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THE MALEVOLENT *KOKLIR*: IBAN CONCEPTS OF SEXUAL PERIL AND THE DANGERS OF CHILDBIRTH

In this essay I am concerned with Iban notions of sexual peril, by which I mean beliefs that sexual relations are potentially endangering to the individual. To the Iban, an indigenous riverine people of west-central Borneo, these notions are cast in an idiom of spirit malevolency and are predominantly associated with what the Iban perceive to be, and what to a large extent are, in fact, genuine physical dangers connected with childbirth, and with etiologically assumptions concerning miscarriage, *in utero* or infant death, maternal mortality, and the physiological complications of parturition. Sociological discussions of sexuality tend to emphasize the solidarity produced by sexual bonding and the resulting reproductive replenishment of members to a social system. Iban notions of sexual peril bring out another side of sexuality not easily encompassed by sociological theory, and are seen here as ideational projections of conflict between the sexes, associated, in this instance, with the perceived dangers of sexuality as a potential source of death to women and infants in the actual, phenomenal world of Iban experience.

The Iban are a Proto-Malay people, who together with linguistically allied groups, such as the Bugau, Kantu', Seberuang, Mualang and others of the northern Kapuas drainage, number some 430,000 persons in western Borneo. The present essay concerns the Saribas or Layar Iban of the Saribas and Kalaka Districts of Sarawak.¹ At present the Saribas Iban occupy the banks and numerous tributaries of the Krian and Saribas Rivers above the coastal estuaries, where they practise mixed cash and both swamp and dry rice farming, in some two to three hundred longhouse communities with a total population of about 33,500.

Parturition and the Supernatural

Parturition and early childhood are events or intervals in the human life cycle particularly associated in Iban society with notions of physical and spiritual peril and together represent a major focus of belief and ritual concern. At one level this concern reflects an actual state of affairs in which death is common at birth and in early childhood, particularly in the form of miscarriage and infant mortality.² Secondly, at the level of belief, the frequent association of death with parturition — otherwise the source of new life and physical continuity from generation to generation — poses a fundamental ideational conflict, reflected sociologically in sexual conflict and discrepant values that attach to sexuality and procreation in Iban social structure.

The dangers of childbirth are associated in Iban belief with imperiling aspects of human sexuality. Sexuality is not considered menacing in general, but rather imperilment is associated with aspects of sexuality that entail conflict, as we shall see subsequently, in the Iban social and moral order. In actual, physical terms these dangers are of two sorts: miscarriage or possible infant death and maternal mortality. Each of these dangers is conceptualized in terms of contrasting spirit assailants. In terms of etiological explanations, the first of these dangers is most commonly attributed to the nefarious actions of a type of spirit conceived of by the Iban as an incubus (Freeman 1967: 317), a phallic spirit that assumes a human shape at will in order to descend upon mortal women for the purpose of carnal intercourse. The spirit's attack is characteristically experienced by its victim in her sleep as a highly ambivalent dream encounter, at once, and in varying degrees, erotically pleasurable, yet horrifying and shameful. The incubus is essentially a spirit of the forests and rivers that invades the dream world of living women in order to pursue its victims in erotic nightmares, exciting them to adultery and lascivious sexuality. As a consequence of the spirit's molestation, the life of any child that the woman who is its victim conceives is destroyed by soul loss, either in her womb or later on after its birth. Thus stillbirth, foetal and infant death are linked in the Iban symbolic order with a particularly fearful manifestation of aggressive male sexuality. In addition, the newly born are believed to be endangered by those within human society who are bereft of normal sexual ties or are victims of illegitimate sexuality, the souls of aged crones or aborted fetuses. Maternal mortality, in contrast, is associated with a form of spiritual malevolency that inversely parallels that of the incubus. It is believed that a woman who dies in childbirth may assume for

a time a vengeful ghostly form, the *koklir*. Malevolency follows from death, rather than precedes it, and is the ill-fated outcome (*busong mati*) of legitimate human sexuality. Correspondingly, the *koklir* threatens men, as agents responsible for female death, with castration and possible death by emasculation. Thus the dangers of parturition extend at the level of belief, not only to infants and mothers, but also to men. The purpose of the present paper is to offer a sociological explanation of these beliefs, and more generally of the underlying association of sexuality with the physical dangers of childbirth, in terms of overt conflict in Iban sexual relationships and by reference to a wider context of attendant beliefs, including notions of demonic spirits, the soul, and the fate of the dead in the afterworld.

Incubus spirits, miscarriage and infant death

The most frequent cause of miscarriage and infant death is believed to be the malevolent actions of the incubus spirits, demonic intruders that bring about death by sexual molestation of the infant's mother. But other causes are also recognized, some ostensibly physiological, others related to additional supernatural dangers unconnected to notions of sexual imperilment. Miscarriage and *in utero* death are occasionally attributed to the fatigue or ill-health of the mother at the time of delivery, to the "drowning" (*lemas*) of the foetus in the fluids of her womb, or are the intentional result of actions performed by a female abortionist. Following delivery, death of the newborn may be ascribed to the baneful influence exerted by the waxing and waning moon (*nitih ka bulan*) or to the attacks of a nocturnal, predatory spirit hawk, the *burong geruna*. Multiple causality is recognized and *nitih ka bulan* is rarely seen as an independent source of death, but is usually viewed as a contributing factor to death caused by other agencies. The waning of the moon is thought to be specially debilitating to the young, particularly to those within the first three or four months of life who have not yet tasted salt (*ngetup garam*), been ceremonially bathed (*meri anak mandi*) and by other ritual means attained the full status of a living human being, and is believed to weaken, or "waste", the infant spiritually, leaving it vulnerable to other forms of spiritual harm, including that posed by the *burong geruna*. The latter, also known euphemistically as *diayah utai terebai*, "predatory flying thing", is the principal Iban form of the Malayo-Indonesian garuda. The pathological symptoms of *burong geruna* attack are said to be diagnostically distinct from those of incubus malevolency, although both affect the newly

born: intense diarrhoea, and, if death ensues, an inward curling of the child's fingers and toes.

Incubus malevolency has, in contrast, an overtly sexual nature. Infant death is believed to result from the mother's sexual congress with a spirit. Freeman (1967: 317) reports that among the Baleh Iban the spirits involved are identified as *antu buyu*. In Saribas the *antu buyu* are also preeminently associated with the incubi, although not exclusively so, nor are all *antu buyu* thought to take an incubus form. The term *antu* refers generically to all types of generally anthropomorphic supernaturals, including ghosts of the dead (*antu sebayan*), diverse minor sprites and more powerful demonic spirits, except for paramount deities and major tutelary spirits, called collectively *petara*. Most demonic spirits are thought occasionally to assume the form of incubi. These include, besides the *antu buyu*, most commonly the water spirits (*antu ai*), less often the demon huntsmen (*antu gerasi*), sea demons (*antu tasik*), and very rarely the spirits of trophy heads (*antu pala*) taken formerly in head-hunting.³ All incubus spirits possess a number of common attributes and as a group are among the most dreaded of all Iban supernaturals. With the minor exception of trophy heads, all are essentially forest or river spirits that appear in the physical world in one of a number of animal manifestations, the type of animal determined by the type of spirit it contains. But in dreams, which the Iban interpret as the direct experience of the dreamer's soul, the spirit assumes a human guise, possibly as the woman's husband, a paramour, or handsome young man whose sexual advances she finds it impossible to resist. It is thus an intruder whose disguised entry into the human world subverts and, in the end, destroys the positive, procreative power of human sexuality.

Once the spirit has seduced its victim, and the woman has become the inamorata of a particular animal-associated spirit, she is described as being *nunang*, "affianced", or "possessed" by it. The action of *nunang* has a wide range of meaning in Iban but in its most general sense refers to a state of attraction, or bonding, between persons or objects. In reference to human relationships, *nunang*, at one extreme, may describe socially legitimate betrothal, signifying "affiance", or more generally positive sexual attraction; at the other, it connotes an obsessional, abnormal attachment which is beyond volitional control and regulation by social conventions. This latter meaning most closely approximates the sense of *nunang* used in this context. Here *nunang* describes the woman's state, as "in the power of", "enthralled", or "possessed by" her spiritual *tunang*, or "betrothed". It represents a state of unordered,

promiscuous excitation, the very opposite of sexual attachment governed by social norms. Once established, the victim is likely to be visited repeatedly by her *tunang* until she is placed under ritual protection.

As a consequence of sexual intercourse, the incubus spirit is said to violate, or "spoil" (*ayah*), the woman's womb (*kandong*). Spoliation is thought to endanger the woman's physical health, but, more importantly, it is believed to render her womb incapable of sustaining the life of any infant she conceives either before or after her seduction. Most Saribas informants deny that the incubus procreates through its congress with a mortal woman, although this is not inconsistent with Iban belief.⁴ Without denying this possibility, most informants argue that the spirit, instead, destroys its inamorata's ability to bear living offspring through coition with her husband or other human partner. The spirit is thus conceived to be essentially hostile to human sexuality. More specifically, the incubus is said to take into itself the infant's soul, causing the child to abort, to be stillborn or to die sometime shortly after birth. While the incubus may appear in the form of the woman's husband, or as a human paramour, its true nature is thus revealed through miscarriage and infant death, as a demonic killer, whose sexual attentions jeopardize the woman's health and fecundity and deny her offspring life in the physical world by depriving them of their soul.

Quite clearly, spiritual malevolence is linked in Iban belief to notions of the soul. Every human being is thought to possess a separable soul, or *samengat*, capable of leaving the body (*tuboh*) and traveling abroad (cf. Freeman 1967: 319). During its travels it may encounter the souls of other persons, spirits or deities, and dreams (*mimpi*) are thought to be the experience of the soul's wanderings and encounters. Dreams are of great importance to the Iban and are looked upon as a source of both good fortune, through their revelation of spiritual benefaction, the bestowal of charms (*pengaroh*), special warnings or guidance, and of spiritual danger. In the latter sense, the soul in its journeyings may become lost, be trapped, or carried off by malevolent spirits, and, if not restored to the body, the individual deprived of his soul is thought to languish and die.

The physical world inhabited by man is separate from the unseen realms of the deities and souls of the dead, but is shared by man with the natural species of plants and animals and with the spirits. Each of these beings has its proper place, as do beings of other worlds, and contacts or obtrusions between them, and from one world to another, are charged with power and potential danger. Such obtrusions occur

frequently and supernaturals may assume the substantive form of human beings, or of animals, birds or other natural species during their entry into the sphere of human habitation or the realms frequented by the human soul. For ordinary human beings, dreams are the principal occasion for such encounters, although contact with spirits and other supernaturals may be made in waking life as well, especially while wandering (*belalang*) in the jungle, and for the adept, particularly the shamans, during trance (*luput*) and ritual performances in which spirits, deities or ancestral souls are invoked and believed to be present among the living.

Insofar as the incubus spirits are concerned, their entry into the human world is typically experienced in dreams. Incubus dreams are interpreted, not simply as symptomatic of the spirit's attack, but as an actual experience of it. The dreamer is most often the woman who is its victim, although occasional intrusion of the incubus may be disclosed to others who are said to see the woman in their dreams in the embraces of her spiritual *tunang*. The spirit's visit may even occur while a woman is sleeping beside her husband. At times she may not be fully conscious of the spirit's attack or may mistake the incubus for the man whose form it assumes in her dreams. More often, however, the incubus appears to its inamorata as an irresistibly attractive stranger whose advances are totally overpowering. Although a spiritual intruder, the incubus thus takes the form of a man, who, through the use of love charms, songs or words, excites the woman, divests her of personal will and leaves her completely possessed by its compulsive sexual power. As Freeman notes, the experience is described in highly ambivalent terms by Iban women as enormously pleasurable by some, yet fearful and loathsome. Not only does it evoke shame and revulsion, but the woman's personal behavior or carelessness is commonly thought by others to have drawn the spirit's attention to her. Even more importantly, the experience of sexual excitation reveals the strength of her own erotic impulses. Yet interpretation of the experience in terms of spirit malevolence relieves the dreamer, in an ultimate sense, of moral complaisance. While her inner lasciviousness or neglect of ritual precautions may be blamed for attracting the spirit's notice, she is, nevertheless, thought to be ultimately powerless, a victim of a demonic interloper and of the overwhelming sexual lust that prompts its nocturnal obtrusions into the human world.

To the Iban the incubus spirits convey a menacing image of ungovernable sexuality. Like human beings, all *antu* are thought to possess both a body and a soul, but their bodily form is ordinarily imperceptible.

