CHAPTER VIII

Curing and protective rituals

Most Kayan rituals include a restorative component. The rites of the annual cycle induce prosperity, avert dangers, and remove existing difficulties for the whole community. In particular, the enhancement of health is the main purpose of the headhunting ritual which concludes the ritual year. All *dayong* promote prosperity and strengthen the health of domestic units. This chapter focuses on the rituals which specifically focus on restoring health and curing illnesses. These procedures are in the hands of several kinds of specialists. The Kayan have a few natural cures, in other words interventions without any religious aspect. Herbalists combine the intrinsic properties of plants with supernatural intervention. Because several curing rites take place within the framework of *dayong* ceremonies, priests play a major role as curers. Shamanic cures are an alternative. A patient can select any one or several of them in sequence. This chapter ends with the rituals which protect the community from collective dangers such as epidemics, blights, or the threat of head-hunters. Some practices described in this chapter belong to the category of *lali*, the rituals which are set apart from ordinary life and managed by priests. These include the curing rituals which are part of *dayong* and collective rituals. Herbal and shamanic cures are not *lali*.

The literature demonstrates with depressing detail that illness was a part of daily life. This was exacerbated by colonial expansion and pacification which increased contacts between populations, hence epidemics. At the end of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, this brought about a noticeable population decrease. Smallpox swept through the Rejang in 1851, 1873, and 1876; there were cholera epidemics across Sarawak in 1873, 1877, and 1888. In March 1876, there was an epidemic in Brunei when ten people died every day. About 6,000 had died in the previous two years and smallpox was followed by dysentery. Dutch Borneo was equally affected. In 1913, measles started in Uma Jalan; in Long Nawang, it killed 115 children but no adults, a sign that the same disease had struck earlier. In 1918, flu and cholera were widespread in Dutch Borneo and 90% of the population suffered from the Spanish flu. In the late 1920s in the Mahakam region, the incidence of venereal diseases was directly related to proximity to the coast (Rousseau 1990:112-3). Understandably, the likelihood of diseases was a cause for anxiety.

After World War II, some medical services were provided in the interior of Sarawak by 'dressers', travelling medical officers who dealt with hygiene, malaria, and various endemic diseases. The effects of this low level of medical intervention became evident in the 1960s, which saw a decrease in infant mortality. Nonetheless, the incidence of morbidity remained an important concern at the time of my fieldwork.

Natural cures, herbal cures, and drugs

Natural cures

Some treatments call for no supernatural agency. Broken bones are set and splinted, cramps are massaged. (In Uma Bawang, the same man was bone-setter and masseur.) Wounds are washed with a decoction from the bark of the *maro'* tree. A bleeding wound can be plugged with lime and covered with a betel leaf. Headaches and sore throats are treated by bruising the skin of the affected area between the knuckles or with tweezers in order to produce regular red lines about one centimetre apart. A bachelor who is attracted to a young woman may ask her to cure his headache in this way. If the attraction is mutual, she is likely to produce neat, regular, patterns. Therapeutic bleeding is also practised: I saw a man with a bad headache make superficial incisions to his temples. On another occasion, a man made minute cuts on his wife's forehead for the same reason. With a cloth tourniquet, he made blood ooze out. One can also bleed a throbbing limb after an accident. The practice is meant to remove the 'bad blood' which causes the pain.

The aromatic bark of the *buo* tree is chewed to cure headaches, stomach aches, chest pains, and centipede bites. The heart of wild palm (*uvun talang*) is another pain-killer. Lime juice cures coughs. Honey soothes burned skin. Leaf poultices shrink boils. The sticky latex of the *unong* fern heals boils after they have been lanced. An application of *Derris elliptica* mixed with lime juice can cure the bite of poisonous snakes. People are ready to experiment with new treatments: during a smallpox epidemic, someone felt better after eating a bitter gourd (*terak*); others followed suit in case it might be effective. All these traditional remedies are either self-administered or provided by a neighbour free of charge.

The people of central Borneo are eager to obtain remedies from afar; a variety of drugs are available in the Chinese shops of Belaga and from travellers. During my fieldwork, there was cautious interest in Western bio-medicine, but the need to travel to dispensaries and hospitals was a serious limitation. My neighbours were more than willing to use my drugs. When they did visit dispensaries, they were eager to have injections, which they considered to be very powerful. In other parts of the world, medical practitioners report a dislike or fear of injections. The positive attitude of Borneans towards injections may be

linked to practices which transform the body: pierced ears, tattoos, penis pins, and bleeding.

While the Kayan recognize that illnesses and accidents may be due to natural causes, these do not exclude supernatural intervention. Accidents, ailments, and disabilities – which are 'natural' – can be caused by malevolent spirits; they can follow a breach of taboo. A child's death was explained as a consequence of a spirit's anger. The father had brought his child with him when he went fishing; a dream revealed that, unbeknownst to the father, a spirit had asked the child for fish and the child refused; the spirit killed him in anger by sending an illness.

Herbal cures

Some herbal cures (*ubat uro'*) combine natural and supernatural aspects; they are the purview of a few specialists who derive little prestige or profit from the activity. A very old man, Lake' Ivak, was fond of talking about his skill as an herbalist; he knew specific spots around Uma Bawang where medicinal plants could be found and I accompanied him on collecting trips. Many Kayan think these plants are effective without any ritual; Lake' Ivak insisted they should be collected and administered in a ritual context. Once, he provided an herb to a patient with a swollen knee; the swelling increased; it subsided only when the patient paid him. An appropriate payment could be a sword or $3 to $5. Another herbalist expressed dissatisfaction after receiving $1; he feared his spirit helpers would be offended and would scold him. Herbalists keep their knowledge secret to prevent people from treating themselves; one herbalist pounds leaves to make them unrecognisable. Most herbalists I met were men, but some old women also have a knowledge of therapeutic plants.

Before collecting bark from a *belavan* tree, Lake' Ivak crouched beside its base and talked to it, affirming the tree's efficacy, explaining he was collecting its bark because his wife was spitting blood. He bit the blade of his sword seven times, then took bark from the west side (*matan do uli*). When we returned home, we went behind the house to another tree (*anyi' negring*) and he repeated the same performance. One of these trees is a man, the other its wife. Lake' Ivak brought both pieces of bark to his apartment, his wife munched some of it; he put the rest in a kettle which he placed on a tray with a sword. He started to pray. The sword was meant to give the decoction the strength of steel. He brought the kettle to the kitchen to heat its contents, which his wife drank.

