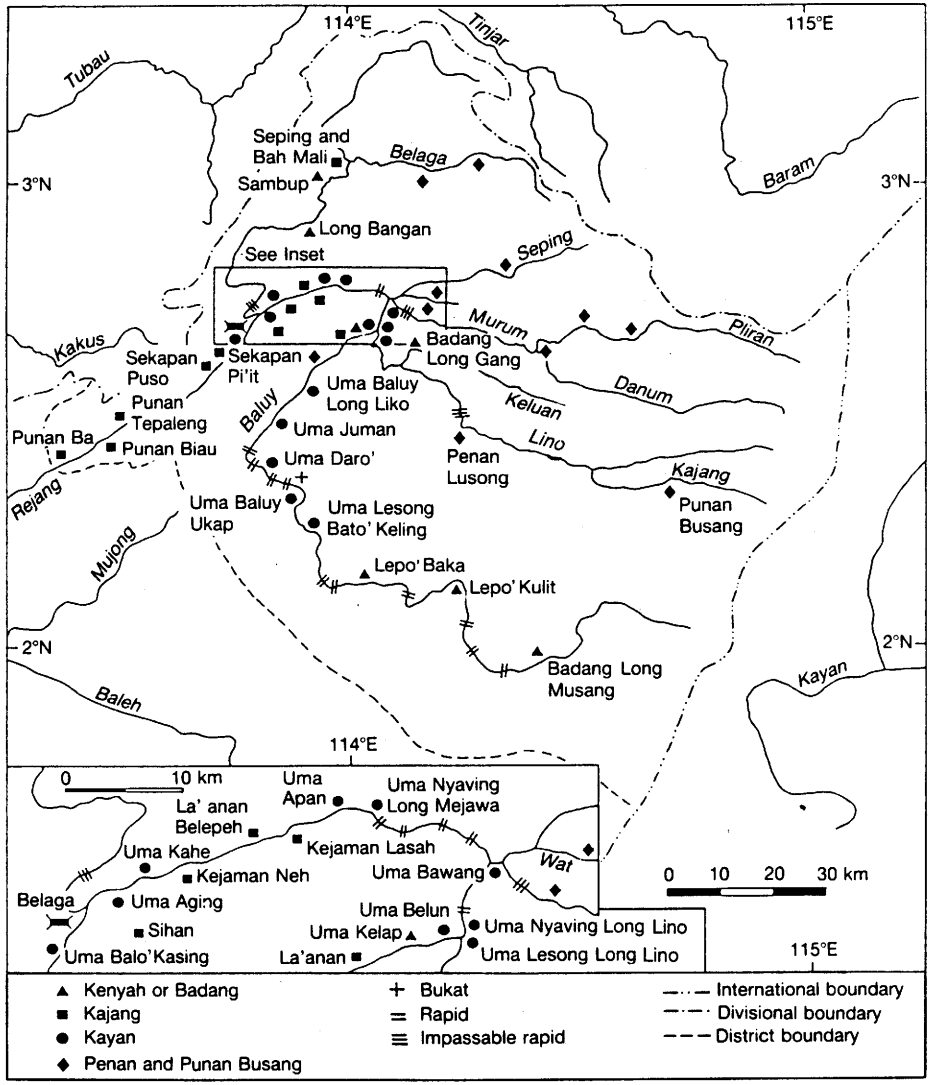

Map 2. The Baluy area in 1971

CHAPTER I

Introduction

This book describes Kayan religion as observed in the village of Uma Bawang (Seventh Division, Sarawak) in the 1970s (Map 2). Kayan social organization was my primary focus during my first fieldwork in the Baluy area in 1970-1972. My dissertation dealt with social organization and most of my publications on central Borneo have had the same focus for twenty years. However, more than half my fieldwork was devoted to religion, in part because the Kayan were keen for me to focus on that topic. Soon after the Second World War, the Kayan had undergone an indigenous religious reform; they felt they had achieved the true, final, religion and they communicated to me their heightened interest in religion.

Until this religious reform, Kayan religion had been an almost seamless part of daily life, a taken-for-granted element of being Kayan. This is still largely the case; however, the success of the reform has encouraged attention to the topic of religion. A terminological contrast is made between the new religion (*adat Bungan*) and the old religion (now called *adat Dipuy*, although it had no name until the *adat Bungan* reform). Because the new religion was still a recent phenomenon at the time of my fieldwork, it and the old religion were frequent subjects of conversation between Kayan and with me; they were eager for me to record it in written form. My use of the 'ethnographic present' to refer to the early 1970s is not meant to connote an image of an unchanging Kayan culture. Given my focus on the historical changes from the old to the new religion, the use of the present avoids ambiguity. Data about unique events are couched in the past tense, for instance much of Chapter II, which describes the shift from *adat Dipuy* to *adat Bungan*.

In writing this ethnography of Kayan religion, I have made only passing reference to the voluminous, and often excellent, general literature on religion. Likewise, I have not attempted comparisons with the religions of other Southeast Asian societies. It would obviously be fruitful to articulate this material with the ethnographic and theoretical literature, but this is not my task here. Compared to the rich literature on Borneo social organization, there is relatively little on Borneo religions; one goal of this monograph is to fill an ethnographic gap to facilitate comparative studies. Much of the available ethnographic material on Borneo religions is too fragmented or is organized in ways which make

comparison difficult. For instance, descriptions of annual ritual cycles are rare and usually sketchy. (At this stage, there is enough material to make a fruitful comparison between Iban and Kayan religions, but this would be another book in itself. In this book, I present comparative aspects in footnotes when it helps comprehension of the Kayan material.)

