Ritual Retellings

Series: Epistemologies of Healing

General Editors: David Parkin and Elisabeth Hsu: both are at ISCA, Oxford

This series publishes monographs and edited volumes on indigenous (so-called traditional) medical knowledge and practice, alternative and complementary medicine, and ethnobiological studies that relate to health and illness. The emphasis of the series is on the way indigenous epistemologies inform healing, against a background of comparison with other practices, and in recognition of the fluidity between them.

Volume 1
Conjuring Hope: Healing and Magic in Contemporary Russia
Galina Lindquist

Volume 2
Precious Pills: Medicine and Social Change among Tibetan Refugees in India
Audrey Prost

Volume 3
Working with Spirit: Experiencing Izangoma Healing in Contemporary South Africa
Jo Thobeka Wreford

Volume 4
Dances with Spiders: Crisis, Celebrity and Celebration in Southern Italy
Karen Lüdtke

Volume 5
'The Land Is Dying': Contingency, Creativity and Conflict in Western Kenya
Paul Wenzel Geissler and Ruth J. Prince

Volume 6
Plants, Health and Healing: On the Interface of Ethnobotany and Medical Anthropology
Edited by Elisabeth Hsu and Stephen Harris

Volume 7
Morality, Hope and Grief: Anthropologies of AIDS in Africa
Edited by Hansjörg Dilger and Ute Luig

Volume 8
Folk Healing and Health Care Practices in Britain and Ireland: Stethoscopes, Wands and Crystals
Edited by Ronnie Moore and Stuart McClean

Volume 9
Moral Power: The Magic of Witchcraft
Koen Stroeken

Volume 10
Medicine Between Science and Religion: Explorations on Tibetan Grounds
Edited by Vincanne Adams, Mona Schrempf, and Sienna R. Craig

Volume 11
Fortune and the Cursed: The Sliding Scale of Time in Mongolian Divination
Katherine Swancutt

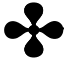
Volume 12
Manufacturing Tibetan Medicine: The Creation of an Industry and the Moral Economy of Tibetanness
Martin Saxer

Volume 13
The Body in Balance: Humoral Medicines in Practice
Edited by Peregrine Horden and Elisabeth Hsu

Volume 14
Asymmetrical Conversations: Contestations, Circumventions, and the Blurring of Therapeutic Boundaries
Edited by Harish Naraindas, Johannes Quack, and William S. Sax

Volume 15
Healing Roots: Anthropology in Life and Medicine
Julie Laplante

Volume 16
Ritual Retellings: Luangan Healing Performances through Practice
Isabell Herrmans



Ritual Retellings

Luangan Healing Performances through Practice

Isabell Herrmans

berghahn
NEW YORK • OXFORD
www.berghahnbooks.com

First published in 2015 by
Berghahn Books
www.berghahnbooks.com

© 2015 Isabell Herrmans

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purposes of criticism and review, no part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without written permission of the publisher.

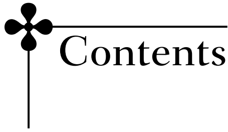
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Herrmans, Isabell, author.
Ritual retellings: Luangan healing performances through practice / Isabell Herrmans.
pages cm. — (Epistemologies of healing; volume 16)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-78238-564-6 (hardback) — ISBN 978-1-78238-565-3 (ebook) 1. Dayak (Indonesian people)–Rites and ceremonies. 2. Healing–Indonesia–Kalimantan. 3. Traditional medicine–Indonesia–Kalimantan. 4. Ethnology–Indonesia–Kalimantan. I. Title.
DS646.32.D9H47 2015
305.8009598'3–dc23 2014033540

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78238-564-6 (hardback)
EISBN: 978-1-78238-565-3 (institutional ebook)



Contents

List of Figures vi

Acknowledgments vii

Introduction 1

1. Luangan Lives: The Order and Disorder of Improvisation and Practice 25

2. Representing Unpredictability 71

3. Making Tactile: *Ganti Diri* Figures and the Magic of Concreteness 91

4. The Uncertainty of Spirit Negotiation 125

5. So that Steam Rises: Ritual Bathing as Depersonalization 177

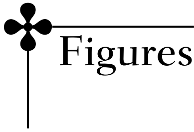
6. It Comes Down to One Origin: Reenacting Mythology and the Human-Spirit Relationship in Ritual 217

Conclusion 254

Glossary 264

References 271

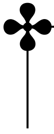
Index 287



Figures

All images by the author or by her fieldwork partner Kenneth Sillander

1.1 Map of Southeast Borneo 31
1.2 Village longhouse surrounded by "development houses." Sambung Village 41
1.3 *Belian bawo* performance 50
1.4 *Belian sentiu* performance 52
2.1 "Dressed up, perfumed, made-up." Tak Lodot, Tak Dinas, Nen Bujok, Nen Bola, and Mancan 73
3.1 Rice paste figurine (*ganti diri*) depicting patient 93
3.2 Spirit houses 94
3.3 A *belian* holding some *ganti diri* sticks while curing a patient 102
3.4 Spitting on the *ganti diri* sticks 104
3.5 Images of *juata*, the water spirit, in its different manifestations 106
3.6 Sleeping at a ritual 114
4.1 Playing the *kelentangen* during *buntang* 127
4.2 Soul search ship (*sampan benawa*) and soul house (*blai juus*) 135
4.3 Mancan's peculiar *ganti diri* figures 141
4.4 Ma Putup as *belian sentiu* 142
4.5 Kakah Ramat (beneath sarong cloth) traveling to the *seniang*, confronting Ma Bari's fate 159
4.6 Mancan possessed by a Javanese *belian* 165
4.7 Kakah Ramat embodying Jarung 167
5.1 Participants in bathing ritual seated in the flower grove (*baang bunge*) of Sembulan 181
5.2 Kakah Ramat bathing people outdoors at *balei naiyu* during *buntang* for Ma Bari 204



Acknowledgments

This book has been long in the making. Like the journey of *belian* curing which it is about, the process toward its completion has followed a meandering and often ramifying path. Along the way significant political and environmental changes have occurred: Indonesia has left the New Order era behind and entered an era of reformation and democratization; the narrow forest trails along which I first walked in 1992 to reach what later was to become my field site are now roads, some even paved, and recently large parts of the rainforests encircling central Luangan villages have, to both my regret and that of many Luangans, been converted into oil palm plantations.

Writing the book would not have been possible if it was not for the advice and inspiration received from numerous people that I have encountered at different steps of this journey, or the financial support of many foundations. I would like to thank them all here. I have shared all parts of the journey, from fieldwork through the process of writing the book, with my partner, fellow anthropologist Kenneth Sillander. Sometimes it is hard to say where his input ends and mine begins and my gratitude to him is beyond words.