They also possess extraordinary mobility and the power of metamorphosis. Thus in the physical world, as opposed to the dream world of the souls, all of the incubus spirits, with the minor exception of the *antu pala*, assume, as we have said, the substantial form of animals. The principal animals identified as incubi are the *nyumboh* and *kra* monkeys (*Macaca nemestrine* and *Macaca irus*, respectively), *tedong* or cobra, *kijang* or barking deer, *rusa* or sambar deer, and *engkule* or clouded leopard. All of these animals are ordinarily associated with the *antu buyu*. The association is complex, however, as an animal may have more than one spirit association. Even as an incubus, the barking deer, or *kijang*, for example, may be identified as a demon huntsman, or *antu gerasi*. Its other spirit associations are unrelated to *tunang*-ship; thus the *kijang* may additionally be identified as a personal guardian spirit (*tua'*), or as the slave (*ulun*) of Rajah Simpulang Gana, the Iban god of agriculture, in which form its appearance is interpreted as a farming omen. Occasionally the *enturun*, the bearcat or Binturong (*Arctictis binturong*), is associated with the *antu buyu*, but more often it is regarded, as we shall see presently, as the animal manifestation, in its female form, of the *koklir*. Finally, in addition to the *antu buyu*, the water spirits may also appear as incubi. Their animal manifestations are as the *menarat* or monitor lizard, *lelabi* or river turtle, *baya* or crocodile, *lintah* or leech, *ikan tilan* or eel, and two other river fish, the *ikan udun* and *ikan keli*.

The Iban clearly distinguish between the incubus spirits and the animals in which they are said to make their appearance in the physical world. The great majority of animals identified with the incubi are regarded simply as animals, and so part of the natural world. Renang, the former headman of the Paku longhouse at Kerangan Pinggai, explained its nature to me by comparing the animal appearance (*gamal jelu*) of the incubus with a "coat" (*baju*) in which the spirit clothes itself while traveling abroad. "When it enters the longhouse, or we meet with it in our dreams, the spirit removes its coat, and so becomes invisible, or appears to us as a human being." As Renang went on to stress, its coat is merely a convenient cover or container; the incubus is fundamentally a spirit. Thus it is a spirit, not an animal, that pursues women in their dreams, and whose attentions a woman must take care to avoid attracting when, for example, she bathes or washes her garments in the river, or when she airs her sleeping mat on the open-air verandah of the longhouse. On the other hand, the incubi are said to display the same promiscuous sexual lust as is attributed to the animals

with which they are associated. In this regard, all of the animals that we listed earlier are endowed in Iban belief with phallic or strongly sexual associations. The spirits they contain are essentially phallic beings and are thought to share the same phallic attributes and lascivious character as the animals in whose form they clothe themselves. Occasionally some of these animals are said to assault women in the forest, but such attacks are distinct from notions of *tunang*-ship. It is the spirit, not the animal associated with it, that is truly menacing. Animals constitute an expected, if unpredictable, danger, but the imperilment of the incubus spirits is of an altogether different sort. Menace arises from the disguised nature of the intruder, its appearance in human form, and from the wedding of animal lasciviousness with cultural artifice, in the use by the spirit of love charms, spells and other instruments of human courtship, to possess its victim in bonds of obsessive attraction. Through her possession, the victim, in her dream encounters with the incubus, is excited to a parallel state of lasciviousness that renders her incapable of resisting its attack.

There is one additional form of *tunang*-ship, separate from that of the incubus spirits and of much less importance, that remains to be mentioned. This is called *tunang rarong*, or "possession by a coffin". Here the "possessing agent" (*utai tunang*) is not a demonic spirit, nor, as a physical object, the coffin (*rarong*) itself, but rather a deceased husband to whom a widow is unable, or unwilling, to sever ties of physical longing. As in the case of incubus *tunang*-ship, the object of possession is a woman, but in this instance, she is a recent widow who is sickened, and may in extreme cases be threatened with death, rather than her offspring. Thus *tunang rarong* is not directly linked with miscarriage or infant death. Nevertheless, like incubus *tunang*-ship it is seen, by its nature, as an imperiling, obsessive sexual relationship and is similarly contrasted with legitimate *tunang*-ship, betrothal and conjugal sexuality. The particular nature of the husband's death is immaterial, and generally the widow's condition is attributed to her failure to *ngupas tabalu*, "to clear away her widowhood", by paying compensation to the deceased's family at the end of a suitable mourning period, as is expected of both widows and widowers, in order to terminate affinal relations and restore the surviving spouse to a state of marriage eligibility. The danger is that the widow's soul, through her continued longing, will depart her body and follow her husband in death. Unlike the incubus, the deceased husband is not seen as an active disturbing agent. His surviving soul, as the object of the woman's longing, is sometimes spoken

of as an *antu rarong*, a "coffin spirit". But it is not considered to be a sexual aggressor. Instead, the woman's condition is said to be self-inflicted and results from her refusal to relinquish sexual bonds with the dead and reestablish them with a new partner through ordinary human betrothal and remarriage. The relationship is thus an injurious sexual attachment. It is considered undesirable for a woman, particularly if she is still young, to remain celibate and unattached after she has observed appropriate mourning. Like spirit *tunang*-ship, *tunang rarong* therefore represents a menacing form of sexual bonding, outside and contrary to social norms, that endangers the woman and is similarly barren of possible new life in the human world. Although unconnected to the dangers of parturition, it represents in the same way a sexual relationship destructive of sexuality as a positive force in society.

Freeman, in a penetrating analysis of Iban shamanism (1967), offers a psychological explanation of incubus beliefs. Basically he sees the incubus as a phantasy, both an intra-psychic projection and a part of the Iban symbolic order, that expresses a woman's repressed libidinal impulses, particularly those of an Oedipal nature. This phantasy, when interpreted by the shaman in terms of spirit aggression, partially alleviates the sense of personal guilt aroused by the erotic dreams that are its chief experienced element. Similarly it divests the woman of possible feelings of complicity in her child's death, which loss of her newborn infant is likely to cause, while at a deeper level, the ritual slaying of the incubus enacted by the shaman during its exorcism is interpreted by Freeman (1967: 339) as a symbolic reenactment of the child's death in which the mother is able to project her repressed aggressive impulses towards her infant onto a ritual surrogate, in this case, the shaman. I shall return to the problem of explanation presently. Without disputing Freeman's view of the psychological and symbolic status of incubus beliefs, the basic argument of this paper is that they must additionally be seen in their social and ideational context. Reflected in these beliefs are also sexual antagonisms and conflicting values relating to marriage and procreation. These conflicts are fundamental aspects of Iban social structure and become particularly apparent when incubus beliefs are related to allied notions, especially those concerned with the human *buyu* and, above all, the *koklir*. It is therefore to these notions that we must first turn our attention.

The Buyu Rumah, Tembawai and Tempuan Spirits and Their Human Allies

To the Saribas Iban, not all *antu buyu* are identified with spiritual *tunang*-ship. There is also a class of malevolent *antu buyu*, associated with the aged and foetal dead, that possesses none of the characteristics of the incubus spirits. This class consists of the *buyu rumah* or *sadau*, the *buyu tembawai* and the *buyu tempuan*. The term *rumah* refers to the longhouse, *sadau* to the loft above the family apartment, and *tembawai* to a former longhouse site. *Tempuan* describes the communal passageway between the family apartment and the longhouse gallery. In each case the name of the spirit emphasizes its connection, not with the forest or rivers, but with human society itself. Unlike the incubi, members of this class are perceived, not as intruders, but as adversaries within the human order, possessing essentially human, not animal, identities. Moreover, the first two of these spirits are said to be aided in their malevolent activity by allies drawn from among the souls of the living.

The *buyu rumah* or *sadau* are believed to inhabit long-occupied longhouses, the *buyu tembawai*, former longhouse sites, particularly those on which ruins or abandoned dwellings still stand.⁵ In practice, these two types of *buyu* are very similar and both are thought to be drawn to older longhouses, where, as the years pass, they gather in ever increasing numbers. Here they live in parasitic dependence upon their human hosts, subsisting upon the rice bran (*seku*) that has accumulated, particularly on the gallery floors and passageways, as a result of the pounding and winnowing done by village women over the years, or traces of which remain in discarded or forgotten *umpok* and *sintong* storage baskets. Iban women were traditionally reminded by their elders to take special care in storing bran, especially to keep storage baskets covered, and in sweeping clear the passageways in order to avoid attracting the *buyu rumah* and *tembawai* spirits. In addition to bran, both are also said to feed upon the tiny, brilliantly luminescent mushrooms (*kulat jalai malam*; *Mycena* sp.) that appear in damp weather beneath the longhouse floor and whose bluish-white light is said to be identical to the brilliant glow of the spirit's eyes when seen at night.

The *buyu rumah* and *tembawai* are thus thought to live in close dependence and association with mankind. Unlike the incubus, they never appear as animals, nor are they identified with phallic sexuality. Instead, they are perceived as ancient, decrepit beings of extreme ugliness bearing a characteristic odor of mustiness and decay (*bau abu*). Although some informants say that the *buyu rumah* and *tembawai* may

be either male or female, in fact, they are ordinarily spoken of without sexual attributes. When seen, they reputedly appear as ancient, bent-over anthropomorphic spirits, usually resembling aged crones or hags. Most often they are said to be met with at night, hobbling (*rigang-rigang*) in the lofts or along the eaves over the longhouse gallery, usually by bachelors on their way to court sweethearts, or are seen passing to and fro beneath the *tempuan* passageway. Indeed, their most significant characteristic is precisely their asexuality, their identification with beings deprived by age of sexual characteristics.

While the *buyu rumah* are associated fully with the longhouse, the status of the *buyu tembawai* is more marginal. Like the *tembawai* itself, which is transitional between an inhabited community and the regenerated forest, the *buyu tembawai*, while dependent upon their human hosts, are also associated with the forest and the dangers of nature that it embodies. Since Iban longhouses are periodically rebuilt, and generally relocated in the process, most longhouse territories contain a number of *tembawai* sites. Unless these are very ancient, their location is remembered, and they are generally returned to from time to time, particularly during fruiting seasons when the trees planted around the original longhouse are bearing fruit. But because of their association with the *buyu* spirits, the *tembawai* are thought to be dangerous to the young, and parents are reluctant to allow their children to visit them unless accompanied by an adult caretaker. On occasion, the *tembawai* spirits are thought to capture the souls of very young children. But more commonly, they appear to older children whose souls are no longer so susceptible to direct attack. To these children, the *tembawai* spirits typically appear as elderly kinswomen, usually as a "granny" (*ini*), who invites the child to follow her into the forest. A child who accepts her invitation is led into the jungle until it loses its way and is then left to die of starvation or exposure. Sometimes the *buyu tembawai* is said to encircle the child's throat with an invisible wild creeper to prevent it from crying out to the search parties seeking it. Like the incubus, the *buyu tembawai* are thus partially identified with danger inherent in nature.

Like all *buyu*, the *rumah* spirits direct their malevolency toward the young. Infant death is similarly attributed to soul loss, but occurs, not through molestation of the mother, but as a result of a direct attack upon the newly formed souls of the young. Occasionally the *buyu rumah*, like the *buyu tembawai*, are thought to appear to older children. They appear, it is said, as small, black spirits usually at night in the family

room or in other parts of the longhouse. The experience is regarded as frightening, although not generally fatal, as the child's soul is now thought to be strong enough to withstand its assault. But such encounters are believed to leave a child fretful and ill, and as a defensive measure, parents may call upon the shaman to erect a spiritual fence around the child or to seal the doors and windows of the family's apartment to the *buyu*'s entry, especially by the use of combs of the *engkerawai* tree wasp, which are thought to be particularly repellent to all types of *antu buyu*.⁶ It is also believed that the *buyu* spirits, during their nocturnal appearances, may lick the skin of young children, causing them to cry out in terror and pain. The *rumah* and *tembewai* spirits are thought to eat, not with their hands, but by licking up (*nilah*) bran with their tongues, and sometimes they are said to touch their tongues to the skin of sleeping children causing a painful, purplish discoloration (*maloi*) attributed to the "touch of the *buyu*" (*kena tegu buyu*).

