebrate a *bedara mata* or *bedara mansau* ceremony. Richards (1981:32, 208-209) defines *bedara* as to 'make offering and sacrifice to accompany prayer (*pedara*)', while *mata* means 'raw, uncooked, unripe' and *mansau* means 'ripe, cooked'. At *bedara*, Sandin (1980:43) says, 'offerings are made to the deities and the spirits of past *manangs*, so that they will come to treat the sick person with miracles and spiritual charms'. Masing (1981:35-38) describes *bedara* as the least complex of all Iban rituals, in which 'a person of standing in the community' prepares an offering (*piring*) or sacrifices a four-footed animal

'to secure a human life'. Thus, at *bedara* ceremonies, the Iban make offerings, in order to oblige reciprocal spirit assistance, and perform sacrifices, which provide substitute 'lives' to satisfy malevolent spirits.

If the *bedara* is not successful, the family will next call a *manang* to perform a *pelian* ceremony. The *manang*'s first task is diagnostic: he endeavours to determine the nature of the complaint, the cause of the illness and any involvement of spirits. To do so, he must ascertain the condition and the whereabouts of the patient's *semengat*. Having made his diagnosis, the *manang* decides on appropriate remedial action (Jensen 1974:146-147). Sandin (1980:43) lists the Iban names of twenty-eight kinds of *pelian* ceremony, which might be performed. In each, he says, the *manang* 'invites [the celestial] Manang Raja Menjaya and the souls of great *manangs* of the past to come to assist him with charms and miraculous healing'. At the conclusion of the rite, the *manang* may seek to divine its success, by examining a flower bud of the areca palm (Sandin 1978: 78-79 n.6) or by observing whether a roughly carved wooden figure (*pentik*), stuck into the ground at the foot of the longhouse ladder, remains upright or inclines to either side, by the morning following the rite (Perham 1887:97-98).

Perham (1887:89-90) reports that the *manang* never performs in daylight, unless the case is very bad, for to do so is considered 'difficult and dangerous work'. Sandin (1978:58) says most *pelian* are held at night, beginning after the evening meal is finished. This timing accords with the notion that reversals characterise the land of the dead (*Sebayan*), so that, when it is daytime in the world of the living, it is night in the land of the dead and vice versa (Uchibori 1978:236). Thus, the shaman, who ventures into the spirit realm to overtake a soul on the way to *Sebayan*, considers it safer to do so, when it is light in that realm.

Jensen (1974:145) extends this idea of reversals to account for blindness or poor sight as an asset for a *manang*. As he puts it, 'the physical handicap of blindness ... becomes an asset in dealings with the spirit world, indeed enables the *manang* to see the spirits where others cannot'.

The *manang* is equipped with a medicine box (*lupong*) in which he keeps a variety of objects, 'including pieces of tusk, wood, root, stone, crystal and glass' (Jensen 1974:146). These items include medicinal charms and possibly ingredients for herbal medicines. According to Brooke Low (Ling Roth 1896:i. 266-267), some *manang* added to their medicine box 'European medicines procured from the Government dispensary, for they are wide awake and ready at all times to avail themselves of remedies of known efficacy'. However, while the *manang* may practise herbal medicine, they do not do so *qua manang* and herbal remedies are not part of shamanic rites as such (Freeman, pers. comm., 15 December 1982). Nor are medicinal charms the exclusive prerogative of the *manang*, as any Iban may possess such charms, the whereabouts of which are usually revealed in a dream by benevolent spirits.

The most important object in the medicine box is peculiar to the practice of the *manang*: the quartz crystal 'seeing stone' (*batu ilau* or *batu karas*). Looking into the *batu ilau*, the *manang* is deemed able to see a representation of the patient's soul-counterpart (Baleh Iban: *ayu*, Layan-Skrang Iban: *bungai*), a plant-like form, tended by celestial shamans on a mythical mountain (Freeman 1967:324; Uchibori 1978:19-22). In the 'seeing stone', the *manang* is also thought to be able to see and locate a wandering soul (Jensen 1974:146; Perham 1887:89). Finally, it is by looking into the *batu ilau*, that the *manang* seeks the cause and the site of any foreign matter, if a passing *antu* is thought to have deposited a physical token in the patient's body (Jensen 1974:146-147). Another

important item in the *manang*'s collection is the *engkerabun* or 'blinder'. This is a talisman of some kind, which blinds an opponent, 'whether the enemy in war or the spirits among whom a *manang* travels or anyone who looks inside the *lupong* of a *manang* without leave' (Richards 1981:84). Thus, the *batu ilau* is thought to make aspects of the spirit realm visible to the *manang*, while the *engkerabun* is thought to make the *manang* himself invisible to the malevolent spirits.

Should the *pelian* rituals fail to cure the sick person, the family will hold a *gawai sakit* (ritual festival for the sick), at which a group of bards (*lemambang*) recite the *pengap* invocatory chant (Sandin 1980:43). As described by Perham (1882:136) and Richards (1981:326), the bards' invocation is combined with the *manang*'s performance of *saut* rites, 'the fullest rites for the sick performed by *manang* when *pelian* rites have failed'.

If divination indicates that no cure has been effected by this festival, the sick person might be left alone with offerings at a solitary place, thought to be inhabited by spirits (*nampok*). Recognising 'that his illness is beyond human cure', he hopes the spirits of the place will come to his aid. Finally, 'if he cannot be cured, he awaits death' (Sandin 1980:43).

## II

Shamanic rituals may incorporate subsidiary rites for the neutralization of omens and dreams. Sather (Sandin 1980:xli) reports that, 'when a shaman treats a patient, he customarily first calls upon the person he treats, his family and others who have gathered to relate their dreams and omens. These may enter into his diagnosis of the patient's condition. The ill-portents revealed in this way are frequently dealt with after the

main curing rite is concluded in a secondary rite of neutralization so as to eliminate possible further hinderance to the patient's recovery'. In other circumstances, the neutralization of inauspicious omens and dreams is a self-contained rite, conducted as a pre-emptive end in itself.

Iban augury is a form of divination, 'based on a belief in the interpretation of divine revelation in the behaviour of birds, reptiles and animals' (Sather in Sandin 1980:xii). To the Iban, omens are 'a source of direct guidance through which, it is thought, the gods make known to the individual their personal support or disapproval of his conduct within the permissible perimeters defined by *adat* [customary law]' (Sather in Sandin 1980:xii). While some inauspicious omens may be counteracted by the blood of a pig or chicken and by making offerings, those who have observed bad omens often have them neutralized by an *orang tau makai burong* (person who can eat omens)<sup>1</sup> (Sandin 1980:133). Such a person is usually a *dukun* (herbalist) or a *mancong* (shaman), but may be anyone who possesses at least one of the four stone charms capable of wiping away the effect of a bad omen. These charms are given them by spirits in dreams or handed down from ancestors, who were themselves 'persons able to eat omens' (Sather in Sandin 1980:xl; Sandin 1980:133-134). Inauspicious omens, which foretell various misfortunes, including a 'poisonous' rice crop, ill health and impending death, may be neutralized as follows: the *orang tau makai burong* immerses in a bowl of water his neutralizing charm and something affected by the omen (e.g. nail/hair clippings from the person or edible produce from the farm concerned). He then drinks a little of the water and, if farm produce is involved, he eats or, at least, bites it. The remaining water is used to smear the officiant and the client, then the family, *bilek* apartment or farming

land to which the omen referred (Perham 1882-85:231-232; Sather in Sandin 1980:xli; Sandin 1980:134).

The indispensable element in this rite is the stone charm, *batu penabar burong* (literally, stone for making omens tasteless), which is thought to neutralize the omen. As mentioned above, a *dukun* (herbalist), a *manang* (shaman) or any Iban may possess medicinal charms revealed to them in dreams by benevolent spirits. Use of medicinal charms is, thus, not peculiar to the *manang*, and the neutralization of omens is simply a particular subset of such practices, defined by possession of the appropriate charms.

The Iban do not explain dreams according to any psychological principle: 'They regard them as of external origin, independent of the inner psychic process of the person who dreams. In the dream, they say, something is told or revealed (*utai padah alam mimpi*), obviously by external agents' (Uchibori 1978:16). Mythical shamans are deemed able to erase inauspicious dreams (Uchibori 1978:182). Even the great Singalang Burong (the Iban god of warfare and head-hunting) calls on them for this purpose. In a ritual chant (*timbang gawai amat*), he is depicted as addressing his wife in reassuring terms:

"If I have a dream of divorcing" says Lang  
 "The following morning I'll fetch shaman Guyak  
 to brush it away;  
 If I dream of our parting by death, my dearest love,  
 I will summon a shaman to right things with his  
 potent rituals"

*Enti mimpi sarak ambai jako Lang Nyakai,  
 Pagi ari aku ngambi manang Guyak enggau bejadi;  
 Enti aku mimpi terumpang di peransang tunang,  
 Aku ngambi manang enggau bepagar api.*

(Masing 1981:504-505, 504-505b)

Likewise, the terrestrial shaman is credited with the power to interpret the bad dreams of his clients, so enabling the Iban concerned to take appropriate action or precautionary measures (Uchibori 1978:18). Inauspicious dreams include those in which an Iban experiences a landslide, is divorced, capsizes in his boat, is crippled or wounded, or, worst of all, dreams of his own death or the death of one of his family. Jensen (1974:147) says such dreams are 'seen as a confrontation with a spirit [which] may merely wish to give warning, to express a wish, or it may have evil intent'. Nyuak (1906:410) mentions the *manang*'s use of charms to rub the dreamer's body 'which makes him invisible to the evil spirits'. This shielding rite is termed *bedinding* (to make a protective wall) (Richards 1981:73). Another report suggests that when a dream occurs, the *semengat* — the actor in the realm of dreams — has already come to harm, as for instance: 'When we dream of falling into the water we suppose that this accident has really befallen our spirits, and we send for the *manangs*, who fish for it and recover it for us' (Apai Balai in Ling Roth 1896:i. 232).

Just as dreams are a state homologous with sickness, in which the *semengat* wanders independently of the body, so these rites are homologous with the *manang*'s healing rites: diagnosis, followed by shielding or, if necessary, retrieving the *semengat*. On this analysis, the shaman's role in neutralizing inauspicious omens and dreams involves, on the one hand, the use of medicinal charms — a common Iban practice — and, on the other, the manipulation of *semengat* — the quintessential shamanic technique.

It should perhaps be noted at this point, that the Iban *manang* is not a sorcerer. Although Iban culture includes a concept of sorcery (*empa ubat*) and a notion of the evil eye (*tau tepang*), these are not attributed to the *manang qua manang* (Nyuak 1906:168-169; Freeman 1970:70).

Individual Iban might sometimes consider, that the power to restore health implies the power to interfere with it, but this would be a heterodox view. Heppell (1975:135 Case 0 45) describes one such case, in which a young girl asked a *manang* to put a spell on another girl's clothes: 'He refused saying that such actions were not the *adat* [customary law/behaviour] of shamans'.

### III

Turning now to the *pelian* rites, these may be classified according to the tasks the *manang* is required to undertake. An examination of the *pelian* rites described in the literature on the Iban reveals that these tasks fall into three broad categories: first, tending the soul-counterpart; second, retrieving the lost soul; and, third, rectifying spirit interference. In this section and the two that follow, I analyse what is entailed in each of these three categories, in order to ascertain the nature of the powers specifically attributed to the *manang* in Iban ritual. I then go on to examine the symbolism of the apparatus (*pagar api*, literally, fence of fire), which is the centre of ritual activity for the *manang* in these rites.

Perham (1887:97) reports that '*Betepas*' ('Sweeping'), a ceremony for tending 'the flower ... supposed to grow in Hades [sic] and to live a life parallel to that of man', is the first, the lowest and the cheapest function of the *manang*. More detailed ethnographic accounts indicate that the Iban of different river systems have somewhat divergent ideas and ritual practices with regard to this 'soul-counterpart'.

Uchibori (1978) describes and interprets the Layar-Skrang Iban concepts of *bungai* and *ayu*. The *bungai* is an imaginary, invisible plant growing at the hearth-post of each *bilek* apartment. It symbolises the health, welfare and, above all, the unity of the *bilek*-family. Mythical shamans are

thought to tend the *bungai* and a *manang* can examine it through his quartz crystal. Uchibori's *manang* informants interpreted the *bungai* variously as a metaphor expressed in the context of ritual language or as a cluster of the *semengat* of members of the *bilek*-family. The *bungai* may be represented by a young plant, which is placed in a jar on the longhouse gallery, for the enactment of a protective rite, and is disposed of subsequently. In the rite, a *manang* clears away weeds and wraps the *bungai* in an *ikat* patterned fabric to protect it from the heat (Uchibori 1978:19-22). I return to the symbolic associations of heat in Section VI of this chapter.

To the Layar-Skrang Iban the *ayu* is a 'life' which cannot be seen even by *manang*, though, like the *bungai*, it is cared for by mythical shamans. Represented by a young plant placed in a jar in the *bilek* apartment, the *ayu* may be tended by *manang*, then planted and fenced till it is well established. This rite is carried out for the *ayu* of children only; it is enacted if a child's growth or constitution is weak or if the child faces danger of contamination through another person's death (Uchibori 1978:25-26). This description of a protective rite for an endangered child, recalls the *pelian bejereki* rite discussed earlier (Sandin 1978). In that instance, the *sabang ayu* was placed in the public gallery rather than the *bilek*, but it was subsequently planted outside as a visible symbol of the child's vitality and longevity. The use of a *sabang* cordyline plant in the *pelian bejereki* is consistent with the concern to simultaneously establish a 'ladder of the gods', while the rush or bamboo used by the Layar-Skrang Iban is consistent with their concern to evoke a cool/wet environment and, by analogy, 'coolness/health' in the socio-spatial setting of the *bilek* and longhouse group (Uchibori 1978:32). Despite such minor variations on the theme of health and security, I take the *pelian bejereki* rite (the report of which comes from the Rimbas, like the Layar, a

tributary of the Saribas) as indicative of a common concept and practice in relation to *ayu* throughout the Saribas-Skrang region.

In contrast to the Layar-Skrang data, Freeman's account (1970) of the Baleh Iban makes no mention of a concept *bungai* as such. His discussion of *ayu*, however, prompts Uchibori (1978:26-27) to suggest, that what the Layar-Skrang Iban discriminate as *bungai* and *ayu*, the Baleh Iban encapsulate as *ayu*. This Baleh Iban *ayu* is an individual's soul-substitute; it takes the form of a bamboo-like plant, growing on a far off mountain, where it is tended by celestial shamans. As Freeman (1970: 21) elaborates the concept:

The *ayu* of each *bilek*-family are conceived as of growing in a separate and compact clump, and when a child is born a new shoot appears at the base of the clump, just as it does with the bamboo plant itself. The health of the various members of the family — so it is believed — is controlled in a kind of magical symbiosis by the state of growth of their various *ayu*.

To the Baleh Iban then, the *ayu* indicates both an individual's state of health and his membership of a particular *bilek*-family. Three of their shamanic rites articulate this view. In the first of these, the *manang* is called in to tend the *ayu* of an individual who has become ill: 'the shamans (*manang*) are frequently commissioned to visit the *ayu* of sick persons to free them from encumbrances, and generally to tend them. It is the soul of the shaman that carries out this task, while the shaman himself is in a state of trance' (Freeman 1970:21). In another rite, which very frequently accompanies adoption, the *manang* performs a transplanting ritual called *nusop ayu*. This involves 'the cutting away of the child's *ayu* from the *ayu* clump of his natal group and the replanting of it with the *ayu* clump of his adoptive *bilek*-family' (Freeman 1970: 21). Finally, when an individual dies, a *manang* carries out the *besserara* rite, in which 'the soul-substitute (*ayu*) of the dead man is ritually

cut away from the *ayu* of the surviving members of the family' (Freeman 1970:36).

Uchibori (1978:94-107) gives a fuller account of the Layar-Skrang version of this ritual separation of the deceased from the living members of his *bilek*-family. For the Layar-Skrang Iban, as we have seen, it is the *bungai* which symbolises the unity of the *bilek*-family. The separation ritual is, thus, *serara bungai*, in which the *manang* cuts off the dead, withered part of the family's *bungai*. To do so, he cuts a small piece of skin off a bamboo shoot representing the *bungai* and throws this through a hole in the gallery floor to the ghosts waiting on the ground below. The *manang* also secures the *semangat* of the living members of the *bilek*-family, by tying the white threads attached to his ritual apparatus (*pagar api*). Later he collects the secured *semangat*, putting each into an uncooked grain of rice on the top of the head of each *bilek*-family member. Finally, he sets the *semangat* in the body (*ikat semangat*), by tying creeper vines around each person's wrists. At the close of the rite, palm fronds — a symbol of the border between the human realm and the land of the dead — are attached to the door and other parts of the *bilek* apartment. These form 'an efficacious barrier against ghosts, making the living invisible to them' (Uchibori 1978:105). Uchibori interprets the *serara bungai* rite as a 'manifestation of the Iban idea of *bilek*-family solidarity and continuity' (Uchibori 1978:106-107).

The *manang*'s ritual tasks involving the *bungai* and the *ayu* are, thus, seen to be of two kinds: rites of strengthening and renewal, relating to the health of the individual, and rites of incorporation and separation, relating to membership and continuity of the *bilek*-family. In each case, what is attributed to the *manang* is the ability to dissolve or erect barriers, to facilitate or prevent transfers and interactions. In some

instances, the terrestrial *manang* is thought to send his own *semangat* to carry out these tasks, while in others, the earthly *manang* enacts, in the visible human realm, actions, which the celestial *manang* are deemed to perform among the *ayu* on the far off mythical mountainside.

#### IV

I have already referred to the Iban concept of *semangat*: the separable soul or life force. Each human being is thought to have a *semangat*, which at times leaves the confines of the body. Dreams, for instance, are the experiences of the *semangat* when, during sleep, it leaves the body and wanders abroad either 'mundanely in the immediate neighbourhood or further afield in the perilous world of spirits (*antu*)' (Freeman 1967:316). On such occasions, the *semangat* can become lost or ensnared by a malevolent spirit. Thus, 'the most common diagnosis of sickness among the Iban is that some misfortune has befallen the soul; as Manang Bungai expressed it: "at the first trace of illness, the soul is already wandering abroad" (*Sepi kitai tabin, lelang semangat*)' (Freeman 1967:316). In such cases, a *manang* is commissioned to recover the missing soul.

Jensen (1974:148) reports that the Iban relate the gravity of an illness directly to the distance the *semangat* has gone. In some cases, presumably the less serious ones in which the soul is deemed close at hand, the *manang* tries to coax a return. He might seek to entice it with offerings or try to attract it by dressing a roughly carved human effigy (*pentik*) in headcloth and ornaments. He might try to catch it by 'hanging a bamboo from the ridge-beam as a trap (*besimbang garong*)' (Richards 1981:263). If, however, he diagnoses that the soul has wandered far or been led away by a spirit, he takes a more direct approach and actively pursues

the errant *semengat*. In such cases, one or more *manang* intone an appropriate *pelian* chant on the gallery of the longhouse. During the night long incantation, the *manang* squat on the floor, proceed along the gallery and march around a long handled spear, fixed, blade upwards, and tied with leaves (*pagar api*), which has at its base the medicine boxes of the *manang*. At the climax of the ceremony, 'the *manangs* rush around the *pagar api* as hard as they can ... until one of them falls on the floor and remains motionless; the others sit down. The bystanders cover the motionless *manang* with a blanket and wait whilst his spirit is supposed to hie away to Hades [sic] or wherever the erring soul has been carried, and to bring it back' (Perham 1887:91). When the *manang* revives, as if waking, he is thought to hold in his clenched right hand the errant soul and to return it to the sick person through the crown of the head.

If the *manang* does not indicate a trance, he might discover the *semengat* on a part of the patient's body — a toe, for instance (Jensen 1974:149). Or the *semengat* might be retrieved from the river, the jungle or far away lands: should the *manang* seek the soul in the river, 'they will wave about a garment, or a piece of woven cloth, to imitate the action of throwing a cast net to inclose it as a fish is caught; perhaps they give out that it has escaped into the jungle and they rush out of the house to circumvent and secure it there; perhaps they will say it has been carried away over seas to unknown lands, and will all set to play at paddling a boat to follow it' (Perham 1887:91).

Earlier, I discussed a fragment of a *pelian* chant, which dealt with soul retrieval. At that point, I quoted Uchibori (1978) on the symbolic equation between the itinerary of the shaman's spiritual journey and certain physical features of the longhouse structure. There is some variability in the way this symbolic equation is elaborated by the Iban

of different areas. This is reflected in Uchibori's data on the Skrang river Iban and Jensen's account (1974) of the Lemanak river Iban. In each case, the *pelian* takes place, and the shamanic journey begins, on the gallery (*ruai*) adjacent to the apartment of the patient's *bilek*-family. Uchibori's Skrang river version of the symbolic analogy equates the longhouse structure with the spirit realm accessible to the shaman, beyond which he dare not venture into the realm of the dead (*Sebayan*). Danger is represented as a movement outwards, with the longhouse ladder as the significant dividing line (the Bridge of Fright) (Uchibori 1978: 208-212). Jensen's Lemanak river version is similar, except that the door of the *bilek*-family room is a great stone (*batu*) and the room itself a lake (*danau*). The shaman may enter the family room (*tana ka bilek*), if he fails to find the *semangat* in his journey through the more public areas of the longhouse, although 'this represents a much deeper penetration in the territory of *Sebayan* and exposes the *manang* to considerable risk' (Jensen 1974:148-149). Here then, danger is represented as a movement inwards to the heart of the fundamental social unit of Iban society.

