

Kubu Conceptions of Reality¹

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INTRODUCTION

The Kubu are a traditionally nomadic forest-dwelling people of Southern Sumatra, though by now most of them have settled and been Malayized.² In a central area of Jambi Province, however, there is an enclave of Kubu who, due to a unique combination of geographic and political factors, at the time of my fieldwork still remained totally outside the monetized economy and beyond the reach of the administrative apparatus.³

This paper represents an initial attempt at coming to terms with some of the basic ways in which these Kubu perceive their reality and reacted to the anthropologist's intrusion into it. Apart from episodes of essential exchange and interactions concerning traditional *adat* law, they live in virtually complete isolation from the surrounding Malay society. Within the relatively restricted area of forest which they inhabit, this isolation is maintained by a set of drastically sanctioned taboos which prohibit the sort of contact that is essential for anthropological investigation. Initial attempts at establishing contact with the Kubu through proper Malay intermediaries yielded only brief, formal encounters, and independent efforts at tracking them down in the forest tended to trigger a deeply inculcated response of apparently panic-stricken flight. I arrived in October, and it was not until the following July, with less than four months of my available fieldwork period left, that a kind of breakthrough occurred. After this breakthrough the Kubu not only became willing to tolerate my presence, but even showed an inclination to enter into a relationship of considerable intimacy.

Their avoidance behavior may be viewed as a highly effective

strategy for shielding, against very considerable pressures, a way of life for which they express vehement preference. And as such their taboos could be viewed in primarily sociological terms. However, these taboos also express values that are metaphorically elaborated upon in a number of dimensions, intricately contextualized and isomorphically repatterned in several cultural domains. And although the Kubu obviously use binary contrasts in symbolic representation, I think it is, above all, their extensive use of elaborate, yet close, analogy across domains that vests their mode of seeing with such power and passion. In this paper, though, I can only begin to outline some of the basic features of their cosmology so as to establish a framework within which their thinking, symbolizing and avoidance behavior will make sense.

In their initial efforts to convey to me the impossibility of my remaining with them in the forest, the Kubu had explicitly outlined their view of humanity and the world. Humanity, they said, had been divided into two kinds: the Malays, on the one hand, and the Kubu, on the other. The Malays were destined to dwell in villages and follow the dictates of Islam. The Kubu, in contrast, were equally destined to live in mobility scattered throughout the forest, in accordance with the dictates of their ancestors.

This basic division between the closed world of the forest and the open world outside with its associated dichotomization of humanity, was sanctioned by a powerful curse.⁴ Any attempt to confuse the two domains, whether by Malays coming to live in the forest or by the Kubu adopting Malay ways, would trigger off not only serious misfortune, but, ultimately, the end of the world. And despite my efforts to establish myself as a legitimate third human alternative whose presence would not cause disaster, the Kubu were emphatic about my being Malay, all the more suspect for professing non-adherence to Malay or Islamic religious injunctions.

So what did my being considered Malay really entail? In the following I shall attempt to unravel some of the Kubu ideology to provide partial answers to that and some closely related questions.

CONCEPT OF LAYU

A central concept in Kubu thought is represented by the word-root *layu*. Most basically this denotes the wilting and death of flower or shoot—that is, the death of conspicuous metamorphic tissue. It has a wide range of connotations, however, the most important referring to certain wasting effects on humans whether derived from disease, sorcery or exposure to emanations from a corpse.

Now the Kubu language contains a special marker, *natong*, which

is attached to words strongly connoting wonder, ambiguity, danger, etc. Hence *natong layu* refers specifically to those objects or substances particularly susceptible to or associated with this quality. Prominent examples of *natong layu* are afforded, first, by a variety of palm trees whose starch-rich pith and shoots constitute an emergency food-store, particularly during nomadic forays; and, second, by screw-pines that provide leafy material for pleated mats, satchels and pouches. Palms are symbolically represented as the cultivates of the earth-bound deities known as *Silum-on* (literally, "hidden ones") and should be appropriated only in the context of pre-emptive ritual.

