CHAPTER IV

Religious beliefs

During fieldwork, rituals were common topics of conversation, but beliefs were discussed more rarely, mostly for my instruction. However, a description of Kayan rituals would be hard to understand without reference to beliefs.

A perusal of other ethnographic sources (especially Nieuwenhuis 1904-07; Sombroek n.d.1) suggests that, all over central Borneo, the Kayan share essentially the same beliefs, with some regional variation, as is to be expected in the absence of written records or a central religious authority. Within the Baluy region, even in the village of Uma Bawang, there was no complete agreement about beliefs. On the one hand, some people were more knowledgeable than others, on the other, there were disagreements about points of detail. Such variation follows not only from the absence of written texts, but from the presence of alternative sources of knowledge, namely dreams and divination.

The Kayan take for granted that there are differences of opinions about beliefs. While some statements of belief are accepted as culturally correct (the Kayan belief system posits that the world is populated with spirits who interact with humans), the veracity of such statements may not be universally accepted. We will see that, while most Kayan accept religious beliefs as self-evident, others have doubts about their veracity. The latter either become agnostics or they persist in their beliefs while recognizing epistemological difficulties. I will return later to the question of unbelief.

Cosmology

To the Kayan, the world is divided into two major regions: the world of daily life and the spirit country (Table 6).[1] The two regions are connected but geographically apart because spirits live above humans. The two regions and their inhabitants are of the same nature. Strictly speaking, one cannot talk of 'supernatural' beings, but rather, following Spiro (1966:96), of 'superhuman' beings. (I will nonetheless use 'supernatural' as a shorthand for 'referring to spirits and souls'.) Dreams and rituals give access to the spirit country. In Uma Bawang, I encountered little interest in cosmological matters. Kayan ideas about the world

[1] Neither this table nor Table 7 (on spirits) should be read as representations of Kayan classifications. The same applies to Tables 2 and 3 (on taboos) and 4 (on divination and omens).

can be extracted from the Takna' Lawe' (Lii' Long and Ding Ngo 1984-85). The descriptions of this epic poem are consistent with, but more precise than accounts I recorded in the Baluy. According to it, the sky is like an upside-down kettle; there are several layers to the sky; the stars are between the sky and the earth (Lii' Long and Ding Ngo 1984-85, I:xxxi-xxxiii). The distinction between this world and the spirit country is vague, because Apo Lagan, the abode of the important spirit Dipuy, is thought to be a mountain of the Apo Kayan, where the Kayan place their origin (Lii' Long and Ding Ngo 1984-85, I:xxxviii, 259-60; Römer 1913b:191).

The world is populated by animated beings who communicate with each

Table 6. Kayan beliefs

WORLD

A. *The world of daily life*, which is the abode of humans, animals, plants, and some spirits (who live in rivers, boulders, rock-faces, the jungle, etc.)

B. *The spirit country*

1. *Regions of the spirit country occupied by non-human, individually-named spirits*
   Apo Lagan
   Apo Token
   Ujet Bato'
   etc.
2. *The afterworld*, divided into regions according to cause of death
   Apo Jelungan (for those who died of old age)
   Apo Jakah (victims of headhunting and childbirth)
   Long Telang Julan (victims of drowning or poisoning)

SPIRITS see Table 7

OMENS see Table 4

SOULS

1. *Human souls*
   Soul of the head ('real soul')
   Soul of the eyes
   Soul of the body
   Soul of the bones and joints
   Souls of the veins and sinews
2. *Soul of rice*
3. *Souls of animals*
4. *Souls of objects*

IMPERSONAL SUPERNATURAL FORCES

1. *Uven* (a stormy wind unleashed by the thunder as punishment)
2. *Parit* (prohibitions, taboos)
3. *Tulah* (supernatural power inherent in powerful people; see Chapter III)

other. Animals have their own languages. Some species are more intelligent than others. Some animals may be as intelligent as humans and they experience the same kinds of emotions. Like humans, they have families and a social organization. For instance, snakes form couples and this is why it is dangerous to kill a snake, as the spouse may seek revenge.

Many components of the world are animate either because they have souls (*hipun blua'*) or because they are spirits or spirit dwellings. Human beings, animals, and *padi* have souls, as do various objects. Some natural features, such as hilltops, rockfaces, large boulders, and rapids, are the abodes of spirits who are active in their vicinity. The routine of everyday life can be interrupted by unusual occurrences which are potentially dangerous (*melien*) – such as an animal who speaks a human language or a wild pig with one head and two bodies. Purification rituals counteract the danger of such unexplained circumstances. The level of rivers is affected by spirits (if the river level rises twice in a short period, the higher level is said to be male, while the lower level is female). When they winnow, women shout to call for the wind each time they fill a new tray. The Moon, the Sun, and the Thunder are spirits. The Moon is the wife of the Sun. The stars are mushrooms in the sky.

There is no absolute contrast between humans and spirits. Most spirits can take a human form. Spirits, like humans, originated from the 'Big Tree' (*Kayo' Aya'*) which features in the myth of origin of humans; they became differentiated as this world and the spirit country were pulled apart. People become spirits when they die, but do not cease to be human. Some living people are half human, half spirit, such as Lake' Ding Mering, who lived in Uma Bawang long ago; his left half was a spirit, his right side human. He was the strongest man in the country. Lake' Batang Madang was another half-spirit; he had the ability to fly. His spirit side was black, although only Lake' Batang Madang could see it, and then only in his dreams. (I do not know whether there is a general association of spirits with left and black, or whether this applied only to these individuals.) In olden times, spirits used to visit successful warriors, whose company they enjoyed. Lake' Uva, the oldest person in Uma Bawang, reminisced about his youth: at the time, spirits were visible and they interacted directly with humans. One spirit boasted he could change a rice pestle into a deer, but people begged him not to do so. Spirits sometimes transformed blowpipes into snakes. Nowadays, spirits are less present, especially since the Bungan reform, but they still manifest themselves. At the harvest festival, spirit helpers often possess people who dance around the altar (*jok*). Nowadays, only those who are in trance see them; in the old days, everyone could see them. Lake' Dian, a culture hero of the Baluy and the ancestor of several aristocratic families, was a spirit who lived his life in this world. His agnatic descendants – such as the ruling family of Uma Bawang – are invulnerable to metal weapons (*keben*).

Many animate beings change their appearance: the Thunder manifests itself as a meteorological phenomenon, but in stories it has an anthropomorphic appearance. Ordinary animals can turn into animal spirits.[2] One animal spirit, the *lengunan*, looks like a python when young. It lives in a tree, but when it grows large, its weight brings the tree crashing into the river and the *lengunan* disappears under water. The *lengunan* has horns and is very large. It can change itself into a tree trunk, but its true nature is recognized because the trunk can swim. Metamorphoses are common in specific regions: if dogs bark during a hunt in the Bulo river area (near Uma Bawang), one must refrain from speaking until one has caught up with the dogs. Once, a hunter failed to do so; when he reached the dogs, they were barking at a rotten tree, which had evidently been a wild boar spirit until its protective transformation.

Weredogs are another example of transformation. Anyi' Wang of Uma Aging was a man, but his footprints were those of a dog (although his feet were normal). People discovered this when they followed his tracks. The *anyi'* tree takes its name from him, because they used a stake of *anyi'* wood to kill him. This is why the people of Uma Aging may not use *anyi'* as firewood. Anyi's descendants in Uma Aging have dog's hair on parts of the body.

Some jars are spirits. While hunting, members of the upriver village of Uma Daro' obtained one such jar: the dogs gave chase to four people, three of whom ran away. The fourth was speared and turned into a jar. They tied it with rattan; by the time they reached the longhouse, only one piece of rattan was still holding it, as the spirit was trying to free itself. The chief of Uma Bawang also owns an ancient spirit-jar brought over in the original migration from the Apo Kayan. He occasionally gives it a raw chicken which the jar consumes: when he looks into the jar after a few months, only the bones remain. The jar can move by itself and is able to catch fish.[3]

There are several myths of origin, but the world itself has not been created; it simply exists. Stories describe transformations of the world: in the beginning, the sky was nearby, but a child was always asking his grandmother for the

[2] The *belahabong* snake changes into a *nyang* (a kind of dragon), the cobra metamorphoses into a *sengiang* (another mythical creature); the *nyang* and the *lengunan* are river dwellers, the *sengiang* lives on land. Butterflies are called *hnyap to'*, 'the chickens of the spirits'. In the Mahakam, rhinoceros hornbills are chickens which belong to the spirit Tamei Tingei (Lake' Tenangan, the husband of Doh Tenangan) (Sombroek n.d.1:10.6).

[3] Some spirit-jars are called *busi* (*gusi* in Brunei Malay and Iban); others are called *ka'ang*, such as the one which belonged to the Sekapan chief Puso (Harrisson 1963:332-5). It was passed from one Baluy chief to another to pay for bride-prices and fines. Its penultimate owner was Akem Dian, the chief of Uma Juman, who passed it on to Puso. The latter sold it to the Sarawak Museum (Harrisson 1963; see Plate 29; see also Tuton Kaboy and Chin (1991) for an excellent colour photograph of the same jar). Lake' Kebing (the retired chief of Uma Bawang) said that it took about six or eight months for the jar to digest the chickens. In the past, it was usual to feed such jars at the occasion of a *melo' bengen* (Chapter VIII). Such jars are important in other Borneo religions (see Weinstock 1987:79).

moon; she became annoyed with his incessant demands and pushed the sky away with a bamboo container. Myths explain the origin of human beings, night, rice, ironwood, and various rituals.[4] These are just-so stories, usually independent of each other and, with some exceptions, only loosely related to the Kayan pantheon. The same event may be explained differently in several myths. For instance, there is an alternative explanation for the separation of the sky from the earth. One day, the spirit Dipuy sent her slave Lebuy to earth to get rattan for a *dange* ritual. As he was late in returning, she pulled up the upper world; the stairs fell and Lebuy was caught in this world. The beginning of the myth of origin of human beings gives an idea of the genre.