It may be tempting to speculate on the possible social correlates of this Lemanak version of the symbolic equation. However, I suggest it represents no more than a reworking and a mixing of metaphors, consistent with Freeman's conclusion, that 'in the Lemanak, shamanism has lost a great deal of its traditional character' (Freeman 1975:278). Firstly, Jensen tells us that the *bilek*-family room is symbolically equated, not with *Sebayan* as such, but with a lake (*danau*). Due to sudden storms, crossing a lake in Borneo can be a very hazardous business. Secondly, entering a *bilek*-family room uninvited is an intrusion into the social space of a group, to which one does not belong. As such, it provides a social, as against a natural, metaphor for the *manang*'s intrusion into

the realm of the dead. On this interpretation, the Lemanak version mixes natural and social metaphors for the peril associated with a shamanic journey into *Sebayan*. In so doing, it reverses the direction of the movement from security to danger, which is expressed in the Skrang version and the *pelian* fragment discussed earlier, as a movement outwards from the centre of social life.

To supplement a general account of soul retrieval, similar to the one I have given above, Perham (1887:97-100) provides brief descriptions of fourteen other *pelian* ceremonies. These, he says, may be enacted 'according to the fancy of the *manang*, the violence of the disease and the ability of the patient to pay'. Of the fourteen ceremonies he describes, I have already dealt with the one which is diagnostic (*pentik*) and the one which involves tending the soul counterpart (*ayu/bungai*). Here I want to discuss the eight ceremonies which relate to retrieving the lost soul. I shall comment below on the four remaining ceremonies, which involve rectifying spirit interference. Unfortunately, Perham does not tell us whether the interpretative comments he provides are his own explanations or Iban exegeses of the rites.

Perham's '*Memuai ka Sabayan*' ceremony ('Making a journey to Hades [sic]') is simply that variation of soul retrieval, mentioned in the general description above, in which the *manang* 'go into the jungle to "catch the soul"'. Four other ceremonies, which Perham calls '*Berua*' ('Swinging'), '*Bepancha*' ('Making a *Pancha*'), '*Betiang Garong*' ('Making a post of or for the Manes') and '*Ninting Lanjan*' (?), involve one or two swings erected in, or attached to, some part of the longhouse. Perham tells us that, as the *manang* swings, he is 'kicking away' or 'knocking and driving away' the disease. Nyuak (1906:175) however, describes the *manang* in '*Bepancha*' as 'swinging to and fro, by which means he is supposed to pursue the

soul into the upper regions'. In a sense, swinging is a means of moving without moving. It creates an illusion of travel, indicating that the *semangat* of the *manang* is abroad in the spirit realm. A similar interpretation relates the *manang*'s ritual swinging to trance induction, through its effect on the equilibrium sense. Gell (1980) has argued that the swing is an artefact used in the modification of mental states.<sup>2</sup> In his analysis of Muria religion (1980:230-233), ritual swinging is not only a means of access to the divinities, but also involves a strong element of identification with them. Gell (1980:220) locates this ritual swinging as 'part and parcel of a tradition in Indian religion which is both ancient and widespread'. He cites Schebesta (1928:251 and plate facing p.261) as evidence for an association between swinging and trance states in Southeast Asia. In Iban religion, Sanskrit derived terms (e.g. *petara*) attest some contact with Indian religious traditions (Perham 1882:133; Chadwick 1940:477). But foreign forms — including religious terminology and ritual artefacts — are assimilated for their relevance to local concerns and often imbued with specifically indigenous meanings. So, Jensen (1974:4, 100-102) points out that the Iban have used borrowed terms to designate 'a meaning of their own'. So, too, given a lack of concern with the physical elaboration of trance states, Iban shamanism utilizes the swing as a token, rather than a tool, of bodily disassociation. This interpretation sees the *manang*'s ritual swinging as a highly condensed symbolic rite of soul retrieval. As such, it lends itself to alternative exegeses (e.g. Perham's) more readily than the naturalistic drama which typically expresses pursuit of the soul.

Perham (1887:98-100) describes three other ceremonies of soul retrieval. In '*Ngelembayan*' ('Taking a long sight') the *manang* walk along

planks laid about the gallery and 'when in pretended swoon, one is supposed to sail away over rivers and seas to find the soul and recover it'. Here, the planks might represent the great distance the *manang* must travel or suggest the boat in which he sails. Richards (1981:263) mentions a similar rite (*betiti tendai*), in which a weaver's warpbeam is oiled and set in the gallery (*ruai*) for the *manang* to walk upon. He suggests the beam is a symbol of the Bridge of Fright (*Titi Rawan*) leading to the land of the dead (*Sebayan*). 'Beburong Raya' ('Making or doing the Adjutant Bird') features a 'procession round and round the house, the *Manangs* being covered with native cloths like cloaks in which, I suppose, they profess to personate the bird'. I noted, earlier, the widespread shamanic use of bird symbolism. This specifically Iban form of the analogy, equating the *manang* with the adjutant stork (*burong raya*), pertains to characteristics ascribed to them both. Firstly, two accounts of Iban mortuary practices (Howell 1911:19; Perham 1882-5:293-294) describe how the wailer of the death dirge calls on the adjutant stork, after other animals and birds have refused, to convey a food offering to the newly dead. Like the *manang*, this bird willingly undertakes the perilous journey from the human realm to the land of the dead. Secondly, the wailer refers to the adjutant stork as 'the royal bird who fishes the waters all alone' (Perham 1882-85:293). This suggests a creature set apart from his fellows, a characterisation which then informs the *manang* analogy.

In '*Begiling Lantai*' ('Wrapping with Lantai' [floor laths]) one of the *manang* 'lays himself down as dead, is then bound up in mats and wrapped up with slender bamboo laths tied together with rotans, and taken out of the house, and laid on the ground. He is supposed to be dead. After about an hour, the other *manangs* loose him and bring him to life; and as he recovers, so the sick person is supposed to recover'.

Richards (1981:263) mentions another form of this rite, in which the *manang* is put in a coffin (*betukup rarong*). Death is homologous with dreams and trance, in as much as it frees the soul to commune with spirits. In these instances, the soul of the 'dead' *manang* may retrieve, guide, or blaze a trail for the lost soul of the patient. Wrapping a corpse in mats, secured with a light framework of wood, is a traditional preparation for transporting it to the graveyard (Perham 1882-85:290). Here, I suggest the wrapping in mats or the placing in a coffin emphasises the barriers the *manang* must break through in order to 'return' to life. As he is freed of these constraints by the other *manang*, so the errant soul is freed of the constraints of the spirit realm by the rite itself.

All these rites of soul retrieval focus on the *manang*'s putative ability to move at will between states of being and across realms of the cosmos. He does what others cannot do and sees what others do not see. In metaphor and symbolism -- as a solitary bird and a 'dead' man -- he is set apart from his fellows, in, rather than of, a social world he transcends in the service of others.

#### IV

Ceremonies to rectify spirit interference vary with the diagnosis, which may be object intrusion or spirit assault. The term *pansa utai* (something passed by) refers to a spirit encounter, of which the Iban concerned may not even be consciously aware (Jensen 1974:147). Nevertheless, he/she might have been 'struck by a spirit sword' or 'wounded by an arrow from the spirits' blowpipe' (Nyagak 1906:168). Or the spirit might have deposited a physical token -- a piece of bone, wood, cloth, hair -- in the person's body (Jensen 1974:147). Using his quartz crystal 'seeing

stone' (*batu ilau*) and stroking the patient's body with objects from his medicine box, the *manang* is thought to locate and then remove any troublesome foreign matter. Jensen (1974:147) reports that the *manang* first bites the blade of a knife for strength. In a case Brooke Low (Ling Roth 1896:i. 267-268) describes, the *manang* called on his spirit familiar to divine the fate of the patient and reveal the location of the intrusive object. If a spirit itself is causing the problem, the *manang* may propitiate it with sacrifices, will it away, bark and growl at it or otherwise frighten it away and, in some cases, even attempt to kill it (Brooke Low in Ling Roth 1896:i. 266; Jensen 1974:148). Just as these forms of attack are directed against spirits who interfere with the physical person (*tuboh*), so they are used to overcome spirits who have ensnared a wandering soul (*semengat*). In the latter case, the confrontation occurs in the spirit realm, as part of the *manang*'s efforts to retrieve the soul. Thus, 'occasionally on emerging from his "trance" a shaman will relate his adventures, telling in graphic language of the menacing demons he encountered and how he snatched the lost soul from their grasp, just as they were preparing to devour it' (Freeman 1967:316).

Perham's (1887:97-100) list of ceremonies includes four rites for variously tackling spirit interference. '*Bebayak*' ('Making a *Bayak*, i.e. an iguana [sic]') features a monitor lizard (*bayak*) moulded out of cooked rice and covered over with cloths. The monitor lizard 'is supposed to eat up the evil spirits which cause the disease'. The form of this ceremony coincides with a common agricultural rite. Boyle (1865:205) observed moulded mud male and female alligator [sic] figures, which 'were expected to roam about at night and devour the *antus*, malignantly destroying the produce of the *padi* field'. Jensen (1974:187) treats that rite as one which protects the rice crop from 'illness' and pests, as well as fostering its growth: 'Ribai the spirit associated with rivers and water, sometimes

appears to men as a crocodile .... The earthen figure of the crocodile, Ribai, is moulded by a *tuai* [elder] who is noted for his success in rice cultivation'. Perham might have misconstrued 'Making a *Bayak*' as a *manang* ceremony. It is more likely, however, that at least some Iban have elaborated the rites by analogy: as the crocodile is credited with a *semangat* and is considered effective against the pests and *antu* which attack the *padi*, so the monitor lizard is considered effective against the *antu* which plague humankind.

In '*Berenchah*' ('Making a rush') the *manang* march back and forth from the *bilek*-family apartment to the gallery of the longhouse. 'Beating together a pair of swords', they are thought to make 'a grand charge into the midst of the evil spirits' (Perham 1887:97). This generalised assault on the spirits is clearly intended to scatter them. More direct still is the ceremony '*Munoh Antu*' ('Killing the Demon') which takes place, according to Perham (1887:98), when a spirit called *buyu* is persistently troublesome and must be killed. Freeman (1967) gives a detailed description and interpretation of this most dramatic shamanic performance — slaying the incubus. I have already discussed some aspects of Freeman's account in Chapter 1. There, I was considering the personality structure attributed to shamans and the socio-cultural correlates of a belief in incubus attacks. Here, I am concerned to see what the nature of this rite adds to our knowledge of those powers, which were attributed to the *manang* in traditional Iban culture.

The slaying of incubi described by Freeman took place in a longhouse on a tributary of the Baleh river in 1950. The death of a child was attributed to the abduction of its soul by an incubus spirit (*antu buyu*) — a sometime seducer of the child's mother. The next day a local shaman carried out the rite of *bedinding*, in which *ikat* fabrics were hung around the periphery of the

dead child's *bilek* apartment and then 'magically turned into walls of stone as protection against the incubus which, it was thought, might be haunting [the child's mother] Rabai' (Freeman 1967:321). Freeman reports that, while most shamans can perform this magical rite, only a very few are prepared to summon the spirit in order to kill it. One such shaman, Manang Bungai, was fetched and his diagnosis confirmed the dire situation. To the great relief of the Iban concerned, Manang Bungai succeeded in slaying a number of incubi (*ontu buyu*) and one water spirit (*ontu ai*) during the evenings that followed. Each slaying took place in the privacy of the *bilek* apartment, while the family concerned was 'placed within a protective covering' outside the apartment in the centre of the longhouse gallery (Freeman 1967:327). Before the rite, Bungai used his 'blinder' (*engkerabun*): 'a magical substance indispensable to a shaman in that it is believed to have qualities which make him invisible to all evil spirits'<sup>3</sup> (Freeman 1967:326). After each slaying, Bungai set certain ritual prohibitions (*pemali*) on the longhouse as a whole and on the *bilek*-family concerned in particular.<sup>4</sup> He stressed that further incubus attacks were likely to follow, should the taboos be infringed. Finally, he, too, surrounded the *bilek* apartment with magically protective walls in a further rite of *bedinding*.

This summary does not do justice to either the event itself or to Freeman's account of it. It is intended simply to isolate the conceptual mechanisms employed by the shaman, in terms of which the Iban concerned experienced a restructuring of their reality. The characteristics of the rite resolve into two themes: the manipulation of visibility and the denial of access. The killing itself is the dramatic denouement. To achieve it, the shaman makes himself invisible to the spirit, while he entices the spirit to appear in a physical, and hence, visible and

vulnerable, form. The act of violent retribution has many psychotherapeutic effects for the Iban concerned. Nevertheless, in the cultural logic of the ritual, it forms part of a broader pattern, as the ultimate denial of access. Before, during and after the killing itself, protective barriers are erected: the *bilek* apartment is surrounded with walls of stone; the family are placed in a 'protective covering'; and, finally, the ritual prohibitions enclose the community and seal its boundaries at just those points likely to attract, or to allow penetration by, incubi. The *manang*'s ability to deny access to the incubi, by manipulating visibility and erecting barriers, allows him to enact a separation, to make more discrete the spirit and human realms, whose intimate interpenetration was to the detriment of the human community. As such, this ritual simply takes to an extreme form, that concern to establish an appropriate separation between realms, which characterises all rites to rectify spirit interference. This concern for things and beings in their place is the common theme, which underlies both the rites of soul retrieval and the rites to rectify spirit interference, that are performed by the Iban *manang*.

## VI

One final, somewhat peculiar rite, mentioned by Perham (1887:99) is '*Bebandong api*' ('Displaying fire'). All Perham tells us is that the patient is laid on the gallery (*ruai*) and several small fires are made around him. The *manang* then 'pretend to dissect his body and fan the flames towards him to drive away the sickness'. This initially brings to mind and seems at odds with, the connotations of the Iban terms *angat*: heated, feverish, infected and *chelap*: cool, tranquil, healthy (Jensen 1974:114). These concepts, however, have no simple connection with

the heat of a fire. *Angat//chelap* are not qualities of things or persons as such, but rather characteristics of socio-spatial settings (Uchibori 1978:32). A longhouse is 'hot' (*rumah angat*) only when there are 'obvious and acrimonious divisions' among its residents (Heppell 1975:279). *Chelap* refers to a state of 'harmonious relations, good harvests, health and general prosperity' (Jensen 1974:112). The complementary opposition is, then, one of disorder//order expressed by means of analogy with the contrast hot//cool. To return to 'displaying fire' as a healing rite, I assume that driving away sickness by these means amounts to scaring away malevolent spirits, to whom a fear of fire is attributed. Perham (1882-85:299-300) reports on Iban 'popular' view that disembodied souls, which are homologous with spirits, may be damaged by fire. On its way to the land of the dead, the soul 'has to pass the "Hill of Fire". Evil souls are compelled to go straight over the hill with scorching fire on every side, which nearly consumes them; but good ones are led by an easy path round the foot and so escape the pain and danger'. This may suggest a notion of fire as an agent of transformation and purification in some contexts, although both social and ritual metaphors suggest that heat is a potent and threatening force, which must be manipulated and contained. Unfortunately, the literature is quite inadequate for an analysis in these terms, but there seems to be a modulation of states of heat and cool in Iban ritual. In '*Bebandong api*', for instance, the *manang*'s display of fire may be seen as exploiting the spirits' vulnerability to it and simultaneously asserting the *manang*'s controlled use of it.

Such a conclusion illuminates one puzzling feature of a number of *manang* rites: the *pagar api* (fence of fire). This is usually a spear, blade up, with leaves attached, but it may be a bamboo, banana or *kemali*

stem, placed in a small jar; a plate is hung at the top; an offering (*piring*) on a plate or in a decorated basket is set half way up; and a bowl with amulets, a cup upside down or the *manang*'s medicine box is placed at the foot. The *pagar api* might be covered with a cloth (*pua*) (Richards 1981:243; Jensen 1974:148). Sutlive (1976:70) reports a 'fence of fire' which consisted of 'ironwood beams lashed across the verandah from the centre post of the house to the inner wall'. Richards (1981:326) describes the *pagar api*, in certain *saut* rites, as 'a jar (*tajau*) filled with rice-beer (*tuak*) and secured by crossbars'.

From Perham (1887:90) to Uchibori (1978:99) authors report that no Iban informant could explain the derivation of the name. Richards (1981:243, 262) interprets the *pagar api* as a 'pillar' or 'pillar shrine', providing the *manang* with a means of access to the land of the dead (*Sebayan*). Consistent with this is Masing's report (1981:505), that the Baleh Iban describe the *pagar api* as a 'bridge' the shaman uses, when pursuing the soul of his patient. According to Uchibori (1978:100), the component parts of the *pagar api* symbolise 'the shaman's ability to send his soul in any direction'. Richards (1981:243) relates the *pagar api* to soul retrieval as follows: the offering (*piring*) is to attract the soul, the plate atop the *pagar api* is a resting place (*bangkit*) for the returning soul, while the container set at the foot is to secure the soul. During the *serara bungai* ritual, when the shaman secures the *semengat* of the living members of the *bilek*-family, by tying the white threads on the *pagar api*, it is, at that point, referred to as 'the ladder of *semengat*' (Uchibori 1978:104). Thus, the notion of the *pagar api* as a means of access, or a point of entry to, and return from, the spirit world is well attested and widespread among the Iban.

In Nyuak's description (1906:170) of a *besserara* rite the *manang* locates the soul at the foot of the *pagar api*, suggesting that it represents the *ayu/bungai* plant, from which the dead person's soul must be separated. This would account for the obvious plant references in the *pagar api* itself. Richards (1981:326) interprets the *pagar api*, when used in rites for tending the *ayu*, in these terms: the base is the location of the *ayu (bangkit)*, the plant stem is the *ayu* stem, and the cloth (*pua*) represents the *ayu* leaves. In Hoek's comparative study of 'Dayak priests' (1949:112-113), he follows up the plant metaphor. He sees the Iban *pagar api* as reminiscent of the Ngaju 'tree of life' with its connotations of the creation myth. Yet, even he seems rather unconvinced by this suggestion, pointing out the lack of creation references in the Iban *manang*'s ritual chants. More salient, I think, is his comment, that the Iban 'fence of fire' also reminds him of the Kenya notion of erecting a 'wall' against diseases. Richards (1981:152) echoes such a view when, at times, he translates *pagar api* as 'shield of fire'.

None of these interpretations, however, attempt to explain why a symbol of a pillar, a bridge, a plant-like soul-counterpart, a wall or a shield should be termed a 'fence of fire'. Uchibori (1978:99) does tackle this problem. He translates *pagar api*, in which *pagar* (fence) and *api* (fire) are in syntactic apposition with no preposition specified, as meaning either fence *of* or fence *against* fire. He suggests, that as a 'fence against fire', the *pagar api* 'signifies the protection of the *bilek*'s *bungai*, which is represented as a plant which could be damaged by heat. This inference is supported by the fact that the supposed location of the *bungai* is the foot of the fireplace post and, therefore, it is dangerously near the fire'.

This novel explanation of the *pagar api* is, however, somewhat problematic. Firstly, Uchibori (1978:21-22) himself tells us that when, in a protective rite, the *bungai* is to be shielded from the heat, it is wrapped in an *ikat* fabric, the typical barrier material of *manang* rites. It is not the *pagar api* which is used for this purpose. Secondly, the explanation is specific to the Layar-Skrang concept of the *bungai* as a plant growing at the foot of the fireplace post. As we have seen, the Baleh Iban have no such precariously positioned plant form, as their *ayu-cum-bungai* are located solely on a far-off mountainside. Yet the *pagar api* is so named and common to *manang* rites in the Baleh as well as the Layar-Skrang. Finally, the 'fence against fire' relates to only one category of rites — tending the *ayu/bungai* — whereas the *pagar api* features in a wide range of *manang* healing rituals.

It seems clear that the *pagar api* is a polysemic symbol: as 'pillar', 'bridge' or 'ladder' it implies a means of access to the realm of spirits; as a 'plant' form it represents the *ayu/bungai* soul-counterpart; and as a 'fence' or 'shield' it erects a barrier between the Iban and the malevolent spirits. On my interpretation, it is a 'fence of fire', which intimidates spirits and, simultaneously, a 'dangerous crossing', which affords the *manang* an opportunity to assert, in symbolic terms, mastery over fire and hence, both skill and courage superior to that of the malevolent spirits he must overcome. I can, however, hardly demonstrate this proposition. At a general comparative level, both the concept of the shamanic bridge to the spirit world as a 'difficult passage' and the idea that shamans are 'masters over fire' are widespread. According to Eliade's analysis of the symbolic themes common to shamanism in many cultures, 'he who succeeds' in these two areas has transcended the human condition and become a spirit (Eliade 1964:470-477, 482-486). Iban shamans are not spirits

and only temporarily take on 'the spirit condition', in order to confront and overcome troublesome spirits. The evidence of the 'displaying fire' rite, described earlier, is slim indeed, but it does indicate that Iban *manang* used fire in their contest with spirit adversaries. My suggestion is that, just as *angkat//chelap* becomes a metaphor for one central cultural concern, so fire is a symbol, which elaborates the central concern of Iban shamanism: spirit barriers which the *manang* both erects and transcends.

## VII

The *saut* rites and the *gawai sakit* festival, with which they are combined, are not well described in the literature on the Iban. Virtually the only sources are Richards' (1981) dictionary entry for *saut* and Harrisson and Sandin's (1966) translation and discussion of the main verses of a *gawai sakit* ritual chant.

