“Riding the Horse of Gaps”: A Meratus Woman’s Spiritual Expression

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Adu hai,
Riding the horse of gaps, babe.
Swept by the wind,
Riding the horse of gaps, friend.
—Induan Hiling

This essay presents several dream-inspired shamanic pictures and associated songs from the Meratus Mountains of Indonesia. They are a woman’s work, and I ask in what way that makes a difference.

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My answer has to do with the way these compositions interpret and revise a dominant tradition. I suggest that attention to such pieces as commentary and new addition to discourse, rather than only as fragments of an established text, can break up the false homogeneity of what we tend to present as "culture."

My analysis here is aided by the work of feminist literary critics, and I draw insights from several distinct feminist viewpoints on the sources and shapes of women's creativity. First, some feminist literary critics call attention to common female experiences and connections among women authors as influences on women's creative consciousnesses (e.g., Moers 1976, Showalter 1977). Second, feminist critics emphasize the influence of dominant male traditions on the creative productions of women. They suggest that in writing, women incorporate dominant conventions at the same time as they invert them, resist them, and transform them (e.g., Gilbert and Gubar 1979). Third, some feminist literary critics argue that male dominance is involved in the very conditions of representation—in language and in writing. They show how women's writing refuses the constraints of male structures of signification, thus exposing and challenging these basic conditions of creative production (e.g., Cixous 1980, Kamuf 1982). Each of these frameworks sheds light on the ways that women's creative expression can be shaped by, yet be separate from, the main streams of male-dominant cultural convention.¹

The best explored intersection between anthropology and literary criticism has taken the metaphor of culture as text to show the systematic nature of cultural logic. Recently, interest has turned as well toward improvisation and negotiation in cultural performances, and multiple "readings" of cultural texts (e.g., Bruner and Gorfain 1984). I propose that it can also be useful to look to multiple "writers" within a single cultural context and the process in which they confront, incorporate, resist, and modify dominant conventions. By attending to the heterogeneity of authors, it is possible to gain a perspective on

permission. I am particularly grateful to Induan Hiling for sharing her work with me—and allowing me to share it with others.

Induan Hiling is a pseudonym for a Meratus Dayak woman whose name I have changed to protect her privacy. The lines in the epigraph are from one of her inspired songs. I have translated the entire song in an appendix to show the textual context of the fragment. In order to let some sense of this song come through in my analysis, I have used fragments from it throughout this essay.

the logic of dominant conventions that takes into account the conditions of their dominance. Viewed along the intersection of power and cultural expression, creativity can be seen to sponsor inequality as well as provide channels for improvisation and imagination.

Perspectives from feminist literary criticism also enrich the anthropological analysis of gender and male dominance. Here, the “culture as text” metaphor has pressed anthropologists to focus on what feminist literary critics call “images of women.” We have familiarized ourselves with representations of women as sexually voracious whores and selfless mothers, and with gender oppositions that pose female as closer to nature than male or as inside layers of male protection. But this is not always the most useful approach. In my fieldwork among Meratus Dayaks of the mountains of southeast Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo),² I found that more important than images of women was the issue of who had access to politically significant expressive modes; women were disadvantaged not so much by what was said but by who got to speak.³

Although the imagery of Meratus ritual is generally gender-balanced or gender-neutral, the star performers and producers of ritual are almost always men. In this context, the questions posed by feminist critics about women who manage to participate in purportedly universal creative traditions dominated by men seem particularly relevant. Under layers of conventional—and sometimes brilliant—compliance, the work of these women can reveal a cutting edge of resistance.

This essay extends this bridge between literary criticism and anthropology by looking at the ritual contributions of the Meratus shaman Induan Hiling. Her songs and pictures—the latter drawn in a context in which any kind of drawing or writing was unusual—offer us a perceptive and challenging interpretation of Meratus shamanic tradition. They also provide a guide to the gendered basis of Meratus modes of expression.

Gendered Resources for Expression

I first learned of Induan Hiling’s spiritual work through a connection among unconventional women. Although we had known each other casually for some time, Induan Hiling spoke to me of her inspiration only when she heard of my close ties with another spiritual innovator, a woman named Uma Adang who was leading a religious movement in a Meratus community a day’s hike to the east.⁴ Both Induan Hiling and I considered Uma Adang a sister, a mentor, and a remarkable leader. On

Figure 5.1. Induan Hiling performing. Portrait by Elizabeth Fischbach.

the strength of this connection, Induan Hiling invited me to share her own spiritual revelations, her curing experiences, and her knowledge of *adat* (customary) law. She took out her pictures, showed me her songs and dances, and urged me to take her message to America.

Uma Adang was the first person to encourage Induan Hiling to take her spiritual calling seriously. When Induan Hiling consulted Uma Adang, Induan Hiling had not been sure of herself: was she crazy or legitimately inspired? Uma Adang confidently directed her to view herself as a shaman in training. But despite her continued respect for Uma Adang's teachings, Induan Hiling never portrayed herself as a purveyor of Uma Adang's message. Her spiritual teachings, she insisted, came from her deceased father, once a well-respected shaman, who visited her in dreams. Although encouraged by women, Induan Hiling was a student of the male-dominated central tradition.

