CHAPTER III

The religious environment of daily life

In Chapter V, we will see that the contrast between ritual specialists and the laity is a crucial factor in understanding the workings of Kayan religion. This chapter focuses on the religious facets of daily life, for which this contrast is *not* important. (Chapters VI to IX will describe the rituals which are managed by religious specialists.) We will consider here the religious aspects of community and household and the rituals of daily life. Unless otherwise specified, the description applies both to *adat Dipuy* and *adat Bungan*, the main exception being the taboos and omens of *adat Dipuy*, which were discarded in *adat Bungan*. We will see how Kayan religion legitimates the social system, especially stratification, chiefship, and the traditional practice of headhunting. The rituals of daily life are rarely the object of conversation between Kayan (although many people volunteered information about them for my instruction). The structured way in which I describe these rituals may not fully convey the tacit way in which religion permeates daily life. It may be useful to reiterate that the ethnographic present refers to the 1970-74 period.

Rituals, whether public or private, whether practised by lay people or by religious specialists, are all communicative events: participants are engaged in a dialogue with supernatural beings whom they inform of their activities and needs, and from whom they seek help or at least an absence of malevolence. Anyone can pray to Bungan without any restriction as to setting, circumstances, gender, or social status. Senior people are more likely than the young to utter prayers, but this is a matter of competence rather than a rule; I have often observed young adults praying, but not children or adolescents.[1]

While it is permissible to pray empty-handed, it is preferable to accompany the prayer with an offering. Eggs are the most common offerings in Kayan religion. Cracked eggs may not serve as offerings. While uttering a prayer to Bungan, the speaker holds an egg in the right hand and raises it towards the sky (*meju teloh*). In a building, the speaker must face an opening so that the prayer reaches its destination. People commonly seek Bungan's blessings in this way when they are about to travel, when they make their annual move from the longhouse to the farm house (or conversely), or if a dream troubles them. Eggs

1 By contrast, among the Berawan, 'it is the senior men of the community who offer up prayer in the common interest. Women do not normally pray' (Metcalf 1988:54).

Plate 1. Egg offerings (tapo') placed on frayed sticks. These *tapo'* are at the edge of the riverbank for the benefit of passing spirits. Similar offerings are often seen in front of the longhouse and in fields.

are stored in bamboo containers after use to be offered again on other occasions. When we look at the *dayong* ritual (Chapter VII), we will see that other offerings, such as beads and pieces of fine cloth are re-used in the same way. It may seem surprising that such a modest offering as an egg might need to be re-used, but hens do not produce enough eggs to discard them after a single use. For the same reason, eggs rarely form part of the diet.

At various occasions, eggs are placed on sticks in a straight line, parallel to the river, in front of the house. These are called *tapo'*, 'something placed on a pole'. As these offerings are placed outside the house, which is men's domain, they are made only by men. The bark is removed and the tip of the stick is slit twice at the top to hold the egg; it is decorated by shaving off curlicues along the stem (Plate 1). A section of bamboo may be used instead of a wooden stick. Any kind of wood may be used for a *tapo'* as long as it is straight. The cleft parts of the stick may be kept open by two pieces of wood which have no ritual significance. (In the Mahakam region, the cleft stick is kept open by food offerings wrapped in leaves (Sombroek n.d.1:6.15)). By extension, all egg offerings are called *tapo'*, even when they are not placed on sticks. According to circumstances, one may offer one, two, four, eight, or sixteen eggs. In multiple offerings, the sticks are placed in a line, parallel to the river, about fifteen centimetres apart. (Besides these egg offerings, there is often an extra stick for the egg used to convey prayers.) These eggs are not retrieved afterwards; they are left on the sticks until they fall and shatter (or are eaten by pigs). The number of eggs corresponds to the supernatural power of the man making the offering.

Religion and community

The social and geographical limits of daily life

In the middle Baluy region, each village is constituted by a single longhouse. Villages are far apart from each other and are in contact with each other only on an episodic basis. Thus the longhouse forms the usual setting of daily life. Baluy Kayan villages typically have between one and three hundred inhabitants; hence individuals are part of a small, closed network. Inter-community relations take several forms: informal visits, economic exchanges, participation in harvest festivals, and marriages. These are rare and the lack of contact with outsiders is cause for a pervasive suspicion towards strangers. Visitors to other villages often fear poisoning or sorcery, unless they stay with relatives; villages in far-away regions are thought to harbour powerful and malevolent sorcerers. Community isolation helps develop a frame of mind in which the unfamiliar is potentially dangerous. Children are taught to fear visitors from other villages: adults frighten young children by telling them visitors will take them away, eat them, or assault them, and then they laugh when the child bursts into tears.

Any unusual occurrence – which could be something as simple as an egg with two yolks – portends a potential danger which must be averted by prayers and sacrifices.

Ecological, economic, and religious factors structure the village territory. In any given year, rice swiddens occupy a small proportion of the land. As shifting cultivators, the Baluy Kayan leave the land fallow for ten to twenty years after one season of cultivation; most of the land around the longhouse is secondary jungle in various stages of regeneration. There are also vegetable and tobacco gardens, fruit groves and, increasingly, small rubber, pepper, and ginger plantations (Rousseau 1977). Secondary jungle and fruit groves near the village are prime hunting spots because they attract wild boars. The primary jungle is important to the Kayan economy and world-view. It provides essential resources such as lumber, rattan, game, and wild vegetables. However, it is not part of the Kayan's daily environment: the village, the farms, secondary jungle, and the river are the usual habitats. The jungle is fascinating, but also alien and dangerous.

Religion contributes to mapping the environment. We will see that some meteorological phenomena – such as thunder, lightning, and hurricanes – are supernatural beings or manifestations of supernatural beings; rock faces, rapids, boulders, hilltops, and other places are the abodes of spirits. The territory is further humanized by historical and mythical events. There used to be a longhouse here; there, a Malay trader had his head chopped off. The culture hero Lake' Dian had his farm along the Baluy where the current chief now has his farm-house. Events have imbued all these places with an aura which makes them special.

Hillocks overlooking rivers are favoured as grave-sites. Fruit trees are planted around the graves (for the benefit of the deceased?). One may eat such fruit on the spot, but not bring it back to the house. At night, hunters stalk wild boars who have been attracted by the fruit around the tombs. Occasionally, a hunter returns home shaken by an encounter with a spirit. Ancient cemeteries may be used again for cultivation after a special ritual (*petutong*) which neutralizes the effects of death. The same applies to the sites of murders and battles (*tana puluh*), abandoned longhouses (*lep'un*), and places where curses were uttered and oaths taken. The *petutong* ritual is necessary for abandoned house sites because they might have been locales where women died in childbirth, people coughed blood, or curses were uttered.[2] To desacralize these sites, the

[2] Nowadays, Christians sometimes use these plots because they are not subject to the supernatural dangers of Kayan religion. In 1970, a Christian family of Uma Bawang could with impunity cultivate a piece of ground where the Badang (Kenyah) burned a La'anan (Kajang) longhouse in the nineteenth century. I suspect the choice was also motivated by a desire to convince their neighbours – and themselves – of the advantages of Christianity.

priest places two egg offerings (*tapo'*) at the area to be purified and prays to the spirits: 'I come here to *petutong* you, spirits of the dead (*to' kepusan*).' The priest mixes some earth with rice and cooks it with *meke* (a seasoning) to flavour it, as the spirits will appreciate that. The priest throws a lump of lead in the boiling water: lead is hard, but heat softens it; in the same way, spirits will melt away. The spirits are asked to clean the site with a broom of caladium leaves (*lu'e*). Participants make as if to eat the mixture of rice and earth. 'Spirits, we are about to farm here; we ask you not to be angry. You may not be angry, because you have eaten together with us; make our life easy.'

The longhouse

Conceptually, the longhouse is the centre of the village territory (Figure 1). To the European visitor, the longhouse is possibly the most striking feature of Borneo's social life because it produces such a concentrated settlement. Central Borneo longhouses are architecturally impressive: in 1970, Uma Bawang was more than 100 metres long. As longhouses are built on stilts, they tower over their surroundings. In Uma Bawang, the longhouse floor was level despite the uneven terrain and, in some spots, the floor was six or seven metres above ground. Buildings are made of ironwood, a hard, smooth, dark wood impervious to rot, though not fireproof. The hardness of ironwood is explained in a myth of origin: the brass tweezers of the Moon fell to the Earth and became a tree.

Longhouses are usually built parallel to the river. This orientation is relevant for some rituals: the priest starts to purify (*ngaping*; see Chapter VIII) the longhouse from the upriver end, 'in order to follow the river'. Another purification ritual outside the house takes place at the downriver end, so that the flow of the river carries away evil influences without smearing the building. Egg offerings are usually placed on the high ground in front of the longhouse overlooking the river so that spirits will readily see them (Plate 1).

The side of the longhouse facing the river is a long gallery, itself divided into two longitudinal parts; at the edge is a raised platform, two or three metres wide, ten to fifteen centimetres higher than the other part of the gallery, where one can sit to chat, work, or perform rituals. People may leave belongings on the raised platform in front of their apartment. Between the platform and the apartments is a thoroughfare, which is kept clear, except for rice mortars and troughs for feeding dogs along the wall. There are benches here and there along the outer edge of the gallery and at entrances to the house; the latter are well-used, as they are prime vantage points for watching fellow villagers entering and leaving the longhouse. Both the platform and the thoroughfare are roofed. In headhunting days, the outside of the gallery was blocked by lattice work which made it difficult for enemies to hurl missiles into the longhouse. Examples of this defensive device may be seen in older longhouses (Plate 11).

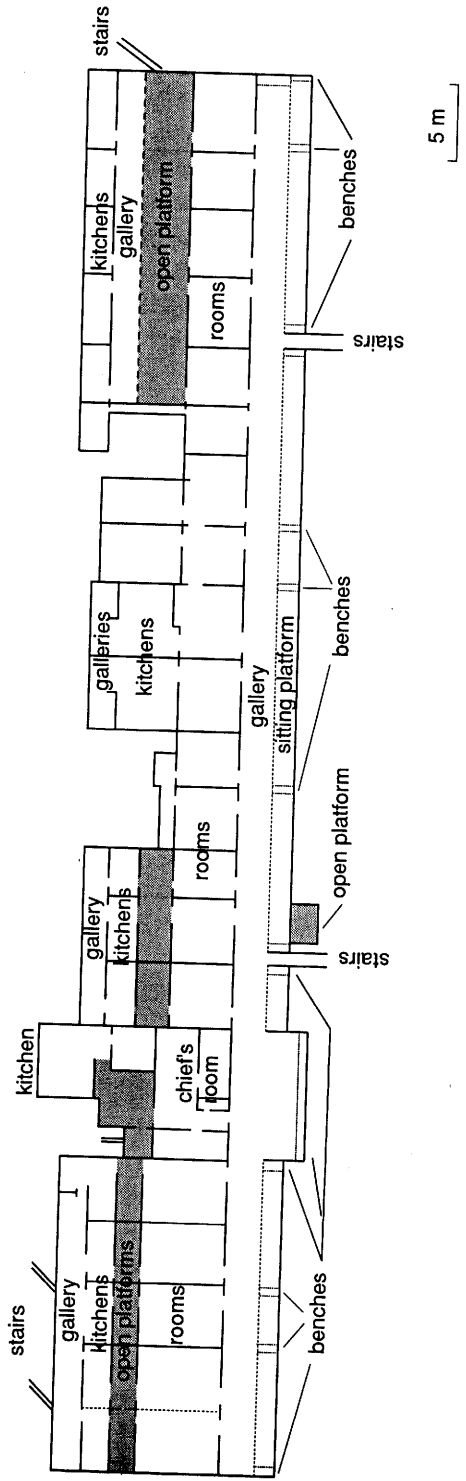

Figure 1. Plan of Uma Bawang (1971)

The other half of the longhouse is divided into apartments. Looked at from the front, a Kayan longhouse is very uniform. The gallery is of the same width for the whole length of the longhouse, except for the section in front of the chief's apartment, which is larger and wider, being a meeting place and the locale of some communal rituals. Uniformity is further emphasized by the use of the same materials throughout. In Uma Bawang, the contrast between the chief's gallery and the rest of the veranda is emphasized in other ways: the wall between gallery and apartment has been whitewashed; on it hang old pictures depicting gatherings of chiefs under the aegis of colonial authorities, as well as posters of the king and queen of Malaysia, the governor of Sarawak, and the Sarawak State Cabinet.

Apartments follow the same model throughout the longhouse, although some of them are wider than others. A large room (roughly five by five meters) opens directly to the gallery on one side and leads to the kitchen at the back. In the room, a raised platform constitutes the sleeping area; people sit and eat on the floor. The apartments of the ruling estate are more spacious and may have separate sleeping rooms. Traditionally, the fireplace used to be in the apartment against the wall next to the gallery. Above the fireplace was a rack where firewood was stacked to dry. Because of the greater stability brought about by colonial rule and the end of headhunting, people have found it practical to expand; while the front of longhouses has maintained the traditional pattern, there is a ramshackle growth of extensions in the back which serve as kitchens and dining rooms, sometimes separate from the longhouse proper, but linked to it by walkways. This reduces the risk of fire and makes the apartment more comfortable by relegating the heat and smoke of the fireplace to an annex. According to Sombroek (n.d.1:9.3), this architectural innovation has religious significance: in *adat Dipuy*, it was forbidden to have the kitchen in a separate structure because the new rice must be cooked in the apartment after the first harvest. Even in *adat Bungan*, the priest's meal during the *dayong* ritual (see Chapter VII) is served in the room, not the kitchen.

In front of the house is an area of bare ground where mats can be spread to dry rice and tobacco. At the river bank's edge, spots are reserved for making dugout canoes. Numerous barns and store-houses are scattered behind and besides the longhouse. They are on stilts, like the longhouse, with big wooden disks around the posts to keep rats away. In *adat Dipuy*, it was forbidden to enter the barn of another household. Ritual devices and offerings were placed in rice barns to keep the soul of rice happy and prevent it from going away (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:120). Only the forge is built directly on the ground. It belongs to the community and may be used by any blacksmith. Uma Bawang's forge has ancient bellows, reportedly brought from the Apo Kayan when Uma Bawang migrated to the Baluy over two hundred years ago. During part of my fieldwork, anthropomorphic statues in front of the longhouse protected the

village. These were sculpted out of two-meter sections of softwood, with clearly represented head and limbs; paint was applied on them to suggest a shirt and loin-cloth. These statues were given life in a ritual and asked to guard the village against dangerous influences.

The concentrated settlement of the longhouse makes for constant activity, of which domestic animals are an important element. Pigs roam freely around the house and supplement their diet by foraging. Pig mangers are scattered in front of and under the gallery; at feeding time, people keep their neighbours' pigs at bay with a long stick and make sure their smaller pigs are not kept away from the trough by the larger specimens. When they are not eating, pigs avoid the heat by lying under the house. This is one reason why they are ideal sacrificial animals: as they sleep under their owners, they know the latter's dreams and are able to recount them to spirits when they are sacrificed. Pigs are also intimately associated with humans because they eat their excrement. (A few Kayan refuse to eat the meat of the domesticated pig for this reason.) Chickens roam freely, except that hens with chicks are cooped at night. Chickens are fed broken rice and supplement their diet by raiding expanses of drying rice, gobbling it up as rapidly as they can before they are chased away.