> Lake' Belare' Ubong Do's tobacco box fell to the earth and became a tree. Belare' Malang Long, who was hunting in the vicinity, saw this fine tree and took possession of it by hammering a tiger's tooth into it. The tree became pregnant from the tiger's tooth and gave birth to a man, Keluven Ga'e, and a woman, Kelube Ange. They had no limbs, only a head, a trunk, and genital organs. They rolled towards each other and copulated. They had two children of normal appearance. The latter begot two children who themselves had two children who begot a girl, Buring Une, and a boy, Uy Ameh. These two gave birth to four boys and four girls, who were paired off to each other. The father told the boys to race against each other to bring about a differentiation into strata.

This myth of origin is not accepted by everyone; some people told me that this was a myth of the Mahakam, while an alternative existed for the Baluy. In the beginning was the Big Tree (*Kayo' Aya'*), which a vine made pregnant. The Big Tree gave birth to a boy and a girl; they had four children who competed in a race (as in the above myth). A fifth child became the ancestor of White Men. The leaves of the Big Tree were transformed into chickens and pigs which humans sacrificed in order to be healthy.[5]

Myths of origin are not simply sources of knowledge; they validate and empower rituals. Within the course of rituals, priests routinely narrate for the spirits' benefit the myth of origin of the ritual. When a pig or chicken is to be sacrificed, it is told the reason why it is a sacrificial animal and how this came about. In principle, there is a myth for every ritual; however, through the years, the people of Uma Bawang forgot most of them. Sometime in this century, Lake' Bit, an Uma Bawang aristocrat, travelled through central Borneo for several years in order to learn myths and rituals; the people of Uma Bawang were very pleased when he returned with myths which explained the origin of their rituals. Lake' Bit learnt these myths among the Busang of the Mahakam area. (The Busang speak the same language as the Kayan and, like the Baluy Kayan, claim an origin in the Apo Kayan area.) Lake' Bit taught the myths to

[4] I have recorded these myths and hope to publish them eventually. Guerreiro (1989) has published a myth of the origin of night from the Baluy area.

[5] Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, I:130-1) refers to the Mendalam (Kapuas) version of this myth.

Lake' Lirong, who eventually became the senior priest (*dayong aya'*); later on, Lirong taught them to Avun, the current *dayong aya'*. For these myths, Avun paid Lirong one gong and one sword. The instruction took four days during which both men slept on the gallery. On the last day, they sacrificed a chicken which they ate together. It took Avun only four days to learn the myths because he had often heard them from his grandfather Lake' Bit. But for him to 'know' the myths, he had to pay Lake' Lirong, who had a right to them.

The spirit country

The world of spirits is a convenient conceptual device to dispose of the questions 'Where do the dead go?' and 'Where are the spirits?' The term 'Apo Lagan' occasionally refers to the spirit country as a whole, but also to a specific section of it, where the once-powerful Dipuy lives. Since the conversion to *adat Bungan*, it is seen as a bad place, because of its association with Dipuy. In the past, it was the abode of good spirits, especially those who helped priests, tattooers, carvers, blacksmiths, and other specialists (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:100-1). Some epic poems, such as the Belawan,[6] recount the exploits of superhuman beings in their world. Human souls can travel to the spirit country in dreams. Although the 'spirit country' (*dale' to', dale' tekna'*) is not radically separate from this world, it is in practice another world, because transformations are necessary to reach it. When priests travel to the spirit country, the offerings they bring are made anew there. In the same way, funerals provide the means to rebuild the deceased's body in the spirit country.

It is not clear where the spirit country is; one day, I heard an old man ask rhetorically 'Where is Apo Lagan?', not expecting an answer beyond the fact that it is a mountain plateau (*apo*), which might be somewhere in Indonesian Borneo near or in the Apo Kayan. The spirit country is composed of a series of named plateaux and confluences of rivers (*long*). Doh Tenangan lives at Apo Aya' ('the Big Plateau', a region of Apo Token).[7] Apo Token is on earth, but we cannot see it because Doh Tenangan hides it from us. The priest Avun, who was concerned with such matters, tried to deduce the location of the various regions of the spirit world. In an epic poem, for instance, Long Burak is described as a

6 This long epic poem has been published in its Mendalam version, the Takna' Lawe' (Lii' Long and Ding Ngo 1984-85). Römer (1913b:190-3) provides a long list of otherworldly spirits.

7 Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, I:98-9) provides a different description. Tamei Tinge and Uniang Tenangan live in the highest region; Jaya Hipuy and Huvong Hwan live in Apo Lagan; the souls of the dead are in Apo Kesio; the earth is the fourth region; a fifth, subterranean, region is the abode of Amei Awi and his wife Buring Une. This does not tally with Nieuwenhuis's (1900, I:141) earlier description in which Tamei Angoi is Buring Une's husband. In his later book, he identifies Tamei Angoi as Jaya Hipuy's first husband. For an earlier and somewhat different description of the spirit country ('Tokong Pilong'), see Tromp (1888:64-5). Sombroek (n.d.2:39) identifies *lagan* as a hill near Long Maleham where the souls of the dead get beads.

muddy place. The Iwan – a tributary of the Kayan river – is also a muddy river, so, Avun surmised, they might be the same place; consequently the Apo Token might be nearby. On the basis of similarity of toponyms, he hypothesized that Juman Pesong (a location in the spirit country) and Juman Leno (a place in this world) were the same place. Wherever the spirit country is, it is a high place, as opposed to our world, which is 'below' (*hida*).

In the spirit country, there are a number of distinct villages in which named spirits live. For instance, Batang Petuman lives along the Pesong river, in the Apo Token. He is in charge of the structure of satiety (*tuman ta' besoh*, lit. 'joint of satiety') and the structure of wealth (*tuman ta' kaya*). His neighbour is Lake' Telesip. Other spirits in those parts are Lake' Wak Urip, Lake' Ju Urip, Lake' Pe'ong Urip, Lake' Telise Urip, Lake' Makian Urip, Lake' Makatan Urip, and Lake' Jat Urip. These spirits' names all contain the word *urip* ('life'); the middle words mean 'to clean', 'to lift', 'to comb', and so on. These spirits are expected to look after human lives and make sure that people prosper. Spirits live like humans, but on a grander scale. They dwell in longhouses, hunt, cultivate rice, and have children; they even carry out rituals. *Dayong* ceremonies contain detailed descriptions of the journey to the spirit country. Priests travel there, they paddle up and down its rivers, walk across hills and watersheds, and even fly. They bring offerings to the appropriate spirits in their respective villages and regions. Not all parts of the spirit country are equally accessible: Ujet Bato' ('the top of the rock') is the abode of the *maren*'s souls: when it is necessary to retrieve the soul of an aristocrat, only an experienced male priest (*dayong aleng human duan*, 'a priest who is skilled at speaking') will dare go there.

The spirit country is also the afterworld, the abode of the dead when they have become spirits. People do not worry much about the daily life of the dead in the spirit country. The dead are a concern to the living only if they return to this world. The afterlife is neither reward nor punishment for one's life. Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, I:102) mistakenly introduces a moral element to the geography of the spirit country when he says that those who have broken human and superhuman rules are punished with a bad death (*mate ji'ek*) which sends them to a bad afterworld. In fact, a 'bad death' refers to any violent or unusual demise, such as an accident, drowning, suicide, death in childbirth, murder, death in warfare, or gangrene (*butung*); no moral aspect is attached to it, but it affects the form of the funeral (Chapter IX). Apo Jelungan (in the upper reaches of Telang Julan) is the abode of those who die of sickness or old age.[8] They have an easy life there, or at least they live the same life as before: if they were rich in this world, they still are rich up there. Couples are reunited and can have children. My neighbour Avun Imang had been widowed twice. He

8 According to Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, I:89), those who die of illness go to Apo Kesio, but Ding (Lii' Long and Ding Ngo (1984-85, I:xl) says this is incorrect. Other Borneo religions also divide the spirit country in sectors according to the cause of death (Weinstock 1987:80).

did not know whether he would be reunited with his first, second, or third wife; he was not unduly concerned about the uncertainty.

Ujet Bato' ('the top of the rock'), where the straying souls of *maren* sometimes go, is the afterworld of some priests. (However, one priest told me he expected to go to Telang Julan, the abode of those who die of old age or sickness.) Victims of headhunting go to Apo Jakah (also called Apo Keliman),[9] where they fight all the time. Women who died in childbirth also go there, as do all who suffered a bloody or sudden death. They are said to live 'under the *petah* tree' (*hida petah*). This tree has edible stinking beans, which are considered to be 'hot' and produce flatulence.[10] The residents of Apo Jakah have an easy life and play with spinning tops. When a spinning top hits a *petah* tree, its beans fall to the ground and they compete to grab them; these are their staple. Women who died in childbirth seek small fish with hand nets all day long. Suicides also go there, although not all informants agree about this.[11] Residents of Apo Jakah do not marry, because their spouses are elsewhere. Those who died mad (*buling*) or drunk (*mavok*) carry a gourd container on their necklace; their saliva drips into it and they drink it again and again. Those who drowned or were poisoned go to Long Telang Julan. Long Lela Leka Lireh is the abode of infants who died before receiving a name.