We live in an era when unexplained facts are disturbing to the reader – at least the anthropological reader – and authors may feel called upon to provide explanations and generalizations. I have sometimes done so; at other times, I have resisted the impulse, especially when several alternative 'explanations' are equally plausible, with nothing to differentiate between them. Some analytical questions could in theory be answered by additional fieldwork, but the ethnographic reality described in this book no longer exists, because the Kayan have changed so radically in the last 20 years. When I visited them in September 1994, they were living in the shadow of a huge hydroelectric project which may wreck their future. In this uncertain context, Kayan religion had lost its salience. At the end of 1995, their territory was in the process of being clear-cut in preparation for the dam, while there were no clear resettlement plans for them.

My reticence to provide explanations has another source. While writing this book, I had the occasion to compare it with a previous analysis of social systems in central Borneo (Rousseau 1990). This has made me more aware of a fundamental difference between religious and social systems. It is easier to understand social systems because they are grounded in technology, demography, and economy which together create a relatively narrow corridor of possibilities. Religious systems are more 'free-floating'. While they may be internally as coherent as social systems, they can exist in relative autonomy from the surrounding social setting. For instance, it is difficult to explain convincingly why the major deities of Kayan religion are women. One could correlate the existence of female deities with the practice of uxorilocality among many (but not all) Kayan, but I am far from convinced that the link is significant. The existing scholarship on world religions adds to my caution. We can see, for instance, that many elements of Christianity are virtually unrelated to the current socio-historical situation and must be understood with reference to societies of 1000 and 2000 years ago. The same presumably applies to Kayan religion, except that our only avenue to the past is comparative, hence beyond the scope of this ethnography.

Furthermore, comparisons shed little light if one lacks a sufficiently large corpus. For instance, the Kayan and their neighbours the Kenyah share a ritual called *dayong*. The Kayan *dayong* is a lengthy affair (sometimes 10 or 12 hours), while the Kenyah *dayong* takes only an hour or two. Kayan and Kenyah priests agree that their *dayong* are essentially the same ritual, with similar outcomes and efficacy. They explain ritual differences solely on the basis of tradition. Frankly, I am at a loss to provide a better explanation, although it is easy to

speculate. The greater length of Kayan rituals might be linked to higher levels of anxiety among the Kayan; it could also be that, when the Kenyah borrowed the *dayong* from the Kayan, they streamlined it. Both explanations might be valid, but they are pure speculation. My reluctance to engage in speculative interpretations has another source. In writing this monograph, I have felt an enormous responsibility to describe a disappearing tradition as accurately as I could, and I have been reluctant to offer doubtful generalizations which might detract from the quality of the observations.

What is Kayan religion?

Without a central authority or single sacred text, there is no reason why Kayan religion should form a uniform whole. There are minor variations from village to village in the same way as there is dialectal variation; despite this, Kayan religion shows remarkable homogeneity throughout central Borneo. When priests officiate in other communities, they follow their own rituals which may differ from those of the host village; these differences are noted without concern by the participants. The rituals of the old religion varied from one longhouse to the next, while *adat Bungan* is more homogeneous. This is hardly surprising, because *adat Dipuy* developed over many generations, while *adat Bungan* is a recent development. In *adat Dipuy*, ritual variations were sometimes present within villages. For instance, the village of Uma Bawang, where most of my fieldwork took place, was composed of three sections, (originally three distinct communities which coalesced for demographic and strategic reasons): Uma Bawang proper, Uma Daro', and Laham.[1] I recorded only a few of these variations as I focused on religion in a single community.

My focus on religion in Uma Bawang is pragmatic; I do not assume that its religious practices form a distinct system. For one thing, there is religious interaction with other communities, such as when priests from other villages are invited to officiate. Furthermore, the inhabitants of Uma Bawang do not

[1] Uma Daro' is an offshoot of a village of the same name, now in the upper Baluy area (Uma Daro' Bato' Keling), but this offshoot is said to have been with Uma Bawang since the migration from the Apo Kayan two hundred years ago. The Laham are presumably related to the people of the same name in the Mahakam area. The memory of their first alliance with Uma Bawang has been lost. In 1938, they lived in three separate buildings; in 1945, Laham moved in with Uma Bawang and Uma Daro' followed them in 1950. When a new longhouse was built in 1955, the sequence of apartments reflected the division, with Uma Bawang occupying the upriver part of the longhouse, Uma Daro' and Laham the downriver end (Rousseau 1974:210-11). By 1970, only three domestic units identified themselves as Laham; they knew very little about their old rituals. Uma Daro' still kept some of its distinctiveness. Despite this ritual variation, some villages shared essentially the same *adat*, for instance the communities of Uma Juman, Uma Apan, and Uma Baluy Ukap in the middle Baluy area. In *adat Bungan*, ritual variation between villages is still present, but this does not create ritual boundaries. When priests from other villages use their own rituals, this may be noted with mild curiosity by bystanders, but it is not a matter of great importance.

have a complete understanding of their religion (which is indeed what one would expect from followers of any religion). The Kayan are well aware of ritual variations from one village to another and from one ethnic category to another. On a trip to the bazaar of Belaga, our boat passed by a Kejaman village and a travelling companion took this opportunity to tell her ten-year-old daughter about Kejaman funeral rituals and their practice of secondary burial.[2] When a man from the neighbouring Kayan village of Uma Nyaving married an Uma Bawang woman, elders discussed the differences in wedding rituals between the two communities. They agreed that these differences were slight and they organized a wedding ritual which included features from both traditions. The distinction between system and practice can sometimes be complex. Thus, the people of the Baluy area all agree that secondary burial is characteristic of the Kajang and absent among the Kayan. However, a few Baluy Kayan chiefs underwent secondary burial because they had Kajang ancestors. Thus, individuals can participate in more than one system. Some people are more interested in religion than others. Not surprisingly, priests fall in this category; so do many aristocrats (*maren*). One day, Lake' Ivak, a herbal curer, and Avun, the senior priest, bemoaned people's undue concern with economic pursuits. 'Recently, people were endlessly discussing the price of fish; earlier, they talked about rattan and trade with the nomads', said Avun. 'What's worse', replied Lake' Ivak, 'is that even some old people like Lake' Anyi' show the same attitude'.

