



## Freud among the Orang Sakai

### The Father Archetype, the Talking Cure, and the Transference in a Sumatran Shamanic Healing Complex

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**Abstract.** – This article provides a detail description of a Sakai shamanic healing ritual session. The aim is to show that certain therapeutic techniques and themes associated with Freud are prevalent in indigenous form within the shamanic healing “tool kit.” These Freudian themes are a) recognition of the therapeutic force of the word, b) the healing qualities of the father archetype, c) recognition of transference type phenomena, and d) recognition of the detrimental side of emotional investment in others (object cathexis). This article also makes the point that in our attempt to understand indigenous healing we should focus on the one-to-one relationship between the healing techniques and the indigenous theory of consciousness. [*Sumatra, Sakai, shamanic healing, talking therapy, transference, father archetype*]

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Since Lévi-Strauss’ seminal treatise on the effectiveness of healing (1963), anthropologists have explored the therapeutics of spirit-based cures. Taking the talking-therapy technique for his analogy, Lévi-Strauss tried to show how symbolism in the Kuna shaman’s song to facilitate childbirth worked

as a metaphor for the female patient’s reproductive system. Lévi-Strauss’ analysis was based on an examination of a Kuna songtext, which Holmer and Wassén published in 1947. Subsequent writers have shown that the flaw in Lévi-Strauss’ “talking-cure” analogy with the shaman’s song is that the Kuna patient does not hear or even understand all the words (Sherzer 1983). However, authors accept that the cure works within a symbolic field of action in which the patient has some understanding of what the healer is doing. But this is not what Lévi-Strauss was arguing for as he was clearly using the psychoanalyst’s “talking-cure” as a therapeutic analogy for the effectiveness of the shaman’s song. Lévi-Strauss’ point was that if the psychoanalyst’s talking cure has any therapeutic effect, then by analogy we can interpret the shaman’s chant within a similar therapeutic frame of symbolic efficacy, an efficacy that has direct bearings on the body’s physiology.

Lévi-Strauss’ essay had inspired anthropologists to understand the effectiveness of symbolic mechanisms in spirit-based healing. His article led to rather diverse but interesting symbolic and phenomenological analyses by subsequent authors. Although some authors still analyse shamanic texts,<sup>1</sup> there has been a general shift beyond the analysis of texts and the “talking-cure” analogy and a move towards the study of the total performance in which healing is carried out (Hill 1992: 176). Laderman (1991: 301),

1 McGuire (1983); Laderman (1991); Atkinson (1989); Humphrey (1995).

using a Turnerian approach to symbolism speaks of a “fan of symbols” that generates meaning for the patient. In her work she focuses on the performance of indigenous archetypal personas (1991). Kapferer recognises the transformative power of ritual symbols in the reconstruction of self in his study of Sinhalese exorcism rites (1983). Csordas, in his study of American religious charismatics, sees efficacy in the rhetoric of transformation and the use of mental imagery as bodily healing techniques (Csordas 1994, 2002). Roseman (1991) explores the role of music in healing. Whereas it is recognised that spirit-based healing utilises universal symbols (Dow 1986) and psychodynamic techniques, such as catharsis-induction (Lévi-Strauss 1963; Scheff 1979), these features are generated within the total context of the performance of healing. In this performative approach, healing is not just drama-therapy but is a total cultural performance in its own right (Jennings 1995, Laderman and Roseman 1996). In most of these analyses the relationship between the indigenous theory of consciousness and the techniques of healing, such as songs and the performance of different healing techniques, is not fully articulated.

In a non-Christian specifically shamanic healing context the problem seems to be in our understandings of indigenous concepts of “souls” that shamans are supposed to manage. While in most ethnographic writings the indigenous word is retained for the term that translates into English as “soul,” the ethnographic understandings of the indigenous terms are still framed within Western religionist-spiritualist discourses from where the word “soul” finds its origin (Lambek 1998). On the other hand, the interpretative models for understanding the therapeutic effectiveness of healing are drawn from Western psychotherapeutic models that are based on clearly elaborated theories of consciousness (Kirmayer 1993: 161). One, therefore, has to read between the lines to conclude that the efficacy of symbols in the shamanic healing context works on certain levels of the body through unconscious processes. The term “unconscious” forms the foundation of the modern psychotherapeutic epistemology. It experientially fashions ideas about and directs psychological experiences of the culturally modern body-consciousness. This is even the case within modern religious healing contexts as Csordas has shown for American Christian Charismatics (1994).

Most studies of the effectiveness of symbolic healing then remains on an elaborated semiotic level of “it is performed, it is believed in, it is sensed, and, therefore, it has a therapeutic effect on the mind/body.” In these analyses the “performed fan of symbols” becomes a fan spraying meanings in all direc-

tions for the patient to embody (through conscious and unconscious bodily processes). A one-to-one relationship between the symbolic healing techniques and the indigenous ideas of consciousness is rarely revealed. Even Dejarlais’ (1992) account of the patient’s sensoriality of presence or loss of it does not fully make the connection (for my critique of Dejarlais see Porath 2011). We should, therefore, be looking at how healing techniques work directly through indigenous concepts of conscious experience without reducing them to a religionist-spiritualist conception of the soul, or Freud’s concept of the unconscious.

In this article I will provide an example of a shamanic healing ritual performed by the late Bah Sehari who was a shaman (*kemantat*) of the Orang Sakai of Riau, a Malayic-speaking Orang Asli (first people) of Sumatra. The main technique in this particular healing session was what in Western literature is called “the search for the soul.” The session utilised very clear father-son tropes for this end through the use of a spirit-song imagery. Although the patient was the shaman’s natural son, I have seen Bah Sehari perform similar father-child tropes for other patients who are his classificatory children. Further, within Sakai healing the knowledge of other psychoanalytical therapeutic technical themes that Freud introduced to Western medicine, such as the transference and investment of emotional energy in an object (object cathexis), seems also to be prevalent here in an indigenous form. I suggest that these thematic and therapeutic procedures can actually form part of indigenous healing knowledge and techniques of healing.

## The Ethnographic Context

### A Brief Description of Father-Son and Sibling Relations among Sakai

The Orang Sakai are mainly cassava shifting cultivators and forest resource collectors. In the past, they lived at the forested edge of the Malay Sultanate of Siak. Today (late 20th century – Millennium) most Sakai live on the edge of the Pekanbaru-Duri high road, which runs in a north-south direction (see Suparlan 1995; Porath 2000, 2002). The fundamental unit of Sakai social relations is the nuclear family, which inhabits its own house. A settlement consists of a group of conjugally related households living in the same compound. These households are usually sibling related households.

Within the Sakai nuclear family complex the father is not an authoritarian father. Neither is the fa-

ther an absent or distant father to reappear as an authoritative figure at a later age. Fathers are very close and protective ones. In fact, the father is the only male present when the child is born and takes care of the child immediately. At the early stages of a child's life, fathers reduce their workload outside of the house in order to help the mother in childcare and share in household chores. Father's also spend a lot of time playing and looking after their children. It is very common to see a father carrying the child in a sling resting on his hip in the same way the mother would carry the baby.

Sakai children are born into a community of conjugal households formed by men and women who are milk-blood or classificatory siblings to each other. All these men and women are of the parental generation to the child. Although the growing child calls on all adults by the term *mak* and *bah* (mother and father) and gradually starts moving between households, the child still recognises the biological parents as parents (*o'ak tuo*). It is this pair who has nourished the child. Their household remains the child's household of orientation unless the parents give him (or her) up for adoption to another family. Even when this occurs, the child still recognises the biological parent's household as their second home.

In between the biological parents and the classificatory parents are the people who are categorically considered to be the child's siblings. As the male (and female) child starts to walk and play outside of the parental house, she/he usually follows the company of older girls (sisters and classificatory sisters – *kak*). These girls not only play with the child but also deliver childcare. During the age of two to six years many sisters surround the Sakai child.