Many of the people to whom my greatest thanks are due sadly passed away before this book was completed. I would like to dedicate the book to them, and especially the many *belian* curers who so generously shared their knowledge with me. Without the late *belian* Kakah Ramat, who seemed to enjoy telling us myths and chants as much as we enjoyed listening to them, this book would not have been the same. The near-daily discussions with him during fieldwork on all things ritual have served as my basic guide to *belian* curing and Luangan tradition. Besides Kakah Ramat I would also like to thank all other ritual specialists who shared their knowledge with us, among them especially Tak Ramat, Ma Buno, Ma Putup, Ma Sarakang, Mancan, Ma Dengu, Nen Bai, Tak Dinas, Ma Lombang,

Ma Kerudot, Ma Joke, Nen Tampung, Nen Bola, and Ma Beliai. Besides them, I am especially indebted to the late Tak Ningin and Ma Bari who took us into their family, allowed us to live in the village longhouse and shared their sparse resources with us throughout our fieldwork. Special thanks are also due to the schoolteacher Thomas who helped us with translating myths and chants whenever we visited Benangin on the Teweh River. Lemanius, a death ritual specialist from the village of Lawarang in the upper Teweh region, was also a major source of information on Luangan life and ritual, and he generously allowed me to copy his manuscript (1996) on Luangan myth and religion. The late *kepala adat besar* and *wara* of Lambing, Mas Arsa Muda Idjau Duk, allowed us to stay in his house whenever we passed by on our way to or from Samarinda, and shared his countless stories and knowledge of Benuaq ritual, myth, and history with us. In Palangkaraya, capital of Central Kalimantan, the members of the Hindu Kaharingan Council, and Mantikei R. Hanyi in particular, welcomed us with utmost hospitality, guided us around, and allowed us to participate in their ceremonies.

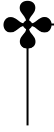
Financial support for our fieldwork was provided by the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies and the Finnish Cultural Foundation. I am grateful to the Sasakawa Young Leaders' Fellowship Fund, the Oskar Öflund Foundation, the Ella and Georg Ehrnrooth Foundation, the Alfred Kordelin Foundation, the Nordenskiöld Foundation, Vetenskapsstiftelsen för kvinnor, and the University of Helsinki, for supporting my writing.

The Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) provided me with a research permit. Professor Parsudi Suparlan at Universitas Indonesia acted as local sponsor of the research. For practical assistance in helping me to obtain the research permit and for encouragement as well as valuable information on Borneo, I am greatly indebted to Bernard Sellato. Joseph Weinstock likewise generously shared his knowledge on the Luangan region before I started my fieldwork.

The final form of this book was influenced by critiques and comments generously provided by several readers. I am especially grateful for the comments provided by Clifford Sather, Peter Metcalf, Marina Roseman, Timo Kaartinen, Karen Armstrong, Jukka Siikala, Jane Margold, Louise Klemperer Sather, Pascal Couderc, Elisabeth Hsu, an anonymous reader of the *Journal of Ritual Studies*, and the three anonymous reviewers of Berghahn Books. I am also grateful

for comments and encouragement by colleagues and students from the Social and Cultural Anthropology department at the University of Helsinki.

Permission to reprint a revised version of my article "Representing Unpredictability: An Analysis of a Curing Ritual among the East Kalimantan Luangan," previously published in the *Journal of Ritual Studies* (vol. 18, 2004: 50–61), in chapter 2, has been granted by the co-editors of the *Journal*, Dr. Pamela J. Stewart and Prof. Andrew Strathern. A version of chapter 3, "Making Tactile: *Ganti Diri* Figures and the Magic of Concreteness among the Luangan Dayaks," appeared in the *Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* (vol. 30, 2005: 44–67), as well as in the *Borneo Research Bulletin* (vol. 36, 2005: 108–138).



Introduction

> And yet, can the knowledge deriving from reason even begin to compare with knowledge perceptible by sense?
>
> —Louis Aragon (1994: 9)

This book is a study of the emergent and variable character of ritual performances for healing and how they enable ongoing negotiation of participants' life conditions. It is an ethnography of *belian*, a lively and unobjectified tradition of shamanistic curing rituals which are performed by the Luangans, an indigenous population of shifting cultivators of Indonesian Borneo. In *belian* rituals one or several shamans negotiate with and present offerings to a variety of spirits in order to cure illness and improve well-being more generally. Ranging from sleepy low-key affairs involving small circles of close kin and neighbors to festive crowd-seizing community rituals, these events interpunctuate work and other activities on an almost daily basis and provide principal occasions during which the generally dispersed swidden-cultivating communities gather.

The principal purpose of the book is to investigate the formation and significance of these highly popular rituals in practice. It explores how *belian* rituals concretely operate in the variable contexts of their performance, and what they do for particular people in particular circumstances. Departing from conventional conceptions of rituals as ethereal liminal or insulated traditional domains, the book demonstrates the importance of understanding rituals as emergent within their specific historical and social settings, and highlights the irreducibility of lived reality to epistemological certainty. Focusing on how the *belian* rituals unfold in everyday life, it explores how different aspects of Luangan "reality"—social relationships, existential and political concerns, ontology, cosmology, etc.—are portrayed and shaped through ritual representations—in chants

and visual imagery—and how the rituals' objectives and capacity to influence are enabled by what I call the "openness between reality and representations," the dialectical, two-way relationship between these aspects of reality, and their expression in ritual media.

I will begin my exploration of *belian* rituals by presenting a short vignette which illustrates some of their prominent characteristics, such as their frequency, integration with everyday life, and what might perhaps be called their "everydayness"—their informal and habitual nature. This vignette also serves to illustrate that the principal strategy through which I have chosen to approach my topic is by way of providing concrete examples. Each chapter in the book presents a case study in the form of a narrative account of a particular ritual performance and some related life events, and describes the importance of these performances and events for the particular people who were most centrally involved in them. This strategy of approaching my material through concrete, situationally contextualized examples and concomitant analysis is motivated by a fundamental fieldwork experience, namely, that the *belian* rituals were thoroughly shaped by their organization and significance in practice: by the form and circumstances of their enactment, and by their role in the personal lives of the participants. In particular, it serves to evoke the rituals' situationally emergent character, as well as other associated characteristics such as their loosely framed and open-ended nature, and to explore how these qualities affect the appropriation of ritual representations and facilitate the rituals' capacity to influence people's life conditions.