In order to learn the use of medicinal plants, Lake' Ivak had given his teacher a tray, a sword, and $5. He was already a mature man when he learnt the skill; the practice would be dangerous for a young man. Plants are used to treat a number of diseases such as problems of the digestive tract, lower back pain (*prah kenyong*), and chest pains. Herbal plants are often combined, either by

being boiled or pounded together. While being treated with herbs, the patient must avoid scaleless fish or fish with spikes.[1]

Other cures

Some cures involve the use of imported remedies. They often call for some ritual which is explained by the seller. One day, a man treated himself with an oil produced in the Baram. As people kept coming in and out of the room, he went to his uncle's apartment to take the treatment because he had been told the drug would not be effective unless he isolated himself (the uncle and his whole family were living at their farmhouse at the time). Only his daughter was allowed in to bring him food. Part of the gallery in front of the apartment was closed off with two long sticks crossed in an X. A sun hat on the door reiterated the message that the room was closed off.[2] For this drug, he had paid chickens, cloth, a big gong (*tawak*), a bronze tray, and money. He died not long afterwards.

Despite his skill as an herbalist, Lake' Ivak was perfectly willing to try other cures. I brought him to the neighbouring village of Long Lino to obtain for his wife a drug which had the colour and consistency of petroleum jelly. Its price was a piece of cloth, a sword, a tray, and $5. Given Lake' Ivak's limited means, the seller lent him the cloth, sword, and tray, which he immediately gave back to her (I provided the money). Holding her fee and the drug, she went near a window and talked to the drug, explaining to it its intended purpose. Lake' Ivak asked whether any taboo was linked to it and the woman told him the patient must avoid two kinds of fish (*luang* and *nyaran*) as well as smoked fish. Only cool foods may be ingested with it. The drug disliked chicken feathers; it should not be in the sunlight. Other drugs have specific prohibitions attached to them; for instance patients must avoid eating wild boar, fresh food, or smoked meat, or they must not be disturbed by chickens or dogs. For one such drug, visitors may not turn their back to the patient. Some foods are considered dangerous during illnesses (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, I:446). Caladium (*lu'e*) is avoided for any ailment or accident in which blood is involved. It is thought that fresh food will exacerbate some illnesses.

Dayong cures

The *dayong* ritual has been described in Chapter VII. Any *dayong*, including a calendrical one, can serve to cure a member of the sponsoring household; one may hold a *dayong* specifically to cure someone of an ailment or a bad dream.

1 The Kayan names of these kinds of fish are *tiken, buhi, selarang, hrang, luyan, haut, kelamo', teken, keluheh, kejarong. Uro' kap* is a counter-poison for the venom in spiny fish.

2 Anyone who ignored these warnings could be fined between $5 and $15.

Curing rituals are inserted in the *dayong*.[3] While a *dayong* may be scheduled in order to cure one individual, it always remains a familial ritual and all household members benefit from it. The *dayong* is efficacious in two ways: priests bring offerings to spirits who might be the cause of the misfortune and they retrieve the soul of the patient, which may be stuck in the spirit country. One priest was of the opinion that all diseases are a consequence of soul loss, specifically the soul of the eyes.

As part of a *dayong* cure, the priest may stipulate specific prohibitions. One victim of sorcery had to abstain from the meat of the domesticated pig for a year. For a curing *dayong*, it was traditional to place a sun hat on the door as a sign that a cure was in progress; a section of the gallery in front of the apartment was closed off with long sticks forming Xs. This is rarely observed nowadays. The patient need not be present for the part of the *dayong* which takes place on the gallery (nonetheless, the whole ritual contributes to his recovery). On one occasion, the priest inserted a blow-pipe through the roof of the gallery and called the patient's soul. This procedure is deemed to be highly effective, but may be used only by powerful priests and warriors.

Four major curing procedures are integrated to the *dayong*: a. *Ngaping* consists in waiving away evil influences; it may require the use of specific plants; b. a figurine is substituted for the patient; the spirits are expected to take the figurine rather than the person; c. the priest repairs the patient's staff of life (*tuken urip*); d. spirits are challenged to revive a dead bush and, if they fail, they lose their claim on the patient.

Kaping: sweeping away the bad influences

Ngaping means 'to sweep away' (*kaping* is the nominal form). It is part of curing *dayong* and other rituals. The 'broom' can be a chicken, specific plants, or water (which is sprinkled). These objects are transformed by Bungan who gives them potency to remove evil influences (bad dreams, illness, or death). One may combine the *kaping* with other curing procedures in the context of a *dayong*.[4]

In a typical case, the priest carried out the *kaping* for the family right after

3 When a *dayong* is performed as a curing ritual, it is sometimes described as *na haduy*, 'to work' (see also Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, II:112). We have seen (Chapter VII) that household members routinely report their dreams at every *dayong*; in addition, particularly ominous dreams can be the occasion of a special *dayong*. For a description of a curing *dayong*, see Ding Ngo (1937-38b).

4 In one case, the *netek pusah* ritual ('to cut pieces of rattan used to produce fire by friction') was added. The priest cut 16 pieces of rattan about 15 centimetres long, saying: 'In the same way as the rattan is cut, in the same way the illness will disappear'. After that the participants underwent a *kaping* and threw away the pieces of rattan. Only one variety of rattan (*we hngga'*) may be used. If a *kaping* has been ineffective, one can turn to the *batang keluven urip* ('the logs of the rolling over of life'). A structure is built on which two logs are placed, the good one on top, the rotten one below. The priest throws away the 'bad log of the rolling over of life', then rolls the good one in place, after which he *ngaping* the patient to throw away the bad influences.

slaughtering the sacrificial animal in order to neutralize bad dreams. (The *kaping* could also precede the sacrifice.) They gathered around a basin of water. At the edge of the veranda, one of the priests lifted the basin, a small chicken, a piece of cloth and a sword to seek Bungan's blessings. He dipped the chicken, the cloth, and the sword in the water and entered the empty room to sweep away the bad dreams. On his return to the gallery, he waved the chicken, cloth, and sword around the family. The cloth wipes away the dreams, the chicken pecks at them, and the sword scrapes them off. In this way, the ritual strengthens and shields the family. The priest held up the bowl, the cloth, the chicken, and the sword, under which the family walked on its way to the room. The priests then carried out a *kaping* for each other, after which the chicken was killed. The officiants also 'strengthened' (*ngemhing*) each other with a sword and a tray, then threw away the water.[5]