While the *buyu rumah* and *tembewai* may harm the young by their own actions, it is more often held that their assaults, particularly those of the *buyu rumah*, are carried out in concert with human agents who live directly among their victims, possibly even as elderly members of the same family as those who suffer their attacks. Although similarly described as *buyu*, these agents are not considered to be spirits at all, but are rather actual, living human beings.⁷ More precisely, it is the malignant soul (*samengat jai*) of such individuals that is thought to act as nefarious agent, leaving its owner's body reposed in sleep to wander abroad, committing secret acts of spiritual violence under the guidance or in collusion with the true *buyu* spirits. A further aspect of these spirits' parasitic relationship is thus their connection with human allies. Unlike other demonic spirits, the *buyu rumah* dwell in the midst of human society and carry out their evil work in concert with the souls of living human agents. The notion of the human *buyu* comes closest in Iban culture to that of the "witch". In contrast to the incubus spirits, the human *buyu* are quite clearly not demonic interlopers, but are conceived of as traitors, in effect, enemies within, who live in human society yet whose actions abet the work of its supernatural enemies.

For present purposes, it is notable that the human *buyu* are universally regarded as women. Moreover, they are women who, in virtually all instances,⁸ no longer fulfill a woman's normal sexual and reproductive role due to old age. In other words, women suspected of being human *buyu* are characteristically extremely old women, beyond the age of menopause and active sexuality. Their nature is not only physic-

ally, but also spiritually defective, and their malevolency is thought to arise from the "bad", or "ill-fated" (*jai*), nature of their soul. Some women are believed to turn envious and hateful once old age deprives them of the ability to bear children and sustain a normal wifely role. The state of their soul is correspondingly blighted and is thought to lead them unwittingly to commit jealous acts of violence against the offspring of younger women. The victims of the human *buyu* may include the elderly woman's own descendants, her grandchildren, or even offspring born or conceived to women of her own *bilek* family. She is thus doubly a traitor. In this regard, the Saribas Iban describe as a *buyu* a mother cat that kills and eats its own young. The image of the human *buyu* is thus a particularly repellent, horrifying one of an elderly woman who, while outwardly a member of human society, spiritually attacks and preys upon the young, possibly even her own kinsmen and descendants, owing to the inward malignancy of her soul.

The Iban notion of a bad or malignant soul (*samengat jai*) is discussed at greater length presently, but here it is important to note that human beings cannot directly know the state of a person's soul, its "goodness" or "badness". It can only be surmised through an individual's outward actions or by the consequences of his behavior in the world of experience. With regard to the human *buyu*, the woman whose soul acts as a malevolent ally of the *buyu rumah* spirits is believed to be unaware of its actions because the attacks that give evidence of its malignant state occur, not in the directly perceivable physical world, but in the realm of the souls ordinarily imperceptible to herself and others. Only the ultimate consequences of its actions — miscarriage and infant death — are directly seen. Thus the woman who acts as a human *buyu* is thought to be unconscious of the inner betrayal of her soul that unknowingly causes her to harm others. However, the notion of a bad soul carries with it a taint. In this case, the elderly woman suspected of being a *buyu* is often thought to harbor envy, or her ill-fate may additionally be attributed to an inherited defect, a neglect of omens or omission of ritual observance. But even so, the human *buyu* is believed to be unaware of her malevolent nature. Like those she attacks, she is conceived of as an unsuspecting victim of her soul's own inner malignancy. To the Iban her ill-fate is precisely that she is an unwitting source of harm to others, including her descendants and those closest to her. Denied the normal role of her sex, she is thus betrayed into an alliance with the demonic *buyu rumah* by the blighted state of her soul and in consequence is thought to attack the delicate souls of the newly born.

Iban concepts of the *buyu rumah* and *tembewai* spirits are thus associated with sexuality, but in a negative sense. Both spirits and human agents are sexually deficient, deprived by age of fertility and, in the latter case, of conjugal sexual ties. As blighted spiritual agents, by seeking out and destroying the young, they therefore represent destroyers of fecundity in human sexual life. These concepts are additionally connected with elements of Iban social structure.

Belief in the human *buyu* reflects the ambiguous position of the elderly in Iban society and points up one dimension of the conflicting values that attach to sexuality. The principal social unit of Iban society is the *bilek* family (cf. Freeman 1958). The *bilek* is typically a three generation domestic group consisting most often of a senior husband and wife, a married son or daughter, his or her spouse and dependent offspring, plus possibly still unmarried children of the senior pair. It constitutes the basic economic, ritual and jural unit in the Iban social system, and is additionally an independent allodial group, possessing its own corporate estate, consisting primarily of a longhouse apartment, heirloom valuables, ritual sacra and agricultural lands. As an economic and jural corporation, the *bilek* is a perduring group. Provision is made for its continuity and the transmission of its estate by the succession to membership and management of its property of a single child in each generation, either a son or a daughter, and by the incorporation of the successor's husband or wife following the couple's marriage. Thus the composition and persistence of the *bilek* family depends upon marriage and procreation. To continue, the group must recruit an in-marrying spouse in each generation and by their union the couple must produce at least one child to ensure their further succession and the physical continuity of the *bilek*. But at the same time, a fundamental conflict exists in the structural role played by marriage and childbirth. Marriage is not only a means of *bilek* recruitment but also creates competing claims upon its partners and may equally well bring about the departure of natal members and their incorporation, as in-marrying spouses, in other *bilek* families. Similarly marriage and parenthood give rise to divergent interests which, outside the family, tend to weaken the bonds between its former members now scattered among different *bilek*, and, within the family, creates cleavages along which partition may occur and possible division of the family estate. Thus marriage and procreation both ensure and threaten the continuity of the *bilek*, and this fundamental conflict is reflected, as we shall see presently, in the discrepant values that attach to sexual relations generally in Iban society.

Belief in the human *buyu* reflects a further aspect of this conflict. While ties between husband and wife, and parents and children, constitute the principal social bonds uniting *bilek* members, the marriages formed in each generation, and the subsequent birth of children, tend to lessen the strength of relationships with the most senior generation of *bilek* members. Social bonds are reoriented and as children and grandchildren marry, establish families of their own, and possibly as these attain household independence, relationships with parents and grandparents tend to recede in importance, as the personal interests of the younger generations come increasingly to focus upon these newly established family ties. Moreover, there is no descent group organization in Iban society to accord compensating social weight to lineal relationships with antecedent generations. Thus while marriage and filiation provide for the continuity of the *bilek*, they tend, at the same time, to undermine the position of the senior generation of members, most especially the very aged. Significantly, the latter are precisely those most strongly associated with the human *buyu*. The fact that such persons have not yet joined their contemporaries in the other world, but are still alive, adds to their anomalous status. In this regard, the death of the very old is sometimes interpreted as an outward sign of the shaman's destruction of a human *buyu*, and in death the souls of women who have allied themselves with the *buyu rumah* are thought to shed their spiritual abnormality and thereby cease to disturb the living. In social terms, elderly women occupy an especially anomalous position. Senior men retain a degree of social importance, even as their physical powers decline, particularly as legal counsellors and in their command of ritual knowledge on which the well-being of the *bilek* is thought to rest. There is no corresponding role of equal importance played by elderly women. Menopause represents, in a sense, an enforced disengagement from the principal roles in a woman's life, those of mother and wife. Moreover, these are also the principal roles of social importance a woman plays within her *bilek*. Thus marriage and procreation represent a direct social threat to a woman beyond childbearing age, particularly one who is widowed or no longer able to fulfil a normal wifely role, and tends to diminish the strength of her social attachments with succeeding generations of family members. This threat and more generally the conflicting structural role of marriage and filiation are expressed in the notion of the human *buyu*, its association with the aged and with the imperilment of the newly born. The blighted soul of the human *buyu* and her alliance with the demonic spirits symbolically reflect her anomalous social posi-

tion and the diminished attachments that join her to the living members of her *bilek*. The malevolency she embodies is directed against the young, including her own descendants, and is conceptually linked to the known physical dangers of parturition. Death terminates the process of her disengagement from society and correspondingly restores her soul to spiritual normalcy by removing it to the world of the ordinary dead.

The *buyu tempuan*, like the *buyu rumah* and *tembewai*, are also thought to prey upon the young. But unlike the latter, the *buyu tempuan* appear as tiny foetuses or newly born infants and are associated, not with the aged, but with the souls of the *anak lulus*, the aborted, still-born or newly born dead. As spirits, they are thought to take the lives of living infants out of jealousy and despair with their own ill-fate. The wife of the current headman of Kerangan Pinggai believes that on two occasions she saw *buyu tempuan*, and her experience reflects typical elements of Saribas belief. Both occasions occurred at sunset, a time associated with the appearance of demonic spirits, and took place at Samu, an old longhouse thought to be especially frequented by *buyu* spirits. On the first occasion the spirit appeared momentarily seated inside an *umpok* basket licking up bran. The basket rested against the wall separating the family room from the *tempuan*. An Iban longhouse is divided into well demarcated spatial zones. The *tempuan* is a communicating passageway and, above all, an area of transition between the inner family rooms and the outer gallery, and, like all transitional zones or boundaries, is strongly associated with spiritual danger.⁹ The *tempuan*, and in particular the edge of the *tempuan* and family rooms, called the *temetong*, represents a spiritual thoroughfare, along and under which are thought to pass, largely unseen, the *buyu* spirits inhabiting the house. On the second occasion the spirit, resembling a tiny red infant or foetus, was briefly seen swinging (*berua*) at the inner edge of the verandah from a long loop of cord called the *tali sengkuit*. This cord is also identified with the *buyu tempuan*. Following harvest, when padi is dried on the verandah, a long pole (*sengkuit*) is suspended from the loop and swung over the drying grain to frighten away the longhouse fowl. After a family has finished drying its padi, it is required by *adat* to cut down the *tali sengkuit* so as not to attract the *tempuan* spirits. Like all infants, the *buyu tempuan* are thought to be especially fond of swinging. Traditionally parents amused young children by swinging them from swings suspended over the *tempuan*. Swings are also associated with the shamans, who frequently use them when invoking and mastering the *buyu* and other demonic spirits, usually also at the *tempuan*.

Unlike the *buyu rumah*, the *buyu tempuan* are without human allies. As spiritual agents, they resemble the *koklir* in the sense that they are identified with the troubled souls of those who have died an untimely death related to parturition. In this regard, they might similarly be described as victims of human sexuality. Cut short by death of full human status, the souls of the *anak lulus* are similarly denied peace in the other world and so return to trouble the living. While the nature of their death links them to the incubus and other *buyu* spirits, the *anak lulus*, in the form of the *tempuan* spirits, are associated most directly with deliberate abortion, illegitimate sexuality, and, in particular, with incest. Most of the *anak lulus* are said to be fetuses intentionally aborted before the mother's pregnancy became apparent in order to avoid detection and the requirement that she name the infant's father. In the case of ordinary premarital pregnancy, a woman may in this way seek to avoid social reproval or an unwelcome marriage, but when the relationship is incestuous, marriage may be out of the question, and by disclosing paternity she makes a public avowal of the pair's guilt of a grave crime, which can only be avoided by abortion. In Iban belief the danger of incest is thought to arise, not so much from the act itself, as from the possibility of mismated conception, a condition of supernatural peril, as we shall see. The *buyu tempuan* are thus associated with this danger. Their malevolency has its origins in incest and sexuality outside of wedlock and represents a consequent danger of illicit sexuality. In destroying the lives of legitimately conceived infants, these foetal spirits, like the incubus and human *buyu*, thus similarly threaten the positive, procreative nature of sexuality.

The Malevolent Koklir

The *koklir*, or *antu koklir*, is thought to be the malevolent ghost of a woman who has died in childbirth. As such, she is believed to enter the human world as a malevolent intruder with the intent of carrying off the souls of the living. In this she is like the incubus, but in other respects the nature of her intrusion represents, as we have said earlier, an almost total inversion of that of the incubus spirits. As the ghost of a once living woman, she assumes a menacing presence only as a result of death. Whereas death is the final outcome of incubus malevolency, it is through death that the *koklir* comes into being, and, in the first instance, the notion of the *koklir* is closely bound up with Iban beliefs regarding death and the fate of the souls of the dead.

For the Iban an individual's soul is thought to persist after death and

the surviving soul of the *koklir* is conceived of as having been rendered "bad", or *jai*, as a consequence of the particular nature of her death. In other words, her malevolency is attributed to the state of her soul, like that of the human *buyu*. But her soul is that of a dead woman and its state is the product of an ill-fated death (*busong mati*). Maternal death (*mati beranak*) is described by the Iban as an abnormal death (*mati nyelai*, or *mati enda sebaka enggau orang maioh*) and it is generally believed that any woman may become a *koklir* should she die during childbirth or within the 40-day warming period (*bekindu*) that follows, due to infection, haemorrhage, or as a result of other complications attributable to parturition.