Associations of *layu* are also powerfully evoked by the porcupines because of the characteristic manner in which they leave a trail of broken and withering shoots and palm-seedlings. These animals are referred to as *natong me-layu*—the prefix *me-* rendering the meaning "wasters" or "withering gents." Although eaten, porcupines are regarded as unpredictably and lethally toxic and subject to a number of taboos. Even more significantly, however, the porcupine is one of the very few forest animals that, for doctrinal reasons unfathomable to the Kubu, are considered edible by the Malays.

Here we approach the crux of the matter. In the Malay language the self-designation of the Malays is of course *Orang melayu*. *Orang* means "human" or "people," and the designator *melayu* is of uncertain etymology. In the language of the Kubu, which is closely related, the Malays may also be called *Orang melayu*, in addition to various topographically derived designations. However, as might now be evident, there is an inescapable homophony between, on the one hand, *Orang melayu*, the name of the Malays, and, on the other, the term *orang me-layu* which denotes a destructive or "withering" kind of humanity.

Indeed, the Kubu are quite explicit that there is an essential homology here. In metonymic linkage the Malays are seen to have a special predilection for all kinds of shoots and palm-starch usually avoided by the Kubu themselves, and, as already mentioned, the Malays have selected the porcupine as the only forest animal, apart from the deer, fit for food. Furthermore, in metaphorical association, the Malays are recognized (sometimes even by themselves) to be especially adept at and inclined towards sorcerous practices, the typically wasting effect of which is also *layu*.

Mention has been made of the *Silum-on* deities who are held to be the supernatural cultivators of palms and bamboos. Now they too are referred to as *orang me-layu*. Normally invisible to humans, these otherwise perfectly human-like beings inhabit the forest. How-

ever, they are said to dress like Malays—rather than wear loin-cloths like the Kubu—and live in Malay-like villages particularly associated with swampy and palm-rich indentations in the terrain, which tend to contain salt licks attractive to deer and other ungulates.⁵ The *Silum-on* are regarded as highly dangerous, apt at any time to vent their ample spleen on the Kubu with a variety of *layu*-causing tools. Yet, despite their irascibility, they are basically rational beings that can be supplicated and may be called upon to perform an essential mediatory role between the Kubu and the deities on high.

There is one other deity that resides in this world and performs a similar role to that of the *Silum-on*. This is the Tiger Deity (*Mato merego*) of whom the actual tiger is but a material and animal manifestation. The Tiger Deity, too, is classified as *orang me-layu* on account of his strong inclination to harm human beings in a great variety of ways.

STRUCTURE OF THE UNIVERSE

Now for an elaboration of these metaphorical representations to make sense, it is necessary to place them within a more comprehensive cosmological framework. The Kubu conceive of the universe as a multi-levelled structure in which the major contrast is between the “this world” (*halom nio*) and the “God world” (*halom dewo*) above. Actually, this world is equidistant between the God world and the nether world of the so-called *Orang kapir*. The latter are almost unimaginably depraved and polluted beings, quite clearly a reflection of common Malay attitudes toward the Kubu.⁶ The Kubu say that, according to traditions passed down from ancestral times, these nether beings worship the humans like the latter worship the gods, but present-day humans are incapable of perceiving these efforts. The *Orang kapir*, then, constitute a purely notional category with which there is no ritual interaction.

The Kubu maintain that, its insubstantiality notwithstanding, it is the God world which is the more real; our world is but an imperfect reflection or imitation (*tiru-on*) of it. The two worlds are contrasted by the pair *kasar* vs. *haluy*, which, in translation, corresponds quite closely to our concepts “coarse” (substantial) vs. “refined” (rarified). Taken together with other percepts, this suggests that the matter/spirit duality is not so much an absolute one as one of extreme degrees of condensation/attenuation. As such it constitutes a basic dimension, along with those of space and time, in terms of which experience is inescapably ordered and interpreted. Certainly the deities, though possessing some super-human qualities, are, like humans, subject to