In 1971, there were about a hundred dogs in Uma Bawang for 213 people. Good hunting dogs are in the minority; the others serve no purpose, but their owners feed them. Most dogs are thin and mangy and are treated indifferently. Dogs spend most of their idle time on the gallery or in apartments. Given a chance, they sleep in the ashes of the fireplace. This behaviour is explained at the beginning of the myth of origin of the dog and wild animals.

> While Bang Ka'an was gathering palm leaves for roofing, his sister Bang Ming and his wife Teprang went to weed the rice fields. Bang Ming took a break from work to cook rice leaves [which in these mythical times turned into rice when cooked]. While Bang Ming was getting water at the river, Teprang opened the lid of the pot before the rice was properly cooked. Upon her return, Bang Ming, finding *padi*[3] leaves in the pot, knew Teprang had opened the lid and spoiled the meal. Furious, Bang Ming kicked Teprang towards the fireplace and she became a dog. This is why dogs like to lie near the fire. Before Teprang's blunder, *padi* leaves could become cooked rice, but not any more; one must wait for the *padi* to ripen.

When a man goes hunting, his dogs awake from their lethargy and eagerly follow him. Dogs are fed by the man who normally hunts with them. Dogs play an important role in boar hunting; good hunting dogs are highly valued. The dog is a powerful symbol: the 'dog motif' (*kalong aso'*), which represents a kind of dragon, may be used only by aristocrats. The representation of the dragon is euphemistically referred to as 'dog motif' to avoid attracting the dragon's

3 Rice-cultivating societies normally have at least three words to refer to rice: they distinguish between the rice grains in their kernels, husked rice, and cooked rice. *Padi* is the Malay word for rice grains and the rice plant.

attention. There is a secret language (*daho' ivun*) by which animals, people, and things are referred to indirectly so as not to attract their attention. In this covert language, tigers are called 'dogs' (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, II:237; Sellato 1983). I get the impression that this metaphorical meaning of 'dog' imbues real dogs with power. It is taboo to kill dogs on pain of madness, which is why they are so numerous. The most effective oaths are taken over a dog.

Except at dawn or dusk, when men may sit at the edge of the river bank, people stay under shelter whenever possible. The longhouse feels like a cocoon. Inside it, its inhabitants are separated from the outside world while they are close to each other. Except at mealtimes, people visit any apartment freely. A Kayan's longhouse may be his or her castle, but the apartment most certainly is not. There often are windows between contiguous apartments which make it easy to keep an eye on neighbours and chat with them. Thus, when a young man visits a young woman at night, everyone knows about it the next day. Evening visitors need not leave when some household members go to sleep; they stay as long as someone is willing to keep up the conversation.

The intensity of social life within the confines of the longhouse keeps nature and spirits at bay. The separateness of the longhouse is marked in communal rituals from which outsiders are excluded; the house is sealed off and its autonomy is not to be breached. Even community members who are away at the time of a ceremony are barred from entering the longhouse while the ritual is in progress. Unwelcome intrusions are resisted: one day, a spiderhunter (*hisit*) flew on the gallery; everyone ran after it until it was killed. In *adat Dipuy*, this would have been a particularly bad omen and, even in *adat Bungan*, people felt it was better to be safe than sorry and eliminate the bird so that it would not be a portent.

In a number of ways, religion underlines the importance of the longhouse. All residents are subject to the same ritual prohibitions during public rituals. A transgression of these rules by any resident is an offence against the whole community. This has created problems when two religious systems coexist in the same longhouse, which has been the case when portions of Kayan communities have adopted Christianity and in the village of Uma Daro' between the rival traditions of *adat Bungan* and *adat Tenangan* (Chapter II); the same problem arose during the transition between *adat Dipuy* and *adat Bungan*. In Uma Daro', a follower of *adat Tenangan*, blatantly disregarding *adat Bungan* rules, brought fresh fish to the house while a ceremony was in progress. He was fined a gong (*agong*), a sword, and a pig. In protest, the four *adat Tenangan* households left the longhouse and erected a separate building. The same solution has been adopted in other communities where two religious systems are present, but not in Uma Bawang, where Christians are careful not to offend against *adat Bungan* prohibitions.

Conflicts between religious traditions also arose between variants of *adat*

Dipuy. Uma Bawang is the result of the amalgamation of three communities: Uma Bawang proper, Uma Daro', and Laham, which have lived in close proximity for over a century, although they each retained their own chief, spoke slightly different dialects and had minor ritual differences. By 1938, they still occupied distinct longhouses to avoid the interference of their distinct rituals. In 1945, having lost their ruling family and their priest, the four Laham households joined the nine Uma Bawang households in a single longhouse; they abandoned their ritual distinctiveness and adopted the Uma Bawang dialect. Uma Daro', with only three domestic units, retained its chief and a separate building. By 1950, everyone had converted to *adat Bungan* and Uma Bawang, Laham, and Uma Daro' formed a single longhouse. In its initial form, *adat Bungan* was marked by great ritual simplicity and there were no ritual reasons for people to live in separate longhouses. By the time a new house was erected in 1955, *adat Bungan* had reinstated most *adat Dipuy* rituals and there were again ritual differences between Uma Bawang and Uma Daro'. Consequently, with a single exception, all Uma Bawang households form a block at one end of the longhouse, while Uma Daro' and Uma Laham are at the other end. This is a compromise whereby distinct rituals can coexist in the same building.[4]

Religion marks the unity of the longhouse in yet another way: all communal rituals, except those which take place in the chief's fields, must happen in the longhouse, which is not only the social, but the religious embodiment of the community. During the major communal rituals of *adat Dipuy*, the longhouse was closed off to members of other communities and indeed to community members who had not entered the longhouse before the start of the ritual. (This rule is followed in a more relaxed fashion in *adat Bungan*.) Banks (1940:84) reported that the Kayan were more anxious than their Kenyah neighbours about the ritual closure of the longhouse. While the Kenyah were satisfied to exact a fine from a visitor who appeared at the time of a communal ritual, the Kayan kept them away from the longhouse. An Uma Bawang man told me of crawling in the underbrush to the river bank to send away unwanted visitors and tell them to return after the end of the ritual period. By crawling in the underbrush, he was hoping spirits would not notice his absence from the longhouse. He was taking a calculated risk, but the visit of outsiders would have been a much greater disaster. After the house was open again to visitors, the Kayan asked 'a forfeit from the first stranger to enter the house after the period of retreat is over, a custom unknown to the Kenyah' (Banks 1940:84).

Harvest and headhunting rituals replicate the spatial organization of the longhouse (Chapter VI). One woman from each household must perform the

4 In 1955, Uma Laham apparently sided with Uma Daro' to retain a modicum of distinctiveness from the dominant Uma Bawang section.

first ritual harvest. Women process out of the longhouse by the downriver steps; as they return from the fields, they wait outside until everyone has returned and re-enter the longhouse by the upriver steps. Both times, the women take a position in the line corresponding to the location of their apartment, the file being led by a woman from the downrivermost apartment. In the headhunting ritual, men also exit and return to the longhouse in a line which reproduces the sequence of apartments.

Because fields are far away from the longhouse, most domestic units have a farmhouse. A few farmhouses are single-family dwellings, while most are built on the model of a small longhouse, with three to five apartments (Rousseau 1974:323-5). During the weeding and harvest, the longhouse is almost abandoned. While visiting the Mahakam region, I even came across completely deserted longhouses. This would not have been allowed in *adat Dipuy*, as the absence of people would have made the longhouse 'cold'; this would bring misfortune to the whole community. Even in *adat Bungan*, when a *dayong* ceremony must be held by people who are living at the farm, participants trek back to the longhouse, the only appropriate locale for a *dayong*. The unity of the longhouse is also marked in another way: if a domestic unit moves to another community, it pays a fine to the chief who uses part of it to defray the cost of a purification ritual (*pelah*).

There is a corollary to the rule that communal rituals must take place in the longhouse. It is not sufficient that the community should be together; it must avoid any show of division. A quarrel desecrates and nullifies a ceremony. Once, the chief's brother-in-law got into an argument with the officiant, Avun, and eventually became violent. At first, it was suggested that the ritual should be started again from the beginning, but a purification ritual was deemed sufficient. The culprit was ordered to give Avun a gong (*talam*), a sword, a plate, and a chicken, and he replaced damaged property. In Uma Lesong, a ritual was cancelled and rescheduled because of a quarrel. There again, the priest collected a fine and the culprit supplied the sacrificial pig.

A Kayan community also forms a social unit through its ownership of communal property. Many charms under the chief's care belong to the whole village. This is particularly the case of head trophies and sacred stones. Head trophies used to hang on the chief's gallery.[5] They were a source of well-being for the whole community. Many years ago, a fire ravaged part of Uma Bawang, but it died down near the trophies, which were given the credit for this lucky break. A few heads were sufficient to provide prosperity. With the Bungan reform, head trophies were discarded along with the old charms, but when some features of *adat Dipuy* were reinstated in *adat Bungan*, a few trophies were

5 In the Kapuas and Mahakam regions, head trophies were kept out of view (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:94).

retrieved and hung again in the longhouse. In 1970, only part of a cranium remained in Uma Bawang; it was stored under the house to reduce its danger. It was used every year in the headhunting ritual. Although it had been a tenet of *adat Dipuy* that trophies lost their efficacy with time (see Chapter II), this was not a concern at the time of fieldwork: events had shown – or at least suggested – that the head was not malevolent, and the headhunting rituals seemed to provide the expected blessings (Chapter VI).

Sacred stones (*bato' tuluy*) were associated with headhunting rituals. These round stones, about fifteen to thirty centimetres in diameter, were placed outside the house in front of the chief's apartment. There used to be three *bato' tuluy* in Uma Bawang. Each stone was protected by a bush of Cordyline (*avang*)[6] and surrounded by a small fence or put on a platform to protect it from pigs. The *maren* fed these stones during the annual headhunting ceremony. These stones could grow and shrink. They were believed to move on their own account, especially when danger threatened the house. (In Uma Bawang, the *bato' tuluy* disappeared mysteriously a long time ago. Other longhouses still have them.) When a community migrated to a new location, they were carried to the new site (Hose and McDougall 1912, II:16).

House building

The erection of a longhouse is accompanied by rituals. The timber is lumbered and prepared over a period of one or two years. Then, the whole community cooperates to set up the structure, starting at the upriver end, after which households work independently on their own apartments. Barring mishaps, the longhouse is completed in a few days. The material for the chief's apartment is provided by the whole community, which sets aside beams, boards, and shingles for that purpose.[7]

[6] For the distribution and ritual use of Cordyline terminalis, see Ehrlich (1989). '*Avang*' also means an ambush and it may be that this homonymy is significant, as the *bato' tuluy* are related to headhunting. Among the Ulu Air, *tuloi* means 'human sacrifice' (Bouman 1924:177). The presence of these stones has been reported in the Baluy region and among the Baram and Apo Kayan Kenyah (Haddon 1901:360; Hose and McDougall 1912, II:plate 144; Whittier 1973:186-7). They were held in such awe that Galvin (1975:93) inaccurately states that 'the authority exercised by a certain "*Ketau*" family came from the possession of certain stones (*Batu Tuloi*), each member of the family possessing such stones was called "*Paren*" or "*Paren Bio*" '. Galvin is correct in underlining a link between *batu tuloi* and authority, because, in Long Nawang, longhouses composed entirely of commoners (*uma panyin*) had a Cordyline bush but no sacred stones (Elshout 1926:229). Among the Lepo' Tau, the Cordyline bush was the dwelling place of house spirits (*bali uma*) and spirits of bravery (*bali akang*). These stones were considered to be a gift from the *bali akang* (Whittier 1973:187).

[7] I did not observe the erection of a longhouse, nor did I get a first-hand account of house-building since the Bungan reform; I have only a general idea of *adat Bungan* building rituals. Given that few houses have been built since the shift to *adat Bungan*, there is no complete agreement about the form that house-building rituals should take now. At first, people simply prayed to Bungan and asked her for a good life; later, as some *adat Dipuy* rituals crept back, they felt the need to have more elaborate rituals and to perform a brief *dayong* the night the new longhouse is completed. *Adat Dipuy* house building rituals were described to me in great detail. Except for a brief prayer, no ritual is necessary for the erection of a farm house or a temporary longhouse (*luvong*).

In *adat Dipuy*, favourable auguries were sought before clearing the house site. For a year after clearing the site for a new longhouse, various taboos had to be observed, such as a prohibition against killing bears, clouded leopards, and snakes, otherwise the soul of the vegetation which had been removed might punish the villagers (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:107). Communal rituals focused on the first post (*jihe' betuvuh*)[8], which is part of the chief's apartment (*amin aya'*). A piece of iron and a sacrificial chicken or pig were placed at the bottom of the hole; occasionally, the sacrificial animal was replaced by a captive. The offerings were crushed by the post as it was placed in position. About 1847, there was a human sacrifice when the house of Bato' Dian was built. A Malay slave was bought for the purpose (it was not permissible to sacrifice a village slave). She was bled to death, the blood was sprinkled on the house and the body was thrown in the river (Burns 1849:482).

In his youth, Lake' Kebing, the retired chief of Uma Bawang, was an eyewitness to a human sacrifice at the erection of a new building. Early in the morning, people prayed for prosperity, entrusting their messages to a sacrificial pig. They asked the intercession of auguries, after which they sacrificed the pig and erected the post in a hole at the bottom of which the slave had been placed. Commoners erected the first post of their apartment later in the day after a simple egg offering (*tapo'*). Gongs were struck during this procedure and for the whole period when the house was being erected; everyone made sure not to look up, so they could neither see nor hear ill omens. Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, II:158) says the post was erected at night, so that bad omens could not be observed. The danger of bad omens persisted until the house was completed. People complained that the noise of the gongs and the need to keep one's eyes downcast made house building a stressful activity.

People who coughed blood were not allowed to participate in house building, as their condition would have polluted the building and the community. Minor rituals fostered prosperity. For instance, a member of the chief's household threw pieces of bitter pumpkin (*terak*) under the house so that pigs would be healthy and fat. House building could be affected by various unfavourable circumstances: among the Mahakam-Kayan, if a worker fell from the scaffolding, his loin-cloth had to be buried where he fell; work was halted for eight days and a priest carried out a purification. All tools and pieces of clothing had to be buried where they fell. Objects associated with women were not to be brought under the unfinished house. Visitors from other communities were not

[8] Or *jihe' bato' tuvuh*, lit. 'planted post of stone'. This is the post on which the basket of charms (*ingen lali*) of the chief's household was eventually hung.

allowed to go through the unfinished house because they might bring with them foreign spirits (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, II:174-5). With reference to the Mahakam-Kayan, Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, II:172-3) notes restrictions in the use of materials and techniques: posts had to be oriented in the same way as the tree they were made of, in other words the top of the post had to be the top of the tree. Horizontal beams were oriented according to the river, the top pointing downriver. Door and door-frame were made of a single piece of wood. Wall boards were placed vertically; only burial structures had horizontal boards. Nails or ironwood dowels could not be used; if necessary, pieces were bound together with rattan (Sombroek n.d.1:9.1).