* * *

Navigating the darkness of a moonless night in March 1996, lighting my way with a flickering torch, watchful of water buffaloes roaming free in the village, I follow the sound of drums (*tuung*) to Ma Kelamo's house. As I get closer, the sound of drums gets louder and is accompanied by the reverberating sound of a xylophone (*kelentangen*), the melody revealing that a *belian* ritual in the *sentiu* style is being performed. As I enter the small modern-style house, I am met by the sharp light of a kerosene lamp and the pungent scent of *gaharu* incense (*Aquilaria* sp.), emerging from among the porcelain bowls of offerings arranged on the floor in the middle of the room. Next to the offerings, Mancan, a *belian* curer in his mid-thirties, is

dancing with a small bowl on his head, containing rice and a lighted candle, chanting to invoke his spirit familiars. Lida, an eight-year-old girl suffering from flu, is lying on a rattan mat in a corner of the room, half-asleep. She is surrounded by her father and mother, who play the drums, her older sister Ena and her sister's newly wed husband Mohar, as well as Nen Bai, a female neighbor, who is playing the xylophone. Lida, a much loved daughter who usually lives with an aunt in the neighboring village where she attends her first year at school, has been brought home for the ritual, a rather small event, arranged to maintain her well-being as much as to cure illness.

As I sit down on the floor, joining in the small talk of those present, distractedly observing Mancan's movements as he dances, trying to grasp the words of his chant, there is suddenly a sound of another drumbeat, emerging from Kakah Unsir's house which is situated opposite Ma Kelamo's, just a few meters away, across the village path. Apparently, and to the surprise of at least some of us, another *belian* ritual is being performed there. Jokingly, Ma Kelamo, Nen Lida and Nen Bai join in the rhythm coming from next door, playing the drums and the xylophone faster and louder, laughing as the beat from the other house increases in pace and force in response to their own. The penetrating voice of Ma Putup, the shaman next door, can be discerned through the drumming, causing Nen Lida and Nen Bai to declare that they are frightened of his strange and curious spirit familiars, called in a language unintelligible to them.

Mancan finishes early, and as he blows on his bear-tooth whistle as a sign of closing up, I excuse myself and rush over to Kakah Unsir's house. Ma Putup, a man in his sixties who has just married into the village and who is known for his peculiar style of curing in which he summons a variety of spirits from all over the island and beyond, often in foreign sounding names and words, stops in the middle of a sentence to welcome me. He points out that he is pleased about my presence, the presence of an anthropologist somehow adding to the authority of the occasion, along with the strange and powerful assemblage of spirit beings congregated. He then resumes his chanting, continuing from where he just left off. The people present in Kakah Unsir's extended-family house (*lou*) sit scattered around the room, plaiting rattan baskets, chewing betel, smoking, playing cards, chatting about everyday affairs, with some people taking a nap on the floor. The objective of this ritual, eclectically combining

the *belian sentiu* and *belian bawo* shamanic traditions, is to cure Kakah Unsir, who is said to be tired due to old age, and Milu, his granddaughter, who suffers from a stomach-ache. Ma Putup takes turns attending to the two patients, and addressing the various spirit familiars (*mulung*) and malevolent spirits (*blis*) invoked with offerings and requests of either assistance or withdrawal. As this is the first evening of a several-day long ritual, and as word of it has not yet been spread widely, people being away on their swidden fields as it is harvest time, the event draws only a rather small audience, mostly consisting of members of Kakah Unsir's extended family. A couple of hours later, as the ritual finishes for the evening, I join the other participants in eating the variety of rice flour cakes (*okan penyewaka*) and small pieces of grilled chicken that are offered as rewards to the spirits during the ritual, before returning home to sleep in the village longhouse (*lou solai*), my principal residence during my fieldwork.

The Frequency of *Belian*

Attending *belian* rituals was a major experience of my fieldwork, conducted intermittently between 1993 and 2011, and, after a while, an unexceptional and rather mundane occurrence, part of the expected course of events. In fact, it was *belian* rituals, and the popularity of these rituals, that first attracted me to do fieldwork in Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo), and to do it among the Luangans rather than among some other Dayak (indigenous non-Muslim) group, so in a respect this was not unexpected, but anticipated.[1] My initial interest for the subject arose during a holiday trip to the middle Mahakam region in the province of East Kalimantan in 1991, which I made with my partner, fellow anthropologist Kenneth Sillander. Visiting a predominantly Christian Luangan village, we stumbled upon a *belian* curing ritual late one night as we were about to go to sleep. No one had mentioned that there would be a ritual in the village that evening. In fact, the village head had spent much of the day emphasizing how devoted they were as Protestant Christians, how they even had stopped smoking as a consequence. Thus I was utterly surprised as the sound of drums led our way to a house filled to the brim with people, with a shaman chanting and dancing in their midst, spinning around rapidly while shaking heavy brass bracelets. I was immediately drawn in by the music, the scent of incense, and the

simultaneously dramatic and laid-back atmosphere. Providing a vivid expression of a vital shamanistic tradition, maintained, in this particular case, despite an apparently strong commitment to Christianity, the event continued to fascinate me long after and motivated me to start exploring the ethnographic literature on Borneo.

As a result, Kenneth and I set out the next summer on a two-month trip to southeast Borneo, with the objective of possibly finding a future field site (Kenneth was at that time attracted to Borneo primarily by its ethnic complexity). During this trip we visited several Dayak groups—among them the Siang, Murung, Ot Danum, and Luangan—on the upper Barito River and the eastern part of the mountainous area of the Barito-Mahakam watershed that forms the boundary between the provinces of East and Central Kalimantan. This time again it was our encounter with Luangan rituals that made the strongest impression on us, and it provided a decisive incentive for us to choose the Luangan area as a field site.[2] As we traveled through the central Luangan area, walking from village to village on a long-used footpath connecting Central and East Kalimantan, starting from the village of Lampeong in the subdistrict of Gunung Purei in Central Kalimantan, and leading into the Bentian Besar subdistrict in East Kalimantan, there were *belian* rituals performed in almost every village we stayed in, most of them small family affairs, curing rituals sponsored by individual households, but also, in one case, a large community ritual (*nalin taun*), at the time reaching its finale after weeks of ritual activity.

This rather extraordinary ritual activity continued during our main fieldwork in 1993 and 1996–1997. In broad statistical terms, there was a *belian* ritual going on every second night of the fieldwork, and sometimes, as in the event recounted earlier, several at the same time. As the rituals typically lasted into the middle of the night or even until morning, and larger *belian* rituals also featured activities in the daytime, I spent a large proportion of my time in the field observing *belian* rituals. Most Luangans also took part in rituals very frequently, although no one, of course, attended every ritual arranged, and few as many as Kenneth and I did. Remarkably many Luangans were also trained shamans themselves. In the small village of about ninety inhabitants in which the rituals performed by Mancan and Ma Putup recounted in the vignette above took place—where we did the larger part of our fieldwork—there were

fifteen practicing *belian* (the person officiating for these rituals is referred to by the same term that designates the ritual), most of whom performed on a regular basis. In addition to these shamans, others were invited as guest performers from neighboring villages, and occasionally from more faraway places. Although ritual activity and the number of practicing *belian* relative to the total population may have been extraordinarily high in this village at this particular time, it was very high in many other upriver non-Christian Luangan villages as well. Providing a characterization of one such village, a woman who introduced me to it told me in Indonesian that they had "*belian terus*," arranged *belian* rituals incessantly. She did so expressing mixed feelings of pride and embarrassment, as the frequency of rituals, from an outsider's perspective, could be seen as an expression of both backwardness and spiritual power.