Superhuman beings

The general term for spirit is *to'* (Table 7).[12] Some spirits have always been spirits, but all human beings become spirits after death. Myths of origin aver that humans are descended from spirits. Some people used to be half human, half spirit, and this is why humans have learned the myths of origin. Spirits are immortal. Some live in the spirit country, others in this world, or they go back and forth between one world and the other. Humans and spirits communicate with each other in dreams and rituals. Most spirits have a human form, some are theriomorphic. Some categories of spirits are identified by their relationship with humans: these are the spirit helpers (*utam, dayong*). Some spirits are identified only by a collective designation; these are very numerous and they

9 Apo Jakah means 'the tableland of the life cut short'; Apo Keliman means 'the tableland of the easy life'. The second designation emphasizes the positive value placed on headhunting.

10 It is extremely inauspicious to dream of gathering *petah* because it portends a violent death. A cleansing ritual (*ngaping*) is essential to avert the consequences of such a dream.

11 A common means of suicide was to drink a decoction of *Derris elliptica*, normally used as a fish poison. There were alternatives: during a famine, a man went with his children to process sago in the forest. He caught a toxic frog (*bunang lejo*), warned his children against touching it, ate it and died soon afterwards.

12 *Tekna'* is a synonym of *to'*, but it seems to apply primarily to the denizens of the spirit country. Barth (1910), Sombroek (n.d.3) and Southwell (1990) all gloss *tekna'* as a song or legend. This meaning is present in the Baluy as well. Song styles are often named after their topic: a *belawan* is the story of the hero Belawan; a *tekna'* is a story about spirits.

Table 7. Spirits (*to'* or *tekna'*)

1 Named individuals, who usually reside in the spirit world
- Bungan Malan (also known as Doh Tenangan), the most powerful and benevolent spirit of *adat Bungan*
- Lake' Penyelong Luan (also known as Lake' Tenangan), her consort
- Dipuy, the most powerful spirit of *adat Dipuy*
- Hunyang Lahe', who is in charge of rice
- etc.

2 Categories of spirits, each represented by numerous individuals
- The Thunder (*Belare'*)
- The Tiger (*Lejo*)
- Spirits of this world (*to' usun tana*), who occupy natural features (hollows, swamps, outcrops, some trees, etc. Some of these spirits are named individuals). Some are very dangerous: *to' duwok*, who lead people astray in the jungle, *kok imo*, ogres who eat humans and dogs in the jungle; *pejamun*, who cut people's heads, etc., etc.
- Theriomorphic spirits (*nyang, lengunan, sengiang*)
- Spirits in charge of every aspect of human life (spirits of shingles, spirits of walls, spirits of doors, spirits of priests' fees, etc.)
- Spirit helpers
- In-dwelling spirits (*utam*)
- *Dayong* spirits (*Dayong* spirits have a residence in the other world)
  - General *dayong* spirit helpers (linked to lay people)
  - Priestly *dayong* spirit helpers
  - Shamanistic *dayong* spirit helpers
- Spirits of the dead
- Ancestor spirits (*to' sepun*), who may be benevolent
- Spirits of women who died in childbirth (*to' ka'*)

tend to lack individual names. Other spirits have a name, a personality, and a life-history.[13] On the whole, spirits have many human attributes, but I found the Kayan were not much concerned with the spirits' daily life. Spirits are not

13 In general, spirits of this world have only a categorical designation, while many other-worldly spirits are individually named. However, some spirits of this world have names, such as Hirang Ketang Tawe, who is taller than a tree. When he is in the river, water reaches only the middle of his legs. Conversely, some spirits of the spirit country are known only as 'the spirits of Such-and-such-a-place'. Spirits who normally reside in this world usually have a one-word name. In Uma Bawang, the spirits Galu, Gurang, and Timang live in stone outcrops downriver of the longhouse. In rituals, they are identified either by name or by their location (such as *tun batu' hudik uma*, 'the spirit of the stone upriver of the house', *tun 'un Belepe*, 'the spirit of the source of the Belepe river'). A small number of very important spirits, who reside primarily in the spirit country, but remain concerned with this world, have a single name with a prefix: they are Lake' Tenangan, Doh Tenangan, Dipuy (a contraction of 'Doh Hipuy'). Many spirits of the spirit country have three-word names, such as Huring Doh Liding; the second and/or third words identify their role: 'Huring Doh Liding' means 'Huring [woman's name] Woman of the Walls', in other words Huring the female spirit in charge of protecting walls. The first (or second) name is often taken from a small list of names: for male spirits, Jelivan, Batang, Joh, Hingan, Lirong, or Lake'; for female spirits, Huring, Ubong, Ladang, Bua, Silo, Julan, or Doh.

all-seeing or all-knowing. One interacts with them in a stilted, formulaic way and what they do in their own time is of no interest.

Some spirits are helpful, others are hostile. Purposeful contact with spirits is normally achieved through the *dayong* ritual. One can also meet spirits by going to remote parts of the jungle, such as hill-tops or river-pools. One first comes into contact with evil spirits; if one is able to withstand them, then a benevolent spirit comes, to whom one can make a request (Sombroek n.d.1:6.47). Even a well-intentioned spirit can be dangerous. In particular, if spirits of the dead miss their living relatives, they visit them in dreams, asking them to come and live with them. They do so out of affection, but are in effect wishing the death of a relative. Spirits are prone to catch people's souls and priests have the responsibility of retrieving lost souls and placating spirits with offerings. Men skilled at poetic praise songs (*peleken*) sometimes meet spirits in the jungle, who manifest themselves to express their pleasure after hearing these songs. However, if the singer is incompetent, spirits express their anger by attacking his dogs.

Spirits often cause things to disappear. My neighbour Avun Imang gathered rattan and palms in the jungle, which he stored in his basket. He went hunting; when he returned for his basket, it was nowhere to be found; this was blamed on spirits. In the evening, he prayed to Bungan so she would protect him from any consequences of this encounter. If stocks of rice disappear mysteriously from a barn, this is due to the depredations of spirits. During my fieldwork, this happened in the neighbouring village of Uma Nyaving (Long Lino) and it became the subject of animated conversations. Some believed this was the work of an aristocrat buried nearby. A Christian surmised it was caused by a Tiger spirit (*utam lejo*). They also considered the possibility of natural causes (rats or thieves), but came to no conclusion.

Diseases and accidents are often caused by spirits, as is madness. In their incomprehensible ramblings, mad people are talking with spirits. Unexpected occurrences may be interpreted as the deed of unidentified spirits. An Uma Bawang woman spent the night alone at her farm hut. The previous night, she had dreamt a spirit was making love to her. She woke up to find an adult python sleeping beside her, its head on the pillow. She shouted for help and neighbours killed the snake. This snake clearly was a spirit, because: a. she had dreamt of a spirit; b. the snake had its head on a pillow, like a human; c. the snake could not have been there by accident, because the notched log which served as stairs had been turned around to prevent access to the hut; d. it rained for a whole month after the snake was killed (rain is associated with the Thunder, which is associated with snakes and tigers); e. her husband died sometime after that. (Some people thought the snake might have been responsible for the husband's death, others thought the two events were unrelated.)

Theoretically, in *adat Bungan*, it ought to be sufficient to tell a bothersome spirit to go away, because, under Bungan's dominion, spirits have lost much of their power. Bungan may punish a spirit who brings bad dreams; she admonishes the spirit not to repeat such unfriendly behaviour. In practice, people feel they cannot fully count on Bungan's protection.

There are large numbers of spirits in this world (*to' usun tana*) and there are many kinds of spirits. There are spirits just about everywhere and each one of them is in charge (*mamong*) of something specific: for instance, the various spirits of the longhouse respectively look after posts, floors, walls, shingles, beams, doors, and so on. Some spirits look after ritual devices, such as the priests' fees or their ritual bracelets. Spirits are found in hollows, swamps, rock faces and outcrops, boulders, lakes, bamboo clumps, old *tanyit* and *lunok* trees (the *tanyit* is the tallest jungle tree; the *lunok* is a parasitic fig tree, whose fruit is eaten by rhinoceros hornbills). There are spirits at the sites of battles and murders. A passage of the end-of-year ritual lists such spirits:

> Protect us against spirits which might bother us, such as the spirits of breadfruit, the spirits of ant-hills, the spirits of crevices, the spirits of landslides, the spirits of places where people were killed, the spirit in the boulder upriver of the village, the spirit of the Thunder's Bench [a hill opposite Uma Bawang], the spirits of the upper reaches of the Belepe and Murum rivers, the spirits at the bottom of the river, the spirit of the Bakun rapid, the spirits of whatever place [...]. Protect us against our [dead] relatives of Uma Beluvu, Uma San, Uma Pako', Uma Time [...].