Western history has fashioned religion into a separate institution. This is not the case in central Borneo. I describe 'Kayan religion', but the contrast between religious and profane does not have the same salience as in contemporary Western society. Religion pervades ordinary life, which does not mean that the Kayan are particularly 'religious', but it would be impossible to study religion without placing it in the context of Kayan life. Daily, annual, and life cycles form the framework of this monograph.

There is no Kayan term for 'religion', but *adat* (or *adet*) is an approximation. The term is a borrowing from Malay (and ultimately, from Arabic), but is now an intrinsic part of Kayan thought. '*Adat*' covers religious rituals as well as non-religious forms of socio-culturally regulated behaviour. Good manners are an element of *adat*, as are legal principles and precedents which form part of Kayan jurisprudence. '*Adat*' could be translated as 'socially-established activity'. It also refers to 'usual behaviour', both for individuals and collectivities: it can be said of an individual's peculiar habit that 'it is his *adat*'; a Kayan could also say that 'it is the *adat* of Chinese to be financially successful'. '*Adat*' covers a

[2] In secondary burial, the bones of the deceased are cleaned and placed in another container after the flesh has rotted away, sometimes many years afterwards. In the Baluy area, the Kayan have first-hand knowledge of such rituals: when the Sekapan chief Puso carried out a secondary burial for his wife Layo, people from all villages came to participate.

wider field than 'religion'. On the other hand, because it focuses on action, it does not include religious beliefs *per se*. Another term, '*lali*', can be translated as 'religious ceremony'; a *lali* is an organized, public, ritual which follows an elaborate series of specifications. However, '*lali*' does not apply to the simple rituals of daily life.[3] Kayan religion is also structured by a social division of labour: to a significant extent, Kayan religion is the activity of specialists who obtain payment for their services.

The contrast between *adat* and *agama*, present in several Indonesian minority religions, did not exist in Uma Bawang in 1970. In Indonesia, *agama* refers to 'world religions presumed to be monotheistic, to possess a written scripture, and to transcend ethnic boundaries' (Atkinson 1983:688), in practice: Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. In Indonesia, these religions are overseen and financially helped by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. By contrast, what we would call local religions or minority religions are *adat* or *kepercayaan*, 'beliefs'. They are not officially sanctioned and indeed are perceived as potentially subversive. To persist, these religions have tried to fit the mould of *agama* and be recognized by the state. Some have been successful, such as Kaharingan, the religion of central Kalimantan (Weinstock 1987) and the *aluk to dolo* of the Toraja in South Sulawesi.

By contrast, in 1970, Malaysia had not attempted to bring about religious change in remote areas of Sarawak; the middle and upper Baluy regions were far removed from outside interference. The British rulers of the independent principality of Sarawak, who established their power over the Baluy area towards the end of the nineteenth century, had a policy of preserving local cultures, particularly those of the interior. At that time and during the British colonial period after the Second World War, the Baluy area remained one of the most neglected regions, because of its remote location and sparse population. This policy did not change when Sarawak became part of Malaysia in 1963. The region was a 'restricted area' which one could not visit without a special permit. Access to the middle Baluy was further limited by a series of rapids, especially the infamous Bakun rapid immediately downriver of Uma Bawang. At the time of fieldwork, the people of Uma Bawang did not clearly recognize themselves as part of Sarawak, let alone Malaysia. In 1970, the *adat Bungan* reform was still new and the Kayan lived in a world which they could comprehend. They had a

[3] These brief glosses do not cover the complete range of '*adat*' and '*lali*'. One can refer to those who practise aristocratic rituals as *daha' aleng lali aya'*, 'those who [use] the high rituals' (see Chapters VI and VII). Also, there is now a tendency to compartmentalize '*adat*' into distinct sections. This is partly a consequence of the Bungan reform, which is contrasted with the old *adat* and to Christianity. Also, because of colonial and post-colonial rule, the Kayan are beginning to distinguish law and religion (see also Whittier 1978:107). Other terminological usages are becoming fashionable. 'Bungan', which is the name of the central deity of the new religion, also means 'to carry out a religious ritual', such as *'kame' Bungan'*, 'we are performing a ritual'.

local perception of their world. Theirs was a local religion adapted to a local context. By now, their lives have changed radically and elements of the Indonesian contrast between *agama* and *adat* are becoming more relevant.

The people of central Borneo shared many religious practices with each other and with other indigenous groups of Borneo, such as ritual headhunting, animal omens, and a multiplicity of taboos. For instance, the link between mockery of animals and petrification is found throughout Borneo (see Needham 1964).[4] Some religious features may be specific to central Borneo without being present among all groups: neither the Kenyah nor the Kayan ate the clouded leopard (Hose and McDougall 1912, II:72, 77), but other central Borneo groups did. The prohibition on eating deer is found among the Kayan and the Segai-Modang (Von Dewall 1849:99, Tillema 1939:140), while the Aoheng eat deer (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:277). Aristocratic Kenyah did not eat or kill deer or wild cattle, while Kenyah commoners might do so if they cooked the animal away from the longhouse (Hose and McDougall 1912, II:71). The Aoheng inherited from their Pin ancestors the prohibition against the use of ironwood; the Mahakam-Kayan adopted it from their Pin slaves (Sellato 1986:293, 303). This prohibition was also present among the Batang Lupar [Iban] of the Kapuas (see Bouman 1924:186). Some characteristics of Kayan religion set it apart from other central Borneo religions. The old religion had an unusually large number of taboos and prohibitions, and its ceremonies were elaborate and noticeably expensive (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, II:486). This may be correlated with the fact that Kayan society had more marked social cleavages and greater economic exploitation than its central Borneo neighbours. According to Banks (1940:84), the Kayan show greater anxiety about religious prohibitions than do the Kenyah.