The term *jai*, or "bad", as applied to her soul, does not, in ordinary usage, imply a moral judgment. By virtue of her death, any woman may become a *koklir*, no matter how morally or spiritually upright she may have been in life. To have a bad soul, or *samengat jai*, is not necessarily to possess a "bad character" or "nature" (*ati jai* or *pendiau jai*), or to engage in "bad deeds" (*pengawa jai*), such as fornication or theft, and only rarely is the "badness" of the soul, that is, its *jai*, seen, as it is in this instance and in the case of the human *buyu*, to be a source of spiritual malevolency. An individual may be born with a bad soul, his soul may turn bad in the later course of life, or be rendered bad by the particular nature of his death. Most commonly a living person who is thought to possess a bad soul is said to be simply *nadai tuah*, "without luck". There is, however, ambiguity in this regard. As we noted earlier, the notion of *samengat jai* tends to carry a taint, and an individual who possesses such a soul may be suspected, for example, of ritual negligence, or of harboring ill-will towards others. Moreover, a woman who assumes the form of the *koklir* is said to bring shame and grief upon her family, no matter how blameless a life she may have led previously, owing to the subsequent actions of her ghost.¹⁰

The notion of a bad soul thus implies lucklessness for which the individual who suffers its consequences need not, and is ordinarily said not to be personally responsible. Thus an ordinary luckless man, whose fields, for example, consistently yield less than enough to feed his family despite his diligent efforts, may say of himself, or be described by others, as having been fated with, or given by nature, a *samengat jai*, a bad soul. Such persons are said to be *enda di-kelala petara*, "ignored" or "unnoticed by *petara*". *Petara* may refer to either the universal divinity, more specifically, Bunsu Petara, the ultimate source of creation whose attentiveness is thought to preserve the universe from chaos, or, more

generally, to Bunsu Petara plus all of the deities and tutelary spirits that enter into relations of benefaction with individual human beings. To be ignored by *petara* means that one's endeavors go unrecognized by the beneficent supernaturals and so unblest with the success that in the normal course of things should be their reward. In the case of the *koklir*, the woman's death in childbirth is both the source of her *samengat jai* and its partial manifestation, and her particular misfortune, like that of the human *buju*, is to be transformed by the state of her soul into an unwitting agent of spiritual malevolence.

The death of a woman in childbirth is regarded as especially grievous because it typically claims a woman in her prime, or middle years, whose loss seriously disrupts her family, usually leaving a widower and possibly motherless children. As a ritual defence, to cripple the ghost and prevent the woman who has died in childbirth from wandering abroad as a *koklir*, the soles of her feet and the palms of her hands are pierced diagonally with citrus thorns (*duri limau*) immediately before her body is removed from her *bilek* apartment and placed inside the *sapat* enclosure on the gallery prior to burial. Plants have generally a life-sustaining meaning to the Iban and thorns are frequently used, as here, as a protective instrument against demonic spirits. Piercing the soles and palms is felt to be an unpleasant task and generally falls to one of the woman's closest female relatives, usually her mother or a sister; it is performed surreptitiously so as not to be seen by other mourners, and is accompanied by a brief prayer in which the dead woman is requested to accept her fate and not cause further grief to her family and others. Some informants say that the woman's tongue may also be pierced with a needle or porcupine quill. Otherwise, she is given a normal burial, except that citrus branches are sometimes placed upon her grave. But owing to the especially grievous nature of her death, it is considered to be abnormally ill-lucked, and her soul is believed in consequence to suffer a separate fate in the other world, different from that of those who have died ordinary deaths.

In Iban belief, the soul is thought to take leave of the body and at the approach of death begins its journey to the land of the dead (*menoa sebayan*). Death occurs only after the soul has passed through the earthen door (*pintu tanah*), the portal to the other world, and has been received by the souls of former friends, relatives, deities of the other world and ancestors of past generations. As the moment of death approaches, the souls of former kinsmen gather around the death-bed in order to escort the soul of the dying person on its coming journey. To

ensure its safe arrival, the soul's journey and reception in the land of the dead are enacted in the dirge (*sabak*) sung on the final night of mourning by a female singer, the *tukang sabak*, behind the *sapat* enclosure containing the body. The soul of the *tukang sabak* is believed to accompany the party on its final journey, acting as a guide, explaining the various spiritual realms they pass, and recounting their experiences to the living mourners through the verses of her dirge. The land of the dead is believed to be close at hand, yet invisible to the living. As in this world, the souls of the dead, with the exception of the shamans, are thought to dwell along the banks of a river, the Mandai. Following its reception in the other world, the soul is directed by a company of its kinsmen to its appropriate place. Those who have died abnormal deaths are established apart from the other souls in separate areas within *sebayan*. Their fate is not eternal, however. Some say the souls go through a series of lives in *sebayan*, and all souls, although otherwise indestructible, are believed to turn eventually to dew (*ambun*), and, as dew, are thought to fall to earth and so nourish the growing rice by which the living are sustained, thus ultimately unifying, in the Iban view, states of being in the physical and spiritual worlds.

There are eight of these special areas, or domains (also, *menoa*) within *sebayan* to which the souls of persons who have died abnormal deaths are consigned: (1) *menoa orang mati tasat*, the domain of those who died as a result of having lost their way in the forest; (2) *menoa orang mati laboh*, the domain of those who died by falling from a height; (3) *menoa orang mati lemas*, the domain of those who died by drowning; (4) *menoa orang mati pandak umor*, the domain of those youth who died before their time, without issue; (5) *menoa orang mati makai tubai*, the domain of those who took their lives by eating *tubai* poison (*Derris* sp.); (6) *menoa orang mati ngayau tauka mati pangka peti*, the domain of those who died in war or were killed by traps; (7) *menoa orang mati telih*, the domain of those who died of wounds; and, finally, (8) *menoa indu mati beranak*, the domain of women who died in childbirth. There is also a ninth area, *menoa anambiak mati lulus*, the domain of the *anak lulus*, the still-born or foetuses aborted before their mother made known their paternity. Consistent with their marginal status, the area to which the foetal souls are consigned is located outside *sebayan* proper, at *kendi aji*, the junction of the roads traversed by the souls and other supernaturals leading between *sebayan*, the world of the living, and the various realms of the deities and spiritual heroes of the Iban. An Iban woman is required to disclose the paternity

of an expected child soon after she knows for certain that she is pregnant and failure to do so within three or four months of conception is a serious ritual offence for which she may be fined should anyone in her longhouse or any house she visits fall ill as a consequence.¹¹ Because their death ordinarily occurs before this disclosure is made, the *anak lulus* are thought to be ignorant of the identity of their father, and so are believed to wander in every direction from *kendi aji*, beseeching passers-by and inquiring of the men whether they are their fathers or not. In this regard they resemble the souls of the others who have died abnormal deaths. All are similarly occupied with a quest or task directly associated with the particular nature of their death. The task of the foetal souls emphasizes, in particular, their connection with illegitimate conception, and, like women who have died in childbirth, their separate fate is associated with their transformation and reappearance as demonic spirits.

The arrival of the souls at *menoa indu mati beranak* is described in the Saribas dirge in the following terms (Sandin 1968: 85):

*Lengka ka ari nya,
Nyau manggai di kampung
Madang tekalong,
Baka rengkong malu balut
Beseberai enggau tatai madang lukai,
Ke disium bau rengut,
Nya menoa indai randa,
Bekelai ka bingka lia purang.*

Leaving that place,¹²
They come to a forest of *tekalong* trees
Sounding as if someone is beating
Their bark to make bandages.
Opposite is a hillside grove of *lukai* trees
Whose bark is fragrant.
This is the realm of those unfortunate mothers
Who died in childbirth, the location of which
Is marked by an uprooted ginger garden.

The use of floral imagery is characteristic of Iban ritual symbolism and each of the trees and plants referred to in the dirge has a special meaning connected with childbirth. Bark of the *tekalong* tree, a species of breadfruit (*Artocarpus elasticus*), is pounded to make long bandages used to bind a woman's abdomen during the warming period that follows delivery. The pounding is performed by men, and thus women

experience, as in the dirge, only the sound of the men's labor. *Lukai* bark is also pounded, but is burnt, particularly at night, to safeguard the mother and her newborn infant from spiritual harm, as from the *burong geruna*. Finally, the mother's body is bathed with ginger water, which she also takes internally to warm her body, and uprooted ginger plants indicate a recent birth. At *menoa indu mati beranak*, the souls of the *indu mati beranak*, the women who have died in childbirth, are believed to be forever obsessed with making preparations for delivery. They are said to be distraught, their minds agitated by the pounding sound of the *tekalong* bark being beaten, and are continually busy with the squeezing of ginger pulp (*rampang lia*) to make ginger water. Because of their obsessive, excited state they are thought, like others who have died abnormal deaths, to be beyond the ritual recall of their living descendants.

Once a soul is established in *sebayan* it is ordinarily not permitted to return through the earthen door, except to welcome dying kinsmen or when ritually recalled. Among the Saribas Iban, the souls of the dead are periodically recalled in a major ritual festival, the *gawai antu*, held in celebration of the ancestral dead and for the erection of tomb huts over their graves. During the *timang jalong* chants that mark the opening stages of the festival, invitations are dispatched to the other world where the deities of *sebayan* assemble the souls of the dead and lead them in ritual procession to the earthly celebration where they are feasted and honored. Each of the special domains of those who have died an abnormal death is visited in turn, but in each case the souls that dwell there refuse to join the procession, as they are preoccupied with the special task that they are unable to set aside. Thus the ill-fated nature of their death is heightened by the belief that their souls are beyond further beneficent communion with the living. Contact, at best, is irrevocably lost; at worst, further connection is imperiling to the living. This latter danger is most fully conceptualized in the case of the *indu mati beranak*, who, as *koklir*, may return to imperil mortal souls, until, like the ordinary dead, their interest in the living subsides and gradually fades away.

Much as the roles of men and women are overtly contrasted in Iban social life, the notion of *koklir* malevolency inverts, and is sharply contrasted with, that of the male incubus. The *koklir* emerges as a malevolent agent in consequence of death. Death and the subsequent fate of her soul are the source of her spiritual malignancy. Removed from this world, yet unable to find peace in the next, her ill-fated soul

TABLE 1

Positive and Imperiling Forms of Sexuality

A. *Normal Sexuality and Successful Parturition:* B. *Imperiling Sexuality and Death at Parturition:*

thus assumes the role of a demonic interloper. Death, in contrast, is the ultimate outcome of incubus malevolency. The incubus, as a spirit, is pre-existent, and it is through death that its true identity, as a demonic intruder, is revealed to the living. However, the incubus and *koklir* are similar in that death in both cases is the outcome of sexual intercourse, the imperilment of which is ultimately realized only in death itself, although dreams may give prior warning.

The normal course of human existence can be seen as a continuing sequence of procreation, sexual bonding and further procreation, extending from one generation to the next (see Table 1 above). Although the individual's life-span is finite, continuation of the sequence denies death finality to mankind as a whole. The sequence has also a social counterpart in marriage, filiation, and the resulting continuation of society and its component *bilek* families. Yet death may interrupt the sequence and can arise from the very acts of procreation and sexual bonding themselves, thus denying them their positive consequences in both nature and society. Concretely death may claim the young or

women in childbirth. In each instance death is symbolically associated with contrasting forms of spiritual contact or agency. Infant death is attributed chiefly to sexual relations with a male spiritual intruder, maternal death to the ill-fated outcome of a woman's normal congress with a human sexual partner. The woman herself, in the latter case, is spiritually blighted, her tormented soul cut off from positive recall, and so she becomes a malevolent agent whose actions are correspondingly directed against human males as those bearing collective responsibility for her death. The *koklir*'s attack, like that of the incubus, thus takes a sexual form, but its nature is totally reversed (Table 1).

The *koklir* is a female intruder and her victims are men, never women or the young. Death precedes and is the source of malevolence. Owing to its nature, she appears as a vengeful agent who repudiates sexual bonds and emasculates her victim. Both the *koklir* and incubus similarly appear to their victims with disguised identities. But whereas the incubus takes advantage of its disguise to cause injury through seduction, the *koklir* is an assailant hostile to sexuality, who castrates her victims, and so brings about their death by destroying their sexual organs, the principal source of their sexuality. But, in fact, this latter danger is never realized, and, in final contrast, the *koklir*'s victims always escape death. Her presence places men under a death threat, but it is one which they always evade. In the case of both the incubus and *koklir*, the object of sexual assault is never the individual who actually suffers death. In the case of the *koklir*, the individual who suffers this fate is the assailant herself. In contrast, it is the young, not the woman seduced by the incubus, whose soul the spirit captures, and, in a reverse manner, whose positive, living presence it removes through death from the earthly world.

