

“As if in a Dream ...”
Epics and Shamanism among Hunters.
Palawan Island, The Philippines¹*

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The island of Palawan stretches northward from Borneo like a bridge to Luzon in the South China Sea. This tropical forest environment, rich in thousands of species of plants and animals, is home to about 50,000 people, known as the Palawan. Besides hunting with blowpipes, traps, spears, and dogs, these people also practice shifting cultivation. Hunting and gathering activities as well as work in the fields follow the alternation of two seasons, the “monsoon” and the “heat,” *barat* and *bulag*. As an integral ecosystem, swidden places a high value on mobility rather than on land property. Land tenure, and recourse to physical violence of all kinds are considered unethical behavior. Social life among the Palawan is governed by a bilateral or undifferentiated kinship system, a complex customary law based on rules and values dictated by “the tradition of the Ancestors,” *Adat üt Kägunngurangan*.

This society of scattered habitat is acephalous. Here there is no such thing as rank, lineage, chief, or leader. The hamlet of five to ten nuclear families is made up of a group of sisters and first cousins assimilated to sisters, around whom the husbands congregate. A father or uncle of the group of sisters is in charge of the hamlet in the sense that he keeps an eye on interpersonal relations and tries to maintain harmony and peace in the community or with other hamlets in the same region.

Palawan ideology is profoundly peaceful and egalitarian. The values of cooperation in work, *tabang*, sharing, *bägi*, and equal exchange, *gantiq*, form the basis for relations with others and the world, as we shall see. Life in the forest demands altruistic and group-oriented behavior.

A set of etiological and cosmogonic myths, invocations, ritual speech, and a wide variety of behaviors manifest a system of religious thought that is well known elsewhere, not only in islands and mainland Southeast Asia but also in Northern Asia and Central Asia.² There is no dogma here, no clergy or liturgy, but rather peculiar individuals, *bālyan*, who in their quest attempt to enter into a relationship with the Spirits through a dialogue and the beauty of a song, through the art of negotiation and ecstatic techniques.

In this small forest society, which represents a transitional state between hunting and upland rice cultivation, we are indeed in the presence of animist and shamanistic thought, particularly in the Highlands and the Foothills.³

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According to the Palawan, people have a physical body and a soul, or rather an invisible "double," *kāruduwa*. The plants, animals, game, and fish that they eat also have a physical body and an invisible "Master," *Āmpuq yä*, which must always be taken into account. The Master is to natural objects what the double is to the body of the true man. In order to survive in nature, their source of sustenance, men must of course "take" – but not in excess. They can hunt, fish, and cut down forest trees if they make joint decisions and show care and respect by appeasing and making offerings to these other humanities, invisible and omnipresent, which demand that equitable relations be maintained. Hence it is crucial to know how to please them, how to speak courteously and to negotiate fairly with them, for these beings also have a desire to survive and a need for sustenance, and their food is none other than the flesh, blood, and soul of human beings.

On this earth, then, there are only hunters and prey, eaters and eaten. The food chain must be fairly managed in a "generalized hunt" that joins humans to the masters of plants and animals in one ineluctable cycle of life and death, as I have shown (1991). How can this balance within the biotope be maintained in the face of constant threats? This is the task of the shaman, who has the courage to manage these constant vicissitudes.

Living in the cultural region of the islands of Southeast Asia, the Palawan speak a language of the Austronesian family and

keep alive a heritage of oral literature of unsuspected wealth. Comprising various genres, it tells the origin of landscape features and natural phenomena through myths, a genuine "teaching," *tuturan*; men and animals evolve in tales, *sudsugid*, that reveal the elementary principles of ethics with humor and charm. A highly elaborate and self-conscious rhetoric is manifested in long jural discussions, *bisara*, between specialists in oratory art and invocations. Extremely dense verse compositions in quadrains, *karang*, accompanied by the lute and the bamboo zither, are the vehicle for subtle courtship songs and poetic jousts in which men and women compete in a mode that recalls the Malay *pantun*, whereas for evenings of collective ritual ebriety to commemorate the Master of Rice or the Master of Flowers, everyone improvises "jars songs," *karang ät siburan* (*lantigi, yaya, timpäsan, bangkiyaw, sudsud ...*) during a ritual feast, *tamwäy*, that may be repeated for seven consecutive years.

But whenever it is a time to give thanks to the Master of Game or the Master of Wild Boars, after a successful hunt in the forest, or to welcome an honored visitor to the hamlet, or when a gathering beneath the roof of the large meeting house must be entertained on the eve of a wedding or during the great ritual vigils with dozens of bamboo internodes full of glutinous rice, then they choose a wholly different register: stretched out in the darkest corner of the house, a bard begins to sing an epic, *tultul*.⁴

The epic in Palawan has no professional singer of tales. Vocal talent, combined with a burning desire to learn, *iräg*, qualifies a man or a woman to perform these sung narratives. A similar vocal quality enables one to perform the shaman's song, *lumbaga*.

The epic is not in verse,⁵ but rather consists of several breathing groups of words, with melodies that vary subtly according to the different characters. As the *lumbaga* or shaman's song of dialogues is not in verse either, the two forms share a common vocal style. A single voice, from one and the same person, may sing both the epic and the shamanic Voyage. However, while all shamans are bards, not all bards are shamans, for to accede to the latter function one must go through a physical as well as a psychic ordeal, and this lived experience is interiorized in consciousness as a dream experience.