The remainder of this introductory chapter describes the fieldwork and provides a brief sketch of Kayan society in order to place Kayan religion in its social context.[5] Chapter II describes the similarities and differences between the old and new Kayan religions. The two religions share a core of beliefs and practices, and the following chapters document both traditions. The Kayan distinguish the rituals of daily life from the liturgies which constitute sacred time. Chapter III deals with the former, while Chapters VI to IX focus on the latter. When the Kayan talk about religion, they focus more on rituals than on beliefs. However, it would be difficult to understand rituals without reference to Kayan beliefs, and this is the object of Chapter IV. Chapter V looks at ritual specialists, particularly priests and shamans. Religious specialization is an important feature of Kayan religion and some of its complexity derives from the presence of trained specialists.

4 There is much more literature on the social organization of central Borneo than its religious practices; nonetheless, some excellent publications exist, in particular Elshout (1923, 1926) on the Lepo' Tau Kenyah and Peter Metcalf's detailed and extensive study of Berawan religion. For a bibliography of central Borneo religions, see Rousseau (1988:164-71).

5 For a more detailed description of Kayan social organization, see Rousseau 1974, 1977, 1979, 1983, 1990, 1991.

Through the communal rituals of the annual cycle, Kayan religion structures time and marks the boundaries of the community (Chapter VI). The domestic unit is the basic socio-economic grouping of the Kayan village; its health and prosperity are maintained by the frequent performance of the *dayong* ritual (Chapter VII). Chapter VIII, which describes curing and protective rituals, is largely an appendix to Chapter VII, because many curing rituals take place in the framework of the *dayong*. Chapter IX describes the rituals of the life cycle, especially funerals. As with other Borneo religions, the Kayan give much attention to the management of death and the orderly separation of life and death.

Fieldwork

This book is based on two years of fieldwork (August 1970 – April 1972 and June – July 1974) in the Baluy area of Sarawak, most of it in the village of Uma Bawang. After my first fieldwork, I wrote a preliminary manuscript on the annual ritual cycle, the *dayong*, life cycle rituals, omens, taboos, and myths of origin. I also translated Baling Avun's (1961) manuscript on Kayan religion. In the 1974 field trip, I filled gaps which had become apparent from this first draft.

The whole fieldwork was carried out in Kayan. Even during the initial period when I was learning the language, I used very little English or Malay. Nobody in Uma Bawang spoke more than a few words of English and my Malay was limited; in any case, few Uma Bawang people had more than a smattering of bazaar Malay. With very few exceptions, I was free to attend rituals and did so systematically. I could ask questions while rituals were in progress and directly afterwards. I observed two annual cycles; other rituals, especially the *dayong*, were recorded on numerous occasions. Both the old and the new religions were common topics of conversation among the Kayan themselves and with me. I recorded prayers and myths of origin and discussed rituals and texts with religious specialists. Lay people were forthcoming with information. Not only were they more than willing to answer questions, they also initiated conversations on religion because they cared that I should develop an accurate understanding of the subject. As I was twenty-three years old in 1970, people had no reluctance in teaching me what they knew and correcting errors of knowledge and behaviour. Age hierarchy is well established among the Kayan and my youth was much more significant than my identity as a member of a prestigious ethnic category. My interest in religion was also known in other communities and the topic came up regularly when I visited other villages.

While Kayan social organization was the primary focus of my fieldwork (Rousseau 1974), I had planned at the outset to gather material on religion if

possible. This turned out to be considerably easier than I had expected. While the people of Uma Bawang had no objection to my observing their social life, they were eager for their religion to be recorded for posterity and they were insistent I should make it a major focus of my work. Rather than meeting reticence, I received constant support in studying Kayan religion. Early in my fieldwork, this encouraging attitude was stressed at the occasion of a funeral. With my Western notions of decorum, I was sitting quietly in the background, taking unobtrusive notes. After a while, a member of the bereaved family asked me why I wasn't doing my work properly. Shouldn't I be taking pictures? Shouldn't I get closer to the priest to hear and see clearly? My experience was different from Nieuwenhuis's (1900, I:56), who found it difficult to get the Kayan to talk about their beliefs. He complained that, whenever he brought up the subject, they seized the first opportunity to go away. Our different experiences may be due in part to the eagerness of my Kayan neighbours to share their *adat Bungan* and to the fact that I spent two years in one community.

While I had direct access to *adat Bungan*, it took longer for me to gain knowledge of *adat Dipuy*. Uma Bawang converted to *adat Bungan* around 1950; by 1970, all full-fledged priests of the old religion had passed away. Two informants (Avun Ngo and Avun Imang) were apprentice-priests in the 1940s and they had officiated at *adat Dipuy* ceremonies. I obtained much of my information about the old religion from elderly people, who were very interested in talking about the topic. Some accounts were clear but, after twenty years, memories were sometimes vague and descriptions confusing. One informant, Bulan, was fortunately able to provide detailed and cogent accounts which illuminated the fragmentary information obtained from other sources. Some features of *adat Dipuy* were described repeatedly by many informants, in particular the taboos and auguries. I developed a comprehensible picture of *adat Dipuy* during the last months of my first fieldwork and gathered additional information in 1974. By then, I had read Baling Avun's manuscript (1961) and parts of Nieuwenhuis (1904-07) which drew my attention to some topics which had previously eluded me. The fact that *adat Bungan* is a reform of *adat Dipuy* (rather than a wholesale rejection of the old religion) helped to keep its memory alive, especially as the Kayan were fond of comparing the two systems. Finally, although Uma Bawang had converted to Bungan twenty years before my fieldwork, other villages retained *adat Dipuy* longer and my informants were in episodic, but direct, contact with the old religion until the 1960s.