Someone dreamt that spirits would set fire to her apartment while other spirits would take her away eight days hence. She hastily called for a *dayong* which included a *kaping* in order to remove the danger of fire, and a *hudo' kaluy* (see below), so that spirits would not kill her. This *kaping* used specific plants (*uro' kaping*) whose efficacy is explained by myths of origin. There is no need to use all species at once; it is sufficient to collect those which are readily available, as long as the officiant lists all the *uro' kaping* in the ritual.[6] Holding boughs of *uro' kaping* in the right hand, the priest narrated the appropriate myth of origin, explained how the knowledge of their use had been transmitted from priest to priest and gave the names of other priests in the area who could undertake a *kaping* with plants. The dreamer and her family were told to leave the apartment; the priest entered alone and purified it by waving the boughs. Back on the gallery, he repeated the procedure in order to purify the family while mentioning all the evil influences against which the *uro' kaping* are effective. He dipped the boughs in a basin of water and sprinkled each family member while circling him or her four times and counting: 'One, two, three, four, all right' (*Ji, dua', telo', pat, sayu kah*). He threw away boughs and water outside the longhouse and asked them to take away with them the evil influences. This case exemplifies a general principle: spirits threaten a single individual, but the whole family has to be protected from supernatural danger. This is true of all curing rituals which are integrated to a *dayong*.

5 On another occasion, a priest who did a *kaping* for the chief and his father then asked the latter to *melah* him (see Chapter VII), because he felt there was supernatural danger in carrying out a ritual on behalf of such a powerful person.

6 A myth explains the origin of some species of *uro' kaping* (*avong lo, sepirang abit, napun, uro' ahi, kelikang*, and *sihit*). Other myths explain the origin of other species (*nyalo, jilupang, songho*, and *bet'wi*). The *uro' kaping* are particularly appropriate to remove the danger created by an oath or curse and to cleanse a longhouse after a fire.

Substitution of a figurine for the patient

Two rituals substitute a human figurine for the patient; the spirits are satisfied with the simulacrum. The more common ritual uses a *hudo' kaluy*, a 'replacement figurine'; the other is called *hudo' kepatong bangu*.[7] These take place when spirits want to snatch someone away from the living. One may come across such spirits in dreams or in the jungle. The spirit's intentions may also be revealed in a dream to a third party.

The *hudo' kaluy* is about a meter tall and is made of a particular species of tree (*kita'*). The head is well defined, but the body is formless. The figurine itself can be used again and again, but it is dressed up differently for each occasion, preferably with the patient's clothes; it wears earrings, a necklace, and a bead bracelet, because it becomes a priest in the ritual. It is placed besides the *jok* (Plate 16). In one case, there were two figurines for two patients. During the night, in the third part of the *dayong*, the priest offers sugarcane juice (*jakan tevo' amoh*) to the figurine to bring it to life. Towards the end of the *dayong*, the officiant lifts the *hudo' kaluy* while someone plays music (preferably the *sape'*, but a gong will do). After dancing for a moment, he dismantles the figurine. By this process, the soul of the *hudo' kaluy* goes to the spirits. Later, the priest retrieves the patient's soul. As the danger of death has made the soul jittery, the officiant takes great pains not to frighten it away and it is shielded from the light.

The *hudo' kepatong bangu* is a small human figurine (about thirteen by five centimetres) carved from a section of bamboo container used for cooking. The food smell is expected to seduce the spirits. The figurine is clothed with a loincloth and a headband. The *hudo' kepatong bangu* can be part of a *dayong* in the same way as a *hudo' kaluy*; it is also possible, but uncommon, to use it outside the context of a *dayong*. While the *hudo' kaluy* is taken apart at the end of the ritual, the *hudo' kepatong bangu* is left in the woods after being brought to life. Spirits are expected to find it there. As with other curing rituals, the priest recounts the myth of origin of the *hudo' kepatong bangu* so that the ritual will be effective:

> Kata Long Lihu went hunting with his blowpipe. His son Lejo followed him; his father mistook him for a pig and killed him. He returned home and his wife Kata Patong Kite said they must divorce. Kata Long Lihu was reluctant to leave her, but she insisted that he return to Telang Julan. She made life miserable for everyone and did not allow them to hunt or fish. After a while, she missed her husband and went to find him. While he was feeding the dogs, she jumped on him and brought him back to this world. The spirits of Telang Julan were reluctant to be parted from him

7 '*Kepatong*' seems to be a cognate of *hampatong*, the wooden figurines of the Barito which ward off illnesses and disasters. Barth (1910:217) also lists *tepatung*, 'image, representation', especially a wooden image, such as the Ot Danum offering posts.

Plate 16. A wooden figurine (*hudo' kaluy*) dressed in the patient's clothes stands beside the *jok* and the offerings. It wears a cap, earrings, a necklace, a shirt, and a wrist-band on the right arm. Legs have been fashioned from pieces of rolled cloth. Spirits are expected to take the soul of the figurine rather than kill the patient.

and they pursued her. She made a figurine from a section of a bamboo container used for cooking. When the spirits caught up with her, she placed the figurine on the left, her husband Kata Long Lihu on the right. 'Which one do you want', she said, 'the figurine on the left, or Kata Long Lihu on the right? – You lie', said the spirits, 'Kata Long Lihu is on the left, we recognize him from the good smell', and they took the piece of bamboo. This is why we can make a *hudo' kepatong bangu*.

Repairing the tree of life

Every human being has a tree of life (*tuken urip*) in the spirit country. If it is covered with moss and creepers, if it falls, if it is knocked over by a falling tree, an animal, or another staff of life (when a relative dies), one must repair it to restore well-being. (This can be carried out in combination with a *kaping* or *hudo' kaluy*.) The prop for this ritual is a squat stick of hard wood, about twenty-five centimetres high, three centimetres thick, with a horizontal hole pierced through its tip in which a wire or chain is inserted. The stick is wrapped in a piece of fine cloth held by a bead waistband or bracelet (Plate 17). The ritual transforms the stick into a tree and the cloth into the tree's leaves. The bead waistband forms its buttresses, so that it is solid and does not fall. The beads themselves are fruits and flowers. Four swords form a square around the staff; they are at the same time branches, a platform for the tree of life, and its fence. The *tuken urip* is assembled when the altar (*jok*) is set up. At night, just before the priest sends the *jok* to the spirit country, the wire is attached to it 'in order to make the patient's life stand up' (*avan miti urip*); the spectators shout (*lemalu*) to attract the attention of the spirits in charge of trees of life. The priest dances around the *jok* for a little while, then unties the staff from the *jok* and takes it apart. This is similar to the ritual which restores the power of a priest (*neme tuken dayong*, see Chapter V), except that the staff of a priest travels to a different part of the spirit country.