The emphasis in the *manang*'s *saut* rites, says Richards (1981:326), is in the soul-counterpart (*ayu*). The series of rites begins with the *manang* calling upon the deities (*petara*), celestial *manang* and Selempandai,<sup>5</sup> while offerings are made to all three. After this is done once, as a night long ceremony (*beterayu mata*), it is repeated in a more elaborate form (*beterayu mansau*), for which the *manang* engage the bards (*lemambang*) to recite the invocation (*pengap gawai sakit*). Divination by examining an areca blossom follows. If the result is satisfactory, the ritual concludes at this point, with a prayer (*sampi*) and a name-changing rite for the patient (*bepindah* or *be-silih-ka nama*). If divination indicates that the cure is yet to be effected, the *saut* proper is performed in two parts, each 'combined with full *gawai sakit* (ritual festival for the sick)'.<sup>6</sup>

Richards' account (1981:326-327) of these two *saut* rites — *nudok-ka saut* (set or begin) and *ngulur-ka saut* (let down or remove) — is as follows:

At the end of either rite the patient's name is changed and his recovery marked by a new tattoo (*pantang*) and planting a "croton" (*sabang ayu*). In *nudok-ka saut* the "shrine" (*pagar api*) is a jar (*tajau*) filled with rice-beer (*tuak*) and secured by crossbars. The patient supplies a threshing frame (*pelangka, panggau*): to its legs which are oiled and scented are tied 4 balls (*gerunong*), 4 stone beads (*pelaga*), and 4 strings of beads (*marik*). Areca blossom is set ready and the *manang* make 3 rice offerings. They process along the gallery (*ruai*) with the patient and the *pelangka*. At the steps, the patient sits on a gong (*canang*) and the *manang* attack one another with the blossom. The procession returns to the "shrine" through the inner gallery (*tempuan ruai*) where 8 plates of rice (*berau indik*) have been set for the *manang* to "tread" upon. The *manang* bow to the "shrine", climb over it in turn, join hands and go round it. At each stage some go into trance (*luput*). On recovery they enter the room to examine (*betabas*) the patient's state and settle their fee (*sabang*). *Lembang* begin the *pengap* invocation. When the *manang* reappear, 9 plates of rice (*berau tumpu*) are set about the "shrine", from which the *manang* take and throw rice into the air: they move round the "shrine" chanting to fence the *ayu* (*ngeraga Bangkit*). Near dawn, the patient sits on a *canang* and leans against the "shrine". The *manang* set him on the *pelangka* and lift him up 7 times while a *canang* is sounded. Areca blossom is struck on a mat (rite of *mecah-ka anak orang*, literally, breaking the children, i.e. of evil): blossom is examined and, if satisfactory, the second part (*ngulur*) need not be performed but the patient's name is changed. For this, 10 plates of rice are set round the "shrine". The *manang* present the patient with a *pelaga* bead in exchange for rice and salt meat or fish. The *pelangka* is put in the room covered with red cloth: in it are placed *tubai* root, *lukai* wood, the *manang*'s "blinder" (*engkerabun*) and other amulets (*pencelap*), and betel (*pinang*). During a storm the *tubai* and *lukai* would be burned to keep off evil and the *pelangka* put in a mosquito net (*kibong*). Some say the patient's soul (*semangat*) stays in or near the *pelangka* until the rites are complete. *Ngulur-ka saut* is the same ritual except that (a) the *pelangka* with the patient seated in it is lifted from the *ruai* into the loft (*sadau*) and let down through the 'pounding hole' (*lubang penutok*) seven times: (b) the *pelangka* is taken away by the *manang* or set adrift in the river.

On my interpretation of these rites, the preliminary activities, in which the *manang* attack each other with areca blossom, are a preparation for trance. That initial procession is the forerunner to a celestial ascent — indicated by the *manang*'s climbing over the 'shrine' (*pagar api*) —

in order to go and tend the patient's *ayu*. On their return, the *manang* check the patient's condition and set their fee according to the difficulty of the task they have just performed. They then throw rice to distract any malevolent spirits, while they themselves chant to fence the *ayu*. In this, the *manang* have the help of the celestial *manang*, invoked by the bards (*lemambang*) in their ritual chant for the sick (*pengap gawai sakit*). Once the *ayu* is restored to health, any malevolent spirits still troubling the patient must be dealt with. The use of a threshing frame (*pelangka*), might suggest the separation of evil spirits from the patient, after which they are attacked on the mat or set adrift on the *pelangka* in the river. The lifting of the patient, however, indicates that he is taken on a celestial ascent by the *manang*, presumably to have his body recast by Selempandai, the blacksmith god who forges human beings. In the more elaborate rite, the patient's soul (*semengat*) is set aside in the *pelangka*, made invisible by the *manang*'s blinder and protected by those roots and woods which keep *antu* at bay. From Richard's brief description, it is not clear whether the *semengat* is simply guarded while malevolent spirits are attacked, or whether it remains separated from the patient and kept secure in this world, so that it cannot stray during his journey to Selempandai in the spirit realm.

On this interpretation, in the *saut* rites, the *manang* tend and fence the *ayu*, dispose of troublesome spirits and effect the 'death' of the patient followed by his rebirth as a 'new' person. The emphasis on Selempandai, the new name given the patient and the planting of a new visible soul-counterpart (*sabang ayu*) support this interpretation. As such, the *saut* rites do go beyond the *pelian* rites, in which the *manang* retrieves the soul or rectifies spirit interference by his own actions. In the *saut*

rites, the *manang* make ultimate recourse to Selempandai, who may forge the individual Iban anew. While it is, thus, Selempandai who effects the cure, it is the *manang* who bring it about, by extending to the patient their own ability to transcend the human realm.

As mentioned in this description, the *manang*'s *saut* rites occur in conjunction with the bards' (*lemambang*) performance of the invocatory chant for the festival for the sick (*pengap gawai sakit*). *Gawai* are religious rituals accompanied by festivity, at which *lemambang* recite an invocation (*pengap/timang*) to call the appropriate deities to attend the festival. Thus, Richards (1981:98) defines *gawai sakit* as a ritual festival 'for the sick to be healed by intervention of [Manang Raja] Menjaya and other deities in major *saut* rites'.

Harrisson and Sandin (1966:101-115) have published a text and translation of those verses of a *gawai sakit* chant cued by a bard's *aide memoire* — a board with a series of idiosyncratic incisions (*papan turai*). Unfortunately, in the accompanying discussion the roles of *manang* and *lemambang* are confused and both terms are, at times, translated as shaman, as the authors construct a single continuum of Iban healers: *dukun* (herbalist) → *manang* → *lemambang*<sup>6</sup> (Harrisson and Sandin 1966:131-132, 139-140). In a similar vein, a sociological continuum is suggested by Schmidt (1964:150) in his distinction between the two roles: 'the *manang* aims at integration into the family group (*pelian*-ceremony), while the *lemambang* aims more at a harmonious longhouse community (*gawai*-ceremony)'. In this form, the continuum view even finds its way into Richards' dictionary (1981:204): '*manang* deal with individual ills, while *lemambang* help communities to secure positive benefits'.

Certainly, the *manang* and *lemambang* in any Iban area draw on the same ritual language vocabulary and on those poetic forms, which make up

a common mode of communication elaborated in a repertoire of ritual chants. While the *manang* are shamans, however, the *lemambang* are essentially bards. The *timbang/pengap* chanted by *lemambang* during a ritual feast is 'both an invocation and a depiction of a journey to the world of the gods and the gods' subsequent adventures while coming to the ritual feast in the world of humans' (Masing 1981:90). The efficacy of the chant lies in the power of words to actualise that which is depicted. To the Iban, 'spoken words are fully capable of determining the course of events' (Masing 1981:131-132). In traditional Iban society, the *lemambang*'s primary role was, thus, 'as an agent possessing the power and skill to unleash the lethal words of the *timbang* against Iban traditional enemies' (Masing 1981:136).

Given the actualising potency of the chant, the *lemambang*'s depiction of a journey to the spirit realm is readily assimilated to the category of shamanic voyages, which in turn echo the adventurous journeys of ordinary Iban in warfare, pioneering and *bejalai* excursions. While the images of both the *manang* and the *lemambang* may be informed by this cultural preoccupation, in the case of the *lemambang* the notion of a spiritual journey is clearly a literary fiction, an analogy drawing on the shamanic model, but readily distinguishable from it. The *lemambang*, for instance, are not thought to go into trance, although this is the rationale given for the shamanic ability to release the *semangat* for other-worldly excursions (Uchibori 1978:175). Furthermore, a significant part of those ritual chants recited by the *lemambang* is the search for messengers willing and able to carry to the gods the invitation to attend the festival. Certain plants and animals, often the wind spirit (*antu ribut*) and sometimes even culture heroes (*orang Panggau*) carry out this task. The texts

themselves do not depict the *lemambang* as accompanying these messengers (Harrisson and Sandin 1966; Masing 1981). So, the *lemambang*'s chant for the sick (*pengap gawai sakit*) describes the journey of the messengers, in this instance a small and large bat (*entawai* and *kusing*), as they go to invite the great celestial shaman Manang Raja Menjaya to attend the festival.

Menjaya, on his way to attend the festival, is depicted as passing through the country of Selempandai, perhaps to inform him of the ritual, during which the *manang* may call on him for assistance:

Leave that place,  
 And come to a stone bellows with hole,  
 Blown by the feathers of the victorious cocks.  
 Then reach a hill with a hole blown by the wind,  
 Which murmurs along the *lalang* bamboo joints.  
 This is occupied by Selampandai,  
 Who can make the dead live again.  
 This is Selampetoh's land,  
 He who forges the body with a clinking sound.

*Lengka ka ari nya,  
 Manggai diteladok batu pesok,  
 Labu nyepu kebu kebu,  
 Ngena labu bulu manok menang.  
 Manggai dibukit lubang ribut,  
 Bemanyi beka dengut,  
 Tampong surong buloh lalang.  
 Nya menoa pangkang Selampandai,  
 Tau ngumbai orang enda sulai laya midang.  
 Nya pangkang Selampetoh,  
 Tau ngamboh tuboh rentang rentang.*

(Harrisson and Sandin 1966:110)

After this, Manang Menjaya journeys on to the festival and, finally, takes his place in the longhouse:

Then he finds the verandah of the man,  
 Who is the chief of this festival.  
 He finds the verandah of the man,  
 Who is the chief worker in all this.  
 Now the tail feathers of the cock hang down;  
 Menjaya comes and sits down.

*Nya baru tetemu ka ruai orang,  
Ke pun pengawa megai gawai,  
Nya baru nemu ruai orang,  
Ke pun ngereja utai.  
Nya baru lentok lentok langgai manok;  
Menjaya ke datai belaboh dudok.*

(Harrisson and Sandin 1966:114-115)

The chant ends at this point. Thus, the *lemambang* have, by the power of their words, summoned the appropriate celestial being to attend the festival. Now, it is up to the *manang*, terrestrial and celestial, to bring about the cure by means of the *saut* rites, having recourse to Selempandai with the patient if need be.

A very clear indication of the different kind of powers attributed to the *manang* and the *lemambang* in traditional Iban society is the nature of the training deemed essential for each role. The *manang* vocation is obliged by the command of a spirit or deity in dreams; disobedience to the call is thought to result in madness or death (Richards 1981:204). Elaborate rites of initiation follow. These are deemed to confer on the candidate the special powers peculiar to the *manang* (Perham 1887:100-102; Richards 1981:204-205). Intending *lemambang* are not obliged to the role, but do seek the sanction of the gods, revealed in dreams, for their aspiration. Without this, a person cannot hope to succeed beyond the status of a minor bard (*lemambang mit*), who has mastered only certain categories of the ritual chants (Masing 1981:137, 151-152).

Initially, young people, who show potential at recitation and interest in the ritual chants, are encouraged to participate in the *lemambang*'s two-man chorus for ritual performances. They may then spend a very brief period in formal training with a *lemambang* of established reputation. Learning is by rote, with the aid of incised mnemonic boards (*papan turai*). The master *lemambang*, who agrees to take on pupils for a nominal fee, performs a *piring* (offering) ceremony, in which

he shares with his pupils 'his *ubat pengingat*, a charm to aid one's memory, either by letting them drink the water in which the charm has been rinsed or by slicing tiny pieces from it and giving one piece to each of his pupils' (Masing 1981:140). After this initial instruction, the main acquisition of chant skills is by informal means, learning from other *lemambang* as opportunity permits and learning through participation on ritual occasions (Masing 1981:138-145).

While a person could acquire all the skills of a *lemambang* without the benefit of formal training, those few days are considered important for two reasons. Formal training gives an aspirant direct access to an established master's knowledge and skill. What is more important, however, is that it provides the opportunity for him to obtain from the master a memory charm and 'the Iban believe that without the aid of such a charm the learning of the *timbang* will be difficult, if not impossible' (Masing 1981:153). This emphasis clearly indicates, that the skills deemed essential to the *lemambang* are not the shamanic feats of magical flight and soul retrieval. Rather, the *lemambang* require that command of oral literature and those skills of recitation, which will enable them to unleash words having the potency to shape Iban perceptions of their experience.

Thus, the *lemambang* acquires his skills through training and participation in rituals, with the aid of a memory charm, while the *manang* attains his peculiar powers through elaborate rites of initiation. It is to these, I now turn.

#### VIII

The ethnographic reports on the initiation rites of an Iban *manang* are not only incomplete, but also somewhat inconsistent, reflecting the

variability in Iban practice across time and space in this regard.

Jensen (1974:144-146) makes only passing reference to the initiation ceremonies, concentrating instead on the novice's dream summons:

In the dream he is summoned perhaps in the form of a riddle to perform certain tasks. Assuming his initial response is correct the aspirant is taught, principally through dreams, the functions of his office under the supervision of Menjaya Raja Manang, spirit ruler of the *manang*. The spirit calling the Iban remains his familiar spirit, his contact, guide and helper in the spirit world. This is the only recognised apprenticeship; an Iban cannot "make himself a *manang*" (*manang ngaga diri*). However, the novice may supplement his spirit training by receiving practical instruction, and even the tools of his profession, from an established *manang*.

All other writers stress the crucial importance of initiation rites (*bebangun*) (see Richards 1981:204-205; Freeman 1975:278; Sutlive 1976: 67-69). Richards (1981:26) defines *bangun* as 'install in the office of *manang*'. Eliade (1964:57), following Perham (1887:100-102) and Gomes (1911:178-180), distinguishes 'three different ceremonies, corresponding to the three degrees of Dyak shamanism'. Sandin (1978:57), however, refers to a particular shaman of the middle grade (*manang mansau*) as 'fully consecrated ... having undergone a complete cycle of seven stages of consecration (*bangun*)'. From these reports, it seems that, while some rites are considered essential to attaining each of the three grades (*manang mata*, *manang mansau*, *manang bali*), other additional rites may add to the repertoire of skills and the level of competence of *manang* within each grade.

Perham (1887:100) terms the first initiation ceremony '*Besudi*', which he says means touching or feeling. In it, the novice sits on the longhouse gallery, while other *manang* chant over him. From the ceremony, he acquires 'the power of touch, to enable him to feel where and what are the maladies of the body and so apply the requisite charms'. Richards (1981:45-46) defines *besudi* as 'examine (palpate) a patient before a minor *pelian* rite;

(the 'touching') ceremony of initiation for a *manang mata*'. He (1981: 351, 297) relates it to *besipat* from *sipat*: whipping, whip, beat and to *berandau* from *randau*: discourse, talk, conversation. He (1981:204) describes the rite as one, in which other *manang* walk around the novice with areca blossom, 'passing it over (striking, touching) his head (*be-sipat, be-randau, besudi*) till he falls into trance'. Sutlive (1976: 67-68) also describes how the *manang*, together with the novice, pair off and begin to whip one another with areca blossom. Whenever this occurs, it is followed by the *manang* falling into trance. Sutlive interprets it as a mock battle, in which the *manang* demonstrate their 'bravery', after which they collapse like 'fallen warriors'. While this is in line with Sutlive's thesis, that *manang* are seeking alternative ways to approximate male behavioural norms, it is an odd interpretation, for surely a display of bravado should culminate in rousing victory, not 'fallen warriors', whose trance state is homologous with death.

As against Sutlive's functional analysis of this rite, I would stress the symbolic significance of striking and touching with areca blossom, in the ritual context, as an attack on malevolent spirits and a preparation for trance. Perham (1887:101) describes the waving of areca blossom over someone as 'an action, which, all over Borneo I believe, is considered of great medicinal and benedictional value'. In the *saut* rites, discussed in the last section, areca blossom was struck on a mat to 'break the children of evil'. The areca blossom, I suggest, is deemed an effective weapon against malevolent spirits (*antu*). It is, thus, used to drive away interfering *antu* from patient, novice and *manang* alike. Given that disembodied *semengat* are homologous with spirits, the areca blossom may also cast out the novice's *semengat*, enabling him to experience 'trance'.

The other *manang* ensure that the *semangat* later returns, as 'a drum is beaten lest the souls of the *manang* lose their way' and, as they revive from the trance, some are 'aided in the recovery of their souls by other *manang*, who snare their souls with a blowpipe' (Sutlive 1976:68). At this stage, then, the novice is learning to experience himself in new ways and is being introduced to techniques of trance induction.

Richards (1981:204) next mentions rites of sprinkling with husked rice (*sioh berau*) or heaping unhusked rice (*padi*) around and over the initiate. In the former case, the spirit of the rice is thought to drive any *antu* away, whereas in the latter case, the *padi*, supplied by the candidate's *kaban* (kith and kin), is later kept by the *manang* who officiate at the initiation (Freeman, pers. comm., 15 December 1982). Nyuak (1906: 173) gives the fullest account of this 'burial' rite:

The young *Manang* is laid on a mat, his head pillowed on a gong and cocoanut [sic] is placed by the sides of his head. His body is completely covered with a blanket and several bushels of rice are heaped over him. His eye lids are then pierced with two fish hooks, supposed to give him the power to see the soul and diagnose diseases. The cocoanut [sic] is then split in two with a chopper over his head, which signifies that he has ceased to be an Iban and is henceforth a *Manang*.

Sutlive (1976:68) likewise interprets this ceremony as the 'death' of an Iban and the 'birth' of a *manang*. After the rite, the initiate is given charms by the other *manang*, who each instruct him in the healing arts. He also receives a new name.

This rite has symbolic significance on at least two levels. It evinces the three phases, by which van Gennep (1960) characterised rites of passage: separation, margin and aggregation. The candidate steps out of society, enters a liminal state and, finally, emerges to a new and different social role. The universal theme of death and rebirth articulates this structural transition. At the same time, the symbols,

which mark the liminal state, express the particular transition from *Iban* to *manang*. I have commented earlier on the frequent use of *ikat* decorated textiles in Iban ritual. The large hanging or blanket (*pua*) is used to cover a *manang*, when he falls to the floor in a state of 'trance' (*luput*) (Jensen 1974:149). It may also be used to wrap the body of the dead for the journey to the cemetery (Vogelsanger 1980:119). Used to cover the initiate in this rite, therefore, it indicates his separation from this world and his entry into a liminal state, homologous with those the *manang* enters in his ritual performances. In the various *bedinding* rites, as discussed earlier, the *pua* cloth is the barrier material, which keeps the incubus at bay or makes the Iban, who had an inauspicious dream, invisible to the malevolent spirits. Here, in the initiation rite, it once again marks the border between the social world of the Iban and the other-worldly realm of the spirits.

But why, then, cover the *pua* with rice? To answer this question it is necessary to realise, that rice to the Iban is not just a staple food. Hill rice cultivation is an inherited way of life, which expresses the traditional Iban sense of identity: '*Adat kami bumai*' (Our *adat* is hill rice cultivation). Jensen (1974:152) points out, that for generations of Iban, 'rice has meant the difference between eating and going hungry, between health and sickness, prosperity and deprivation, even life and death. It was and is to the Iban his very existence (*pengidup*: "life itself") and the focus of his activities'. At the same time, it is rice cultivation, which distinguishes men from animals and the true Iban from their remote predecessors, who lived in the jungle like wild beings, not entirely human, or like nomadic hunters, who did not cultivate crops (Jensen 1974:151). Rice cultivation, thus, 'sets the Iban apart from

other tribes and races who do not farm hill rice according to the same conventions and beliefs. And, finally, the Iban believe their agricultural methods confirm their spirit pedigree, since their faith in the cult and knowledge of the techniques of shifting hill rice cultivation are derived from the spirits' (Jensen 1974:151). Rice, then, symbolises everything that is Iban. It articulates Ibanness and, thus, the initiation rite places a 'barrier' between the candidate's past life as an *Iban* and his future existence as a *manang*.

Perham (1887:101) makes this same point, but with reference to a different rite, which he terms '*Bekliti*' ('Opening'). At the end of the rite, he says, the candidate 'is no longer an "Iban", a name by which all Dyaks speak of themselves, he is a "*Manang*". He is lifted into a different rank of being. And when engaged in their functions, they make a point of emphasising this distinction by constant use of the two words in contrast to each other'. As Perham makes no mention of the 'burial' rite I have just discussed, it is possible that his report comes from an Iban area, where the *bekeliti* rite served as the induction to *manang* status. Other authors describe *bekeliti* as a rite to initiate a *manang* 'to a higher grade' (Richards 1981:35, 204). From this, I infer that substantially similar rites could be used as rites of transition from Iban to *manang*, from one grade of *manang* to another grade, and from *manang*, as such, to a *manang* with wider-ranging skills or particular powers. In each case, the structural form represents the transition which is deemed to occur.