From previous fieldwork in the Canadian Arctic, I had become only too aware of the extent to which questions predetermine, or at least constrain, the answers. To avoid this problem in my study of Kayan social organization, I very rarely interviewed people on subjects of my choosing, but rather waited for topics to crop up in conversations; I then inserted myself in the conversation. Except for such data as genealogies and censuses, for which a

structured interview is essential for the ethnographer (if somewhat irritating for the informants), this was a very rewarding approach, as it gave better access to Kayan perceptions of their world. It also brought out various 'inconsistencies' and differences of views which would have remained undiscovered in interviews. I used the same approach for religion but, in the second year of my first fieldwork and in my second fieldwork, I also set up informal interviews with informants who had by then become friends to clarify points of detail. Except for these interviews and my conversations with Avun Ngo and Avun Imang in 1974, exchanges on any topic, including religion, were brief, rarely lasting more than fifteen minutes. It was necessary to return to the same subjects several times with the same and different informants because most people found it difficult to give clear, complete, and sequential accounts of ceremonies, hence direct observation of rituals was an essential aspect of the fieldwork.

I obtained information on Kayan religion from a large number of people and from direct observation of rituals; my task was made easier by the fact that Uma Bawang had more priests than other Kayan communities, and several lay people were also knowledgeable about religion. A few individuals deserve special mention. Avun Ngo (henceforth Avun) was the senior priest (*dayong aya'*) of Uma Bawang. My guess is that he was in his early fifties. Although an aristocrat, he lacked the sociability and polish which are common to this stratum. He was a shy, retiring, and sometimes brusque man, whose main purpose in life was to develop and practise his skills as a religious specialist; he was committed to developing his knowledge of Kayan religion and its variations. He learnt his trade from Lake' Lirong, the previous *dayong aya'* of Uma Bawang, a brilliant, ambitious, and outgoing man, who had played a major role in the conversion to *adat Bungan*. Avun was not very good at explaining things and he easily became flustered, but he knew his subject and cared that I should understand it accurately. During my first fieldwork, he became tongue-tied when I tried to use a tape recorder in private sessions with him, and I abandoned the practice; however, he did not mind if I took notes as we talked. By 1974, he was perfectly willing to be taped; also, by then I had a discreet cassette recorder. Recording technology was now more familiar to Avun because he had travelled to Kuching to record Kayan myths of origin for the Kayan service of Radio Malaysia-Sarawak. In 1974, Avun was suffering from a painful bout of elephantiasis which made it difficult for him to walk. As virtually the whole community was living at the farms, he was lonely and bored in the longhouse and was delighted to have someone with whom he could talk for hours. There was an eleven-day stretch during which we spent most of the day together, and this made it possible to deal with many topics in great detail. The tapes of our conversations allowed me to ponder some points which I would have missed if I had relied only on note-taking.

Another important informant was my next-door neighbour Avun Imang, an

early convert to Bungan. He was a kind, relaxed person, less knowledgeable than Avun, but an excellent teacher, and he helped clarify a number of points which I had previously discussed with other informants. He was in his late forties. Just before I returned in 1974, the floor of his apartment had collapsed and he moved to the room I had occupied in 1970-1972, so I stayed with him and his family. In the evenings, as I listened to the recordings of my conversations with Avun Ngo, he joined me and provided additional information, comments, clarifications, and comparisons. This was of particular interest because he was from Uma Bawang proper, while Avun Ngo was from the Uma Daro' section (see note 1).

A few others must be mentioned. I have already noted that Bulan Ngo was an important informant for *adat Dipuy* rituals. She was Avun Ngo's younger sister (in her late forties). Although a Christian, she had maintained a strong interest in the old Kayan religion; she was one of the most intelligent people I met in the area. Uku Hlong and her husband Lake' Ajang (in their late and early sixties respectively) were not particularly knowledgeable about religion, but my close relationship with them gave me an entry into the way in which religion was lived and felt at a personal level, especially because they often took opposite views. For instance, Lake' Ajang thought the Bungan reform had been perverted by aristocrats and priests when they reinstated elements of the old religion, while Uku Hlong retained a much more positive view of *adat Dipuy*. She provided me with interesting fragments of the old rituals and the festivities associated to them.

While I did my best to fade into the background, people's perceptions of me affected the information I obtained. My Kayan name (Lirong Dale') made it easier for me to be a student of Kayan religion, because 'Lirong' is a priestly name. (It was bestowed on me when I attended a *dayong* in the Kenyah village of Uma Kelap at the beginning of fieldwork. However, the Kenyah spirits were considerate enough to give me a Kayan name.) At the beginning of fieldwork, in response to persistent enquiries, I indicated I did not practise any religion. This was well received because it meant I was not Christian and certainly not a Christian missionary, but it raised questions about my motives. Why was I spending so much time studying Kayan religion, if not to become a priest myself and bring the Bungan faith to Europeans? I did my best to clarify my ethnographic goals, but some people persisted in seeing me as a convert to Bungan. My disclaimer did not change their opinion, because, they said, Europeans are known to be deep thinkers who are discreet about their intentions. On the other hand, most people seemed to accept my stated goal at face value. My observation of rituals was similar to the activity of a priest-in-training. Towards the end of my fieldwork, as I was sitting besides Avun Ngo during a *dayong* ceremony, a member of the sponsoring household gave me a bead bracelet, the basic payment for a priest; this made me the junior officiant in the ritual, to Avun's quiet delight (and mine).

When possible, I recorded ceremonies but was sometimes hampered by technical problems: high humidity is not kind to mechanical devices and my first two tape recorders rapidly broke down. The third one, though a sturdier Uher, worked fitfully. In addition, the noise level of Kayan longhouses was such that the quality of recordings was often poor. I sometimes enlisted the help of a priest to listen to recordings with me and make comments; however, the technology was somewhat intimidating. Small cassette tape recorders were not available in 1970-1972 and the large reel-to-reel recorders were a bulky, alien, presence; I used them only with those who were not disturbed by them. There were no technical or social problems with photography, and I took many slides of rituals. People were comfortable with my taking pictures; they did not mind the flash, without which it would have been impossible to take pictures in the longhouse (I was using 10 or 25 ASA films, the best available technology then!).