My most recent follow-up visits to the field area in 2007 and 2011 have showed that the popularity of *belian* curing has remained nearly undiminished so far among central Luangans. In the village where I did most of my fieldwork in the late 1990s, however, most of the older shamans have died (and, regrettably, quite a few younger ones as well), creating heavy pressure on those left behind. During a *belian buntang* family ritual performed in the late Kakah Unsir's house in 2011, the shaman Ma Kerudot held a speech in which he complained that he had been performing as *belian* for forty days in a row, officiating for four different rituals without any rest in between. He needed to tend to his fields as well, he pointed out, urging people to appoint other shamans besides him. It seems that there are currently less people willing to become shamans, even though the demand for *belian* still persists pretty much undiminished. The *belian* rituals themselves have also remained basically unchanged in terms of style, purpose, and duration during the twenty years I have experience of them, at least in those villages which I know the best. Exemplifying this continuity, both the format of, and the composition of the participants in the particular ritual performed by Ma Kerudot were virtually identical to another *buntang* ritual that I witnessed in 1996, as were the reasons for arranging it (listlessness and persistent minor illness among the core members of the sponsoring extended family, and concern with its standing relative to those of others in the village).

Even though central Luangan ritual activity may be uncommonly high in comparative perspective—a condition enabled by an unusu-

ally low degree of conversion to Christianity and a relative remoteness from larger government centers—there are indications that such a popularity of shamanic curing rituals may not have been exceptional in Borneo in a historical perspective. Indeed, similar rituals seem to have been fairly common among several groups of Dayaks, before many of them converted to Christianity a few decades ago. Douglas Miles (1966: 3) notes that there were seances arranged nearly every week among the Ngaju during the time of his fieldwork, one ceremony giving rise to another, while H.S. Morris (1997: 6) observes that "almost every night there were ceremonies held to cure illness" among the Melanau in the 1950s. Peter Metcalf (2010: 237) points out that among the Berawan in the 1970s "there were half a dozen active [shamans] at Long Teru, and when the house was full, there were sessions on many evenings, and occasionally, two or three going on simultaneously." In the same vein, Anna Tsing (1988: 830) notes that "rarely a week goes by in a Meratus community without a shamanic curing ceremony."

The persisting frequency of curing rituals among the Luangans—remarked on both by their neighbors and themselves—intrigued me from early on, all the more so as the literature on those Borneo peoples who, like the Luangans, practice secondary mortuary rituals, has paid considerable attention to these practices, while largely neglecting curing rituals.[3] Certain aspects related to the performance of *belian* rituals, such as their openness and flexibility—eclectically combining the new with the old and the local with the foreign—as well as the ease with which rituals tended to blend with each other and with everyday life, questioning conventional conceptions of ritual, only served to trigger my interest in *belian* and eventually came to define the theme of my research.

The question of why *belian* rituals are so frequent is important for this study. However, rather than being concerned with the somewhat unproductive question of whether or not their importance among the Luangans is unique—which the available evidence indeed seems to suggest it is not—I am interested in what prompts their indisputable Luangan appeal, in what motivates the Luangans to practice these rituals, even while they simultaneously, in some respects, work to marginalize them. In other words, I am interested in the significance of the *belian* rituals from the Luangan perspective and, more particularly, in how their form and content reflect or reproduce this

significance and thus contribute to their appeal and frequency. As with Sherry Ortner's study of Nepalese Sherpa rituals, this entails an interest in "what ritual does … as a certain sort of event and experience for the society and the people" (1978: 4). How does the *belian* ritual, as a specific configuration of social practice and symbolic representation, influence Luangans in their life-worlds and social environment? How does the distinctive manner in which *belian* is typically performed and experienced by ritual participants potentially contribute to this? In particular, how do such prominent features of Luangan rituals as their often situationally emergent and open-ended, negotiable qualities and their practical constitution affect this process? And, on the other hand, what is the role of their "everydayness"—their habitual, tactile appropriation, and their non-objectified character—in this connection?

Ritualization, Practice, and Framing

Modern health care was still largely absent in the area where I did fieldwork—and, until recently, in much of Kalimantan—so this is obviously an important factor contributing to the popularity of *belian* curing. For this reason, among other things, infant mortality was high, and during my fieldwork people often died of what, from the viewpoint of modern medicine, could appear as unnecessary causes, including malaria, tuberculosis, gastrointestinal diseases, and bacterial skin infections. But taking into account the fact that *belian* rituals were often arranged even when no direct medical need appeared to be present, and notwithstanding, in some cases, concurrent medicinal treatment—or neglect of such treatment despite its availability—this explanation is clearly insufficient (cf. Hoskins 1996). Even more basically, it is insufficient for the reason that illness is defined very broadly among Luangans, and the field of application of these rituals even more broadly.

A principal way in which I will approach the above-mentioned concerns of this study is by presenting an ethnography of ritualization. This is to say that I intend to account for the popularity and distinctive characteristics of *belian* rituals by analyzing them in the context of their initiation, in terms of how they represent responses to specific or general concerns in the Luangans' social and cultural environment and how they as creative strategies act upon

and reshape this environment. I use the term "ritualization" loosely in the sense that it has been developed by Catherine Bell (1992). Ritualization, in her practice theory-based understanding, refers to a special form of strategic action which "people engage in … as a practical way of dealing with some specific circumstances" (1992: 92). Bell prefers to talk about ritualization, as opposed to ritual, to emphasize that it should not be studied as a separate reality, apart from the concrete social settings in which it is articulated and juxtaposed with other forms of action and various everyday and political concerns. In her view, "ritual should be analyzed and understood in its real context, which is the full spectrum of ways of acting within any given culture, not as some a priori category of action" (1997: 81). In this view, understanding rituals requires looking at what they *mean* in terms of how they are perceived and function in *practice*, that is, in terms of how the sponsors, officiants, and other participants experience, understand, and are affected by them, prior to, during, and after arranging them, and with a view to how this complex relationship between rituals and ritual participants is influenced by the latter's social relations, cultural understandings, and material life conditions.

However, at the same time as the ritualization concept highlights the fact that ritual is indissolubly linked with everyday life, it also stresses, like most approaches to ritual before it, that ritual is intrinsically differentiated from other forms of action in some fundamental respects. As Bell notes, ritualization refers to "a way of acting that distinguishes itself from other ways of acting in the very way it does what it does" (1997: 81), thereby "differentiating itself as more important or powerful" (1992: 90). It indeed represents a special form of strategic action, which is associated with culturally variable special properties whereby it is distinguished from "everyday," non-ritual action, and attributed special authority. By forming a "cultural strategy of differentiation" in this way, ritualization also entails "a translation of immediate concerns into the dominant terms of ritual" (Bell 1992: 8, 106), meaning that it restates the concerns it responds to in a profoundly different, ritual mode of representation. In acting upon social reality, ritualization thus at the same time distances itself from it, in terms of content as well as form.