space and time dimensions. One way in which the Kubu express this is to say about deities that they can be heard, and then seen, gradually approaching. Also, while they have eternal life, they do, as a genus as well as individuals, have a point of origin from which time can be calibrated. But the Kubu also conceptualize an entity which they refer to as *Tuhan*—the ultimate force in the universe—and this entity would appear to be outside perceivable dimensions altogether. Rather like the Muslims describing the existential paradox of Allah, the Kubu say it is impossible to tell whether this being is on one's left or on one's right hand side, whether near or far away, yet it is always within a span of one's face. *Tuhan*, then, can move with no perceivable lapse of time, rather like the *selelayaq*-bird, which is hardly ever detected in flight, but can suddenly startle with its characteristically penetrating cry sounding at close range.

The overall structure of the God world is a close analogy of that of this world as seen by the Kubu. The extent of both worlds is delimited by an edge (*biray halam*) joining four corners (*sudut*). At each of these corners the two worlds are held precariously together by a contraption having the same name as the triggering mechanism (*pesenting*) employed by the Kubu in their mundane traps and snares. At each corner there is a guardian deity (*Orang de sudut*) whose job it is to ensure that the fasteners stay secure lest the cataclysmic end of this world be hastened. Similarly, there is a deity (*Orang de biray*) guarding the integrity of the world's edge.

Now the landscape of the God world is bisected longitudinally by a great river which has its source in a hilly region, whence it meanders through flatlands toward an estuary which is said to run off the world's edge. The dwelling places of the various deities are distributed according to a very definite order along this river, as well as in and around the hilly area. However, the most important overall distinction made is that between the deities associated with the upstream (*hulu*) and the downstream (*hilir*) respectively.⁷

NATURE OF DEITIES

Though different kinds of deities have highly specific characteristics, they share certain generic qualities already referred to in connection with the two deities who inhabit this world. That is, they are designated as *orang*, which is also the word for human, and their appearance is precisely that of human beings. Their clothes are like Malay fineries and their houses and villages characteristically Malay. Moreover, their communities are hierarchically organized on the traditional Malay model with kings, nobles, headmen, ordinary people and slaves. Their

language is invariably the Malay which, for the Kubu, constitutes a second level of speech and, as such, is a medium both of sacred communication with the divinities and mundane communication with Malays in the course of external exchange. The different deities are thus not single individuals—though they tend to be spoken of as such—but collectivities. However, the Kubu say that among the gods—unlike among the humans—there is perfect unity so that, despite their being many, it is as though they are one!

While many of the deities are closely associated with specific resources or with structural features of the world, others are associated with health. And each according to their function or even in a general collective way, may be called upon to help maintain or re-establish a state of *ke-selamat-on*—a comprehensively understood “safety”—which on the part of the Kubu is a pervasively expressed concern. While the upstream deities are essentially benign, the downstream ones are ambivalent beings; some of them more than others have a malign streak and are apt to cause suffering to humans. Hence they too are generically referred to as *orang me-layu*. And, as indicated earlier, the Kubu are quite explicit and emphatic about this homophonous identity between human Malays and their celestial namesakes in fact being profoundly homologous.

By far the most dominant of the downstream deities, indeed the archetypal *orang me-layu* as the Kubu see it, is the deity responsible for all kinds of contagious disease (*Orang de penyakit*). The most dreaded and devastating of known diseases is smallpox, which is said to be caused by the entry into this world of the disease king himself. The word for smallpox, *cacar*, is a potent swear word used in affect but otherwise hardly even whispered.⁸

While an outbreak of smallpox would cause panic-stricken flight (as it has in the past), even a mild flu epidemic may trigger fairly drastic quarantine action with a strong taboo on proximity, let alone contact, between those affected and those free of symptoms. I have observed such quarantine taboos in effect for three to four weeks even among members of nuclear families who have then lived widely separated. While they would intermittently meet in forest clearings, they would be sitting several meters apart, creating a situation structurally reminiscent of a formal encounter with Malays in which, however, only males would be involved.