Napo' huket: challenging spirits to revive a dead bush

I once observed a rather intriguing ritual. During a *dayong hudo' kaluy*, the priest went near the river bank and stuck upside down into the sand a dead uprooted bush (*napo' huket*, 'to stick the bush in the ground'). The priest threw a handful of sand and shouted a challenge to spirits: 'If you can count these grains of sand, then you can take this person away. If you can revive the bush and make leaves grow on it, then the patient is yours'. The priest turned away from the bush for a moment and looked at it again. As the spirits had not been able to revive the bush or count the sand, they had forfeited their right to take the patient. Holding an egg, the priest informed Bungan of the outcome and placed the egg on a stick as an offering. This ritual took place early in the *dayong*, before the divination with an egg. If there are two officiants, one of them can carry out the *napo' huket* while the other is engaged in the divination procedure.

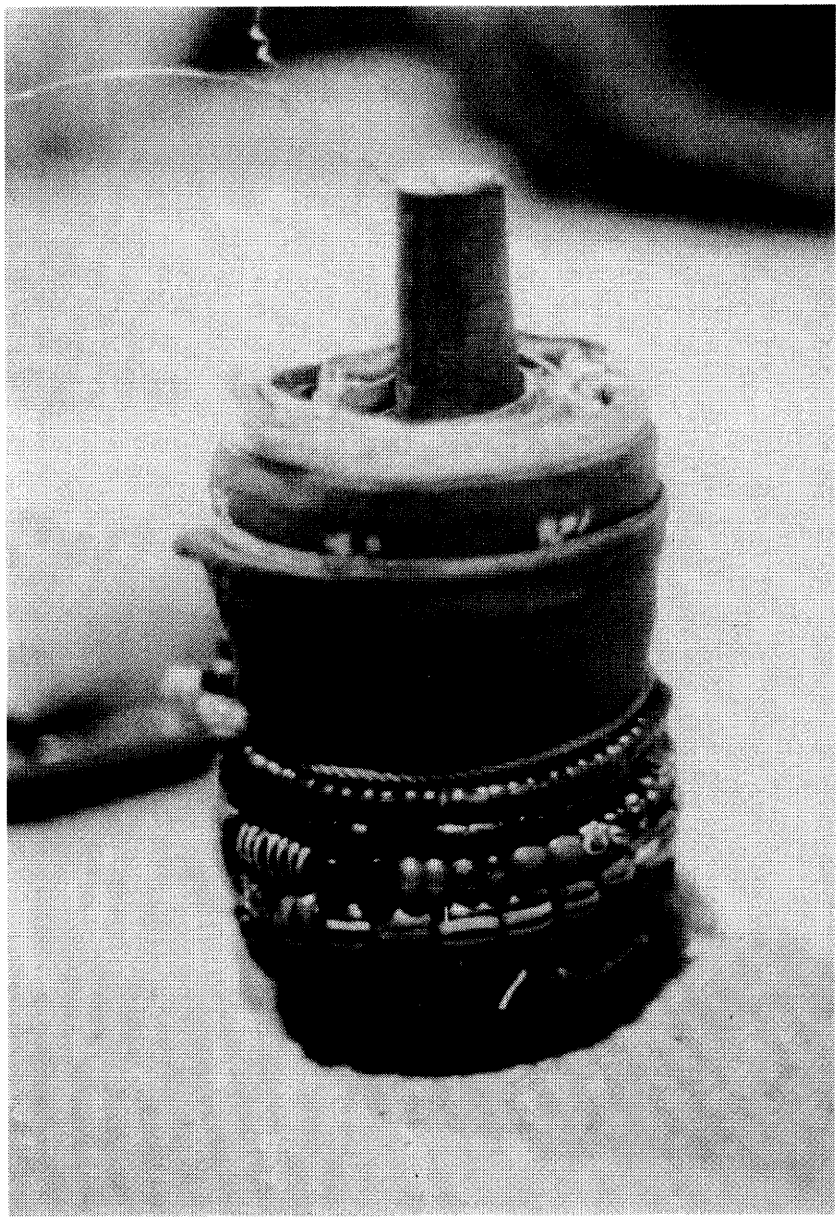

Plate 17. The tree of life (*tuken urip*) is 25 cm high. The cloth wrapping constitutes its leaves and the beads are its buttresses.

Shamanic cures

Unlike a *dayong* where the action takes place in the spirit country, the shamanic cure is immediate and direct: spirits possess the shaman who extracts disease-causing objects from patients. Many patients find conceptually satisfying the immediacy of the cure. *Dayong* and shamanic cures have different social implications: the *dayong* cures the domestic unit while the shamanic intervention treats individuals. *Dayong* are regulated by balanced reciprocity: priests are paid by the beneficiaries of the ritual. Shamanic performances follow the principle of generalized reciprocity: the shaman receives a fee from the person who requests the treatment, but anyone present may also be treated free of charge. Because the economic transaction is an essential element of the *dayong*, a priest may not officiate for his or her domestic unit. A shaman, on the other hand, may treat family members free of charge. All the shamanic performances I observed took place at night, but the shaman Lake' Luyang asserted they could be scheduled during the day.

One night, people congregated in the apartment of an old lady, the shaman Dulap, who was holding a séance because one of her grandchildren was sick. Dulap had been pointed out to me as a shaman at the beginning of my fieldwork, but she was not much in demand; this was the first time I saw her in action. To start the ritual, she held an egg in her right hand and informed Bungan of the proceedings. She lit a wickless wax candle, waving her hands and placing her face in the smoke to cleanse herself. The aroma of the wax was also expected to attract spirits. She danced for a while, accompanied by a man who played the *sape'*. Suddenly, she stumbled as she was possessed by a spirit.

Once in trance, she was ready to start curing patients. The child's mother sat on the floor, holding her baby; Dulap bent down and sucked his chest to remove the illness. Then she spat out tobacco and mucus which she showed us. I was told the disease object emits a rotten smell. She danced again, then briefly blew air on the mother's head and sucked her belly. Once she had finished with the mother and daughter, other people asked to be cured. With her fingers, she plucked at the afflicted parts to remove their ailments. Patients remained completely impassive as she cured them.

Another spirit entered her; Dulap talked in a very high voice, instructing a patient to cure herself with the leaf of a particular plant. The spirit within Dulap announced its desire to dance. She moved with small steps and stamped her feet on the floor; sometimes she stumbled. She returned to an earlier patient and treated others. She blew air on the top of the head of some patients so the power of her spirits would destroy the illnesses. An old man, Lake' Ajang, who wanted to be healed, talked directly to the spirit which inhabited Dulap. She put the candle on a sword in order to catch souls and placed the sword on the heads of two babies. She put the sword on her own head, threw it on the floor,

and clapped her hands; this marked the end of the spirits' visit. The man who had been playing the *sape'* stopped at that point. Dulap placed a plate above her head to protect herself (*melah*) against the supernatural danger of the performance and to strengthen (*ngemhing*) herself.