The various categories of spirits have specific characteristics and behaviours. Spirits of the *lunok* tree have pointed heads, their hands are thin and they have big feet. Spirits of crevices (*tana bekang*) catch the souls of children. Spirits of round hollows speak; if one digs a hole at the spot where their voices are heard, they move elsewhere and speak again; one could keep digging without ever catching them. A lone hunter may come across a *to' blanit*, whom one recognizes by his cry *'ho'uy!'* To get rid of it, the hunter can boil water which is to be thrown on the *to' blanit* when it is about to attack; the spirit runs away, shouting. *Burawen* spirits like to warm themselves near a fire; they visit those who are often spending the night alone away from the longhouse. They are as big as humans, but harmless. Another category of spirits, the *to' ngut*, are known by their cry (*'ut, ut'*). Spirits roam the world and one can come across them anywhere. As my driver, Kilat, was going up the Bakun rapid, something black hit the side of the boat. This was surely a spirit and he was deeply troubled at his close brush with death. Upon being told of this encounter, the chief's wife concluded this was the female spirit in charge of the Bakun rapid.[14]

The *to' duwok* fly and can change into humans; they scratch like cats and have the ability to make people lose their way in the jungle. Thus, if a woman

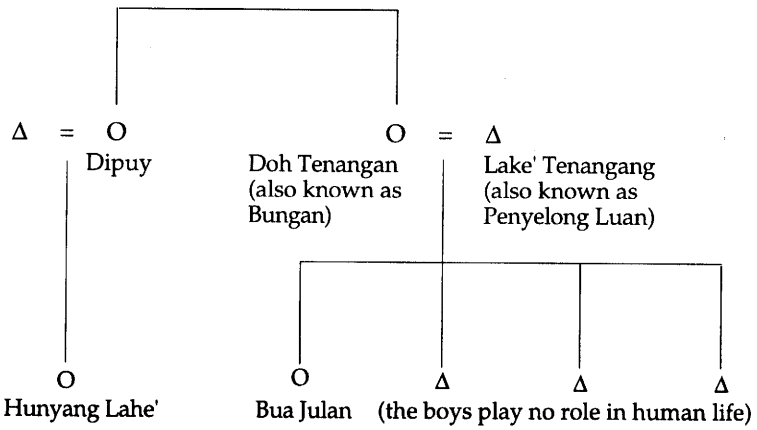
[14] There are two spirits at the Bakun, one male, the other female. The male spirit is called Abang Met; he has large ears. One can ask him for a safe passage through the rapids. Intriguingly, Abang Met is a Malay name, so this could be the spirit of a Malay.

goes to catch fish with a hand net, the spirit can take the shape of her child and lead her astray. One can see their small footprints in the forest. The *to' duwok* are sometimes seen masturbating. Brain spirits (*to' utek*) land on the roof at night; they eat people's brains and make them ill. *Kok imo* eat people and dogs. Avun once was woken up by a spirit helper when a *kok imo* was about to attack him. On another occasion, a *kok imo* entered the village of Uma Aging. People on the gallery fled to their rooms. The chief came out and, with the help of his spirit helper Hingan, chased it away.

The dangerous *pejamun* stealthily cut off people's heads. A number of years ago, a *pejamun* came to Uma Bawang while most people were away at the farm. He climbed up the posts and rattled the floor boards. People were terrified; they congregated into one apartment and asked the senior priest Avun to stay awake to protect them. The next morning, they discovered the pig feed of one household had been eaten by the *pejamun*. The chief ordered everyone to leave for their farm houses and the village was deserted for a while.

The spirit of rice (*to' aleng hipun pare*) is of major importance; she is propitiated in ceremonies. All varieties of rice are under her control. Hunyang Lahe is the mother of rice (*hinan pare*); she is Dipuy's daughter. She died during the harvest ritual when she pricked herself with a needle; out of anger, Dipuy decided to create onerous ceremonies. Every year, she dies after the harvest, is born again at the sowing, and grows with the *padi*. Her tomb is in the Kayan river area and has now been turned into stone (see Whittier and Whittier 1974). Lake' Batang Hang is in charge of farm borders. Another spirit, Jelivan Alam Blap, owns a species of trees which are notched to mark boundaries.

Table 8. Relationships between some spirits



Doh Tenangan (Bungan) plays a central role in *adat Bungan*, while her sister Dipuy played a dominant role in *adat Dipuy*.

The foremost spirit of Kayan religion is Doh Tenangan. '*Doh*' means 'woman'; it is used as a prefix to the personal name of women of grand-parental age and is a term of respect (Rousseau 1983). '*Teneng*' means 'true, correct, proper'; Sombroek (n.d.2:108) translates '*tenangan*' as 'powerful'. Doh Tenangan has a husband, Lake' Tenangan, who is otiose (see Table 8). Since the Bungan reform, Doh Tenangan and Lake' Tenangan are usually referred to by their Kenyah names: Bungan Malan and Penyelong Luan.[15] Lake' Tenangan and Doh Tenangan have one girl and four boys.[16] The whole family lives in Apo Token.

Doh Tenangan is often invoked in intercessions. In rituals, she and her consort are commonly addressed in the same breath, although she remains the central character: it is acceptable to mention her without her husband, but one would never invoke Lake' Penyelong without Bungan. This is not an innovation of the Bungan reform: in *adat Dipuy*, Doh Tenangan occupied a more prominent position than her husband (Hose and McDougall 1912, II:6; Ding Ngo 1979:20).

Lake' Tenangan and Doh Tenangan shaped the world to its present form. Since the Bungan reform, the Kenyah name of Lake' Tenangan, Penyelong Luan, has been Kayanized as Lake' Penyelong Urip. While *penyelong* is a Kenyah word, the Kayan have developed their own etymology: *nyelong* means 'to give a shape to, to make' and *urip* means 'life'; thus, Lake' Penyelong Urip is 'The old man who shapes lives'. Doh Tenangan is also said to make people.

> The one who really made us at the beginning of our life is Bungan Malan; it is true that we appeared from a hole in a stump of the Big Tree, because of Belare' Ubong Do, but Bungan Malan is the one who made us humans in the hole of that tree (Baling Avun 1961:66).

An elderly informant said that Bungan's contribution to making every individual is more important than the sperm which enters the mother; he also thought that the manner of an individual's death is decided at birth (by

[15] Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, I:98) refers to Lake' Tenangan as Tamei Tingei and Doh Tenangan as Uniang Tenangan. Nieuwenhuis (1900, I:141) mentions Do Tenangan. Barth (1910:220-1) explains *tame tinge* as follows: *ngetinge* means 'to catch in flight' (of a bird catching a prey), so *tame tinge* could be glossed as 'Our Father who always has in his power to catch humans like a hawk and take them away, thus bringing their life to an end'. The identification of Doh Tenangan to Bungan and Lake' Tenangan to Lake' Penyelong is not a creation of the Bungan reform. Hose had already noted this correspondence early in this century (Hose and McDougall 1912, II:6, 15). '*Malan*' is a Kenyah word meaning taboo (Elshout 1923:34). 'Bungan Malan can be considered as the highest figure in Kenyah religion' and plays a direct role in creation (Elshout 1923:36). Some Kenyah call the male figure 'Penyelong Luan', others 'Pa Selong Luhan', which means 'the organizer of the person': Pa is a prefix to the name of grandfathers; *nyelong* means 'to put something in order all at once' and *luhan* refers to the human body (the vessel of the soul) and the human form (Elshout 1923:48-9). To a Kayan, it is not surprising that Bungan has several names, because humans also have several names (Rousseau 1983).

[16] I was told that the girl is called Bua Julan, the boys La'ing Ningan, Kato Julan, La'ing Buring, and Belulok Julan. However, on another occasion, I was told that Bua Julan is Doh Tenangan. The boys seem to play no role in human life, but Bua Julan is invoked in *dayong* rituals.

Bungan?). Another old man added that Lake' Lirong Mujan (an alias of Lake' Tenangan) makes the bones, while Doh Tenangan makes the body (*batong*). The same is true of humans: bones come from the man, flesh from the woman.

Bungan gives rituals their efficacy. She has piercing eyes, eyes like a spy-glass; she knows everything, she has access to people's dreams. She is benevolent and concerned about people's well-being. She looks after the souls of humans and rice. While Doh Tenangan clearly was a very important spirit in *adat Dipuy*, she occupies an even more central position in *adat Bungan*. In *adat Dipuy*, Doh Tenangan was a *prima inter pares*; Bungan is the foremost spirit. While the Kayan have no notion of gods (as distinct from spirits), Bungan comes closest to fitting the notion of deity. Parallels are made between her and the Christian God (*Tuhan*) and some people assume they are one and the same person.

Dipuy Avuy is responsible for rituals (*lali*), omens, and taboos. She is Doh Tenangan's only sibling (see Table 8).[17] Unlike her sister, Dipuy is harsh; she is wicked and haughty (*ji'ek aren*) and is responsible for the many taboos and omens which made life difficult until the Bungan reform. After Doh Tenangan made humans, Dipuy asked to take care of them. Hunyang Lahe', in charge of rice, is her daughter. With the Bungan reform, she lost her dominion and is of no contemporary relevance.[18] According to Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, I:99-100), Dipuy started as a human being in the Apo Kayan. Her first husband, Tamei Angoi, went on a trip with their son, Tekwan, who drowned. Tamei Angoi went to Apo Lagan in the spirit country to get rice and he met their son Tekwan, who had moved there after his death. Dipuy decided to join her son in Apo Lagan; she displaced the spirit Buring Bango, who up to then had been the ruler of Apo Lagan. Tamei Angoi stayed on the earth and became the ancestor of the people of central Borneo. Hence spirits and humans are relatives. While Dipuy was in overall charge of the old religion, other spirits were given specific tasks.

17 'Dipuy' is the contraction of 'Doh Hipuy', 'Aristocratic Woman'. Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, I:98-9) calls her Jaya Hipui and her husband is Huvong Hwan. 'Jaya Hipui' translates as 'Distinguished Aristocrat'. Ding Ngo (1979:12) says that 'Jaya Ipuy' is incorrect and should be Daya' Ipuy, who is also called Ine Aya' ('the great mother'). Ding's 'correction' is problematic, because he derives 'Daya' from orang Daya' (Dayak), which he says used to be the Kayan's ethnonym. However, 'Dayak' was introduced recently to central Borneo (Rousseau 1990:12, 74); furthermore, *daya'* means 'fish-spawn' in Kayan; its appearance as the first part of a name would be puzzling. Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, I:98) says that Dipuy shares her power over the world with Amei Awi and his wife Buring Une.