Not only does disease originate in the downstream area of the God world, it is held to be visited upon the Kubu via the downstream of this world. In other words, contagion comes via their Malay neighbours. “If we had no contact with the Malays,” they say, “there

would be no disease amongst us." Whether they want to or not, of course, they need to carry on a modicum of exchange, thus exposing themselves to the external world.

INTERACTION WITH DEITIES

Not surprisingly, anxiety about illness is one of the main grounds for seeking shamanistic communication with the deities. The grandest occasions for such communication involve the building of a large raised platform called *balay* of 100 sq. meters or more somewhere in primary forest. Skirted by temporary shelters, it becomes the centerpiece of shamanic rituals that may take place nightly for up to a fortnight, after which it is abandoned and left to disintegrate. The shamans comprise virtually all the adult men as well as most menopausal women, while adolescents and women of childbearing age are their assisting acolytes. I lack the space here to go into the details of the ritual. Suffice it to say that, having replaced their simple loin-cloth with carefully saved Malay style trousers, shirt, sarong, and shawl, as well as specially made head adornments with particular flowers, the shamans go into trance or dream states (*amal* or *ke-ado-on mimpi*), and while in this state their *haluy* or "insubstantial aspect" or "astral body" dominates their consciousness. This spiritual body exactly resembles its physical counterpart. The real action then takes place in the insubstantial dimension, and earthly bodies and paraphernalia and their movements are just perfunctory outer manifestations. Yet as the cycle of songs is imitative, in words and voice, of the various deities encountered, or of the state of terror associated with the vertiginous feats that must be performed to surmount obstacles underway, bodily movements provide stylized symbolization at every stage of the action unfolding in the invisible world.⁹

Early on in the ritual the lower deities residing in this world, the *Silum-on* and the Tiger, are called. It is they who accompany the human "astrals" on the difficult and dangerous journey to the Sky door (*pintu langit*), which provides entry to the God world, and from there to the location of the so-called Meeting-place Deity (*Orang de ke-randoq-on*). On the first evening of the proceedings the various deities are called to the meeting place and given offerings, each deity being presented with the type of flower associated with it. On the following nights the shamans proceed to transport themselves about the God world, visiting the villages of deities with whom they may have special relationships or may need to contact for a particular purpose. In the case of illness, all the deities may be supplicated and petitioned for assistance, particularly the upstream ones. Here again, the plants

known as *natong layu* are used, this time as tools with which the deities offer prognoses for the illness. A branch or stalk of a *layu* plant is held above the patient's head like a protective parasol. If it remains firm it is a sign that the deities will do their job and the patient will recover; if it wilts he or she may be doomed.

Actually, the Kubu have an extraordinarily intimate relationship with their gods and goddesses; indeed, in a very real sense they may be said to be their own gods. Shamans in fact not only bring supplicatory gifts to the deities, they marry them. Indeed, it is considered prudent for each individual to establish and maintain matrimonial alliances with as many kinds of deities as possible. In that way, it is felt, one's health and safety is all the more likely to be well looked after. Shamans go through the motions of making their goddess-wives conceive by offering them an appropriate flower to be rolled into their hairbun where, rather than wilt and die, it is metamorphosed into a divine child.

At this stage it is necessary to examine more closely the interconnectedness between the human and the divine constitutions. Now there is a special category of divinity known as *bidodari* or Mother Goddesses, and these occupy a sphere of their own, described as more *haluy* or insubstantial still than that of the "ordinary" gods. Their abode is referred to as *gelanggang* or "playground" (for infants).¹⁰ These Mother Goddesses also produce babies by metamorphosing flowers in their hairbuns. Some say that the Goddesses themselves pluck the flowers which grow in abundance around the *gelanggang*. Others say that they are impregnated by the so-called "Keeper of All Living Creatures" (*Orang pe-mogong ciao-mencipay*), a divine entity of male gender who also occupies an especially rarified sphere above the more concrete deities. Incidentally, he is frequently referred to in tandem with a complementary entity, the "Keeper of All Plants and Trees" (*Orang pe-mogong kayu-kayan*). The more specific or concrete deities of the God world are likened to their lieutenants.