After the house was completed, a palm hut was erected and promptly set ablaze. After this 'mishap', villagers made a show of looking for a place to live and were pleasantly surprised to find a brand-new house. The house was cleansed of potential bad auguries and of the malevolence of people who might have been murdered at that site. Each household offered eggs and lit a fire; its smoke was fanned towards the apex of the apartment. The same night, each household held a brief *dayong* (*dayong meju*) in the room to tether the souls of its inhabitants to the apartment; after that, it was permissible to eat fresh food, which had been prohibited during house-building. The *dayong* entailed ten days of ritual prohibitions, after which they carried out a headhunting ritual (*kayo*).[9] From then on, prohibitions on taro and mushrooms were lifted. Other taboos remained in force until the end of the year (*lebo duman*): one could not handle tree bark, lest centipedes infest the house; one had to avoid the *dungan* fish and other fierce animals, otherwise domestic pigs would be fierce; one could not eat the monitor lizard, otherwise pigs would be thin.

Longhouses have to be rebuilt for various reasons. This is an obvious necessity after a migration. If the population grows, one can add apartments at the ends of the longhouse, but there is a preference for building a new house more suited to present needs. The concentrated settlement of the longhouse also increases the risk of fire and many longhouses have had to be rebuilt for that reason. After a fire, it is forbidden to re-use intact material from the burnt house, as this would infect the new building. In practice, any intact timber retrieved before the fire has cooled down may be used again. One should rebuild further upriver, in order to be free from the taint of the fire; however, after a fire, the people of Uma Bawang rebuilt on the same spot because there was no suitable site upriver. This disregard of a well-established taboo was watched with great interest by neighbouring communities to find out whether

9 Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, I:124, II:174-7) describes other rituals when a house is newly occupied. Among the Mahakam-Kayan, the first fire was produced by friction in the chief's apartment and other households got their fire from that source.

Uma Bawang would suffer some calamity. When they did not, it was assumed the taboo had become inoperative.

A special ceremony is held after a fire. There are two versions, one for a major conflagration, the other for a minor fire (such as a hut or part of an apartment). This ritual (*pelah tutong*) still exists in *adat Bungan*. (My informant, Avun Imang, knew only the short form.) The priest brings eggs to the site and invites the spirit Lirong Tutong to eat with the villagers. Lirong Tutong is in charge of fires and counteracts their negative effects.[10] The priest calls back the souls of people and the soul of rice (*bluan bulit*), which might have been frightened away by the fire. Some earth and water are cooked in a pot; the priest and the owners of the hut make as if to eat the mixture. Water is sprinkled to remove (*ngaping*) the bad influences. The affected household is strengthened (*ngemhing*; see Chapter VII).

Any undue contact with uncontrollable forces could be a reason for rebuilding a longhouse. At the turn of the century, when Uma Bawang was located further up the Baluy, they were the target of an Iban attack. Although they defended themselves successfully and massacred their assailants, they rebuilt the longhouse elsewhere because so many enemies had been killed at that site. There was every reason to expect that the spirits of the slain attackers would be malevolent. If life is difficult in a community, people may come to the conclusion that there is something wrong with its location; the village of Uma Nyaving (Long Mejawa) moved twice because of general ill-luck and poor harvests.

The household

Because of the communal life fostered by the longhouse, the casual observer might fail to notice that each household is a little universe. Although it would seem impossible to keep any secret in a Kayan longhouse, people are sometimes unaware of what goes on in other households. The suspiciousness to which outsiders are subject is also present in a milder form towards some fellow-villagers. There are concentric cycles of intimacy starting with the household, then relatives, neighbours, other longhouse members, and finally villagers in nearby communities. Households are secretive about their wealth and the size of their harvests; rice and valuables are hidden in barns and storehouses. The apartment is not only a dwelling, but also the embodiment of the domestic unit; it is protected by rituals and prohibitions. One day, a man had an accident and cut his foot badly. I was surprised when I saw him sleeping on the gallery, because he would have been more comfortable in his

10 Lirong ('bay') is a priestly name; *tutong* means 'fire, burning'. The priest asks Lirong Tutong for a *pelah* (see Chapter VIII) and narrates the myth of origin of the *pelah tutong* ritual. There are distinct myths of origin for each version of the ritual.

apartment. He was obliged to stay on the gallery until he was healed, because a bleeding cut would endanger the apartment and its denizens. At meals, the separateness of the household becomes evident: people freely enter other apartments at all times of the day, except during meals, at which point they beat a hasty retreat. There is a polite exchange in which they are invited to eat; they decline, claiming to have eaten already. If a window overlooks the neighbours' apartment, it is gauche to look at them while they eat.

If the terrain is uneven – as in Uma Bawang – it is difficult to add new apartments to a longhouse. As its population grows, a domestic unit may be partitioned into two separate households which continue to share the same apartment. This is most commonly the case when several grown-up children have children of their own, because the ideal household is the stem family.[11] This arrangement is called *dua' ta'ang taring*, 'two cooking pots', because the two households cook and eat separately. However, they remain a single ritual unit: they join in *dayong* rituals; at the ritual harvest, one woman harvests the new rice for the whole apartment. In 1970, five of the 21 apartments of Uma Bawang housed two domestic units. Of the 26 domestic units, there were 17 stem families, three extended families, and two nuclear families (Rousseau 1974:214-5).

Interaction on the gallery is informal, because this is a public area. One can sit anywhere, strike up a casual conversation with anybody, and leave whenever one wants. A visit to an apartment is different. Social visits tend to take place at night. Visitors come unannounced. Women enter each other's apartments informally and make themselves at home. Male visitors sit down silently; the conversation does not start before the hostess has rolled two or four cigarettes for them. Later on, some rice beer, sometimes food, may be offered, especially during the harvest festival, when people are expected to visit their neighbours. The hostess commonly provides ingredients for a betel plug made of a section of areca nut wrapped in a betel leaf which may be smeared with lime. The areca nut is intoxicating and the lime burns the mouth. Visitors usually prepare the plug themselves so they can mix the ingredients to their own taste: they remove the shell of the nut with special scissors, smooth the betel leaf, and smear it carefully with lime, sometimes adding a strand of strong Javanese tobacco. Betel amateurs produce copious amounts of red spittle and their teeth and lips are stained. A guest may not refuse any offering outright, but must at least touch it as a sign of acceptance. Failure to do so would bring bad luck (Sombroek n.d.1:6.27). Although a non-smoker, I would have found it difficult to do fieldwork if I had refused cigarettes when I visited people. Kayan

11 A stem family includes a couple (or a widow/widower), their unmarried children and one of their married children and the latter's nuclear family. An extended family also has three generations, but the grand-parent(s)' domestic unit includes more than one married child. A nuclear family includes only parents and their unmarried children.

hospitality is equally intrusive concerning alcohol. Rice beer is intoxicating (with an alcohol content ranging between 18 and 23%, according to Banks 1937:440-2). Replacing one's glass in the tray signifies one has had enough; the glass is now available for another guest. The hosts often insist on pouring another glass and it is safer to leave the glass almost full as long as possible; this is not a fool-proof ploy, as hosts press their guests to keep on drinking.

Household belongings have a religious significance; we will see that many objects have a soul. At the headhunting ritual, men make offerings to their household goods, as well as their walls, roof, floor, and beams, so they continue to prosper. Most households own charms (*pengaroh*), of which the Kayan have a wide variety. Some charms are revealed in dreams which instruct the dreamer to go to a particular place and look for a specific object. Virtually anything can become a charm. A bone from a hen which died while laying eggs protects its owner against danger. Scaly anteaters (*hem*) have no teeth; someone hypothesized that if one ever found an anteater with teeth, these would be extremely potent. Some spirits metamorphose themselves into jars when one comes across them in the jungle. Only the *maren* are allowed to own them. One night, a slave dreamt he met some people, one of whom was speared and became a jar. The next day, they went to the spot indicated in the dream and found the jar. The most powerful charms are owned only by the *maren* because their supernatural power matches that of the *pengaroh*. In Uma Bawang, the chief's charms were so powerful that only the retired chief or his slave dared touch them. The slave could handle them because he was simply his master's instrument, not an independent actor.[12] Priests and powerful commoners are more likely than other people to seek charms, because they are less vulnerable to the negative aspects of the sacred and can harness its power.

While the Kayan have charms of their own, they also buy them from other groups, in particular from 'Arab' traders in the coastal town of Sibu. These are called *gimet* (from the Malay *jimat*, 'amulet'). In some cases, the seller may not share a belief in the supernatural power of an object. Some Chinese jars are charms for the Kayan but not for the Chinese trader; wild boar tusks have no religious significance for the Penan hunter-gatherers who sell them to the Kayan. The fact of being a charm is not inherent to the object; its power can come and go. In particular, childbirth damages the *pengaroh*: when a woman gives birth, all households in the longhouse store their charms on the gallery. Some people prefer to store their charms on the gallery on a permanent basis: under the roof of the gallery of Uma Bawang's chief, a box contains powerful charms and war swords which have tasted human blood. This also allows the charms to travel at will, whereas they would be trapped in the room. There is

12 Harrisson (1964) describes a striking bronze charm which belonged to the chief of Uma Nyaving, the village immediately upriver of Uma Bawang.

no attempt to explain why or how *pengaroh* are powerful. With some exceptions, they are not assumed to be spirits or have a soul; their power is unnamed, undefined, and unquestioned. Some charms are sentient: if their owner dies, they become wet because they are crying. If there is some doubt about the continued efficacy of a charm, one can test it by killing a chicken, propitiating (*melah*) the charm, after which one shoots it with a shotgun. If it does not break, then it is powerful. I have not heard of an actual instance of such a test.

Weapons which used to slay enemies become charms. The people of Uma Bawang consider that potent swords were a crucial factor in successfully repelling Iban attacks in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. All war paraphernalia are treated with respect, in part because of their association with killing and the power which derives from it, in part because of the materials they are made of. A seating mat (*tabin*) of leopard skin derives power from that aristocratic animal (*tulan maren;* while the clouded leopard is a rather timorous creature, it is seen as a manifestation of the Tiger); a sword sheath carved from a tree struck by lightning is imbued with the power of the Thunder. In 1970, only a few Baluy Kayan had been to Kuching, Sarawak's capital, but everyone had heard of the Sarawak Museum's rich ethnographic collections. It was generally believed that the Museum could never be successfully attacked or bombed because it housed so many charms. While one can never own too many charms, a community should limit the number of its head trophies. The issue does not arise nowadays, because most villages have at most a single trophy; in headhunting days, it seems that not more than about five or ten heads were kept, even if a larger number had initially been collected. The others were given to allied villages or buried in the jungle. We have seen that head trophies have both positive and negative effects; on the one hand, they foster prosperity, on the other the victims seek revenge. With time, the positive influence wanes, while their malevolence increases. It is thought that the beneficial properties of the trophies are finite; in other words, twenty heads are not better than five. On the other hand, twenty vengeful victims are more dangerous than five.

Stones with unusual shapes or stones found in peculiar circumstances may be charms. While having intercourse with his wife, a man extracted a stone from her vagina; this is a very powerful *pengaroh.* An odd-shaped stone may manifest itself so that someone discovers it. Through divination, one ascertains whether it is indeed a charm and what is its function. Some stones provide wealth, others protect their owners against specific dangers. In 1970, a young girl found an odd-shaped brown stone which the senior priest diagnosed as a charm. A little later, her mother found a round piece of quartz which was identified as a charm for finding lost objects. As a first test, the senior man of the household balanced the quartz on a stone, asking it to stay there if it were indeed a charm; later, the priest Avun Imang confirmed this finding in a brief

ritual. Some stones are hook-shaped (*bato' kawit*). There are two of these in Uma Bawang, which they obtained a long time ago from Uma Alim, a village of the Pujungan area in Indonesian Borneo. These stones made an excited sound ('nyik, nyik!') when people went to war because they were looking forward to eating human heads. Teeth of wild felines can also be charms, especially tiger teeth. Circular eye-teeth of wild boars are invulnerability charms against metal weapons. An informant of Sombroek (n.d. 1:6.35) explained that these are effective only if their owner stays dry, no mean feat in central Borneo! The descendants of the culture hero Lake' Dian inherit invulnerability to metal weapons (*keben*).[13] Some stones are deemed to be the teeth of the Thunder. When trees or huts are destroyed or damaged by lightning, people look for marks which they interpret as bite marks of the Thunder.

Various objects provide protection against malign spirits; for instance, one may hang Caladium leaves (*long*) in front of the apartment.[14] A face drawn on a large bread-tree leaf (*kihan*) and hung over the sleeping area or behind the apartment keeps spirits at bay during the night. Pieces of bamboo frighten the Thunder.

Daily life

Nearly every moment of life has a religious aspect; this is true of the agricultural cycle (Chapter VI), the life cycle (Chapter IX), and illness (Chapter VIII). Here, we consider the religious aspects of fishing and hunting, as well as the taboos and auguries which regulated all activities in *adat Dipuy.*

Hunting and fishing

Earlier in this chapter, I recounted the beginning of the myth of origin of wild animals and the dog. Because Teprang spoiled the meal by peeking into the pot before the rice was cooked, her sister-in-law Bang Ming kicked her towards the fireplace and she became a dog.

> When Bang Ka'an returned, he was furious to hear his wife had been turned into a dog. He told his sister: 'If you are so powerful, kick the bundle of palm leaves which I left on the gallery'. She did so and it turned into a rhinoceros. Bang Ka'an made models of every wild animal and asked Bang Ming to give them life by kicking them. Being the elder sibling, he gave them names. This is why, when they go hunting, the Kayan invoke Bang Ka'an. As for dogs, they know how to find prey because they are descended from a human being.

Like their human owners, dogs have names, unlike pigs and chickens, which only have descriptive designations referring to colour and markings. (Thus,

13 The same quality (*kebal*) is present among the Iban (Uchibori 1984:21).
14 For other methods of chasing away dangerous spirits, see Nieuwenhuis (1904-07), esp. Chapter 5.

when a woman is calling a brooding hen to place her in a cage at the end of the day, she might shout '*Hnyap pitem*!', 'black chicken!') In *adat Dipuy*, the naming ceremony for dogs included features of the ritual for naming children. The owner took four pieces of banana leaves and asked the dog whether it wanted a particular name; he threw the leaf sections in the air and, if two of these landed top side up and the two others top side down, this meant the name was accepted. The dog was given some food on a leaf; the owner made sure the dog ate from the base of the leaf towards its tip, as this would make it a good dog. Unlike other domestic animals, dogs may get special treatment when they die: a good hunting dog may be buried with gifts (such as a lighter or a sword) and its body is left in a lean-to.

While hunting is an enjoyable activity and a major topic of conversation, fishing is the main source of proteins. Men fish with cast-nets or floating nets. Occasionally, the whole community – men, women, and children – goes up a stream into the primary jungle to fish with poison. Poison-fishing is a festive occasion which provides a break from the daily routine. To protect against the dangers of the poison (*tuva'*, *Derris elliptica*), a ritual is necessary.[15] Before starting, an egg is offered to spirits to ask for a good catch and fine weather (rain would dilute the poison). In the past, Derris root bundles were beaten on a barked log decorated with banners (*lujuk*); two rows of people struck the bundles alternatively. These days, the procedure is more informal.

One day, we all went on a fishing party. After the Derris bundles had been placed in the river, a young man held a Caladium leaf (*long*) and prayed to Bungan and Lake' Penyelong, emphasizing that, in Bungan's religion, poison fishing is not burdened by any taboo. He threw the leaf in the river and took a partially burnt piece of wood: 'This is fire,' he said. 'May the river be hot in the same way'. He took a fish which he had set aside for the purpose and threw it on a rock, saying this was the spirits' share. (One might also offer cigarettes and betel plugs to the spirits.) After the poison had been mixed in the river, some men went hunting while women and the other men started fishing. Women used hand-nets, men threw cast-nets and installed fish cages and floating nets; they speared fish with tridents. There was great excitement, people shouting and calling to each other, splashing in the shallows, running from net to fish cage, moving downriver with the poison. Afterwards, there was a picnic on the riverside. Women cooked rice, fish was boiled or grilled. Hunters returned with a wild boar which was added to the victuals. After our return to the longhouse, women dried the remaining fish on racks above slow fires. It was consumed in the following weeks.