We might add to Table 1 the other sources of possible infant death. All are similarly linked with negative or imperiling aspects of sexuality. The *rumah* and *tembewai* spirits and their human allies are associated, as we have seen, with the loss of procreative power and disengagement from sexual bonds. The association is a negative one, with loss of sexuality. The human *buyu* are additionally associated with death, but, in contrast to the *koklir*, are liberated, rather than blighted by death. The foetal *tempuan* spirits also emerge as demonic agents from death, and, like the *koklir*, are similarly victims of human sexuality. However, their death is related, not to legitimate sexuality, but to deliberate abortion, incest and illicit sexual congress. In other words, they themselves are the victims of a negative sexuality, rather than those they endanger,

and, in final contrast to both the *koklir* and incubus spirits, none of these other *buyu* spirits are themselves sexual assailants, even though sexuality is the source of their malevolence.

In contrast, the attack of the *koklir*, like that of the incubus, is sexual in nature. In physical terms, the *koklir* is said to tear a man's testicles (*telu pelir*) from the scrotum and devour them (*makai telu pelir*). Not all Iban agree, however, that this action should be understood in a literal sense, and some assert that the loss is a spiritual one that leaves no visible mark upon the victim. This view, although not widely shared, is consistent with a secondary meaning of *makai*, "to eat", best translated, perhaps, as "to ingest spiritually", as used, for example, to describe a spirit's "eating" of a food offering or the actions of the herbalist magician (*dukun*) when he "eats an omen" (*makai burong*), that is, neutralizes it, after having first rendered it ineffective, literally "tasteless" (*tabar*), by the use of charms (*batu penabar burong*). Loss of the testicles, whether spiritually ingested or torn from the body and eaten, is thought to be automatically fatal. It is said to dislodge the victim's soul beyond the recall of even the most skilled shaman. Occasionally the *koklir* may only partially emasculate her victim. This results in a characteristic swelling of the scrotum called *sup pelir*. The swelling is distinguished from hydrocele, and from at least the most common forms of filariases, but I am uncertain as to whether it describes an actual pathological condition or is purely imaginary. Whatever the case, it is said that *sup pelir* may also be caused indirectly by means of magical contagion, should the *koklir* come into contact with, or gain possession of, a man's urine. For this reason, elderly men, who regard the *koklir* seriously, will avoid the usual practice of urinating from the open air verandah at night, if a local woman is known to have died recently in childbirth. Instead, jars or other containers are used to collect urine which is carefully disposed of in the morning. If sufficiently severe, *sup pelir* is said to bring about a lingering death.

What is especially notable here is that the cultural status of *koklir* beliefs is entirely different from that of the incubus. The incubus is characteristically objectified in the erotic dreams of women, although these may be subject to interpretation by a male shaman. In contrast, the *koklir* is entirely a male fantasy.¹³ It is a highly active fantasy and scores of *koklir* stories are well known in every local community. Nonetheless, the status of the *koklir* is wholly folkloristic, it is seldom evoked in ritual and its actions rarely figure as an etiological explanation of actual death.¹⁴ When men gather, they frequently exchange *koklir* stories

or experiences. Some men disclaim serious belief in the *koklir*, although to others she evokes genuine dread. A number of men claim to have personally heard the *koklir*'s call, especially at night, and a small number report that her call followed them when they were traveling in the forest or returning from their farms. While I was staying in Ulu Paku, a fairly typical incident took place downriver at Surih in which a party of longhouse men, practicing at night a form of martial arts called *pencha*, was set to flight by sounds taken to be the call of the *koklir*.¹⁵ The leader of the group, a man named Das, was troubled later in the night by a dream interpreted as the visitation of the soul of his brother's wife who had died recently in childbirth. In this case the sounds believed to be made by the *koklir* approached the longhouse and were heard by a large number of persons living in the community. But more often, in contrast to this, purported incidents involve other persons than the teller or involve past events in which those involved are not identified. There are, however, numerous exceptions, and some accounts take place in such contemporary settings as boarding school dormitories, taxis, or involve female hitchhikers. But what all these stories have in common is that the man who is the *koklir*'s intended victim always evades her attack and escapes unharmed. Thus the imperilment that the *koklir* is believed to embody is resolved at the ideational level, directly in belief itself, rather than behaviorally in the ritual attention of the shaman. At one level this resolution can be interpreted as an indirect assertion of male superiority. Thus the female *koklir* is always outwitted or eluded by her male victims. At other times, the resolution is more complex, as we shall see presently, and the sexual hostility expressed in the *koklir*'s attack is more complexly masked by an act of female intercession.

The principal elements of belief relating to the *koklir* can best be seen by examining some folkloristic examples. The following version is of a traditional *koklir* tale recorded from a Saribas informant, variants of which are widespread in Sarawak.¹⁶ A distinctive element in this account is the theme of male solidarity of father and son.

A man and his young son went upriver to fish with nets. After they had thrown their bait into the water, it began to rain heavily, and the two set out to look for shelter. As they were searching, the boy's father saw a hut close by. Inside were two women, living by themselves, who invited the boy and his father in out of the rain and offered to cook the food they had brought with them. They accepted, and while the women were busy, the boy removed his wet loincloth. The women served them. But while they were eating, one of the women began to laugh with the voice of the *koklir*,

pointing to the boy's genitals. At the same time her finger nails grew long like those of the *enturun*. Frightened, the two ran from the hut, found their boat, and began to pole quickly downriver. However, as they poled they could hear the voices of the *koklir* following them along the river bank. As they reached a deep pool (*lubok*) in the river, the father intentionally capsized the boat, so that he and his son could hide themselves under the hull. There they remained hidden from sight throughout the night. But just before dawn, the boat drifted close to a dry gravel spit connected to the shore, and the *koklir* were able to climb onto the bottom of the boat. The two could hear the scratching of their nails (that is, the long nails of the *enturun* cat, the *koklir's* animal manifestation), as they walked over the hull. With the first light of day, the sound stopped, as the *koklir* departed, and the man and his son returned home, cold and wet from their night in the river.

Like the incubus spirits, but in contrast to the other *antu buyu*, the *koklir* is associated with the forest and assumes at times an animal appearance. The *koklir's* animal manifestation is as the *enturun*, or bearcat mentioned earlier, a nocturnal carnivore with long claws and shaggy, mottled fur. While the *koklir* may take on the outward form of the *enturun*, particularly its long nails and unkempt hair, she is thought, however, to retain an essentially human character. The incubus properly belongs to the forest and represents an endangering male sexuality identified with nature. The *koklir*, in contrast, is associated, not with nature, but, as we shall argue presently, with conflict inherent in relationships between the sexes in society itself.

Like other demonic spirits, the *koklir* is thought to possess the power of metamorphosis, and when she appears to her intended victim, it is ordinarily as a beautiful young woman. In Saribas it is said that she frequently disguises her features when she confronts her victims with a woven sunhat (*tanggui serawong*) or a huge *kubong* leaf (*Macaranga* sp.) that obscure her face and hair. Her attack occurs, not in dreams, but in the forest, the other major setting of spirit encounters. In this, again, she differs from the incubus. In contrast to the latter, she is thought to reassume her original human identity in dreams. This, informants say, is because the *koklir* is not a pre-existent spirit, but is rather the ghostly form of a once living human soul. Dreams are frequently believed to follow encounters, and like other forms of disguised contact are seen by the Iban as revelations concerning the true nature of the spirit encountered earlier by the dreamer. Here the woman appears undisguised and her former human identity is disclosed. The experience is a revelation, but also dangerous to the dreamer. This can be seen in the following accounts, also from Saribas, which relate encounters of living individuals.

During the dibbling season, Mandau anak Lila of Matop longhouse left the work party he was with in order to collect fruit from a durian tree in a nearby fruit grove. As soon as he had climbed the tree, a beautiful woman appeared below and called up asking him to drop fruit to her. She was so exceedingly beautiful that Mandau suspected at once that she must be an *antu*. He quickly descended, jumped free of the tree and ran towards the fields. As he did so, he heard the cry of the *koklir*, which followed him until he rejoined the others. In his dreams that night he met a woman whom he had once known who asked him why he had not answered when she called to him. He awoke in fear.

In the last year of the Japanese Occupation, Ragai anak Lemudoh, the current headman of Kerangan Pinggai, was hunting mousedeer at night in his rubber garden across the river from the longhouse. As he searched for signs of game, he heard a noise and saw the *resam* ferns quivering in front of him. He fired a shot from his shotgun. This was answered by the voice of the *koklir*, "Kok, kok, kok..." He had only a few home-made cartridges with him which he quickly fired and then fled to the river. It was during the farming season and most active men were away at their farms. However, those who were present in the village, hearing his call of alarm, quickly set off with lamps to the river landing. Here they met Ragai, and the party (including my informant, Renang, who was then a young man) returned to the longhouse without further incident. However, just after he had fallen asleep that night, Ragai cried out and his wife heard him call the name "Bembang". Bembang was a woman of nearby Senunok longhouse who died in childbirth just before the Japanese arrived in Sarawak. His wife quickly roused him.

Dreams are never ignored or regarded as insignificant by the Iban. Dreams related to the *koklir* are thought to be highly endangering, but in a way quite different from an individual's encounter with the *koklir* while awake. The experience is thought to be frightening and may throw the dreamer into a state of *ngigau*, or sleeping terror, from which he must be awakened at once. Otherwise, he may lose consciousness (*tau luput*) and his soul may become disoriented and lost. But the element of sexual assault is absent. Instead, the image of the dead woman appears to the dreamer, undisguised in her original human form, and imperilment follows from the shock of the experience upon the dreamer's soul.

In waking encounters with her victims, the *koklir* typically appears as a beautiful young woman. But she is only momentarily alluring, and the element of sexual attraction is heavily overlaid with revulsion and dread. Her hair, rather than being fastened in a bun at the back of her head in the traditional manner of Iban women, is said to flow in disorder and is infested with lice. The latter make her appearance both terrifying and pathetic, for lice give evidence of her solitary existence without a companion to assist her in personal grooming. Hair is also symbolically associated with death. During the rites of mourning a lock of

the hair of the immediate survivors of the deceased is cut to prevent them from becoming demented with grief. Here the *koklir*'s long hair implies a reverse association of a soul tormented by its continuing obsession with the living.

Upon meeting her victim, or in approaching a longhouse during her nightly wanderings, the *koklir* gives a distinctive cry from which the term *koklir* derives (plus *-lir* = *pelir*, testicles) in which there is, again, a special element of menace. The cry begins, "Kok, kok, kok . . .", a sound interpreted by the Iban as identical to that which a mother hen makes when she calls her chicks together, but which ends with a shrill, "hai waii!" Hens, cocks and chicks are commonly symbolic of human beings. The conventional reaction in meeting the *koklir* is terror and flight. In fleeing, a man must take special care not to trip and fall prone on the ground, for, should he do so, it is believed, the *koklir* gains instant possession of his soul. This association of danger with the prone position characteristic of sexual intercourse might be interpreted as a further sexual element in the *koklir*'s assault, although stumbling and falling have also an augural significance to the Iban as general portents of ill-fate. It is thought that a man may be able to evade the *koklir*'s pursuit by crossing water or by climbing a tree. The huge leaves of the *pingan* tree (*Artocarpus odoratissimus*) are believed to be especially repellent to her and the tree and its foliage are thought to offer an effective refuge. The *koklir* is said to be able to cross only shallow water, and her wanderings occur primarily at night, so that a man may be able to escape if he can remain hidden in a tree or surrounded by water until daybreak. Water, in particular, is considered to be a protective barrier.

Among downriver Iban some elements of the Malay notion of the *pontianak*¹⁷ have been grafted to *koklir* belief, including the use of Malay spells (*puchau*) to turn back the *koklir*'s pursuit. Spells are frequently accompanied by the drawing of magical signs, most commonly star-shaped figures, upon the earth. The *koklir* is said to be unable to cross beyond these signs. Sometimes signs are also drawn, as a protective measure, at the base of the entrance ladder to the fieldhut when men are spending the night at their farms, or on *pingan* leaves hung above the doorway of the hut or buried beneath the floor posts. There are also more purely Iban devices, used generally against spirits to prevent their pursuit, such as *resam* fern (*Dicranopteris linearis*) charms or inverted sapling stakes placed on the path or inserted in the ground, which are believed to divert and confuse the

pursuing *koklir* and which cause her to lose the trail of her victim. An attempted use of a spell, in this case the Lord's Prayer, is illustrated by the following account of a Christian Iban, from Temudok in the Kalaka District.