All shamans share the same basic procedures, but they have their own idiosyncrasies, dictated by their spirit helpers. When curing a mother and her child, Binye, an Uma Bawang shaman, placed a cloth over her head and the heads of her patients. She asked for a black chicken which she waved around them, then repeated the procedure with a tray and a sword, in imitation of an element of the *dayong*. After returning the souls of several patients into their heads, she placed a cloth on their heads to make sure their souls would stay put. I never saw another shaman use these procedures, but this was not cause for comment. Another woman shaman cleansed herself of tabooed foods by scraping her tongue with a piece of bamboo, in imitation of the procedure that men follow during the headhunting ritual (see Chapter VI). The shamanic cure alternates with dancing, drinking, and conversation. This follows from the fact that the spirits' behaviour is unpredictable; they are expected to be in a playful mood. Shamanic séances usually are low-key affairs, but two shamans have a developed sense of the dramatic. One is a woman, Doh Imut (from Uma Lesong Long Bla'an), the other a man, Lake' Luyang (from Uma Juman). Lake' Luyang covers the top of his body with his sarong while he dances. He speaks fluently a number of 'spirit languages' (*dahun to'*; these are incomprehensible utterances, somewhat like glossolalia). He identifies interfering spirits by name (while other shamans are more indirect in their designations). Some procedures are specific to him and his disciples: he places the tip of a sword on the patient's belly and sucks the illness from the handle. While people normally laugh at the antics of shamans, they are clearly impressed by Lake' Luyang.

Other ritual cures

Other ritual cures fall under the category of *pelah*. '*Melah*' means 'to recede (of a flood)' or 'to subside (of a swelling)'. Thus, a *pelah* serves to reduce evil influences; it is an element of the *dayong* and other rituals. The *pelah* is normally a priestly ritual, but some older laymen have also been empowered to do so by spirit helpers; furthermore, frequent participation in headhunting rituals has strengthened them. Indeed, a particular *pelah*, the *pelah nyingem*, duplicates elements of the headhunting ritual. It aims to 'cool down' (*nyingem*) dangerous influences.

One day, Lake' Ivak had chest pains. After sundown, he carried out a *pelah nyingem* for himself on the gallery. He expressed a need for it because he had been cured neither by a *dayong* nor through his participation in the headhunting ritual. He thought he might be ill because he had failed to entertain his spirit helpers. He sacrificed a chicken in order to remove evil influences (*sekilah, dawi*); the bird would also be the 'payment' for the war paraphernalia which Lake' Ivak had donned recently during the headhunting ritual. He cooked the chicken with rice over a temporary hearth set up on the gallery. When it was ready, he placed some rice on a leaf. With his left hand, he threw it outside the house to feed the spirits. Afterwards, he carefully folded the leaf on which the rice had been placed and slipped it under the shingles. This simple ritual attracted no onlookers other than myself and he invited me to share his sacrificial meal.

On another occasion, Lake' Ivak held a *pelah nyingem* for a neighbour, Saging, in order to feed the latter's spirit helpers. As officiant, Lake' Ivak should have worn a bead wristband (which he did for the previous *pelah nyingem*). However, when someone pointed out the omission, he said it did not really matter. Saging narrated an inauspicious dream; a sacrificial cock was instructed to repair the situation and deliver Saging of his cough and breathing problems. Lake' Ivak narrated the myth of origin of sacrificial animals before killing the cock. When the meal was ready, three old men joined Lake' Ivak, Saging, and myself. A man in his thirties refused the invitation because he felt he was too young to participate. After performing the *pelah*, the officiant may not work for the rest of the day. All the elements of the *pelah nyingem* are found in the headhunting ritual: it takes place on the gallery, only men participate, the sacrifice is (ideally) cooked in a bamboo container, and food is thrown to spirits.

The *pelah* are used for various illnesses. In addition, they can have a protective effect. One kind of *pelah* counteracts the effects of incest, another removes curses (*lala'*). Curses are a not only a danger for their intended target (which is bad enough if the victim is deemed innocent), but to the person who utters it, his family, and possibly his neighbours and even the community as a whole. Once, the chief fined an Uma Bawang man for uttering curses; he was required to provide a chicken, a pig, a sword in its sheath, a bead wristband, and a gong. A *pelah lala'* took place at the curser's farm, rather than at the longhouse, where it might affect the whole community. An incision was made on the man's arm and his blood was smeared on a wood shaving. The priest prayed to the spirit Batang Telang Lala'. The officiant cleansed the man of the effects of the curse. This was followed by a *dayong*, during which the priest and the people concerned went in front of the longhouse; the officiant cleansed (*ngaping*) them by waiving a chicken at them. The officiant instructed the sacrificial pig to remove the curse and to cleanse the people and the longhouse. The gong became a roof and the sword a wall against supernatural dangers. The priest cleansed each apartment with the chicken and sprinkled water from one end of the longhouse to the other, starting at the upriver end. The priest kept the sword, the wristband, and the gong as his fee.