Feminist literary critics have shown how women writers draw from one another even as their work fits neatly within the male-dominated canon. These critics argue that women's creative work often develops from and extends a "female subculture." For anthropologists, this point seems almost commonplace, since anthropological studies of gender divisions in expressive culture have focused on the separation between male and female traditions (e.g., Weiner 1976, Bell 1983, Ardener 1975, Herdt 1981). However, feminist literary critics also show that the "female subculture" of Western literature is neither autonomous from nor complementary to a "male subculture"; each woman's writing is intimately bound up with the *dominant* literary tradition, which rests mainly in the hands of men. This point should remind anthropologists that a separation between male and female cultural spheres cannot be breezily assumed, and, even in ethnographic contexts of gender segregation, it is useful to look at the gender relations upon which segregated expressive modes are predicated. The approach from feminist criticism suggests we explore the dynamic process in which men and women interact differentially with dominant cultural modes.

The Dominant Tradition in Meratus Shamanism

Meratus rituals feature a star performer, the shaman (*balian*), who chants and dances to "bring down" spiritual beings to help with cures, taste the newly harvested rice, or protect the community from spiritual danger. Shamans are almost always men. Women may have a speaking

role in ritual performances as *pinjulang*, the accompanist singer paired with each shaman to echo or answer him.⁵ Often *pinjulang* are wives of shamans, and they learn from their husbands. In contrast to the enthusiastic self-presentation of shamans, *pinjulang* sometimes put a hand or a piece of their skirt over their mouths, muffling their own voices. Although some *pinjulang* are bolder, and even claim to learn their skills from other women, *pinjulang* never summon spirits, sponsor ceremonies, or initiate a round of chanting within a ceremony.

Women are also participants in shamanic ceremonies in other ways: both women and men help to prepare the ritual apparatus, bring their rice to be consecrated, and present themselves as patients for shamans to cure. Meratus ceremonies are never gender-segregated, although male shamans dominate center stage. Both women and men are essential in forming the audience, which is the spiritual community that creates the success of the performance.

Shamanic performances are occasions for socializing, eating together, and—in big community festivals—dancing, fighting, arranging love affairs, settling disputes, and visiting relatives. The importance of shamanic expression in the Meratus setting stems in part from its centrality in events in which both women and men reaffirm social and political affiliations. Shamanic performances also involve the recitation of long, poetic chants, which map the shaman's travels through spiritual realms. Many women, as well as men, can knowledgeably discuss this poetic tradition. Unlike the exclusively male rituals of many parts of Melanesia, Australia, and the Amazon, Meratus shamanic ceremonies do not construct gender-segregated ritual spaces or commitments.

Most Meratus I asked would not rule out the possibility that a shaman could be a woman, even if they knew of no examples. But women have less access than men to both formal and informal training. Men are more likely than women to practice and play with ritual expression. Boys sing the drum beats that signify particular spiritual styles as they play by the river;⁶ young men call out lines from the chants as they hike through the forest. Young men who want to become shamans can embark on a formal apprenticeship; they learn by sitting next to, and dancing behind, an experienced shaman. The apprentice repeats each line of the shaman's chant, committing it to memory. Some men also learn through dreams or spiritual encounters on lonely mountain tops or on great rocks in the middle of wild rivers.

Becoming a successful shaman involves more than expressive training: a shaman must use personal charisma and theatrical display to

draw an audience for his ceremonies. The ability to combine a dramatic self-presentation with articulate knowledge of the tradition is especially important. Shamans can impress their audiences by fainting away from impassioned spiritual dialogue, or, when possessed by dangerous spirits, growling and drinking blood while crouched on all fours. A woman with extensive pinjulang experience may know a great deal about the chants. But knowledge alone cannot draw an audience, and without an audience, she has few opportunities to present herself as a spiritual authority.

The Women's Possession Movement

Since men ordinarily dominate the dramatic center of ritual performances, I was quite surprised at one big festival when a woman jumped up and began a wild dance around the ritual decorations, waving her arms and singing under her breath. As the festival proceeded over the next few days, a number of other women followed her example. I soon learned that episodes of women's possession had been sweeping across the mountains over the past few years, and, people said, they were spreading from one festival to the next. It was said that the women were possessed by the *dewa* spirits who had been invited to the festival. Some women even continued possessed singing and dancing outside the festival context.

Senior shamans and other men described the movement as an epidemic of illness or craziness. They did their best to cure the affected women, noting that otherwise the women might kill themselves by wandering off at night or stepping obliviously into a ravine. Since most of the women danced without a clearly articulated shamanic chant to explain their dancing, it was easy for the senior shamans to classify the possessed women as patients rather than healers. A number of the women, however, spoke later not of being wordlessly possessed but of learning inspired teachings from this spiritual contact.⁷

Induan Hiling first found herself affected by uncontrollable singing and dancing about a year and a half before the episode I have just described. She remembers that her in-laws told her she was crazy. She had tended to agree until she consulted Uma Adang and, as a result, began to take her spiritual training seriously. She then realized that her deceased father was passing on his teachings through her dreams. Slowly, his teaching came to be augmented by other spiritual

dream guides. As a shaman in training, Induan Hiling went beyond the women who danced and tranced inarticulately—with whom she originally identified—and her actions challenged standards of gender-appropriateness in new ways.

Induan Hiling's Contribution

Induan Hiling vacillated at times between the labels of "shaman" and "pinjulang." As her influence was not yet great enough that she could claim to be a successful shaman, she avoided presumptuousness by calling herself a pinjulang. But she never meant her talents to serve as accompaniment to a shaman's performance; her innovative work challenged shamans, not their pinjulang support. Her ambivalence about labels reflected her dependence on female resources as she attempted to enter the male tradition.