Richards (1981:151) defines *keliti* as 'skin, tear or rip off', as in '*aku agi ngeliti-ka kulit kera*' (I'm still skinning the monkey). In the *bekeliti* rite, the *manang* is 'skinned' and his organs are 'replaced', so as to give him the powers of feeling and perception necessary to his new role. In Perham's words (1887:101):

The *Manangs* lead the neophyte into a private apartment curtained off from public gaze by long pieces of native woven cloth; and there, as they assert, they cut his head open, take out his brains, wash and restore them, to give him a clear mind to penetrate into the mysteries of evil spirits, and the intricacies of disease; they insert gold dust into his eyes to give him keenness and strength of sight powerful enough to see the soul wherever it may have wandered; they plant barbed hooks on the tips of his fingers to enable him to seize and hold it fast; and lastly they pierce his heart with an arrow to make him tender-hearted, and full of sympathy with the sick and suffering. In reality, a few symbolic actions representing these operations are all that is done. A coco-nut shell, for instance, is laid upon the head and split open instead of the head itself ....

Thus, the rite includes the separation, the liminal seclusion and the rebirth of the candidate as a newly powerful *manang*.

Another rite, described by Perham (1887:101-102), results in a '*Manang bangun, Manang enjun*' ('*Manang* waved upon, *Manang* trampled upon'). The officiants first wave areca blossom over the candidate. At various intervals, they lead him up and down two short ladders fastened to either side of a tall jar placed in the longhouse gallery. They also lie the candidate on the floor and 'walk over him, and trample upon him'. I have already discussed the waving of areca blossom as a means of despatching spirits and inducing trance. The *manang*'s leading the candidate up the ladder, over a form of *pagar api*, is a ritual climb suggesting a celestial ascent (Eliade 1964:126). Sutlive (1976:68) describes an initiatory climb to the ridgepole of the longhouse, during which the *manang* and the initiate fall into trance, more clearly indicating an other-worldly journey. The candidate's lying flat on the floor represents a ritual death at the hands of the other *manang*, who trample upon him. It, too, suggests the separation from him of, not only any hovering malevolent spirits, but also his own *semangat*, as the terms used — *enjun* (tread hard, jump on) and *indik* (tread, step on) (Richards 1981:86, 115) — carry connotations of shaking fruit from a tree and treading out the grain from the ears of the rice. The

threshing analogy, thus, implies the separation of the initiate's bodily self (*tuboh*) from his spirit self (*semengat*), so engendering the *manang*'s peculiar power of soul flight. This ties in with the waving of areca blossom and the acting out of celestial ascent.

Once again, this rite can be interpreted, at a general structural level, as an enactment of transition. At the same time, it articulates, by means of symbolic actions, the cultural content of the transition and the nature of the specific powers the rite is deemed to confer on the initiate.

After his account of *manang* initiation rites, Perham (1887:102) goes on to say: 'In former times, I believe, all *Manangs* on their initiation assumed female attire for the rest of their lives, but it is rarely adopted now, at least on the coast districts; and I have only met with one such'. This comment is repeated, almost verbatim, by Gomes (1910:58), who, however, states elsewhere (1911:180), that 'sometimes a male *manang* assumes female attire ... because he has had a supernatural command conveyed to him in dreams on three separate occasions'. He is referring here to the *manang bali* (transformed shaman), the 'highest rank' Iban shaman, who 'is supposed to have changed his sex and become a woman'. Brooke Low (Ling Roth 1896:i. 270) says a feast is held to mark the initiation of a *manang bali*, at which the candidate 'will sacrifice a pig or two to avert evil consequences to the tribe by reason of the outrage upon nature'. As Richards (1981:205) describes the initiation:

For a *manang bali*, a sevenfold offering (*piring tujuh*) is made which includes pigs, fowls, eggs and jars of *tuak*. Other *manang* are paid to assist. The main rites are performed in secret behind a screen of cloths: they are said to include splitting a coconut, representing the new *manang*'s head, and insertion into it of gold dust to increase his understanding. The *manang* is then clothed as a woman and introduced to the assembly under his new name.

Again, a period of separation and entry into a marginal state, during which the other *manang* renew and strengthen the powers of the candidate,

precedes the *manang bali*'s emergence as a new social identity.

The only description of an actual initiation of a *manang bali* is that given by Benedict Sandin (1957) in an article entitled *Salang changed his sex*. Sandin did not witness the ceremony, but collected an account of it in 1953, from an elderly Saribas woman, who was a lineal descendant of the initiate's adopted sister (Sandin 1957:151-152). The informant could not have witnessed the ceremony herself, given Sandin's estimate (1957:146), that it took place 'about six generations ago'. Sandin describes the '*gawai berasok*' as an 'uncommon ceremony .... a special feast to be held for the ordination of a *manang bali*'. *Berasok* means 'to put on clothes' and also 'overlapping and mingling, dovetailed' (Richards 1981:42, 300).

On Sandin's account of the ceremony, seven *manang* officiated; seven *piring* (food offerings) were 'offered to the gods and spirits of the past *Manang* chiefs who were believed to be coming to the feast'; and seven pigs were killed and their livers studied for indications of Salang's future as a *manang bali*. Salang, dressed as a man, was led in procession by the other *manang* to an 'enclosed platform' erected on the longhouse gallery, where he passed the night of the festival. The officiant *manang* invoked the gods and spirits, including *Manang Menjaya*, to come to the feast with blessings and charms. Late in the evening, the gods were welcomed with a musical procession and a fowl waving rite. The *manang* chanted all night and the divination took place the next morning. Finally, 'the *manangs* started another ceremony, specially known as *berasok*, to dress Salang with the woman's garment. It was from this time henceforth that Salang would never again wear the man's garment'. In conclusion, the initiate was given a new name, *Manang Chellong*, ceremonially picked by a cock from seven lumps of rice, representing seven possible names.

Subsequently, Manang Chellong became both famous and wealthy as a celebrated *manang bali*.

The striking thing about these reports of initiation to *manang bali* status is that they do not elaborate a range of new skills thought to be acquired by the candidate, over and above those attained by other, non-transformed *manang*. It is as if the new status is inherently powerful, the transformation itself conferring greater potency on the *manang*. To explore this issue, I examine the *manang bali*, in the next chapter, looking, first, at ethnographic accounts of the status and, then, at Iban notions of gender, in an attempt to ascertain the indigenous meaning of transvestism, as a symbol of the *manang bali*'s special potency.

Footnotes to Chapter 3

1. The Iban word *burong* has the primary meaning, bird and the secondary meaning, omen and omen bird or animal. Hence, the term *tuai burong* (augur) and the expressions *kami beburong* (we practise augury), *orang tau makai burong* (person who can eat omens) (Freeman 1961; Richards 1981:57).

2. As Gell (1980:221) puts it:

All swinging relates to the experience of vertiginous play, and has to do with the pervasive relation which exists between bodily equilibrium and disequilibrium and states of consciousness. In all swinging, there is an element of self-surrender to a loss of individual equilibrium, and the contexts in which ritual swinging is found, despite their overt disparity, are all such as to make one suspect that this loss of equilibrium is capable of being invested with religious significance.

3. Freeman (1967:326) describes Bungai's blinder as 'a remnant of the hand-woven loincloth or *sirat* which he had worn during his initiation as a shaman'. He rubbed a small piece of this on each of his shoulders and on his chest. He then set it smouldering and, as its fumes drifted about the room, he addressed the following imprecatory words to all incubi and other malevolent spirits:

There, you the troublesome ones, you the perverse  
ones,  
Be cursed, be enfeebled,  
Be abused, be bereaved,  
Trip and fall headlong;  
Be weak of bone, be weak of limb,  
Be weak of leg, be weak of hand,  
Be stupid, be senseless,  
So you may expire outright, perish utterly.  
We pray thus  
Because you so constantly plague us,  
That we freely die, till all be gone.

*Nya, kita ngawa, kita ngeruga,  
Asoh busong, asoh lunggong,  
Asoh tulah, asoh papah;  
Kita asoh trap, asoh tingkap,  
Asoh lemi tulang, lemi geragang,  
Asoh lemi kaki, lemi jari,  
Asoh dugau, asoh dayau,  
Awak mati lus, mati mugus.  
Sampi kami mai pia  
Laban kita mangat mungkal  
Kami sangat parai, sangat nadai.*

4. The taboos for the longhouse as a whole were: '(i) for a period of three days no one from another community could at any time, enter the long-house (i.e., Rumah Nyala); (ii) for three days no member of Rumah Nyala could enter the long-house after dark; (iii) for three

days no living plant or animal could be brought into the long-house' (Freeman 1967:330). Freeman (1967:330 n.7) notes that 'the entry to the long-house of a stranger by day or night or of anyone after dark is viewed as symbolic of the return of the incubus, while the introduction of a living plant or animal symbolizes its reviviscence'. The taboos for the immediate *bilek*-family were '(iv) no mats or other sleeping gear could be sunned on the day following the slaying of the incubus; (v) Menun [the woman whose incubus-lover had been slain] could not bathe in the river for three days; (vi) for a period of two months no one could enter the *bilek* when it was in darkness (i.e., unlit at night); (vii) until a new moon had appeared no flowers (either cultivated or from the forest) could be taken into the apartment; (viii) no forest flowers could be taken into the apartment until Menun had stopped giving birth to children' (Freeman 1967:330). Freeman (1967:330 n.8) notes that 'the exposure of a sleeping mat or of the woman concerned is viewed as an incitement to other incubi; entry to a darkened *bilek* is symbolic of the behaviour of incubi; flowers (especially those from the forest where incubi, in their animal forms, dwell) are believed to attract an incubus'.

5. Selempandai is not a celestial *manang* himself, but he plays an important part in Iban healing rituals. As Sandin (1978:79 n.23) explains: 'he is the blacksmith god, a brother of Singalang Burong, Raja Menjaya and the other principal gods of the Iban pantheon, who is thought to forge the individual human body (Sandin 1977:2, 192). During curing rites, he is typically called upon to recast the patient's body, in order to correct its imperfections'. So, Gomes (1911:174, 228), calls him 'the god who fashions mankind' and 'the Great Spirit-Doctor'.
6. Thus, the *gawai sakit* (ritual festival for the sick) is equated with a situation, which 'is too grave for the *manang* alone and the intervention of *lemambang*, shamans, is required' (Harrisson and Sandin 1966:132). A similar ranking is implied with respect to invoking gods and spirits: 'way below the *lemambang* shaman level, ordinary *manang* may invoke these people in *nyampi* prayers on much simpler occasions' (Harrisson and Sandin 1966:286).

## Chapter 4

The transformed shaman (*manang bali*)

## I

Howell and Bailey (1900:12, 98) and Richards (1981:24) define *bali* as to change, alter or fade. Freeman (1975:286) says '*bali* means: to change in form'. As the *manang bali* 'is supposed to be a man who has changed his sex and become a woman' (Howell and Bailey 1900:98), the Iban phrase is generally rendered into English as 'transvestite' or 'transformed' shaman (Sutlive 1976:68; Sandin 1978:80).

Descriptions of *manang bali* characterise them as men, who dress and act as women, like to be treated as female and may even take a 'husband' (St. John 1863:i. 73; Brooke Low in Ling Roth 1896:i. 270; Howell and Bailey 1900:98; Gomes 1911:180). Hose and McDougall (1912:ii. 116) describe them as:

men who adopt and continuously wear woman's dress and behave in all ways like women, except that they avoid as far as possible taking any part in the domestic labour. They claim to have been told in dreams to adopt this mode of life; they are employed for the same purpose as the more ordinary *manangs* and they practise similar methods.

Low (1848:175-176) gives the following account:

He is generally old, and rich from the many presents and payments made to him by those who require his services: his dress precisely resembles that of a woman, wearing no *chawat*, or waistcloth, as the men, but the *bedang*, or short dress of the other sex ... together with the appropriate ornaments. Not satisfied with the assumption of the dress of the women, the *manang*, the more to resemble them, takes unto himself a husband, who is generally a widower having a family, and who, in expectation of inheriting the *manang*'s property, is glad to comply with his caprices: he is treated in every respect as a woman, and does not go to war with the men; he sees little of his husband, and the fact of calling

a person by this name appears only to be necessary to render his assumed character more complete.

Masing (1981:322n.), drawing on Freeman's fieldnotes, gives additional details:

Once he is initiated he assumes the role and dress of a female, and this new identity is not only accepted socially, but is also sanctioned in Iban customary law. Any member of the society who draws attention to his male attributes, or calls him by male kinship terms (e.g. father, uncle, etc.) is fined (Freeman, fieldnotes, 1950).

According to Howell and Bailey (1900:98), *manang bali* is the 'highest rank' which a *manang* can attain. St. John (1863:i. 85) describes them working in consort with other *manang* in healing rituals. He refers to a ceremony in which two of the eight *manang* officiants were 'dressed in women's clothes'. Gomes (1911:180) says that *manang bali* were often called in, when others had been unable to effect a cure and that 'a *manang bali* is paid much higher fees than an ordinary *manang*'. Richards (1981: 263) says that, when in pursuit of the patient's soul, it is the *manang bali* who travels all the way to the land of the dead (*Sebayan*), while ordinary *manang* dare not go further than the Bridge of Fright. It is interesting to note Brooke Low's report (Ling Roth 1896:i. 271) that, if the candidate already has children, before becoming a *manang bali*, 'he is obliged to give them their portions and to start afresh unencumbered in his new career'. This replicates at a social level, that which is symbolically enacted in the initiation ceremony: the candidate's death and his rebirth as a new social identity. The *manang bali* must sever his existing sexual and familial ties before taking on his new role.

It is difficult to gauge how common, and widespread amongst the Iban, the *manang bali* phenomenon was in former times. The Iban trace its origin to the time of the great god of war, Singalang Burong, who appears in Iban genealogies (*tusut*) at a point over twenty generations

back (Sandin 1967; Morgan 1968). According to the charter myth, when Singalang Burong's wife was ill, his sister, the supreme healer, Ini Inda, consecrated their brother the first *manang bali*, so he could carry out the cure. The brother, then known as Manang Raja Menjaya, thus, became the patron of Iban shamans (Harrisson and Sandin 1966:260-261; Sandin 1980:94-95).

Some early European writers state, or imply, that once all *manang* were *manang bali* (Low 1848:175-176; Perham 1887:102; Gomes 1910:58). There is, however, no evidence of this and reports rather suggest that *manang bali* were uncommon even in the nineteenth century. St. John (1863:i. 73) recorded that, in Lingga, out of thirty *manang*, 'only one has given up man's attire'. Charles Brooke, the Second Rajah (1866:ii. 280) was angered by the audacity of a *manang bali* who, participating in the 1863 expedition against the Kayan, told the Rajah how he thought an episode in the campaign ought to have been conducted: 'I was dreadfully enraged at this ancient personage, who was dressed in woman's clothes and I sent him off speedily'. Perham (1887:102) met only one *manang bali* and considered them rare, 'at least on the coast districts'. Gomes (1911:180) also met only one *manang bali* and reported that 'he seemed a poor sort of creature and appeared to me to be looked down upon by the Dyaks, though they were glad enough to ask his help in cases of illness. He had a "husband", a lazy good for nothing, who lived on the earnings of the *manang bali*'. According to Freeman's informants, 'the last of the *manang bali* in the Baleh region was Langgong, who died in about 1870-80' (Masing 1981:322n.).

By the turn of the century, the institution of *manang bali* was certainly not flourishing. At that time, Howell and Bailey (1900:98) considered 'the *manang bali* may be said to have almost ceased to exist,

among the down-river Dyaks, but the up-river people possess several recently made specimens'. Brooke Low (Ling Roth 1896:i. 271) was of the opinion that the *manang bali* phenomenon 'is confined ... to the remote tribes of the Sea Dyaks: the Ulu Ais, Kanaus, Tutong, Ngkaris and Lamanaks. It is not unknown to the Undups, Balaus, Sibuyaus and Saribas, but is not in vogue among them, owing perhaps to their vicinity to the Malays, who invariably ridicule the practice, and endeavour to throw it into disrepute'.

## II

Explanations offered of the *manang bali* phenomenon are many and varied. The literature on the Iban includes accounts of the institution in terms of biological factors, sexual deviance, religious roles, historical developments, social structural evolution and religious symbolism.

Low (1848:176-177) reports:

I could never learn anything of the history of this curious institution from the Dyaks themselves, they declaring they knew nothing of it, and merely saying that it was an old custom, and laughed with us at its absurdity: perhaps it originated in persons of natural imbecility, being compelled by the tribe to assume the garb and habits of women, and thus have become through time a custom followed by men who were apparently in every respect fitted for the ordinary intercourse of society.

Obviously dissatisfied with this suggestion, he advances another, but finds it equally unconvincing:

Perhaps they only become *manangs* after having proved themselves incapable of becoming the fathers of families, but I am not inclined to believe that such is the case.

Wilken (1887:476 n.151) takes the latter hypothesis more seriously. He notes the transvestism of the Iban *manang bali*, the Ngaju *basir*

and the Buginese *bissu* and he suggests that this behaviour is at least modelled on that of impotent men. For the Buginese *bissu* and the Ngaju *basir*, Wilken argues in support of his interpretation from the etymology of the terms, the disposition of the incumbents and their 'marriage' to 'pederasts'. His reference to the Iban *manang bali*, in this context, is by analogy only, on account of their adoption of female attire and manner. It seems unlikely, however, that impotent men were so frequent in Iban society as to generate and support such an institution. Furthermore, it is not at all necessary that there be something in nature which corresponds to a cultural construction such as the *manang bali*. As O'Flaherty (1980:290-291) has observed, with reference to androgynous symbolism: 'Occurrence in nature is usually a risky basis for the analysis of any myth or symbol'. In fact, Brooke Low (Ling Roth 1896:i. 270) inverts the impotence argument, suggesting that the individual is made to conform to the cultural image: 'Before he can be permitted to assume female attire he is sexually disabled. He will then prepare a feast ... to avert evil consequences to the tribe by reason of the outrage upon nature'. This view at least accommodates the man, who was married and had children prior to his assumption of the *manang bali* role, but it is simply speculation with no basis in ethnography.

Wilken's argument from sexual impotence is similar to Sutlive's argument (1976:68) from sexual deviance. Such theories identify a social function which the institution might serve, but the social functions proposed hardly account for the existence, the peculiar form or the apparent decline of the *manang bali* institution. Sutlive explains the *manang bali* as a 'socially sanctioned status for the homosexual male who cannot function as a man'. This analysis slides from the features of the social role to the motivations of the individual. Yet, if 'sexual

behaviours that occur within the context of normative expectations tell us something about normative expectations, but very little about human desire' (Whitehead 1981:81), such an inference is invalid. Furthermore, homosexuality may be, not the cause of shamanic transvestism, but rather its ultimate form (Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg 1970). The choice of permissible sexual object may be delimited by assumption of the *manang bali* role. Brooke Low's account (Ling Roth 1896:i. 270) of the 'husband' and the 'sexual conquests' of the *manang bali* support this view, suggesting that such encounters were valued, not so much for themselves, but as confirmation of success in the prescribed role: 'as episodes of this kind tend to show how successfully he has imitated the character of a woman he is highly gratified and rises, accordingly, in the estimation of the tribe as a perfect specimen'.

Perham (1887:102) suggests that the *manang bali* is imitating female deities:

It will be observed that most of the beings mentioned or invoked by *Manangs* are addressed as "*Ini*", "Grandmother", which perhaps implies that all the special deities of the *Manang* world are supposed to be of the female sex, and, to be consistent with this belief, it might have been deemed necessary for the *Manang* to assume the outward figure and the dress of his goddess.

Yet, if the *manang* is imitating female deities, it is hard to account for male *manang* at all. On this interpretation, one would at least expect that all male *manang* were *manang bali*, and possibly expect that even *manang bali* were inferior to female *manang*. It is relevant to note, here, that celestial grandfather figures may also be depicted as shamans, as is the case with the grandfathers of the omen birds (*aki burong*) (Masing 1981:94). Furthermore, the creative encounter, in which a female confers powers on a male, is not uncommon in Iban mythology. The male hero often acquires items of culture, either directly from a female spirit

(Jensen 1974:76-78), or indirectly through a celestial wife, whose kin instruct him in the appropriate knowledge and skills (Jensen 1974:83-91). So the *manang* domain does not stand out as unusually female in this regard. Finally, in a cross-cultural study, Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg (1970) has found that ritual transvestism in order to identify with a female deity, generally occurs in connection with spirit mediumship, in which the medium is possessed by the spirit concerned. However, Iban shamanism, as I pointed out earlier, does not involve any spirit medium activity of this kind.

Eliade (1964) cites Perham's material (1887) and Ling Roth's compilation (1896) as the basis for his discussion of the *manang bali*. He (1964:351-352) describes the features of the *manang bali* and concludes that 'this combination of elements shows clear traces of a feminine magic and a matriarchal mythology, which must have formerly dominated the shamanism of the Sea Dyak'. Then, mistakenly taking the Iban to be 'certain sea tribes' distinct from the 'hill Dyak', he posits the diffusion of the transvestite shaman from foreign sources: 'the fact that this *manang bali* class is unknown in the interior of the island shows that the entire complex (transvestism, sexual impotence, matriarchy) has come from outside, though in distant times'. This confusion is clearly based on a literal reading of the terms Sea Dyak (for Iban) and Hill Dyak (for Land Dyak/Bidayuh), coupled with a report, cited in Ling Roth (i. 270), to the effect that the *manang bali* 'is quite unknown amongst the Hill Dyaks'. It is simply a misreading of the, admittedly thin, ethnographic evidence to see the *manang bali* as an imported matriarchal element adopted by a coastal population.