A man named Rawing, whose father, Unak, was a well-known catechist trained by Rev. Howell of the Anglican Mission at Simanggang (in the early 1900's), and who, himself, was a devout Christian, heard the voice of the *koklir* while on his way one night to court (*ngayap*) a sweetheart in another village. He ran, but still the voice of the *koklir* followed, coming nearer and nearer. Finally, he stopped, knelt down on the ground, and recited the Lord's Prayer. But still the voice of the *koklir* drew nearer and nearer. At last, he could stand it no longer, and began to run again. The voice only ceased when he reached the safety of his sweetheart's house.

Beside the attempt to ward off the *koklir* magically, this account also contains a common theme that we shall consider presently, namely the notion that a man may escape danger through the presence, or by the active intercession of a living woman.

The richly developed folklore surrounding the *antu koklir* evidences the genuine anxiety that the threat of castration evokes to many Iban men. At a psychological level, this anxiety has obvious Oedipal associations. The *koklir* is an ambivalent figure, alluring yet menacing. She is likened to a mother hen calling her chicks. In behavioral terms, Iban women frequently admonish and tease their small sons with fondling and mock threats upon their genitals. Freeman (1968: 387-88) has described this behavior at some length and notes the strongly threatening element implicit in the mother's action which, in this regard, precisely parallels the phantasized image of the *koklir*. But more generally yet, the mother's behavior reflects a wider pattern of sexual conflict overtly expressed in Iban culture in female mockery of men, of which her action is only one example. In its most direct form mockery is seen by men as a threat to masculinity, and this aspect of sexual conflict is central to the notion of the *koklir*, as a female agent of emasculation.

The connection between sexual intercourse and conception is fully understood by the Iban and the expressed motive of the *koklir*'s attack is said to be revenge against men in general for having caused her death. Male sexuality is thus held directly responsible for her premature, ill-fated death. Although her hatred is generalized to all men, some informants insist that, if she can, a woman's ghost will seek out in particular those men with whom she has had sexual relations while alive, including her own husband. Psychologically there is an apparent element here of male guilt invertedly projected onto the menacing

image of the female *koklir*, as at once a sexual assailant and a figure of revenge. More generally still, the belief reflects an essential conflict or discrepancy in the nature of sexual relationships themselves. It is enjoined upon men and women that they form an intimate, enduring union and are fruitful, yet, in a physical sense, their intimacy is potentially imperiling. The act of procreation itself may bring forth, not new life, but possibly death to the woman or the infant she conceives. Sociologically this conflict has its counterpart in the discrepant nature of sexual roles and the conflicting values that attach to marriage and procreation in Iban social organization. In Iban social life, sexual equality is a significant principle. The social structure is totally bilateral. The distribution of social rights and responsibilities is more or less equally balanced between the sexes, and within the *bilek*, men and women enjoy identical jural rights and have equal claim to the family estate. In everyday life, there is very little overt inter-sexual antagonism. Women are not excluded from ritual or public affairs, premarital sexual relations are institutionalized in nightly courtship, and there is very little formal segregation of the sexes of any sort. The major exception to the principle of sexual equality is in the domain of warfare, to which enormous prestige was traditionally associated and from which women were wholly debarred. In Iban culture warfare stands as a metaphoric symbol of male sexuality and, as we shall see presently, it is primarily in this connection that overt conflict and female mockery are, or were traditionally, expressed. In addition, while marriage and procreation replenish membership in the *bilek* family, at the same time they threaten its internal solidarity and diminish the strength of social attachments with the surviving senior generation of members. More basically still, marriage creates contending lines of possible family affiliation, and with the birth of children, sets in motion forces leading to possible partition of the family and the eventual departure and scattering of its natal members. Thus sexual bonding and childbirth, linked in Iban belief to the known dangers of parturition, carry opposing valuation, at once positive, denying death finality and ensuring the continuity of the family, and yet also imperiling, as a possible source of death and social extinction.

Defeat of the Malevolent Supernatural

In Iban belief, defence against the demonic supernatural, including the incubus spirits and human *buyu*, is the chief task of the shamans, or *manang*, who are thought to possess the power to penetrate the supernatural world, make contact with its spiritual inhabitants and influence

their conduct towards mankind or specific human beings. There are three classes of *manang* recognized by the Iban¹⁸: (1) *manang mata*, the "raw" or novice *manang*; (2) *manang mansau*, the "ripe" or fully consecrated *manang*; and (3) *manang bali*, the "transformed" or transvestite *manang*. There are no *manang bali* currently in the Saribas.¹⁹ Of the others, only the fully consecrated *manang* can actually defeat the demonic spirits and recover the souls of those whose lives they threaten. This is because, through the complex rites of consecration (*pelian bebangun*), the fully consecrated *manang* is said to acquire the needed invulnerability to combat the demonic spirits and a *iyang*, or spirit familiar. It is the *iyang*, and not the soul or unaided acts of the shaman, that, in the latter case, recovers captured souls and restores them to their owners. Other shamans may provide defensive protection, by spiritually fencing in the threatened soul, for example, or through other prophylactic rites, but only a small number of fully consecrated *manang* are thought to possess the power to call forth molesting spirits, engage them in direct combat and thereby destroy their active presence in the human world.

The major ritual enactments performed by the *manang* are called *pelian*. Those for defeating the demonic spirits are generally called the *pelian bebunoh* or *bepantap antu*. Preliminary to any *pelian* performance, the *manang* will generally consult his crystal (*batu keras*) in order to determine the precise identity of the spiritual attacker and the whereabouts and state of the victim's soul. With this done, he then proceeds with the *pelian*. Its chief purpose is to destroy the molesting supernatural, and, if death has not yet occurred, to recover the victim's soul. In the case of the incubus, the spirit is first presented food offerings and then invoked as a lover, using the language of courtship. The moment the spirit appears in its human guise, it is slain by the shaman, ordinarily with a knife. The *pelian* thus reverses the relationship that exists between the incubus and its human *tunang*, and the shaman, disguising himself as a female lover, lures the spirit to its destruction. The struggle between the *manang* and the incubus takes place, with carefully staged effects, in a supernatural arena invisible to ordinary human beings, but as soon as the spirit is slain, it reappears in its visible animal manifestation, and the blood of an animal, a wetted blade in the case of a water spirit, possibly its fleeting appearance, or an animal corpse, gives evidence of the *manang's* success. Upon completion of the *pelian*, the shaman imposes a series of prohibitions (*mali*) on the patient's *bilek* family. These relate chiefly to the entry and departure

of persons and the types of objects that may be brought into or removed from the family apartment. These prohibitions must be observed for a prescribed period of time, usually from one to three days, and are intended to prevent a renewal of spiritual attack. The elaborateness of these prohibitions, as Freeman observes (1967: 341), and the virtual certainty that at least minor infractions will be committed, afford an explanation for the victim's possible relapse, or a woman's future miscarriage, without calling the shaman's powers or the effectiveness of his *pelian* into question.

The *pelian bebunoh buyu* performed for the defeat of the human *buyu* is basically similar, except that the element of sexual allurements is lacking. But more importantly, the demonic agent is, in this case, thought to be a human soul and so is contained in the material world, not in the body of an animal, but in that of an actual, living human being. Owing to this, the *manang* in slaying the human *buyu* is thought to be placed in a very different, and more serious, predicament than in defeating the incubus. Before he proceeds with his *pelian*, the shaman will accordingly advise his patient's family that the probable outcome of its performance will be a human death, possibly even that of an elderly woman among their immediate kinsmen. He often makes his warning more pointed, without, however, referring to the suspected *buyu* by name. He may indicate that the *buyu* is present in the same longhouse, or in one nearby or he may specify the *bilek* or set of *bileks* in which she lives. Only with the full agreement of the family will the shaman undertake the *pelian*, and its success is confirmed by the subsequent death of an elderly woman whose identity generally fits that disclosed by the shaman. The *pelian* performed to defeat the human *buyu* thus has the form of a communal judgment against a traitorous assailant whose identity is known only to the shaman. Its outcome is thought to release the woman whose slaying is ritually enacted by the *manang* from unwitting bondage to her blighted soul. It ends her alliance with the *buyu rumah* spirits — just as it severs her last remaining attachments with the living — and thus reunites her soul with those of her contemporaries who journeyed to the other world before her.

What is significant so far as the present essay is concerned is that the *manang* who defeats both the incubus and the human *buyu* is always a man. Iban shamans may be either men or women, and shamanism itself is closely identified mythologically with women, particularly with the goddess Ini Inda, the spiritual founder of Iban shamanism, and with the figure of the transvestite, trans-sexual *manang*

bali. However, only the male shaman is able to engage the demonic spirits in combat and slay them. Moreover, his role, as champion or slayer of incubi and other demonic spirits, replicates in the supernatural sphere the role traditionally played by the male warrior in the human world.²⁰ While women in Iban society enjoy a status equal in most respects to that of men, an exception existed traditionally, as we noted earlier, in the area of warfare and ritual head-taking. Indiscriminately women and children, as well as men, might lose their lives in war, but only adult men actively planned and waged war. From their display of skill and leadership in warfare, men alone derived the highest honors and achieved positions of status and power in Iban society, further symbolized by praise-names and ritual distinctions, from which women, as a sex, were totally excluded. Warfare as an institution and its attendant glorification of male aggressiveness thus directly conflicted with the principles of sexual equality and egalitarianism otherwise inherent in traditional Iban social structure. Traditionally this conflict found overt expression in a number of ways, particularly in ceremonial mockery of men by women, who at times during head-hunting rites dressed as warriors complete with wooden phalli and weapons, and mimicked what Freeman (1968: 388-90) has described as the "narcissism", or posturing pretensions of the men, especially evident on such occasions.

It is significant in this connection that warfare is also a metaphor for sexual intercourse. Sexual congress is commonly described metaphorically by the Iban as "combat", the penis as a "sword" or other weapon and ejaculation as the loosening of a spear or the firing of a gun. As in warfare, the male is said to take the initiative in sexual relationships. This is evident in the notion of *tunang*-ship in which the male incubus forces his attentions upon a female victim. Also the connection between warfare and the sexual aggression of the incubus is apparent in the prophylactic magic used to protect women from its assault, particularly charms of invisibility which are identical to those used by war parties in the past to protect them from being killed or wounded by their enemies. But by conceptualizing sexual intercourse as armed combat, women are made coequal adversaries of men, capable of challenging male assertions of prowess. It is exactly here that sexuality poses a threat to men as well as women. During ritual mockery women not only mocked the status pretensions of male warriors, but more directly belittled their potency (Freeman 1968: 388-9). In this regard the *koklir* represents the ultimate female challenge. Thus she is seen by men, not as a seductress, but as a hostile emasculator who tears away

and ingests the tangible sign of male sexuality, the sexual organs.

When seen in this connection the ritual combat of the shaman and the incubus spirits may be viewed as a ritual masking, or resolution, of this fundamental conflict in sexual relationships. The shaman who defeats the spirits and defends women against the manifestation of male sexual imperilment symbolized by the incubus is himself a male and he turns back the spirit's attack through a ritually enacted combat, or contest, as a spiritual warrior or champion, although one of alterable sexual identity. In other words, it is in the form of combat that women are spiritually defended from male aggression. But at the same time, it is significant to note, the shaman assumes the identity of a woman in his *pelian*, and in this disguise, as a woman, he defeats the incubus, and through combat, which both actually and metaphorically represents the chief threat to female status, banishes the incubus, the symbolic embodiment of male peril.

The notion of the *koklir* reflects this same fundamental conflict. Its resolution, however, occurs wholly at the level of belief. Thus the danger thought to be posed by the *koklir* is not entirely equivalent to that of the incubus. Bearing in mind that *koklir* stories are told largely by men, this can be interpreted, in its simplest form, as an assertion of male superiority and an inversion of possible feelings of male guilt and their projection onto women. Structurally it also reflects, I would argue, the fact that it is women's status that is most directly threatened in Iban society. Even so, sexual danger extends to men. This, again, reflects social structure. As a bilateral society, the conflicting role of marriage and procreative ties applies equally to both sexes. But the basic element of sexual conflict involved is often masked in a more complex manner in which a woman assumes a role that precisely parallels that of the male *manang* in his confrontation with the incubus. This is seen in its simplest form in her preventative act of piercing the hands and feet of those of her own sex who have died in childbirth. But even more generally a woman's presence is thought to afford a measure of protection against the *koklir*, much as the shaman's presence affords prophylactic defence, keeping the incubus spirits at a distance. At other times, a woman may assume an active role of intervention to defeat the *koklir* precisely as the *manang* does in his *pelian*, and so destroy its menacing presence as an intruder in the human world. This is illustrated by two final traditional *koklir* accounts, both from the Saribas.