18 Avun surmised that in the old religion, rituals were directed to Dipuy as well as Doh Tenangan. Lake' Ivak, whom I am more inclined to believe on this point, because he was already middle-aged at the beginning of the Bungan reform, said that rituals were directed to Doh Tenangan, who forwarded the offerings to the various houses of spirits as necessary. This is still the case in *adat Bungan*.

The Thunder is usually described as an individual. However, in religious texts, reference is made to a number of Thunder spirits.[19] People for whom the Thunder is a spirit helper (*putam Belare'*) have strong spiritual power. A rather dull witted priest of Uma Bawang, who was a poor singer as well, was nonetheless recognized as a powerful ritual specialist because of his association with the Thunder. Priests who receive the help of the Thunder must purify (*ngaping*) their family from time to time to remove the potential dangers. It is taboo (*parit*) for anyone to partake of the sacrificial animal offered on behalf of a *putam Belare'*. The Thunder can be appeased by offerings of blood or raw, bloody, meat, which is thrown outside the house.[20]

In *adat Dipuy*, a complex of ideas linked the Thunder, mockery of animals, incest, warfare, rain, and petrification. All animals had to be treated with respect, except for the monkey (*brok*) and the frog (*ja'uy*), who had displeased Dipuy. It was forbidden to make fun of animals (including dogs and pigs), even inadvertently. Few people had pets, in order to minimize the danger. Those who transgressed this rule were punished by the Thunder who unleashed a harsh stormy wind (*uven*). The most extreme consequence of *uven* was petrification; it was also meted out to those who had committed incest.[21] Warfare also brings *uven*. During the Malaysian-Indonesian Confrontation in the early 1960s, Indonesians attacked the Kenyah village of Uma Kulit in the upper Baluy. This was followed by heavy rain, which was interpreted as a form of *uven* due to the killings. Long ago, some Kenyah communities lived in the Wat river near Uma Bawang. Many of them were killed by enemies and the others moved away. This region has retained its association with death and *uven* often manifests itself there. If one puts poison in the Wat to catch fish, it rains afterwards because of *uven*.

Some stone alignments are identified as petrified longhouses, some boulders

19 I was told that the Thunder was both the husband of the Lightning (*Bekilat*) and the wife of the Wind (*Bahuy*). The two statements are not contradictory insofar as there are several Thunders. As a meteorological phenomenon, thunder originates from a very large stone (Bato' Belare'), which is the abode of Belare'. Belare' can take a human form. Being struck by lightning is described as being 'bitten by the teeth of the Thunder'. It is said that, if someone's farm is struck by lightning, its owner's head will turn red. In related fashion, the baldness of an Uma Bawang man was explained by his association with a Thunder spirit helper; the heat of the Thunder had burned off his hair. There may be a link between the Thunder and the hornbill: a Kayan described the thunder as taking the form of a white rhinoceros hornbill (Römer 1913a:139).

20 This recalls the Batek Negrito blood sacrifice; however the Batek who offends the Thunder sheds his or her own blood. By contrast, the Kayan offer the blood of chickens or pigs. The Batek De' Negritos of Kelantan describe the blood sacrifice as 'throwing blood' (Endicott 1979: 156). Among the Kayan, the Thunder can be frightened away with pieces of bamboo.

21 Similar ideas exist among the Penan and Iban of Borneo and the Semang of the Malay peninsula and among Austronesians in general (Needham 1964; Freeman 1968; Endicott 1979; Blust 1981). Thunder and lightning are not common in the Baluy, at least in Uma Bawang. Breathing difficulties are sometimes interpreted as a consequence of *uven*. Hail is linked to thunder and petrification (*Hail and hell* 1966).

are petrified individuals. It is said that, long ago, the people of Lepo' Tepu (a Kenyah village of the Iwan, in the Apo Kayan) were gathering material in the jungle for the end-of-year festival (*dange*). They caught a rat which grew to the size of a pig. They used it as a sacrificial animal along with a real pig. This showed disrespect for the wild animal and for the spirits which were to receive the offerings. (There is no disrespect in killing an animal; the transgression consisted in treating the rat as something it was not, namely a domesticated pig.) A strong wind came up and darkness fell suddenly. Someone tried to stop the wind by striking a drum; he was turned to stone. *Uven* may also manifest itself in other ways than petrification: if an animal's bite turns septic and kills the victim, this may be interpreted *ex post facto* as a result of *uven*.

In *adat Dipuy*, there were ways of mitigating the force of *uven*. For instance, if children laughed at animals, a drop of their blood was offered to the Thunder with the help of a blowpipe. The child's blood became a whole human being against whom the Thunder could vent his wrath; he was beseeched not to send a supernatural wind (*bahuy uven*) or to produce any other form of *uven*. In the neighbouring Kenyah village of Uma Kelap, a child was said to have died as a consequence of imitating a bird. Even in the days of *adat Dipuy*, Doh Tenangan eventually prevented the Thunder from petrifying whole communities. Since the advent of *adat Bungan*, the Thunder is only allowed to 'bite' (*merit*) the culprit, in other words to mete out a mild form of *uven*.

Spirit helpers are an important category of supernatural beings. There are different kinds of spirit helpers. From birth, everybody has a protector spirit (*to' aleng nyineng ita'*), somewhat like a guardian angel. When the person dies, the protector spirit moves on to look after someone else. Other spirits offer their help later in a person's life. An Uma Bawang man dreamt a woman carried out a shamanic cure on his behalf. In the morning, he made two egg offerings to the woman spirit. The dream was interpreted as an offer by the spirit to become the man's familiar. In a later dream, the spirit said she would return, thus acknowledging the egg offerings.

Some protector spirits establish an intimate relationship with human beings: they are the *utam*, familiars who dwell within the person.[22] People learn the identity of their spirit-helpers through dreams. The *utam* may introduce him/herself by name or is recognized by distinctive features such as tattoos and decorations. Various spirits may become *utam*, but spirits who play tricks on people usually do not. A spirit helper may associate with several human beings at once. People do not seek *utam*; they manifest themselves of their own volition because they have taken a fancy to someone. Some *utam* tend to associate with

22 *Mutam* means 'to enter'; an *utam* is an 'in-dwelling spirit'. A person with an *utam* is *putam*, 'entered'. A spirit helper can be referred to as *sepilah* (*sepilah sah*, 'blood-brother'). The spirit 'makes a nest' (*nelen*) for his human charge.

the descendants of a particular individual with whom they had a relationship. It is important to make occasional offerings to one's familiar in order to enjoy good health and prosperity, otherwise the *utam* sends bad dreams and illnesses. It is customary to do so at the occasion of *dayong*.[23]

Some spirit helpers provide a specific skill, such as the ability to be a good paddler, to handle cast-nets, or to be an accomplished guitar (*sape'*) player. Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, II:110-1) notes that not only religious specialists, but also blacksmiths, carvers, and other craftsmen derive their gift from a spirit to whom they must make offerings. Theriomorphic spirits can become *utam*, such as the *nyang* (a lizard-like dragon) and spirit crocodiles. Snake *utam* provide prosperity. Those who have Lake' Lebuy as an *utam* are good hunters, because this spirit is himself a hunter who owns excellent hunting dogs. He helps his human counterparts; his dogs provide assistance to the hunters' dogs by barking loudly. If he kills a boar, the hunter must offer its feet and ears to Lebuy in order to placate him, because he is sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile. One day while he was hunting, my neighbour Avun Imang heard a strong voice saying "*I kuy, 'I kuy!*' ('Give me, Give me!'); Avun Imang was not afraid and he continued to climb the hill, while Lebuy came down towards him. Avun Imang became separated from his dogs who found themselves on the other side of the river and the prey escaped. It is risky to antagonize Lebuy, as he can harm dogs.

Some *utam* are particularly powerful: those who are 'entered by the Tiger spirit' (*putam Lejo*) are good traders and warriors because they take quick decisions and grasp opportunities.[24] In olden times, several men had a Tiger familiar, for instance Lake' Bo', the famous Uma Bawang chief of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These heroic times are over: 'Nowadays,' a man told me, 'we are all women.' Nonetheless, a number of contemporary men still have Tiger familiars. There are several Tiger spirits; the underwater Tiger (Lejo Hida Danum) associates only with priests. Those who are 'entered by the Thunder of Rice' (*putam Belare' Pare*) have prosperous farms as long as they remember to sacrifice a pig to their familiar every year. At the time of fieldwork, three Uma Bawang men had a relationship with Belare' Pare: the retired chief, the foremost commoner, and the latter's son. People who are blessed with an *utam* from Apo Duna (a region of the spirit country) have an easy life and succeed without hard work, because Apo Duna is the abode of particularly auspicious spirits.

All powerful people are assumed to have spirit helpers. Some prominent

23 Old men are less vulnerable to spirits and can perform without danger a special ritual, the *pelah nyingem*, which serves to feed one's *utam*. *'Pelah'* ('purifying ritual') is a cognate of *'melah'*, 'to recede (of a flood)', 'to go down (of a river); *'nyingem'* is a cognate of *'hngem'*, 'cool'.