In the Luangan case presented in this study, ritualization entails invoking an unseen world of spirits and souls, of hidden forces and

processes, and doing so in a special register of "ancestral language" (*basa tuha one*) and symbolically encoded ritual action. Through an analysis of ritual chants and the use of material objects in ritual, this study explores the representational practices of *belian* curing, in order to better understand what constitutes their particularity. Following Webb Keane (1997: 8), I examine how representations exist "as things and acts in the world." This entails conceiving representations as "entities with their own, particular, formal properties (such as poetic structure and material qualities) and as kinds of practice, distinct and yet inseparable from the full range of people's projects and everyday activities" (ibid.). Since this unseen world—and the conventionalized symbolic mediation of it—is relatively rarely invoked outside ritual, ritualization also plays a crucial role in reproducing it, indeed, in bringing it into being for the Luangans, I claim. Thus ritualization not only represents reality but actively creates some dimensions of it.

My interest in *belian* as action not only involves an interest in how it reflects and responds to extra-ritual concerns—such as something which people want to do—but also in *how* it does so *as ritual*, largely by means of precisely those characteristics which distinguish it from non-ritualized action. In this respect, my approach to *belian* entails recognizing a complex two-way dialectic between ritual, on the one hand, and society and "everyday life," on the other. In fact, it allows for a view of *belian* as genuinely productive or creative, and thus not simply reflective, but transcendent, of extra-ritual reality. Thereby it mitigates a criticism of Bell's theory by Don Handelman (2005: 217) and Bruce Kapferer (2005: 39), according to whom it is characteristic of a tendency to reduce ritual to representations of a social, political, or other extra-ritual realm, and amounts to a failure to address "ritual in its own right."

The approach to *belian* applied in this study indeed involves an interest in what Kapferer calls the "virtuality" of rituals, referring to their quality of forming a "dynamic process in and of itself" or "a kind of phantasmagoric space … in which participants can reimagine (and redirect or reorient) themselves into the everyday circumstances of life," although without a similar stress on rituals as lacking "essential representational relation to external realities" or forming "a self-contained imaginal space" (2005: 46–47). Inspired by Victor Turner's (1969) theory of ritual as process, and its stress on the

generative and transformative, as opposed to representational and reproductive, dimensions of ritual—evident especially in its liminal stages—Kapferer regards ritual "as a crucible for the emergence of original meaning, of new ways of structuring relations and for reorienting experience" (2008: 5). Like Kapferer, and Turner before him, I perceive that the inner dynamics of *belian* do have a creative and transformative potential. Based on my field experience, however, I suggest that *belian* rituals are not closed to what goes on outside their boundaries, or unambiguously aimed at "holding at bay the chaotic qualities of reality" (Kapferer 2005: 48). In fact, I hypothesize that the chaotic, uncontrollable qualities of reality may form an intrinsic part of the ritual process itself in *belian*. This is so especially if *belian* is understood as a complex of activities—including both those of the shamans and those of the other participants—that go on during the progression of the ritual, but even, to an extent, if it is considered to be restricted to the more "structural" elements of the performance, such as the shamans' chants. An interest in how *belian* rituals are open, or responsive, to the contingencies of life, even while they serve to overcome their effects, occupies my interest especially in chapter 2 and chapter 4, which explicitly deal with unpredictability, including both the unpredictability of events, and that of representation.

For the Luangans, the frequency of *belian* curing means that rituals at times constitute "the everyday" as much as any other activity. What is more, the distinction between the ritual and the non-ritual realm—or between one ritual and another, as the example that I presented in the beginning of this introduction suggests—is not always clear-cut or absolute, but elastic, transgressed, and occasionally purposively played with. Indicating this, the word most often used to describe rituals among Luangans is *awing,* "work," expressing an understanding which places ritual on a par with other work, such as farming, pointing to its nature as an instrumental *activity*.[4] In an SMS message that I received after a short field visit in 2007, a young Luangan man referred to an upcoming large ritual as *aur*, a word meaning "obstacle" or "impediment," which may be used for any task or occupation which hinders one from performing other activities, thus separating ritual from other activities as it juxtaposes it with them.

The critique Handelman (2006: 582) has presented of what he calls "lineal framings" of rituals, "premised on hierarchical ordering

and surgical incising of outside from inside," and his advocation of a "fuzzier," more "Moebius-like" framing instead, is thus highly relevant for my exploration of Luangan curing practices. Framing is a concept that has been used to describe how a social activity (e.g., ritual) is set apart from other activities (e.g., non-ritual activities) (see Bateson 1955; Goffman 1974). A frame is a schema of activity that also serves as a schema for the interpretation of that activity (T. Turner 2006: 235) and thus forms a sort of meta-commentary of it (Handelman 2006: 572). Contrary to "monothetic ideas of ritual organization" which, according to Handelman, "limit, skew, and reduce our comprehension of how change in ritual emerges from ritual practice itself, and draw attention away from complexities of the interpenetration of the interior and exterior of ritual" (2006: 582), I set out to examine how *belian* rituals constitute creative strategies that may be interactive with, occasionally inseparable from, and yet in some respects autonomous from non-ritual reality.

An issue of special interest in this connection is how ritual representation in *belian* involves both creation and recreation in that the shaman sensuously (through words, sound, movement, and objects) brings the world into being for his human and spirit audience as he tries to transform it. The process whereby the Luangans, through *belian*, "not only express but manipulate reality by means of its image," a process constitutive of what Michael Taussig calls "the magic of mimesis" (1993: 57), forms a leading theme of this study. In his book *Mimesis and Alterity*, Taussig describes his concern with mimesis as a concern "with the prospects for a sensuous knowledge in our time" (1993: 44). Mimesis, misjudged as "realist copying," is, as he sees it, essentially about "sensate actualization," about bringing something into being through tactile re-presentation. Instead of viewing mimesis primarily as an act of representation, as a naive form of realism, he focuses on its transformative and creative properties which he understands as being intimately associated with the representation's—or "copy's"—concrete and sensuous character by virtue of which it creates as much as it represents its referent. By treating the copy as a sensate actualization—rather than a representation—of the original, and by perceiving mimesis as what he calls "active yielding," as an act involving the subject's embodiment, or concrete emulation, of the object, he develops a view of mimesis

as a productive practice in which the importance of its aspect of representation is subordinate (ibid.: 44–46).