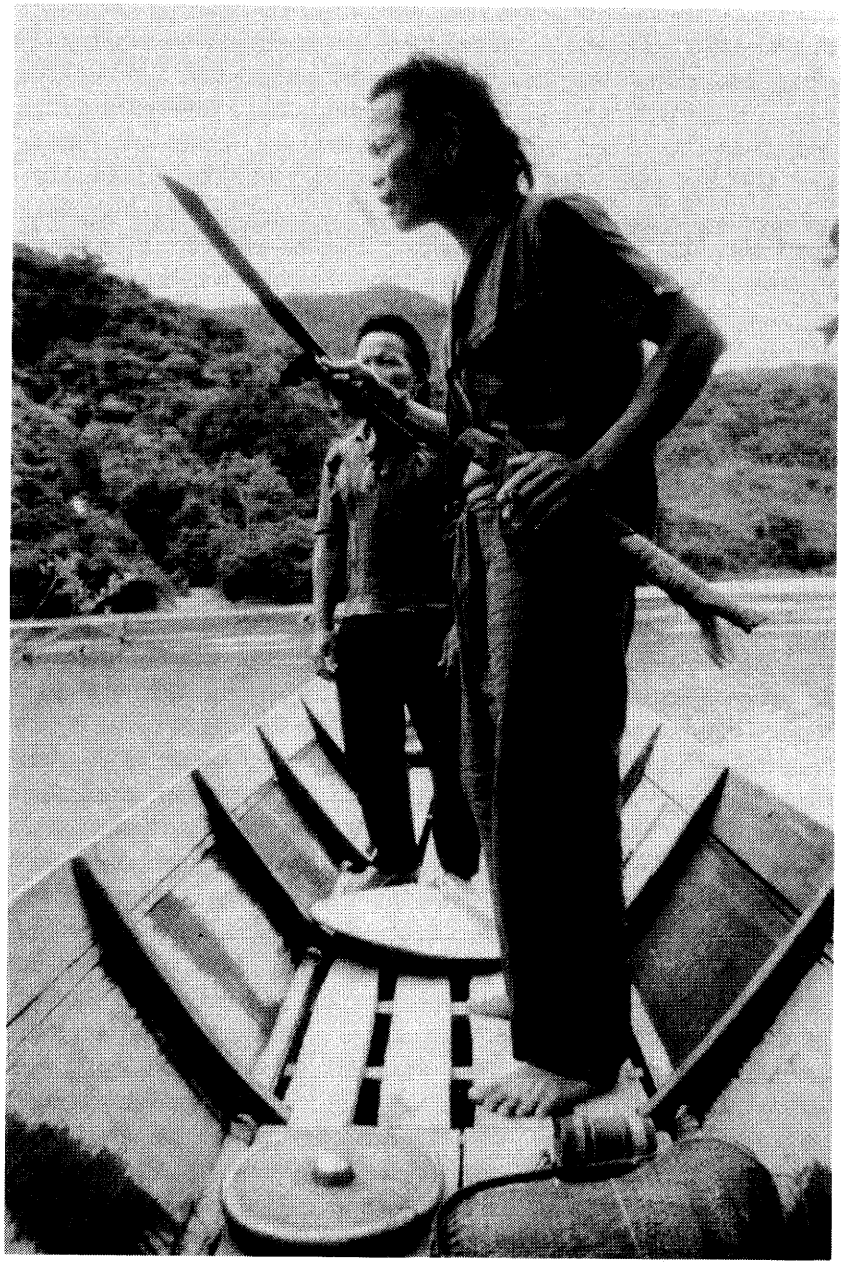

Plate 18. The priests Avun Ngo and Avun Imang purify the territory of Uma Bawang during an epidemic. Avun holds a sword and a chick in his right hand, a cigarette in his left. There is a gong on the floor of the boat. Avun Imang is also praying.

Communal rituals

Kaping: sweeping away the bad influences

Like individuals and families, communities need curing and protective rituals. We have seen that, within the framework of the *dayong*, the *kaping* protects a domestic unit. A whole village may also undergo a *kaping* (without a *dayong*) to avert a collective danger. A cholera epidemic in the Baluy area was the occasion of one such ritual in Uma Bawang.

Around 1 pm, Avun Ngo and two other priests gathered on the chief's veranda, each wearing a bead wristband. All village members came to touch the eggs and the sacrificial pig to signify their participation. Avun Ngo donned a sword and prayed to Bungan. He passed a gong over the heads of his colleagues Avun Imang and Wan Angit, who went to their respective apartments to prepare themselves for a trip. They walked down to the river, downriver of the house. Ten egg offerings were placed on sticks. A larger stick with a pointed end was stuck in the ground beside the eggs. Holding a gong over his head, Avun Ngo prayed for ten minutes; Avun Imang continued for three more minutes. Avun Ngo lit a small fire while Wan prayed for five minutes. Avun Imang spoke to the pig and killed it. Avun Ngo poured its blood in a container made with a leaf, prayed, and threw it away. Its liver was extracted and pronounced auspicious by Avun Imang. (Hepatoscopy has disappeared in *adat Bungan*, but there is no harm in pointing out positive signs.) The pig was impaled on the stick. Avun Ngo roasted the liver, cut it into small pieces, and threw it to the spirits. Then, Avun Imang and Avun Ngo prayed while holding two chicks.

Avun Ngo and Wan returned to the house to repeat the purification. While everyone sat on the gallery, they entered every apartment. Wan waved his sword, Avun Ngo followed with a gong on his head. In doing so, they chased away the spirits which cause illness (*bengen*).[8] The priests then left the house to purify the village territory. Wan went in one direction in his boat, while Avun Ngo and Avun Imang rode in my boat to the other limit of Uma Bawang's territory. Standing in the boat, Avun Ngo prayed, holding a chick and a sword in his right hand, a cigarette in his left hand (Plate 18; the rising smoke helped carry the prayers towards the spirits). Avun Imang added prayers of his own. We went on to another spot near the edge of the village territory, where Avun Ngo cut the chick's throat and threw it away. As soon as all three priests had returned, the longhouse was closed off and no one was allowed to leave it until 6 pm, at which point the spirits were informed that the ritual was completed.

[8] 'The Kayan also describe coughs and colds, the major symptoms of this [influenza-like] infection, with the same name they give to alien spirits, namely "*bengen*" ' (Nieuwenhuis 1904-07, II:103). Barth (1910:33), glosses *bengen* as a cold, in general a sickness or epidemic, and more generally, a calamity (primarily with regard to the rice harvest).

On another occasion, Avun carried out a *kaping* after the chief dreamt the longhouse had burnt. Avun, alone, entered each apartment, ordering everyone out of it. He carried a sword and a chicken. At the downriver end of the house, he threw away the chicken without killing it.

Melo' bengen: removing scourges

In *adat Dipuy*, when there were rumours of epidemics or head-hunters, people wanted to know whether they should stay in the longhouse or flee to the jungle. They made a neat hole in an egg, emptied it, and drew a line along its longest circumference, then another one perpendicular to it; it was called *teloh buring*, 'egg with patterns'. The eggshell was balanced on the stem of a banana leaf held vertically. Water was poured on the shell to make it fall. If it fell on the long line, they could remain in the village; if it fell on the short line, they had to flee. If they escaped to the jungle, they built huts in which they remained as quietly as possible until they had news that the danger had passed. If they stayed, they could carry out a *melo' bengen*, 'to lay down the epidemic'. The ritual still exists in *adat Bungan*. Its goal is to make a spiritual fence around the house. When it happened in Uma Bawang, a woman priest told me this is a dangerous ritual and only male priests perform it. This *melo' bengen* was needed because many people were unwell and the rice crop showed signs of being poor.