Around the age of six the gender separation begins and the female child gradually enters the girls peer group and the boys enter the peer group of boys. For boys there is a shift from spending time and being fussed over by their older sisters and classificatory sisters to spending time with their older brothers who up to this point are relatively more distant. At this stage first-degree sisters (cousins), who fall in the incest-avoidance category, start becoming a gendered-other to the male child.

As the male child reaches puberty his personal movements in the area expands and follows the trajectory of the social relations that tie his parents' household to the greater community. Following puberty, adolescent boys start spending more time in other settlements for work, for social purposes, and in search of a bride. They become mobile. Although classificatory parents do not provide much childcare at the early stages of a child's life, at a later stage

their house is opened to the older child. Adolescent and young unmarried adults utilise their relations with them to stay in their house (*menumpak*) if it is in another settlement. Thus rather than being a repressed male within his father's household, which characterised the patriarchal Freudian father archetype, the growing son starts to wander in different locations securing and developing his own personal network of relations with people before marrying. Such mobility also has its problems as it exposes the man to dangers. Human, animal, or spirit intruders referred to as *misuh* can intercept a person's path and provide obstacles to their movements. *Misuh* can cause both physical and mental harm. Animals and humans can cause physical harm. Humans (through the use of magic) and spirits can harm a person's conscious and physical well-being as well. When this occurs, the person approaches a shaman (*kemantat*). Every settlement has at least one shaman who, outside of his healing practice, is usually a father/classificatory parent or sibling to others in the settlement. (There are also a small number of shamanesses.) The shaman performs a healing ritual called *dikei*. In the healing ritual, which starts after sunset and lasts for approximately two hours, the shaman enters the other dimension (*masuk alap lain*), sees spirits, and calls them for their help. He might also travel with them in search of the patient's *semanget*. This term *semanget* is the key term within Sakai cultural understanding of consciousness and healing and below I will devote a section to it.

In *dikei*, shamans utilise many different healing techniques from extracting the illness to the performance of specific scenarios, singing loudly with metaphoric speech and, as already indicated, "the search for the patient's soul." Sakai call this technique *muncari semanget* (search for *semanget*) for which the aim is to *me'mawo semanget balik* (to bring the *semanget* back). The following ritual is an example of "the search for *semanget*" technique utilising spirit songs (*nanyi dikei*) as a form of "talking cure" therapy.

### A *dikei* Held on January 1st, 1997

On the night of January 1st, 1997, Bah Sehari held a *dikei* to restore the *semanget* of his son. Prior to the healing the young man had been working temporarily with other Sakai men at a logging site, sleeping nights out in the woods. The shaman called his son and the other Sakai men from the settlement to return home so that they could help in an all-night ritual that he was preparing. The son already felt physically weak during that event but still served

as a principal drummer to his father and the other shamans who participated that night. A couple of days following the all-night event, the young man could not return to the woods and resume his work. He suffered from high fever, which alternated with bouts of chills. He lost his appetite and complained of disturbed sleep, with vivid dreams. Whereas at the time I thought he might be suffering from malaria, the Sakai healer diagnosed the illness that caused *semanget* to wander as *sakit tetogu*. This is the illness originally brought upon a patient through his *semanget*, encountering a *tetogu* spirit that inhabits the miasma of a lake. A specific non-shamanic magical rite to ward off the influence of this spirit was performed before the *dikei* ritual started.

In the following healing ritual, the shaman was not concerned with this spirit but with the patient's *semanget* wanderings, which he diagnosed from the patient's nighttime dream experiences, his activities prior to onset of the illness, and his bodily condition during the day. A vital element of his body and self was reduced preventing the patient from joining his classificatory siblings in their daily economic activities. As Bah Sehari explained to me, the patient's wish to return to his friends and to his work is reflected in his dreams in which his disturbed *semanget* is travelling out to them at night instead. Because of his illness his wish for reintegration is displaced onto the other dimension where his *semanget* is wandering (*semanget jalat*). Healing was carried out to search for and restore the wandering *semanget*.

During the day, some people of the settlement built a palm leaf model called *balai ombak bungo* (House of Billowing Flowers) that served as the altar in the session. This was a square-shaped model house about 60 cm in height. Leading up to the door of the model house was a small ladder with three steps. Instead of a roof on top of the low rising walls, the interior of the model house was filled with a variety of flower forms (*puat*) woven from palm leaf.

The *dikei* commenced shortly after seven o'clock in the shaman's house. As in all *dikei* sessions and other communal events, the men sat on the floor, leaning against the inner panel of the front and back walls. Women sat in the same room opposite the men with their backs to the kitchen extension. They all faced the direction of the *balai ombak bungo*. They were all the people of the settlement related to each other through sibling or parent-child kinship affiliation.

I shall now use the present tense.

As in all healing events, this *dikei* opens with the shaman sitting cross-legged, his body is prostrated

before the palm leaf altar. His head is covered with a red cloth. Under the cloth the shaman alters his state of consciousness by going into the trance. The spirit dimension enters (*alap lain masuk*) the shaman's perceptual awareness and the shaman's *semanget* in turn enters the spirit dimension (*masuk alap lain*). Once he has entered the spirit dimension he starts singing the opening song.

<i>Dondak dondak</i>	[Words of invocation]
<i>salam alaikum</i>	greetings of peace
<i>sebolah ki 'i</i>	to those on the right
<i>salam alaikum</i>	greetings of peace
<i>sebolah kanan</i>	to those on the left
<i>meminto tabe</i>	I request permission
<i>kepada anak ajo</i>	from the child of the king
<i>di tonga podak</i>	in the middle of the field
<i>o'ak di gunuk</i>	people of the mountain
<i>memo'i Salam</i>	give their greetings
<i>kepada o'ak di podak</i>	to the people of the field
<i>minto tabe</i>	request permission
<i>kepada o'ak di podak.</i>	to the people of the field.

As the shaman is paying respect to the spirit, he gently bounces his knees in time with the drumbeat. He stretches out his hand from under the cloth and his wife puts some puffed rice in his palm. The shaman, still singing, calls on the spirit of Anak Ajo (Child-of-the-King) to descend and heal. After exhorting the spirit not to embarrass him for requesting medicine, he stops singing and scatters granules of puffed rice in the direction of the spirit in a manner reminiscent of a person throwing flowers at an honoured person.

Following ritualised procedures (which do not interest us here), he walks to the patient who is sitting upright with his legs crossed. Holding the candle in one hand and the plate with puffed rice and with burning coal in the other, the shaman circles these items over the patient's head. He ends the last circle by raising and lowering his hands just above the patient's fontanel. As he does this, he repeats the following spell quickly:

<i>Tuju timbak,</i>	Seven of weight
<i>bule ku timbak</i>	I can weigh
<i>tuju ganti,</i>	seven of exchange,
<i>bule ku ganti.</i>	I can exchange.

The shaman gives the plates to his wife-assistant (*didayak*). He takes some puffed rice and holds the granules in his clenched fist over the patient's head and spills them over his fontanel. He gives the

impression that he is filling the patient's head with them. Next he stretches his fingers out over the patient's head and with his palm he presses the puffed rice down and sings the following spirit song:

<i>Budak lah kocik, dae,</i>	Little child, friend,
<i>omeh, bubintak omeh</i>	golden, with a golden star
<i>jawet lah salam</i>	greetings of peace
<i>aku kem'ali</i>	I return the greetings
<i>budak lah kocik, dae</i>	little child, friend
<i>omeh, bubintak omeh</i>	golden, with a golden star
<i>aku sombah budak dae</i>	I pay homage to [you] child, friend
<i>jawet lah salam, kem'ali,</i>	greetings of peace, returned,
<i>sombah kem'ali</i>	homage returned
<i>budak lah kocik, dae</i>	little child, friend
<i>omeh, bubintak omeh.</i>	golden, with a golden star.