24 Trading and headhunting are related activities insofar as they require expeditions away from the longhouse, with all their attendant dangers and opportunities.

aristocrats receive the protection of renowned spirits. One Kayan chief, who became a Minister in the Sarawak Cabinet, had several spirit helpers, the most important of whom was the hero Belawan. Aristocrats (*maren*) of both genders have familiars, but it appears that only male commoners receive the help of *utam*. In Kayan society, status and influence are correlated not only with stratum ascription, but also with age: old men are expected to be influential and they all – or virtually all – have spirit helpers. Younger commoners who are noticeably influential and successful also have *utam*. For instance, in the early 1970s, Himang Jok was a successful young man; he was a prosperous cultivator, a good trader, and an active participant in public meetings; he was blessed with a large and healthy family. His success was ascribed to the help of an underwater spirit (*utam Hida Hunge*). By 1988, he was even mooted as a possible candidate for the village chiefship, an unprecedented position for a commoner.

Supernatural power is always dangerous: people with spirit helpers are 'hot' (*lasu*). My driver avoided close proximity with an elderly relative who was associated with a powerful spirit. One must be particularly careful with men associated with the Thunder or the Tiger. When they are in a bad mood, their spirit counterparts can be dangerous. Utterances by those who have been 'entered by the Thunder spirit' are said to be powerful (*dahun daha' bisa*); it is unwise to ignore what they say. Men with several spirit helpers are treated with great caution and even adult men may be afraid to share food with them. The help of some spirits may be a mixed blessing. Men whose familiar is the 'Thunder spirit of the feeding trough' may not feed pigs or dogs, otherwise the latter would die. Men who are helped by the 'Thunder spirit of dogs' may not raise dogs. Some spirit familiars require their human counterparts to observe specific taboos, either to show respect to the spirit or to protect their family against its power. Those who are blessed by the Thunder (*putam Belare'*) may not feed chickens, pigs, or dogs, as this is dirty work; if they sacrifice a chicken or piglet, others do not partake of it, as this would bring them into undue proximity with the Thunder. Households with a *putam Belare'* perform a purification ritual every year to avert the potential danger of this powerful spirit.

Dayong spirits are a specific kind of spirit helper. They are denizens of the spirit country, but visit this world to interact with specific human beings. Most people have at least one *dayong* spirit. Unlike the other spirit familiars described above, the *dayong* spirits do not necessarily provide their human counterpart with special powers; they associate equally with people of both genders and all ages.[25] We will see (Chapter V) that *dayong* spirits manifest themselves by causing an illness and they are identified through divination. A few *dayong* spirits are priestly or shamanic spirits and their human counterparts are expected to become religious specialists.

25 The spirit and the human are referred to as *hnda' dayong*, '*dayong* counterpart'. '*Hnda'*' refers to someone with the same name as Ego. Sombroek (n.d.2:23) defines *henda'* as 'friendly spirit of a *dayong* priest, from whom he derives his *dayong* name'. He also mentions *hendang*, 'the mediating spirit through which the *dayong* priest can achieve his *dayong* and sometimes also his tricks' (Sombroek (n.d.2:23).

All dead people are, by definition, spirits (*to'*). One does not refer to the newly deceased by name, as this might attract their attention. One alludes to them as *to'* or other indirect designations (such as 'the man who recently went away'). Spirits of the dead live in the spirit country, but they often return to their previous abodes; they roam in graveyards. Murder and headhunting victims are wont to visit the place of their death.[26] In order to use a parcel of land haunted by such spirits, one must first purify it with a *petutong tana* ritual. Ancestral spirits (*to' sepun*) can help their descendants, although their interest is dangerous: if a deceased relative visits you in a dream, this may be because the spirit wants you in the spirit country. Ancestral spirits are thought of as a vaguely defined assemblage of relatives who may choose to take an interest in their living kin. There is no ancestral cult, and no expectation that ancestral spirits should help their relatives.

Some spirits of the dead are fearsome, such as the *to' ka'*, the spirits of children and mothers who died in childbirth. These angry spirits tear off young men's testicles and eat them.[27] Unfortunately, they are very numerous. They can take the form of a wild or domestic fowl, a mousedeer, or a civet cat. One hears them at night. What sounded to me like an owl was identified as a *to' ka'*: one evening, two young men were returning home from fishing; they heard the hoot of a *to' ka'*, which suddenly veered towards them. In terror, they ran to my apartment, locked the door and cowered in a corner, hoping my invulnerability to Kayan spirits would also protect them.

Souls

Animals, some plants, artefacts, and skills all have souls (*blua'*).[28] Each human being has several souls. Souls, like spirits, play an important role in making sense of the world. Rituals serve both to communicate with spirits and to manage souls. In curing rituals, the patient's soul is captured and reinserted into the body; in rites of intensification, the priest seeks the soul of rice, the soul of good hunting dogs, the soul of prosperity, the soul of success in commerce, the souls of all good things. The absence of a grammatical marker of the plural

26 They are called *to' kepusan*. The derivation of '*kepusan*' is not clear, but it is probably a cognate of '*usan*', 'rain'. A euphemism for 'having died' is '*belepok usan*', 'hit by rain'.

27 This is similar to the Iban *koklir* (Sather 1978:312, 334). The *to' ka'* are not seen as a subcategory of ancestral spirits (*to' sepun*).

28 In this respect, the Berawan are different: 'Animals, plants, and objects do not have *telanak* [soul].... They may have spirit.' (Metcalf 1982:48; see also Huntington and Metcalf 1979:69; Metcalf 1989.)

in Kayan allows for some ambiguity, but it appears that there is a distinct soul of rice for each household. However, this must be deduced from ritual practices, because the Kayan are not concerned with the nature of the soul.

Lability is an important characteristic of souls. I seemed to be an exception: people surmised that my soul was tightly attached to my body, and this is why I seemed impervious to spiritual dangers. This invulnerability is known to be a characteristic of Europeans. Mothers routinely call back (*nawi*) their children's souls, which are particularly prone to wander. In the evening, they stand at the door of their apartment, holding the tassel of their necklace in the right hand, and they call their children's souls in a high voice.[29]

Dreams sometimes convey the information that one's soul, or someone else's, is leaving the body; a *dayong* is held to prevent this. If someone dies after partaking of the new rice, it is necessary to call back the soul of the rice, which might have gone away with the deceased. Souls are particularly prone to wander where spirits are present. On my way to Belaga bazaar, I once stopped to take pictures of a monumental funeral post (*kliring*) near the Kajang village of Kejaman Lasah. As we returned to the boat, my companion called back his soul, which might have lingered because of the immanent power of the place. In *dayong* ceremonies, priests wear a bead bracelet (*leku dayong*) in order to hold on to their souls. In headhunting rituals, men wear a palm wristband for the same purpose. One may not step over someone's legs, as this action might take away one of his or her souls. If there is no space to walk around the person, one must ask him to fold his legs; if he is asleep, one must wake him up.

Every human being has a soul in each eye (*blua' mata'*) and one in the head (*blua' kehong*).[30] Avun says that the 'real soul' (*bluan lan*) is the soul of the head;

[29] The first meaning of '*nawi*' is 'to call an animal' so that it returns home to eat. Hens are called back at night in order to be placed in baskets. Informants made a parallel between calling children's souls and calling chickens. The simile between calling chickens and calling souls is widespread in insular Southeast Asia (Forth 1992). Sombroek (n.d.1:8.21) calls this practice *nyinah* and provides a text: 'Child, return from the river,/ return from the playing field, return from the house of Mebang Luhung,/ return from the house of Mebang Likung,/ return from the house of Bua Kerava',/ return from the house of Bua Alat,/ return to hide under the breast,/ the breast of your mother'. Mebang Luhung, Mebang Likung, Bua Kerava', and Bua Alat are female spirits who live at the bottom of the river and take small children away. In the poetic language, both beads and eggs are referred to as 'fruit' (*bua*). Eggs are the most appropriate device to catch the souls of children, but the beads which constitute the mothers' necklaces are appropriate substitutes because of the identification of bead to egg.

[30] Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, I:103) presents a different account. He states that the people of central Borneo 'believe that humans and their domestic animals, pigs, dogs and chickens, as well as deer, macaques, and wild boars have two souls, while the other animals, plants, and objects [*toten Gegenstände*] have a single soul'. Animals with a single soul are 'real animals', while domesticated animals, as well as deer, macaques, and wild boars have two souls like humans (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:105-6). The soul which leaves the body during illnesses and dreams is called *brua*, while the other is *tun luah*, which stays in the body during life (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:103). (However, *tun* means 'spirit' and *luah* means 'skeleton' (Barth 1910:123), hence *tun luah* is 'spirit of the skeleton', which raises questions about the relationship between

it is responsible for our ability to think. During rituals, the priest's 'real soul' travels to the spirit country. Some people think dreams happen because the soul of the head travels, others think the souls of the eyes are involved. There is an indeterminate number of souls in the body, some of which at least are located in major joints. The 'soul of the body' (*bluan le'ong*) goes away when one is about to die. After death, the 'bad souls' (*blua' ji'ek*, the souls of the veins and sinews) linger and bother people. The real soul goes to Telang Julan, a region of the spirit country. Head trophies also have a soul, in this case the soul of bones (*bluan tulang*); this is what one would expect, as the trophy is only a cranium. The 'real soul' of a headhunting victim dwells near the source of Telang Julan, as this is the abode of those who died in warfare.

Sickness is often due to soul loss, when the souls of the eyes go away. When people's souls wander, they go to specific places in the spirit country, where their spirit counterparts (*dayong*) reside; for instance, the soul of the *maren* goes to Ujet Bato' and this is where the priest has to find it. The souls of other *hipuy* and important people are also there. The soul of ordinary *panyin* may take residence in various parts of the spirit country. Avun thinks a baby has a soul as soon as it is born. By naming a child, one provides the soul with a means of remembering the body.