This ambivalence can be seen throughout Induan Hiling's work. She calls her songs *dunang*, the term used for the love songs and lullabies that both women and men sing and compose freely. But her love songs have a spiritual rather than a romantic message; her songs describe a spiritual flight that puts her in the company of shamans and separates her from the answering counterpoint of pinjulang as well as the teasing admiration of lovers. In the song fragment that begins this essay, Induan Hiling rides a flying horse. In the fragment below, she chooses a flying cobra, a conventional familiar of Meratus shamans. The cobra's scales map her route of spiritual flight, as it extends both forward and back:

Child of a cobra, babe,
soaring to the sun.
If it has scales,
they cross across each other.
The scales they point, babe,
Where do they point, friend?
They point to its tail,
They point to its head,
Those scales, babe.

Pinjulang sometimes describe themselves as supporting the shaman's flight or following him, but they never launch themselves. In contrast, Induan Hiling's is a shaman's song. Yet, the melody and the use of

line markers like “babe” (*ding*, short for *ading*, “younger sibling,” used for romantic partners as well as children) remind us that this is the kind of song a woman could sing.

When I knew her in 1980 and 1981, Induan Hiling was in her mid-thirties, the married mother of three sons, and a central figure in a small cluster of households that included her mother and sister as well as her husband and some of his kin. She was a soft-spoken, graceful woman, with no particular aspirations to a “male” dramatic style. Yet, she had embarked on a route of independent spiritual innovation. Only her close relatives and neighbors knew of her abilities at that point, but all agreed that she was on her way to more important achievements.

Induan Hiling stressed the importance of her creative connections to her deceased father, once an important shaman in the area. (One of the first things she told me about herself was that her father had encouraged her to climb trees as a child, endowing her with an admired talent few women possess.) Yet the development of her skills and influence depended on the support of her mother and younger sister, who both lived next door. Both mother and sister were well-respected *pinjulang* with a thorough knowledge of ritual. Within the social cluster of which their households formed a central part, Induan Hiling’s spiritual innovations provided a basis for aspirations to autonomy from the larger encompassing neighborhood.⁸ There were no shamans within the cluster; instead, the women explored their own spiritual authority.

Induan Hiling’s sense of her spiritual antecedents and mentors reflects her ability to use female resources while inserting herself within a male tradition. Of necessity, she uses conventions created by male shamans and appeals to male sources of authority for inspiration and legitimation. However, she also draws inspiration and support from other creative women.

Inversions and Revisions

Induan Hiling’s contributions proceed in dialogue with dominant conventions of shamanism. At the time of my research, her work had not sparked a prairie fire of change; however, an analysis that began with the assumption that her work merely reproduces social categories and reenacts cultural values would miss the tensions and breakthroughs of her innovations.

Unsubmissive, inspired women have made other appearances in

the anthropological literature. A number of analysts have shown how women use possession, or other ritual participation, as an "oblique strategy" of protest (Lewis 1971: 117, Kessler 1977). Yet, because most anthropologists focus on predictably repetitive, nondisruptive female protest, their accounts too often take for granted the stability of local discourses of male dominance. Thus, although functionalist and psychoanalytic analyses have highlighted women's defiance of male authority in ritual (e.g., Gluckman 1963, Freeman 1968), these analyses ultimately dismiss women's challenges as a reaffirmation and restabilization of women's subordination through the expression of tensions. Interpretive approaches have looked more closely at local discourse on gender; for example, Kapferer (1983) discusses Sinhalese beliefs that women are "natural" victims of possession and perpetrators of disorder. But because his analysis shows women as objects of cultural interpretation rather than as positioned subjects, Kapferer obscures the possessed women's role in negotiating new understandings of gender and inspiration. In such analyses, we watch the women through the eyes of conservative male elders—like those senior Meratus shamans who denied women's spiritual initiative by saying the women were victims of an epidemic illness. In contrast, my approach avoids assumptions of social or cultural stability by exploring how an inspired woman's work contributes to a continually evolving discourse.

Induan Hiling's work draws eclectically from a set of familiar metaphors and genre conventions. As she uses pieces from one tradition to revise others, she creates products that, like the writings of Western women novelists and poets, seem open to multiple and sometimes contradictory interpretations. The following sections explore some of Induan Hiling's revisions and innovations, showing how her work contests conventional Meratus expectations of the links between gender and expression. Indeed, although her work builds from the dominant Meratus tradition, it also interprets this tradition in a new way that is linked to her status as a woman creator.

Induan Hiling's Innovations: The Songs and Dances

What shall be used, babe?
Forging spurs,
Finished in a day.

Induan Hiling inverts and revises both male and female expressive traditions in her song and dance repertoire. For example, male shamans use hand-held rattle bracelets to control rhythm and cue the drummer; Induan Hiling puts rattling bells on her ankles, thus setting the rhythm with her steps without appearing to control it.⁹ Her dance movements, featuring small, circumscribed steps and graceful body and arm movements, bear some resemblance to the secular women's dance done at festivals. (Male shamans tend to include much more prancing and stomping.) But, diverging from the slow, mincing gait of the women parading at festivals, she moves to a lively and energetic rhythm, responding to her own inspired singing. Whereas women at festivals normally dance with their faces away from the audience, Induan Hiling dances with her face to the audience, thus dramatically unmuffling her voice.

As I mentioned earlier, Induan Hiling uses the melodic structure and refrains of love songs (*dunang*)—a comfortable, familiar medium for women. But she fills her songs with sacred imagery from the repertoire of shamans. One song she sang for me traces spiritual travel in a form almost identical to that found in conventional shamans' chants. In other songs, however (including the one I translate in the Appendix and quote throughout this essay), she forges a hybrid genre.