In 1988, I made a brief visit to Uma Bawang during which I attended a *dayong* ritual and discussed religious matters with a priest. I could not detect any innovation since 1974, but I was there much too briefly to make any detailed enquiries.

This book is based on fieldwork, but some published and manuscript sources provide additional information. Foremost among these is Nieuwenhuis's magnum opus, *Quer durch Borneo* (1904-07). This account of his expeditions to central Borneo in 1894, 1896-1897, and 1898-1900 includes descriptions of Kayan religion, especially in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 8 of vol. I, and Chapters 5 and 7 of vol. II. He describes the Kayan of the Mendalam as well as the Busang and 'Kayan' of the Mahakam. The Mendalam Kayan are closely related to the Baluy Kayan. The Busang speak the same language as the Baluy Kayan and have the same origin. The group of the Mahakam called 'Kayan' also has the same origin, but they adopted the language of Barito-speaking groups whom they subjugated (see Rousseau 1990:15, 62-3). Nonetheless, their priests use Busang as the religious language (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, II:107). Nieuwenhuis's earlier book *In centraal Borneo* (1900) covers only the expeditions of 1894 and 1896-1897; information on religion is found mostly in Chapters 7 and 9. It contains some photos which are absent in *Quer durch Borneo*. Nieuwenhuis's first-hand descriptions are excellent; what he learnt from informants is sometimes less clear. Furthermore, Nieuwenhuis met with some opposition when he attempted to learn about religion (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:127-8, 163-4) and, given this was only one of his interests, he did extremely well.

Nieuwenhuis's descriptions are complemented by the very valuable notes of H. Sombroek (n.d. 1), a Roman Catholic missionary in the Mahakam region from the late 1940s to the mid 1970s. His notes are based on observations and discussions with Busang informants through the years; each item is dated and

the name and village of the informant is noted when relevant. Hose and McDougall's *The pagan tribes of Borneo* (1912) contains useful information, but it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between Kayan and Kenyah whom Hose occasionally conflates. Hose relied primarily on aristocratic informants and seemed to be unaware of some commoner rituals. Also, Hose's interpretations are doubtful and his descriptions of rituals rather superficial. In 1961, Baling Avun, the chief of the village of Uma Aging, wrote a 61-page typescript in Kayan (Baling Avun 1961) about the old and new Kayan religions. This fascinating manuscript, which I have quoted extensively here, will form the object of a separate publication.

Kayan society

The Kayan are swidden agriculturalists; rice is the main crop. After one year of cultivation, land is left fallow for ten to thirty years, during which it is covered by secondary jungle. Fields, secondary jungle, and rivers are the usual environments of the Kayan. They also venture into the primary jungle to hunt, gather forest produce, and trade with nomads. They obtain most animal proteins from fishing and hunting, although they raise pigs and chickens for ritual purposes. They generally prefer to act as middlemen between nomadic collectors and downriver traders rather than collect jungle produce themselves. For a few individuals, trade in jungle produce provides a significant income.

Rivers are axes of settlement and travel. Village sites are selected so that the river bank is suitable for mooring boats, bathing, washing, and getting water. Longhouses are imposing structures of ironwood which foster a high level of social interaction, but little privacy (Figure 1). Longhouses are on stilts, parallel to the river; they are divided longitudinally into two sections: on the river side is a gallery, which is a public area; apartments are on the other side. Logs with carved steps provide access to the longhouse; each entrance serves several households. At the time of fieldwork, there was an average of ten people per apartment; in the Baluy region, communities typically had a population of one to three hundred people living in a single longhouse. In daily life, a community is an isolate, although there are relations between neighbouring villages.

The longhouse is not only a residential arrangement, but the framework of social life; it plays a more important role than kinship in the social organization. Kinship is cognatic, with a very simple terminology; the contrast between consanguines and affines is not emphasized. The Kayan feel that relatives should not be favoured to the detriment of the community. This is clearly expressed in the management of agricultural cooperation teams which include members of distinct domestic units. These teams are not organized on the basis of kinship; their membership changes by design to guarantee that people cooperate with as many members of the community as possible. There is great insistence on

communal harmony. Quarrels between village members are not allowed to escalate: elders or the chief summon everyone concerned to a meeting in which the quarrel is analysed in minute detail and resolved. The desire for harmony is also evident among children: in two years, I never witnessed a quarrel between children (see Lumholtz 1920:73).

Tasks are distributed according to gender and age. Children willingly help their parents and look after younger siblings. Adult men perform all work related to wood: they clear the jungle for fields, cut trees for timber, canoes and firewood, and erect buildings. They make all tools and appliances, including those used by women, and do all metal work. They hunt, fish, and cut up large game. Likewise, it is the men who go on trips to gather jungle produce and trade with nomads. Adult women pound rice, prepare and cook food (men do so only on jungle trips), grow and process tobacco, collect foodstuff in the secondary jungle, and catch small fish in streams with hand-nets. They gather snails to make lime for betel plugs. They sew clothes and make beadwork decorations and tattoos. Women wake up around 6 am and start cooking rice. Men rise soon afterwards and catch fish for breakfast if there is no meat left from the day before. Except for rice cultivation, male activities involve a higher degree of cooperation than women's work. Some tasks are performed in part by men, in part by women. Men pare rattan and make most baskets and all basket straps. Women weave mats, headbands, and women's baskets with rattan prepared by their husbands. Dogs are fed by men and chickens by women, and pigs mainly by women or old men.

Cultivation is the main activity. The felling of trees is a male task, but a few young women help cut the underbrush. Men alone set fire to the dried swiddens. The division of work is very definite for sowing: men dibble holes while women and adolescents of both genders deposit seeds in the holes. Men and women participate in the weeding and harvest, with a slight preponderance of women in these activities. In the past, weeding was primarily a female task; at that time, men were busy building fences around the fields, a practice which has disappeared in recent years. Nowadays, most men participate in weeding; a few men devote this period to other tasks, such as building boats or trading with nomads.