In *dayong* and curing rituals, the officiant catches the patients' souls and places them back in their heads. (The conduit for the soul is the spot on the cranial vault where the fontanel is in a child.) In a *dayong*, the priest uses a sword to attract the souls of men and a rolled cloth for women's souls. Men's souls are reinserted in their heads while they sit on the gallery. The same operation is performed inside the apartment for women and children, because their souls are weaker and more easily frightened; the souls of boys have not yet hardened and are similar to women's souls. In general, all wandering souls are skittish and it is preferable to catch them in the dark. In some circumstances, the priest may use a blow-pipe to catch a soul. In shamanic seances, wax is placed on a sword and set alight to produce a pleasant smell; the soul is attracted by it and settles on the sword. Shamans use this procedure both for women's and men's souls.

soul and spirit.) After death, the *tun luah* stays in the vicinity of the tomb and can take the form of an animal such as a deer (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:105). Contemporary Mendalam Kayan do not believe that each person has two souls (Lii' Long and Ding Ngo 1984-85, I:xli); the Mahakam belief may have been borrowed from Central Kalimantan: see for instance the Luangan contrast between *kelalongan* (the 'refined' soul of the head) and *liau* (the 'coarse' soul of the body/ shadow) (Weinstock 1987:79).

Human nature

We have seen that the Kayan do not establish a sharp contrast between natural and supernatural: the world is populated by spirits and humans, who have a common origin and interact with each other. Human beings are not unique: animals, humans, many plants, and other entities are animate as well. There are alternative theories about the seat of thoughts and emotions. Old people locate them in the belly[31], young people in the brain (*utek*); this change is presumably a consequence of outside influences. The gall-bladder is the seat of the emotions: in funerals, the deceased is given a *kaluy prun*, a 'replacement for the gall-bladder', in order to have feelings (*kenep*) towards those who died previously. Part of one's identity remains in one's belongings, particularly clothes. It is possible to provide an absent family member with the benefit of a *dayong* by bringing along some of his or her clothes to the ritual. Conversely, a ritual can leave effluvia on personal belongings: someone borrowed from a young man a good shirt to be used in a *dayong hudo' kaluy* (Chapter VIII). Afterwards, he refused to take it back and gave it to an influential man who was able to withstand the dangerous emanations of the ritual.

Personal names are part of one's identity. Infants who die before receiving a name do not require a funeral. We will see (Chapter IX) that the relationship between personal name and identity is complicated because the Kayan acquire several personal names through their life. Stratum ascription is an essential element of personal identity, as is the relationship with spirit helpers.

The duration of a person's life is determined by the 'record of duration of life' (*tevuko' urip*) under the control of Doh Tenangan.[32] This belief is not normally associated with fatalism, although someone whose judgement may have been affected by large amounts of rice beer told me there was no point in worrying about dangerous endeavours, such as jumping rapids, because the length of one's life is set by Doh Tenangan.

In the beginning, people did not die but regenerated themselves (*ngaluy*), shedding their skins like snakes. Lake' Uy, an underwater spirit, disapproved of human immortality and transferred immortality to the *belavan* tree, which sheds its bark periodically, while men became mortal. According to Avun, when a child is born, Doh Tenangan asks the infant how long it wants to live and she writes it down; a clever child will take this opportunity to ask her for wealth as well as a long life. 'But I do not know whether this is true', added Avun. In the spirit country, there is a wooden 'pole of life' (*tuken urip*) for every human being. Illness may be due to the fact that the pole is leaning or dirty; a priest can

31 This is evident in the following statement by an old man: '*Perita uh terima daha' alem butit*', 'the Government has received them in its belly', meaning that the Government was well disposed towards them. See also Nieuwenhuis (1904-07, I:445).

32 A *tevuko'* is a length of rattan in which knots have been made, with each knot marking a day before a meeting. A knot is untied every day.

repair (*neme*) it in a *dayong*. Death is a drawn-out process. At first, the deceased remains conscious of its surroundings; funerals and mourning rituals serve to attenuate the relationship between living and dead.

The nature of belief

From an epistemological viewpoint, religious beliefs can be validated in two ways: through common sense or sacredness. Commonsensical statements are seen as the transparent, unproblematic, representation of the reality to which they refer. Common sense takes everyday reality for granted. A statement is sacred when it is assumed to be unverifiable and unquestionably true at the same time.[33] Sacred statements reject – or at least set aside – reasoning and understanding at the same time as they demonstrate the desire to accept the veracity of their content. This is more than a simple refusal to face facts. The sacred validation of statements is a specific procedure and sacredness is self-validating: if you can accept something as true and unverifiable at the same time, there is no conceptual difficulty in believing unquestioningly in the appropriateness of sacred validation. This acceptance of the unknowable is the opposite of common sense; it constitutes faith. The sacred and common sense are similar in their unquestioning attitude. The same belief may be validated by either common sense or sacredness. A commonsensical acceptance of a religious belief can be replaced by a sacred validation when common sense fails, as when an unquestioned belief is questioned and there is a need to continue to accept its veracity in the absence of proof.

On the whole, most Kayan consider that their beliefs are self-evident; these remain unquestioned, they are rarely the focus of attention, and they form an undifferentiated part of people's tacit knowledge. A few individuals do question them and this leads them to one of two different outcomes: some Kayan become agnostics, while others buttress their beliefs with a sacred validation. I will return to agnosticism in a moment; let us consider first an example of sacred validation.

Avun once noted that spirits are made of flesh and blood in the same way as human beings; we can see, hear, and touch them if we meet them. There are numerous reports of encounters with spirits. The existence of such spirits is commonsensical. Most Kayan lay people are happy to leave it at that, but Avun

33 This definition is derived from Rappaport (1971a, b); for a fuller discussion, see Rousseau (1987). The following quote adequately describes common sense: 'The reality of everyday life appears already objectified, that is, constituted by an order of objects that have been designated as objects before my appearance on the scene. [...] The reality of everyday life is taken for granted as reality. It does not require additional verification over and beyond its simple presence.' (Berger and Luckmann 1966:35, 37.) The need to justify statements arises only when there is a diversity of view-points (Piaget 1964:38-9). Common sense is based on such a lack of differentiation.

was looking for more. Religion was the focus of his life; why then had he never been face-to-face with major spirits, in particular Bungan, the superhuman protector of human beings? He hypothesized that he – and other people – fail to encounter spirits either because they live far apart, or because they always happen to be somewhere else when we are looking for them. Indeed, he thought, we probably fail to see them because spirits play tricks on humans and hide from them. However, he had not lost hope of meeting Bungan some day. His argument was couched in a commonsensical framework, but was moving beyond it; in effect, Avun was saying Bungan's existence could be demonstrated by empirical observation and the only problem was the current absence of evidence. In recognizing the absence of such evidence, Avun had abandoned a commonsensical framework. He was still utterly convinced of the existence of spirits; their existence was unquestionably true. In thinking this way, Avun had shifted towards a sacred validation. He had not pushed this approach to its limits, in other words he was not stating the existence of spirits was unprovable, but he certainly did not think it was evident.

Belief and unbelief

One must distinguish between statements of beliefs and acceptance of these statements. There is variation in what the Kayan believe and some people also express doubts about the veracity of some statements of belief. Like many other ethnographers, I might easily have fallen into the trap of thinking that the Kayan necessarily accepted the truth of belief statements, but circumstances of my fieldwork drew my attention to this issue. When I arrived in Uma Bawang, I was asked repeatedly about my religious affiliation. At first, I was reluctant to label myself in a way which might affect my fieldwork. Not knowing what to say, I put off answering by promising I would explain when I spoke Kayan better.

For a while, people politely refrained from pursuing the matter. After two months, an old man pointed out that I now spoke Kayan well enough to explain my religious position; I admitted that I followed no religion. There was a long silence, during which I wondered whether I had made a dreadful mistake in being straightforward. 'You are lucky,' the old man said finally. 'I wish I could live without religion [...]. But no, I don't think I could do it, it wouldn't work.' Several bystanders agreed with him, others thought my approach was risky. Someone retorted that the risk was minimal because Europeans are known to have strong souls and they may be able to exist without religion. On another occasion, the old man who had brought up the issue surmised that, if he could read and write, he too would be able to dispense with religion.

This was not the reaction I had expected and it took me some time to appreciate its significance. I had started fieldwork with the tacit assumption

that the Kayan must see religion as a necessary part of being human and that irreligiousness would seem incomprehensible. But I was envied! At first, I explained away this attitude as a consequence of recent religious change in central Borneo; this was reinforced by their use of a loan word, *pesaya'* (from Malay *percaya*) for 'believing'. I eventually found out that this attitude was neither rare nor new. Some time after this incident, in a private conversation, a middle-aged man informed me that, like me, he practised no religion. When I visited other villages of the Baluy, my reputation had preceded me and people were pointed out who shared my irreligion, or, more precisely from a Kayan viewpoint, a non-ritual stance.[34] In the days of *adat Dipuy*, some men already did not take part in rituals.

Unbelievers feel there is no reason to believe in supernatural beings or at least in the efficacy of rituals. Agnostics do not stand out, because they see no point in proclaiming their attitude. 'Agnosticism' is not the ideal term, as the focus is on avoidance of rituals rather than the absence of beliefs. However, it remains legitimate to use the term, because avoidance of rituals is related to doubts about the validity of some beliefs.[35] Agnostics are surrounded by household members who practise religion normally. If the household sponsors a ritual, the agnostic does not stand conspicuously apart, but attends as a spectator.[36] In that respect, agnostics are no different from the few Christian Kayan who attend *adat Bungan* rituals because these are occasions for sociability and artistic performances. They do not participate in chanting, but they partake of the sacrificial victims because for them this is a matter of commensality. It is easy not to notice them.