There are many Palawan epics, all of which sing of the quest of a wife and thus illustrate the multiple facets of jural law related to affinity. The heroes take wives in society and in the supernatural world. The plot also serves to reawaken memories of a cosmogony.⁶

The bard's performance of an epic, like the shaman's performance, requires the trusting and comforting presence of the whole community, which participates either as a chorus (as in the Punang area) or through individual exclamations (as in the Highlands). One can also hear a musical accompaniment by the *bäbäräk*, a high-pitched voice that is slightly off in relation to the bard's voice, which it shadows like the image of a protective soul during the Voyage.

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In order to better grasp what is involved in epic and shamanic performances, I propose to draw connections between excerpts from the life story of a bard who was also a shaman and some of the speeches exchanged between men and spirits during a shamanic session, and finally to listen carefully to brief excerpts from an epic singing the tale of the Voyage towards *Ämpuq*, the "Lord-Master," or towards *Upuq Kuyaw*, "Grandfather Thunder." By doing so, we will shed light on the way the enactment and plotment of the values of this society.

First, I shall focus on the bard's life story. The shaman-singer of tales life narrative in his own words will alternate with interpretive commentary. The song can be heard and the life story read, along with the entire text of the epic in three languages (Palawan, French, and English), on a forthcoming recording, *Mämiminbin, in Quest of a Wife* (1999).⁷

1. The Life Story of Mäsinu, Bard, and Shaman (Excerpts)

Hunting and the Bard's Apprenticeship

Every time a wild boar was caught, someone sang a tultul. And from then on, I gradually increased my knowledge of them. I couldn't yet sing the story myself, but we played games around the houses and all day long I practiced the tultul in my head. I imitated the tultul of the grown-ups deep within myself. I didn't yet sing myself

"As if in a Dream ..."

I did not yet sing epics, tultul. I whistled the tunes while I was building my house. Once my house was finished, I began to chant until sunrise. I had performed Binyang and the Muslims. This tultul lasts two nights. I had learned it from Mislām, a man from Tämlang in Kāmantiqan. But he came from the highlands of Laplap at the source of the Tämlang. Mislām wore a loincloth. He had a fringe and his hair was tied back in a knot, simbulung. I went to his place and I spent two whole nights listening to the entire chant. We slept during the day and I could hear the voices in my ear. Then he picked it up again and chanted the whole night.

A year later, I went by to visit Mislām and Rinkun, his wife, and I sang this story for them to test myself. We began again for two entire nights to make sure that all the characters and all the actions had been included. Then, while I was weeding, I used to whistle the tunes and rehearse to myself. I sang if I was alone at home. I couldn't sing in the presence of anyone, for my voice quivered, mägärgär lyäg. I was intimidated because I had just learned the story, bagung anad. My father-in-law is astonished. They don't want to sleep anymore and invite me to sing Lumalayag, "The Sailing Outrigger's Datuq." I am not ashamed. I feel confident. When visitors come to our place, they ask me to sing. Then they invite one of the guests to sing. And I listen carefully; I don't interrupt, I don't participate by accompanying him with exclamations, tubag. I listen to the voices and the story in silence. Inwardly, I sing. The next day I hear it in my ear and when I doze off after a whole night awake, the voices are still there. I remember all of it. I can't forget the stories and the voices.

At Banglas, with my brother-in-law Mangkinas, we hunt with spears and dogs, and we set wild boar traps. I caught three wild boars in my traps. When I have finished with my work and evening comes, I go into the forest. I trap squirrels and catch green pigeons, balud,⁸ with my blowpipe.

The singing of an epic is a counter-gift, a compensatory offering, redressing the balance in nature after a large game animal is captured. *Läli* is offered gracious compensation through an all-night vigil during which the epic is sung, while the boar's head and hindquarters are slowly roasting high above the embers in the hearth. The hope is to seduce and propitiate *Läli*, the Master of Prey, in an attempt to bring luck. Such is the symbolic efficacy conferred by the singing of an epic. It takes place only at night; at daybreak, it must stop. The prohibition against singing in the daylight links the performance of the epic to the singing of shaman's Voyage. Moreover, these words emphasize the Palawans' cynegetic passion, which can lead to excess.

Becoming a Shaman: The Initiatic Ordeal

In the past, I did not yet know how to heal.

After the births of my first and second children, I still did not know.

I became very ill at Kangrian. I had great pain in my chest. I could no longer breathe and for several hours I was in a very serious condition. At five o'clock in the

evening I stopped breathing. My wife was crying, the children were very young. At four o'clock in the morning I began to breathe again, at the break of day, with the crowing of the cock.

It is as if in a dream ...

I am walking in a far off land. There is a path. It is not a pretty open path, but the bushes are not very thick. I am not aware of my house. It is like a dream, and I walk ...

Half-way up there is a hill and I see a path, like a road with a fence running alongside it. Many people lean against it in silence ... and I keep on walking.

I go along and in front of me there is a house made of palms of basnig that are still fresh. I arrive. "It's the house of father and mother!" I go up and the door isn't closed. There is a seat, like a bench, and on the side platform my father is making a blowpipe, but his eyes are looking towards the back. My mother is also there, weaving a basket.

They do not speak. Nor do I.