Whatever the agency of conception, these celestial babies of the Mother Goddesses are started and develop in conjunction with specific earthly counterparts, whose "soul" or *semangot* they are destined to be. During the period of pregnancy shamans consult the God world deities to establish which one of these will agree to adopt the new child. After birth the soul baby is then transported by the Mother Goddess down to the God world and placed in the village of the adopting deity where it is deposited in a special elevated and shielded enclosure (*kedelom-on* for girls and *anjung* for boys). The adopting deity becomes known as the individual's *aku-on*, i.e. "Guardian deity" or "Familiar."

Now while this *semangot* or soul baby—who, incidentally, retains

forever its infant aspect—remains with its adopting deity, the latter, in turn, furnishes the earthling child with a “ body-soul ” or “ travelling soul ” (*haluy badan* or *haluy be-jelon*). Its appearance is exactly identical to that of its material body, with which it is perfectly fused even though able to leave. This entity actually travels to the God world in the course of shamanic seances or even in the dream states of sleep. It is this entity, too, that survives after the death of the material body, which it is said to discard somewhat in the manner of snakes discarding their dead skin.

Only those who have developed the shamanic seeing ability are able, in the after-life, to find their way to the God world. Referred to necronymically as *malekat*, they enter the pantheon of the Kubu to become individuated entities of veneration (*somboh-on* or *poja-on*) in their appropriate category of deity. Those who have not attained shamanic status become known after death as *ndihang* and end up only half way to the Gods, in the bleak afterworld known as *hentew*. Even shamans must spend a lengthy period in *hentew*, however, to shed their *layu*—the wilting contamination deriving from their earthly corpse—before they can proceed to the God world. Indeed, the clouds in the sky and particularly the low, enshrouding mist which brings shivering discomfort, are said to result from excessive emanations of *layu* from *hentew*. Those who die as still innocent infants are said to be reclaimed by the Mother Goddesses and will spend a playful eternity in the *gelanggang*.

ENVIRONMENTAL REALITIES

Mention has been made of only a few of the most salient ways in which elements of the natural environment are infused with symbolic value. In fact, nearly all recognized species of plants and animals are systematically incorporated in a comprehensive order of categories, which, being thought to have prior existence in the insubstantial world, is linked to a pervasive system of taboos. The natural habitat of the Kubu, which is part of an equatorial rainforest, is extraordinarily rich in species of all orders—mollusks, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, insects, fruits, nuts, tubers, palms and so on, all extensively exploited by the Kubu—and so the number of items entering into, say, food-taboos—which may depend on gender, age, health, ritual state, etc.—is very considerable and no attempt can be made to consider these here.

Nevertheless, the very basic and pervading significance of the dichotomy between Malays and Kubu in the world view of the latter should now be fairly apparent. And this is something which both reflects and conditions the experiential reality of the Kubu. The area

in which my fieldwork took place resembles an island of about 2000 sq. km. defined on three sides by navigable rivers and, on the fourth, by a vast, uninhabitable swamp. The Malay villages are located on the banks of the major rivers in such a way that the Kubu are entirely surrounded.

Malays have also traditionally used the forest to extract marketable produce such as rattans, bees-wax, gums and wood oils. Their traditional kingdoms have constituted the political economies within which the Kubu have been under a variety of exploitative pressures. Although general administration in Jambi was extensively reorganized during colonial times, and still further after Indonesian independence, the Kubu have not been directly affected by this; indeed, their contact with the outside continues to be mediated through virtually feudalistic relationships with a very small number of powerful Malays. The area also happens to be divided between three administrative divisions which have a major disagreement on where the boundary should be and this has also inhibited efforts on the part of the authorities to implement schemes for the forest people.

However, this Kubu enclave—enclosed within an area that is no more than 40 kilometers across—remains intact very much against the odds, and this is certainly due in large part to their highly effective avoidance behavior. The pressures on them are now drastically on the increase. Their forest is becoming the target of timber extractors, oil prospectors and, most ominously of all, of land surveyors for a giant transmigration scheme for landless Javanese peasants. The apocalyptic parts of their mythology—presaging the end of the world as they know it—are indeed taking on a sense of urgent and objective truth. More than ever, it seems imperative to the Kubu that vital taboos be maintained.