Hoek (1949) makes a more informed, but equally unconvincing, attempt to explain the *manang bali* as a product of historical developments and

social structural evolution. In his comparative analysis of 'Dayak priests', he notes that, among Bornean societies, only the Iban and the Ngaju exhibit a transvestism, which goes beyond the ceremonial context into secular life. To Hoek, this is an extreme development of a tendency throughout Borneo to associate female clothing and emblems with certain ritual functionaries (Hoek 1949:181-189). He is, thus, prepared to explain the homosexuality associated with Iban and Ngaju transvestism in psycho-pathological terms, as he considers its sacred character very dubious. His concern is to account for the more general Bornean association between female emblems and certain ritual roles.

On Hoek's interpretation, Bornean religious systems exhibit two types of ceremonial: the more recently developed head-feast type employed male functionaries and, he argues, gradually influenced the older creation type, which had used female functionaries. As males came to the fore socially, so they took over previously female domains, adjusting to the older female gods, by adorning themselves with female emblems and, at least ritually, presenting themselves as women (Hoek 1949:181-192). Hoek is careful to note that his 'culture-historical' conclusion is not the only explanatory framework possible. The merit of his systemic approach, he argues, is that it accounts for Bornean socio-religious change, without recourse to a diffusion of foreign influences model (Hoek 1949:193). Unfortunately, his account has little else to recommend it. In my opinion, Hoek's analysis is a premature attempt to compare a series of inadequately understood religious systems, so glossing the differences and homogenising the content. His theoretical framework — a shift from matrilineal to patrilineal social forms (Hoek 1948:192) — generates speculative hypotheses quite inappropriate to cognatic Iban society.

A final interpretation, hinted at, rather than fully explored, in the literature on the Iban, looks on the transvestism of the *manang bali* as a symbol within a system of ideas. In this context, it is relevant to note that 'one of the simplest but most universal sources of power in the supernatural sense seems to be the combination of male and female symbols' (Forge 1973:xx). This supernatural potency, Jensen (1974:145) ascribes to the *manang bali*, as one who belongs to neither the male nor the female sex role category in Iban society: 'The Iban recognise the *manang bali* as a man, but he lives like a woman. In a society where the sexual roles are clearly, if not dogmatically, defined, this sets the *manang* apart from normal people. As such he observes the characteristics of neither sex; he is neither true man nor true woman, implying that he does not belong fully to the world in which Iban men and women live. While exhibiting some aspects of male and female human behaviour, he also belongs partly to another world, the world of spirits'. In a survey of transvestism in selected Indonesian societies, van der Kroef (1956:193) makes a similar point. He concludes, that 'it is not transvestism itself that is of paramount importance', but rather that which transvestism symbolises in each society.

Following these leads, the question then becomes one of isolating the symbolic significance of transvestism in traditional Iban society. I begin with Jensen's view that the *manang bali* transcends the categories of gender, those cultural elaborations which give social meaning to the basic physical differences between the sexes. To explore this hypothesis, I consider the significance of Iban gender categories, in order to ascertain how a male who dresses as a female could be a salient symbol, expressing the potency of the Iban *manang* in a particularly apt form.

## III

Recent studies suggest that two spheres of social life — the domain of kinship and marriage and the sphere of prestige relations — are critical in shaping, and are in turn shaped by, cultural notions of gender and sexuality. Ortner and Whitehead (1981:10) argue that the sphere of prestige relations, 'in fact mediates between the organisation of kinship and marriage on the one hand, and the ideology of gender on the other, in any given society'. Certainly in traditional Iban society, the prestige system articulates salient distinctions based on sex, not evinced in the domain of kinship and marriage.

Freeman (1958, 1960, 1970) has documented and analysed the principle of utrolateral filiation, on which the Iban *bilek*-family system rests, and the wider cognatic social organisation of which it is a part. These and other mostly social structural features<sup>1</sup> have led a group of researchers to rate Iban society, as one which makes 'minimum use of sex as a discriminating factor in prescribing behaviour and membership', a situation which, they argue, correlates cross-culturally with the presence of 'institutionalized male transvestism' (Munroe, Whiting and Hally 1969:88-89). In my view, this exercise is not only methodologically suspect (the authors dropped one item — 'subsistence-pattern sex distinctions' — from their index, because it showed a low correlation with the other ratings overall), but theoretically misguided (it focuses almost exclusively on the salience of sex distinctions within the domain of kinship and marriage). To gauge the significance of gender in traditional Iban society, however, it is essential to take account of the prestige system. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in any detail the life cycle of Iban men and women. I am, therefore, concerned solely to

establish that gender is an extremely significant category to the Iban, as it delineates and elaborates the individual's means to personal prestige in an achievement oriented society.

An Iban myth, noted by Jensen (1974:211 n.2) mentions that the unborn child is offered a spear or a weaving implement and, in choosing to handle one or the other, determines his or her own sex accordingly. A few weeks after birth, a baby is given its ceremonial first bath in the river. On this occasion, the wings of a sacrificial cock are hung from a spear, thrust blade upward into the river bank, if the child is a boy, or from part of a loom, variously identified as a heddle or a shuttle, if the child is a girl (Sandin 1976:11, 1980:67, 141; Jensen 1966-67:176; Komanyi 1972:77). Similarly, grave goods — spears, swords, weaving materials, baskets — mark the sex of the deceased, for whom the goods constitute the tools necessary 'to begin life with, in the new stage of existence' (Perham 1882-5:291). Finally, the newly dead are thought to be tantalised, if male, by a piece of *nibong* palm or, if female, by a piece of gold, which they are unable to grasp as it recedes before them (Nyauak 1906:165). The *nibong* palm and the piece of gold are male and female metaphors for that highly prized Iban trophy — the severed head. Gender is, thus, marked by the implements of warfare and weaving, bravery and beauty from before an Iban's birth through to the journey to the land of the dead.

The traditional means of attaining status in Iban society have been described as involving 'competitive self-assertion' (Morgan 1968: 147). The competition was within each gender category, so that, when during periods of Iban aggressive expansion, many human heads were taken, the relative prestige of getting just one head declined, 'creating

an inflationary spiral' (Morgan 1968:143). At different stages in the life cycle, the competition took different forms, as young men sought trophy heads and elders sought to 'outwit each other' in discussions arranging a marriage (Sandin 1976:35). Finally, achievements were correlated across gender categories, as men and women sought to match each other's status as potential spouses (Haddon and Start 1936:22) or as respected elders (Sandin 1961:186-187). Thus, the most difficult dyeing process — for the colour of 'the red cloth' (*kain engkudu*) — was referred to as the 'warpath of the women' (*kayau indu*) (Howell 1912:63), directly equating this task with hazardous male pursuits.

Freeman (1981:38) points out, that while traditional Iban society lacked hereditary rank, it had developed in its stead 'a highly elaborate prestige system'. The words used to describe a man, who achieved distinction within this system were *raja brani* (literally, rich and brave). This appellation indicated that the man had, 'not only acquired for his *bilek*-family an assemblage of the ceramic jars (*tajau*), the bronze gongs (*tawak*), and the other wares treasured by the Iban, but had also made his name as a warrior by having taken one or more trophy heads which were looked on as *tanda brani* or signs of bravery' (Freeman 1981:38). The personal prestige of becoming a *raja brani*, thus, rested on a man's acquiring items of wealth, through the barter of surplus hill rice, as the profit from journeys (*bejalai*) or the plunder of warfare, while simultaneously becoming an illustrious warrior, through the aid of a spirit helper (*antu nulong*). These forms of achievement were interconnected as the Iban's success in warfare and head-hunting allowed the pioneering of new tracts of land, which yielded bountiful harvests (Masing 1978:66; Sutlive 1978:24-31). Finally, male attainments could be marked by the individual's performance of 'an ascending sequence

of complex rituals or *gawai amat* specifically associated with the cult of head-hunting' (Freeman 1981:40). Such successful men of action, who had demonstrably secured the approval and support of the gods, might be given a praise-name (*julok*) (Freeman 1981:41-42). Thus, Iban male prestige was based on a process of achievement throughout the life cycle. It was celebrated through the individual renown of a praise-name and elaborated in the performance of a graded series of rituals.

Komanyi (1972:102) maintains, that 'women's achievements are equally acknowledged as those of men'. As proof of this, she points out, that, just as a great warrior was tattooed on the back of his hands, so 'women are tattooed as proof of their achievements in weaving, dancing and singing'. This assertion of equality, however, glosses over the considerable differences between the two parallel prestige systems. Certainly, an Iban woman is 'greatly respected', if she is 'skilled and capable' (Penghulu Ngali in Heppell 1976:212). Women are praised in ritual chants for their weaving and dyeing skills (Richards 1972:67-68; Masing 1981:182-183). In these pursuits, they, too, are guided by spirit helpers (*antu nulong*), who communicate techniques and designs to individual women in dreams. The spirit helpers invite women to extend their textile-working skills, indicating the level of aspiration appropriate in each case. As with male pursuits, the call of the spirits is obligatory and their guidance is considered essential to success (Vogelsanger 1980:115-122). Women's hazardous achievements in textile work are socially marked: ritual precautions (*pemali*) are taken, so as not to irritate any spirit represented in a pattern; a thumb tattoo indicates the successful completion of a blanket-sized cloth (*pua kumbu*) bearing a novel *ikat* design; and *indu ngar* is a title of honour given to skilled weavers, who have accepted a spirit's invitation to perform the ritual (*gawai ngar*) to prepare

the yarn for the red colour. The *gawai ngar* is 'the only major religious celebration which is exclusively the affair of women' (Vogelsanger 1980: 117-121).

Nevertheless, 'a head-hunting ritual is a much more important ceremony for the whole longhouse than a *gawai ngar*' (Vogelsanger 1980:121). Not only that, but Vogelsanger (1980:121) suggests, 'the women's prestige system expressed in weaving seems to be an imitation of the men's prestige system expressed in head-hunting, certainly not the other way round'. Thus, while the two parallel systems articulate the individual's means to personal prestige, the male achievement structure is more highly differentiated, more elaborately ritualized and more significant socially than its female counterpart.

A full analysis of the content of Iban gender categories is beyond the scope of this thesis and would require data not yet provided in the literature. There are indications, however, that the Iban espouse an ideology of men as the source of fertility and of women as the producers and reproducers who tend, nurture and bring that fertility to fruition. There is little data on Iban ideas concerning male and female contributions to conception and the physical person. Jensen (1966-67:168) reports that spells to prevent conception contain the key phrase, 'closes the entrance to the child's container', which depicts the womb as the receptacle for male seed. The view, common in the Austronesian-speaking world, that the "'flow of life" is synonymous with the transmission of a woman's blood, the vital fluid that, united with semen, produces the human person' (Fox 1980:12) may be reflected in the Iban notion, that 'for almost three months of early pregnancy the embryo is thought "still to be blood" (*bedau darah*)' (Jensen 1966-67:168). If so, this suggests that the man is thought to fertilize with his semen, while the woman is thought to

nourish with her blood. In the agricultural sphere, men prepare ash-fed swiddens and, after co-operative dibbling and sowing, likened to sexual intercourse, it is the women who weed and harvest the rice crop, personifying the ears of *padi* as children likely to weep if left behind (Jensen 1965; Sather 1977). The cult of head-hunting emphasises the symbolic equation of trophy heads, acquired by men, with both biological and agricultural fertility (Freeman 1979). Women receive the trophy heads in woven textiles (*pua*) (Vogelsanger 1980:119), just as, in areas where the Iban now cultivate wet rice, they carry 'rice babies' (*anak padi*) in such textiles during the festival of transplanting (Sutlive 1978: illus.). Cloth is, thus, associated with the female nurturing role in ritual life, as it is in myth (see, for example, a creation myth given below).

Such an interpretation of Iban gender concepts, entails a contrast between the male life process of ascending attainments in a variety of spheres and the female life cycle of waning reproductive capacity. Sather (1978:324) argues that, at least in the Saribas, elderly women occupy an anomalous social position. He relates this to a belief, that the malevolent soul of such a woman — 'characteristically extremely old women beyond the age of menopause and active sexuality' — might spiritually attack and prey upon the young, 'possibly even her own kinsmen and descendants'.<sup>2</sup> This would imply that, while Iban men are socially vulnerable, if their women do not effectively fulfil the nurturant role assigned to them, Iban women are socially vulnerable, if they are unable to carry out the productive and reproductive tasks expected of them. On the other hand, such a view may paradoxically acknowledge the increased supernatural powers of older women, who not only have the technical skills and spiritual strength to weave the most potent textile designs, but, as somewhat anomalous figures,

are also ascribed the supernatural power to harm the souls of others.

The factors outlined above — the high social valuation and ritual elaboration of specifically male achievements, together with an implicit recognition of men's dependence on women's co-operation — inform certain behavioural and ideational complexes found amongst the Iban. Men's anxiety about their own adequacy and potency is evident in assertive boasting about the size of their penises (Heppell 1975:115), in castration dreams (Freeman 1968:372) and in the practice of wearing a penis pin (*palang*) (Freeman 1968:388). Their vulnerability, should their women be seduced away from them, is expressed in their violent reaction to being cuckolded (Heppell 1976) and reified in the customary law forbearance of male, but condemnation of female, adultery, when spouses are apart (Freeman 1967:335). Tension between the sexes finds expression in women's mockery of men and male pretensions. Freeman (1968:388-390) describes the mockery of males as one of the favourite pastimes of Iban women. It occurs in both a social and a ritual context:

One of the forms which this mockery takes is for two women to share a nickname (*emprian*) which they regularly use in addressing one another in a bantering tone of voice. It is always a nickname directed at males, and usually at the male genital. For example:

*ribok tangan batang*: damaged tree trunk (a jeering, reference to a male organ with a *palang* or penis pin, a phallic ornament affected by Iban braves)

*kring enda lama*: stiff but not for long

*ringat enda makai*: enraged if it does not eat

*udun bepala lasu*: bald-headed fish

*enda tau di tegu*: that which must not be touched

Again, during head-hunting rituals which are occasions for the celebration of the preoccupations and the narcissism of men, bands of women as comically dressed transvestites complete with grotesquely ornamented phalli, for hours on end chant songs in which they mock male pretensions and denigrate the male genital. For example:

Bald-headed fish,  
 Fish with one tail,  
 Throttle and beat this thing,  
 Which, like a child,  
 Takes out its father  
 For nocturnal walks.

Needless to say, the men do not find the jests of their womenfolk amusing; they are joking about far too serious a matter, and the experience too closely resembles the events of their childhood. Threatened and anxious, the men become incensed and retaliate by bellowing out chants critical of women which lack wit and leave nothing to the imagination.

Freeman (1968:386) interprets mockery as a highly aggressive act, behind which lies envy. In view of the parallel, but unequal, Iban prestige systems just outlined, it is not surprising to learn that 'adult women in Iban society are, virtually without exception, envious of males' (Freeman 1968:388).

Turner (1969:166-189) has analysed such 'rituals of status reversal', in which social inferiors 'mobilize affect-loaded symbols of great power' to mimic their social superiors. He (1969:176) concludes, however, that this reversal is inherently transitory, as it actually reaffirms those categories 'that are considered to be axiomatic and unchanging both in essence and in relationships to one another. As Turner (1969:176) puts it: 'Cognitively, nothing underlies regularity so well as absurdity or paradox. Emotionally, nothing satisfies as much as extravagant or temporarily permitted illicit behaviour. Rituals of status reversal accommodate both aspects'.

Against such anxiety, tension and hostility, other aspects of Iban culture emphasise a complementarity between male and female, expressed in the ideational systems which inform social life. A creation myth depicts the fertile complementarity between men and women, as the Iban see it: Raja Entala or Kree Raja Petara (king of the spirits) and his wife decided to create the earth and sky, the mountains and rivers, the

plants and animals. Having done so, they were still not satisfied, as there was no-one to enjoy their creation. So, as Jensen (1974:74-75) recounts:

they cut down a *bangkit* banana and from the stem Raja Entala fashioned the likeness of himself and his wife with eyes, nose, arms and legs. For blood he used the red sap of the *kumpang* tree. His wife then covered the image with a *pua* (hand woven and dyed Iban textile used on all ritual occasions) and, after Raja Entala had shouted at it for the third time, it stirred and came to life.

Thus, the woven textile envelops the images as the life force activates them.

At the social level, the interdependence of husband and wife is expressed in a vast array of restrictions on the behaviour of spouses in certain circumstances. Taboos particularly apply when the husband is on the warpath (Hewitt 1909) and when the wife is pregnant (Howell 1906). Lack of adherence to the restrictions by either party is thought to result in misfortune to the one in danger. These practices emphasise the unity of the marital pair and suggest, that the tie is seen as a vitally important one to the individual and society. At the same time, the very existence of such taboos indicates that the relationship is perceived as a fragile one, which needs social reinforcement in the face of individual aspirations.

In a similar manner, Iban notions of sexual peril articulate the tension between men and women and, simultaneously, resolve the conflict in a reassuring expression of cross-sex solidarity. Sather (1978) details this ideational complex, which includes two inverse parallel sequences: the *antu buyu* (incubus spirit), representing male sexual aggression, is destroyed by a male *manang*, who thus saves the female victim from further sexual assault; the *antu koklir* (ghost of a woman who died in childbirth), representing female sexual revenge, is destroyed by a woman, in order to save the intended male victim from castration and death.

Table 1  
Iban concepts of sexual peril  
 (after Sather 1978:332)

Spirit assailant	Victim of assault	Saved by
<i>antu buyu</i> (male)	women	male shaman
<i>antu koklir</i> (female)	men	female companion

Thus, men save women from sexually menacing male spirits and women save men from sexually threatening female spirits. This set of beliefs clearly articulates, that, just as either sex may pose a threat to the other, so, too, they can rescue each other from the 'imperiling aspects of human sexuality' (Sather 1978:311). The resolution reaffirms cross-sex solidarity, as human men and women rely on each other's help to overcome threatening spirits, spirits which Sather sees as ideational representations of those 'aspects of sexuality that entail conflict ... in the Iban social and moral order' (Sather 1978:311).

Two aspects of this ideational complex are of particular interest here. The first is that even shamans are assigned tasks according to their gender category. Freeman (1967:340) reports, that 'Iban shamans are frequently women, but only male practitioners tackle the slaying of incubi'. Likewise, Sather (1978:342-343) writes, that 'the *manang* who defeats both the incubus and the human *buyu* is always a man .... only the male shaman is able to engage the demonic spirits in combat and slay them. Moreover, his role, as champion or slayer of incubi and other demonic spirits, replicates in the supernatural sphere the role traditionally played by the male warrior in the human world' (Sather 1978:343). Thus, the male *manang* defends men's rights in women (their sexual services and reproductive capacity). In so doing, he expresses the male concern for fidelity and fruitfulness, asserting that what most men defend in warfare against human Others, he, the shaman, defends in combat against

suprahuman Others. Together, Iban men and male shamans save libidinous women from themselves and from the attacks of Others, so ensuring the maintenance of the social order and the continuity of society through victorious combat. The second point to note is that the *koklir* belief acknowledges the real physical dangers inherent in the female reproductive role. It posits a consequent ambivalence on the part of women, towards their male partners, against whom they may seek revenge as a *koklir* or to whom they may prove loyal, protecting them from attack by severing the head of the menacing *koklir*. In either case, women are depicted as violent aggressors, an image, which acknowledges that the male prerogative of violence, in the form of victorious combat, is a cultural appropriation. Men maintain their prerogative in this respect only through the co-operation of their womenfolk, who are expected to accept it, generally, yet transcend it, when necessary to save their husbands from the attack of the *koklir*.

Gender was, then, a highly significant cultural category in traditional Iban society. It articulated the means, by which individuals could achieve personal status. It encapsulated two parallel prestige systems, which, complementary but unequal, implied a fragile hierarchy of men over women. Conflict arising from this was resolved in behavioural and ideational complexes. These stressed the value of cross-sex solidarity and covertly acknowledged the gender categories as cultural constructs, which productively ordered social life, only so long as they could be transcended for the good of the larger social units of which the individual was a part.

In the next section, I argue that the *manang bali* epitomises this transcendence. As neither male nor female, he/she is outside the

prestige system and, for that reason, is thought to see beyond the limitations of gender related categories. The *manang bali* is, thus, deemed able to diagnose and interpret events in terms of the greater social good, which, the Iban acknowledge, must transcend individual aspirations couched in the gender dichotomised pursuit of personal status.

#### IV

Analyses of Iban head-hunting stress the symbolism of the severed head. McKinley (1976:92-126) is concerned with the social relevance of such symbols. To him, the head represents the individual as a social person and, so, head-hunting enables 'the ritual conversion of an enemy into friend' (McKinley 1976:117). Freeman (1979:233-246) sets out to explicate the indigenous account of the severed head as a container of seed (*benih*). He argues (1979:237), that 'the trophy heads by which the Iban set such store have a phallic significance as symbols of the generative power of nature'. Freeman's analysis, together with Perham's early comments (1878), brings out the character of the severed head as a polysemic symbol, which may mean different things to different people. To Iban braves, it is primarily a trophy, proof of their fighting prowess and symbolic of male potency, while to women it is both an ornament to adorn their person and an infant to be cradled in a woven textile (*pua*), nursed and nourished.