In the early afternoon, people came to the chief's apartment to touch egg offerings. We waited for latecomers before starting because the house was to be closed off during the ritual. Avun Ngo donned his sword and bead bracelet and started a long oration, of which the following is a précis.

> I raise offerings towards you, Bungan Malan, Lake' Penyelong. These offerings have been contributed by everyone. Many of us are feverish, many of us are unwell. This is why we have come to talk to you, because your are our father, our mother, our grandparents; you look after us. Also, many of us had bad dreams. We have ceased work to ask for your help because we are about to start the harvest. We ask you for prosperity, we ask you to talk to the spirits who bother us. Maybe some dead relatives miss us or are angry with us; tell them we have only good feelings towards them. We express ourselves badly, but you will be able to find the right words when you talk to spirits. We are related to spirits, because Lake' Ding Mering was half-spirit, half-man, his spirit side was dark, his human side white. He lived not so long ago: Lake' Ding Mering begot Dubong Ding, who begot Lake' Bo', who begot Lake' Kebing [the retired chief of Uma Bawang].
>
> This is why we are talking to them [Lake' Ding Mering, Dubong Ding and Lake' Bo'], so they will give cigarettes and betel plugs to our dead relatives, whose help we beseech. This is why we offer these sixteen jars [eggs]. Bungan Malan, you will be able to talk to these spirits; it is true that I am a priest; I am speaking with the help of these jars, but I speak indistinctly, in the dark; I have to trust you. The young and the old are ill. We ask for the potion and the *kaping* which will cure us and throw away the illnesses, the *parit* and the *tulah*, because these interfering spirits are powerful, they are *maren*.[9] They visit us because we are relatives; but we are soft, we are weak, we cannot withstand them. We ask you for the remedy, for the cleansing liquid which will wash the whole house and everyone in it.
>
> There is another matter. We might have ignored spirits who live in the vicinity. We trust you to resolve this; this is why we have these sixteen jars. The same might be true of the boulders upriver of the house [which are the abodes of spirits]. Also, [the spirit] Belare' Puyang Joh, who is in charge of the land on which this house stands, told us his name in a dream when we first came here. Please talk to him; maybe he has forgotten us, because Lake' Kebing is an old man, who has lost most of his faculties. These sixteen jars are to be shared between all the spirits who look after us, Bungan Malan, Penyelong Luan. We ask the help of all spirits from this world and the spirit world who would bother us; we invite them to eat with us. We do not know them all and we ask you, Bungan Malan, to talk to every one of them.
>
> People are about to sleep at their farms during the harvest. This is why we ask you for a sun-hat, for a shirt, for a roof, for shade. We will be scattered over the village territory, over land which belonged to other people. 'This is uninhabited land', the spirits might say. I ask you to talk to every spirit, to the spirits of every hollow, the spirits of every stream. We are also very concerned because the rice does not look healthy. Some of it is dying, some is stunted; some areas are bare. Please, Bungan Malan, produce a stupendously plentiful crop which will astonish people. We ask you for protection, we ask for cleansing, we ask you to look after all the workers who might otherwise have accidents.

He lifted the tray of sixteen eggs:

> These are offerings from all of us. You can divide them between the spirits.

Carrying a bamboo container filled with water, Avun Ngo purified each apartment, starting at the upriver end of the house. As he entered each dwelling, he ordered all occupants to go to the gallery. In each apartment, he said the following:

> I ask for the curative juice, because many of us are not doing well. This will serve to wash the *parit* of deceased relatives who disturb us. Maybe they have incurred *tulah* from heirlooms. Bungan Malan, I ask you for the cleansing water from the moon, from the sky. Please, place it in this bamboo container so that I can clean away every illness, every *tulah*, every misfortune.

After purifying the apartments, he sprinkled water on the people sitting on the gallery. He killed a chick which he threw away as a gift to the spirits. The whole ritual took forty minutes, after which villagers were not allowed to leave the house until nightfall.

Six days later, the situation had not improved; someone had died in the interval and the chief's sister dreamt a rain of stones struck her father. The dream specified it was necessary to remove the danger (*ngaping*) with the help of a black chicken. This was taken as a sign that the *melo' bengen* must be repeated. In addition to the previously-described offerings, rice pastries were

9 *'Maren'* refers to the ruling estate. It also means 'haughty, arrogant'. Both meanings seem to be relevant here.

provided by several households. The same entreaties were repeated; Avun Ngo's oration was longer, more insistent, more anxious.

> We have already fed the spirits; they have plenty of provisions on their journey out of here. We do not understand what is wrong, we have carried out all the rituals. You, Bungan, will make sense of this. Please come down for a short visit to help us clean up the situation.

Two priests added their prayers to Avun Ngo's. They drank some rice beer and placed a glass of beer with the offerings as a sign of commensality with spirits. After everyone had touched the offerings, Avun Imang spoke to a sacrificial pig (which was not killed) and asked it to be their mouthpiece. Afterwards, people gathered to receive spiritual protection (*melah*) from two of the priests. Holding a chick, Avun Ngo beseeched spirits to purify the house and he cleansed every room again, killing the chicken and throwing it at the downriver end of the house after visiting every apartment. Again, everyone was asked to leave the rooms, except one woman who was following a magical cure and had been enjoined not to go out. After strengthening (*ngemhing*) themselves against dangerous spiritual influences, the three priests ate together. After sundown, Avun Ngo informed Bungan this was the end of the ritual.

There are variants to the *melo' bengen*: two human figurines can be placed at opposite ends of a small raft, surrounded by a fence. The raft is set adrift, carrying away the illness (see Ding Ngo 1937-38a). In *adat Dipuy*, some villages placed one or two human-shaped statues in front of the house, holding a shield and a wooden sword in order to repel spirits. Avun told me this was not part of Uma Bawang *adat*, because they consider spirits to be relatives and they prefer to treat them in a friendlier fashion. However, during my fieldwork, such figurines were installed in front of the longhouse, overlooking the river.[10]

The *melo' bengen* of *adat Dipuy* had a few ritual features which have disappeared in *adat Bungan*. Children hanged Caladium leaves (*long*) on vines around the house in order to make a fence against spirits. When the priest had returned to the longhouse after offering eggs, a chick, and a piglet, they barred the entrances and closed up the gallery with mats to make it dark. People spoke in low tones; they extinguished all fires and avoided smelly substances, so as to make themselves inconspicuous to spirits. (Food was prepared ahead of time.) The Kayan are tobacco addicts and smoking was exempted from this prohibition. In the evening, the priest told people that they could draw water and bathe. The next morning, they were allowed to go fishing.