In general, fishing and hunting do not call for complex rituals, although

[15] Nowadays, a commercial substitute is available which does not require a ritual. Among the Ngaju, poison fishing was thought to produce rain (Mallinckrodt 1924-25:417, 578).

people may pray to Bungan and Lake' Penyelong for assistance. The heads of large fish or turtles, the legs of wild fowl (*manok datah*), and the jaws of pigs are sometimes preserved. The flesh is removed from the jaws, which are told to 'go and get your mother, your father, your siblings'; the jaws are stored behind the house. Some animals are supernaturally dangerous, such as the clouded leopard (*kuleh*). In *adat Dipuy*, after killing it, the hunter shouted eight times a protective formula: 'Clouded leopard, your soul is below mine'; after they returned to the village, the hunter, dogs, and weapons were cleansed with chicken blood (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:106). In the Mahakam region, after killing a sambhur deer, a barking deer, a cobra, or a few other species of animals, the hunter made a rough image of the animal with a piece of black cloth at the site of the killing. Water with sugarcane sap was poured on it in order to bring to life a new animal which could be hunted on another occasion (Nombroek n.d.1:6.19).

Given the intrinsically uncertain nature of hunting and fishing, some taboos are linked to this activity. After gathering his implements (sun-hat, paddle, tobacco-box, weapons, or nets), the hunter avoids talking to those who remain at home, otherwise he will be unlucky; hunting and fishing companions may talk to each other. If he has forgotten something, the hunter may not return home to fetch it, otherwise the hunt will be fruitless. When installing or inspecting traps, one should remain silent. As animals understand human speech, hunters communicate in a secret language (*daho' ivun*) or with gestures. In the past, the secret language was also used when looking for camphor. A number of taboos were linked to this activity; if a woman committed adultery while her husband was looking for camphor, he would be unsuccessful in his endeavour. There were secret words for many activities: during the harvest, if a container was full (*penu*) of rice, one had to say it was *hamun*. It could be risky to mention that some valuable was plentiful, because this would draw the spirits' attention to the fact and they might bring misfortune. In such cases, *leba'* ('many') was replaced by the safe synonyms *pawat* and *pina*. In *adat Bungan*, the observance of these restrictions is more relaxed.

Each activity has its taboos and injunctions: when they catch spawning fish along river banks, men refrain from smoking or chewing betel, otherwise the fish will bite them. Problems are not over after the game has been caught: if dead boars are twitching, this means spirits of the graveyard are asking for a share of the animal. A portion of meat is minced; the spirits are told this is their share and they should not ask for more. (This was first described to me as an obsolete custom from the time of *adat Dipuy*, but I observed it on several occasions.)

In *adat Dipuy*, part of the catch was set aside for the hunter and his dog and cooked before the rest of the animal. After a series of unsuccessful hunts, a ritual restores the hunting ability of dogs (*neme aso'*, 'to restore dogs'). In *adat*

Table 2. Taboos of *adat Dipuy*

Taboos affecting everybody	Taboos affecting certain categories of people	Taboos affecting individuals
Permanent taboos		
Specific foods	Specific foods	Specific foods
Making fun of animals	Handling animals with markings	
Ignoring omens	Entering rice barns of other households	
Careless handling of heirlooms, etc.		
Mishandling rice-processing implements		
Fitting dibble-sticks with iron tips		
Going to the river right after eating		
Context- specific taboos		
Ritual prohibitions (food taboos, contact with the outside, etc.)	Taboos relating to pregnancy, childbirth, illness	
Spilling human blood in apartment	Mourning taboos	
	Uttering specific words while hunting, fishing, trapping or searching for camphor	
	Drinking water from a bowl on one's first trip	
Social taboos		
	Incest	
	Lack of respect towards elders, aristocrats	
	Taboos related to religious specialists	
	Improperly using paraphernalia of rank or headhunting	
	Failure to mourn a relative	
Taboos which are neutralized by a ritual		
Tilling land affected by death (graveyard, battle or murder site	Tying knots or shutting boxes during pregnancy	
Using timber from a house which burned		

N.B. This is not an exhaustive list; for food taboos, see Table 3.

Dipuy, the owner asked the spiderhunter and Brahminy kite omens to make the dog brave and healthy; these days, he prays to Bungan for the same purpose. The dog's owner offers an egg to Bungan so she will 'provide' a large etiolated (*tengan*) leaf with two lobes. In fact, he has already obtained the leaf and placed it on an egg offering; he steps aside for a moment, then expresses surprise at finding the leaf: 'How about that, this is an etiolated leaf which Bungan gave me!' The leaf takes upon itself the dog's incapacity. The man tears away a small section of the leaf and mixes it with rice so the dog eats it; then they go hunting.

The prey caught on that day cannot be shared with other households. The next day, the man and his dog make as if to hunt, but only go in front of the house with a spear and a basket, then they stay home for the day. The third day, they can return to their normal routine. Avun pointed out that the ritual does not always work. There is an alternative procedure: in the evening, one asks Bungan for water. After talking to the water, the man washes his dog with it. They stay home that night and go out the next day. Dogs are not as good as they used to be, Avun told me, because people are forgetting dog-curing rituals.

Although the jungle plays an important role in their life, the Kayan are never completely comfortable in it; they long for the security of the fields and the longhouse. Travel away from the community is a cause for anxiety; one is leaving the security of the village territory to encounter uncertainty. In the past, attacks by head-hunters were always a possibility; rapids remain a danger to river travel. It is wise to seek supernatural protection when travelling. Once, when Lake' Ajang was joining me in a trip to Belaga, he raised an egg to Bungan to inform her of our impending departure and to ask for her help. When the weather turned bad, he prayed again. When it started raining, he spit at the rain and told it to stop. When we hit turbulent rapids, people dispensed with the requirement of holding an egg while praying, because we all held onto the gunwales with both hands. When children shoot rapids for the first time, their parents offer an egg on their behalf to secure the good will of spirits. In major expeditions, watersheds are significant boundaries: each region has its own spirits and it is wise to make egg offerings before entering it (see Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:246-7).

Taboos

Under *adat Dipuy*, the Kayan were burdened with a staggering number of taboos (Table 2). *Adat Bungan* has done away with nearly all of them. Therefore, this section is based on informants' accounts rather than observation.[16] Taboos, auguries, and ritual prohibitions are related to each other: a. they all impose restrictions on normal behaviour; b. taboos and auguries were created by Dipuy and discarded in Bungan; c. auguries create taboos, insofar as those who observe the auguries must abstain from some actions (see below). In *adat Dipuy*,

16 Several Kayan words refer to prohibitions: *tepang, parit, tukit, uven, panah, puni, tulah, senana, dawi, due, lali*, and *sekilah*. The most general term is *tepang*, 'prohibition, avoidance', which does not necessarily have a religious meaning, although it usually does. All other terms have a supernatural connotation and they refer both to the prohibition and the consequences which follow from a transgression. *Tepang, parit, uven, panah, puni, tulah, dawi*, and *due* are discussed in this chapter. *Tukit* and *senana* are synonyms of *parit* and *tulah* respectively. *Lali* refers to organized rituals and, by extension, to the prohibitions attached to these rituals (see Chapter VI). *Sekilah* refers to incest and is discussed in Chapter IX. *Bawa'* is a word which I have not often heard. It is an impropriety based on ignorance. If I understood correctly, it consists in breaking a taboo one does not know about – as could happen to children or mad people.

taboos and omens created a world in which one's actions were constantly regulated and scrutinized by supernatural beings, where the pervasive expectation of supernatural danger echoed the possibility of attacks by head-hunters. Prohibitions affecting rituals and the life cycle will be considered later; this section focuses on the taboos of daily life.

Specific forms of misfortune were attached to some taboos. In other cases, consequences were not specified; illnesses or accidents were often explained after the fact as a result of breaking some taboo, even inadvertently. In assessing the inconvenience caused by taboos, we have to keep in mind that people occasionally disregarded them if they felt they could get away with it or if they doubted the validity of the taboo. The absence of any subsequent mishap justified their stance, while misfortune was interpreted as retribution. A number of taboos had 'escape clauses': for example, an expectant couple was not allowed to tie knots or close lids. In practice, they got around this irksome prohibition by untying the knot, then tying it again, or opening the lid and shutting it again. It was sometimes possible to counteract breaches of taboo. Among the Ma' Urut of the Mahakam, it was taboo to sit in a field during the sowing, but a Catholic did so. In order to confuse spirits, the owner of the field shouted: 'This is nothing at all; this is not a human being, only a monkey!' (Sombroek n.d.1:12.14).

Tulah is the supernatural power inherent in powerful people – especially aristocrats and elders; it is unleashed automatically if they are not shown proper respect. The chief once told a boy not to climb a tree; the boy disregarded the order and fell; the scar on his face is a permanent reminder of the chief's *tulah*. *Parit* refers to improper contact with, or handling of, someone or something which is supernaturally powerful, such as a tiger's tooth, a head-dress with tail feathers of rhinoceros hornbills, or head trophies. The tiger occupies an important position in Kayan mythology, although the animal is not part of Borneo's fauna. *Panah lejo*, 'the heat of the tiger', follows from disturbing the tiger's belongings and brings death within a day. Other animals with markings (*tulan kalong*) were also treated with caution. These include the bear (*buang*), the clouded leopard (*kuleh*), hornbills (*bato' ulo'* and *tingang*, which have white tail feathers with black stripes), the civet cat (*bekulo'*), the *dungan* fish, and the *belahabong* snake (which has a red tail, a red head and a black body). If one singed the skin and teeth of the civet cat over a fire, it was possible to eat it.[17]

Parit also applies to ritual contexts: it is *parit* for lay people to perform priestly rituals or to handle some ritual implements; it is *parit* for a priest to

17 The tiger is the archetypal *tulan kalong*; it is probable that the *tulan kalong* form a special category because their markings mimic those of the tiger. For more on the tiger motif in Borneo, see Sellato (1983). The Aoheng link bear and tiger: the bear is the master of the wind and is at the same time the thunder, while the Tiger is the master of water; the tiger is the son of the moon, which controls water (Sellato 1983:47).

carry out a *dayong* without receiving a fee. The paraphernalia of war and headhunting are also *parit*. I bought an old sword from the chief and he polished its blade before handing it to me. Later, his knee swelled; this was an effect of *parit*: the sword was powerful because it had tasted human blood. The chief had done nothing wrong in polishing the blade, but contact with a powerful object had, unexpectedly, been dangerous. If one takes good care of such weapons, one is free from danger, but it is *parit* to neglect them. *Parit* covers a wide range of prohibitions: it is taboo to step over someone's legs, which would remove that person's soul. In a crowded room, one must walk around people or ask them to make space.[18]

Blood is dangerous and we saw that someone who has been wounded may not stay in his apartment until he has healed. The same rule applies to men who have participated in the headhunting ceremony: that night, they sleep on the veranda in order not to bring effluvia of death into their dwellings. Because it causes bleeding, tattooing is a perilous activity; rituals reduce its danger. Specific phases of the moon are preferred because they are believed to reduce the flow of blood. Tattooing sessions take place on the gallery or in a hut; one may not be tattooed on the gallery of a successful headhunter (*kelunan lakin*), a priest, or a person with a Thunder spirit helper, because the spirits of these people would be offended by the tattooing. The tattooer avoids the edible Caladium (*lu'e*) and *meke* (a seasoning); she cannot engage in any agricultural activity while tattooing, otherwise her spirit helper would be offended; the client is not subject to any taboos. The tattooer receives a fee for her work but, before starting, it is essential for her to make a small gift to her client in order to compensate for the fact she is about to draw blood.[19] In the same way, someone who deflowers a girl gives her something because he has spilt blood. This counteracts the danger to which the girl would be exposed through loss of blood.

Food taboos were a striking feature of *adat Dipuy* (Table 3).[20] They mostly applied to animals, and only rarely to vegetable products. Some animals were generally prohibited: monkey (*brok*), wild cattle (*keliho*), python (*penganen*) and possibly all snakes, omen animals, clouded leopard (*kuleh*), helmeted hornbill (*bato' ulo'*), and rhinoceros hornbill (*tingang*). The last three are aristocratic animals (*tulan maren*); while they could not be eaten, the leopard was hunted

18 Conversely, in the Mahakam it is *parit* for Ego to walk under the raised arm of someone of the parental or grand-parental generation (Sombroek n.d.1:6.43).

19 In 1970, tattooing was coming out of fashion and most young girls were untattooed. I did not witness the activity.

20 Taboos linked to rituals will be described later. Food taboos were so numerous that one informant found it easier to list the animals which could be eaten without restriction: fish, wild boar, birds, porcupine (*ketong*), and monitor lizard (however, Uma Bawang had a special taboo against the latter). The absence of prohibition on the porcupine is interesting, given that its meat is said to make one drunk (*mavok*). Species of fish with a poisonous spine (such as *hrang*, *buhi*, and *tiken*) are not generally prohibited.

Table 3. Food taboos of *adat Dipuy*

Foods prohibited to everybody
monkey
wild cattle
python (and other snakes?)
omen animals
clouded leopard
helmeted hornbill
rhinoceros hornbill
Foods prohibited to some adults (in some communities)
sambhur deer
mouse deer
monitor lizard
scaly anteater
soft-shelled turtle
Foods prohibited to the aristocratic descendants of the hero Lake' Dian
specific kinds of fish (*tepaha, turing,* and *dungan*)
gibbon
bear
leaf monkey
monitor lizard
Foods prohibited to religious specialists
specific kinds of fish (*dungan, hlan*)
shrimps (priests for whom Belawan is a spirit helper)
Foods prohibited during rituals (lali)
fresh food (meat and vegetables)
mushrooms
dungan fish
edible caladium
grilled cassava (during mourning)
sugarcane (during mourning)
chilli (during mourning)
Foods prohibited during illnesses
edible caladium (for those who spit blood)
fish with spikes (for those who are treated with medicinal plants)

N.B. This is not an exhaustive list.

for its skin and eye-teeth, the hornbills for their skulls and tail-feathers. Aristocrats and men who had been on the war path used them as decorations on their ceremonial dress; only they could kill these animals with impunity. Kayan men have a hole in the shell of the ear in which leopard's teeth can be

inserted. However, only brave or old men may wear them.[21] Because of its association with the Tiger, which is itself linked to the Thunder (Chapter IV), the body of the clouded leopard may not be brought to the house. In *adat Dipuy*, hornbill tail feathers could be handled only by those who had participated in the appropriate number of headhunting ceremonies.

The helmeted hornbill is more dangerous than the rhinoceros hornbill, because the former is the ruler (*laja'*) of birds, while the latter is simply a *hipuy* (lower aristocrat). Early in this century, Lake' Bo', the ruler of Uma Bawang, captured a helmeted hornbill and he asked his young *hipuy* companion to hold it. Soon after, the boy became ill for the best part of a year. While, as a *hipuy*, he was in theory impervious to the danger and, furthermore, he was acting on the chief's behalf, his illness was explained *ex post facto* as a consequence of *parit*. This explanation shows the theory of taboos was not set in stone but was subject to reinterpretations according to circumstances.