The shaman repeats the verses of this song a few times. He then walks towards the *balai ombak bungo*. Here he raises both his hands bringing the palms together in a gesture of respect (*menyombah*). He then takes the candle, and faces the altar (*balai ombak bungo*). The shaman begins to dance forming a geometrical cross in the room. With his dance steps he maps the four cardinal points of the cosmos and the fifth in the centre. The shaman then starts to dance around this geometric centre-point but quickly converts the circle into a figure of eight.

When he stops dancing, he motions the drummer to stop drumming. Facing the patient, the shaman presses his thumb on the patient's forehead. He dips his thumb in the water, passing the thumb over the candle flame to purify it, and then again positions his thumb on the patient's forehead. He stretches his fingers upwards fanning them out over the patient's forehead as he presses on this *semanget* spot of the patient's body.

The shaman then begins to sing a new spirit song:

<i>Anak Mu'ai tu'ut la sayak</i>	Child of Magpie Robin, descend, oh endeared one
<i>Tu'ut meubet jangan me-nyampi</i>	descend and heal with the power of spell
<i>Jangan bule kito malu.</i>	don't embarrass us [for asking].

The shaman continues to treat the patient as he calls on the child of Magpie Robin. He purifies his hand with the candle's flame and briefly presses the patient's upper abdomen. Then he holds the patient's right wrist feeling his pulse. He repeats this for the left wrist thereby checking the patient's *se-*

*manget*. He takes puffed rice, rubs the patient's wrist with it, and then wipes the sweat of his brow on the patient's right wrist. The shaman then gets up and motions to the patient to sit in front of the *balai ombak bungo*. A female assistant covers the patient's head with a clean batik cloth, so that he does not see the next stages of the healing procedure. He is only exposed to the ritual through the medium of sound and body sensations. In this seated position, with his head covered, the patient resembles the shaman at the start of the *dikei*, and, like the healer is symbolically positioned in the centre of the room and thus in the centre of the cosmos.

The shaman holds the puppet bird of Magpie Robin (*Mu'ai*) in his left hand and the candle in his right. The drumming resumes and the shaman continues calling on the spirit "Child of Magpie Robin," swaying to the beat. He begins to dance behind the patient in a figure of eight with the puppet bird, candle, and the corners of the cloth in his hands. He sings the following song:

<i>Eh, anak mu'ai,</i>	Eh, the child of Magpie Robin,
<i>ai'nyo doeh,</i>	its water is flowing,
<i>sungainyo sompi</i>	its river is narrow
<i>masuk lengo'i Jami,</i>	enter the Jami town,
<i>pumesi, Jami</i>	where the Pumesi [fish] of Jami [are found]
<i>tu'ut anak mu'ai</i>	come down Child of Magpie Robin
<i>jangan lah kito malu</i>	don't make us embarrassed [for asking]
<i>jangan lah kito tubuo ai'.</i>	don't blow us away as you would do water.

The shaman tries to negotiate with Magpie Robin and sings:

<i>Tuju timbak,</i>	Seven of weight,
<i>buleh ku timbak</i>	I can weigh [for you]
<i>tuju ganti</i>	seven [units of] exchange
<i>buleh ku ganti.</i>	I can exchange [with you].

The shaman sings these verses a number of times and then teases the audience by saying that Magpie Robin wants to go fishing first (*onak munaju dolu*) and hence the delay. He continues dancing in a figure of eight as the beat intensified. The drummer and the shaman now sing alternately. As the shaman exhorts the bird to respond, the drummer sings:

<i>Ili ku canang</i>	Down river [there is a] gong [sound]	<i>Ajo mudo</i>	Young king
<i>mudik ku candi</i>	upriver [there is a] shrine	<i>sedan, bumain sedan</i>	sedan [car], driving his sedan
<i>kain selendak</i>	a cloth	<i>sedan gilo,</i>	sedan is crazy,
<i>laman punampek laman</i>	[used] to sweep the yard	<i>lopeh di tangan</i>	escaping from the hand
<i>ili ku ca'i</i>	upriver [I] search	<i>ajo mudo bumain sedan</i>	young king driving [his] sedan
<i>mudik ku pandak</i>	down river I can see	<i>sedan tu lalu tobak</i>	that sedan always flies
<i>bu'uk mu'ak lopeh di tangan</i>	a peacock escapes from the hand	<i>sedan tu dapet</i>	that sedan is caught
<i>eh, tangan tu lokung</i>	eh, that hand holds [it] loosely	<i>bosa, di angin bosa</i>	in a big wind
<i>betututnyo bukapal</i>	[on hearing] the engine sound of a boat	<i>sedan tu tawan</i>	that sedan is captured
<i>keut mu'ai anak</i>	Magpie Robin shivers	<i>lobat, di 'ujan lobat</i>	in heavy rain
<i>mu'ai di mano kinin</i>	Robin, where is now	<i>ajo mudo</i>	young king
<i>badat mu'ai anak</i>	the [body of the] child of Magpie Robin	<i>sedan, bumain sedan</i>	sedan, [driving] his sedan car
<i>pinang gading,</i>	[under the] ivory areca nut	<i>sedan dolu,</i>	the car drives first,
<i>betoduh mu'ai toduh</i>	Magpie Robin takes shelter	<i>kenian, ati kenian</i>	but it's heart is behind
<i>mu'ai jangan la kito</i>	Robin, from us don't	<i>sedan tu tawan</i>	that sedan is captured
<i>toduh muak</i>	take shelter in weariness	<i>lobat, di 'ujan lobat</i>	in heavy rain
<i>bu'uma bosa</i>	there is a big house	<i>inget inget</i>	careful, careful
<i>buladak lebah</i>	and a wide swidden	<i>sedan, munyalang sedan</i>	sedan, in your driving, sedan
<i>mu'ai, anak mu'ai</i>	Magpie Robin, child of the robin	<i>tingal sekojap</i>	stop for a moment
<i>tu anjong ado</i>	there is a chamber	<i>omeh, soi di omeh.</i>	oh, golden one.
<i>tu gadih ado</i>	and there is a maiden [waiting]		
<i>mu'ai anak mu'ai</i>	Magpie Robin, the child of the Robin		
<i>iko nan balai bungo</i>	this is that house of flowers,		
<i>ombak bungo</i>	billowing flowers	<i>Lancak kocik,</i>	Small yacht,
<i>untuk penyopit dibalak</i>	for healing [our] warrior	<i>timbang butimbang</i>	balancing and balancing
<i>eh, bungo tu ogun</i>	eh, those flowers are waiting	<i>timbang ombak dobu</i>	balancing on the waves of sand
<i>mu'ai, anak mu'ai</i>	Magpie Robin, child of the robin	<i>jangan boleh kito malu</i>	don't make us shy [for asking]
<i>panjang kobanan bu'uk,</i>	lengthy bad news,	<i>ili tak onak,</i>	it does not move down river,
<i>jangan dibilak</i>	don't tell us	<i>mudik tak mau</i>	it does not move upriver
<i>mu'ai, anak mu'ai.</i>	Magpie Robin, child of the Robin.	<i>lancak kocik</i>	small yacht
		<i>manjo, putulo manjo</i>	endeared as the petula fruit
		<i>lancak kocik</i>	small yacht
		<i>timbang, butimbang</i>	balancing and balancing
		<i>timbang ombak dobu</i>	balancing on the waves of sand
		<i>ili tak onak</i>	it does not move upriver
		<i>mudik tak mau.</i>	it does not move down river.

After a while, the shaman interjects the drummer's singing by abruptly changing the spirit song. Now he is calling on "Ajo Mudo Bumain Sedan" (Young King Driving a Sedan). The drum beat slows down and the shaman begins to dance in a figure of eight again and the drummer takes over the song:

The shaman continues with the same dance steps, but the upper half of his body now moves more ecstatically. After a few minutes the drumming stops but starts again with a new song, which the shaman sings:

He holds the candle out in front of him with his upper arms rigidly held to his waist. He sways his hips from side to side like a boat caught on the sandy banks of a river. The drumming gets faster. As he sings the above song, one of the female assistants (*didayak*) shouts at him “*Ba’o lah bali, di mano len-gah dibalak awak*” (Bring back the [*semanget*] of our warrior. Why does it take so long?). Abruptly the shaman stops dancing and puts the candle down. He is given the puppet bird again. In a moment he will use this puppet to characterise the patient’s *semanget* bird.