Mäsinu's story testifies to what he has lived and experienced, what he has undergone. Often the revelation of the ability to become a shaman takes place through an ordeal in which the individual is felled by a "fatal" illness, which he alone is able to overcome. This illness is often associated with "altered states of consciousness." In the present case, it consists of a shortness of breath and pain in the chest, followed by a death to the self and a long voyage of initiation ("I am walking ..."), assimilated to a dream. The ailing subject's return to the parental home and his description of his father and mother are indeed symptoms of a moribund state. The sexual division of labor – basketry for women and the making of blowpipes for men – is maintained, but the look backwards indicates that Mäsinu has entered the world of the dead, that he has left behind the world of the living. The suffering in body and spirit is centered around the vital breath, the suspension of breathing for several hours. The mastery of breathing techniques is precisely what characterizes both the bard and the shaman in their respective performances: on the one hand, epic singing, with the particular vocal gesture that requires a balance of breath and a balance of vocal timbre for an entire night, producing a sustained impression of perfect sound equilibrium; on the other hand, the shaman's song, the *lumbaga*, which unfolds in an epic mode and proffers a call followed by a dialogue (questions asked, answers given, negotiations) with Benevolent and Malevolent Spirits.

Moreover, in their daily life, the Palawan have developed a code for interpreting dreams, *tagināp*, and the day often begins with a conversation between neighbors about their dreams and the omens they hold for dealing with what the day will bring – as if the dream lifted a veil on the major points of the day about to start. In the case of a serious illness, the dream is close to a death, a symbolic death.

Māsinu, in his state of illness, thus accedes to the realm of the dead, but not to the point of no return. In the Voyage, the shaman will undertake an analogous round trip. His soul will leave his body to approach dangerous invisible beings, which he must address and with whom he must negotiate the amount of the fine required for the return of the captive soul of a family member or friend.

Diwata Appears. Rebirth to the Self

I have been sitting for a long time and the seat turns and I see an opening at the other end of the house. There is a kind of curtain that opens and I see a woman with long hair, wearing a white robe. But I do not see her quite clearly. She disappears and reappears. She is standing but is small and she asks me: "What are you doing here?"

I have come back to my mother and my father. For I am longing to see them again."

She says to me: "It is impossible. Your father-in-law will be angry. Go home!"

"I do not want to go home, I want to stay with my parents."

She replies: "No, I will see if you have a name and if it appears on the lists. If your name is not there, the soldiers will capture you."

She takes a thick pile of papers and looks at them, looks.

"Your name is not there, you are not on the list. Go home."

"I no longer know my way."

"The path is there. Here is what you should do."

She gives me several feathers of a white chicken, tied together. "Here is what you must do. You are going to heal people. If one day someone is ill, take these with you."

When I held the feathers and I got up to leave, when I began to walk, I woke up and was alive.

I looked towards the roof and there was a resin torch that my wife had made. She is in the house. I am near the fireplace on the lower level. When I look, I say, "My house, I am ill, my chest is in pain ..."

The initiation dream continues and a new young female character, immaculate and slightly blurry, appears. This is the meeting with Diwata, a deity of the middle space, always benevolent and protective.

In this state of latent death, the initiate's "double" is endowed with clairvoyance, the original state of which all men once par-

took according to the myth, and which the initiate will have to reiterate in his therapeutic function. One must have experienced, have gone through this state of consciousness in order to be able to cure.

Diwata sends the wanderer back to life, that is, to his father-in-law's hamlet where, according to uxorilocality, he makes his home. We also note a metaphor for the fear of death, associated with writing (the list of names) and the fear of being arrested by the army, two sources of anxiety rooted in the global society of the modern world: the world of script, the bureaucracy, the world of coercion, with no appeal, no compassionate help. The meeting ends with a gift of feathers from a white chicken – often sacrificed during shamanic cures – and the command to heal. Thus little by little, a return to life, a rebirth to the self, takes place.

Diwata's Gift of Basil: The Cure
The Serpent's Gift: Return to Life

I feel I am holding something and it is basil, a white sprig, and a black sprig, the basil of Anduwanän, abode of Ämpuq.

Whose basil is this? I smell it while I am still lying down and I say, "I would like to eat. If there is something to eat, I feel hungry."

My wife says: "You are alive!" I reply "Yes," but she was afraid because she thought I had lost my mind ... There was no rice with which to make rice porridge since it was the time of scarcity. My wife cut slices of sweet potatoes. She gave me some hot and I didn't eat them. I let them cool.

After having eaten, I sat up and I already felt better. I say to my wife: "I am coming back to life. I am no longer ill." She did not whisper a word, she did not tell me that I had stopped breathing.

The next morning, I said to her: "We are moving. We are going to Päsü, my brother-in-law, the father of Lunyu. There I shall be able to sleep."

I said to my wife: "Who gave me this basil?"

"I do not know ... You had stopped breathing and I was crying. When you began to breathe again, at the crowing of the cock, pus was coming out of your mouth and your nose, and I was in tears."

I said: "I was dying, but I did not reach the abode of Ämpuq, the Lord Master, but only my father's house.

"Then, a little girl met me and gave me the bunch of basil. That helped me to breathe, to find my breath again, to remove the illness. Now you are going to see if I will recover."

The following night I was able to sleep, but I still did not feel well. I had lost weight and had been ill for a month and a half. I was only skin and bones.

While I was asleep I received a gift from the Being who had come to me and returned. He put a serpent on my chest, a span in length, with a head at both ends, and it was as cold as ice. That cured me and made me come back to life again. That's all.

The sprig of basil deposited in the right hand is the flower with scented essence that will enable the shaman to see through the invisible and to forge a path. The "group of scented plants," *sulu ät abu-abu*, fosters clairvoyance: there are two types of basil, *Ocimum sanctum*, or *ruruku*, white basil, and *Ocimum basilicum*, or *kulasi*, black basil; an acanthaceous plant, *bawing*; mugwort, *uribas*⁹; and two Araliaceae, *pärinaq* and *panagang*. The wafting of smoke helps to see through the "veil," the "ash" stuck to our eyes. They make the world transparent and allow the shaman to move through the visible and the invisible during his Voyage.