While some animals were generally tabooed among the Baluy Kayan, others were prohibited in specific communities. We have seen that there were three sections in Uma Bawang: Uma Bawang proper, Uma Daro', and Laham. When boys were old enough to don a sword or serve as lookout on a boat prow, and when girls started being tattooed, they avoided contact with the monitor lizard in Uma Bawang, the scaly anteater and the soft-shelled turtle[22] in Uma Daro'. Grandparents and men who had participated in many headhunting rituals could eat these animals. The Uma Daro' taboo on the anteater arose when an anteater visited the village as they were burying someone. This unusual event was deemed to be significant; it was the occasion to institute a new prohibition.

Some animals were tabooed to specific categories of people. Priests avoided the *dungan* fish. The most burdensome taboo – at least the one which was mentioned most frequently – applied to the sambhur deer (*payo*) and the mousedeer (*bilun*). Virtually all those who had been the object of a curative *dayong* ritual had to avoid deer meat. More precisely, the sambhur was taboo for those who 'owned a *dayong* hook' (*hipun kawit dayong*; some *dayong* rituals do not call for a hook and those who had never used that device were exempted from the prohibition). The smell of deer meat was dangerous for those who observed the taboo, and those who were allowed to eat it cooked it outside the house. There was no prohibition on using deer antlers as sword handles, but only those who could eat deer were allowed to make the handles. Dogs could

[21] Some travelogues state that only men who had taken head trophies could wear these teeth ornaments (*udang*); this is incorrect. It is not even clear that participation in a headhunting expedition was a condition for wearing them, although it may have been the case in theory. In contrast to the Kenyah fashion, it would be unthinkable for Kayan to decorate baby carriers with leopards' teeth.

[22] *Kelavang*. There was no taboo on the hard-shell tortoise (*sian*). The people of Laham presumably had taboos of their own. The inhabitants of Uma Apun – now absorbed by Uma Juman – avoided the *tepaha* fish.

eat deer, but one could become ill after touching a dog which had recently eaten deer meat. (Dogs ate the flesh of monkeys, which humans could not do.) Sambhur deer, barking deer, and macaque (*brok*) produced shortness of breath (*lama*), because their hair was said to irritate the respiratory system. Any breathing dysfunction was explained as a consequence of having smelled the aroma of deer meat. Coughing was another consequence of eating forbidden foods. The soft-shelled turtle produced swellings, particularly in the penis. While the link between transgression and punishment was often specific, any misfortune could be interpreted as the result of a transgression.

Descendants of the culture hero Lake' Dian were subject to specific taboos. Although adoptive children are normally treated exactly like natural children, these prohibitions did not apply to the former. Lake' Dian's descendants avoided *tepaha*, *turing*, and *dungan* (three species of fish), gibbon (*havet*), bear, leaf monkey (*nyakit*), monitor lizard, and sambhur deer. Some individuals observed additional taboos which were revealed through divination: Avun's wife avoided the *hlan*, a scaleless fish.

Besides food taboos, there were prohibitions related to eating. One must not leave in the middle of a meal; one must not go to the river right after a meal, otherwise one would be attacked by a snake, eaten by a crocodile or a tiger, or hurt with a tool. In Uma Bawang, four sudden deaths were attributed to transgression of this taboo (*panah*, lit. 'heat'). We have seen that a guest may not refuse food, drink, or cigarettes (the transgression is called *puni* and brings bad luck). In order to 'throw away the *puni*' (*mebet puni*), one must signify acceptance of the proffered food by touching it (or its container).

Given its importance, rice was also subject to taboos – in addition to the prohibitions of the annual ritual cycle. It was forbidden to enter another household's rice barn, otherwise the soul of the *padi* would be offended and might leave. Dogs were not allowed to enter barns, otherwise the rice would disappear unnaturally (*kesavang*). It was forbidden to hold rattan between the teeth while building a barn or farm hut, otherwise rats would attack its contents. Dibbling sticks could not be tipped with iron, as this would offend the soul of the *padi*. Consequently, men periodically had to take breaks to sharpen their dibble sticks. The acceptability of iron-tipped dibble sticks is seen as a significant advantage of *adat Bungan*.

Some taboos remain in *adat Bungan*, but they are not numerous or particularly irksome. They compare favourably to Christian taboos against alcoholic drinks or farm work on Sundays (Uma Bawang's Christians ignore the prohibition on rice beer). The near absence of taboos is often pointed out as a significant advance of *adat Bungan* over *adat Dipuy*. People are still reluctant to allow outsiders into their barns. The soul of the *padi* can still be offended if one spills rice carelessly (*padi* and cooked rice), if one accidentally set fire to *padi* or hits it with a sword. One must be careful not to handle roughly the implements

with which rice is processed – winnowing trays, baskets, and mats – or strike a barn with a sword. During rituals of the annual cycle, priests ask for Bungan's indulgence in case rice has been accidentally mishandled. In the fields, one must be careful not to chase away the *peliut* (the white eye) which copulates (*ngiut*) with *padi*; it is the mother of *padi* (*hinan pare*).[23]

Mary Douglas's (1966) incisive analysis of Jewish food prohibitions has been the model for other studies of taboos. Kayan taboos do not lend themselves as a whole to such a structural analysis. It is possible to offer some partial generalizations, but no overarching system is evident. Powerful people, paraphernalia of rank, animals related to the Tiger and other aristocratic animals are dangerous. Blood is dangerous, as are manifestations of death (such as weapons used in headhunting). Fresh food and fresh products of the jungle should be avoided while the longhouse is ritually closed. Some taboos can be explained on the basis of mimicry or contagion: tying knots makes childbirth difficult, intact timber from a burnt longhouse endangers the new building. As a whole, Kayan taboos lack conceptual unity, except insofar as they are attributed to a single spirit, Dipuy. The cogency of the taboos is to be found at the affective level: they were a concomitant of the uncertainty of life and of the anxiety this created. At the conceptual level, the existence of taboos served as a ready-made explanation for misfortune, which could be attributed to the inadvertent (or malicious) transgression of a taboo. Omens also belonged to the same complex.

Omens

Kayan religion offers several kinds of portents. Animal auguries played an important role in *adat Dipuy*, but have disappeared in *adat Bungan* (as has hepatoscopy). Dreams and divination procedures remain sources of knowledge in *adat Bungan*. The importance of omens in the life of Bornean peoples is well-known (Metcalf 1976). My informants returned again and again to the topic. Omens affected life on a daily basis, in the same way as taboos; the disappearance of omens was one of the major benefits of the Bungan reform. Some portents are spontaneous, others are sought (Table 4). Dipuy is responsible for the existence of omens.

> Belare' Malang Long ejaculated in a bunch of fruit and sent it flying. Hiang Bulo' Patang caught it, ejaculated in it too, and sent it flying again. It landed where their sister Tube Navan was bathing and made her pregnant. When her brothers found this out, they felt responsible for her pregnancy and committed suicide. One day, while Tube Navan was fetching water, her mother Dipuy took Tube Navan's child: 'I'd better kill you, child,' she says, 'as you have no father and nobody to take care of

[23] It may seem contradictory that the same entity is male and female. However, it is common to describe powerful gendered entities as both father and mother. Prayers refer to the female deity Bungan as *taman, hinan kame'*, 'our father, our mother'; in speeches, the same expression can be applied to the chief and to the *maren* in general.

Table 4. Omens and divination

Spontaneous omens	Sought omens
Animal auguries	
Birds	
Brahminy kite	Brahminy kite
spiderhunter	spiderhunter
greater yellow-eared spiderhunter	greater yellow-eared spiderhunter
maroon woodpecker	maroon woodpecker
rufous piculet	rufous piculet
white-eye	
Other animals	
muntjac (barking deer)	muntjac
belahabong snake	
Dreams*	**Divination**
	hepatoscopy
	tossing sections of bamboos or leaves
	divination with an egg*
	oaths*

* These elements are present in *adat Bungan*.

N.B. The list of animal auguries is not exhaustive and varies from village to village. (All Baluy Kayan identified as omens the Brahminy kite, spiderhunter, greater yellow-eared spiderhunter, and muntjac).

you.' So she chopped up the baby. 'Grandchild,' she said, 'I have decided you will go and live with humans.' She told the various parts of her grandchild to become the spiderhunter, the Brahminy kite, the rufous piculet, the maroon woodpecker, the crested jay, the barking deer, and all other omen animals. She gave them these instructions: 'If you go to the left, people may not hunt, fish, or farm. If they do so, make them hungry, make accidents happen. When you go to the right, make them successful.' A man named Paren Iran picked up the baby's head and transformed it into a human being, Ngaling Ledang. Ngaling remembered Dipuy's injunctions; this is why we know how to observe auguries.[24]

In *adat Dipuy*, some omens manifested themselves spontaneously; others were

[24] This version was narrated by Avun. In another version (Baling Avun 1961), auguries started as ordinary animals until Dipuy superseded Bo' Dale' Gerang and Bo' Dale' Sirang (who were in charge of the original, easy, Kayan religion; see Chapter II). Dipuy summoned the animals to a feast: 'I am about to tell you to become auguries. If you speak when people leave the house or go on a trip, your voice will be venomous; it will make them ill, it will kill them, it will cause them to get hurt.' Dipuy went on to specify what would happen if people disregarded auguries, in some cases indicating specific links between auguries and mishaps: '*Belahabong*, in the same way you are red, people will become red because of you; they will die by the sword, they will die fighting'. 'Auguries, if people do not feed you, give them fevers so they will slaughter pigs and chickens for you, so they will make egg offerings. If people feed

sought before major undertakings such as headhunting or trading expeditions, when looking for camphor in the jungle, or when a community migrated to a new area. Furthermore, some rituals required that omens be sought; these will be described in Chapter VI. The world was full of portents; even now, when auguries have lost their power over people's lives, supernatural signs are not rare. Virtually anything unusual (*slap*) has a supernatural connotation; at worst, it can be deadly (*melien*).[25] Examples of strange manifestations are animals who twitch after being killed, rice stalks or banana palms which branch into two stems, or husked rice which pops up by itself. If one's eyelids are vibrating, this means a distant relative is dying. In order to avert the danger of such portents, one must make an egg offering (*napo' melien*) and, possibly, sponsor a *dayong* ritual.

Until the Bungan reform, spontaneous auguries affected all activities outside the longhouse, such as hunting, logging, boat-building, and travel. When a spiderhunter or Brahminy kite crossed their path, travellers had to acknowledge the event; for a good omen, they went to the river bank where they lit a small fire (a cigarette served the purpose); its smoke carried their prayers to the omen bird and validated the portent. If a good omen was acknowledged during a hunt, the fire was told to burn the quarry and weaken its sinews. If the omen was bad, the trip was postponed for a day or more. If several boats were going to the farm together, an omen which manifested itself to the first boat affected all boats, even if they were only coincidentally together rather than travelling with a common purpose. If in the course of a trip both auspicious and inauspicious omens were observed, the latter prevailed (at least in principle). If one member of a cooperation team was attacked by a snake or hurt with an adze, all members of the group had to stop working and return home for the day.

The general term for omen animal is *nyeho'*; it also refers specifically to the Brahminy kite (*mengiling*).[26] Four auguries seem to have been observed by all Baluy Kayan communities: spiderhunter (*hisit*), greater yellow-eared spiderhunter (*pajan*), Brahminy kite, and muntjac ('barking deer', *tela'u*). In addition, the Uma Daro' section of Uma Bawang observed the maroon woodpecker (*kihing*) and the rufous piculet (*bukang*, also a woodpecker). Uma Apan in the lower Baluy area observed the barking deer, the spiderhunter, the Brahminy kite, the rufous piculet, the maroon woodpecker, the honey buzzard (*asi*), and *kase* (an unidentified bird). When they came across the white-eye (*Zosterops* sp.) or two kinds of arthropods (*kudak ara'* and *katong ba'an*) while clearing new fields or harvesting, the Uma Daro' people had to stop work for the day. I was

[25] *Melien* is a cognate of *lien*, 'starving'. Sombroek (n.d.1:3.8) gives examples of events which are *melien*: a blown egg or an egg with two yolks.

[26] As an omen, the Brahminy kite is also called *malang*, *pelaki*, and *pelebo*. These names may refer to different behaviours or different species. Among the Berawan, *plake* refers to several

told that the *belatok* (banded red woodpecker) was also an omen animal. These omens manifested themselves spontaneously; some of them were also sought in specific circumstances.

An omen associated with the left was inauspicious; on the right it was auspicious. What constitutes left and right is sometimes confusing. Because auguries were no longer heeded in 1970, my knowledge is based on informants' accounts which were sometimes hard to understand. It was not possible to ask for a demonstration, as this would be tantamount to practising *adat Dipuy* again, a potentially dangerous undertaking which could raise Bungan's ire. I understood that if an omen bird flew from right to left, this was a bad omen; from left to right, a good omen.[27] If the omen flew first from left to right and then from right to left, this was even more auspicious. With a good omen, success was assured. Some omens manifested themselves by their call as well as the direction of their flight: upon hearing the greater yellow-eared spiderhunter, one had to stop work. If its call came from the right, one had to stop work until it was silent again; if one heard it from the left, work had to cease for the day.

As a spontaneous omen, the bark of the muntjac was always inauspicious; if it was heard while people were working at their farms, they had to return home for four days. The muntjac omen was catastrophic on the first day of clearing the forest for new fields. In this case, the field had to be abandoned altogether for a year. The muntjac had control over the jungle: if it was heard while people were cutting a log or while jungle produce was being gathered, these had to be abandoned. Some time before World War II, the people of Uma Bawang had spent much time hulling a large boat for Baling Avun[28], and it was almost ready to be pulled to the river. It had to be abandoned because of the muntjac's bark. This made a lasting impression on the people of Uma Bawang because of all the time they had wasted on that boat. They were reminded of it because the hull took many years to rot away and hunters often came across it.

If one ignored omens, negative consequences ensued. Cautionary tales abound. Lake' Uva once made a boat. A spiderhunter flew across it from right

[27] This is also supported by other sources (such as Hose and McDougall 1912, II:52, describing the Kenyah, although on p. 56, a hawk which flew towards the left was a good war omen). Sombroek (n.d.1:6.36) says that if a bird came from the right or flew to the right of the observer, this was a good sign. The Berawan do not use the same omen animals as the Kayan, but Metcalf's (1976, 1989:184-94) first-hand account probably presents observational and interpretative procedures akin to the Kayan's. Like me, Mallinckrodt (1924-25:569) reports difficulties in understanding the interpretation of omens among the Ngaju.

[28] Baling was the son of Uma Aging's chief, whom he succeeded. He spent much of his adolescence in Uma Bawang: it was common practice to send to other communities young aristocrats who were destined to become chiefs. As a resident *maren*, he was entitled to corvée work from the commoners of Uma Bawang. I was told of several instances when people had to abandon rattan and palms which they had painstakingly gathered because of the muntjac's injunction.

to left, but he and his companions kept on working. When they dragged it to the river, it broke; if they had returned home and continued work on another day, everything would have been fine, but they were punished for their disregard of the spiderhunter's injunction. If a spiderhunter enjoined collectors to leave behind rattan and palms, they could return on another day to collect it. Hunters who ignored omens were bound to suffer accidents or their dogs might be hurt. When hunting or travelling, it was preferable to return home (*melo'*) for a day after a good omen in order to 'pull the omen' (*pejat nyeho'*); this guaranteed success on the following day. This was particularly the case when the Brahminy kite flew to the right (*malan ta'o*). Alternatively, one could pretend to sleep after acknowledging a good or a bad omen and then resume the activity. This fooled the omen into thinking a night had passed. Some omens manifested themselves in very specific fashion: it was mandatory to return home if one was 'squeezed out' (*sektip*) by the calls of greater yellow-eared spiderhunters coming from two directions.