How sensate actualization, in Taussig's understanding, may form an essential element of the curative properties in *belian* represents an important inquiry in my study. This is explored, for instance, through *pejiak pejiau*, an elementary activity in *belian* rituals, which consists of a two-phased process of "undoing and redoing," whereby a dramatized transformation of something bad into something good is evoked concretely, through words, acts, and objects illustrating the two phases. This process is part of a more general process in which the *belian* conjures a world of disturbed, and restored, human-spirit relations by sensuously bringing them into being. By giving concrete material form to his representations, the *belian* makes human-spirit relations objects of corporeal reality and experience, and thus enables their reorganization. This exemplifies one way in which ritualization forms what Michael Jackson (2005: 95) has called "a strategy for transforming our *experience* of the world."

The aspect of active yielding constitutive of mimesis according to Taussig, expresses an epistemology predicated upon a subject-object relationship based on continuity as opposed to discontinuity, a quality commonly attributed to animism in the recent theoretical revision of this long-devalued anthropological concept, which I will use to shed light on some aspects of Luangan world views and cosmology (see Bird-David 1999; Descola 2006; Ingold 2000; Viveiros de Castro 1998). *Belian* rituals are essentially about human-spirit relations, and Luangan human-spirit relations basically conform to the pattern which characterizes relations with the non-human environment according to this theoretical tradition, constituting, for example, in Nurit Bird-David's words, "an open-ended web of local connections and mutualities" (2006: 44). Important aspects of this pattern, which I will highlight especially in chapter 6, include what Tim Ingold (2006) has talked about in terms of "the primacy of movement" and a "relational constitution of being" with reference to how in "animic societies" the world and the identities of its inhabitants are in "perpetual flux" and humans and other beings are defined and continually shaped in the interactive field of their relations. These aspects illuminate, among other things, a "spiritual empiricism," a cosmological feature identified for traditional Austronesian religion already earlier by James Fox (1987:

524), whereby the ever-differentiating, transitory, and never fully known manifestations of life and spirits of an immanent cosmos are made sense of through a pragmatic stance "in which various ritual procedures are employed as experiments to see what occurs."

Emergence and Tradition

> Reality is an active verb
>
> —Donna Haraway (2003: 6)

In the late twentieth century, a diverse approach to ritual as performance gradually gained momentum to become something of a major paradigm in anthropological studies of ritual (see, e.g., Atkinson 1989; Bloch 1974; Csordas 1996; Drewal 1992; Handelman 1990; Kapferer 1991; Roseman 1991; Schechner 1985; Schieffelin 1985; Singer 1958; Tambiah 1985; V. Turner 1969). Concurrent with a more general performative turn in the social and cultural sciences, this development reflected the influence of various strands of theory within and beyond anthropology, among which two stand out. First, a "dramaturgical approach" associated most prominently with Erving Goffman's sociology of ritualized everyday encounters (1959, 1974) and Victor Turner's (1969) theory of ritual as transformative social drama, and the interdisciplinary field of "performance studies" which they encouraged (Schechner 2002). Second, a linguistic tradition originating with John Austin's concept of "performative utterances" and the so-called "speech-act theory" (Austin 1962; Searle 1969), and subsequent developments in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology such as the "ethnography of speaking" (Bauman 1984; Hymes 1975).

Reflecting these influences, performance approaches to ritual have highlighted two distinct aspects of ritual which correspond to two different connotations of the word "perform": to stage or enact, and to accomplish or achieve. They have looked at how rituals represent performances in the sense of staged and distinctly framed events presented before an audience, which are organized by specific genre conventions and in interaction between the participants, and on how they represent performative or constitutive action, in Austin's sense, which do things "simply by virtue of being enacted" (Tambiah 1985: 135).

Like practice theory, performance theory essentially views rituals as action as opposed to representation, as creative activities which act upon the world rather than describe it, and they stress the presence, active role and creativity of the participants and the formative importance of the ritual event in itself over the formal, structural properties of rituals. In this respect it is obviously relevant to the present study and represents a complement to practice theory. An additional asset of this approach is the common stress on the sensory qualities and phenomenology of rituals, and on what Thomas Csordas (1996: 94) calls the "experiential specificity of participants." Beyond the emphasis on rituals as performative action and a distinct type of staged events, what is most distinctively valuable to me about this approach is largely summed up in Edward Schieffelin's understanding of performances as "emergent," which highlights their situational organization and historical contingency.

Echoing Dell Hymes' call to understand structure as "emergent in action" (1975: 71), Schieffelin (1985; 1996) has emphasized the ephemeral character of ritual performances. "While the form of a performance may recapitulate the forms of performances in the past and presage those of the future, the performance itself is of the particular moment, articulating cultural symbols and ritual genre at that particular time and submitting them to particular circumstances" (Schieffelin 1996: 66). Even though the aim of a performance may be formulated in advance, its outcome cannot be predetermined (see also Atkinson 1989: 13; Rao 2006: 147). This means that the success of a ritual performance is dependent on the performer's ability to respond, in a culturally appropriate way, to the circumstances in which it is performed (even if this may include distantiation from these circumstances, see Kapferer 2006: 671; also chapter 5 of this book). The authority of a ritual performance is thus, as Schieffelin (1996: 81) points out, "a fundamental condition of *emergence*."

One implication of this, which Schieffelin among others draws attention to, is that rituals involve "risk." For example, they entail the risk of failure and, even more momentously, can pose danger to the life and social status of those involved by attracting powerful and unpredictable forces or by provoking competition between sponsors (Howe 2000: 67–69). The correct performance of a ritual is thus not as straightforward a business as the common scholarly emphasis on their characteristic as rule-governed behavior might make them

appear. Rules are not, for example, always well known by the participants, or agreed upon by them, or easy to implement even when they are known (Howe 2000: 69). In some instances it is precisely the aura of danger and risk encompassing rituals that endow them with much of their powerfulness (L. Pedersen 2006).

By analyzing *belian* as a fundamentally situated practice, an "emergent social construction" (Schieffelin 1985: 721), my aim is to draw attention to the indeterminacy and the uncertainties that are typically part of not only the Luangans' life-world but also their curing rituals. I want to investigate the risks involved in *belian* curing and how these risks and other conditions beyond the control of participants are reflected in the ritual form as well as in the enactment of particular rituals that never conform perfectly to the mold in which they are cast. At the same time, I seek to highlight the power of action "to bring the new into being" (Jackson 2007: 24). Rituals change, as we all know. They do so in response to happenings in the wider context of their implementation, but also as a result of developments arising out of their internal dynamic, such as in response to inspiration received during the ritual, or out of the interaction between human participants and between humans and unseen non-human actors. Thus I will examine the creative potential of *belian* rituals, how they are "not out-of-time but utterly full of time, bursting-with-time, with all of the possibilities (of becoming, being, existing) that time potentially enables" (Handelman 2005: 216; cf. Drewal 1992: xv). "Natality," as Hannah Arendt (1958) has labeled the human faculty to initiate something new, is something that cannot be ruled out from rituals, even when they are perceived as highly conservative by their participants.