Why in the end did they finally appear to make an exception in my case? The answer is not simple and it is all too easy to make up one's own mythology about it. In part it was a *modus vivendi*: till the very last my own camp was no closer to theirs than a couple of kilometers in a straight line; that can be nearly one hour's walk in the jagged and densely wooded terrain. However, during the final three months of my stay, boys and adult men would keep me nearly continuous company, usually sleeping with me in my shelter. With little more than one month remaining the females also began to appear regularly, but by this time I had to such an extent become hostage to Kubu conventions that I was almost too shy to speak to them. Only shortly before my departure was I able to join my companions in relaxed visits to their camps.

But they had also worked out a symbolic solution to my presence in terms of their cosmological categories. From quite early in my contact with them they had kept asking me, looking palpably expectant, if I knew where the *nangoy* pigs came from. Not realizing then the significance of the question, I would deny any knowledge of these creatures. Now there are two species of wild pig in Sumatra, namely, the common wild pig (*Sus scrofa*) and the bearded pig (*Sus barbatus*). The latter is known there as *nangoy* and appears to migrate during the fruiting season, sometimes in very large numbers, from the coast to the interior.¹¹ These bearded pigs can be speared in considerable numbers at river crossings and thus bring about a glut of meat which is a complete reversal of the normal state of affairs.¹² This migratory pig is represented in Kubu cosmology by a deity that dwells farthest downstream. However, it is located not only on the opposite side of the river from all the other downstream deities, but, also unlike these, dwells in elevation on the so-called "Mountain of the Seaside" (*Gunong pasir laut*).¹³

In sacred discourse the *nangoy* deity is referred to as "The White Lord of the Seaside" (*Tuan puteh me-masir laut*), which alludes to the somewhat lighter tint of the bearded pig as compared to the common wild pig. This happens when Kubu shamans carry out the yearly ritual of "reactivating the world" (*bo-po-jedi-ko halom*) or "activating the new season" (*bo-po-jedi-ko pe-tahun-on*), in which the most senior of them travel the entire God world.

Amongst other things they then perform a vertiginous balancing act around the entire world's edge to ensure its integrity, stopping at the corners to establish that the 'tween-world fasteners stay secure. The Fruit Deity is called upon to bring flowers to the trees. The Riverhead Deity must be made to close the dam (*sukam*) so as to shrink the river and stop the rains. The Honey Bee Deity must send his swarms of bees, and last, but not least, the King of the White Pigs must be persuaded to send forth his multitudinous minions.

To achieve the latter, the shamans make their way down to the estuary of the God world river whence they beckon and call across the waters. Possessing, like all deities, normal human shape, the pig gods swim across in response and, arriving on the other shore, assume the appearance of pigs. As such they enter this world, where they materialize and allow themselves to be speared and eaten. At the end of the season, the survivors are said to take away with them the remains of their slaughtered fellows, who are resurrected and, like the rest, re-metamorphose into human shape.

It thus appears that the Kubu, initially inclined to associate my

presence with the many dangerous manifestations of the roaming tiger spirit, eventually had come to prefer the more harmless similitudes which would make me some kind of (inescutable!) porcine metamorph. They had clearly been gradually reassured about my intentions and increasingly tempted by the prospect of gifts, until a turning point was reached. And their behavioral turnabout may well have been facilitated by substituting the image of the marauding tiger with that of the beneficent white pig.