The shaman bends down with the puppet in his hand and slowly raises it to his waist as though it were extremely heavy. Has he caught the bird? Then suddenly and without notice he whirls on the spot (*bu’pusik*). A few seated men (*dibalak*) get up and surround him for protection, lest he jerks backwards or falls. As the shaman whirls, he suddenly leaps forward and past the seated patient giving a loud yell “*aaarr*,” as he lands alongside the *balai ombak bungo*. His gestures mime the capture of a bird now clasped in his hands. There is a momentary commotion. The young men follow him to guard him from falling. His wife, the principal female assistant (*didayak*), also gets up quickly. She unties the red cloth and she swiftly wraps it around the puppet bird in his hands. The bird firmly wrapped, the shaman slips his left hand out of the bundle and picks up the candle. He keeps his right hand bundled in the cloth, securely close to his chest as though protecting a bird. He has caught the patient’s *semanget* as one would catch a timid bird.

The shaman now has the task of bringing the bird back and reembodying *semanget*. With the rapid drumming in the background and the shaman’s quick dance movements, the whole scenario now gives the impression of urgency. The shaman dances in a figure of eight. He gradually closes his dance steps into a circle until he whirls on the spot (*bu’pusik*) with his bundle kept close to his chest. He then stops.

The assistants direct him to sit near the patient, who by now has taken the cloth off his head and is facing the shaman expectantly. The shaman washes his face with the scented water and picks up the candle again. He looks around for malign spirits (with his eyes closed). He puts the candle down, takes puffed rice in his hand, purifies his hand over the flame, and scatters the granules in a certain direction. He then makes a hand gesture of respect (*menyombah*) in the same direction. Then, instead of restoring the patient’s *semanget* as everyone expects him to do, he gets up and walks to the *balai ombak bungo*. He sees a spirit hovering around it that

can help him. He stretches his hand out in request for medicine (whilst still holding his other bundled hand close to his chest). He waits for the spirit to spit its medicine in his hand. He twitches as though some energy has just touched him. He closes his fingers on the palm of his hand. The shaman now prepares himself to restore the patient’s *semanget*.

Sitting cross-legged in front of the patient he slips his free hand into the bundle and tugs it out again as if he is pulling something out from the bundle’s content. As he does this, he makes a twittering-kissing (bird) sound giving the impression that the bird in the bundle has been pinched. Removing his hand away from the bundle, he keeps the tip of his index finger and thumb tightly together as though he is now holding something very small. Wiping the tips of his fingers and thumb on the sweat of his forehead, he then aims the piece of *semanget* at the patient’s forehead, moving his hand back and forth as if aiming a dart at a target. He stretches his arm towards the patient’s forehead following the direction of his aim. He reinserts the “piece” of *semanget* held between his fingers into the middle of the patient’s forehead. He presses his thumb on the patient’s forehead, fanning his fingers outwards. He then dips his hands in the scented water, purifies his fingers with the candle flame and then places his thumb back on the patient’s forehead again. He keeps it there for a few seconds. Then again, he purifies his fingers with the flame and rubs the patient’s forehead.

After restoring and sealing a piece of the patient’s *semanget*, the shaman slips his hand into the red bundle again and pulls out a second “piece of *semanget*,” making the kissing sound. He motions the patient to raise his vest. The shaman targets the patient’s abdomen in the same manner as he did the forehead. Once *semanget* is mimed in place, he rubs his thumb on that spot. Then he dips his fingers in the scented water, purifies them in the flame, and then again gently rubs the patient’s upper abdomen. Next, Bah Sehari takes the patient’s hands and folds the fingers inwards. He lines the thumbs side by side and rubs granules of puffed rice on their tips. He also rubs his thumb tips on his sweating forehead. Once more he slips his hand into the bundle, pulls out another “piece of *semanget*” with finger and thumb and aims at the patient’s aligned thumbs. The shaman then dips his fingers into the scented water. He purifies his fingers in the flame and holds the patient’s thumbs for a few seconds to secure the restored *semanget*. The patient then puts his feet together and with a twittering-kissing sound the shaman pulls out another “piece of *semanget*” from the bundle aimed at the patient’s big toes. He

then brings his finger and thumb to touch them. He dips his fingers in the scented water, takes puffed rice in his hand, passes it over the candle flame, and then rubs the patient's big toes with the granules.

Now that *semanget* has been reembodied, the shaman takes distance from the patient. He raises the bundle of cloth to his right ear and shakes it. He then raises it to his left ear and shakes it again, listening for any remaining contents. Satisfied that the bundle is empty of its *semanget*, he gets up and circles the wrapped cloth above the patient's head. On the last circle he raises and lowers the bundle just above the patient's fontanel. As he secures and comforts the restored *semanget* in the patient's body, the patient's mother makes a very important sound in the background. She raises the palm of her hand to the side of her mouth and makes a bird-like twittering sound. The bird sound is to comfort the reembodied *semanget* bird with maternal bird's twitterings during this delicate moment of its restoration.

After circling the bundle above the patient's head (*muinak inak*), the shaman passes the bundle downwards, tracing the contours of the patient's body: first the right side, then the left. The shaman gets up, picks the *balai ombak bungo*, and circles it over the patient's head. Again the patient's mother makes bird twitter sounds.

He then turns to other patients with minor ailments. After the shaman has treated all the patients who presented themselves to him he returns his attention to the principal patient and begins to dance in a figure of eight. He sings a new song:

<i>Anak alun,</i>	Floating child,
<i>si kumpai alun,</i>	of the floating rush [leaves],
<i>bu'alun pulak</i>	floating to return
<i>ketompet asal mulo jadi.</i>	to the place of its origin.

The male assistant tells him that it is time to return (*balik*). Soon after, the shaman sits cross-legged in front of the *balai ombak bungo* as he had done at the start of the *dikei*. He covers his head with the cloth and returns from the spirit dimension.

## The Indigenous Idea of (Altered) Consciousness

### *Semanget* as the Conditioner of a Person's Body Conscious State and Its Role in Object Cathexis and Transference

As already mentioned, every healing tradition has its own understanding of consciousness through which its techniques work. Sakai ideas of conscious awareness and non-awareness centre on the

key concept of *semanget*. *Semanget* is an intangible essence in the human body. Under ordinary healthy conditions *semanget* is one with the body. It gives the body conscious life and a healthy image. Its throbbing presence in the body can be felt where there is a pulse and it is also associated with blood running in the veins. However, parts of embodied *semanget* can splinter and detach itself from the body. Unless one is a shaman, and discounting ordinary dreams, a healthy human body should not consciously experience *semanget*. Consciously experiencing *semanget* through non-ritualised techniques implies its loss and departure from the body. When it departs from the body, Sakai talk of these states as moments when one is "not aware anymore" (*tak soda' la'i*) of one's human environment. Instead, the person is aware of the spirit-dimension (*alap lain*). Experientially, *semanget* is the sense of self in the alternate states of consciousness (dream states, madness, controlled and uncontrolled trance states). Its detachment is expressed through the metaphor of an airborne being, usually a bird (*bu'uk semanget – semanget* bird) taking flight (*tobak*). As an airborne being, *semanget* is characteristically timid and can suddenly depart from the body under extreme confrontations. By extension, parts of *semanget* can leave the body leaving the person weak and in a state Dejarlais (1992) calls "loss of presence." The expression "*semanget* bird taking flight" suggests that Sakai conceive the body consciousness as fragile and susceptible to negative influences.