[34] My irreligion was a topic of conversation because people tried to pigeon-hole me. I was the only European in the whole Belaga sub-district; I was not working for the Government, I was not in the army (the Confrontation of 1963 had brought a few British soldiers), I was not an explorer (Harrisson's trip across the Usun Apo was still remembered: see Harrisson and Leach 1954); finally, I clearly was not a missionary.

[35] Sombroek (n.d.1:6.47-8) notes a case of agnosticism. After his return from a twelve-year jail sentence for headhunting, Nyurei lived miserably. As he was becoming blind, he asked his daughter to bring him to a spot where he could meet a spirit who might help him. No spirit manifested itself and he came to the conclusion there were no spirits, or at least that they had ceased to exist. He decided to ignore all taboos; he ate any food he wanted and he tried to wean other people from their beliefs by putting tabooed foods in their mouths and challenging spirits to punish him. This seems to be the same Nyurei mentioned on p. 30.

[36] All the agnostics I met were men. This may be related to Kayan patterns of post-marital residence: uxorilocality is the norm (72% in Uma Bawang in 1972). While the husband is, jurally, part of the domestic unit into which he has married, he sometimes feels marginal. An agnostic man can justifiably consider his stance an individual decision, while his wife defines herself more fundamentally as part of the household; her lack of participation in rituals would affect the whole family. Virilocality is more common among the aristocrats (*maren*); however, there is less incentive for a *maren* to doubt the validity of a religion which justifies the *maren*'s powers and privileges. There are only a few declared agnostics. In Uma Bawang, only one man declared to me his irreligion; I met a few agnostics in other Kayan villages. On the other hand, the behaviour of several Uma Bawang men was consistent with irreligion insofar as they barely participated in rituals.

I did not pursue the matter as much as I would have liked because Kayan priests took a dim view of unbelief and, given my research focus, I did not want to alienate them.[37] On the other hand, the majority of people did not disapprove of agnostics. Unlike priests, for whom religion was an important part of their self-identity, many lay people took a practical view. The truth of a statement is established situationally. An example may clarify my point.

In the early part of my fieldwork, Avun narrated to me a series of myths of origin. Later on, a priest from another village asked me to read out my record of these myths. He stated I had not been given the right myths; my texts originated from the Kayan of the Mahakam area (who call themselves Busang). My new informant went on to tell me the myths of the Baluy Kayan. The two sets shared a number of characters and stories were fairly similar, but there were differences in *dramatis personae* and plot. I asked the narrator whether Avun had given me erroneous myths. No, his myths were not wrong; they were true and correct for the people of the Mahakam, but in the Baluy, the other set was correct. If two narratives which are inconsistent with each other can both be true, it follows that criteria of truth are based on tradition rather than logic.

The Kayan gloss for those I call agnostics is *kelunan aleng jinun adet*, 'people who lack religious practices'. The focus is not on belief but on the efficacy of ritual. The attitude to belief is also revealed in the way in which the Kayan have adopted other religions. The essential criterion is whether the new religion is effective or not. For instance, when the prophet of Bungan had his revelation, he did not talk about it; he simply worked at his fields without following omens and taboos, in contrast to his fellow villagers. At first, people thought him mad, but, when he had a bumper harvest, they questioned him and he started spreading the new religion. In the same way, when some people became Christians, their neighbours simply waited to see what would happen to them: would they be healthy or sick? Would their crops be plentiful or meagre? In the absence of disaster, Christianity was accepted as a viable alternative. By contrast, *adat Tenangan* (Chapter II) failed because its curing rituals were ineffective. The same logic applies for agnostics: the validity of their stance depends on its outcome. Prosperity validates their choice, misfortune suggests they would be well advised to return to religious practice. The issue is not the general validity of religious systems, but the adequacy of religious practice to different individuals or groups. The fact that different religions are viable alternatives rather than competing belief systems is shown by the following event: a follower of *adat Bungan* informed Bungan that the death of an old Christian woman should not stop him from visiting his farm on that day.

[37] Priests with whom I associated interpreted my irreligion in a positive way: because I was demonstrably not Christian and at the same time manifested a profound interest in *adat Bungan*, I must be learning the religion in order to practise it and become a missionary of *adat Bungan* to white people.

Normally, everyone stays at the longhouse on the day when a community member dies, but as the deceased was Christian, she did not come under Bungan's purview. Bungan and Tuhan each have their own dominions which operate according to different procedures.

The value of a religion is to be found in the results of its practice, in the same way that the validity of some social stances is established by their outcomes. We have seen that the Kayan are a stratified society; the ruling stratum and the lower aristocrats form the high ritual level, while commoners and slaves are the low ritual level. A sub-category of commoners, the *panyin jia*, the 'good commoners', are well-to-do, politically active, with some aristocratic ancestors. Some ambitious 'good commoners' may want to be redefined as lower aristocrats (*hipuy*). Unlike other Borneo societies, where people can buy rank, the Kayan stratification system is rigid and lacks overt procedures for social mobility. During my fieldwork, my next-door neighbours, who formerly had been 'good commoners', suddenly started using ritual devices appropriate to *maren* and *hipuy*. Some aristocrats privately scoffed at their pretensions, but felt there was no need to take action: these upstarts would be punished by spirits if they had no right to these ritual devices. After a few months, my neighbours were still alive and healthy and they had a satisfactory harvest. From this, people concluded that, after all, they were and had always been *hipuy*. The proof of their status was marked by events, not by analysing the veracity of statements about pedigrees and the transfer of status.

Agnostics are only the tip of the iceberg. *Adat Dipuy* was burdened with countless omens and taboos; I heard many stories about people who ignored a taboo or an omen and then suffered for it. I asked why they had transgressed the rules in the first place; the answer was that, at the time, they expected no spiritual punishment because they doubted the reality of these taboos and omens, or at the very least, they thought they might be immune from them. They knew the Kayan dogmas, but they did not necessarily believe in them.[38] Similarly, not everyone participates in rituals. In 1971, Lake' Ajang did not join the headhunting ritual (*kayo*). His wife was much annoyed with him because she felt he was missing a ritual which would provide health and prosperity to him and his whole family; by contrast, he thought there was no place for the *kayo* in *adat Bungan*. Varying attitudes towards religion are also noted elsewhere in central Borneo: 'While one only hears ordinary people speak of the *to'*

[38] Leach (1967:40) addressed this issue when he launched the Virgin Birth controversy: 'When an ethnographer reports that "members of the X tribe believe that [...]" he is giving a description of an orthodoxy, a dogma, something which is true of the culture as a whole. But Professor Spiro (and all the neo-Tylorians who think like him) desperately wants to believe that the evidence can tell us much more than that – that dogma and ritual must somehow correspond to the inner psychological attitudes of the actors concerned. We need only consider the customs of our own society to see that this is not so.' Kayan agnosticism is not unique: for a related phenomenon, see Durrenberger (1980).

[spirits] as the source of their joys and sorrows, those with a higher status, such as chiefs and priests, consider the *to'* to be only the direct or indirect tools of the highest god Tamei Tingei' (that is Lake' Tenangan; Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:98).

For the Kayan, beliefs and practices are not separate from each other, but different facets of the same reality. To put it another way, the belief system is articulated through acts and has little existence apart from these acts. Beliefs are not taught didactically, they are learned by participation. In this respect, a personal example is relevant. The Kayan have a taboo against stepping over someone's legs; its transgression will harm the person who is sitting. I followed this practice because I did not want to offend my hosts, but I did not accept the validity of the belief. Shortly after my fieldwork, I was sitting on the floor at a party and someone walked over my legs. My spontaneous reaction was outrage at such callous behaviour and anxiety about its consequences. It took me only a moment to realize that I had unconsciously adopted a Kayan belief (which was immediately neutralized by self-consciousness). This is the way in which the Kayan – and indeed the tenants of most unwritten religions – acquire their beliefs. So long as they are tacit, such beliefs have particular force. This example might make Kayan agnosticism more difficult to understand: if I came to accept this taboo, how does a Kayan have a chance of becoming an agnostic? An answer may be that agnostics were repelled by aspects of religion which reduced their enjoyment of life, such as taboos, omens, expensive rituals, and beliefs which justified exploitation by aristocrats.

The nature of Kayan beliefs may also influence the likelihood of unbelief. The Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition constructs the image of an omnipotent God to whom humans are incommensurably inferior. Kayan believers do not have this feeling of insignificance: they have some control over superhuman beings, they have control over nature itself. If primary relatives commit incest, they create a cataclysm whereby all productive crops turn into worthless weeds, and game and fish disappear. This is not a punishment from God, but the result of their own actions. In *adat Dipuy*, people had some control over omens: if they saw an omen bird about to cross their path in an inauspicious way, they turned the boat around and made it into a good omen. More routinely, the offering of sacrifices imposes on spirits the obligation to reciprocate. Spirits are like humans – after all, they share a common origin – and a sacrifice to a spirit has the same binding requirement of reciprocity as a gift between humans. I noted earlier that the relationship between humans and spirits consciously parallels that between commoners and aristocrats. There are cases when families of commoners attempt to form communities in which they are free from aristocrats (Rousseau 1979). Likewise, some people seek to free themselves from the tyranny of spirits. In both cases, the success of the endeavour may be short-lived, but it indicates a recognition of alternatives.