The use of either the basil flower or the leaves or resin is a basic component of "healing a patient" or "healing the world," of all the propitiatory rituals and commemorations of the Master of Rice, the Master of Flowers, or the Master of Boars. Moreover, scented flowers are held in the hand or placed in the hair during any travel through the forest, from the everyday to the more risky, in order to protect human beings from the Evil Doers.

On the first day of Mäsinu's return to consciousness, the decision to move his household is not surprising. After a death in the family, the Palawan immediately leave their home and temporarily move in with a nearby relative: this is a way to escape the threat of Ghosts, *Mämanggut*, and to avoid being dogged by misfortune. Then comes the slow recovery, with strength gradually returning to a tired body emaciated by this difficult time of scarcity when rice, the most sought-after and nourishing staple food, is lacking.

The gift of the cold snake placed on the chest is more than "sympathetic magic," *päsiring*; the serpent is the protective spirit that will guide the future shaman.¹⁰

Acceding to the Shamanic Function

From the moment that I was cured, I knew how to heal.

If I had to make an invocation, sägina, I called on this little girl. Christians call the being which came to me "an angel", but we call "Diwata," the mediating Deity of the Lord Master. And it was thus that I knew how to heal.

If there is something inside the body like a thorn, I suck it out. I know what the illness is because the serpent guides me. I am not hiding anything from you.

Sister, in the past I did not know how to identify illness, I did not know who ate men in the surroundings of the houses. I was not confronted directly, I was seeing it as if in a film, on a screen, the Mängingarü, the huge dog bristling with fiery hair, the demons Länggam and Säqitan.

Mänginaru, Dumarap, the bone eater in the bushes, Lumandagaw, the dog with a human face, but there is also a horse. She didn't tell me to strike the Lumandagaw. If he is aggressive towards man, I can strike him, I hear him.
So for a long time, I knew how to heal ...

The simultaneity of his own cure and his immediate ability to heal others proves that overcoming the illness without help is enough to unleash the shaman's powers, and in a way forces him to begin healing. Surviving this ordeal amounts to an election.

In Palawan society, we have not witnessed extended initiatory teaching by a group of shamans. The lonely experience of dying to oneself, a rebirth after a Voyage through the invisible world, and a dream that belongs to the realm of revelation have to be undergone.

The shaman is linked by a very strong affective bond to the little girl, the protective spirit of the middle world, of whom he spoke to me as an "angel," a guardian angel. Her help along with the snake's allows the shaman to "see" the Evil Doers (ogres, vampires, and aggressive animals¹¹). The apprenticeship is almost unconscious. The know-how of others is observed, but it is the dream that shows the way and reassures the neophyte in the shaman's art. The first examination, *sägpaq*, is conducted by holding several sprigs of basil blossoms in the right hand. The shaman evaluates the seriousness of the illness. There are three degrees. An illness caused by hair, *buwäk*, spider webs, *ingkät*, or cotton, *burak*, is benign. Or it may be an injury, *tawan*, caused by the Evil Doers, for which there are cures of increasing intensity, depending on the suspected illness. The first cure is the *tawar*, in which a magic formula is uttered in a low voice while a piece of ginger root or a garlic clove is applied to the patient's body. If the patient does not recover, the *ulit* or shamanic performance is then proposed; however as the last resort it is usually preceded by suction or extraction procedures.

The Voyage. The Compensatory Offering. The Exchange.

But even if I never told you, I no longer heal now. I have given it up since I lost two sons. It is a kind of suicide. I do no more healings.

If I am ill, I do nothing to be healed. I want to die because I feel such deep sorrow for my two sons.

If there is a Benevolent One, a Good Doer of the Hills who comes to me, who becomes my brother – for up there in Mount Kábätangan are also the Good Doers of the Rising Sun, the Good Doers of the Reefs, and that is why the mountains are never destroyed – there are Good Doers who come close and one of them whispers in

your ear and tells you what treatment to give. And if you go on the Voyage, ulit, you know that one or two of them come and alight on you, and if their words are, "Go up to the Master or Rice," you fly off! It is not your physical body that makes the trip, but it is like a dream.

You no longer recognize your friends, your wife, the children, but you go there and ask what kind of remedy, you raise the questions that human beings wonder about. You rise up and then you shoot back down again. You have been there. Your soul is like your thought – it is powerful, it is as quick as a glance sight, and you have had access to it.

You think: I arrive in Manila, and you are there, no matter what your place of origin. Your Diwata is as quick as that. So the Voyage isn't long and when you return you say: "That's what struck him down: it is the forest." Or else, "It is an illness connected to a neglect, especially towards the Master of Rice ..."

Then, according to the situation, you offer a box of betel nut or a gong. A chicken is sacrificed or an offering of glutinous rice cooked in a bamboo internode, lutlut, is made, and the sick person recovers.

You have paid, you have given a counterpart, you have made an exchange.

In the past when I was at Inbangan, at Kangrian, I did not yet know. Now, I no longer know. But for me, it is not as it is with others, for I follow the instructions of Diwata. For it not, your protective soul, lapis, is feeling ashamed, you are telling a lie, you are not transmitting messages of Diwata to people.

After the death of my other son I gave it up completely. I asked my four protective souls to go away, but they did not want to ...