In substance, *semanget* is the same as the substance that makes up the refined materiality of spirits (*antu*). Spirits cause illness by attacking the human body through *semanget* or by attracting *semanget* to them. In the first instance, the attack is somatised as pain in the body, in the second instance, the person suffers from madness (*gilo*). The second experience is described in terms of the mad person's craving desire for the spirit-possessing *semanget*. If experientially *semanget* is the sense of self in the altered states of consciousness, then spirits are the sense of others in those states interacting with *semanget*. Thus, whether *semanget* is interfered with by spirits, magic, or by its own predisposition to take flight, it is the conditioner of a person's conscious awareness.

Central to the symbolic and metaphoric expression of *semanget* is a key image portraying an airborne being usually a bird but also a bee gravitating towards an upright tree like object and flies in circles around it. This symbolic image and its metaphoric uses in shamanic and magical activities represent the gravitation of parts of embodied *semanget* to the object that has the power to attract it. The image appears in love spells (*monto*) that call on the *seman-*



get of another to libidiously fly to the spellcaster like a bee to a flower and suck on its nectar. The aim is to pull the *semanget* of another so that the bewitched will feel an extreme longing and desire for the spellcaster. Another spell scenario orders an eagle or a bee to bring the bird *semanget* of the other to the spellcaster, for the same purpose of making the bewitched fall in love with them. Sakai recognise that this emotional investment in the other is not real love but is due to control of *semanget*. As an extreme emotional experience it is a form of madness (*gilo*). What is interesting for us is not whether there is a direct cause and effective relationship between the spell utterance and the other's emotional experience. Sakai themselves say that inducing an affect through spell utterance is never certain and the most promising method is through food-poisoning. But people do experience aberrant sudden desires and longing for others who a day earlier they may have totally rejected or ignored. What is interesting for us analytically are the scenarios that the spells depict and the role they give disembodied *semanget* in those emotional states. The metaphor of the bee flying to the flower or the bird to a tree orbiting in its gravity characterises the aberrant emotional (libidinal) obsession with the object-other. In this process the victim's *semanget* is "tied" (*semanget-nyo di tali*) and the person "is taken" (*di ambil*). As Kapferer (1995; see also Hobart 2003) describes in another context, consciousness is "chained."

If *semanget* detachment from the body has its symptoms in bodily psychological states, the aim of the *dikei* healing technique of *mencari semanget* is to redirect the detached *semanget* back to the body (*mem'awo semanget bali*) and restore the individual to psychological normality. For this aim *dikei* healing sessions utilise the centralising image of a palm leaf tree-like object standing about sixty centimetres in height. This healing prop is the *puat*. The *puat* not only has many layers of symbolic meaning attached to it, but there are many types of *puat*. In old Malay, *puan* (the Malay rendering of the word) means court lady, and as we shall see below, on one symbolic level, the *puat* is an offering of a maiden.

Woven palm leaf models of flowers and leaves representing the foliage of various forest trees are spiked into the *puat* base. Each flower or leaf represents a variety of different species of very tall forest trees in which bees build their hives (*sialang*). In the past, these *sialang* species of trees (generically bee trees) had a semisacred status not only among Sakai but in the greater Malay area as a whole. *Sialang* species of trees have provided Sakai verbal art with positive symbolical imageries of cosmic centrality, kinship, health, and continuity. Condensed in each

*puat*, the leaf, representing a species of bee tree, is the associated idea of the bee (*kumbak*) flying to the beehive in the *sialang* tree. In this context and through its association with the bee tree, the *puat* represents the welding sweetness of family and friends who are seated around the *puat* in the healing session. In other words, the *puat* is an object associated with cosmic centrality, social bonding, and a positive "power of attraction" (see Porath 2003).

Sakai do not directly think of the *puat* as a tree although much symbolism and metaphors surrounding the *puat* does suggest that it represents the world or cosmic tree (*kayu alam* in modern Malay, Indonesian). People's general exegesis of the *puat* is that it is a beautiful gift of a bouquet of flowers to the shaman's tutelary spirit persuading it to help in the search of medicine. When the *puat* wilts and withers (*melayu*), the image (*mayo*) that gives the palm leaf the *puat* form is released and transferred to the spirit dimension for the spirit's taking. Through the beauty of the *puat* image the shaman also attracts the patient's disembodied wandering *semanget* from the object of its attraction in the spirit dimension. The image of the airborne being flying to a tree-like object does not focus on the bird/bee or on the tree/flower/*puat*. The focus of the image is the presumed "force of attraction" that compels the airborne being in each case to gravitate towards the latter.

There is also a negative side to this "power of attraction" within *dikei* healing sessions. Sakai are aware that members of the audience, watching shamans as they trance and dance (*dikei*), can suddenly have a strong feeling of love or adoration for the healer. Parts of their *semanget* may simply detach from their body and fly to the shaman. This is not supposed to happen, but it can. Moreover, since shamans have the ability to manipulate *semanget* they also can use this knowledge to their advantage by deliberately influencing the emotions of a member of the opposite sex.

The bee/flower or bird/*puat* images that are central to Sakai healing (*ubet*) are root metaphors for psychological experiences that "pull the self out of oneself" (Roseman 1991). Most (although not all) of Sakai shamanic healing is concerned with manipulating the *semanget* of others and concomitantly directing the other's body consciousness and emotions.

### The Emerging Rhetorical Therapeutic Picture – Bringing the Son Back to the Father

The most important body technique in *dikei* is the shamanic trance that suggests spirit dimensional presence. The shamanic trance is the only way the

shaman can embody the spirit dimension and is an embodied expression of spirit-human boundary crossing. When the shaman alters his consciousness, he is positioned in the centre of the room and he enters the spirit dimension through its centre.

From the moment the shaman begins with the *dikei*, the event demonstrates his own *semanget* movements in the spirit dimension (*alap lain*). What the shaman does in his performance in the physical reality symbolically represents his activities in the other spirit-*semanget* dimension. The mirroring of activities in the two dimensions is an indigenous symbolic theory of *dikei*. Sakai recognise that the physical activities of a *dikei* healing session is a materialised performance (*mainan*) that represents the reality of what should be happening in the spirit-*semanget* dimension. Every act is a materialised icon; it is a mirror (*ce'min*) of the spirit-*semanget* dimension (see Porath 2011).

After entering the spirit dimension, Bah Sehari would always start with the song “*Anak Ajo*” (Child of the King), although it is not necessarily the case that all shamans open their *dikei* sessions with it. *Dikei* expressions of the spirit-dimensional other are constructed through traditional Malay kingdom (*kerajaan*) language. Spirits are called *ajo* (meaning raja, king) and they are conceived of living in idyllic palaces and utilising ideal royal objects that in the past the Malay Siak nobility used. Further, only when they are in an altered state of consciousness participants in a *dikei* do call the shaman *ajo* too.

The song “*Anak Ajo*” (Child of the King) evokes a formal gathering of a royal audience and asks permission from the *Anak Ajo* for the purpose of the meeting. The evocation is that of one king or nobleman addressing another in a formal royal gathering. The formal greetings of respect to the royal spirits and their attendants can on another level be read as greetings for the people of the settlement attending the *dikei* event – “greetings of peace to those on the left, greetings of peace to those on the right.” In this particular *dikei* the “Child of the King” emerges as the first mirroring metaphor for the patient who is also the child of the *ajo* (the shaman).

Following this evocation the shaman repeats a poetic formula above the patient’s head, which evokes the scenario of the healer negotiating the exchange of medicine from the spirit dimension. The item of exchange is not defined but this is irrelevant. What is important is the suggestion that negotiation is taking place for the spirit medicine. The words express a desire for balance and the shaman stresses that he can achieve that balance (“seven units of exchange, I can exchange with you”). Later in the ritual, the shaman repeats this poetic formula again.

In his first healing act the shaman pours grains of puffed rice on the patient’s fontanel, the exit point from which *semanget* takes flight. This act plays on “the-body-as-container” metaphor. As it is performed at the beginning of the ritual before the *semanget* has been reembodied, the act suggests that the body is opened and emptied of some of its content. This prefigures the shaman’s purpose of searching for, capturing, and reembodiment *semanget*.