Freeman (1979) discusses and Masing (1981) translates the ritual chant (*timang*), which is recited during a head-hunting festival (*gawai*). It is my contention, that this chant depicts both males and females responding to the severed head in terms of the parallel prestige systems

elaborated within Iban culture. The chant expresses the gender marked symbolism of the severed head, describing how it is treated as an object relevant to the attainment of first male and then female prestige. Furthermore, the chant depicts the transvestite shamans (*manang bali*) as the ones who see beyond this gender related symbolism, to perceive the severed head's more fundamental social significance as a container of seed with the potential to nourish the entire community.

The head-hunting *gawai* extols the feats of the successful Iban head-hunter. It is performed by a *bilek*-family for one or more of its male members. As Freeman (1979:239) describes the ritual:

The most important rite after the arrival of the guests (made up as far as possible of men renowned for their prowess as head-hunters) is the setting up of shrines, or *ranyai*, on the *ruai*, or public gallery of the long-house — one for each of the participating families. A shrine consists of a bamboo framework over which *ikat* fabrics (which commonly depict the feats of head-hunters) are draped. On the outer surface of the shrine are hung swords, and various ritual objects with phallic connotations. Under Iban custom it should be set up by a man who has himself taken a head. Once erected, a shrine becomes the centre-piece for the rites that follow and, in particular, it becomes the abode, during the course of the *gawai*, of Lang Singalang Burong. .... Lang is the god of head-hunting: the custodian of severed heads from the beginning of time.

Lang's attendance at a head-hunting *gawai* is secured by the bards (*lemambang*), who recite the appropriate invocatory chant (*timbang*). This *timbang* describes the journey of two culture heroes, who go to invite Lang Singalang Burong and his companions to the *gawai*. It recounts how Lang's daughter insists on a freshly severed head to take to the festival and how Lang and his sons-in-law obtain this trophy. It describes the party's journey to, and arrival at, the festival and their participation in the proceedings. At one point, it recounts how Lang, half-drunk, is performing the dance of the head-hunter and how, as he does so, the basket containing the trophy head falls from his shoulders and out onto

the floor rolls the head itself. Freeman (1979:241) summarizes the events that follow and their replication at the *gawai*:

... the women present recoil, and, in revulsion, exclaim that it [the severed head] is not the fine and shining object talked of by their husbands — but, as ugly as a barbecued bat. On hearing this, the head, just as though it were an infant, begins to cry. But the women persist in their denigration, likening the head to a "pointed red pepper". This is even more hurting, and the head, insulted, cries inconsolably. In an attempt to still its crying the head is nursed by a long succession of female spirits. And while this is described in the invocation, living women ritually act out its words, taking down actual trophy heads which they nurse like infants as they parade up and down the gallery of the long-house.

Despite being nursed by all kinds of female spirits, the head remains inconsolable. Eventually, it is given to a group of *manang bali* and at once ceases its crying and laughs aloud at their anomalous appearance. Finally, it is passed to 'its beloved mother', a role always assumed by the wife of the man performing the *gawai* (Masing 1981:323). At this point, the *manang bali* announce the wishes of the severed head to the gathering:

"This 'seed'," explains Shaman Guyak,  
 "Says it is angry and crying,  
 As it wants to be planted as are young banana plants."  
 "This 'seed'", explains Shaman Lambong,  
 "Wants to be harvested as are the yams that are planted  
 deep in the soil."

*Senawai igi jemak ko jako begiang manang Guyak,  
 Kati ko iya enda ringat ransing nyabak,  
 Iya minta tarenak nundak tambak pisang bungai.  
 Senawai ranyai igi nibong ko jako begiang manang Lambong,  
 Iya minta tanggung nunda paong subong keladi pantai.  
 (Masing 1981:323, 323b)*

Freeman (1979:241) suggests, that the description of 'the droll appearance of the transvestite shamans, with their female attire all awry, their unformed breasts, and their broken and dangling penises' is a projection of male ridicule of the transvestite homosexual'. He also points out, that the female spirits failed to comfort the head, while the transvestite shamans, 'whose hands are without envy and only wish

to possess and fondle', succeeded in the task, since the head felt 'more secure and happy' in their care. My point is that, in the chant, the transvestite shamans (*manang bali*) recognise the severed head as, not just a trophy of male prowess, nor simply an infant to be nursed, but as seed, which wants to be planted for the benefit of the whole community. After the *manang bali* discern the reason for the head's crying — effectively diagnosing the problem and proffering the solution — Lang splits open the head to reveal 'all manner of seed, and, most prominently, the seed of the sacred rice (*padi pun*) of the Iban' (Freeman 1979:243). The *timbang* then becomes a protracted allegory on the cultivation of hill rice, an allegory, in which the crop reaped is not rice, but rather a human crop of the enemies of the Iban — more 'severed heads that germinate' (Freeman 1979).

In this ritual chant, then, the *manang bali* are depicted as anomalous figures with respect to gender, who interpret events for their relevance to the entire community. They transcend gender dichotomised perceptions, which are inherently limited in their purview. They draw attention to the needs of the greater whole in a society of competitive individuals — individuals who must rely on co-operation between the sexes in order to attain the success and security they seek. Thus, like ordinary *manang*, the *manang bali* are deemed able to transcend culturally posited boundaries and culturally elaborated categories. The difference is that, what the other *manang* do in their ritual performances, the *manang bali* are at all times, constantly symbolising the transcendence of gender categories in their social persona. This conception of things is reflected in the *manang* initiation rites discussed earlier. There, the *manang bali* was not given any further powers or skills unavailable to other *manang*. The additional initiation turned entirely on the male's assumption of

female clothing, as that which made the *manang bali* inherently more potent than either the male or female *manang*. On this interpretation, the *manang bali*'s transvestism is simply a more thorough-going elaboration of the recurring theme, that the *manang* is deemed capable of manipulating and transcending cultural categories.

Since I am arguing, here, the salience of the *manang bali* as a symbol within Iban culture, I cannot ignore its rarity in modern times. The decline of the institution is well attested, even though the ethnographic data is indeed slim. My analysis of the *manang bali*, as a symbol of transcendence, leads to the hypothesis that changes have occurred in Iban culture, which make such a symbol less significant now, than in past times. I have related the existence of the *manang bali* to an ideology of gender, expressed in two parallel, but unequal, prestige systems. I have isolated, as the dominant theme of this complex, the male appropriation of victorious combat and its ritual elaboration in the cult of head-hunting. In recent times, this aspect of Iban culture has undergone major changes.

Initially controlled and exploited, later contained and suppressed, the Iban practice of head-hunting has gradually declined, since Europeans established a political presence in Iban areas well over a century ago. Despite pacification, the spread of formal education was slow. Charles Brooke, the Second Rajah, 'believed that education was a worthwhile and growing force in the world, but he also knew that Western education was bound to erode the native cultures which he admired' (Pringle 1970: 139). His ambivalent attitude and his son, Vyner's early attempts to continue his father's policies, left Iban education entirely in the hands of the missions, till well into the twentieth century (Pringle 1970: 339). Nevertheless, education and other 'modern' forms of achievement

have to some extent filled the breach in the Iban prestige system consequent on the final suppression of head-hunting. Masing (1978:67) explicitly compares the role of education in contemporary Iban society, with the cult of head-hunting in traditional Iban communities: each, in its own way, could be said to open up to the individual a 'vast new world of knowledge, skills and opportunities'. Furthermore, Sutlive (1977: 162-163) has argued, that Iban women are increasingly appropriating the traditionally male 'cultural norm of mobility and assuming new roles'.

These changes indicate, that the Iban prestige system has been reworked over time, as new forms of achievement take the place of traditional ones. The significant point for my argument is that these new forms of achievement, such as education, are not marked for gender. In theory at least, this means that the two parallel prestige systems start to overlap. Practice, of course, is another matter and the interface between old and new forms of prestige would be an interesting area for future research. Women's prestige may well have remained relatively traditional, while the suppression of head-hunting would have propelled men to embrace the new forms of achievement more vigorously. Nevertheless, to the extent that the Iban prestige system began to lose its sexual dichotomisation with the enforced decline of head-hunting, so the correlates of the traditional complex would have been affected: with less polarization of individual aspirations into gender marked categories, there would be less saliance attached to a symbol of the transcendence of such categories.

Other historical developments are also likely to have been involved in the decline of the *manang bali* institution. Nineteenth century observers noted its greater resilience in remote areas, compared with its virtual disappearance from coastal regions, where the influence of

Malay culture was seen as contributing to its demise. Sutlive (1978: 186-188) argues that the Iban are a 'culturally mobile' people, who are sensitive 'to the reactions of members of other ethnic groups, to whose values the Iban are adjusting'. He relates this to 'a shift in the locus of cultural validation' in the expanding world of the contemporary Iban. As he puts it, 'whereas traditionally such authority existed among the Iban themselves, their exposure to members of technologically superior groups has eroded confidence and fostered belief in the supremacy of the values of such groups'. To support this argument, he quotes his Iban informants on their reasons for becoming Christians. Their statements show a pragmatic appreciation of the practical benefits of embracing Christianity in their particular historical circumstances. While this opportunistic approach is typically Iban and, in that sense, consistent with the traditional cultural ethos, it also bears witness to a gradual historical change in the consciousness of at least certain Iban, who have increasingly attuned their orientation to the world, and their concept of their own place in it, to an expanding socio-political environment. This indicates that not only is the traditional ritual corpus of the Iban subject to variability, as we have seen, but that the basic assumptions of individual Iban about the nature of the world may change too in an ongoing historical process.

One last point should perhaps be made about the transvestite shaman. I have, hitherto, accepted the reports of early European observers, that the *manang bali* was the 'highest rank' of *manang* (Howell and Bailey 1900: 98) and received 'higher fees' than other *manang* (Gomes 1911:180). Whilst this is quite likely, it is also possible that such observers over-systematised the *manang* institution in their own minds, creating a hierarchy from what the Iban conceived of as more like a range of specialists. The *manang bali* may simply have been one particular form of fully initiated

*manang*. The male *manang*, who specialised in the slaying of *antu buyu*, would then be seen as a different, rather than a less potent, form of *manang* — one favoured for certain kinds of shamanic ritual. Such an interpretation sees the *manang* role as one, which the individual could assume, in a form which suited his personal disposition and/or the felt needs of his community.

My analysis of the transvestism of the *manang bali* — as a symbol within a changing system of ideas — is quite compatible with either interpretation of the different kinds of *manang* and their relationship as 'ranked' or 'range of' specialists. Finally, only a detailed knowledge of the variations in both the forms of, and emphases within, Iban culture in different communities ranged over time and space would enable us to account more precisely for the varying importance of the *manang* institution in general, and the *manang bali* phenomenon in particular, at different time periods and in different Iban areas.

Footnotes to Chapter 4

1. The index of items, according to which 'a rating was made on the use of sex as a differentiating variable', was as follows:

(Abbreviations used: s.d. = sex distinctions; n.s.d. = no sex distinctions.)

(1) Residence:

s.d. = exclusive residential emphasis on one sex,  
e.g., matrilocality.  
n.s.d. = all other patterns.

(2) Kin groups:

s.d. = unilineal kin groups, e.g. patrilineal groups.  
n.s.d. = all others.

(3) Avuncular kin terminology:

s.d. = different terms for father's brother and  
mother's brother.  
n.s.d. = same terms for father's brother and  
mother's brother.

(4) Cousin kin terminology:

s.d. = different terms of first cousins.  
n.s.d. = same terms, i.e., Hawaiian or Eskimo  
terminology.

(5) Authority succession:

s.d. = follows either male or female descent  
line, e.g., patrilineal.  
n.s.d. = all other patterns.

(6) Eating arrangements:

s.d. = husband and wife eat separately.  
n.s.d. = husband and wife eat together.

(7) Attendance at birth:

s.d. = males not allowed to be present  
at childbirth.  
n.s.d. = males allowed to be present at  
childbirth.

(Munroe, Whiting and Hally 1969:88)

2. This belief in human *buyu* has not previously been described in the literature on the Iban. As Sather points out, it may be present only in the long settled Saribas and Kalaka areas, where stable continuous communities could have experienced heightened inter-generational conflict (Sather 1978:352 n.7).

## Chapter 5

Iban shamanism in social and cultural context

In this chapter, I contextualise Iban shamanism in terms of, what I see as, the broader themes of Iban culture. To do so, I look, first, at the forms of experience and expression, which characterise Iban religion and argue that shamanism, by its very nature, marks the limit of individual autonomy in the religious domain. I go on to suggest, that this apparently divergent practice is just one indication of the dialectic inherent in Iban culture, according to which the pragmatic Iban assert an ideology of individualism, yet temper it with mechanisms which, like shamanism, delimit the arena in which it operates.

## I

Iban culture posits anthropomorphic gods and supernatural beings modelled on the lived experience of Iban men and women. These supernatural beings are thought to build longhouses, hunt and farm just as the Iban do (Perham 1882-85:215-217). They are subject to customary law (*adat*) and they practise augury (Sather in Sandin 1980:xxx-xxxiii; Sandin 1980:128-129). Similarly, the concept of the land of the dead entails no radical discontinuity, as life there is 'but a simple prolongation of the present state of things in a new sphere' (Perham 1882-85:303-304).

A myth describes how the Iban originally lived together with the supernatural beings, some of whom quarrelled about a fruit-tree and then departed to the sky (*langit*) or over the sea (*tasik*). The culture heroes,

who remained at Panggau, subsequently acquired invisibility from a cobra (*tedong*), while the ancestors of the Iban chose to remain visible and built a separate longhouse for themselves (Jensen 1974:94-95; Masing 1981:471). These separation myths express the Iban concept of the universe as having three basic divisions: the sky (*langit*), which is the abode of benevolent supernatural beings; the sea (*tasik*) and the lands beyond the sea, which form an essentially alien sphere to the Iban; and the earth (*dunya*), which is shared by the Iban, both the living and the dead, and, on a different plane of experience, the culture heroes (*orang Panggau*) and the spirits (*antu*) (Uchibori 1978:227-232; Jensen 1974:103-106).

A folk account tells how the Iban, literally, lost sight of the *antu* in their midst:

in the beginning, man and spirits were on equal terms, and could eat, drink, and, if necessary, fight together. In those days spirits were not hidden from mortal gaze, and men were not afraid of them. After a certain combat, in which men were the victors, the treacherous "*Hantu*" [sic] invited them to a banquet, pretending they wished to make peace, and the men went unsuspecting to their fate. Deceived by the apparent joviality of the "*Hantu*", the forefathers of Dyakdom suffered themselves to be overcome by the strength of the "*Hantu*" arrack, and got helplessly intoxicated. The wicked spirits saw their advantage, rubbed some magic charcoal into the eyes of the drunken Dyaks, which made their eyes black thenceforth (before that time they were blue, like those of white men), and took away from them the power of seeing spirits as long as they are in the flesh. Thus, men lost their equality with spirits, and instead of fighting them, they have ever since been obliged to propitiate them by doctorings and offerings (Brooke Low in Ling Roth 1896:i. 225-226).

It is in a similar manner, that the Iban readily share their earthly domain with the gods, for it is believed that, when Lang Singalang Burong and his entourage 'attend a *gawai* in the land of mortals, they come in human form, but are invisible to human eyes' (Masing 1981:276).

To the Iban, then, the human and spirit realms interpenetrate and yet, are perceptually distinct: it is a different way of seeing which

characterises the spiritual vision of the world. As Freeman (1967:317) notes, 'the Iban world view recognises no firm boundary between phantasy and reality, between the imagined realm in which demons roam and the natural world of everyday experience'. On my analysis, it is precisely because no such fixed boundary exists, that the Iban seek to enact one by ritual means, as, and when, they deem it necessary to do so. In this way, precautions are taken against threatening *antu*, as well as against hazardous exposure to the dead.

In this context, I have already discussed the shielding rites (*bedinding*, literally, to make a protective wall), in which a shaman uses textiles to enclose an Iban woman threatened by an incubus, or applies a talisman (*engkerabun*) to make an Iban invisible to evil spirits and so cure him of bad dreams. In another instance, Heppell (1975:328-332) reports that after an ordeal by diving, 'all the supporters of the winning principal receive a payment (*lantun*), which is made to create a barrier across which any curses made by the loser cannot pass'. The payment is thought to strengthen the souls of the victor's supporters, making them immune from the consequences of the loser's curse. Again, men leaving a graveyard after a burial perform acts intended as 'the putting of a barrier between the world of the living and the land of the dead, for the border between the two worlds has been dangerously opened by the digging of the grave' (Uchibori 1978:68). Finally, when the troop of the dead come to collect the newly deceased, they find themselves unable to enter the longhouse, since 'the entrance is blocked by a mythical shaman with ceremonial fabrics, which have fearful designs of crocodiles and tigers' (Uchibori 1978:184).

When no such measures are taken, the border between the world of the living and that of the dead is said to be 'no thicker than the skin

of the *brinjil* fruit' (Freeman 1970:39) and as penetrable as 'the inner skin of a *lemayong* fruit' (Uchibori 1978:219). Likewise, a ritual chant describes the door of the sky as 'thinner than the skin of a banana plant' and 'thinner than the skin of the fruit of an eggplant'. Nevertheless, this same door of the sky is simultaneously depicted, in the chant, as 'a formidable door', which only Lang Singalang Burong is powerful enough to break through (Masing 1981:266-284). Thus, even fragile borders are exploited as the means to demonstrate superior skills.

Ethnographers characterise the relationship between the Iban and those benevolent supernatural beings whom their religion postulates, as informal and affectionate. Masing (1981:26) comments that the ease with which gods and humans are thought to move between one another's worlds, suggests an interaction, which is both 'informal and direct'. Uchibori (1978:284-285) describes the relationship as warm and affectionate:

In prayers (*sampi*) the gods (as generic *petara*) are often referred to as grandfathers (*aki*) and grandmothers (*ini*). This implies that the gods are intimate with and kind to humans, as grandparents generally are to their grandchildren. This also suggests that the gods invoked in this way may be considered by the Iban as having been their remote ancestors (*aki-ini*).

Furthermore, the appearance of named gods, as 'direct though remote ancestors', in Iban putative genealogies reduces 'the ontological distance between the gods and humans' (Uchibori 1978:284-285).

The relationship between the Iban and the culture heroes (*orang Panggau*), to whom they attribute supernatural powers, is equally direct, though less universal. As Masing (1981:31) points out:

the gods usually render help to anyone who has performed the required rites, while *orang Panggau* only help a selected few. And when that help is given, it is usually made known to the person concerned in a dream.

Hepell (1975:278) argues that a similarly personal and one-to-one relationship exists between the Iban and the spirits (*antu*), such that

if an Iban is thought to injure particular spirits, he expects the spirits to retaliate much as an Iban would do in similar circumstances. Such a situation then requires appropriate propitiatory rites to restore the direct relationship between that Iban and those spirits.

Not only do individual Iban relate warmly and easily to the supernatural beings, they also aspire to be like them. Masing (1981:468) sees reflected in Iban myths, rituals and invocatory chants, a belief that by emulating the gods (*nunda petara*), individuals might procure some of their powers. He points out, that the Iban system of religious festivals (*gawai*), not only 'enables an individual to seek divine help', but also provides any Iban male of spirit and ambition with 'the opportunity to try to become like the gods'. As the plot of the ritual chant (*timbang*) moves from the longhouse holding the *gawai* to the longhouse of the culture heroes and back again, so the world of the Iban is equated with the world of the supernatural beings. Furthermore, the holder of the *gawai* himself becomes the subject of the last section of the *timbang*, reflecting 'the fundamental desire of the Iban to acquire the characteristics of their culture heroes' (Masing 1981:462-468).

Uchibori (1978:263-288) makes a similar point from a discussion of a different cultural domain. He attributes the enshrinement of the dead — an occasional deviation from the usual mortuary practices of the Layar, Skrang and Balau Iban — to an aspiration 'to raise humans to the level of those ideal heroes [Keling and the other *orang Panggau*]'. In some instances, this custom explicitly follows on a posthumous judgment that the deceased has become a god (*nyadi petara*). Such a judgment occurs when an animal, frequenting some human habitation, is revealed in a dream as the direct transformation of the deceased's *semangat* and is recognised as the visible manifestation of a *petara* in animal form (*tuah*).

This 'becoming a god' is independent of any characteristics of the deceased's personality, his life or the particular circumstances, in which he died. It is, thus, open to everyone (Uchibori 1978:274-275).

The actual means of communication between the Iban and the benevolent supernatural beings generally take the form of personal revealed experience. The most important of these forms of communication is the dream, in which the individual's *semangat* enters directly into the realm of spirits. As Uchibori (1978:16) points out:

the dream is the primary source of mystical and religious experience for the Iban. They regard a dream experience as something beyond human intervention, something that occurs outside the ordinary perceptible world and at the same time something real in so far as it is an experience.

I have noted in the Introduction how dream experiences initiate innovation and change in Iban ritual life, resulting in the variability in religious ideas and practices documented among the traditional Iban (Freeman 1975: 284-287). Dreams also indicate candidates for certain social roles:

Leadership is commonly associated with a flair for constructive dreaming. This means that the dreamer regularly has dreams which appear relevant, secondly, that he is able to interpret their meaning — the advice of the spirits — and, that acting on this interpretation, he is successful. This proves him a man of insight, discrimination and judgment' (Jensen 1974:119-120).