As an *ulit* performance takes place, the shaman's double leaves his body. Escorted by several protective souls, *lapis*, he sets out on the Voyage, *päpanaw*. The more *lapis* a shaman has, the more powerful he is. This journey, described as flashing, is always undertaken at the instigation of protective souls, who come close to the officiant's back and sides and take him up. Further, sometimes he raises his arms, opens them and brings them down like wings.

As the experience of illness that ushers in his ability to heal, the shamanic experience is assimilated to a dream state, a loss of consciousness. This "amnesia," *lipat*, is also termed "sleep," *migaq*, or again "death," *patäy*, the term varying from one valley to another. The shaman feels he is weak, too human, and invokes the Good Doers of the Hills, of the Rising Sun, and of the Reefs. By summoning the Masters of the various landscapes to assist him, this mediator for People is calling on "Other People" in the supernatural world. It is always a matter of understanding the cause of the illness and of negotiating with the Invisibles for the return of a captive soul in the never-ending litigation between People and Spirits, a natural History that keeps on repeating forever.

The offering, *ungsud*, of gongs, betel boxes, glutinous rice, or chicken provides a means of restitution for the displeased, dispossessed, or cheated Spirits. Impelled by the hope and will to reach an agreement by understanding the terms of the dispute and settling on the amount to be offered as compensation and indemnification, the shaman proceeds with courtesy, calm and discretion, a distant speech sung in the manner of an epic in order to mediate.

The Shaman's "Suicide" and Renunciation

And my wife too could see the serpent. Diwata left the serpent to here as a companion. "If there is a noise, don't be frightened," I told them.

And if my children were alone at home when I went away, they were not afraid. They saw the serpent that was sometimes lying on the chest of my wife, the length of a span. But if there was an Evil Doer, it became bigger and if there was the Säqitan it became bigger than they were.

It came from Ämpuq. There are serpents that are dangerous snakes, there are serpents that help you.

When I was ill in the past, I did not go to the doctor and no one took care of me. I came out of it alone, by myself.

When Miduy died, it was also the end for me.

I saw an enormous wound across his body after a blow by Särapan, an Evil Doer of the Forest. Miduy asked me to heal him, and I saw this enormous wound as he was lying with his arm outstretched to me. When I saw his heart, it was cut in two, with only half of it still beating.

When I spoke, I said: "I am incapable of curing. Ämpuq did not give me the Lagundiq, the Tree of Life, the invisible and primeval tree."

I said to my wife: "I cannot heal him, and I do not want to take him to the doctor. Even if I spend a thousand pesos he will not live."

I said to my brohters: "This protective soul who gave me the chicken's feathers has abandoned me. I will no longer heal."

If she had not abandoned me, I would tell you. I would not hide it from you. I know where she went for I had died once in the past.

On our way back, she had not yet reached the level of Ämpuq; she is with the Ancestors. Let us wait for the judgement. What will it be?

Diwata says through the little girl, "If your name is on the list, you return. It is like at the polling station.

Even if your illness is not serious and your name, Mäsinu Intaräy, is on the first page, you are a dead man."

But I have not yet had access to the level of Ämpuq, I have faced Ämpuq, for there is a supreme judgement.

If someone has committed a wrong against Ämpuq, little by little everyone will die.

In the past, when I came back again, the Ancestors were not far away. They could hear the crowing of the cock. And if one offers rice to them during the time of year, Byag ät Taw, "Life of Man", one has to make offerings to the Ancestors, one has to remember them, one has to be compassionate towards them. We give food to the Ancestors. If they ask you for food and you don't hear them, they make you ill. They stay in the Kulibägan.

After remarking on the role of the protective soul, "Black Serpent," a gift from *Ämpuq*, Mäsinu describes his renunciation as a shaman. Faced by his inability to heal his own adult son, and driven to despair by the son's premature death, Mäsinu refuses to intercede for others. He assimilates this relinquishment to a "suicide," that is, a personal choice, made of his own free will.

This choice bespeaks his loss of confidence in his own power, his will not to deceive his peers, an honesty. The wound he perceived in his son's heart is in the image of a mortal blow by an Evil Doer. The diagnosis is *Särapan*, which is none other than an intentional, premeditated encounter between an Evil Doer and a human being. The demon hides in the forest or field or around the houses, awaits his victim, and attacks when the latter passes by. There are two modes of aggression: "striking" and "biting." The symptoms are as follows: sudden high fever, a sensation of painful wounds in the heart and all over the body, tongue frozen. The shaman intervenes with medicinal plants, *ururu*, then with *tawar*, the magic formulas similar to an "abracadabra," which he utters while tracing a cross seven times over the location of the pain. Because *Särapan* designates the gravest illnesses, those that are incurable, no one dares to utter it aloud while the patient is still alive. Alongside the abandonment by the *Lapis* and *Diwata* is the theme of the "Tree of Life," *Lagundiq*, which is always elusive.

Here the shaman's renunciation is a conscious act that provokes resistance on the part of his protective souls, who cling to his person, refusing to disperse.¹² The account ends with a more general consideration that is also more metaphysical: death is inevitable, and is always the consequence of a human misdeed.

II. *Ulit*, A Shamanic Session

Endowed with courage and clairvoyance, the shaman, *bälyan*, risks everything to help his troubled community and the patient, this relative or friend whose soul is lost and must be brought back.