Doing this, the shaman calls on the spirit “*Budak Kocik*” (Little Child). Although it is not mentioned in this particular singing of the song, the image of the *Budak Kocik* spirit is like Oedipus, that of a distressed abandoned child crying in the forest because it has lost its parents. In the all-night performance, shamans who merge with the spirit, lie down on the floor and suddenly in the middle of their singing cry out “*kuek, kuek,*” the sound of a crying baby. The way Sakai pronounce the word *kocik* (little) resonates with a compelling endearment for something cute, small, and vulnerable. In the above example the shaman sings the song while standing in front of the patient with his right hand on his forehead. The shaman uses the song to affirm and praise the ordinary non-ritualised relationship between him and his patient. That the spirit song “*Budak Kocik*” is clearly decontextualised from the spirit dimension for the patient who is his natural son (*anak kandung*) is revealed immediately; the song is extemporised. The healer publicly greets his son through the use of the spirit song and showers the patient with comforting words directed to the spirit “I pay homage to you, my golden (precious) friend.”

After the shaman sees the spirit and subsequently calls it with the song, he stretches his hand out in request for medicine. The spirit deposits the medicine in the palm of the shaman’s hand, and the healer performs receiving it as the spirit’s saliva.<sup>2</sup> Consequently he motions towards the patient and transfers it to him with his hand, although sometimes with his cloth. Csordas points out that hand gestures have polysemic symbolic properties (1994: 51). It symbolically and physically represents the “giving of medicine” (*dibo’i ubet*). It is the symbolic location where medicine resides once granted by the spirit. This gesture, suggestive of the shaman conveying the spirit’s medicinal saliva to the patient, follows the direction of the rebounding song metaphor. Thus, if the song’s lyrics conceptually go outward to call the spirit, the therapeutic efficacy of the meta-

2 Not all shamans perform this in this way. One shaman would jump forward with a yell to signify the reception of medicine and stamp with his foot.

phor is directed by the hand movement that transfers the medicinal spit to the patient.

In the third song, the shaman calls on “Child of Magpie Robin.” As he does so, the shaman’s figure-of-eight-dance resembles a bird continuously circling a pole, and symbolically associates the shaman’s body movements with the patient’s own *semanget* bird. The choreography of his movements, the figure-of-eight-dance and the circle, always keeps the geometry of the original cosmic centre present.

Since the spirit is the child rather than Magpie Robin itself, the song metaphorically plays on the familial relationship between the birds and that of the shaman and the patient. The metonymic and metaphoric references between Child of Magpie Robin and the patient’s *semanget* are also brought into further focus as the shaman names the spirit country near the forest location where his son had been staying when working in the woods. The area and the spirit country are known as Jami, where the nearby river flows into a narrow stream and where a certain species of fish is known to swim. It is here where his *semanget* was dislodged and may still be wandering (*jalat*).

By naming the location the shaman’s *semanget* can also travel with the tutelary spirit in search of the patient’s wandering *semanget*. Presumably the shaman sees the spirit landscape with the inner eye (*mato batin*) when in a trance and experiences him-/herself travelling (*jalat*) through these locations (Desjarlais 1989: 289). By asking the spirit to enter that particular locale, the shaman conceptually anchors the illness to that area and any personal associations the patient has with that place and activities that the patient had carried out there prior to the illness.

In the above *dikei*, the drummer who was the second shaman of the settlement takes over the song, although he did not go into the trance. Through the creative use of verse and rhyming couplets (*pantun*) he gives a clear and beautiful imagery of the *semanget* metaphor of a timid bird that flies away. The first four lines of the song are from one *pantun*. The quatrain explains that the speaker is looking for a friend. The first two phrases give the image of upstream and downstream movements. The reference to gongs evokes the territorial boundaries that were traditionally established at the point where the gong could no longer be heard. The second couplet evokes the imagery of someone sweeping the yard with a cloth. The words *ku*, *candi*, and *laman* cryptically rhyme with the quatrain’s formulaic meaning “I am searching for a friend” (*aku ca’i kawan*). It would seem that in this context the quat-

rain suggests that the friend (*semanget*) the speaker is searching for is lost somewhere in a space lying between these broad diminishing boundaries. The expression serves as a metaphor for a dislocated self. The next two lines are from another *pantun*. The peacock, symbolically a bird of royalty in this extemporisation, becomes a synecdoche for “Child of Magpie Robin” and the patient’s *semanget* bird. Taken together they form a total metaphor for the patient. The singer is searching for his friend, the patient’s wandering *semanget*, which is likened to a “peacock escaping from a hand” in which it is loosely held.

In the song, the drummer negotiates with the “Child of Magpie Robin” by offering the *balai ombak bungo* to help should it agree. The model offering is a combination of a *balai* (house) and a *puat*. As already mentioned, on one symbolic level, the *puat* represents a maiden and it is, therefore, the *puat* that is the maiden waiting in the chamber of the “House of Billowing Leaves.”

One of the main purposes of a *puat* is to attract not only the spirits but also the patient’s *semanget* bird. Here then, the image of “Child of Magpie Robin” and the patient’s *semanget* bird come full circle in connection with the image of the *puat*. The *puat* in the house is an offering to the spirit “Child of Magpie Robin” whose image emerges through the song as a metonym for the patient’s *semanget* and together as a metaphor for a dislocated aspect of the patient’s self. As an offering, the palm leaf model is personified as a maiden for the spirit in a chamber. This offering is for “Child of Magpie Robin.” The *puat* also attracts the patient’s *semanget* to it. The patient’s *semanget* is drawn to the offering (*puat*) allowing the shaman to catch and reembody it. Although the “Child of Magpie Robin” emerges as a metonym for the *semanget* bird, it becomes important for the shaman to symbolically separate the metonym from the metaphor, the bird spirit from the patient’s detached self (*semanget* bird). As one becomes a mirror opposite of the other, they remain distinct. The spirit bird becomes other to the *semanget* bird. In return for the spirit’s aid in disentangling the patient’s *semanget* bird from the spirit dimension it receives an image of a maiden through the vehicle of the withering *puat* model.

The imagery of escape and danger is conveyed in “Young King Driving His Sedan.” The singer uses the same words “escaping from the hand” to refer to the crazy sedan car which flies but gets caught in a heavy storm referencing danger. This song exhorts the spirit to stop for a moment.

If in this and in the previous song we have the poetic imagery of uncontrolled wandering move-

ment, in the next song, “Small Yacht,” there is an image of balance, stasis, and centrality. This image is in stark contrast to the images in the song of “Child of Magpie Robin” and “Young King Driving His Sedan.” In that song there are upstream/downstream movements in a broad territory defined by the sounds of a gong. In this song the small yacht balances on the sand. It does not move upstream or downstream, and the juxtaposed contrast of the two river flows suggests centrality and immobility. This song was sung just before and during the moment shaman S. leaped to catch the patient’s *semanget* and already, verbally at least, suggests the reembodiment of the patient’s *semanget*.

### Catching and Restoring *semanget*

The most dramatic moment in the healing performance is when the shaman suddenly leaps towards the palm leaf model to *semanget* (*to’kam semanget*). As he lands beside it, he gives a sudden yell startling the patient under the cloth. Unable to see the events has an immediate sensorial affect on redirecting the patient’s awareness to him at the moment of his *semanget*’s capture. He performs the act of catching a bird fluttering by the model’s leaves.

Much of the dancing builds up to this climax. When a shaman leaps to catch the patient’s *semanget* bird it is usually sometime in the middle of the healing session and the drumming beat is fast. Up to this point, the shaman’s dance movements are in accordance with the beat. The shaman’s leap is sudden and momentarily breaks the beat-dance coordination. If, as Sakai say, the drumming is a path the shaman travels on, the shaman suddenly steps out of the monotony of the sonic path. At this point there is a commotion until the shaman’s hand, holding the puppet representing the patient’s *semanget*, is wrapped in the cloth. Then the shaman resumes the beat. This sudden movement out from the “sonic path” and then the subsequent movements and intensity of the drumming beat intentionally reverses his movements, suggesting that the shaman is now urgently moving back towards the patient rather than away from him. He is returning and bringing back (*mem’awo balik*) the patient’s disembodied *semanget*.