Induan Hiling's songs refer to the gendered metaphors of conventional love songs, but transform them in gender-free spiritual directions. Thus, like ordinary love songs, her songs are filled with metaphorical references to vegetation. In love songs, shining, golden, healthy but passive plants represent the beautiful women pursued by male suitors, who are portrayed as birds, wandering soldiers, and tree-cutters. In Induan Hiling's songs, the lovely but passive vegetation is transformed into an extremely active element: she sings of "swaying" fig trees and "singing" bamboos. Removing vegetation even further from the love song context, she omits the male half of the tree/bird and tree/tree-cutter contrast. The result is that vegetation becomes a metaphor for various aspects of *human* spiritual expression rather than for *women*.

The following fragment shows one complex set of associations for bamboo:

There is a planting:
A cut bamboo
A bamboo that plays the flute

A bamboo that sings.
We cut it off,
Touching the shoulders,
The scissored bamboo
Touching the waist.
Babe, the scissored bamboo,
The cut bamboo
Where is it planted?
Where does it hang?

Bamboo is female in a number of love songs, such as the song "Yellow Bamboo." To the extent that Induan Hiling's bamboo carries female resonances, its singing and playing of the flute establishes it as a creative subject, not an object of courtship admiration. Induan Hiling's dominant metaphor, however, is not of bamboo as woman but of bamboo as hair; this is a common shamanic reference for a (gender-neutral) spiritual attribute of the body. To make the move to a *human* spirituality clear, Induan Hiling establishes the gender symmetry of her metaphor; as she explained to me, she simultaneously invokes a male subject, whose hair is "touching the shoulders," and a female subject, whose hair is "touching the waist." She transforms a reference to women into a reference to spiritual experience that holds equally for men and women. Her vision of a human spirituality unbiased by gender is strengthened through the other metaphors she draws into the portrait: she compares the bamboo to ritual streamers that are intricately "scissored" (actually, cut with a knife into designs) and finally "cut" (tied up) to close the performance; the bamboo is also, as references earlier in the song make clearer, the shamanic route itself, the pathway of spiritual expression. In this way Induan Hiling removes female resonances from the context of an asymmetrical male-female contrast, and places them among spiritual references as features of a human spirituality that does not depend on gender difference.

The dualism of love songs is not entirely lost in this transformation, however. Induan Hiling's vegetation enters into a different opposition—with mountains and rocks rather than birds and tree-cutters. She explained mountains and rocks as representing an internal inspirational knowledge, the as yet unarticulated wisdom of origins. In contrast, her vegetation represents the ritual apparatus used in shamanic ceremony and the well-worn ritual practices within which the shaman's chants emerge. Rocks and mountains contrast with vegetation as inspiration contrasts with tradition. Both elements, she implies,

are needed for ritual efficacy: indeed, inspiration is articulated through tradition.

This complementarity is a motif repeated in much of her work. She sings of a fig tree on a mountain, which, as she explained, also refers to the hair growing on our heads:

On the summit of a mountain
There's a wild fig tree
A hanging fig tree
A swaying fig tree
Hanging where
Swinging there
Our wild fig tree.

Elsewhere, she repeats the vegetation-mountain opposition in singing about bamboos on rocks, or, using an image borrowed from “city people,” of flowers on a table. This is *not* a gendered opposition. Transcending the gendered imagery of the love song with non-gendered sacred text is essential to Induan Hiling’s ability to cast her work as shamanism. Yet, her use of the two element opposition as motif has its roots in the love song.

The Dream Pictures

Induan Hiling draws the same opposition into her dream pictures. Pictures are not a common form of Meratus creative expression; besides the scribbles of a few schoolchildren, almost no one writes or draws. Her dream-inspired drawing and “writing” transform and revise familiar themes in a new medium of spiritual expression. The complementarity of rocks and plants, as text and ritual apparatus or inspiration and tradition, is also key to the pictures’ message.

The drawing in Figure 5.2 shows a tree standing next to a rock. Induan Hiling explained that the tree is at the same time a ritual decoration complementing the rocks’ written text, the scribbled lines that depict the internal knowledge of the shaman to be expressed in the chant. Although she herself could not read the message, she assured me that the scribbled lines in the rocks are “writing.” (The English words on the side of the page do not represent “writing” in the same sense; I will come back to them.) She features this kind of

Figure 5.6. Flying over mountains, rocks, grass, and trees.

Figure 5.3. The shaman's book.

dream-dictated “writing” in a number of her drawings; in Figure 5.3, she has filled the page with it. She told me how painstakingly she had drawn the writing of Figure 5.3. Although unreadable, this dream writing is a carefully written text.

Figure 5.2 presents the opposition between tree and rock, or tradition and inspiration, as symmetrical: each element occupies one side of the page. Other drawings show further dimensions of her vision of the complementarity between these opposed spiritual elements. In Figure 5.4, she has drawn a spiritual mountain as seen from above. Crisscrossing over the mountain like vines are the ritual decorations known as “walkways of the gods”; these represent the paths of articulated ritual expression. Her “writing” fills one open quarter of the mountain; although visible only in this quarter, this is the inspirational text that energizes the whole mountain. In this drawing, the vinelike “walkways of the gods” are ritual paths that provide the superficial expression of the inspired text of the mountain.