The *belahabong* snake was a very bad omen and, if encountered, there was an alternative: one could suspend for two days the activity in progress or one could kill the snake. This in turn would either bring great success or death, depending on the strength of one's soul and the power of one's spirit helpers. If the *belahabong* manifested itself while people were processing a log (to make a boat or planks), it had to be abandoned. During clearing or sowing, if one was reluctant to abandon the farm after meeting the *belahabong*, one could stealthily kill it and place it near the field's edge. The snake was 'revived', fed, and placed in a gutter (*teli*) made from a large banana leaf in which the snake was made to glide to the neighbours' farm. At that point, the *belahabong* became the neighbours' problem; they might be expected to suffer bloody accidents (*ga' daha*) or headhunting attacks. Presumably, one reserved such neighbourly behaviour towards people against whom one had a serious grudge. More generally, if one came across a snake, one had either to stop what one was doing or kill the snake, feed it with sugarcane to bring it back to life, and then offer it dry fish (*ilep*).

The Bungan reform did away with all these prohibitions; the Kayan's relief at the new dispensation is obvious. After listing tabooed animals, Baling Avun (1961) concludes:

> In *adat Dipuy*, one would have died after eating any of these. Now that we follow *adat Bungan*, there are no more taboos, one can eat without restrictions. Life is good; we are not at risk because of breaches of taboos, there are no illnesses, no deaths [from this cause]. This is why we say that Bungan Malan and Pesilong Luan are more powerful than Dipuy of the Apo Lagan, because She [Bungan Malan] managed to overthrow the religion of the Apo Lagan. Life is peaceful again because of Bungan. Now, we can eat anything we want without breaking any taboo.

There has been discussion in the literature about the effect of religion on

productivity in Borneo, particularly in relation to taboos, omens, and periods of ritual inactivity. Leach (1948:393) rightly refused to believe Banks's (1940:85) assertion that Kayan omens and taboos made farm work impossible for 117 days in the year. However, there is ample evidence that taboos and omens had drastic effects, to the point where rice cultivation was cancelled for a whole year after bad omens when they started to clear new fields (Bampfylde 1888; Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:161). To escape such a fate, people resorted to various stratagems: they went to their field sites at night (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:161) or they studiously kept their eyes to the ground to make sure they could not see bad omens. In order to avoid the cry of omen animals, one member of the group banged a gong during the critical period so the omens would not be heard (omens have an effect only if they are perceived).

Dreams

Dreams (*nyupe'*) may be portents; an element of the *dayong* ceremony (Chapter VII) serves to test whether they are significant and, if so, to make them come true if they are auspicious or cancel them if they are inauspicious. Divination serves to ascertain whether a dream is a portent or a meaningless occurrence. Lay people sometimes interpret dreams without consulting a priest: if a member of a cooperation team dreams the group should refrain from farm work for a day, they are likely to act accordingly. (In any case, there would be no point in testing the dream through a *dayong* ritual, because this would require that they stop work for the day anyway.)

While training as a border scout during the Confrontation with Indonesia in the early 1960s, a young man, Hngo, dreamt that an old man with white hair told him to carry out a ritual in a particular place; his travelling companion was to join him. The dream specified he had to use one egg and two swords. Hngo told me he had been well-advised to comply with the dream because the spirit saved their life twice, once by cancelling an order for them to go to Long Jawi (where they could have been killed by an Indonesian attack), another time by stopping Indonesians who were planning to attack Long Lino. Hngo did not always heed his dreams. Once, as he was about to travel, he dreamt his trip would be unlucky; he told his dream to his travelling companion, Himang, who insisted on going. They capsized, Himang's motor was destroyed and all their goods were soaked. However, all of Hngo's belongings remained in good shape because, he said, he had wanted to heed the dream and the spirits let him off lightly.

Dreams can have serious practical consequences. Lirong was married to Livan. Someone dreamt they should divorce. As is mandatory, the dreamer reported the dream; Lirong refused to believe it because he was very attached to his wife. The next day, Lirong went to his farm and a *belahabong* snake crossed his path, slithering over his foot. This was the worst possible omen,

which confirmed the dream unambiguously. Elders told the couple that they must separate, which they regretfully did.[29] Sometimes, children are adopted because of a dream. Shortly after a man's death, Min, a fellow villager, dreamt the deceased wanted to take his daughter away with him – in other words he wanted his daughter to die and join him in the spirit country. Min adopted the girl, thus protecting her from her father's lethal affection. The girl sometimes lived with her adoptive parents, sometimes with her natal household.[30]

Dreams are often interpreted after the fact: Hngo Jok dreamt he was bailing water with a basket and, lo and behold, there was rice in it. That year, he had a plentiful harvest which, he reasoned, had to be a consequence of the dream. Dreams provide all kinds of information: it is through dreams that one finds out about the existence of spirit helpers (*utam*). One can get a new name from a dream. Anyi' Lupak is so called because he dreamt he was carried off by a wave (*lupak*). This is an *aran nyupe'*, a 'dream name'.

The causality of portents

The Kayan do not perceive omens and divination as sources of information, but as indices about reality. In other words, omens and divination are not messages. An auspicious omen bird does not foretell good luck, it brings it about. This can be contrasted with the Iban view of omens as 'a message of advice or warning from Lang' (Jensen 1974:138).[31] A few examples illustrate the correspondence between omens and events. If travellers noticed an omen bird about to cross their path inauspiciously, they turned the boat around and made the encounter into a good omen. If omens were not observed, they had no effect. As I have already described, when they were engaged in activities for which bad omens would be disastrous, the Kayan kept their eyes on the ground in order not to see them and a member of the cooperation team made noise to guarantee the barking deer could not be heard at crucial stages of the yearly cycle. In addition, if an omen was observed, something could often be done to change the outcome. When people came across the *belahabong* snake, they could kill it in an attempt to transform it into a good omen. None of these responses fit with a communication model; rather, omens are events which have power in

[29] Unlike a normal divorce, for which there is a guilty party, neither of them had to pay a fine. Until she went to live in another village, Lirong continued to look after Livan. Later on, she returned to Uma Bawang to marry another man.

[30] Such children are called *anak nyupe'*, 'dream children'. This forms a separate category of adoptees, distinct from the ordinary kind (*anak among*) (see Rousseau 1974:230-7).

[31] Freeman (1961:147) also describes Iban auguries as messengers under the control of gods: 'The gods, in their omniscience, ensure that an augury is seen or heard only by those for whom it is intended' (Freeman 1961:147-8). Among the Baluy Kayan, there is no assumption of intentionality, nor are omen animals the messengers of spirits. On the other hand, the people of the Mahakam offered rice and eggs to the spiderhunter (*hisit*) in order to forestall evil influences (Nombroek n.d.1:6.37), which may suggest some intentionality on the part of omen animals.

and of themselves insofar as they are perceived. In other words, the connection between omen animals and humans creates the omen. If omen animals were only the messengers of the gods, the delivery or non-delivery of the message ought not to affect the outcome. For the Kayan, an omen is the act of perceiving specific events; we do not have here the three components of a communicative event (sender, message, and receiver), but an indivisible entity, the omen.

Dipuy is responsible for the existence of omens, but is not involved in individual occurrences. The myth specifies that the omens are free agents, not Dipuy's messengers. Needham (1976) warns us against an indiscriminate use of our notion of causality in studying other societies. In discussing the efficacy of headhunting, he shows that the Kenyah make a direct connection between the capture of head trophies on the one hand and prosperity, fertility, and health on the other. There is no assumption that the headhunter appropriates a hypothetical 'soul-substance'. Kayan taboos and omens follow the same causal model. Omens cause good- or ill-luck directly. There are some practical differences between taboos and omens: taboos are broken by the action of a human agent, while omens require the agency of omen animals; more importantly, a taboo takes effect even if it is broken unwittingly, while awareness of omens is necessary for them to take effect. Dreams differ from omens: they are, at least sometimes, communications from the spirits. Spirits cause people to dream in order to impart information or state their wishes. However, many Kayan talk and act as if the dreams had a power of their own: people say an auspicious dream is the reason for their prosperity.

There are similarities between auguries and spirits: both have a will and can be propitiated; both can be tricked. We saw that if people did not want to return home after an omen, they lit a small fire and pretended to eat, so the augury would think they had returned home. In the same way, we will see (Chapter VIII) that a spirit who is trying to kill someone may be tricked into accepting a simulacrum. However, omens and spirits are distinct in other ways: spirits have personalities like humans and their wishes and orders are subject to negotiation. Spirits may attack humans because of human-like emotions and choices. Auguries do not have the same degree of freedom: they freely decide to manifest themselves, but they have to be perceived to be effective.

We can contrast three forms of causality: 1. breaking a taboo brings a mishap. The link is organic, automatic, and unexplained; 2. spirits act out of the same impulses that motivate human action and can be influenced in similar ways; 3. omen animals choose, without evident purpose, to affect humans. If they are perceived – which is independent of the augury's will – then there is an omen, which has the automatic effect of establishing auspicious or inauspicious circumstances.

Religion and society

In this section, we will see first how religion contributes to define social roles, including gender, age, stratum ascription, and political power. We will then look at sorcery and oaths and finally the religious significance of headhunting. Religion pervades daily life insofar as it contributes to define social roles and social units; it strongly buttresses the stratification system. On the other hand, Kayan religion has relatively little to do with morality. Adultery, theft, and murder are essentially secular matters with only incidental religious aspects (*hun*, a murder within the longhouse pollutes it). However, habitual thieves may suffer supernatural punishment. Their rice stores disappear unnaturally fast, their clothes become worn rapidly, their possessions are broken, and so on. The shabby life of one Uma Bawang family was explained as a consequence of their habitual pilfering. Adultery is controlled by secular sanctions, but the adulterer's close relatives may also incur permanent disabilities such as blindness or lameness. This kind of misfortune, which strikes the innocent, is called *due*. An extremely old man who had recently lost his sight explained his condition as a consequence of his mother's adultery half a century ago. Incest is religious as well as a secular matter (see Chapter IX).

Social roles

Rituals of the life cycle by definition play a major part in the Kayan imagining of social roles (Chapter IX). More generally, Kayan religion marks gender and age differences. Elsewhere (Rousseau 1991), I have described relationships between genders as one of relative equality and limited differentiation. While this description is valid in a comparative context, Kayan religion emphasizes gender differentiation more than secular aspects of daily life do. Men's souls are deemed to be stronger than those of women and boys; headhunting rituals are for males only, while the selection of rice seeds, sowing, and the first ceremonial harvest are women's activities. Several rituals establish that the apartment is the women's space, while the gallery is the men's domain. The theory of conception distinguishes father and mother: bones come from the father, the flesh from the mother. Tattoos mark both gender and stratum differences: women, but not men, are tattooed according to culturally specified patterns which signify the woman's stratum ascription. It would be taboo (*parit*) for a commoner to take on an aristocratic tattoo pattern. After her death, a woman's tattoos shine and light the way to the spirit country. In the naming ceremony, a cock is killed for a male child, a hen for a girl.

In *adat Dipuy*, Kayan men avoided touching looms or clothes worn by women, as this would make them weak (*dawi*) and unsuccessful in hunting, fishing, and

war (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:350).[32] Drawings (*kalong*) were imbued with power and could be drawn or carved only by men. Women could sew bead designs and tattooers were women, but they used patterns made by men. In theory, the prohibition on women creating patterns has disappeared with the Bungan reform; in practice, it persists. The power of patterns is also demonstrated by the fact that, in *adat Dipuy*, men had to make an offering before carving (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, II:206). Indeed, only old and brave men felt safe in making patterns. This may explain why the Kayan hired Kenyah craftsmen to decorate their walls and mausoleums (*salong*), because the Kenyah did not have the same prohibitions. There are stylistic differences between Kayan and Kenyah motifs, and Kenyah craftsmen used Kayan patterns for their clients. Because of the power imbued in these mausoleums, it was taboo (*parit*) to execute the drawings before receiving payment for them.

Both for men and women, age provides status; age is also correlated with supernatural strength. For this reason, it is important to show respect to one's elders. Failure to do so makes one vulnerable to *tulah*, the supernatural force inherent in people with high status. Because of *tulah*, children should not come in contact casually with old men, although this does not apply to grandparents and other relatives. One must follow the advice of seniors and obey them: an elder advised a young man to cut wood more carefully; the youngster ignored him and hurt himself. With grim satisfaction, the elder said: 'You see, this is my *tulah*'. Failure to use the proper term of address towards an elder or social superior is also *tulah*.

Religion defines social roles in another way; the household and the community are religious as well as social units. At the ritual harvest and the headhunting ceremony, participants form a line which duplicates the sequence of apartments in the longhouse (Chapter VI). In *adat Dipuy*, each household had a *lusan lali*, a bamboo container in which the first five grains of the new harvest were placed every year. The *lusan lali* was among the most valued possessions of each household, in some cases dating from before Uma Bawang's migration from the Apo Kayan to the Baluy two hundred years ago.

Social stratification

We have seen that socially prominent people are deemed to owe their success to their spirit helpers. Kayan religion also gives great importance to stratum differentiation. The myth of origin of human beings explains how Kayan society came to be divided into strata. A brother and sister gave birth to four boys and four daughters who married each other; they were all equal at first.

[32] During part of the sowing ritual, the Mahakam-Kayan wore masks; some women dressed up as men (*hudo' lakeuy*) (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:327). Does this mean there was no taboo on women wearing men's clothes?

[illegible] the father:

'You are living without any order; this is not good. You must decide who among you will be your leader. You must compete in a race. The winner will be your ruler. The runner-up will be a lower aristocrat (*hipuy*) and the next one a commoner. The very last will be the slave.' So they ran. Jok Uyok Une did well because he was the oldest. He finished first, followed by Joh Kelangawan and Hanyi Kelanggayan. Hanyi Kelien Jihe' Dange was last.

They returned home. 'Who was first?', asked the father. 'I was!', said Jok Uyok Une. 'I was number two!' said Joh Kelangawan. 'I was third!', said Hanyi Kelanggayan. 'Hanyi Kelien Jihe' Dange was the very last', said Jok Uyok Une. 'This is what will happen', said the father. 'You who were first, Jok, and your wife Huring Keluhing Meke', you will be slaves. Joh Kelangawan and Husun Telun Bawe' will be commoners. Hanyi Kelanggayan and Hendo' Lengo Pare will be *hipuy*. You two who are the smallest, Hanyi Kelien Jihe' Dange and Seluy Buring Une, you will become the *maren*, you will become the rulers of the longhouse. This is because you, Jok Uyok Une, and your brothers showed a bad attitude [after your success in the race]. You will look after Hanyi Kelien Jihe' Dange and Seluy Buring Une, because they're all thumbs, they can't look after themselves. You and your wife will be their slaves, you are committed to their well-being. If you [commoners and slaves] get a wild pig, you must give them a thigh and the head. When you work in the fields, you must help them. When Hanyi Kelanggayan, the *hipuy*, has to work, you help him as well.'