While a man and his wife were staying in a field hut, they heard the cry of the *koklir*. The man hid himself inside while the cry could be heard

outside moving in a circle around the hut. In order to save her husband, the wife built a fire on the ground in front of the entrance ladder. Presently the *koklir*, in the form of a young woman, came to the fire to warm herself. The wife approached with a knife concealed in her hand and cut her throat. As the *koklir* died, her nails grew long and her body turned into that of the *enturun* cat.

Once a man and his wife were on their way to pay their first formal visit following marriage on the wife's family (*nyundang pinang*). As they walked, they suddenly heard the voice of the *koklir* — "Kok, kok, kok . . . hai waii" — following behind them. They ran until they were exhausted, but still the *koklir* followed. At last, the husband climbed a tree and hid himself in the foliage, while his wife took a seat at its base. Presently a young woman appeared and the wife invited her to sit beside her. As they were sitting together, the wife told the woman that she would like to pick the lice from her hair. As she was picking lice, she drew a knife with her other hand, and severed the *koklir's* head. Instantly its body was transformed into that of an *enturun* cat.

In this last example the symbolic association of the demon slayer and the warrior is emphasized in the severing of the *koklir's* head. Also the occasion of the attack, during the first visit to the wife's family, associates it with a period of potential tension arising from conflicting claims to family affiliation created by marriage. Like the incubus, the slain *koklir* reassumes an animal shape, the corpse of which gives evidence of its destruction. The slaying itself recreates the *pelian bebunoh*, except that the sexual roles of the slayer and the victim are reversed. The resolution of conflict has an identical form, except that it is now a woman who becomes the anti-demonic champion, defending men against an imagined female assailant.

Through belief in the *koklir*, men in their sexual connection with women are placed under a death threat, but by its evasion aided by women, this threat is not only neutralized, but what is stressed is, on the contrary, the life solidarity of ties between men and women. The Iban are not a puritanical people who view sexuality as a generalized source of anxiety. The phallic assault of the incubus and the emasculating attack of the *koklir* represent essentially anomalous aspects of sexuality. Both are associated with the physical dangers of parturition and conflicting values attached to sexuality in social life. Their conceptualization and ritual manipulation in the Iban symbolic order is expressed so that anomaly is resolved in a way that lays ultimate stress on the positive power of human sexuality as a source of life solidarity and social continuity.

Conclusion

The concern of this paper is with the social values that invest sexual relations in Iban society and in particular with notions that sexuality is a potential source of physical and spiritual peril to the individual. The Iban do not, as we have said, view sexuality as generally endangering. Peril arises only from those aspects of sexuality that entail a fundamental conflict in moral values or the principles that order social life. Danger is conceptualized in terms of spirit belief and the basic assumption here is that the nature of this conceptualization tends to mask or resolve the fundamental conflict to which notions of peril are linked by belief.

Within contemporary social anthropology, Lévi-Strauss is the principal major figure to treat the social regulation of relationships between the sexes as a central feature of social structure (1969). As Badcock has recently observed (1975: 34), the importance of sexuality to Lévi-Strauss derives primarily from his position as an heir to the sociological tradition of Emile Durkheim. The basic tenet of this tradition is an ascription of explanatory autonomy to social phenomena. Social facts require, in Durkheim's words, explanation by reference to antecedent social facts. Thus the major question to which Lévi-Strauss addresses the opening chapters of *Les Structures Élémentaires* is that, if society is the supreme social fact in an explanatory framework, then clearly there ought to be some antecedent social fact that accounts for the existence of society itself. For Lévi-Strauss the solution is that human sexual behavior constitutes just such an original social fact. Sexuality is a natural, instinctive drive. But unlike other drives, it is also social in the sense that another person is required for sexual gratification, at least in its adult heterosexual form. Thus human sexuality is both natural and social, and becomes cultural and the original social fact as soon as it is conducted on the basis of social rules. The variability of these rules, the norms, prohibitions and prescriptions that relate to exogamy, incest and alliance, attest to their contingent, cultural status. They represent the beginnings of culture in nature (1969: 12). But for Lévi-Strauss, sexuality continues to entail a fundamental paradox. While at once the most social of all human instincts, sexuality remains, nevertheless, a natural drive, and so partially impervious to cultural regulation. Thus its expression, as Robert Murphy notes in his review of *Les Structures Élémentaires* (1970: 166), "manifests the contradictory tendencies of randomness and involution, or promiscuity and incest", that rules of alliance serve to resolve for Lévi-Strauss. At the same time, relations

between the sexes, for the same reason, retain, in Lévi-Strauss' words, an "affective richness, ardour and mystery" (1969: 496), distinct from all other human relationships.

The purpose of the present essay is to offer an explanation of the particular values ascribed to sexuality in Iban society. These values, as we have noted, tend to be linked to the procreative role of sexuality, seen both positively as a source of new life, and negatively as a source of possible death in childbirth. Negative aspects of sexuality are conceptualized, as we have seen, in terms of spiritual states or agents the actions of which provide etiological explanations of the physical dangers of childbirth. As we have argued here, notions of imperilment attach not to sexuality generally, but only to anomalous aspects of sexual relations. In a traditional society, such as that of the Iban in which infant and paranatal death are common, the most immediate source of anomaly is the commonly experienced association of parturition with premature death itself. But anomaly also reflects conflict in the social order. In this latter regard, conflict may be seen as having to do, at one level, with sexuality directly and its social regulation, at another, with the conflicting role played by sexual ties and filiation in the social system. Through notions of spirit agents, both are closely interrelated.

In the first instance, it can be argued, following Lévi-Strauss, that a situation of conflict or tension universally exists between the expression of sexuality, as a drive rooted in nature, and its social regulation and restriction to outlets defined by jural and moral norms. Iban notions of sexual peril give clear recognition to this tension. One source of imperilment is represented by sexuality outside social governance and contrary to the moral order. Most endangering, in this regard, is the threat of incest. Breach of the primary rules of incest is regarded by the Iban as universally defiling (*ngamah*); it represents a violation, not only of the human moral order, but of the natural and spiritual orders as well, and if unrepaired by ritual means, brings down upon the violators, their kindred, and possibly the entire community to which they belong, universal calamity (*kudi*) in the form of earthquakes, destruction of crops, floods, hailstorms and petrification. Major forms of incest are thought to jeopardize the beneficent fecundity of nature itself and in the past were punished by the death of the guilty pair whose blood was believed to cleanse the earth of their defilement. Secondary forms of incest (*jadi mali*) are dealt with by graded ritual fines. These neutralize the spiritual harm believed to follow from

violation of these rules. Alternatively a woman may attempt to avoid disclosure of an incestuous relationship by recourse to abortion. However, such recourse is morally reprobated and, unlike payment of ritual reparation, abortion involves supernatural danger. This danger has a more specific nature than the universal calamity that follows from major incest and is represented primarily by the foetal *buyu tempuan* spirits. Deliberate abortion is almost always associated with illegitimate sexuality, and most often with the suspicion of incest, so that in Iban thought the ill-fate of the souls of the foetal dead is linked to violation of these basic norms. Moreover, abortion severs the positive connection between sexuality and procreation. Correspondingly the souls of the foetal dead, in the form of the *buyu tempuan* spirits, are conceptualized as destroying agents present in the human midst who, as agents of infant death, jeopardize the positive fecundity of human sexual life.

Another form of menacing sexuality is represented by the incubus spirits. These spirits are associated with adultery and promiscuous sexuality, identified as a natural force, antagonistic to social norms and represented by the carnal assault of intrusive spirits of the forest and rivers. Following from Iban notions that males initiate sexual relations, promiscuous sexuality thus assumes a phallic character. Belief in the carnal attack of the incubus spirits represents, again, a threat to the fecundity of human sexual life; but, at the same time, it also reflects conflict in the Iban social order.

This brings us to our second point, that notions of sexual peril are associated not only with the nature of sexuality and the dangers of parturition, but also with underlying structural conflict, in the existence of relationships under pressure of discrepant structural principles and values. In Iban society these discrepancies center on sexual ties, marriage and filiation as they relate to the social position of women and men and to the status of the elderly. The first two are associated most directly with belief in the *koklir* and incubus spirits, the latter with the *rumah* and *tembewai* spirits and their living allies, the human *buyu*.

Relationships of marriage and filiation threaten the social position of the elderly, particularly elderly women within the *bilek* family. The elderly are compelled by age to relinquish active sexual and parental roles, the relinquishment of which poses a special threat to women because, in partial contrast to men, their most important social relationships are those based on these roles. Particularly feared in this connection are the malignant souls of the human *buyu*. Their blighted spiritual status, as we have argued, reflects their similarly anomalous social

position and diminished attachment to succeeding generations of *bilek* members. The malevolence of the human *buyu* is known only to the shaman who confronts her, not directly, but in his ritual *pelian*. Significantly the *pelian* is believed not only to remove her menacing presence from the earthly world, but is thought to free her soul from spiritual bondage. The consequence is her death and final disengagement from society. Her social position is no longer anomalous, and correspondingly death restores the normalcy of her soul and establishes it safely in the other world where she may be brought again into beneficent contact with the living.

Belief in the *koklir* and incubus spirits reflects discrepant values associated with relations between the sexes arising from the conflicting role played by marriage and filiation in Iban society. Meggitt (1964), writing of New Guinea, has pointed to a similar connection between marriage and notions of sexual peril. The situation he describes is entirely different from that of the Iban, but the contrast is consistent with his arguments and throws into clear relief the connection that exists between these notions and elements of social structure. Basically Meggitt describes a situation in which female sexuality is seen as polluting and a source of danger to men and this he associates with the marriage of agnatic clansmen to women drawn from perennially hostile, warring groups. Thus for the Mae Enga a persisting dichotomy exists between female sexual danger and extra-clan military threat and masculine purity and intra-clan military protection (1964: 218). In Iban society no such dichotomy can be drawn because of its very different structure. The basic social units are not agnatic, exogamous clans, but bilateral families whose members are recruited by both marriage and bilateral filiation. In-marrying affines are accorded identical family membership as filial members born into the *bilek*. But, as we have stressed, marriage and filiation not only provide a potential means of continuing recruitment, but also threaten the continuity of individual family groups. Thus sexual bonds and ties of procreation have an ambivalent status and carry neither an entirely positive, nor an entirely negative valuation. Iban notions of sexual peril reflect this but are presented in such a way that ambivalence is masked and their ultimately positive nature is stressed. At the same time, since those ties are traced through both men and women, ambivalence involves both sexes. In contrast to the Mae Enga, not only is female sexuality potentially imperiling but also male sexuality; thus the contrasting images of the incubus and *koklir*.

In this connection, the incubus embodies a menacing image of male sexuality, seen, in its most general sense, as endangering the positive connection between sexual bonds and successful procreation. Although this image is projected outside society, onto alien spirit assailants, it may more immediately be seen as reflecting aspects of male sexuality in conflict with female status. Confrontation with the incubus occurs, as with the human *buyu*, in the ritual *pelian* of the shaman. The male shaman, in his anti-demonic role, is the spiritual counterpart of the warrior. Warfare is the principal threat to female sexuality. But in his *pelian*, the shaman reverses the relationship and, as a champion, he vanquishes the male incubus, thus masking this underlying conflict and, by the transposition of his sexual identity, laying stress, in contrast, on the life-sustaining solidarity of sexual bonds.

The *koklir* represents a contrasting image of menacing female sexuality. Men are implicated through their sexual connection with women in the latter's death in childbirth. But, as a male phantasy, the notion of the *koklir*, again, reverses the relationship. It is not men, but women themselves who emerge in death as imperiling assailants. As agents of emasculation, the *koklir* is linked to female mockery of men, and, at the level of belief, extends the dangers of parturition to men. But the imperilment she represents is always evaded in a way which similarly resolves conflict, frequently by the intercession of a woman, who not only defeats the threat symbolically posed to men by their sex, but whose actions, as an anti-demonic champion, stress in the same way the overriding life solidarity of human sexual ties.

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NOTES

¹ I am indebted to Benedict Sandin, the former Government Ethnologist and Curator of the Sarawak Museum, for many hours of discussion of the main points and others treated in this paper. He and his wife were generous hosts to my family and myself during lengthy stays at Kerangan Pinggai in the Saribas District, where, in addition to these discussions, most of the material recorded here was collected. I wish also to thank Dr. G. N. Appell and Professor J. D. Freeman for their critical reading of earlier drafts of this paper. I alone, however, must take responsibility for its shortcomings.