Figure 5.5 shifts focus entirely to the intricate flowering of ritual

Figure 5.4. The mountain of spiritual encounter and the walkways of the gods.

form. This drawing represents ritual decorations; Induan Hiling has shown them here as delicate and plantlike. Each lobe is a “leaf”; each leaf is beautified and empowered by marks that can be interpreted equally as ornamentation or text.¹⁰ She incorporates the text into the ritual apparatus. Although each drawing combines elements of text and ritual in different ways, the importance of a complementarity between inspiration and traditional form is reiterated in each. Even Figure 5.3, in which she has filled the page with inspirational message, reminds us of the importance of ritualized form precisely because it lacks any.

Induan Hiling’s explanation of shamanism as inspiration externalized and articulated through traditional form is both an innovative and perceptive interpretation. Conventional shamanic apprenticeship encourages a reading of the chants that stresses the endless elaboration of complexity and diversity rather than oppositions. Mountains and vegetation are common symbolic elements in shamans’ chants, but nowhere else did I see the two elements so clearly identified as complementary pairs, with such stably resonating reference to the pos-

Figure 5.5. The ritual set-up.

sibilities of spiritual expression itself. Induan Hiling's interpretation of the tradition successfully clarifies a number of key elements. Her oppositions speak to the necessity for both shamanic chants and ritual decorations in a performance. They also recall the complementarity of dreams and apprenticeship in learning, as well as the use of linked images of primal knowledge and carefully learned tradition within the chants themselves. Yet, her interpretation is also a challenging one, pointing to the possibilities of simplification and codification of that which, shamans say, could never be simplified or codified.

Induan Hiling's engagement with the dominant tradition of Meratus shamanism results in a perceptive interpretative framework. As a woman shaman, she has needed to forge original paths to achieve legitimacy. These paths have led her not only to innovative revisions, but also to imaginative and insightful views on Meratus shamanism.

The Conditions of Creative Production

Induan Hiling means her drawings as more than a critical appraisal: they are encapsulations of performance, a substitute for performance. The drawings—particularly the more complex ones—are themselves rituals. Indeed, the contrast between picture or script as ritual and the more conventional male-dominated ritual performance suggests a new dimension of Induan Hiling's contribution: her work makes evident the gendered grounds of Meratus ritual representation.

The complex drawing reproduced in Figure 5.6 presents a complete ritual performance, a curing ritual. Here Induan Hiling has drawn not only the mountain-vegetation opposition described above but also the shaman who brings together tradition and inspiration. On each side of the drawing are rocks; the triangles that dominate the landscape are mountains. On the rocks and mountains grow vegetation; at the peak of the darkest mountain is a wild fig tree, with its fruits; a wild palm grows to its immediate left; near that mountain's summit are herbs and grasses, including the plant that appears to have drifted off the top. But she has also drawn the dreamer herself in the form of an airplane (on the left of the picture). The airplane is the dreamer who energizes and experiences the dream landscape. Meratus generally interpret airplanes as the vehicles of spiritual travel. Here the representation of spiritual travel empowers the drawing as a shamanic ritual. Induan Hiling's sister, who was suffering from leprosy, kept this picture as an aspect of her cure. The drawing is not meant as a reminder of a shamanic performance; it is itself a curing ritual.

The picture incorporates several key elements of more conventional performances, particularly its addition of the spiritual travel of the shaman. There are, however, clearly significant differences between this picture and a conventional performance. Most important, perhaps, the picture involves no dramatic action. The picture flattens the performance, abolishing performance time.

Performance time is not just duration; it is the capture of attention. A successful ritual establishes the centrality of the shaman within the attention of the audience. Indeed, as the performances last all night, the listeners often sleep, but if they did nothing but sleep, the ritual would be less effective. And the listeners might just sleep—despite the beauty of the dance, the decorations, and the poetry—except for unpredictable elements in the performance and the possibility of various kinds of dramatic upsets or excess: the ritual preparations may

Figure 5.6. Flying over mountains, rocks, grass, and trees.

be badly done—the spirit will be angry; perhaps the shaman will be overwhelmed within his chant and fall into a faint, and it may be difficult to revive him. Unlike the decorations and the chants, these elements are never described as necessary to ritual—in fact, they involve messing up rather than following the rules—but they are key elements of performance time.

Dramatic upsets and excesses are also the performance elements most clearly associated with male experience and male political advantage. Outside of the context of shamanism, men more often than women use the threats and surprises of impressive speeches and angry outbursts to position themselves focally within social gatherings. When shamans improvise with their knowledge and ferocity, they call upon these dramatic talents to sustain the drawing power of the performance. This is not so much a matter of gender rules as of men's ability to go beyond the rules—and thus establish them (Tsing 1990).

One male shaman commented that women tend not to become shamans because they do not want to stay up through all-night performances. He was ignoring the fact that *pinjulang* do stay up all night to accompany the shaman. But there is a difference in the wakefulness of the shaman and the wakefulness of his woman accompanist: the attention of the former draws attention; the latter is awake merely for herself and for the shaman. The ability to wake up the audience, at least sporadically, is a crucial skill of the shaman.

Sometimes women can seize the dramatic center. The possessed women with whom Induan Hiling began her spiritual career manipulated audience attention with their wild dancing and bursts of spirit-inspired song. Without the women's dramatic excesses Induan Hiling might not have had a platform from which to rise. Yet most of the possessed women were willing to lend credence to shamans' views of them as patients rather than healers by representing themselves as inarticulate victims of spiritual power. As long as they were seen as patients, their dramatic performance did not threaten the men's preeminence. (Some of the women, close kin of male shamans, were motivated to support rather than challenge the men's authority.) Furthermore, the most ritually knowledgeable women, the *pinjulang*, avoided possession, thus reinforcing the idea that women could be knowledgeable (and shy) or dramatic (and inarticulate), but not both knowledgeable and dramatic. Without gender-appropriate ways of bringing together dramatic self-presentation and claims to traditional

knowledge, women have difficulty breaking into the mainstream of male-dominated spiritual expression.