However, at the same time it should be emphasized that for the Luangans the authority of *belian* rituals is considered to spring ultimately from ancestral tradition, and that *belian* rituals, like other rituals, are always performed in a world already pre-constituted in some respects. It is through a connection to what was done in the past, and especially in the ancestral past, that *belian* rituals are thought to gain their efficacy. However innovative they may be in practice, they must in some ways be incorporated within a tradition of *belian* curing in order to obtain legitimacy. In this sense, *belian* curers are always both "authors" and "not authors" of events (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994; cf. Keane 1997: 24). The actions of

belian curers are based on prior action and they are committed to the enactment of a certain kind of tradition, consisting of a set of performative codes, stylistic forms and genres. The following is a very concrete example of the importance of this connection: every *belian* ritual establishes a link with ancestral tradition through the enumeration and summoning of *belian* predecessors, including both mythical ancestors as well as more recent mentors, who are engaged as spirit familiars (*mulung*) in the ritual. The use of ancestral language, including archaic words and metaphors, serves as another example, as does explicit reference in ritual chants to how what one is doing is a repetition of what has been done in the past. But even to the extent that this connection may be left implicit, *belian* rituals minimally presuppose their own history through allusion and by taking certain things for granted. *Belian* rituals seem to an important extent to require integration with lived tradition in that they presuppose "habituation," an embodied appropriation of the ritual on the part of the rituals' participants acquired through repeated participation in *belian* rituals, which allows for the often conspicuous level of distraction that characterizes this participation.

"Tradition," in Alasdair MacIntyre's (1988: 12) words, is "an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined." This definition illuminates the negotiated character and the simultaneously reiterative and regenerative qualities of *belian* curing. Tradition, in this sense, is something that comes into being through practice at the same time as it constrains practice. It fundamentally involves both construction and reproduction. The tradition of *belian* curing necessitates, to borrow an expression by Jackson (2005: xxiii), "the presence of the past as the condition for the possibility of the future." By bringing the emergent and variable character of *belian* curing to the fore in this study, I do not want to downplay the conventional or structurally determining aspects of *belian,* but to emphasize how these aspects come into being through acts of production. One way in which I examine this dialectic is through a study of how different styles or genres of *belian* rituals constitute "orienting frameworks" for the production and reception of discourse (Hanks 1987: 670; cf. Bauman 1986). William Hanks proposes an approach to the study of linguistic genres based on Bakhtin's "sociological poetics" combined with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice in which "the idea of

objectivist rules is replaced by schemes and strategies, leading one to view genre as a set of focal or prototypical elements, which actors use variously and which never become fixed in a unitary structure" (1987: 681). This is a view which corresponds to my experience of *belian* curing, in which different styles or genres of *belian*, addressing different spirit audiences through distinct performative codes and in different languages, are often performed in conjunction with each other, and thus, in some sense, always "remain partial and transitional" (ibid.).

In Ortner's (1989: 12) words, practice theory is a theory of "action considered in relation to structure." Studying *belian* as practice involves studying those cultural forms, social relations, and historical processes that move people to act in ways that produce those effects (ibid.). Structure in this sense is "doubly practiced: it is both lived in, in the sense of being a public world of ordered substantives, and embodied, in the sense of being an enduring framework of dispositions that are stamped on actors' beings" (Ortner 1989: 13). Like Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, it implies "the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product" (Bourdieu 1980: 56), formed as a set of habitual dispositions through which people give shape and form to social conventions. The ritualized body, the production of which Bell (1992: 98) recognizes as the "implicit dynamic" and "end" of ritualization, thus comes into being through "interaction with a structured and structuring environment." Reflecting these understandings, this study is situated in the conjunction of a world already made and one constantly in the making.

Writing Strategies

Following Dorinne Kondo (1990: 304), I assert that theory lies in "enactment" and in "writing strategies," as much as in "the citation and analysis of canonical texts." In writing this book, I have tried to pay particular attention to the relation between what I present and how I present it. Since the focus of my interest is on the practice of *belian* curing, I have put concrete practices at the center of the analysis. Hence, every chapter of the book revolves around an account of an actual *belian* ritual (in some cases several). Trying to evoke the rituals in their particularity, I base my analysis of them on what these accounts bring out. By proceeding from particulars,

I have attempted to conjure the emergent quality of *belian* rituals and to let some central quality of the event direct the analysis of it. I have often chosen to use the "ethnographic present" in narrating particular ritual events. This strategy admittedly carries with it the risk that the presentation, against my intentions, may create what Tsing (1993: xiv) has called a "timeless scene of action." On the other hand, as Tsing (ibid.) also points out, the use of the past tense in describing people inhabiting "out-of-the-way" places, such as the Meratus or the Luangan, holds the opposite risk of suggesting not that these people *have* history, but that they *are* history, which in regard to a study of *belian* would be equally unfortunate.

The aim of this book is to present, not a generalized synthesis of Luangan curing rituals as such, but a situated study of their local significance focused on what the particular people who initiated or participated in them did and said, and how this was articulated within the wider context of local social life and culture. An important reason in choosing to talk about ritualization rather than just rituals is to emphasize *belian*'s quality as an ongoing process, subject to the interests, understandings, and interpretations of ritual participants in different contexts and at different stages of their lives (see Ortner 1978: 3). Focusing on real events as they unfold in time, I strive to put the people that carry out these rituals in the foreground. The same persons appear in several chapters of the study, sometimes as main characters, at other times in the background of events. Through these multiple references I want to conjure the complexity of agendas involved in *belian* curing, while simultaneously illustrating the interconnectedness of events. My intention has been to show the range of possibilities that *belian* may contain, its characteristically multilayered, variable, and even paradoxical character. Thus the different rituals analyzed exemplify very different and sometimes seemingly contradictory themes. Some illustrate the importance of invention while other conform to convention; some demonstrate the importance of government and other "outside" influence and political aspirations, while others turn inward to local concerns and inter-personal or spirit-related issues. My interest is not so much in "the obligatory" or "the orderly routine" of ritual (Rosaldo 1989: 13–15)—although I do hope that some picture of routine or common ground will emerge from my description as well—but rather in what makes the routines and

the obligatory meaningful for those involved, in how it is made a dynamic part of the "actuality" of events.[5]

The general approach of the study is exploratory rather than explanatory. It follows multiple directions, trying to avoid totalizing explanations in order to enable description of the multiple possibilities inherent in ritual representation. Its technique can be described as "essayistic," in Theodor Adorno's (1991) conceptualization. In essays, according to Adorno's ideals, "thought does not progress in a single direction; instead, the moments are interwoven as in a carpet. The fruitfulness of the thought depends on the density of the texture" (1991: 13). Somewhat like Mancan's and Ma Putup's curing efforts which interact through the merging of sound, evoked in the example presented at the beginning of this introduction, I have purposively allowed different rituals described in the study to stand in contrast to each other, in order to add a dimension to the understanding of each of them.