[illegible] moral of the story is that rulers have slaves because they need them; slaves deserve their lowly position because of the original sin of pride. Not only is stratum ascription hereditary, it is part of the emergence of human beings. While Kayan religion justifies stratification and the authority of the ruling group, there is a difference between the social and religious conceptualizations of hierarchy. The myth of origin recognizes the four strata of ruler (*maren*), lower aristocrat (*hipuy*), commoner (*panyin*), and slave (*dipen*), but other aspects of Kayan religion only distinguish 'good people' (*kelunan jia*) and 'bad people' (*kelunan ji'ek*), who have different sets of rituals. The 'good people' include *maren* and *hipuy*, the 'bad people' *panyin* and *dipen* (Table 5). Many ritual

Table 5. Kayan stratification

Religious strata	Social strata	Social duties
kelunan jia ('good people')	*maren* (ruling estate)	leaders
	hipuy (lower aristocrats)	provide corvées to *maren*
kelunan ji'ek ('bad people')	*panyin* (commoners)	provide corvées to *maren*
	dipen (slaves)	provide corvées and other work to *maren*

N.B. Well-to-do *panyin* with some aristocratic ancestors are called *panyin jia*, 'good commoners'.

procedures come in fours or multiples of four. The number four applies to the 'bad people', eight and sixteen to the 'good people'. The *dayong* ceremony calls for four pieces of fine cloth on commoners' altars (*jok*), but eight or sixteen for the *maren*. In principle, the use of eight or sixteen items is a matter of personal choice, but in practice, it often serves to differentiate *hipuy* and *maren*. Not surprisingly, rituals of the life cycle also mark the contrast between 'good' and 'bad' people. This is particularly evident in naming and funeral rituals: in *adat Dipuy*, gongs were struck whenever a *maren* was born or died; only the *maren* may be buried in decorated mausoleums (*salong*).

Religion prevents stratum mobility from *panyin* to *hipuy*, because the improper use of the *kelunan jia* ritual markers would bring supernatural punishment (*parit*). In theory, there is no stratum mobility among the Kayan, as this would contravene the theory that stratum ascription is part of one's nature; in fact, it occurs (Rousseau 1979:229-31, 1990:179-80). A family of 'good commoners' (*panyin jia*) which aspires to the status of *hipuy* uses the ritual devices of 'good people'. If no misfortune ensues, this demonstrates the validity of their claim to aristocratic status. Why focus on the transition between *hipuy* and *panyin* and ignore the differences between slave and commoner, or between lower aristocrat and ruling estate? As I have shown elsewhere (Rousseau 1979), lower aristocrats (*hipuy*) and commoners (*panyin*) occupy the same social position: they are neither slaves nor rulers and they owe corvées and obedience to the chief. The *hipuy* are an overflow category which includes descendants of *maren* who failed to maintain their chiefly role, as well as descendants of mixed marriages between 'good people' and prosperous commoners who wish to accede to a higher social status. If the stratification system is to persist, one must limit movement from the status of commoner to that of aristocrat – hence the usefulness of religious sanctions – while allowing supernumerary *maren* to slide down imperceptibly to *hipuy* status – hence the absence of religious sanction. Finally, there was no need to resort to religious sanctions in order to control slaves. They occupied that position because of relations of power and, if they managed to emancipate themselves, there was no religious constraint on their becoming commoners.

While the contrast between 'good' and 'bad people' is the main contribution of Kayan religion to buttressing social stratification, other rituals and beliefs also legitimate stratification and inequality. *Maren* have precedence in communal rituals. Until the Bungan reform, commoners shingled the roof of their apartment with soft wood (*kayo' uba*), while the *maren* were allowed to have shingles of ironwood on one side and soft wood on the other.[33] Members of the

[33] Referring to the Mahakam-Kayan, Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, II:172-3) notes that a big pig was sacrificed when shingles were installed on the chief's roof, because these were made of ironwood. If they had used *tengkawang* (*Dipterocarpacae*) shingles, a modest offering would have been sufficient. Kayan commoners and slaves were not allowed to use ironwood for decorations or *tengkawang* for floor beams (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, II:154).

ruling estate are endowed with supernatural power. They have strong spirit helpers, their souls are loftier and a section of the spirit country is reserved for them: this is where their spirit helpers live and, when the *maren* are sick, this is where their souls go (and where priests will retrieve them). The agnatic descendants of Lake' Dian, the culture hero of the Baluy, are considered to be particularly powerful. As a mark of their separateness, they used to observe specific food taboos. We have seen that disrespect towards seniors entails a supernatural sanction (*tulah*). This is even more true for aristocrats and it corresponds to the Kayan conception of power: elders and *maren* are subsumed under the category of 'old people' (*kelunan aya'*). Reference to age is largely metaphorical. The *kelunan aya'* include all adult *maren*, even young adults, but only older commoners who occupy a position of influence. The *kelunan aya'* can expect respect from the 'young' (*kelunan nyam*), including commoners of all ages who have not achieved political prominence.

Some rituals are under the control of the chief, such as the gnomon, which serves to establish the date of the ceremonial sowing (Chapter VI). The chief can deputize someone else to make the actual observations; in 1970, he asked a slave to do so. In Uma Bawang, a strong-willed *hipuy* priest, Lake' Lirong, played an important role in the early stages of the Bungan reform. Buoyed by the new freedoms of *adat Bungan*, he observed the gnomon without the chief's permission and appropriated other rituals previously under the chief's control. His early death was interpreted as a consequence of his presumption. Drought-making rituals (*na taga'*) are under the purview of a few chiefs who have inherited this gift. Among the Mendalam Kayan, 'the *dange* [end-of-year festival] was controlled by the [chief] [...]. Without *dange*, there are no *hipuy*, no *panyin*, there is no old *adat*, there are no traditions of the old Kayan' (Ding Ngo 1975:107). The sacred stones (*bato' tuluy*) were tended by the *maren*; the *panyin* would have shrivelled like a dead fruit if they had come in contact with them. Other sacred objects were reserved for the *maren*, such as clouded leopard skins or heads of helmeted hornbills, which only they were allowed to kill. (The rhinoceros hornbill could be killed or owned by lower aristocrats.) The crow pheasant (*but*) was an augury reserved for the *maren* and *hipuy*.

In many ways, religion defines aristocrats as the embodiment of the community. Communal rituals such as *ngelasan aya'* and *melo' bengen* (Chapter VIII) normally take place in the chief's apartment or on his gallery.[34] Agricultural rituals must start in the chief's fields. This can create problems for the whole village. Thus, in Long Pahangai, a Busang village of the Mahakam, the chief's

[34] Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, II:102) mentions various offerings for the well-being of children as they grow up. Commoners and slaves wait for a major ceremony in the chief's household to

fields had to be abandoned because of a bad omen (a doe had given birth in the field). Before the omen, the plan had been to set fire to the chief's field on the following day; commoners were to follow suit the next day. The whole process was put off for two months until a new field had been cleared for the chief and allowed to dry. During that time, the felled vegetation in the commoners' fields had started rotting and it did not burn well. The crop was an almost complete failure (Sombroek n.d.1:12.54). This was a high price to pay for the belief that the chief is the embodiment of the community.

Kayan religion can serve to re-establish social order. In the past, blood-brotherhood helped prevent violence between individuals. If there had been bloodshed within a community or between neighbouring villages, elders would compel the victim's relatives to become blood-brothers (*sepilah sah*) of the perpetrator. Their blood was mixed and both men ingested the mixture (usually by pouring the blood on tobacco which was rolled into a cigarette and smoked).[35] Afterwards, if one party tried to kill or hurt the other, he would die by spitting blood (*mate busong*), which is the same supernatural punishment as for incest. The blood-brotherhood contract extends to the blood-brothers' siblings, children, and grandchildren. Blood-brotherhood between two chiefs affected all members of both communities.

Sorcery, curses, oaths, and magic

In Kayan thought, sorcery, poisoning, magic, curses, and oaths are all related. Sorcery, an important tool for social control in many societies, plays a minor role among the Kayan. It is rarely practised because it is seen as a dangerous device which may hurt innocent people rather than its intended target. For instance, the death of a senile old woman in 1972 was attributed to the fact that she had taken someone else's belongings. The owner, who thought an ill-intentioned person had wronged him, resorted to sorcery, which killed her. This was deemed regrettable as she was not responsible for her actions. It is considered unwise to practise sorcery against an unidentified thief, as the culprit might be a child who meant no harm. Sorcery can take several forms; I was given one example. Outside the house, the sorcerer talks to a chicken or an egg, then strikes it with a dart. With a single strike, the culprit will be blind in one eye, with two, in both eyes. In 1971, some people wanted to practise sorcery against a family of habitual thieves, but elders did not allow it: if they were

35 Blood-brothers are also called bamboo brothers (*peharin bulu*) because the cut is made with a bamboo knife (a bamboo knife makes a clean cut and can be thrown away afterwards). Given that blood-brotherhood helped to cement political alliances, it is not surprising that the same ritual was present among other Borneo groups; for a brief review of the literature, see Needham (1954). In the myth of origin of human beings, Belare' Ubong Do and Belare' Malang Long undergo an ordeal in which they cut themselves with a chicken feather (*bulo'*, 'feather'). Then Lake' Kitan throws the feather in the air and it becomes bamboo (*bulu*).

blinded, it was reasoned, who would feed them?

There are occasional instances of chiefs practising sorcery to buttress their power or to take revenge against those who have offended them. The retired chief of Uma Bawang kept making unreasonable demands on his people and, while they were afraid of him, they sometimes defied him. He was suspected of practising rain-making rituals in revenge: central Borneo is extremely humid and dry periods are essential in order to successfully set fire to the swiddens. To bring about a rainy spell, one places an illipe leaf (*avang*) in the river, weighed with a stone, and one says 'Let there be rain until this leaf rots'; this brings about a long rainy spell, because illipe leaves rot slowly. In August 1971, the old chief was thought to have been the cause of a long period of rain, this time out of self-interest rather than spite: he stood to gain from timber exploitation and wanted the river level to be high so the logs could be floated downriver. There is a counter-ritual: a last-born child can be asked to throw a stone from a cooking tripod (*bato' angan*) into the river. The efficacy of this ritual was not explained, but presumably the stone, being associated with fire, is imbued with dryness, or else it may burn the *avang* leaf.

Another form of sorcery consists in carving a human figurine from pith (*ngulun*) and dressing it up with a loincloth and a red head-dress. The homunculus settles in the victim's chest and eats his entrails. In order for the ritual to be effective, the sorcerer must recount the appropriate myth of origin. Another procedure consists in placing in the intended victim's path a piece of wood over which spells have been uttered. The victim's hair, clothes, or excrement can also be used in sorcery. Unrequited love can be an occasion for sorcery. The rejected lover sets adrift a little raft carrying a cucumber and cooked rice. The raft takes away the victim's appetite and he or she dies after dreaming of the sorcerer.[36] In a less hostile mode, if a young man falls in love with a young woman who is visiting his village, he obtains a strand of her hair and buries it where she defecates. After she returns to her own longhouse, she will miss the young man and will want to return to him. Husbands sometimes place conditional curses on their wives to prevent them from committing adultery. No informant was keen to elaborate; in all its forms, sorcery is an upsetting matter and it is considered best not to talk about it.

Those who have travelled extensively are thought more likely to be sorcerers, because sorcery is believed to be prevalent in far-away regions. When they visit other villages, people are often afraid of sorcery or poisoning. Poisoning and sorcery are not clearly distinguished; while poisons are understood to be intrinsically dangerous, their danger may be enhanced by

36 A proper meal includes rice and a side dish (*but*), preferably fish or meat, but at least a vegetable, such as cucumber. This kind of sorcery, called *nyalo'*, can be used against other people than ex-lovers.

ritual action. In the Baluy area, the Kayan consider the Kajang to be notorious sorcerers and poisoners; they ascribe the same evil intentions to the people of the Mahakam. Conversely, those who are deemed to be sorcerers are expected to be equally adept at counter-sorcery: a Kayan victim of sorcery was brought to a Kejaman (Kajang) village for treatment. The people of Uma Bawang are also afraid of other Kayan: while visiting a Kayan village of the lower Baluy, a neighbour of mine thought he saw some poison floating in the beer. However, it was ineffective, because the presence of the Uma Bawang chief neutralized the poison. Various counter-poisons are available. When I attended harvest festivals in other villages, neighbours furtively offered me talismans and counter-poisons, some of which I was to place in my clothing, others in my mouth. The latter were also meant to protect me against drunkenness. The further away we went, the more my travelling companions were concerned about poisoning and sorcery. When visiting another village, etiquette demands that the host drink some rice-beer before offering it to guests, unless host and guest know each other well. Counter-poisons are normally stored on the gallery, because the medicine might object to being sequestered in the apartment and might then turn against its owner. In general, the Baluy Kayan are suspicious of strangers and unwelcoming to uninvited guests. This distrust is a consequence of two factors, the geographical isolation of Kayan villages and Kayan chiefs' exclusive responsibility over inter-village relationships. Few commoners have the opportunity to gain self-confidence vis-à-vis strangers (Rousseau 1990:253).

Curses, oaths, and ordeals (all called *lala'*) essentially are all a form of sorcery, insofar as they are utterances which brings harm. 'A dog will eat you!' and 'This section of bamboo will eat you!' are typical curses. This might sound mild to our ears, but the dog stands for powerful mythical creatures and the bamboo is linked to the Thunder and headhunting. An even more potent curse threatens the target with the bite of a tiger's tooth. My employee had developed an attachment to a young Uma Bawang woman, but was not interested in marrying her, as he wished to return to his own village after my fieldwork. Her father, who was keen to find himself a son-in-law, tried very hard to bring about a match between his daughter and this personable, healthy, and enterprising young man. When I declined to become involved, the father resorted to a curse. He placed a tiger tooth in water, offered it to Bungan and asked her to punish the young man. I was given an example of the kind of curse he might have uttered: 'The blood will pour, you will leave the earth; if you come back, you die'. When he heard of this, my employee was very disturbed at first, but then he reasoned that, because he was a Christian, he was probably immune to the curse. His being part of my household was further protection, because it is well-known that Europeans are not liable to sorcery. A curse may harm both its intended victim and the person who utters it, especially if the

latter is in the habit of cursing. The young woman's father had the bad habit of resorting to curses, even against his wife. In the latter case, his domestic unit carried out a *pelah lala'* ritual at the farm (lit. 'to cause-to-ebb the withering-by-fire') in order to counteract the curse. An incision was made on his arm and blood was smeared on a wood shaving. This man may have developed his proclivity for sorcery in imitation of his father, who was held responsible for the death of the senile woman (see above); both had an unhealthy interest in poisons.

One can take an oath (*pesupa'* or *pelemala'*) on the tooth of a tiger or clouded leopard, a stone, a bamboo, or by pointing to a dog.[37] The tooth, stone, or bamboo should ideally be pointed at the opponent. It is forbidden to take an oath – or undergo an ordeal – anywhere else than a graveyard because the procedure unleashes fearsome forces. Anyone who dared take an oath in the longhouse would be fined heavily and would be liable for the cost of a purificatory ritual. An oath is a conditional curse. Some time ago, a Baluy Kayan chief was an inveterate gambler; he even pillaged his father's tomb in order to retrieve gongs and money with which to pay debts. Horrified by his own action, he took an oath, asking Doh Tenangan to kill him if he ever played cards again, but to give him prosperity if he stayed away from his vice. He never gambled again and became prosperous.