The prophet of *adat Bungan*, Jok Apuy, introduced a new ritual with the same purpose as the *melo' bengen*. It is called *ngelasan aya'* ('to set up the big place'). It is held in the apartment of a *maren* when other rituals have failed. All

[10] I was away when they were installed; they were erected at the occasion of a *melo' bengen* similar to what I have described here.

apartments contribute food. The house is closed to outsiders while the ritual is in progress. Bungan and other spirits are invited to come down and visit. The *ngelasan aya'* differs from the *melo' bengen* insofar as all members of the community share food with Bungan and the spirits.

Informants mentioned other curing rituals. In *adat Dipuy*, men asked the help of the Brahminy kite. If there were rumours of an epidemic, they built a lean-to near the house and sat there after placing sixteen egg offerings. They called for the bird to soar; when it manifested itself, they gave it the bad dreams and illnesses. The Brahminy kite was asked to bless water in a bamboo container. After the omen had been seen, they broke one egg and mixed it with water which they sprinkled on the hut and the longhouse.

Kayo' belawing urip: the pole of life

We saw (Chapter VI) that the headhunting ritual takes place every year. Before pacification, headhunting raids were organized from time to time when the community needed to restore its well-being. The *kayo' belawing urip* ('tree-pole of life' or *kayo' urip*) is a variant of the headhunting ritual which is carried out once every few years, when a village feels the need for it. (A *belawing* is a decorated pole linked to headhunting rituals.) I observed it in the Kayan villages of Uma Apan, Uma Aging, and Uma Daro'. The following description is based on my observations in Uma Aging. The Kayan villages of Uma Lesong, Uma Baluy Long Liko, and the Kajang village of La'anan Long Pangai also observe this ritual, which is absent in Uma Bawang. Avun was afraid to perform it because he did not know it well and a mistake might bring misfortune. According to him, this is a Kenyah ritual brought to Kayan villages by Kenyah migrants. Buy Pe, the priest in charge of the *kayo' belawing urip* in Uma Aging, is a Kayan from Uma Leken in the Apo Kayan.

When Uma Aging held a *kayo' belawing urip*, a large Uma Bawang contingent attended it because the two villages have close links. In the late morning, Lake' Baling, Uma Aging's chief, decided it was time to start. Two pieces of bamboo, about 1.3 metre long, tied together to form an inverted V, were placed at the river bank. From now on, the village was closed to visitors until the end of the ritual when the pig was killed.

In the days leading to the ritual, a six-metre pole was placed on trestles in a clearing upriver of the longhouse. The pole must be made of soft wood, so that it will rot in a few years; when it falls, the ritual may be repeated and another post erected. The top of the post was carved into the image of a naked man standing on a jar; additional pieces of wood were nailed in for the eyes, nose, teeth, ears, legs, penis and penis pin, sword, and shield. In the morning, men made a rhinoceros hornbill figurine which they fixed above the human figure. Slats of painted wood were nailed on it to form its tail feathers. Children watching the proceedings were shooed away for the whole ritual. This was in

sharp contrast to the Uma Bawang practice where children wander freely in and out of rituals. Uma Aging children were routinely kept away from rituals because chief Lake' Baling wanted ceremonies to be decorous and he felt children got in the way.

Two egg offerings were placed on sticks to guarantee that the post would be moved without mishap. Previously, a hut had been set up near the spot where the post was to be erected. With a chick, the priest propitiated spirits while men in the hut struck gongs. The slain chick was tied to the hut. The base of the post was placed besides a hole and its tip rested on a scaffolding. Men decorated the post with plaited palms and earrings were placed on the figurine. There were several egg offerings nearby. Men donned their war paraphernalia; they held spears, blowpipes, swords, and shotguns. Some distance away, women struck gongs; some men discharged their blowpipes or shotguns and people shouted (*lemalu*) every time they did so. Rice beer was served freely through these proceedings.

A second chick was killed to remove dangerous influences and men pulled the post upright with ropes while onlookers shouted. The post was rotated in order for the figurine to look at the longhouse; the hole was filled up and the scaffolding removed. The egg offerings were moved near the post. People gathered to touch an egg and a small pig. After some prayers, the priest impaled the piglet on a pointed stick beside the post while people shouted. The chick which had been killed earlier was also impaled. A bowl of husked rice was offered to spirits near the post. The priest placed a sword at its base and sang a praise song (*parap*) to spirits.

Everyone returned to the longhouse where the priest carried out a protective ritual for all village members with a sword and a third chick. People gathered on the chief's gallery. Bundles of plaited palms were tied to a clothes line at the edge of the gallery. While women looked on, men processed from one end of the longhouse to the other, carrying and beating a large drum. As they reached the downriver end of the house, they were offered rice beer. Both men and women struck gongs and the procession returned upriver to the chief's gallery. This procession was repeated three times.

An old man was brought to the chief's gallery on a stretcher. He had been to the hospital in Kapit, but his health had not improved. As people gathered, a cock was placed on a mat near the old man and palm bracelets attached to both of his wrists. The priest prayed for twenty minutes; he mentioned that the *kayo' belawing urip* had been erected and that its power should cure the old man. The cock's throat was slit and a wood shaving dipped in its blood while people shouted and beat the drum. The cock was brought to the chief's kitchen to be cooked. Holding a sword and the wood shaving, the priest touched the chief on the right hand, then every other man and boy, in order to protect them (*melah*). Still holding the sword and the wood shaving, he purified (*ngaping*) the

longhouse. The shaving was stored under the roof of the gallery and the old man carried away.

Lake' Baling entrusted messages to a medium-size pig for about fifteen minutes; I could not hear what he said because people struck gongs and the drum for the whole oration. The pig was killed and Lake' Baling repeated the procedure with a chicken. Men of every household also sacrificed chickens. Then, everyone ate, drank, and danced until late in the night.

Conclusion

The rather disparate rituals described in this chapter come into their own when things are not going according to plan. Unlike the rituals of the annual cycle or those of the life cycle, which we will see in the next chapter, these curing rituals do not form a coherent set. Each of these rituals is a response to specific problems. Shamanistic curing rituals seek to alleviate minor ailments. *Dayong* cures focus on more serious disturbances, including illnesses, bad dreams and other spirit manifestations. Collective curing rituals counteract epidemics and anticipated crop failures. There is another way in which curing rituals are not a distinct ritual set: in a sense, *all* rituals are curing rituals, because they aim to enhance people's lives, because they aim to re-establish order. As we will see in the next chapter, this logic is particularly evident in death rituals, which aim to contain and manage one of the most serious disturbances to harmony and happiness.