It is through acts, things, and ritual language that I explore *belian* curing. As many observers of ritual have noted, "ritual practice, in its very nature, lies on the periphery of what can be thought and said" (Jackson 2005: 95; see also Lewis 1980: 24; Metcalf 1991: 262–263). Or, somewhat differently put, "ritual is not simply an alternative way to express any manner of thing," but perhaps the only way to express some things and achieve some intended effects (Rappaport 1999: 30). The resistance of ritual to translation is something that I experienced time after time during my fieldwork, as questions about ritual content or meaning were answered through the recitation of ritual chants, for example. These chants were not only provided as a key to the rituals' meaning but were, in their materiality and form—exemplified by their auditory qualities, their choice of words, their poetics, etc.—the meaning. Similarly, Luangans, like many other peoples (see, for example, Keane 2008: 113; Lindquist 2008: 117; Metcalf 1991: 242; Rousseau 1998: 118), have quite vague conceptions of spirits apart from those communicated through the practice of ritual. There are no consistent or very detailed perceptions of exactly who or where these spirits are or how they are connected to each other (although there are quite a number of studies by outsiders trying to figure this out). "Their existence is not a matter of belief, [but] of social practice" (Lindquist 2008: 117); hence, to study *belian* for me means to study its practices, and while translat-

ing these into written text necessarily means losing much of their tactile qualities, it is only through these chants, objects, and acts that these qualities can be textually mediated at all.

This book consists of five main chapters which are preceded by an ethnographic account of the Luangans, describing their local milieu, regional and national connections, and the role of ritual and religion in these contexts. All these chapters basically form independent units, which can be read as separate entities, although joined by a common, underlying theme. In the first of these chapters, chapter 2, I describe a rather eclectic and highly experimental ritual in which aspects of tradition and the exigencies of contemporary life were invoked by a female shaman, a ritual which formed a major social event and a forum for the negotiation of a variety of concerns in addition to curing, including shamanic authority, religious identity, and gender relations. Chapter 3 forms a contrast to chapter 2 in that it invokes a highly "traditional" and, in comparison, uneventful ritual, in which it is the conventional, corporeally mediated, and habitual aspects of the ritual that are at the center of the analysis (analyzed through material objects and a ritual chant). Chapter 4 deals with a prolonged curing *buntang* (a combined curing and thanksgiving ritual) in which the certainty of authority and authorship was called into question and tested as a local leader fell critically ill. Central questions dealt with in this chapter are how the uncertainty of life takes expression in the ritual form and content and how unpredictability influences the decisions made in *belian* curing. Chapter 5 juxtaposes three bathing rituals with the intention of showing how personal and social history is embedded in ritual practice and how ritualization works to diminish personal suffering by integrating participants with a collective past. The subject of the sixth and last chapter is the relation between myth and ritual and how Luangan mythmaking works to demarcate the identity and sphere of human beings, both in opposition to and in concert with spirits. Through an analysis of a *ngeraya* ritual, a ritual staged to ask for dry weather from the celestial *seniang* spirits in order to enable the burning of swidden fields, this chapter examines Luangan attempts at negotiating powers that regulate conditions in nature and the fates of human beings, powers which are ultimately beyond human control.

Notes

1. Borneo is divided into Indonesian Borneo (Kalimantan, further divided into the five provinces of West, South, Central, East, and North Kalimantan), which covers the southern two-thirds of the island, and the two northerly Malaysian provinces of Sarawak and Sabah, and the independent Sultanate of Brunei, located between them. "Dayak" is a generic designation for the various indigenous non-Muslim populations of the island, most of who used to be shifting dry rice cultivators. The term originated as an exonym adopted by early ethnographers and administrators, and was long perceived as derogatory, but has gradually become accepted and is now widely embraced as a self-designation by the increasingly politically conscious indigenous population, especially in Kalimantan. It is often contrasted with the term "Malay," which refers to the island's Malay-speaking Muslim populations.
2. Other factors also contributed to our decision; for example, the fact that due to weather and river water-level conditions we could not reach the Punan Murung on the upper Barito, while the distinct, Ot Danum-related Murung living downriver had all converted to Islam. These were groups that had been recommended to us as possible subjects of study by the Borneo ethnographer Bernard Sellato.
3. Since the publication of Rodney Needham's translation of Robert Hertz's (1960) famous essay on the collective representation of death, which was largely based on two-staged mortuary ceremonies in Borneo, death rituals have received considerable ethnographical and theoretical attention (Hudson 1966; Metcalf and Huntington 1976; Metcalf 1991; Miles 1965; Schiller 1997; Schärer 1966; Stöhr 1959; Wilder 2003). At the same time, the curing rituals of the peoples practicing secondary burial have received relatively little attention and even less theoretical consideration, especially in the south of the island. This state of discrepancy has also probably been influenced by the way in which some of these peoples themselves emphasize their death rituals in discourse, assigning them the status of "religion" (*agama*), while downplaying the importance of curing rituals and relegating them to the realm of "tradition" or "custom" (*adat*) (see Schiller 1997). In contrast, and as is the case also among the Kayan (Rousseau 1998: 269), all rituals are in a sense seen as curing rituals among the Luangans, even death rituals, in which it is the souls or spirits of the deceased that are said to undergo *belian* (*benelian*), rather than those of living persons.
4. The Luangans are far from unique in using "work" as a designation for ritual. For example, the Iban also use the word "work," *gawa,* to stand for rituals (see Sather 2001: 134; however, Sather also emphasizes the aspect of play, *main*, inherent in Iban curing and Iban talk about curing). Similarly, the Tikopians call their ritual cycle "the work of the Gods" (Firth 1967), while the Tewa Indians refer to their rituals as "works" (Ortiz 1969: 98ff; for more examples, see Rappaport 1999: 47). By conceptualizing ritual as work the Luangans emphasize its quality as action, as a means through

which one seeks to achieve something, a way of doing certain things. Of central importance in this definition of ritual as work is the fact that rituals demand a lot of physical work from their participants, primarily from the *belian* who perform the ritual, often chanting for days without much rest, and from their assistants, *penyempatung*, who stay by their side throughout it, but also, and not unimportantly, from those arranging the ritual, who are assigned roles as *pengeruye*, "makers of ritual paraphernalia," *pemasak*, "cooks," etc. The fact that it is not only the work of the *belian* that is of importance for a ritual's implementation can be seen in how delays in manufacturing ritual paraphernalia, for example, can often obstruct and delay the ritual work performed by *belian*.

5. This does not mean that questions of what constitutes the obligatory or the routine are not at times important for Luangans. Questions of right performance may rise to the fore, especially when a shaman comes from a different area than his audience. Still, performances are seldom judged as failures because of wrong procedure as such, even if they may cause discussion behind the shaman's back. Also, such discussion is, in my experience, often as much an expression of personal antipathies against a particular shaman, or the family organizing the ritual, as concern with right performance.