To my knowledge, the only previous mention of the *koklir* in the ethnographic literature is to be found in a brief paper published in Iban and English by Benedict Sandin in the *Sarawak Gazette* (1964). Earlier Scott, in his *Dictionary of Sea Dayak* (1956: 94), described the "kuk-lir" simply as "a malignant female spirit". A more adequate definition, generally consistent with our discussion here (cf. note 10, below), is given by Howell and Bailey (1900: 80).

- ² During his initial, and now classic study of the Iban in 1950, Freeman (1967: 318) calculated the combined rate of still-birth and childhood mortality among the Baleh Iban of Sungai Sut, Sarawak, at .47, meaning that just under half of all births terminate in miscarriage or paranatal death or are followed by the loss of the newborn infant within early childhood. Similarly, 90 per cent of the women whose maternal histories Freeman recorded experienced miscarriage or lost at least one child before the end of their childbearing years (1967: 318 fn). Although currently available data suggest a substantial decline in mortality rates (cf. Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, 1976: 55), there is little reason to doubt that Freeman's figures are generally representative of traditional Iban populations. More specifically, they indicate that miscarriage and infant death were common under traditional conditions and were experienced by most Iban women.

- ³ Freeman writes that the Baleh Iban identify the incubus spirits exclusively with the *antu buyu*. This is clearly not the case among the Saribas Iban.

The *antu pala*, however, only rarely figure as incubi. One instance occurred three years ago in the Kalaka District, when after a *bebunoh antu* rite was held, in which the shaman used a blowpipe to ritually slay an incubus, a dart was later found lodged in one of the trophy skulls hanging over the longhouse gallery. Its presence was seen as confirming the skull's identity as the source of the molesting incubus. Cases of this sort are highly unusual, however, although in most conservative longhouses where old trophy skulls are preserved, these receive periodic ritual attention, partly to prevent them from assuming a demonic character. Like the animals more commonly associated with incubus spirits, trophy heads have also a clear symbolic association with male sexuality (cf. Freeman 1975).

- ⁴ Freeman (1967: 318-19) reports that the Baleh Iban commonly believe that the incubus fathers the child it destroys. This is not generally the case in Saribas. However, instances exist in which spirits are believed to have procreated through sexual congress with mortal women. One example is Menggin, father of the major cultural hero Seri Gunting, who is said to have been born of a union between his mother Remi and a spirit, Rukok or Damu. But such births are regarded as miraculous, whereas incubus malevolency, although it involves a spiritual attacker, is considered to be an ordinary hazard that all women face.

There are exceptions, however. At Tanjong longhouse in Ulu Paku, there lives a middle-aged spinster who, over a number of years, has suffered recurrent erotic nightmares. A year ago she experienced a false pregnancy and was taken to the Divisional hospital where an X-ray disclosed the cause to be a growth in her uterus. She returned and the object was "delivered" by a local abortionist. In this case, its non-human form was taken as evidence of demonic paternity and it was widely accepted that the incubus had impregnated the woman. Later, while I was living at the adjacent longhouse at Kerangan Pinggai, she was again visited by the incubus. This time a shaman was called from Rimbas who identified her *tunang* as a water spirit, or *antu ai*, and preparations were being made to exorcize the spirit at the river bank in front of the longhouse when I left the field at the end of June, 1977.

- ⁵ It is thought that the *rumah* and *tembewai* spirits gradually desert *tembewai* sites once the former longhouse structure is totally dismantled or rots away. For this reason, and also in order to salvage still serviceable building materials, abandoned houses are customarily pulled down by the Saribas Iban.
- ⁶ The complex symbolism of the nocturnal *engkerawai* tree wasp is relevant here, particularly in connection with expressions of sexual conflict discussed

later in this paper. Mature wasps are considered to be female (*indu*). However, they are capable of inflicting a painful sting, which has aggressive male connotations, and their behavior of posting a single guard at the entrance to their nest and when the hive is disturbed of swarming in a solid mass to its defense is frequently cited as a model of the ideal behavior of able-bodied men of vigilance and steadfast rallying to the support of kindred and community. Thus the symbolic status of the *engkerawai* wasp is clearly anomalous: a female exemplar of assertive masculine virtue. As we shall see presently, its anomalous status exactly parallels that of the shaman in his role as anti-demonic champion. Also, it might be added that the human relationship with the *engkerawai* wasp is like that of the *antu buyu* with mankind. Just as the *antu buyu* raid the human longhouse to steal the souls of the young, the Iban ordinarily ignore the adult wasps, but raid their nests for eggs and larval young which they eat.

- ⁷ Belief in the existence of the human *buyu* has not been described previously and may be present only in the Saribas and Kalaka areas. That the belief is well-developed here might be attributed to the fact that the Saribas Iban are among the most sedentary Iban groups in Sarawak. Many local communities have been in continuous existence for a number of centuries. In contrast to better known pioneering groups, such as the Baleh Iban studied by Freeman (cf. 1970), populations are more stable, and the inter-generational continuity of longhouse communities and families is far less often interrupted by emigration and dispersal into new areas of settlement. Thus the underlying conflict reflected in this belief may be more pronounced here than among other Iban groups.
- ⁸ In very exceptional instances pre-pubescent girls may become human *buyu*. During the 1950's one such case attracted widespread notice in the region when a young girl at Bangkit, Saribas, avowed to having been a *buyu* while between the ages of 6 and 12. She later disclaimed any further connection with the *buyu* spirits and announced to her family that on a number of occasions she had previously joined the malevolent souls of elderly women in nightly attacks upon the young. She subsequently married and became a practising Christian. What is notable here is that the malevolent actions of the girl's soul are believed to have ceased as soon as she reached sexual maturity. Until then her sexual status was essentially equivalent to that of the aged. This is the only instance known in Saribas in which an individual confessed to having been a *buyu*, and the girl, in this case, claims to have consciously experienced her soul's actions in dreams. Her case clearly points up the significance of dreams in shaping personal conceptions of the supernatural. While set in an idiom of *buyu* belief, these dreams clearly depart from generally held notions regarding the human *buyu*.
- ⁹ The *tempuan* is particularly associated with women because it is here that rice is pounded, a task performed only by women. For the same reason, it is also associated with the *buyu* spirits. Also as noted later on, the *tempuan* is the place at which the *buyu* spirits, including incubi, are most often evoked and slain by the shamans during the rites of *bebunoh antu*.
- ¹⁰ Howell and Bailey write that the *koklir* may be "a deceased woman of notorious character", as well as "one who has died in child-birth" (1900: 80). "A woman of notorious character" has overtones of Victorian morality that are essentially alien to the Iban. I have never encountered among Saribas informants a person who regards the *koklir* as anything other than the ghost of a woman who has died in childbirth. It is possible that Rev. Howell was influenced in his views by his missionary background. On the other hand, he

is our most reliable source among the earlier generation of observers regarding Iban belief, and I suspect what he and Bailey were referring to here is the ambivalent attitude the Iban hold toward women who have died in childbirth. As we have noted, their ill-fate is often attributed to a suspected spiritual blemish or negligence of ritual, and, no matter how upstanding such women may have been, their subsequent behavior, as a *koklir*, is felt to bring shame and discredit upon their families.

- 11 The requirement of disclosure applies primarily to women who are unwed and its violation constitutes a serious ritual offence (cf. Heppell 1975: 135). As we stressed earlier, the danger of illegitimate sexuality is especially connected with procreation and arises in this instance, not from illicit sexual relations themselves, but from the woman's state of pregnancy. It is due to this state that she constitutes a source of spiritual danger.
- 12 This portion of the *sabak* is taken from the richly detailed Saribas text recorded by Sandin (1968, see also 1966). The *sabak* is the basic source of Iban eschatological belief. This version was recorded in the mid-1950's from Suri, the most famous Paku *tukang sabak* of recent times. The *sabak* tradition of Suri was transmitted through her pupil Dujong to Belayau ak. Achun of Samu longhouse, who is today the principal senior *tukang sabak* in the Paku. Suri and Dujong are both dead but the basic *sabak* tradition remains essentially unaltered. The translation is my own based on a considerably looser translation contained in Sandin 1966.
- 13 There are rare exceptions. Again, these occur primarily in connection with dreams. One of the most individual I recorded involves a woman of Ulu Paku and was told to me by her son. The incident occurred a few days before the woman gave birth to my informant's younger sister. At the time there was thought to be a small party of *koklir* lingering about a fruit tree that overlooked the longhouse. A major celebration was in progress and the woman, although in an advanced stage of pregnancy, came down from the longhouse to watch the cockfighting contests that were being held on the open ground (*menalam*) in front of the village and to chat with her friends. She was apparently seen by the *koklir*, for that night a group of women appeared in her dreams dressed in skirts made of light flour-sacking material. They explained that this was the dress of the *koklir*. They offered the woman a skirt and invited her to join their sisterhood. She resisted. They caught hold of her and tried to force her into the skirt. Struggling, she awoke in fright. My informant added that if the women had succeeded in getting his mother into the skirt, she would have died during the delivery of his sister and her soul would thereupon have joined the band of *koklir*.

This example is interesting in showing how, through dreams, conventional elements of belief may be given an entirely personal construction. It is ordinarily believed that the *koklir* threaten only men. For this reason women are able to shield men without danger to themselves. But in this instance the dreamer herself is attacked. Reflecting her sex and personal condition, the *koklir* is transformed in her dreams into a causal agent of maternal death. This represents a complete departure from conventional male belief. Moreover, the elements of dream attack following from notice having been drawn to the victim are conventional features, not of *koklir*, but of incubus malevolency. But here the attack is given a highly individual interpretation. The dreamer is invited to quit her role as wife and mother to join a sisterhood pledged to hostility towards men. Acceptance means death; the dreamer refuses and is attacked. The notion expressed here of a malevolent alliance with demonic spirits is like that of the human *buyu*, except that the latter

have been forced by old age to relinquish their womanly roles, while the dreamer in this instance is asked to do so by accepting death. Although this dream has a highly personal character, the underlying notion contained in conventional *koklir* belief, the association of peril with sexual hostility, and its opposite, positive sexual ties, with life solidarity, is, nonetheless, present, although expressed in very different terms.

- ¹⁴ Although there may be others, I know of only one generally accepted instance of a death attributed to the *koklir*. This occurred in the early 1930's, not in Saribas, but in an immigrant Saribas community settled in the lower Rajang near Sarikei in the Sixth Division. The man, whose funeral my informant's father attended, was thought to have died of a swollen scrotum (*sup pelir*) attributed to urination when a *koklir* was abroad.
- ¹⁵ *Pencha* is strongly involved with magic. It is notable in this connection that *pencha* training is generally conducted in a secluded place where it will not be witnessed, particularly by women whose presence is felt to render this magic ineffective. On the other hand, magical prowess in martial arts, as also in warfare, is thought to make a man sexually attractive to women.
- ¹⁶ I have recorded an almost identical variant from Sungai Menuan, Kapit District, Seventh Division of Sarawak (Sather 1977: 199). See also Sandin (1964: 223-4).
- ¹⁷ The *pontianak* is similarly believed to be the ghost of a woman who has died in childbirth. But her malevolency is more generalized, and is not exclusively directed against men.
- ¹⁸ There is, in fact, a fourth class, the *manang mengeris*, which consists, not of *manang* proper, however, but of laymen who have received instruction and are ready for ordination into the grade of "raw" or novice *manang*.
- ¹⁹ Actual *manang bali* are exceedingly rare, although of great importance to Iban conceptions of shamanism. According to Benedict Sandin, only one *manang bali* has been consecrated in Saribas in the last eight to ten generations. This was Manang Chellong of Maja near the present Betong bazaar, who, on the basis of extrapolation from the *tusut* genealogies, lived probably in the early or mid-1700's.
- ²⁰ Freeman makes the same point (1967: 340). The Iban *manang* has generally an ambiguous sexual identity. Aside from the association of shamanism with transvestism, male shamans are often believed to lack male potency (Sutlive 1976). In the past shamans were not expected to take part in warfare, although they might do so, and a few exceptional *manang* established reputations as both warriors and shamans. The male shaman who acts as a demon slayer is a partial exception and his role is seen in strongly masculine terms. It needs to be added, however, that there remains, nonetheless, an ambiguity in his sexual identification. Theoretically, and to some extent ideally, the role of demon slayer is also associated with the transvestite *manang bali*. But more importantly, as we shall see presently, a transposition of sexual identity occurs during the *pelian bebunoh antu*, which, I am arguing here, is crucial to the symbolic meaning of the rite in giving ritual resolution to a fundamental conflict in Iban sexual roles.

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