In conclusion, then, I should re-emphasize the very basic constitutive mechanism of Kubu cosmology whereby selected aspects of material reality are subject to closely wrought analogical transfigurations which are then recombined and reified in an idealized realm, conceptualized as parallel to that of the mundane.¹⁴ These transfigurations give rise to and are reflected in an elaborate use of synonyms which vests discourse with a constantly evocative double-entendre. But the essential point is that the way in which the Kubu project certain essential aspects of tangible reality into an imaginal dimension—whose metaphorical representations are constantly elaborated and enacted in collective shamanistic rituals—generates a set of powerful “enhanced perceptions” which conditions their existential experience. In particular, this tends to make them see their lives, arduous though these may be, as the only ones worth living and to be protected at all costs against infringement or change. As the enclave of rain forest in which they live is now being opened up to a large-scale influx of settlers, change will be inevitable and inexorable. Clearly, the forest dwellers are ill equipped to cope with such radical change thrust upon them, given their conceptions and perceptions of reality. It is to be hoped that the profound anxieties which these engender will prove less than fully justified, and that the special plight now emerging among the Kubu will be recognized and ameliorated.

NOTES

1. The data on which this paper is based derive from fieldwork carried out in the course of a twelve month stay in Sumatra from October 1979. The fieldwork was financed by a Research Fellowship from the Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities. The project enjoyed the support of the *Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia* and was sponsored by *Fakultas Hukum, Universitas Negeri Jambi*. During the initial phases of fieldwork I was assisted by Lone Thorstensen, who has read and commented on this paper. Roxana Waterson's comments also helped clarify a number of points in the paper. It was presented at the Symposium on Southeast Asian Folklore, 23–26 August 1982, Humlebaek, Denmark.

2. The primary referent of the Malay word *Kubu* is a defensive stockade or

place of refuge. In Malay thinking the Kubu prefer to live in the forest precisely because this has made them immune to efforts by external authorities (variously Malay, Dutch, Indonesian) to rule them. The name "Kubu" has acquired very negative connotations, however, and its use is resented by those to whom it is applied. Its use here, therefore, presents a dilemma. The Indonesian authorities tend to refer to them as *Suku anak dalam* or "People of the interior," but the same term is also applied to other minority groups and so is somewhat unsuitable as a proper noun. The people of the locality where the major part of my fieldwork was carried out referred to themselves as *Orang rimba* or "People of the forest," yet in other areas of Jambi where acculturation has been pronounced this term is rejected because of its connotations of "primitiveness," etc. I have decided, therefore, to retain the name "Kubu" because, despite its derogatory connotations in local popular usage, it is well established in the ethnographic literature and is basically unambiguous.

3. The standard work of reference on the Kubu people remains the monograph *Die Orang Kubu auf Sumatra* published in 1908 by the German anthropologist Bernard Hagen. This book is based partly on observations made by the author during a brief journey between the provincial capitals of Palembang and Jambi, and partly on the then available, and rather limited, published sources. Hagen's route took him through a backwater area whose rivers form a relatively minor drainage system unconnected with the main thoroughfare rivers along which the Malay population is clustered. Possibly because of the absence of Malays in this area, the Kubu visited by Hagen had occupied a riverain niche and were in fact settled in Malay-style riverside villages. There were reports, however, that there was also a different kind of Kubu, said to be entirely nomadic, forest dwelling and actively avoiding contact with the world outside the forest. Some of these reports, evidently reflecting popular notions, bestowed on these so-called "Wild Kubu" rather extravagantly arboreal characteristics and were hardly to be taken seriously. The more sober observers tended to agree, however, that even the settled Kubu represented an extraordinarily impoverished or deprived culture, both materially and spiritually, and, in the evolutionary idiom of the day, would appear to occupy the "lowest level of human development."

4. While the Kubu tend to call themselves *orang rimba*, or "forest people," one of the many contrastive terms they have for the Malays is *orang terang*, or "people of the open."

5. The Kubu have a special horror of the seemingly obsessive manner in which the deer behaves at the salt-lick and the sustained way it can drink. To prevent any ill effects on those who are to partake in eating a deer, the hunter must first eat its *panoy*: an eyelid, the skin around a nostril, the tip of the tongue, and the tip of an ear. The word *panoy* represents a concept which, unlike that of *layu* with its largely conscious symbolism, is more subtle, and even largely unconscious, especially in some of its highly charged sexual aspects. An analysis of notions of *panoy* will be performed elsewhere.