The actual act of restoring the patient’s *semanget* is a delicate one. The *semanget* is targeted at the main pulse points of the human body. Sakai see the *semanget* “seats” in the body as being five in number. The first is the forehead, which is associated with the *batuk semanget* (the *semanget* stone). Then the shaman focuses on the wrists, abdomen, and the

feet. Finally, when *semanget* has been restored to these points of the body, the shaman uses the cloth to circle above the patient’s fifth point, the fontanel, which is *semanget* exit point. By raising and lowering his hand above the fontanel he senses the closure of this invisible body-opening. Finally, the shaman traces the contours of the patient’s torso.

In this procedure there is an interesting shift of the *semanget* metaphor from the wandering *semanget* bird to the *semanget*-as-substance and finally to the patient’s own body and self-image. The metaphor of *semanget*-as-substance is acted out when the shaman pulls bits of *semanget* from the bundle, although he still retains the link with the bird metaphor through the twittering-kissing sounds he makes each time he performs the extraction. The *semanget* as body image is produced by the body points where *semanget* is inserted and when the shaman passes his cloth or hands over the patient’s body. The aim of these movements is to push the detachable *semanget* back down into the boundaries defined by the patient’s physical body.

With the mimed performance in which the shaman targets the patient’s *semanget* back into the body also goes the total embodiment of the experience of the performed *dikei* session the shaman has created for the patient. Symbolically wrapped up in the bundle and represented by the *semanget* bird are the combination of the dance movements and intentions and the therapeutic tropes of the song created for the particular patient through word sounds (see Porath 2008). The refilled and rebounded body suggests the patient’s emotional repositioning among family and friends: in the words of the last song “returned to his place of origin.”

Sakai body-*semanget* dualism does not conceptually extend to a structural objective-subjective dualism. Even though Sakai conceptually contrast *semanget* to the body, when it is in the body, it is one with it. When *semanget* detaches from the body, the space it wanders in is both conceptually external as it is conceptually internal to the body. To be more precise, it is conceptually neither. It has the qualities of the dissociative pace we see in a dream. When the shaman performs the capture of *semanget*, this is in a space that collapses the internal-external and objective-subjective dichotomies. It is both out there in the spirit dimension as it is in the patient. The acts we see in the ritual itself are mirrors for what is happening in the spirit-*semanget* dimension, which they also suggest to the patient that it is happening to him (Porath 2011).

The ritual symbolism for searching and restoring the patient’s *semanget* works to sever the patient’s *semanget* with whatever attracts it away by “attract-

ing” it back to the ritual space and to the healer. In the above session the unsounded “rhetoric” of transformation (Csordas 2002) is of a wandering son who encountered danger and should return to the father (parents) to recover before proceeding with his activities. If the patient would have not recovered, this healing session would have been the first in a sequence of rituals in which the shaman would have generated other imageries and utilised other healing techniques, including more of the “search for *semanget*” technique.

### Conveying Medicine through Song, Or the Analogy of Spirit Song as a “Talking Cure”

Similar to what Atkinson describes for the Wana of Sulawesi (1989: 124) Sakai consider the songs in a *dikei* session to be of little therapeutic importance. They are like “embellishments,” as Atkinson puts it, to the real power of healing. This is because these songs are mere extemporisations momentarily calling on the spirits who are the source of healing power. Moreover, shamans need not sing out aloud. Some healers cannot sing songs very well. They start with the opening line of the song which names the spirit and then mumble the rest as they dance. Even some of the more renowned shamans do not sing aloud, but this may be a practice at a more advance stage of their shamanic careers where they can do away with the technique and focus on conveying the efficacy of the spirit’s presence. Even shamans who do sing out loudly and construct metaphoric meanings for the patient will deny the importance of the song the next day. The problem with singing out aloud is that it could suggest that a shaman has less intimacy with the spirits in the spirit dimension and is more involved in constructing beautiful words in the human one. In fact, some shamans and their familial clients can use this as a tactic to denounce rival shamans.

When people deny the importance of the song, they do so in a context in which they are concerned with the nature of efficacy that backs the words in general. In *dikei* the power of healing must come from the spirits and not from the shaman. The shaman first catches a glimpse of the spirit (*nampak*) flashing across his inner eye (*mato batin*), then he starts singing the song. The song is sung to call on spirits who live in the spirit dimension. A shaman never sings the same song twice within a given *dikei* event. This is the same as saying that he never calls on the same spirit twice. The shaman does not need to have a tutelary relationship with the spirit characterised in the song in order to sing the spirit

song. Nevertheless, he will call the spirit if it flashes across his inner eye. This is a very important point for our understanding of the efficacy of spirit songs as talking cures. Sakai explain this feature of calling on a nonfamiliar spirit through the concept of empathy (*kasihan*). The spirit the shaman sees and calls on may empathetically be identified with the patient’s *semanget* as a kindred spirit and who gives its healing aid regardless of whether the shaman has a relationship with it or not. For example, it is extremely rare for a shaman healing a person within the child category to call on the spirit of “Grandparent of Nine Images” and make allusions to old age. On the other hand, he calls on spirit songs such as “Little Child” and songs bearing such child-like imagery. Maybe, to use Sakai exegesis, the spirit Little Child sees the contextual parent-child relationship the patient has with the shaman, and empathises with the patient, and gives its medicinal power to relieve his *semanget*. Animal spirit songs (and especially birds) can also emerge in *dikei* metonymically to represent the wandering *semanget*, and metaphorically the patient. Spirit characters of songs representing kin categories can also be decontextualised from their spirit context to mirror people’s social relations in the community.

The denial of the spirit song’s therapeutic efficacy does also contradict another very important fact. Sakai shamans use quatrains or *pantun* that are a recognised “ways of speaking” through which metaphoric messages can be directed at people. Although quatrains have set formulaic meanings, they gain connotative meaning in the context of their extemporisation as they refer to and play on the listener’s situated knowledge. *Pantun* are verbal devices that convey messages which might be difficult to be expressed directly. It is this verbal power to affect another person’s thoughts and emotions by conveying messages indirectly that make *pantun* so powerful a medium of communication. Whereas spirit songs were composed by spirits and given to shamans in dreams, *pantun* were composed by an unknown person sometime in the past. It is the combination of a humanly created metaphoric speech (i.e., *pantun*) and the spirit-composed spirit song, which causes the spirit song sung “outwards” to the spirit, to rebound from the spirit dimension as a powerful iconic metaphor for the patient. Consequently, Sakai consider *pantun* to have a semi-spell status and within the ritual context can also affect the *semanget* of a member of an audience to fly to the shaman, causing the patient to feel love for him or her.

Shamans (and drummers) usually have an intimate relationship with the patients they heal because they belong to the same extended sibling group. The

shaman knows the patient's personal attributes and life history. Through the imageries of the general stock of songs that emerge from the shaman's body in healing rituals coupled with the artful construction of *pantun*, specific references to the patient can and is in the particular *dikei* context intuitively generated. Finally, the very fact that people do deny the song's therapeutic validity because it is a temporary extemporisation, only alludes to the idea that these songs are sung for the particular patient in any given *dikei*. Once the *dikei* is over, that particular extemporisation is not important anymore. When Sakai do deny the therapeutic importance of the song in their exegesis of *dikei*, they are providing a cultural explanation that amplifies the presence of the spirits these songs represent. This amplification imbues the song with greater therapeutic force and preserves the metaphoric efficacy of the words within the intended frame of the spirit dimension. Borch-Jacobsen (1993) has argued that curative speech is mimetic speech; speech spoken in the name of another. We might say that when Sakai deny the words' therapeutic importance, they are wittingly or unwittingly preserving the source of the songs' curative efficacy as spirit representation.