Induan Hiling's work succeeds by sidestepping performance requirements that advantage men; thus, even in its omissions, it exposes gender asymmetries in the conditions of spiritual expression. In this regard, we also see some of the advantages for her of the love song format over the chant. If she feels more comfortable calling her chants "love songs," it is perhaps because the performance requirements of the two forms differ significantly—rather than because she would not know how to put together a conventional chant. Whereas shamans must convene a formal ritual event to perform chants, love songs are sung while minding children, lying around the house resting, and socializing with friends. Although both forms use an improvisational style that responds to context and audience, as well as the intentions of the singer, the kinds of audience attention shamanic chants and love songs seek are different: love songs tease, flatter, soothe, and flirt, thus drawing attention to the subtle attractions of daily interaction; shamanic chants alternately amaze, wheedle, praise, pontificate, or startle, but all in an attempt to convene a spiritual community around the performance of the shaman. Induan Hiling's innovation has been to use informal daily contacts, the audience of love songs, as a community to support spiritual leadership. Since public ritual performance privileges male expressive leadership, she ingeniously avoids it.

Her pictures even more clearly bypass performance requirements: they do away with performance entirely in favor of the codification of spiritual knowledge and authority. This codification has a number of significant features.

First, her drawings, unlike shaman's performances, are easily reproducible. Induan Hiling was happy to allow me to copy the drawings; in two cases, she requested my copy and gave me the original, because my copy was on cleaner paper and seemed likely to last longer.¹¹

Second, her drawings work toward an impersonal visual authority, rather than the contextually grounded authority of shamanic dialog. Shamans may claim to chant time-honored traditional poetry that cannot be altered, but in fact, every performance changes with the purpose of the ceremony and the particular moods and motivations of both shaman and audience; the drawings, in contrast, cannot change their shape as they are called into different contexts of healing (although, of course, interpretations may change).

Finally, Induan Hiling's drawings claim the authority of script. "Writing" gives her message the permanence of an artifact and disengages it from performance politics and its time. Her indecipherable writing collapses time in other ways as well: it brings the power of mysterious origins to bear on the spiritual meanings of the present.

In all these aspects of codification, writing becomes a woman's project—through which male privilege can be countered, evaded, and exposed. In avoiding the shaman's task of drawing an audience through unpredictability and drama, the "writings" show these performance elements as gender-asymmetrical conditions of expression. Her writing encodes a form of resistance to male performance privilege.

Writing the Horse of Gaps

Induan Hiling's difficulty breaking into the male-dominated domain of ritual performance has encouraged her development of new forms of ritual—spiritual songs with the melodies of love songs and pictures and texts that invoke the authority of codification rather than performance. Her empowering spirit familiar, "the horse of gaps," is her ability to weave her creativity in and out of the empty spaces of male-dominated modes of expression.

The feminist literary analysis that alerts us to the significance of such empty spaces draws particularly from French feminists (e.g., Marks and Courtivron 1980). French feminist literary critics have argued that because writing (in Western culture) is a male project, female writing finds itself in the gaps and the margins rather than along the lines that codify male dominance. This work does not differentiate writing from other modes of expression; the argument is that all signification is male-dominated, and writing is merely the most powerful example. In contrast, my analysis of Induan Hiling's "writing" points to distinctions between modes of expression as each promotes gender-linked possibilities for creativity and empowerment within particular cultural contexts. She uses "writing" in the Meratus context to undercut male-biased performance requirements.

Her "writing," however, does not tempt me to construct a theory of an essential "female" expression—even one tailored for the Meratus context—like the pre-Oedipal *écriture féminine* of Cixous (1980). Instead, it points me away from an analysis limited to gender to attend to the ways that the gender-specific features of any cultural project

are determined within a particular class and ethnic situation. Indeed, Induan Hiling's dream writing draws from a source of authority that, though not extensively exploited by male Meratus shamans, is ultimately male-dominated. Her writing invokes the authority of the written word as used by the government officials and Muslim traders and settlers who increasingly draw the parameters of Meratus possibilities.

Here we can return to the disturbing "Made in China" on the margin of Figure 5.2. No one besides me in the Meratus Mountains could read that phrase; I imagine Induan Hiling copied it off of an item bought at market, perhaps a tin plate. Yet she knew it was foreign writing—the powerful foreign writing, in any language, with any message, that motivated her commitment to the codification of Meratus tradition. Her dream of textualization grew within the challenge of competing foreign scripts. Indeed, just as dramatic excesses in performance reveal something of the conditions of shamanic expression, Induan Hiling's own marginal notes reveal something of the conditions of representation for her own project.

The very unreadability of her own written text—and note that she *could* have formed letters—follows from its opposition to the foreign letters, also unreadable, but in a different sense. Meratus tell a story of a time when God handed out the Holy Books: the Meratus ancestor ate his; thus, he ensured both internal inspiration and its essentially unarticulated script. (Similarly, perhaps the undomesticated fertility of Induan Hiling's plant-form, ritual decorations reaffirms that Meratus tradition, while constrained, is yet, by other standards, wild.) Gender assumes a secondary role as the project is guided by Induan Hiling's status as a Meratus Dayak, challenging and challenged by powerful literate foreigners on every side. In Figure 5.6, their words even have a central position, generating the text that replaces performance.