The voyage is preceded by an appeal to *Diwata*, whose aid is summoned, and by an "invitation to the Protective souls," *gayat ät Lapis*, under the watchful eye of *Ämpuq*:

*I appeal to my own body, if you are truly able to hear me ...
Oh You who hover over all and by whose grace I am alive in this world
Thanks to you I can travel afar and draw near, I wish you to hear me!*

*And now if my words can still reach you, if you can hear me ...
Now, I summon you, I invite you.*

*Be thus my companions in the Voyage, wherever I am headed
Despite the presence of Evil Doers, you will stay by my side, you will know
how to keep the Evil Doers away.*

*This evening, I invite you to accompany me on the Voyage, cover me for I am at a loss
So that I may regain my strength,
Oh You, accompany me, Oh You escort me.*

The Shaman's Voyage and Cure

What happened on 18 July 1995 in Jose Apäl's large meeting house in Mäkägwaq?

Tiklaq, the eight-year-old son of Abrinu, was stricken with an acute malarial fever. In addition, Hayna, the eldest daughter of Apäl and Pwal, was in Manila suffering from an illness for which all remedies had been exhausted Samunyu decided to undertake the Voyage and the cure, *mägdiwata*, in other words to perform as a shaman, to "play," *mäğusik*.

The shaman is alone under the blanket. He must be sheltered from others' eyes; particularly during the trance, he conceals his shyness.

He sings an invocation to Diwata, his wife Kandida accompanying him with speech. The melody is similar to an epic melody. Hayna's uncle and aunt were thus leading the ritual. The alternating words of these two human mediators for Ämpuq and the Spirits, in the presence of a concerned, questioning audience, are followed by the song and by the translation of the message in terms accessible to all, thanks to Kandida. She asks questions, *mägingkäät*, and relays the answers; she translates, *mäğpäturun*, for the *ulit* uses a different vocabulary from everyday speech. The Good Doers cannot be addressed in ordinary terms; a change in register is necessary. Hence the shift from daily speech to esoteric song.

Call to Ämpuq, to Diwata, and the Lapis:

Samunyu:

*I invoke Ämpuq, the Lord-Master above,
if my words can still reach you as well as Diwata.
I burn this resin pärinaq,¹³ take me upwards.*

"As if in a Dream ..."

*Alone I could never reach it, one of my granddaughters is sick
far away ...¹⁴*

*Now, dear brother-in-law, all present in the large meeting house
It seems that I am leaving you.*

*But all of you, men and women, maybe you laugh at me,
anyway, I am trying, I am trying.*

*S. to Lapis: Come close ...
Come here ...
Do come here ...*

What happens here is really a sort of jural discussion which will resolve a dispute in such a way as to respect the *Adat*. In the absence of the little boy, who is too sick to be present, and the young girl who is ill far away, the rite has followed a certain modality based on the mystery of a sung speech, followed by more transparent words offered as a translation of the debate between the true people and the spirits. The healing ritual progresses through several stages: *tawar*, or magic formulas; *bāsbas*, sweeping away the heat; and *ururu*, medicinal plants.

Lumbaga, Answers Given by Diwata and the Lapis:

The *Lapis* are nearby, Diwata slips her reply into the shaman's song.

S. sings the words of Diwata:

*"As for us, we are here from now on.
As for us, we are truly here.
Why are you calling for us?
We will not be long ..."*

K. asks questions:

*"Why are we calling for you?
Here is Abrinu's child ...
What strikes him?
They have tried all kinds of curing,
Tawar with the magic spells and ginger
Curing with a piece of cloth and basil flower ..."*

A. father of the child:

*"Then the medicinal plants
and the herbal remedies. Here is the reason we are calling on you.
For us, down below, we are deeply ignorant."*

S. singing:

*"Are you calling upon us for this reason?
Here I am ... and the child is about to die."*

*How can you be surprised?
Nearby is something¹⁵ which was destroyed.¹⁶*

S. singing:

*"This is why you call upon us
Obviously of course, this is why they ask questions.
You have faith in the curing ..."*

Then Kandida inquires as to the amount that must be paid, and the *Lapis'* reply is sung: "Just prepare some *lutlut* (bamboo internodes filled with glutinous rice and coconut milk)."

The Shaman Awakes

For a few seconds the shaman trembles beneath the blanket. Kandida, his wife and acolyte, breathes the soul's return on the fontanel of her officiating husband and strikes him forcefully on the back to bring him to normal consciousness and sensations. She addresses him in the mode of an injunction:

K.

*"Come back to yourself! Return!"
You have made the Voyage.
You have gone too far, you have passed beyond the limits.
Come back! Recover your spirits!"*

S. says:

"Yes."

Five minutes pass and the shaman is awake; no longer singing but speaking, he exchanges a few words with the closest members of the audience; he remembers nothing and asks what was said as he was performing the *ulit*.

III. The Singing of Epics

Seeking Inspiration

A group of men go to the dammar forest to collect *almaciga* resin.¹⁷ After the day of hard labor, the whole night is devoted to poetry. In this favorable place far from the hamlet, one of them will sing through the night, telling the story of a marriage alliance with its attendant tensions, and conflicts, and wars, followed by their resolution. Then the howling of the wind in the treetops and the brushing of the branches, *ringür*, voices floating

from the canopy above, inspire the singers of tales. The epic melodies transpose these sylvan soundscapes into human tones, thin, high-pitched timbres with breaths of varying length. This vocal literature based on imitative harmonies was once accompanied by the strains of the little bamboo flute in a pentatonic scale without half-tones, the "bird scale" *läpläp bägit*. The poetic and musical inspiration comes from "sensing" the world in the privileged space of the forest, this place of exchange par excellence between two humanities destined to live together and therefore to share, despite the invisibility of the spirits and the vulnerability of the true men. There is also a gift, *bingäy*, from a Good Doer of the Hills or a Good Doer of the Forest. This mysterious gift of knowledge and poetic creation is inspired by a dream, in the Punang area, while in the Highlands, it emanates from a state of enlightened consciousness between waking and sleeping, the time when one "touches," *päläpläp*, or "establishes contact" with the Good Doers.¹⁸