## Discussion and Conclusion

### Freud among the Sakai

In the West, one main and foundational example of a psychotherapeutic healing tradition is the psychoanalysis developed by Freud. This therapist developed certain concepts and techniques within his model. One major concept was the Oedipus complex. In a general sense the Oedipus complex refers to the complex ideas, emotions, and impulses that centre around child-parent relations (Bettelheim 1982: 20; Tseng, Chang, and Nishizono 2005: 98). Freud recognised this complex through the clinical encounter with his patients and made it not only the corner stone of his healing techniques but also of his theory of religion, culture, and society. One of the earlier critical anthropological commentators of the Oedipus complex theory was Malinowski. His critique was partly an anthropological defence of his Trobriand material against Ernest Jones' psychoanalytical interpretations (2000 [1925]). Malinowski's critique was that there was no need to imagine a universal father-son antagonism that underlies all father-son relations (1968[1929]: 139, 142). He argued that Freud's theory mirrored the father-son relationships of patriarchal upper middle-class European society. Instead Malinowski argued that we

should take a more relative approach to parent-child relations, the Oedipal complex, and psychological complex formation (1968 [1929]: 82, 142). As I have said earlier, Sakai fathers are not authoritarian fathers and when a father is so, people might explain his attitude as being influenced by Malay parental attitudes rather than Sakai. Hence the symbol of the father is an archetype of emotional anchoring rather than authority, submission, or tension to be overcome.

In *dikei* healing Sakai healers can utilise the father-son archetype as one healing technique through the image of the lost child. The image of the lost child has elements of an Oedipal-type idea. Both, "Little Child" (as well as "Baby Macaque," another spirit representing a lost simian brought up by humans) and Oedipus are children lost to their parents. It was precisely because Oedipus was a lost child that in his wanderings he came across what Sakai would call his *misuh* (adversary, interceptor,) who happened to be his father. His misfortune (illness) lay in him not recognising his parents. Hence, even in Freudian analysis it is important for patients to identify and understand the child-parent relations they harbour in their psyche. In the above healing session Bah Sehari utilised his actual relationship with the patient for therapeutic aim. The shaman marked the patient as son/child while the power of the archetype of the "healer as father" remained suggestively unmarked. The patient's *semanget* was made to recognise the "father" in the healer in order to bring it back to its "place of origin."

Freud made the "talking cure" the centre of his therapeutic endeavours. It was through the speech of the patient that a cure could be affected. Speech brought the delimiting unacceptable content of the unconscious (bodily congealed signs) into the semiotic fountain of consciousness. Freud did recognise the importance of the therapeutic word in what today we call indigenous healing, or what he would have called magic (Freud 1953). But as Borch-Jacobsen writes "if in Freud's eyes psychoanalysis is close to magic it is in the precise sense of providing it with its truth, its completely rational truth." He adds, "curing by speech it cures in effect only by speech – by disenchanting speech ... purified of all ceremonial content ... extracting the rational kernel from magical speech by removing it from its 'mystical shell'" (1993: 76). Borch-Jacobsen argues (and controversially for psychoanalysis, but not for anthropology) that Freud's talking cure could only work within its own ritually mystical shell. This shell induces the transference, which according to Borch-Jacobsen is a highly diluted form of altered state of consciousness. Hence it was not that Freud

extracted the talking cure as the rational kernel of magical healing, but he only rationalised the magic of the talking cure for a culturally rationalised modern society that eschewed all forms of ASC<sup>3</sup> states (Borch-Jacobsen 1993: 119).

If the talking cure was central to therapy in Freudian understanding, Lévi Strauss pointed out that the shaman differs from the psychoanalyst in that he provides a myth for the patient to work with, rather than a context for the patient to work out her/his own myths. But even this distinction has been challenged. Borch-Jacobsen (1993) suggests that in fact the psychoanalyst's patients speak their "myths" through identification with the otherness of the analyst. The analyst provides the mythical context in which the patient, who is in the transference, is brought to speak not in her/his own name but in the name of a mirroring other, the psychoanalyst. Hence if Borch-Jacobsen is right, and contrary to Lévi-Strauss' original formulation, both shamanic and psychoanalytical "talking cures" emerge as mimetic speech spoken in the name of an authoritative other and not in the name of the patient.

In trying to understand indigenous healing we should try to explore efficacy through a one-to-one relationship between the healer's therapeutic knowledge and techniques of healing and the indigenous concept of consciousness. Freud's concepts of consciousness and unconsciousness form a totality, which in English we call "mind." But "mind" is for some a highly problematic term in anthropology, including myself. I see it as a term with implications that fashions the body consciousness and understanding of a specific type of conscious self, the kind of conscious self that Freud diluted the therapeutic word for. Sakai do not have a concept of the mind, although they have concepts for the body's internal processes and constituents. This suggests that the concept of the mind does not fashion their body consciousness and its experiential inner forces. But *semanget* does, and in relation to this concept the universal therapeutic techniques emerge. Nevertheless, the idea of emotional investment (object cathexis) and the transference which gave Freud's concept of the unconscious its interactive disposition also has its place in indigenous knowledge. For Sakai there is a recognition that people can "invest emotionally" in objects (religionist anthropology traditionally called this "the fetish") and that this can be very dangerous. Further, in healing there is also the recognition that people can feel love for the healer. Both of these forms of emotional investments are related to the movements of *semanget*.

3 ASC = Altered State of Consciousness.

Our comparison with Freudian psychoanalytical healing suggests to us that the approach we should take to indigenous healing is not one that sees shamans as doing their religious cosmic thing and we, who have the science of psychotherapy, can recognise the universal techniques of healing in their religious practices (see also Laderman 1987). Instead, psychotherapy can help us understand indigenous therapeutic techniques by recognising them as part of indigenous therapeutic knowledge and further compare them with similar or dissimilar techniques that other therapeutic systems utilise. Another way of putting it: an anthropologist trained in cultural religious presentations of shamans but who is unaware of therapeutic techniques would simply be blind to therapeutic shamanic healing knowledge as it unfolds in a healing ritual. We would then get the common religionist descriptions, which state that the shaman goes on a trip in search of the soul in order to bring it back. We could accuse such descriptions of suffering from religious reductionism as so much more is happening in terms of therapeutic indigenous knowledge towards which the religionist approach and the terminology it uses is blind to recognise. A strictly psychological understanding of the phenomenon, on the other hand, may suffer from Western psychological reductionism. Both reductive approaches amount to denying indigenous knowledges, their universal claims to therapeutic healing. We should also keep in mind that what shamans know and intuitively know and what laypeople say are very different things. Whereas the latter provide connotational understanding, the former are specialists developing the knowledge through denotational practice, which also gives them the authority to heal (Porath 2011). As I pointed out, ideas such as emotional investment, transference parent-child healing archetypes and the talking cure, all of which form part of psychotherapeutic techniques and knowledge, might be part and parcel of a shamanic healing "tool kit" and knowledge. They exist here not as a symbolic "bits and bobs" system that the shaman uses to patch the patient up (Lévi-Strauss 1963). Instead they form established therapeutic processes and knowledge based on experience and intuitive understanding of the body expressed through indigenous signs.

To say that "shamans manage souls," then is only the first step to understand the techniques they use to manage the body's experience of illness through the indigenous knowledge and experience of the body. Failure to see the shamanic techniques' affective relationship to the indigenous ideas and experiences of consciousness is to further deny others their understanding of consciousness and their techniques to

manage it (Heelas 1981; Cohen and Rapport 1995). In many cultural contexts, people conceive of their indigenous theories about consciousness to be (as Freud did of his psychoanalysis) a universal psychology applicable to all humans (Hill 1992). For example, for Sakai healers, it is not only Sakai who have *semangat*, but all humans do have it by virtue of the fact that we dream. Healers who work with these theories of the body and awareness practice their art in a frame of knowledge that they conceive as being beyond culture and ethnicity. This knowledge might be part of an ethnic group's own healing tradition, but it is their contribution to human universal knowledge (Porath 2007). Healing and the associated theory of consciousness always collapse the universal and the particular in its theoretical and technical scope.

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