Induan Hiling explained the word in Figure 5.6 ("Astarama") as the name she had been given in the dream that generated this picture. She pronounced the word as "Irama," and her teenage son cued me to Rhoma Irama. Haji Rhoma Irama was a popular music star in Indonesia at the time, and his posters were prominently displayed in homes and stores in the market towns surrounding the Meratus Mountains.¹² In invoking Rhoma Irama, Induan Hiling portrays herself as combining the inspiration of a shaman and a rock star. The charismatic image of Rhoma Irama helps explain her use of *love songs* as shamanic text. Moreover, Rhoma Irama's name alerts us to Induan Hiling's stakes in a new, "modern" cultural identity for Meratus Dayaks. She

creates a Meratus spirituality that she hopes can match that of the more powerful national Indonesian culture.

In making claims for her dream-inspired writing as spiritual expression, Induan Hiling leans on the prestige of literate outsiders with Holy Books and written traditions. Why have Meratus men not been drawn to "literate" codification? A comparison to another ethnic situation seems suggestive.

The use of writing as an ethnic marker, and its links to gender division for the Tamang of Nepal, has been nicely described by Kathryn March (1983). For the Tamang, men and women have complementary and parallel ethnic "codifications": men write and women weave. Although the two media are opposed in metaphors that contrast male and female points of view, both women's weaving and men's writing express Tamang ethnic and religious solidarity and their distinctiveness from outsiders.

In contrast, Meratus male leaders in Induan Hiling's mountain area shy away from pressing the distinctiveness of Meratus ethnicity; they emphasize their similarities to, and thus connections with foreign power to augment their leadership positions within the local community. The performances of both shamans and political leaders reproduce models of outside authority as Meratus understand these models. Male leaders generally do not pose the Meratus community *against* outside models, because this would undercut their leadership skills. Thus, in this area there have been few male attempts to codify Meratus "difference."

Women, on the other hand, have fewer opportunities for contact and communication with the powerful outsiders, such as market traders, government bureaucrats, and army men, with whom the men forge ties. This has disadvantaged women in relation to community performance and leadership. Yet as ethnic tensions have increased with the loss of Meratus lands to neighboring Muslims and with the emerging threat of state resettlement to crowded border areas, a number of women have played key roles in reformulating Meratus ideas about culture, and particularly shamanism, to pose an alternative to powerful outside models of "civilization" and "religion." Induan Hiling's early mentor, Uma Adang, is one outstanding example; indeed, Uma Adang influenced Induan Hiling to turn her work in this direction. The last two verses of the song of Induan Hiling's that I have been discussing are a self-conscious attempt to copy Uma Adang's message about the importance of codified local custom and religion

under an imagined state protection (Tsing 1987). This section of the song begins with the following lines:

Adu hai, let's sing
Swept by the wind, and
Riding the horse of gaps, singing,
Counting custom and tradition
in 41 paragraphs.

Here Induan Hiling's "horse of gaps" takes her beyond male strategies to the formulation of a more codified and distinctive ethnic identity for Meratus. Her "writing" also makes its own modest contribution to this emerging discourse, where gender challenges and ethnic challenges meet.

Induan Hiling's work inserts itself within a tradition in which men predominate as star actors and speakers. In its need to revise, sidestep, and transform that tradition, her work exposes some of the tradition's dependence on male privilege. It provides a critical interpretation of shamanic tradition in two senses: it provides an innovative reading of convention, and its inversions, revisions, and even omissions create through their imaginative refusals of this convention. In retreating from ordinary Meratus standards of performance and leadership, Induan Hiling challenges these standards and contributes to an emerging Meratus conversation on gender, creativity, and power.

Appendix: One of Induan Hiling's Songs

All song fragments discussed in the essay are from this song. My commentary appears in the right-hand column.

Adu hai,
Riding the horse of gaps.
Swept by the wind,
Riding the horse of gaps, friend.

*Clearheaded in spiritual
flight,*

Finished in a day—
Forging spurs, babe,
Finished in a day.
The horse of distances.

*the shaman forges
a spiritual route*

What shall be used, babe?
Forging spurs
Finished in a day.

Used to circle and contain, babe—
That striped cup
the gilded one, babe
That striped cup
The cup that is composed
to circle and contain.

Swept by the wind . . .

The child of a cobra, babe
soaring to the sun.
If it has scales
They cross across each other.
The scales they point, babe,
Where do they point, friend?
They point to its tail,
They point to its head,
Those scales, babe.

Let's plant bamboo.
I'll plant some.
A clump of bamboo,
A stick of bamboo,
It may have hollow stems,
It may have nodes,
It may have a growing bud.

Those stems, babe,
Isn't it so?
Half of them are tall,
Half of them are small,
Half of them are high,
The growing buds, babe.

Adu, it's we ourselves,
Our own mountain, babe.
The mountain called Jungku
With two shoulders,
Hanging there
Swinging where
On our own mountain.

*and a message
that protects
and contains
the community.*

*Going farther
in flight,
the route is
mapped out
before and
behind.*

*A spiritual path
is laid out
as bamboo grows:*

*some paths go
farther than
others.*

*But all are
ultimately
based on
knowledge of
the self,*

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing

On the summit of the mountain
There's a wild fig tree,
A hanging fig tree,
A swaying fig tree,
Hanging where
Swaying there
Our wild fig tree.