The bard, *Usuy*, had assimilated the *Taw mänunga*, the "Good Doers," and the *Lapis*, the "Protective souls" that accompany everyone but are present in greater numbers for the shamans, at whose sides they hover, guiding his double during a healing session. On the one hand is nature's gift of food, increased by the generous gift of various techniques and know-how, counterbalanced on the other hand by temporary capture, provoking illness, or definitive capture and ingestion of the *kärudwa*, the person's double, provoking death.

The principle of creation thus rests on this economy of exchanges on various levels between two humanities that were originally manifest on earth, one of which has withdrawn from sight, but yet remains ubiquitous, active, and demanding, inflicting both good and ill upon the other.

Heroes' Journeys, Shamans' Voyages

A comparison of shamanic singing with epic song and the voices of those who accompany the bard with exclamations and questions, *tubag*, gives a better idea of the links between *lumbaga* and *tultul*, both of which, as we have seen, share a similar vocal mode that is heard in the discreet shelter of the night.

In the epic, the notion of space is inseparable from the heroes' action, which is closely related to the journey. This action, rather than the hero's biography, is fundamental: his deeds and behavior are the qualities that identify him and mark his evolution in the multi-level worlds.

Thus Mämiminbin's path through the closed space of the epic that sings of the quest for a wife is none other than a rite of passage, an initiation: he evolves from ill manners to good manners, from impropriety to seemliness, according to the Palawan code of ethics, speech and behavior, as expressed in etiquette.

In order to elaborate a harmonious social space, the plot calls for fourteen voyages – two times seven – for the story's seven characters.¹⁹

The epic "Mämiminbin" reveals the same quest for truth and enlightenment in the shamanic voyage undertaken by Labit, followed by Mämiminbin, to Grandfather Thunder's abode. Projecting himself into the celestial space where the seven Thunder Brothers dwell, after going through trial by fire seven times over – as in the creation myth – the younger brother survives and the dialogue can begin at last. The cure by "sweeping away" heat, followed by a libation with "the oil of the world," will appease the anger and suspicion in the hero's mind .

Let us listen to the bard's account of the voyage taken by the two male characters towards *Anduwanän*, the upper realm, abode of Ämpuq. Mäsinu's words about this lived experience must be kept in mind. The reiteration of gestures and words, a procedure inherent to orality, acts as a crescendo of the intensity of this "epic moment"²⁰ and leads to a successful cure by the youngest of Thunder's brothers.

Labit's Shamanic Voyage

*At this very moment, Labit hurls himself [in space],
the soles of his feet are like flashes of lightning.
The story says, he flies as straight as a swarm of bees.
You can hear only the sound of his feet landing on the entrance platform
of Grandfather Thunder's abode ...*

*And what do you think happened to him? Labit went up and entered straight
the abode and went through the seven levels
So the story tells us.*

"As if in a Dream ..."

Māmiminbin's Shamanic Voyage

*I tell you that even if you go around the world, I will still try to catch you.
As for him, he instantly shot into space.
From the soles of his feet come flashes of lightning, the story says.*

*And the sheath of his sword touches the stars
And he has not even chewed a quid ...
It is as if he has always been standing there on the entrance platform
of Grandfather Thunder's abode.*

The Sweeping Cure

*What is going on? says Grandfather Thunder. Don't act like this!
Let us come to an amicable agreement.
My Grandson, stop making war. That is my wish.
He took his scarf and went up to the young man.*

*And when he fanned the young man's face with his scarf,
what do you think he was sweeping away?
The story tells us that there was a rumbling, there were flames.
Grandfather Thunder's head is engulfed in flames.*

*And what happened to him? His eyelashes were already singed.
He collapsed with the heat.
Little Brother, he says, it is your turn now.
For me, it is over. The young man is stronger than I am.
That is how he spoke.*

The Cure with the Oil of the World and the Advice from Grandfather Thunder

*He took only the bowls ...
He took seven of them, so the story says.
As for him, he went to fetch the oil of the world and the seven bowls were overflowing.*

*And he took his scarf made of the rays of the sun and embroidered in gold.
As for him, he added, My Little One, listen carefully to my words.*

*Your magical power is far superior to ours,
but here you are, in the absence of any wrongdoing, wanting a fight.
And you know that these are not the words of the Weaver of the World.*

*You are without compassion for your equal!
And the cause is your desire for the younger sister of my grandson Labit.*

*So, my children, he says, don't insist on fighting.
I will tell you one thing: if the grandson had committed incest before the world;
We would not have waited for you in order to incriminate them ...*

*So he simply took the oil of the world and, according to the story, threw it seven times.
Māmiminbin looks like cooked taro leaves.
He wiped him immediately with a scarf and Māmiminbin's burst of laughter sounds
like splitting bamboo.*

*Grandson, listen to my words if you have come to your senses, as before.
Sit down and let us come to an amicable agreement.
Do not challenge Labit to a fight anymore, he says.*

Cure to Appease Conflicts on Earth

*As for me, Grandson, in the name of the seven of us, what shall I tell you?
If you wish us to heal you we will cure you
so that there is no longer a dispute between you on earth.
Because, he says, what we are seeing is ugly:
These are not the words of Ämpuq [the Lord-Master].*

Reconciliation of the Two Heroes

*And Labit replies. You are right. The moment he came out,
the smile he gave his companion was like a flash of lightning tearing through the
clouds,
As for me, I am very sympathetic towards you.
And what does he do?
He takes his place and sits cross-legged on the threshold [of the abode of Master
Thunder].