Ritual offices — *manang* (shaman), *lemambang* (bard), *tuai burong* (augur) — are likewise assumed only after appropriate dream experiences, which command or confirm the calling. Finally, dream experiences are the usual source of potent charms (*pengaruh*), which the spirits direct the dreamer to find in a certain location, in a later waking state (Jensen 1974:121). Many former Iban leaders have recounted dreams, in which they met, or sought out, one or more of the Iban culture heroes (*orang Panggau*), who bestowed charms upon them and foretold their future achievements (Sandin 1966:91-123).

Augury (*beburong*) is the other main form of communication between the benevolent supernatural beings and the Iban. Freeman (1961:142) describes it as 'the interpretation of divine revelation as it is believed to be manifested in the behaviour of certain sacred birds'. From the behaviour of these omen birds and the lesser omen animals, the Iban adduce warnings and advice about their endeavours from Lang Singalang Burong (Jensen 1974:86-91, 125-138). While interpretation depends a great deal on the particular circumstances, the omen birds are usually described in terms of human speech and emotion and their calls interpreted by analogy with the human characteristics they suggest (Freeman 1961). Omens might occur unexpectedly and they are also deliberately sought, as, traditionally, no important undertaking was begun without supernatural guidance (Jensen 1974:135). Although any Iban may seek auguries, where community-wide enterprises are concerned, this is the task of the *tuai burong* (augur), 'who enjoys a reputation for attracting appropriate omens, is able to interpret these correctly and proves this by the success of his undertakings' (Jensen 1974:127). Although the Iban sometimes speak of omens as if they themselves produce results, this is simply a metaphorical mode of expression. As Sather (Sandin 1980:xxxiv) points out:

omens are conceived of as a form of divine communication, and whether those who receive them suffer or prosper depends on their own personal conduct, whether they heed their guidance and are able to read their meaning correctly.

If communication and assistance is not forthcoming from the supernatural beings, an Iban may decide to seek them out in search of charms and guidance. Following the custom of *nampok*, an Iban:

who was fired with ambition to shine in deeds of strength and bravery or who desired ... to be cured of an obstinate disease, would, in olden times, spend a night or nights by himself on a mountain, hoping to meet a benevolent spirit who would give him what he desired (Perham 1882-85:219).

*Nampok* is thought to require great courage and resilience, as a meeting with a spirit is both threatening and testing, as well as potentially beneficial, if the Iban shows himself equal to the experience (Jensen 1974:122). Initial trials include encounters with spirits in terrifying animal forms and should the Iban flee at this point, 'he is cursed (*ditepang*) and would suffer consistent misfortune (*pulai ke hal*)'. If, however, the Iban stands his ground, the spirit is expected to reward him with a charm (*pengaruh*) or a promise of future success (Jensen 1974:123-124; Nyuak 1906:183-184). Some Iban are said to have experienced *nampok* 'as it were in sleep, others when fully awake' (Nyuak 1906:183).

This acquisition of spirit assistance is elaborated in the Iban idea of possessing a guardian spirit (*ngarong* or *tuah*) (Perham 1882-85:223-224). Nyuak 1906:182; Jensen 1974:124-125). Hose and McDougall (1912:ii. 92) estimated that only 'one in a hundred men' was fortunate enough to have such a spirit helper consistently favouring him and his *bilek*-family. The *tuah* generally took the form of a snake or some other dangerous animal. As Jensen (1974:125) describes it:

the normal order of events includes a dream, a spirit encounter, a particular animal, and subsequent success. In such circumstances the animal in question is venerated with *piring* and never killed or eaten. Sometimes the guardian animal spirit is also identified with a dead relative.

In the search for a guardian spirit, the Iban concerned might spend the night in a specially constructed dreamhouse (*meligai*), traditionally erected in a place believed to be the abode of spirits (Sandin 1966:91-92), or, in a more recent innovation, erected high above the open verandah (*tanju*) of the longhouse (Freeman 1970:310 and plate 7b, 1975:284-285).

## II

This brief outline of Iban religion provides the context, in which to consider the role of the celestial *manang*/spirit helper in Iban shamanism. Just as the Iban concepts of the supernatural realm and the land of the dead replicate the human domain, so both celestial and ghostly shamans are thought to exist in their respective spheres. Celestial *manang* are 'either deities or earthly *manang* who have joined them after death' (Richards 1981:205), while ghostly shamans are needed in the land of the dead, 'for even the dead may fall ill and must seek a shaman's help' (Uchibori 1978:236).

The destiny of deceased shaman is variously conceived of by the Iban, as either the land of the dead or Mount Rabong, the this-worldly abode of celestial shamans. In the Upper Skrang area, there is nowadays no notion that the destiny of deceased shamans is particularly different from that of ordinary people, though some do say that shamans live in a separate community in the land of the dead (Uchibori 1978:236). The Balau and Saribas-Krian Iban, however, adhere to the custom of burying shamans with the head upriver, as opposed to the usual downriver, so that their *semengat* can reach the top of Mount Rabong and there join the celestial and mythical shamans (Uchibori 1978:236; Sandin 1980:35).

Early European observers report, as a general rule, even more unusual treatment of the corpses of shamans: they were either 'suspended in trees in the cemetery' (Perham 1982-85:292) or 'exposed on a raised platform (St. John 1863:i. 67). The meaning of these mortuary practices can be deduced from the analogous treatment, accorded other categories of the dead. Amongst the Balau Iban, 'infants that died before they cut their teeth were not buried but hung on trees; and they were said to inhabit

the intermediate region between this world and Hades [sic]' (Howell 1911:19). The raised platform burial is today followed by the Saribas, Skrang and Balau Iban, in those instances where the newly dead are enshrined and their *semengat* thought to remain in the world of the living, so as to help (*nulong*) and protectively watch over (*ngemata*) their communities and descendants (Uchibori 1978:263-275). The early European reports, then, depict the corpses of shamans being equated with the corpses of those on the edge of human society, either those yet to become full members of it, or those who have moved beyond it to become benevolent spirits. Anomalous creatures are thought to move on to anomalous destinations: the deceased infants hover between the worlds of the living and the dead; the enshrined dead become local community spirits, described as being still alive (*agi idup*); and the deceased shamans, deemed capable of transcending the human domain, are thought to gather on Mount Rabong, the this-worldly abode of celestial healers.

We have seen that the idea of a guardian spirit (*tuah*) or spirit helper (*antu nulong*) is common to Iban enterprises of all kinds. Brooke Low (Ling Roth 1896:i. 266) describes shamans, called to their vocation by the spirits in dreams, as 'supposed to be attended by a familiar spirit who is good and powerful'. He depicts the *manang* consulting with, and being assisted by, this familiar spirit during healing rites. Jensen (1974:148) refers to the *manang* invoking 'the aid of his friendly and familiar spirits'. Richards (1981:204) reports, that following the *manang*'s initial dream calling, 'the same spirit (*yang*) appears later at intervals with advice or fresh commands'.

These authors do not comment on the relationship between these familiar spirits and the celestial shamans. I suspect they are one and the same. Two reports in Jensen (1974:120, 144) support this interpretation:

Sara of Silik ... was visited in a dream by spirits and summoned to be a *manang*; she was warned that if she refused, misfortune would befall her and when she replied that she had not the knowledge, the spirit offered to teach her — also in dreams.

Again,

the aspirant is taught, principally through dreams, the functions of his office under the supervision of Menjaya Raja Manang, spirit ruler of the *manang*.

Thus, the spirits, who summon the individual to become a *manang* are conceptualised as healers able to pass on the knowledge and skills of shamanism to the candidate. That they do so under the supervision of Menjaya, again implies their identity as his followers, the celestial shamans. One aspect of this spirit guide relationship, however, does distinguish it from some others. While the spirit guide is a personally revealed spirit, the shaman uses the relationship for the benefit of others, his clients in the community.

The relationship between the terrestrial and celestial *manang* is, then, multifaceted: they replicate one another in different realms of the cosmos; they move between realms in their healing rites; the terrestrial *manang* call on their celestial counterparts for aid in their therapeutic rituals; and finally, they merge, as the terrestrial *manang*, on their death, become celestial *manang* and take up their abode on Mount Rabong. Though the literature is not explicit on this point, whether a particular healing rite involves one or more terrestrial/celestial *manang* probably depends on rather pragmatic considerations: the availability of fully initiated shamans (*manang mansau*) and assistance from novice shamans (*manang mata*); the seriousness of the case and the ritual deemed appropriate to its treatment; and, finally, the resources of the *bilek*-family, who must pay for the services rendered.

A final point to note about the celestial *manang* is the apparent lack of hierarchical grading among these followers of Manang Raja Menjaya. Although they include *manang bali* as well as *manang mansau*, there is no evidence in the invocations that the celestial *manang* are thought of as anything but a range of individuals, elaborating their healing role in a variety of ways. The terrestrial *manang*, who, after their death, have joined their celestial fellows, are invoked by name, according to their special skills or the potent charms they were known to possess during their lifetime on earth. In a typically Iban manner, it is, thus, the past achievements of individual *manang* which are celebrated.

### III

The brief overview of Iban religion, provided in the first section of this chapter, sets the stage for the final argument of this thesis. Iban shamanism must be seen in the context of the relationship between the Iban, their gods and culture heroes, and the spirits who likewise inhabit the earth (*dunya*). The forms of communication outlined above — dreams, augury and personal spirit guidance — all attest to the primacy of direct experience in Iban religious ideology and practice. Only when these modes of interaction prove unproductive and the sought-after relationship breaks down, as evidenced by illness, do the Iban seek the intervention of the shaman to diagnose the nature of the problem and carry out remedial measures. In so doing, the shaman asserts, and the Iban accept, the efficacy of his actions, which take place outside the experienced 'here and now' reality of the Iban. The shaman, thus, marks the limits of the autonomous action of individual Iban in the religious domain.

To indicate that this switch from an overtly immanent to a covertly transcendental mode of consciousness<sup>1</sup> is not divergent, but rather typical

of Iban cultural action, it is necessary to look briefly at parallel instances in other domains of Iban experience. To do so, I have chosen three sets of opposing socio-cultural forces, which the Iban strive to keep in balance: the dialectical relationship between the autonomy of the individual and the authority of leaders; the embedding of the individual within community structures; and the mutually defining concepts of Self and Other articulated in the social organisation of kinship and marriage. All I can do, here, is suggest an interpretation of Iban culture, which awaits further investigation, especially in areas that I have either ignored (e.g. the Iban language) or barely touched upon (e.g. the historical development of Iban cultural forms and consciousness).

The Iban concern for individual autonomy is particularly clear in the political and economic spheres. Nevertheless, individual Iban subordinate themselves, sporadically, to the authority of charismatic leaders, when they perceive it is opportune and advantageous to do so.

Murray (1981:40) locates the political and ideological expressions of Iban egalitarianism within their socio-economic framework. She notes, that 'the Iban express a dislike of authority in political relations and daily life, as well as, in more strictly economic contexts' (Murray 1981:35). Her analysis deals with access to land, trade, and labour relations in traditional Iban society and access to capital, attitudes to wage labour, and planned development among the contemporary Iban. She argues, that autonomy in the economic sphere was highly valued, by traditional Iban, as the prerequisite for individual achievement and as a conscious rejection of the corvée labour systems known from other Bornean societies. She concludes, that the Iban's self-definition 'as autonomous, mobile, independent producers' made, and still makes, them 'unwilling to work for others

and hence curtails the development of political and economic inequalities' (Murray 1981:29-35). The value of autonomy, thus, encapsulates both the individual and the historical experience of the Iban.

There has been some debate about the nature of Iban leadership. Freeman (1970:129) describes Iban society as 'classless and egalitarian' and its members as 'individualists, aggressive and proud in demeanour, lacking any taste for obeisance'. Given this, Sahlins (1958:312-313) points out an apparent paradox between the elementary forms of Iban leadership and the success of their military enterprises. Brown (1979) explains that Iban war leaders (*tau serang*) are 'routinized charismatic commissioners'. Rousseau (1980), however, asserts that de facto status levels and hereditary leadership exist despite an egalitarian ideology. In response, Freeman (1981:37-42) convincingly attributes the very effectiveness of Iban leaders to their occupying positions by virtue of their personal ability to attract and hold a following, rather than through hereditary or other regularly constituted authority. He characterises these leaders as 'men of substance and prowess in action', who secured the support of the gods and, thus, the special charisma in the eyes of others, which stemmed from this 'numinous potency'. However, he points out, such men were, in ordinary social contexts, no different from other Iban and were addressed and treated accordingly (Freeman 1981:23-24, 41-42). The achievement oriented Iban, then, seek and follow effective leadership as and when the occasion demands it, yet remain 'freedom-loving and autonomous' (Freeman 1975:286) in response to an 'egalitarian ideology ... that lies at the heart of Iban identity' (Murray 1981:40).

Another set of opposing socio-cultural forces, which the Iban strive to keep in balance, is the inherent conflict between the autonomy of the

individual and the demands of community life. Heppell (1975:46) describes as 'a principal Iban value, that of getting on with one's neighbours (*bekalieng badas badas*, literally, to mix really well)'. It is not difficult to see why such a value should be stressed in a society of competitive individuals living face-to-face in the close quarters of a long-house domicile. This problem is dealt with by the concept of *adat* (customary law), observance of which is thought to assure the social harmony and spiritual health of the community. As Heppell (1975:303-304) explains:

The Iban are quite clear about the importance of the *adat*. Without it, they say, there would be chaos and a quick demise of their society. This is why a person who repudiates the *adat* is driven from a group, for he is regarded as a harbinger of destruction. Each Iban, therefore, belongs to an *adat* community, the harmony and continued existence of which is dependent on the members behaving as the *adat* requires. Any dispute divides this community and this is why a settlement is a triumph for *adat*. The settlement restores the *adat* community.

The idea of supernatural sanctions reinforces the power of *adat* over the individual Iban. The concepts *angat*: heated, feverish, infected and *chelap*: cool, tranquil, healthy (Jensen 1974:114) emphasise that harmony is a matter of maintaining the appropriate balance between the desires of the individual and his responsibility to contribute to the social cohesion of the community. As noted earlier, the contrast *angat//chelap* is a metaphorical means of describing the characteristics of a socio-spatial setting (Uchibori 1978:32). It must be noted, however, that while heated//cool are terms in complementary opposition, they also form a continuum and it is this that the Iban exploit, as they apply the notions as analogues of both the degree and the nature of individual/community interaction deemed desirable. Thus, disruptive social behaviour, which generates acrimony, leads to an undesirably heated environment (*rumah angat*), which presages misfortune for all concerned:

During serious unresolved disputes, anxiety is often experienced by the members of a house, which is in part elicited by the fear of possible baneful consequences of the dispute. In such an unsettled state, a house is conceptualised as being "hot" (*angat*) .... it is believed that members of a "hot" house are liable to suffer misfortunes. It must be emphasised, however, that a house does not become "hot" simply because a transgression has occurred. In any Iban longhouse there are many transgressions which pass unrepaired because the victims prefer not to make issues of them. It is only when there are obvious and acrimonious divisions within a house that people will concede that there is a danger of it becoming "hot" (Heppell 1975:27).

At the same time, neglect of social interaction all together is equally threatening. If an Iban *bilek*-family stays away from the longhouse (e.g. at a farm hut) and does not light a fire in its hearth for more than three days, it incurs the wrath of the spirits of a cold hearth (*antu chelap dapur*), who are thought to chastise and retaliate saying, 'if we become cold, you Iban will die' (Heppell 1975:278).

It is, then, not a state, so much as a balance between dangerously cold and dangerously heated — a middle road, which the individual Iban is exhorted to tread, between too little interaction and interaction of a divisive, disruptive kind. In this the longhouse community is aided by its *tuai burong* acting as *pun rumah* (house founder): the custodian of certain charms (*penchelap rumah*), believed to ward off malevolent spirits and other evil forces, and possessed of the ritual skills, deemed essential to restore an appropriately cool and benign state, following social disruption within the community (Freeman 1961:162, 1981:32-33).

The final dialectic I want to discuss here is the simultaneous involvement of Self and Other in Iban culture, such that they are mutually defining in their interaction. In the religious domain, this is seen in the way *antu* and humans share the same environment (*dunya*), as agents in two perceptually distinct, but mutually influencing, realms of experience. Even where some degree of separation is postulated — the culture

heroes residing at Panggau and the gods dwelling in the sky (*langit*) – there is two-way interaction between the realms, as the orang Panggau and the gods attend the ritual festivals (*gawai*), which the Iban hold as part of their attempts to become like the culture heroes and even to emulate the gods.

In the social sphere, a preliminary indication of the nature of Self/Other interaction is found in the taboos, mentioned earlier, concerning the behaviour of spouses. In this context, these taboos can be interpreted as Other-focused sanctions, which entail restraint of the Self. If, in the circumstances where these taboos apply (e.g. pregnancy and warfare), one spouse breaks a taboo, it is the partner, who is considered likely to suffer some misfortune as a consequence. Thus, in a dialectical process, it is fear of the partner being placed in danger, which constrains a spouse's behaviour.

The social organisation of Iban kinship and marriage also articulates the mutually defining nature of the categories Self and Other. As it is beyond the scope and intent of this thesis to deal comprehensively with the kinship and marriage system, I am focusing on those aspects which reveal a social mechanism for holding in balance the dialectical relationship between Self and Other, a mechanism analogous to the operation of shamanism in the religious domain.

The Iban may be said to possess an 'inclusive' kinship system. Freeman (1960:70) translates the Iban *kaban* as 'kith and kin', noting that it is used to refer, not only to an individual's cognates and affines, but also to all of his/her friends and acquaintances. There is, he points out, 'a general assumption that most, if not all, members of a tribe are kinsfolk, even though their exact relationships to one another can no

longer be traced'. Freeman cites Iban assertions to this effect: "*itong se kaban magang kami Iban*" (We Iban, it may be said, are all kin of one kind or another) and "*se ribu kaban tu kaban magang magang, enda olih kira*" (One's kin [cognatic and affinal] run into thousands; all are kin, they cannot be counted)!. Within this inclusive social field, there is, however, a three-fold gradation from the closest kin, those most definitely Selves, to the more distant kin, those who are, for all practical purposes, Others: (1) *kaban mandal* (cognatic kin); (2) *kaban tampil* (affinal kin); and (3) *orang bukai* (other people).

This Self/Other distinction, within the inclusive kinship system, correlates with the conjunctive nature of Iban siblingship, which intensifies relationships facing inwards away from the wider social world. Freeman (1960:68-69) points out the importance of the sibling tie in the Iban kinship structure and the solidarity between siblings, which continues even once they are adult members of different *bilek*-families. Sutlive (1978:93-94) also instances the affection and mutual support between siblings. He notes that this extends to intra-generational solidarity, as cousins and good friends couch their relationships in the sibling idiom, by reciprocal use of the term of address for siblings. He contrasts this with inter-generational conflicts, which he sees reflected in Iban oral literature.

Both Sutlive (1978:98) and Freeman (1960:80, 86-87) point out the generational aspects of Iban kin terminology. For instance, Iban terms of address not only allow cousins and friends to be addressed as 'siblings' (*menyadi*), but also allow all aunts and uncles, cognatic and affinal, to be addressed as 'mothers' (*indai*) and 'fathers' (*apai*) respectively. There is, thus, a clear demarcation of kin according to generation, as a single

term is used to all the males, and another single term is used to all the females, of each ascending generation and just one term is used to all the members of each descending generation. Freeman (1960:80) associates this with a relationship of authority and its reciprocal, deference and respect, between the members of adjacent superordinate and subordinate generations. Furthermore, the use of teknonymous names would define a sociocentric categorisation of society into generational levels as children, parents and grandparents respectively (Geertz and Geertz 1964). Not only that, teknonymous names (according to which a parent is called 'father of so-and-so' or 'mother of so-and-so') refer to a kinship tie and are therefore relational terms. As such, they define an individual by reference to another, that is, identify the Self in terms of an Other (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1966:191-192).

This dysharmonic combination — an inclusive kinship system, together with a conjunctive siblingship entailing Self/Other distinctions within the social field — is held in balance by the Iban marriage rules, which act to consolidate the field of Selves (cognates) and incorporate into it Others (affines and, rarely, *orang bukat*). Freeman (1960:73-74) outlines Iban marriage rules as follows:

There is no objection to marriage with an unrelated individual (*orang bukat*) as long as it is known that he (or she) has no hereditary taint of the evil eye (*tau tepang*) and is not descended from a slave (*ulun*). Such marriages are not favoured, however, and are infrequent; instead, it is the marriage of cognates which is the norm, both preferred and actual. For cognates the rules governing marriage are strictly formulated. In summary, sexual relations are forbidden as incestuous (*jadi mali*) between:

- (a) all cognates of the same *bilek*-family;
- (b) siblings (both full and half), even though they may be members of different *bilek*-families;
- (c) all close cognates (i.e., within a kindred of second-cousin range) who are not on the same generational level.

Freeman's interpretation (1960:70-76) of this situation is central to my argument here. He points out that:

the intermarriage of cousins constantly reinforces the network of cognatic ties linking individual Iban, and kin that might otherwise have become dispersed are brought together again.

The Iban are well aware of this process, as Freeman reports a common statement among them to the effect that, if cognates do not intermarry they will eventually become *orang bukal*, or strangers, to one another.