Gender differentiation is emphasized in a number of ways. Women are tattooed extensively on the arms and legs according to specific, culturally established patterns which also indicate stratum ascription (Plate 13). By contrast, men may or may not be tattooed and they have a wide choice of patterns. Men have a hole punched in the shell of the ears in addition to holes in their lobes; their earrings are lighter than the women's – when they wear them at all – and do not distend the earlobe to the same extent. Some men have the glans of the penis pierced, so that they can insert a rod before intercourse (Chapter IX). Some men still sport the traditional Kayan haircut: hair on the side of the head

is shaved in a straight diagonal line above the ears (Plate 12), the hair at the back is allowed to grow long (Plate 14). Other men have adopted a 'modern' haircut (Plate 3). Women have long hair. Sometimes, they let it hang down, but they often wear a rattan or cloth headband to fold up their hair so it does not impede them in their activities (Plates 7 and 13). Young women wear pewter or brass earrings (Plate 7); older women do not wear them on a regular basis because they pay less attention to their appearance. Except for sun-hats, which men and women put on when they leave the longhouse (Plates 4 and 6), men normally wear no head gear, but some of them don rattan headbands on special occasions. In recent years, the Kayan have been buying a new kind of rattan cap made by the Kenyah, which is spray-painted white (Plates 16 and 21). These are worn both by men and women and, like other headgear, they are freely borrowed by neighbours. Other items of decoration are shared between men and women, in particular necklaces (Plates 9 and 16). These necklaces are assembled in a specific way. At the front is a tassel, usually made of tiny beads sown together. This is attached to a set of yellow beads which have little value; around the neck are multi-coloured beads, each type of which has a name. Some of these beads are very costly. Men wear them on special occasions; women, especially young women who care about their appearance, often wear them in the longhouse when they are not engaged in a strenuous activity. Young boys and girls also wear necklaces of cheap beads without a tassel or a contrast between yellow and multi-coloured beads. Men used to wear loincloths; except for a few old men, they now do so almost only at the occasion of the headhunting ritual (Plate 10). They usually wear store-bought shirts and shorts. Men wear plain or plaid shorts; they go bare-chested or wear shirts or singlets. Women wear sarongs, which they fold at the waist if they are wearing a long-sleeved shirt, or over their breasts if they are not. Men wear sarongs at home. With the increased availability of store-bought clothes, there is greater variety in dress-styles. The gender-based division of labour is also relevant in social gatherings: when there is a meeting in a room, food and drinks are served by men and women of the apartment, as well as girls from other households; when the event takes place on the gallery, young men are more likely to do the service.

Religion provides further differentiation between men and women; in particular, men are considered to have stronger souls than women. Among the Kayan, drawings and carvings (*hudo'*) have power; only men may carve and make drawings (although women use patterns drawn by men for bead patterns or tattoos). The religious differentiation of genders is interesting because, compared with most societies, central Borneo shows relatively little sexual inequality and no segregation of the sexes (Rousseau 1991). Patterns of daily interaction do not overemphasize gender differences. Virginity is not valued: it is acceptable for unmarried young men and women to have romantic attachments and sexual relations. There are no formal constraints to social interaction between adolescents and adults of the opposite sex; they join freely in all kinds of conversations and talk about the same subjects. Other factors which favour gender equality are the predominance of uxorilocality, which gives an advantage to women, and the de-emphasis (compared to other Borneo groups) of headhunting. The importance of stratum differentiation in Kayan society further limits the possibility of gender inequality: *maren* of both genders play an equal role in leadership. At the commoner level, however, there are more influential men than women. I will return to the relationship between religion and gender differences in Chapter III. It is sufficient to note here that the religious differentiation of genders does not derive from a social gender inequality.

People treat respectfully those who are of their parents' or grandparents' generations. The principle of parental authority is also marked in the symbolic description of the village chief as 'our father and mother' (*taman, hinan kame'*). Seniority within a generation is not marked and the Kayan kinship terminology does not distinguish between older and younger siblings. People of the same generation are viewed as equals.

Baluy Kayan society is divided into four strata, the *maren* (ruling estate), *hipuy* (or *hipuy ok*, lower aristocrats), *panyin* (commoners) and *dipen* (slaves), with the *panyin* forming about 70% of the population and the other strata 10% each. The *hipuy, panyin,* and *dipen* carry out corvées for the ruling stratum. At each phase of the agricultural cycle (felling, sowing, weeding, and harvest), the chiefly stratum is entitled to one day of corvée from every household. The chiefs' farms are not larger than the commoners'; the aim of corvées is not to give the aristocrats more rice, but to save them time and exertion. Corvées do not provide all the necessary labour and the work is completed by aristocratic women and slaves and, in small villages, by *maren* men as well. These four strata are regrouped in two ritual levels: the 'good people' (*kelunan jia*) comprise the *maren* and *hipuy*, while the *panyin* and *dipen* are the 'bad people' (*kelunan ji'ek*).[6] Traditionally, the village was the largest unit which automatically had a chief. Nonetheless, supra-local leaders and a regional political organization were present.

The maintenance of distinct strata requires stratum endogamy in the ruling estate, which calls for locally exogamous marriages: aristocrats can rarely expect to find spouses of their own stratum within their village. The Kayan share the same stratification system as their Kajang and Kenyah neighbours. In *maren* marriages, stratum identity is more important than ethnic identity. In the same way, adoptions between aristocratic families have been frequent and

6 In ritual contexts, the *kelunan jia* are commonly referred to as *hipuy* and the *kelunan ji'ek* as *panyin*. I have discussed elsewhere (Rousseau 1979) the significance of this polysemy. In a ritual context, a synonym for *kelunan jia* is *daha' aleng lali aya'*, 'those of the high ritual'.

these are not restricted by ethnic differences. Among commoners, however, inter-village marriages are uncommon.