Well, he says, I too am terribly sorry!
And he shook his companion's hand.
You decide as you wish, I have already laid down my weapons.
As for me, Friend, even if you don't speak a word,
Here is my fighting sword, to make amends for spilled blood.*

The story continues, but beginning with this cure, seamliness and harmony gradually prevail among the characters.

* * *

I have tried to show links of homology binding together a long narrative sung by a bard, the ritual performed by a shaman, and the telling of a bard-shaman's life story.

Epic poetry finds its barest and most archaic expression among the small forest societies of the "People of the Heights," the Highlanders, *Taw üt daya*.²¹ Here there is no theatricalization but a singer of tales who seems to be "asleep," and throughout the night he relates and creates in his plain-song the trials and feats of a hero and a heroine. Against the social backdrop of his community, he develops and perfects himself for his own happiness and for the good of that community. By his conduct, he must become a model man, the embodiment of the rights and duties that unite

him to his blood relatives and his affines, as well as to those others who must always be kept in mind, the Invisible Ones.

Translated from the French by Jennifer Curtiss Gage
Excerpts of Palawan Oral Tradition translated by Patricia Railing and Nicole Revel

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Notes

1. The first version of this text was presented at the Fourth Conference of the International Society for Shamanic Research, organized by R. N. Hamayon in Chantilly, France from 1 to 5 September 1997: "Le chamanisme: perspectives religieuses et politiques."
2. See E. Lot-Falk, 1953; G. Condominas, 1973, 1974; J. Dournes, 1977, 1978; C. Macdonald, 1973; R. N. Hamayon, 1990; K. Reichl, 1992, 1998.
3. See C. Macdonald, 1988; R. N. Hamayon, 1990 (conclusion): "Shamanism is a symbolic system based on a dualist conception of the world (dualist in principle, not in fact), implying that humanity maintains relations of alliance and exchange with the supernatural beings that are supposed to govern the natural beings upon which subsistence depends, and more generally the chance factors of its subsistence. The shaman is responsible for the alliance and exchange with the supernatural world, which he treats as a partner, a relation that requires a personalized art."
4. The vocal art of Palawan bards changes according to the landscape; as of now I have identified four aesthetics in the whole area. But this repertoire has great vitality in the highlands, and this feature is closely related to the presence of shamanism and the symbolic thought that is inherent in it.
5. In contrast to other traditions documented in Mindanao, among the Talaandig Bukidnon for example, or in the north of Luzon, among the Kalinga.
6. Unlike *Exirit Bulagat* societies, the Palawan have no words or expressions referring to the shaman's symbolic marriage with a spirit-woman of the forest. See R. N. Hamayon, 1990, p. 169.

7. *Mämininbin*, in *Quest of a Wife: A Palawan Epic Sung by Mäsinu*, trans. Patricia Railing (forthcoming).
8. *Balud*: *Duculaena palawanensis*. *Colombidae*, "green imperial pigeon."
9. *Uribas*: *Artemisia*.
10. This theme is also found in Central Asia, where the snake appears in the form of a whip, one of the attributes of Kirghiz shamaness, who is referred to as "open eyes." See S. Renaud, 1997, p. 14.
11. This refers to a whole demonology to be mastered. See N. Revel, 1991, pp. 51-52: "Profils de quelques Malfaisants."
12. But this is not viewed as a love bond followed by a symbolic marriage, as is found among Siberian shamans.
14. *Pärinaq*: "incense," an *Araliaceae*, a resin that is burned.
14. See N. Revel, *Mämininbin*, in *Quest of a Wife: A Palawan Epic Sung by Mäsinu* (forthcoming).
15. This would be in reference to a forest that was cut without the proper preliminary agreements: perhaps forgetting the necessary return gift in order to make the swidden. Here the whole ethical relationship to nature is expressed. One does not cut the forest without paying a tribute. To cut trees, captured souls and broken lives.
16. A forest has been cut without sufficient planning, perhaps without the compensatory rites, in order to create upland fields and swiddens. This situation embodies the ethics of the Palawan's relation to nature. The great forest must not be cut without compensatory offerings, or without paying a fine: in exchange for felled trees, souls are captured or lives broken.
17. *Almaciga*: *Agathis philippinensis*, an evergreen tree with a resin known as "copal de Manila."
18. See N. Revel, 1991, chapter 1; C. Macdonald, 1988, chapter 4.
19. In the visible world and the supernatural world, seven characters evolve: two men, *Mämininbin* and *Labit*, a "Powerful One," *Ämpuq ät Säraq*, the "Lady of Fish," and their assistants in the forest and the sea, the Nutmeg Pigeons and *Tandayag*, a dragon-like fish, monster of the deep, while Grandfather Thunder keeps watch in the middle space. *Labit*'s little sister does not leave the house, which will become the center of a uxori-local social space, the hamlet, *rurungan*, a group of neighbors united by consanguinity and affinity, a local group.
20. See A. Hatto, 1989, vol. 1, Introduction, for a definition of an "epic moment."
21. Outside Palawan, they can be found in Borneo, in Mindanao, Luzon, on the High Plateaus of the Indochinese and Malay peninsula.