Where does it sway?
Where does it hang?
Yes, it's you and I, babe.

There is a planting:
A cut bamboo.
A bamboo that plays the flute
A bamboo that sings.

We cut it off
Touching the shoulders,
The scissored bamboo
Touching the waist.
Babe, the scissored bamboo,
The cut bamboo,
Where is it planted?
Where does it hang?

Adu hai, let's sing,
Swept by the wind, and
Riding the horse of gaps, singing,
Counting custom and tradition
in 41 paragraphs.

The constitution of custom
The law of tradition
The prohibitions of the Basic
Constitution.

We'll stand on the center of the five
National Principles
To face our music in the world.

Adu hai,
At the moment
When God stood up,
And first took care of custom:
The constitution of custom
The constitution of law.
At the moment
When God the One

*as hair grows
from our heads.*

*The songs
of shamans
recount
local custom,
as protected
by the state,*

*and by the
legitimacy of origins.
For as law and custom
were created
by God,
so too,
human breath
("divided into two")*

"Riding the Horse of Gaps"

(I mean, not that God,
not that God—)
Stood up in the wind
It was divided into two
It was named
—Even water was not yet named,
Water was still one—
Du dat
Jat sat
Dat jur
Dat say
dat
Sut tup.

*by the nostrils)
and consciousness
(that "named")
were forged
within the
ultimately
indecipherable
mystery of
original
knowledge.*

Notes

1. The following review articles were particularly useful in introducing me to the nuances of 1980s work in feminist literary criticism: Sternhell 1982; Crosby 1984; Kolodny 1980. Another useful introduction to feminist criticism is Moi 1985, which only became available to me after this essay was essentially completed. Moi's analysis separates Anglo-American and French tendencies in feminist literary theory and criticizes Anglo-Americans particularly for their author-centered humanistic vision in which women's writing automatically reflects the "female" experiences of the author. My essay replicates some of these Anglo-American assumptions, but I would argue that they have at least some usefulness for contemporary cultural anthropology. The "texts" of cultures rather than their authors have been the objects of anthropological analysis. The male-centered unity of anthropological texts can be disrupted by a focus on "authors" that allows us to look at how the heterogeneous interests of ordinary people influence the continuing formation of "culture."

2. The Meratus have also been called "Bukit," but they consider this a derogatory term. "Dayak" refers to the non-Muslim indigenous people of Borneo.

3. The importance of Meratus performance standards in privileging men as political actors is discussed in Tsing 1990, which can be read as a companion piece to this essay.

4. Uma Adang's movement is discussed in detail in Tsing 1987. She "adopted" both Induan Hiling and myself, as well as numerous other fans, as siblings.

5. Conventions differ among the various shamanic styles associated with different Meratus regions. In Induan Hiling's area, women played the part of pinjulang in the most popular styles; in other styles, men tended to be pinjulang (also known as *patati*) as well as shamans.

6. Although in some Meratus shamanic styles women play the drums, in Induan Hiling's local area only men are drummers.

7. The women had divergent positions: some seemed more comfortable with the illness attribution than others. Two were young; in refusing to speak about their experience, they brought their behavior in line with that of children, who, according to local belief, are not uncommonly kidnapped by *dewa* spirits but remain mute about

their spiritual encounter after their return. Several were close kin of *dewa* shamans, and their possession behavior—whether they called it illness or inspiration—seemed closely related to their other attempts to further these men's careers within the community. But a few of the most articulate women told me with considerable self-assurance that they, like shamans, were receiving spiritual teachings.

8. Central mountain Meratus live in dispersed households and small social clusters, which affiliate to form "neighborhoods" of five to thirty families. Neighborhoods are political and religious communities; however, individual families and social clusters have considerable autonomy and are always free to join a different neighborhood or keep their affairs to themselves. Meratus community dynamics are discussed in Tsing 1984.

9. Among the Ma'anyan Dayaks of Padju Epat in Central Kalimantan, female shamans conventionally use rattling anklets (Alfred Hudson, personal communication). I do not know if Induan Hiling was aware of the Ma'anyan tradition.

10. A number of pieces of the ritual decorations for a shamanic festival are painted with plantlike designs. Decorated boards used in ritual stands are called *papan tulis* ("writing boards"). Induan Hiling draws upon this identification of decoration and writing in this drawing. Such an identification of decorated boards with "writing" is also found in the ritual practice of Central Kalimantan Ma'anyan (Hudson 1966). In other parts of Borneo, "writing boards" of rather different sorts are used to remind shamans of the stages of their chants (Harrison 1965). One source of Induan Hiling's ideas about writing is probably these common connections among decoration, "writing," and shamanic knowledge. Other sources involve her interpretation of the power of Arabic and Western scripts.

11. The issue of reproducibility is also relevant to love songs: love songs can be copied more easily than shamanic chants, for they are not so shrouded in secrecy and pass easily from one singer to another. Furthermore, Induan Hiling was aware of the mechanical reproducibility of recorded pop music, to which Meratus love songs are sometimes compared. (A number of young men have tape recorders on which they play tapes of the popular love songs called *orkes malayu*.) The last section of my essay suggests how Induan Hiling mixed her identification with local shamans with an emulation of national pop music heroes.

12. Rhoma Irama himself is a master of combining genres and transforming symbols. One of his current posters showed him as a pious pilgrim in Arab dress, before an Islamic prayer rug, with a woman kneeling at his feet and his electric guitar in his hand. Another showed him with a bloody headrag—and his guitar—manning revolutionary barricades.

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