6. Derived from Arabic, *kafir* or *kafir* is also the Malay term for "infidel" in general and "pagan" in particular.

7. The downstream deities all have some definite association with things in this world which are of great significance to the Kubu, to some extent indicated by their mundane names of reference. While there is no space here to discuss their roles and characteristics, I will list the major ones to give a general idea of their identities. At about midpoint of the river there is a boundary deity (*Orang de per-batas-on*) who is supposed to bar the downstream dwellers from entering the upstream. Moving from the midpoint towards the estuary one encounters in the following order the deities

of: 1) wild yam (*Orang de benor*); 2) aquatic creatures (*Orang de gaung*); 3) exchange goods (*Orang de barang*); 4) wild fruits (*Orang de buah*); 5) contagious disease (*Orang de pe-nyakit*); 6) rice (*Orang de padi*); 7) skin eruptions (*Orang de kuman*); and 8) white pig (*Orang de nangoy*). In addition, at nearly the same latitude as the Boundary Deity, but some distance inland there is 9) the so-called Mecca deity or deity of Malay saints (*Orang de Mekah* or *Malekat orang beru*).

The major upstream deities are the deities of 1) the riverhead (*Orang de mato-ayeq*); 2) the honey bee (*Orang de rapah*); 3) large game (*Orang de kandong*); 4) swidden plantings (*Orang tuan tenaman*); 5) the elephant (*Orang de gejob*); 6) the scaly ant-eater (*Orang de tenggiling*); 7) the high mountain (*Orang de gunung*); and 8) the sky-vault (*Orang de langit*).

8. The words for the various diseases are *ipso facto* the names of the specific disease-causing spirits and to say their names is tantamount to a summons without the safe making ritual context. Hence there is a multitude of more or less contrived synonyms for mundane use. As an example, the disease deity is frequently referred to as *kebial*, which is otherwise the term for the pleated bark-rope that forms the carrying-strap of large back packing baskets (*ambung*). The point is that the disease deity, though agile in the water and traveling on the navigable rivers in their characteristic ships, is not good at walking and is said to latch on to his victim, who will carry him piggy-back until he jumps on to someone else.

9. While women do come along on the journey and are said to be able to *hear* the deities encountered, what differentiates them from the true shamans is that the latter have the gift, or, more commonly, the cultivated ability, to *see*, presumably to conjure up vivid visions and thus give life to their performance. (In real life males can actually visit Malay villages and meet Malays in the forest, while females can only listen from hiding places.) Indeed, it is recognized that people differ greatly in this regard: a vivid mind's eye and ability to project and perform would seem to be the hall-mark of someone recognized as a great shaman (*dukun godong*). Nonetheless, women are considered essential participants on account of their fine voices (described as *haluy*, thus connoting the insubstantial world), which are said to reach the deities most readily.

10. In Malay *gelanggang* means 1) Nimbus around, for example, the moon; 2) Arena, pit (for cock fighting, etc.).

11. Though many trees of the equatorial rainforest bear fruit irregularly or throughout the year, there is a fairly pronounced seasonality in a number of the most important fruiting species.

12. The enormous species diversity of the rainforest implies an extreme dispersion of individuals of any given species, which entails severe limitations on the productivity of hunting (and gathering).

13. In Kubu usage the Malay word *laut* ("sea") (or the Kubu mundane equivalent *lout*) refers to the lower, navigable course of a major river as well as to the sea itself, which, of course, these upstream Kubu have never seen.

14. This paper has dealt only with those spirit-entities (mainly *orang*) that may be considered divinities and with whom relationships of rational, if symbolic, interaction may actually or potentially exist. In addition there is a considerable variety of very differently constituted spirit entities known generically as *hantu*. These spirits tend to be more or less bounded by various aspects of matter such as certain features of the natural landscape. They all appear to be entirely guided by an irrational and unalterable propensity to strike humans with terrible effects whenever the latter come within their reach. In the total context of Kubu cosmology the place of the *hantu* is very important indeed, even though it has been left out of this very basic sketch.