Given the availability of effective secular sanctions (Rousseau 1990:196-8), it is not surprising that chiefs do not usually resort to sorcery for social control. On the other hand, they had recourse to ordeals when litigants did not agree on the facts of the case. Representatives of both parties were asked to retrieve a shell disk (*hulo'*) from a vat of boiling water; the unscathed party was in the right, while the wrong-doer was scalded. Given the element of punishment, ordeals are akin to sorcery, hence an extreme measure which should be avoided if at all possible. Barth (1910:110) gives another example: in order to identify a thief, the accuser dips a tiger's tooth in water which he offers to the suspect: 'This is a tiger's tooth; drink! Tame Tinge [also known as Lake' Tenangan], hear my words! I say he stole things; if he did, let his life be short; if not, let him have a long life; if he took it, he dies; if he has troubled me, he dies tomorrow'.

The Malays have a great reputation as magicians; a few central Borneo people have learnt elements of Malay magic (*pusoh*). It is distinct from Kayan sorcery; it may include the use of poison (*lasun*, which require spells to be effective). A magician can talk to a sword and make it fly with the wind at night to the victim's village, bringing illness and eventual death. Magic cannot be counteracted by traditional Kayan means, but only by Malay counter-magic.

[37] Swearing is related – at least in part – to the Thunder. The tiger is the animal of the Thunder. Both stones and eye-teeth can be the product of the Thunder. The Bisaya use teeth for oaths like the Kayan; they also make a link between tiger and thunder (Peranio 1959:8).

Pusoh can also be positive: the shaman Lake' Luyang told me he practised it when his shamanic séances were ineffective. In his mind at least, the practice has been fully integrated to the Kayan order of things: his power as a *musoh* (practitioner of *pusoh*) comes from a spirit (*dayong*) specialized in that activity. An Uma Bawang man from Indonesian Borneo was a powerful magician before he became Christian. When someone died in the house, his bag of charms moved and he sacrificed a chicken to keep it quiet.

Warfare, headhunting, and religion

The same term (*kayo*) refers to warfare and headhunting, but one must distinguish the two. In headhunting, a few men went on an expedition to obtain head trophies in order to satisfy religious needs and to gain prestige. Warfare was a political act for the purpose of subjugating a group or taking part of its territory; head trophies were collected during wars (Rousseau 1990:275-9). Headhunting was more than an epiphenomenon of warfare and it can be understood only in a religious context. Headhunting is a form of human sacrifice. It was an important element of traditional Kayan religion. Even now, the headhunting ceremonial is part of the annual ceremonial cycle. In religious terms, killing a human being is intrinsically beneficial, even without taking the victim's head; objects involved in the killing take on power from the event. In particular, swords used to slay a victim are powerful charms and become prestige property; through the killing, the blade, which was ordinary (*beleh*, lit. 'bland'), becomes potent (*la'it*). The paraphernalia of headhunting rituals are imbued with some of the same force as the trophy and, if used correctly, they have a beneficial effect.

By killing an enemy, a man gained great prestige; successful head-hunters had their fingers tattooed. Thus, it is not incorrect to talk of head 'trophies'; however, the main purpose of headhunting was not to accumulate marks of valour. If it had been, warriors would have collected as many heads as possible, which was indeed the Iban practice. By contrast, central Borneo villages owned only a few heads. In the late nineteenth century, after the people of Uma Bawang had exterminated a large band of Iban attackers, they kept a small number of trophies, they gave some to other villages and they buried the rest in order to avoid the supernatural danger of a large number of head trophies. Heads are both beneficial and dangerous; this is why they are placed in the chief's care, because he is endowed with sufficient supernatural force not to be harmed by them. As the well-being of the chiefly family and the community are coterminous, the whole village partakes of the benefits of these sacred objects.

What benefits did headhunting provide? It renewed the vitality of the long-house and the land (Harrisson 1959:95); it was particularly appropriate when a new longhouse was erected. A human sacrifice could serve the same purpose. The victim could be a war captive or a slave bought from another group, but

not a local slave. In some cases, slaves were bought to that end from Malays (Burns 1849:483). 'Each movement of Kayans into new territory needed heads to ensure prosperity and fertility in these new settlements. It is a fact that human sacrifices were performed in such cases.' (Southwell 1959:41.) Prominent chiefs were most likely to resort to such sacrifices. Heads were particularly useful to compensate for communal mishaps such as epidemics or the death of a *maren*. While the focus was on the head trophy, other parts of the victim's body served as offerings:

> Before the altar-post of the war-god several shorter thicker posts are erected, and to each of these two or three small pieces of human flesh, brought home from the corpses of the slain enemies for this purpose, are fastened with skewers (Hose and McDougall 1912, I:175).

The need for heads in funeral rites has often been noted (Low 1882; Hose and McDougall 1912, I:158). The headhunting ceremonial marked the end of mourning. An old head could be used, but a new one was preferable for a chief. Fresh trophies were brought to *maren* graves, but not those of other strata (see also Hose and McDougall 1912, I:176).[38] Mourning clothes were discarded as soon as the head was brought into the house (Hose and McDougall 1912, I:176, II:38). For funerals, human sacrifice was an alternative or an adjunct to headhunting: slaves were sometimes sacrificed at the tomb of *maren*. The victim became the aristocrat's slave in the spirit country. Given that the deceased occupy different areas of the afterworld according to the circumstances of their death (natural causes versus violent death), the victim was left to die of starvation and thirst if its new master had died of natural causes.

Religious beliefs and rituals were a motivation for headhunting. However, religious requirements called for few victims: a head remained efficacious for several years. It was not necessary to have been personally involved in the killing to benefit from the head's power, but personal involvement was an advantage. One could borrow a head which had been acquired by another village and behave as if one had just killed an enemy: 'it is brought to the house by a party of warriors in the full panoply of war, who behave both on setting out and returning as though actually on the war-path' (Hose and McDougall 1912, I:159). It was even possible to buy heads.[39] One could not keep using old

[38] Among Kapuas Kayan, 'the people of the neighbouring villages are asked to bring over a smoked skull of an enemy. When it arrives the head is dipped into the water of the river above the bathing place. When the head is dipped, all the villagers, young and old, bathe below it.' (Dian Ndjuk et al. 1961:46.) Among the Baluy Kayan, if no head is available, a bunch of *isang* palms is used instead (Dian Ndjuk et al. 1961:47). (Head trophies are decorated with *isang*).

[39] In the middle of the nineteenth century in the Wahau region of East Borneo, a fresh head was quoted at 20 reals, an old one at 15 reals (Dewall 1849:124). Under Brooke rule, Sarawak administrators stored head trophies obtained in punitive expeditions or through confiscations; they gave them to friendly communities to satisfy their need for trophies without bloodshed.

heads for ever because they ceased having a beneficial effect while becoming dangerous. Malevolent old trophies were left behind when a longhouse moved to a new locality, or they could be thrown into the river (Burns 1849:481). One might also place the heads in a hut with a fire to keep them warm. As long as the fire burnt, they remained comfortable and quiet; when it went out, they started to investigate, but by then the track had gone cold and they could not find their way back to the village. While there is no way to quantify precisely the religious requirements for new heads, far less than one fresh head per village per year was needed; it was probably closer to one head every five or ten years. Kayan chiefs limited the incidence of headhunting because they preferred to maintain their power through diplomatic means. Nonetheless, headhunting retained the same deep significance as with other Borneo societies (Rousseau 1990:Chapter 11).

How do heads bring prosperity, good crops, and health (Hose and McDougall 1912, II:23; Furness 1902:59)? Needham (1976) demonstrates there is no need to assume the existence of a soul substance in the head trophy. Indeed, throughout central Borneo, people recognize the beneficial effect of head trophies without requiring an explanation of their efficacy. The trophy has an identity distinct from the victim's, who becomes a potentially dangerous spirit (*to' kehong*) seeking revenge. The transformation of a person's head into a trophy produces (or unlocks?) a propitious influence which at first overshadows the malevolence of the deceased. With time, the positive effect is exhausted while the ill-will of the victim remains and the head must be discarded. In other words, the beneficial effect of trophies is distinct from the personality of the victims and keeps the latter under control at first, but, when it is spent, victims are able to take revenge.

The headhunting rituals which are part of the annual cycle are described in Chapter VI. Here, I focus on rituals associated with actual headhunting. Warriors observed many taboos. While on the war path, they could not eat any scaleless fish (*masik lanih*); they could not eat fish heads or tails; they also avoided fish broth. Rice is served on leaves; during an expedition, the leaf was oriented towards the enemy and one ate the rice starting from the base of the leaf (*men pe'un da'un*). Members of a war party must not eat anything acid or peppery or crunch salt with their teeth. It appears that relatives of the warriors were subject to the same taboos. Their wives were not allowed to pound food or use needles. In practice, one old woman observed the taboos strictly on behalf of all the relevant women. Wives could not commit adultery or even flirt (*na loko'*) without putting their husbands' lives in danger. The latter prohibition conflates fear of death and sexual anxiety; in my more cynical moments, I wonder whether it was consciously invented by a man in order to make it easier to enjoy the manly task of hunting other human beings.

Young men were subject to additional taboos which they observed on any

trip, whether headhunting was planned or not (because any expedition could turn into headhunting). If they picked up something along the way, such as a leaf or a piece of wood, they could not discard it, but had to bring it back to the hut where they spent the night, otherwise enemies would escape when they speared them. Young men were not allowed to drink; in practice, they drank when they bathed, swallowing while submerged; they could drink the water dripping from a paddle. If they broke the taboo on drinking, their feet would rot. They could only eat fruit directly from the tree; in practice, they could cut a branch from the tree and stick it in the ground for convenience. They could not eat fern fronds, otherwise they would be asleep when enemies attacked (fronds look like a bent head). They stopped paddling near the sites of killings (*tana puluh*). Young men who failed to follow scrupulously these taboos became ill when they travelled; they recovered only after their return home. (Mothers could observe these taboos on behalf of their young sons.)

A headhunting expedition took place only after favourable omens had been obtained (Hose and McDougall 1912, I:168). A few men were deputized to look for the spiderhunter on the first day, the Brahminy kite for two days, and the greater yellow-eared spiderhunter the next day.

> They repair to some spot in the jungle, or more commonly on the bank of the river, where they build a small hut; they adorn it by fraying the poles of its framework, and so secure themselves against interruptions by passing acquaintances (Hose and McDougall 1912, I:168).

omens had to be observed through this frame and in the proper sequence. Offerings were made in order to enlist their help; omens were asked to render the enemies helpless and sleepy and to 'soften their bones' (*na tulang daha' nah*).

> All the men of the war-party then proceed in their war-boats to the spot where the war-omens have been observed, and camp round about it in roughly built huts. Here they will remain at least two days, establishing their connection with the favourable omen-birds. From this encampment they may not return to the house [...]. Spies or scouts may be sent out to seek information about the enemy; but usually such information is sought from the liver of a pig with the customary ceremony. (Hose and McDougall 1912, I:170.)

On the war-path, some men were struck by incapacities (*pali*), such as an inability to walk or see properly. Their companions attempted to cure them by striking them with Caladium leaves (*long*). Another *pali* affected the sword, which remained stuck in its sheath. These incapacities can be interpreted as psychosomatic manifestations of anxiety. Before the attack, the men ritually signified their willingness to participate. A beam was laid between two platforms; they slashed at the beam with their sword and walked under it. When they cut an enemy's head, they shouted (*ngihik*) in order to strengthen their soul and weaken the victim's soul. If one failed to *ngihik*, the victim's soul

would carry the warrior's soul to Apo Jakah (the otherworldly abode of headhunting victims), and he would soon die. By carefully observing all the taboos, one was guaranteed prosperity and long life.

When they were safely away, the warriors prepared the heads 'by removal of the brain through the great foramen, by drying over a fire, and by lashing on the lower jaw with strips of rattan' (Hose and McDougall 1912, I:177). The heads were brought back to the village, but not into the house. They were placed in the smithy; this is where men ate small amounts of flesh from the victims' cheeks in order to avert the evil consequences of the death (*bet parit*) and to get rid of their illnesses. I heard first-hand accounts of this kind of ritual cannibalism, the most recent instances being at the end of the Second World War when some Japanese soldiers were killed. A captured enemy might be brought back to the village and killed slowly by a series of non-lethal stabs inflicted in turn by the whole population (including women and children). This was not done for the purpose of torturing the captive, but to give everybody a chance to participate in killing a human being.

The warriors were not allowed to come up to the house until they had been purified with sacrifices of pigs and chickens. If these rituals could not be arranged on the same day, the men took shelter at the forge or under barns. People struck gongs for the whole night in order to keep the warriors awake and prevent them from having inauspicious dreams. As men waited outside, women prepared a feast: they cooked pastries with sticky rice; households without an adult male pig (*uting betwan*) obtained one from a neighbour. When everything was ready, men entered the house after striking the trophies with their swords, joined by men and boys who had not participated in the expedition. As they entered, a woman poured sugarcane juice on their feet in order to cleanse them from supernatural danger (*parit*), otherwise they would endanger the longhouse. With a guy-rope, they hauled the heads from under the house, lifting and lowering them eight times while people cheered (*lemalu*). This was a way to show respect (*mengadet*) to the trophies. Each household held a ritual on the gallery (this is the same headhunting ritual as in the annual cycle; see Chapter VI). An additional ceremony took place on the gallery of the warrior who had killed the victim. The trophy received food offerings; it was asked to send its relatives along so they could also be killed. These rituals guaranteed the auspicious incorporation of the trophy in the community, they controlled its dangerous influences, and they enabled people, especially men, to derive blessings from the trophies and the killing. If they were well performed, the rituals brought prosperity to the whole village; if not, people died. During the celebrations, some pig flesh was thrown to the auguries. These offerings were made in the same sequence in which the omens had been observed. The muntjac also received meat offerings.

A fresh trophy was an occasion for great celebrations. Everyone ate on the gallery. Women danced with the trophies (*ngajen hule*, lit. 'dance of revenge'): placing a wrist above the head, women waved the hand, which signifies 'Serves you right!' (*paja'*!). After decorating trophies with plaited strips of palm (*isang*), people danced with them from one end of the longhouse to the other. Men performed a war dance. Afterwards, the trophies were attached to a board (*leburan*) over a fire in front of the chief's apartment. In some Kayan villages, the heads were hung below the house because people were afraid to have them in the house.

Peace-making was ritualized, with sham fights and sacrifices (Hose and McDougall 1912, II:66, 288, 291). The former enemies first went through a cleansing ritual (*petutong*), then they smoked together. Peace-making ceremonies did not erase the memory of headhunting incidents: when relatives of a victim visited the village responsible for the killing, there was a cooling-off ceremony in which the perpetrators presented a gift such as a sword to the victim's relatives. Another way to make peace was for chiefs to establish blood-brotherhood which, as we saw, imposed a binding relationship on their followers, who must not fight each other any more. A breach of the peace would bring a supernatural sanction against them all.[40]

This chapter has documented the pervasiveness of religion in Kayan life. Community and household are religious as well as social units. Daily life includes interaction with superhuman beings. The social structure is validated by religion. The religious elements of daily life were even more salient under *adat Dipuy* than in *adat Bungan* because of the pervasiveness of taboos and omens as well as the importance of headhunting, a practice which found its logic in religion. The following chapters, which describe organized rituals led by religious specialists, will show how religious action is structured within the annual and life cycles.

[40] See also Burns 1849:146-7; St John 1862, I:107; Hose and McDougall 1912, II:67.