The Kayan place their origin in the upper Kayan river area (or Apo Kayan; see Map 1). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they migrated to the Baluy (or upper Rejang), the Baram, the Mendalam (a tributary of the Kapuas), and the Mahakam. Except in the Mahakam region, they are called 'Kayan'. In the Mahakam, they are known as 'Busang' or 'Bahau'.[7] The Kayan, Busang, and Kayanic Bahau numbered about 25,000 in 1980. Two Kayan groups migrated to the Baluy region independently of each other and they fought each other for supremacy. Uma Bawang belonged to the losing faction and part of the community migrated to the Baram river area. Despite this early defeat, Uma Bawang has remained one of the three politically prominent villages in the Baluy area (along with Uma Aging and Uma Juman).

The Baluy area remained outside colonial control until the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1842, James Brooke, formerly in the service of the East India Company, persuaded the Sultan of Brunei to name him Rajah of Sarawak (then the area around Kuching, the present-day state capital). Brooke continued to extend his domain at the expense of Brunei and eventually made himself independent of the latter. At first, Brooke's power was concentrated in coastal areas. In 1859, two officers of the Sarawak government were murdered in Kanowit in the lower reaches of the Rejang river. The perpetrators took refuge upriver and Kayan chiefs refused Rajah Brooke's demand to hand them over. A large punitive expedition was organized in 1863, with about 10,000 men (Hose and McDougall 1912, II:260), mainly Iban. It wreaked havoc in the Baluy area below the Bakun rapids and Kajang villages bore the brunt of the invasion. The attackers looted and burned villages, took captives and head trophies, but they failed to capture the murderers who fled further upriver. The impending menace of a second campaign persuaded the Kayan chiefs to surrender them. The so-called Great Kayan Expedition demonstrated the power of Rajah Brooke but did not leave a permanent administration. However, it halted the downriver expansion of the Kayan and gave unwitting encouragement to Iban raiders. The Baluy Kayan came under Brooke rule during the residency of H. Brooke Low in 1882 through a form of indirect rule. Low gave the Malay title of *pengarah* to four regional chiefs, one of whom was the ruler of Uma Bawang. A fort was erected in Belaga in 1884 and Malay traders settled around it (Low 1884:39-40). Because of its inaccessibility, the Baluy area remained a peripheral

[7] One group of the Mahakam is called 'Kayan'. They are the first Kayan migrants from the Apo Kayan. Upon their arrival in the Mahakam, they enslaved a local group, the Pin, who belonged to the linguistic group of Kalimantan Tengah; these Kayan took the language of the Pin. Nonetheless, they retained the same religion as the other Kayan, as is evident from the works of Nieuwenhuis. To avoid confusion, I will refer to them as 'Mahakam-Kayan'. In 1980, they numbered about 1,500.

area throughout the Brooke regime and the British colonial period (1945-1963). In the 1970s, it remained the most dreaded assignment for civil servants because of its remoteness and lack of amenities.

The main effect of European rule over central Borneo was the disappearance of headhunting and warfare between 1910 and 1925. In Sarawak, the upper Rejang was the last region to be affected by modernization. At the end of the British colonial period, some villages received dispensaries and schools and this process continued after Sarawak became part of Malaysia. In 1970, only a minority of children had had any schooling; a handful of them had gone on to secondary school downriver in Kapit. Slavery still existed, although I did not hear of a slave being bought or sold after 1963. Dispensaries provided only basic medical services, but this was sufficient to reduce infant mortality significantly, along with an effective anti-malarial program.

The insertion of Sarawak into Malaysia brought other social changes. Party politics were introduced. In 1970, the workings of the new political system were still fairly mysterious to the people of the Baluy and this allowed the aristocrats to keep power. Through regular programmes in Kayan, Radio Malaysia-Sarawak attempted to foster modernization. Although a few villagers owned transistor radios, people paid little attention to the programmes. They were disconcerted because the programmes were in the Baram Kayan dialect, which they found unfamiliar. They ignored all information on such topics as cash crops, irrigation, and marketing of agricultural produce, listening only to recordings of traditional songs and stories. This was not a linguistic problem, because all Kayan dialects are mutually intelligible (I had no difficulty in communicating with Kayan and Busang of the Baram, Apo Kayan, Mahakam, or Mendalam). The Baluy Kayan felt the outside world was impinging on them more than they wanted; even a small dialectal contrast was enough to trigger a negative reaction.

Since the completion of my fieldwork, much has changed. In 1988, I visited Uma Bawang after an absence of fourteen years. The population had doubled. The house site had been levelled with bulldozers. In front of the chief's apartment was a large guest house which had originally been erected for the visit of Malaysia's Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad. There were two timber camps across the river and lumber roads penetrated the jungle. An enormous stack of logs was waiting to be brought downriver. Many Uma Bawang men were working for the timber company and they had not had time to clear the new fields. It was expected that the harvest would not satisfy half the needs of the village. Many children I had known in the 1970s were now living in towns where they had salaried occupations. Several of them had married Chinese or Iban. There was evidence of greater prosperity, but also a fear of losing control over their lives.

Since the mid-1980s, the people of Uma Bawang and all the communities

upriver have been faced with the prospect of involuntary resettlement because of a proposed hydro-electric dam. This has created major uncertainties about the future, exacerbated by inadequate governmental planning about relocation.

As a consequence of an international financial crisis, the construction of the Bakun dam has been halted indefinitely, and it has been suggested that a smaller dam might eventually be built, which would flood a smaller area. However, timber exploitation is continuing and destroying the environment without providing for sustainable development. In 1998, the Sarawak Government was still planning to relocate about 15 communities into a single resettlement village where they will be overcrowded. According to the Government's own studies, the agricultural land in the resettlement area is unsuitable for commercial agriculture and insufficient for swidden agriculture.