Cousin marriage transforms affines into cognates, as, with the birth of children, those who are affinal kin (*kaban tampil*) in one generation become cognatic kin (*kaban mandal*) to the new generation. Since affines otherwise hold an uneasy position, hovering between Self and Other (Sutlive 1978:98), this resolution is highly desirable. It is foreshadowed by a range of prescribed and proscribed behaviours, through which affinal ties are experientially reinterpreted as cognatic ties of a homologous nature. The most notable of these mechanisms is the avoidance relationship between a *menantu* (child-in-law) and *entua* (parent-in-law):

Sexual relations between them are severely prohibited, and all familiarity and joking are interdicted. These aspects of the relationship are expressed in a strong prohibition (with supernatural sanctions) against a *menantu* uttering the personal name of his (or her) *entua* (Freeman 1960:81).

As one *menantu* will have affiliated to the *bilek*-family of his/her *entua* this avoidance relationship is clearly not a means of isolating the nuclear family from the wider kinship web. On the contrary, it seems to be an attempt to enjoin on the affines, precisely those aspects of the inter-generational relationship appropriate within the *bilek*-family, which have been inculcated over a lifetime's socialisation in the case of the equivalent cognatic tie: the parent/child relationship.

The Iban marriage system, then, has the character of a holding operation, preventing the dissolution of the social field, which would otherwise occur as cognates moved beyond the second cousin range. Without such consolidation, an Iban informant of Freeman's noted, cognates 'grow

farther and farther apart, generation and generation, until in the end they no longer know they are kin' (Freeman 1960:73). This explains why marriage seldom takes place with *orang bukai*. Marriages are deployed to maintain existing cognates (*kaban mandal*) and incorporate affines (*kaban tampil*), while those one-time cognates who have already slipped away to the edges of the system are no longer afforded a high priority. However, this interpretation does not account for the marriage prohibition across adjacent generations. Cousins once removed are equally Selves, in danger of slipping into the Others category, yet any sexual relations with them are strictly prohibited as incestuous. Here, I go on to argue, the concern to maintain the balance, on the horizontal dimension, between Selves and Others, is cross-cut by the even more pressing concern to maintain fertility and the flow of life through the generations arrayed along the vertical dimension of Iban society.

While the notion of incest, among the Iban, has important sociological implications, it is also a cultural elaboration of what the Iban conceive of as the natural order of things. The sociological aspects are clearest in the prohibitions on sexual relations between cognates of the same *bilek*-family and between siblings (including half-siblings) even if they are members of different *bilek*-families. *Bilek*-family exogamy (which extends to cousins, if they are natal members of the same *bilek*), whatever its origin, has the effect of embedding the *bilek* in the wider society, by forging those affinal links, which become cognatic ties to the next generation. The sibling prohibition might be because sibling marriages would be the least productive in a social sense, given that, as kindreds radiate up and out from the individual concerned, siblings' kindreds overlap except for their relationship to one another. However, as the kindred overlap of half-siblings would be similar to that of first cousins,

the preferred marriage partners — 50 per cent overlap in each case — there must be something else involved here. Freeman (1960:161 n.17) suggests that the marital prohibitions beyond the *bilek*-family are chiefly concerned with avoidance of the dysnomia and incongruities in kinship terminology and relationships, which would follow from marriage between cognates of different generations. While this is no doubt a significant social factor it cannot account for the specific sanction, that the incestuous sexual relations such marriages would entail, result in the infertility of both people and the land. Again, some other notions seem to be involved.

Inter-generational prohibitions suggest something of the broader concerns, which may inform all Iban notions of incest. Sexual relations with a first or second cousin once removed is termed *besapat*, literally 'having partition walls' and involves a heavy fine. Sexual relations with a third or fourth cousin once removed is called *bekalih*, literally 'reversed' or 'inside out' and carries a lesser fine (Jensen 1974:39; Richards 1981: 324, 136). *Besapat* I interpret as transgressing the generational categories of Iban kinship, a system in which 'genealogical level' takes precedence over any considerations of relative age (cf. Needham 1966). *Besapat* and *bekalih* are, thus, thought to 'reverse' the flow of life between these articulated categories, which the Iban conceptualise as forming a three generation cycle. This cycle is delineated as a synchronic unit, which encapsulates, and a diachronic process, which effects the transmission of life from generation to generation. As Uchibori (1978:248-258) points out:

- (1) A typical *bilek*-family consists of three generations existing contemporaneously.
- (2) Three generations is the time imagined necessary for the soul elements (*semengat*) of the deceased to dissolve into dew and

be absorbed into the ears of rice, which are eaten by the living.

- (3) A personal name ideally reappears in every three generation set, as a child is named after a great-grandparent or a sibling of a great-grandparent, who, if still alive, must be given 'a piece of iron ... presumably as a protection for his or her *semengat*' According to Jensen (1966-67:177), 'if the name of a living relative is consciously used, this is considered tantamount to the taking of his soul (*semengat*) and requires compensatory payment (*upah*)'.
- (4) Mourning (*ulit*) is dispensed with on the death of an Iban, who has outlived his own children and already has a great-grandchild, that is, on the death of a person, who 'has finished and closed a three generation cycle'(Uchibori 1978:248).

I am not suggesting here, that any notion of shared substance through the transmission of *semengat* is involved in these Iban ideas about *bilek*-family exogamy and the flow of life through a three generation cycle. Uchibori (1978:254-255) is at pains to point out, that while 'the living maintain their lives by eating rice and thus incorporating some elements of the ancestor's existence', there is no explicit idea of a cycling of human souls<sup>2</sup> and nor is the *semengat* of rice equated directly with the ancestor's *semengat*.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the 'dew' of those who were successful in life is thought to confer prosperity, as an invocation from the burning wax ceremony for the ripening rice (*nunu lilin*) indicates:

Now I today am burning wax.  
 May the dew of those who curse, who work evil  
 [and bring misfortune]  
 Be cast away, flung away!  
 And may the dew of those who harvest rice in  
 plenty, abundant sweet rice,  
 [who have success, fame and wealth]  
 Enter into my rice.

*Nyadi aku saharitu nunu lilin.  
 Nyadi samoa ambun orang tau tepang, tau andang, ...  
 Nya buai kesai.  
 Nyadi samoa ambun orang tau padi, tau puli, ...  
 Nya tama padi aku.*

(Jensen 1974:189)

The symbolic content of Iban ideas about the social organisation of kinship and marriage may be clearer, if interpreted as a structural analogue of their custom of head-hunting. Needham (1976) has pointed out the error of postulating a mystical substance or force to account for indigenous notions that associate taking heads with acquiring prosperity. As discussed earlier, Freeman (1979:237) has analysed Iban trophy heads as symbols of the generative power of nature. I suggest, that the Iban marriage rules — analysed as a system of ideas — are a similarly condensed symbolic statement, which points to Iban conceptions of the natural order of things, as regards the fertility of humankind and the land. Thus, incestuous sexual relations, which confound the categories and reverse the flow of that order, result in *kudi*: 'the state of sterility where the natural order ceases to function' (Jensen 1974:113). By contrast, cousin marriage, an attenuation of Self at one genealogical level, followed by its consolidation at a subsequent level, articulates a process appropriate to, not just the continuity of human existence, but, more specifically, the flow of life from the ancestors, which is continually reproduced in three generation cycles.

The three domains of Iban experience just discussed — the autonomy of the individual, the nature of community life, and the social organisation of kinship and marriage — indicate the dialectical interaction of ego-centric and sociocentric forces within Iban society and culture. The freedom-loving individual recognises effective leadership, when it is opportune to do so. The individual might be autonomous and the basic social unit, the *bilek*-family, might be 'like a sovereign country' (Freeman

1958:22), but each is, nevertheless, embedded in community structures. Supernatural sanctions oblige behaviour in accordance with the *adat*, on pain of causing the entire community to suffer misfortune. All members of the society are regarded as kin, yet only the marriage system maintains an equilibrium between Selves and Others, an equilibrium which is under constant pressure. The social organisation of kinship and marriage consolidates the field of Selves along the horizontal dimension, at the same time as it reintegrates ancestors as Selves along the vertical dimension of Iban society. In so doing, it tacitly recognises and acts upon distinctions, which have no place in the overt ideology of inclusive kinship.

In the religious sphere, shamanism is an institution, which operates in an analogous fashion. Iban religion posits a continuum, according to which the benevolent supernatural beings are simply an extension of human society. This religious field knows no radical discontinuities, only a gradation from Iban to *orang Panggau* to the gods (*petara*). Shamanism, however, attests to a tacit recognition, that there are discontinuities. The shaman is called upon to diagnose and rectify the situation, when direct personal communication with the supernatural beings appears to have broken down. The shaman acknowledges the Otherness of the supernatural beings and re-establishes a minimal degree of separation between them and the Iban. In so doing, he/she transcends the categories implicit in Iban religion to restore things and beings to their appropriate place and so enable productive interaction to take place once more.

Footnotes to Chapter 5

1. My application of these terms is based on my understanding of the concepts, as discussed in lectures and seminars given by Dr Geoffrey Benjamin at the Australian National University during 1981. In a paper, currently being revised for publication, Benjamin explains the concepts as follows:

The immanent and the transcendental, as used here, are best seen as contrasting ways of lending cognitive coherence to experience. By "immanent" I refer to a mode of consciousness which focuses upon those elements of the world for which the individual can claim to have direct sensory evidence: one does not need to trust in what others assert to be the case, but is free to construct one's own view of the world. The "transcendental" mode of consciousness, on the other hand, focuses on those elements of the world for which the individual can have no direct sensory evidence, but for which he or she relies on what some other person asserts to be the case (Benjamin 1980:32).

2. 'The *semengat* has its end as well as its beginning .... an individual's *semengat* is personal, belonging to a particular person, and is in this sense unique. The Iban have no notion of a division between a personified soul and an impersonal (and therefore possibly remouldable) "soul-substance", which many, if not most, peoples in Southeast Asia share in common. The perishable nature of individual *semengat* is, after all, no more than a reflected image of the mortality of individual human beings ...' (Uchibori 1978:254).
3. 'The Iban say that rice plants are their ancestors because they are composed of (or contain) the last elements of the *semengat* of the deceased .... Certainly, the rice, which contains the ancestors' *semengat*, is taken into living human bodies and generates physical energy to make the Iban "tough". But the Iban do not have an idea that the ancestors' *semengat* participate in the formation of the living's spiritual power or in the making of an expected neonate's *semengat*' (Uchibori 1978:253-254).

### Conclusion

I set out, in this thesis, to ascertain the range and the nature of the powers attributed to the shaman (*manang*), to analyse the significance of the transformed shaman (*manang bali*), and to locate shamanism within the coherence structures of traditional Iban culture.

An examination of even the small corpus of ritual chants available from shamanic healing rites (*pelian* and *saut*) reveals an indigenous representation of the powers of the shaman. The invocations depict the gods using an idiom of reciprocity and kinship to intimidate malevolent spirits, while the celestial shamans actively participate in the healing rites. The terrestrial shamans are portrayed as capable of bridging the human and spirit realms, as their pursuit of errant souls entails a volitional crossing into the spirit domain. They are shown enacting both a link with, and a separation from, the spirit realm, as they establish a cordyline of vitality and longevity, which represents an unborn child's soul-counterpart, at the same time as they spiritually fence the expectant mother to keep malevolent spirits at bay. They sacrifice domestic fowls, exploiting the cultural categorisation of living things, as these borderline creatures are brought into human society to appropriate the crimes and sicknesses of the Iban, before being despatched in order to satisfy the malevolent spirits without loss of 'real' life. The ritual chants, then, present the shaman as one who manipulates conceptual and cosmic categories, promoting both the interaction between, and the separation of, realms, in ways advantageous to the individual Iban.

The ritual action in *pelian* rites elaborates a range of shamanic techniques around a number of key themes. These rites may promote the vitality of the individual or the solidarity and continuity of the *bilek*-family, through the shaman's activities in relation to the variously conceptualised soul-counterparts (*ayu* and *bungai*). They may entail retrieving a soul (*semengat*), lost or ensnared by a malevolent being in the spirit realm, and restoring it to its rightful owner. They may involve putting a stop to any interference from spirits (*antu*), which threatens human health and welfare. The first of these modes of operation exploits the symbiotic relationship posited between the human and spirit realms, the second utilizes the shaman's putative ability to enter the spirit domain at will, while the third involves the shaman effecting a healthy separation between the human and spirit beings who share the earth (*dunya*). In each case, the shaman is thought to restore or remove things and beings to their appropriate condition and place in the cosmos, so promoting a benign relationship between the human and spirit domains. It is the shaman who is charged with the task of righting the situation, when interaction between these two perceptually distinct, but interpenetrating realms occurs in a way that is to the detriment of the Iban.

In these manifold rites, what is attributed to the shamans is the ability to set their own souls abroad in the spirit realm at will; to deal directly with spirit adversaries; and to erect barriers against malevolent spirits so as to protect those Iban who are at risk. This dual role of the shaman, as one who bridges realms and, at the same time, enforces a separation between them, is encapsulated in the polysemic symbol of the *pagar api*. On my analysis, this ritual

apparatus is, simultaneously, a 'fence of fire', which intimidates spirits, and a 'dangerous crossing', which affords the shaman an opportunity to assert, in symbolic terms, his controlled use of 'ritual heat', thereby displaying both skill and courage superior to that of the malevolent spirits he must overcome.

The *saut* rites are a further elaboration of these shamanic practices, drawing on all the resources of Iban ritual. The shamans (*manang*) do not rely on their own ability to invoke the celestial beings, but rather engage the bards (*lemambang*) to do so. The bards intone the appropriate invocation, which is thought to secure the presence of the great celestial shaman, Manang Raja Menjaya, at this festival for the sick (*gawai sakit*). The terrestrial and celestial shamans tend and fence the patient's soul-counterpart and dispose of any troublesome malevolent spirits. If necessary, they effect the 'death' and the 'rebirth' of the ill person by taking them on a celestial ascent to have their body recast by Selempandai, the blacksmith god who forges human beings. In so doing, they extend to the patient their own putative ability to transcend the human realm.

The cultural logic, which elaborates this system of healing rites, attributes to the initiated shaman the skills necessary to both erect and transcend boundaries between the human and spirit elements of the cosmos. It enables the shaman to effect a restructuring of the patient's experienced reality, so producing a benign result from what is, in scientific terms, a series of fictions.

Seen in this context, the transformed shaman (*manang bali*) is not such an enigma, but rather one who has taken the cultural logic of shamanism to its ultimate conclusion. On my analysis, where the

ordinary shaman exhibits transcendence of cultural categories in ritual action, the transformed shaman exhibits this transcendence at all times in his/her very person. As a man who is not a man and a woman who is not a woman, the transvestite shaman transcends Iban notions of maleness and femaleness and brings these opposed, but complementary categories together in their essences. If the *manang* is one who has, to some extent, stepped outside the prestige systems of Iban men and women, separating himself or herself from society by the acquisition of certain spiritual powers, then the *manang bali* exemplifies this transition to the highest degree.

This interpretation is supported by the nature of the various initiation rites to *manang* status (*bebangun*). These express the structural transition, which is deemed to occur, but they also generally articulate, by means of symbolic actions, the cultural content of the transition and the nature of the specific powers, which the rite is thought to confer on the initiate. The reports of initiation to *manang bali* status stress the assumption of women's clothes, but the rites themselves do not otherwise elaborate any skills acquired, which are additional to those of ordinary *manang*. The content of the transition is, therefore, a particular mode of transcendence, a new and more comprehensive expression of the pervasive theme, that the *manang* is deemed capable of manipulating and transcending cultural categories.

Given this interpretation of the *manang bali*, I am, nevertheless, inclined to reject Howell and Bailey's classification (1900:98) of *manang* into three hierarchically ordered grades, of which the *manang bali* was the 'highest rank'. Just as the range of skills attributed to the *manang* is not extended by their initiation to *manang bali* status,

so the ritual practices of the *manang bali* are not significantly different from those of ordinary *manang*. The one report (Richards 1981:236) which says the *manang bali*, when in pursuit of errant souls, go further towards the land of the dead than other *manang*, may be a contemporary *post hoc* explanation of the status, for it is rather unconvincing in the light of other reports to the contrary (Hose and McDougall 1912:ii. 116; Uchibori 1978:212). Furthermore, the lack of a ranking system among the celestial shamans suggests that initiated shamans could elaborate their calling in a variety of ways and were celebrated, not according to type, but on the basis of their individual achievements. If cultures are patterns of ideas and values which cohere, I think we would need stronger evidence than is available, before accepting that there were fixed grades of initiated shamans in a culture, which otherwise rejected hierarchically ranked offices.

Finally, as regards the coherence structures of traditional Iban culture, I have taken the view that coherence lies at the level of consciousness, which for the Iban entailed an orientation to the world in terms of the dialectical interaction between egocentric and sociocentric forces, operating in an analogous fashion in different domains of their experience. I have argued that, in traditional Iban society, just as effective leadership allowed the fulfilment of individual aspirations, so the force of *adat* kept disorder at bay and allowed the community and its component *bilek*-families to prosper. The marriage system prevented dissolution of the social field and gave some substance to the overt ideology of inclusive kinship, by a covert recognition of the gradations from Self to Other within it. It articulated distinctions only to transcend them in its operation, defining then linking categories so

as to enhance fertility according to<sup>a</sup> culturally constructed 'natural order of things'. So too, in the religious domain, shamanism delineated, only to transcend, those distinctions, which Iban religious ideology, with its concept of the separable soul, entailed, but which Iban religious practice otherwise sought to deny. In so doing, it provided one means, by which the Iban could harmonise the multifarious lived experience of individuals with their common aspiration to approach and emulate the gods.

While the Iban espoused a philosophy of individualism, they tempered it with cultural mechanisms limiting the arena in which it could operate. It was, however, those very mechanisms, that provided the essential context, in which the Iban could strive to attain their personal aspirations, thereby giving substance to the overt ideological bias of their culture.

In turning to a shaman, an Iban tacitly acknowledged that in his relationship with the supernatural, he was not sufficient unto himself. At the same time, he accepted the efficacy of actions which took place, not in the 'here and now' of observable experience, but in the unseen quarters of another realm. The shaman (*manang*) had perhaps ceased to be an *Iban*, precisely because he had adopted, in a more thorough-going explicit form, this different orientation to the world around him. No longer pursuing achievement within the prestige system of Iban society, the shaman organised his experience in terms of those spiritual realms posited by Iban religion, towards which he had transcendentalised his consciousness.

Glossary

- adat* customary law
- angat* heated, feverish, infected
- antu* a spirit
- antu buyu* an incubus
- antu koklir* see *koklir*
- antu nulong* a helping spirit
- ayu* a plant-like soul-counterpart or soul-substitute thought to grow on a far away mountain
- bali* to change in form
- batu ilau* a shaman's quartz crystal 'seeing stone'
- batu karas* see *batu ilau*
- bebangun* rites to initiate a shaman
- beburong* to practise augury
- bedara* an offering or sacrifice to supernatural beings
- bedinding* to 'make a protective wall' in a shielding rite
- bejalai* to go on a journey with the intention of acquiring wealth and prestige
- berau* hulled rice
- bilek* the living room of a family's longhouse apartment
- bilek-family* the family group which owns and occupies a longhouse apartment
- bungai* (Layar-Skrang Iban) invisible plant-like soul-counterpart cluster thought to grow at the hearth-post of each *bilek* apartment
- burong* bird, omen
- buyu* (Saribas Iban) the malevolent soul of a post-menopausal woman thought to prey on the souls of the young
- chelap* cool, tranquil, healthy
- dukun* a healer using herbs and/or medicines
- engkerabun* a talisman thought to 'blind' an opponent
- gawai* a religious ritual festival
- gawai amat* 'true', important ritual festivals
- gawai ngar* a women's ritual to prepare for the red-dyeing of cotton threads before they are woven

- gawai sakit* a ritual festival for the sick
- ikat* a form of textile decoration in which the threads are tied for resist dyeing of the pattern before they are woven
- kaban* kith and kin
- kaban mandal* cognatic kin
- kaban tampil* affinal kin
- koklir* the malevolent ghost of a woman who died in childbirth
- lemambang* a bard
- lupong* the medicine box of a shaman
- luput* trance
- manang* a shaman
- manang bali* a transformed, transvestite shaman
- manang mansau* a fully initiated shaman
- manang mata* a novice shaman
- mansau* ripe, cooked
- mata* unripe, raw, uncooked
- nampok* perform a vigil to seek help from supernatural beings
- orang bukai* 'other people' as distinct from cognatic and affinal kin
- orang Panggau* culture heroes attributed supernatural powers
- padi* rice grain in the husk; the rice plant
- pagar api* apparatus which is the centre of the shaman's ritual activity; literally 'fence of fire'
- pelangka* a threshing frame
- pelian* healing rites performed by shamans
- pemali* a ritual prohibition
- pengap* see *timbang*
- pengaruh* a charm
- penghulu* a government appointed leader of an administrative district
- pentik* a carved human effigy used in some shamanic rites
- petara* a god
- piring* an offering of food to the gods or spirits
- pua* a blanket-sized *ikat*-decorated textile used in many Iban rituals
- ruai* the public gallery of a longhouse
- sabang ayu* a croton plant: 'cordyline of longevity' in certain shamanic rites
- sadau* the loft of a longhouse
- saut* healing rites performed by shamans as part of a ritual festival for the sick
- Sebayan* the Land of the Dead

- semangat* a 'soul': the vital force which ensures the life of its owner
- tanju* the open verandah of a longhouse
- timang* a chanted invocation of the gods
- Titi Rawan* the Bridge of Fright leading across a chasm on the way to the Land of the Dead
- tuai* an elder
- tuai burong* an augur who takes auguries on behalf of the longhouse community
- tuai rumah* a longhouse headman
- tuboh* a corporeal entity: the physical person including an individual's body, personality and character

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