Chapter 3

Life-cycle rituals: birth

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As a category, participatory rituals marking life-cycle transitions are the most structurally salient of those performed by the Nuaulu. Although there is no word in the vernacular to describe them as a collectivity, their cyclical character and connections are evident to those who take part in them. Both subjectively and objectively, the different rituals merge into each other over time (birth ritual into first hair-shaving; first female menstruation into marriage; male puberty into elder investiture; elder investiture into death) – just so many phases of a never-ending process. For these reasons it is perhaps not surprising that, as a corpus, they might be regarded as providing a core model to help the analyst understand the structure of the rest, and that for Nuaulu they might constitute a corpus of practice informing and determining the frequency and timing of other, less frequent categories of ritual. It is not only a temporal continuity that links the rituals together, but also the interrelationship of their parts (that is, of their constitutive ritual actions), especially in their role in articulating the relations between groups and individuals. In most life-cycle rituals these relations are those between wife-givers (*hanahanai*) and the wife-takers (*tanaite*). In the context of birth ritual, this entails relations between the clan of the child's mother (who are 'guests' at the birth ritual, and recipients of feasts) and the clan of the child's father (who are the hosts at the birth ritual, and the providers of feasts). Within this structure of clan alliance, the rituals also articulate relations between the two houses of the wife-taking clan, between the house of the chief (*numa onate*) and that of the *kapitane* (*numa kapitane*), who provide ritual services for each other depending on the house into which the child has been born. Finally, within and between clans and houses, there is a gender

articulation. Thus, while male heads of a clan or house are responsible for male ritual, their wives are responsible for supervising ritual involving females. But in birth ritual men are still ultimately precedent over women, the house of the chief over the house of the *kapitane*, and the husband's clan over the wife's clan.

3.2 BIRTH RITUAL

Lambek (2007) has suggested that we find a place for 'beginnings' in human ritual practice. I would like to argue that while for participating individuals there may well be beginnings, for example, the first time a person participates in a ritual, beginnings are systemically and ultimately all relative, as they are always prompted by some previous event, which for some significant others may be more of a beginning than the last. This is certainly so for Nuaulu birth ritual.

Nuaulu rituals surrounding birth (*makasusue*) constitute a series of linked events that most Nuaulu describe as *nuhune sio ikina*. They are often best known and referred to by that sub-event in which both mother and baby are ceremonially washed (*iriti inai runa anai*). Indeed, this focal rite is well known outside the Nuaulu community, where in Ambonese Malay it is called 'kasimandi anak kecil'. In this degree of outside recognition it is paired with the female puberty ritual, 'kasimandi pinamou', and may be linked to general Moluccan folk generalizations of a pattern of animist practice that was once more widespread, and that preceded conversion to Islam and Christianity. Together with those relating to the monthly menstrual seclusion of women, these rituals constitute a category that is almost entirely female-centered, and, indeed, where any contact with men is regarded as threatening, not only to the health of individual males, but to the order of society in general. In this sense, the dominant and default model of society is male-centered.

There are three physical loci connected with birth rituals: the *posune*, or menstruation and birthing hut; the *numa nuhune*, the special house used by some clans to accommodate the mother and newly born child between coming out of the *posune* and full reintegration into society; and the sacred house of the child's father. The mythology and beliefs associated with birth practices need only be treated lightly here, but each of these loci effectively mark a different stage in the ritual. The general

term linking birth and other female-centred ritual is *nuhune*. Thus, there is *nuhune sio ikina* for birth, and *nuhune pinamou* for first menstruation. In brief, Nuaulu say that a baby is constituted by Anahatana and the female *nuhune* spirit from two kinds of white blood (*sakakau*), one from the female and the other from the male, which then mix (*nehu*) forming an ungendered, androgynous interuterine being. The *nuhune* spirit protects the developing foetus and even massages it to ensure that it is well formed. It is the male *nuhune* spirit, however, who accompanies hunters seeking meat for the birth ritual. The female spirit protects the *posune*, as *saruana* may not go near for fear of gender pollution. In the third part of the ritual sequence, the new life is introduced to his or her male ancestors at the clan sacred house. There is thus a structural tension between the maternal and paternal elements, reflecting material tensions that arise from the dangers that surround birth. This ceremony is significant because it reaffirms an ancestral union (*nuhune sainikane*), the relationship through descent between the paternal and maternal side, between female and male, between wife-givers and wife-takers, and between outside and inside.

3.3 THE POSUNE

When a woman goes into labour she enters the *posune* (Plate 3.1), where she gives birth (*amrae*). Although it is usually the regular *posune* that is used for birthing, Rosemary Bolton reports that the hut where babies are born is alternatively known by a separate word, *karoua*. The *posune* is also the same structure that a woman enters when she has her menstruation, and the main focal location for ritual surrounding a girl's first menstruation. No wonder the semantic linkage between these three events is so significant in the geo-symbolism of femaleness. The *posune* physically ensures the separation of men from women who are menstruating or in labour, and for several weeks after birth.

The *posune* were once located some distance from the settlement, but for at least 50 years they have been constructed on the immediate periphery of the village, just a few metres from the nearest houses. Women in menstrual seclusion are prohibited from entering the village, even when there is a death of a close relative, but other women or children often sleep with them in the hut as they express fears about being alone.

Nowadays, menstruating women are allowed to go to the gardens but may not enter a garden hut, and must ensure that no blood is seen by men. When their household is sleeping in the gardens, a makeshift *posune* must be constructed. If such a structure is used by women from another clan, the first time they use it they must present the man who built it with a ring to compensate for any potential defilement. Similarly, if a woman from another clan uses it to give birth, or a girl uses it when she has her first menstruation, she must also provide compensation, in these circumstances a plate or a cup in addition to a ring.

Females confined to a *posune*, for menstruation or birth, are prohibited from eating food prepared in the normal way in an ordinary household. All sago flour is cooked in bamboo internodes. Meat in the category *peni* (pork, deer or cassowary) is prohibited, although nowadays many menstruating women contravene this rule. The logic of this prohibition is seen in the fact that when a hunter kills *peni*, part must be offered to the ancestral spirits. Neither may male clothing, or any red cloth (particularly associated with males), be brought into a hut. Young men are not permitted once they have been through their puberty ceremonies, nor may they be seen by a woman in the *posune*. Utensils used in a hut may not afterwards be used in the main house, where they might come into contact with men. Elder men who have received their *tupu-tupue* barkcloth are especially vulnerable to contamination from items such as plates and clothing that have been inside a hut, as it is they who are responsible for performing ritual, the effectiveness of which will be influenced by the loss of heat that occurs when a male item is made cold through contamination. The consequences of not observing these prohibitions is sickness and failure in hunting and fishing, and in the case of birth, the death of the child or mother through ancestral retribution. While the mother and baby are in the *posune* they may not be seen by the men who work in the gardens, collect sago and hunt. Women in the birth *posune* are subject to the same dietary and contamination restrictions as a menstruating woman. They cannot cook using modern utensils, but cook and boil water in green bamboo. Calabashes or cocunut shells are used as plates, and sago porridge is prepared in a container (*topae*) made from the base of a sago-frond midrib. Use of paraffin is prohibited and the traditional resin torch is used instead, although some women now improperly use candles. Sexual intercourse is not allowed while the woman is confined. Women and female children may visit a *posune*, as may young boys.

Birth huts are made of sago thatch on a wooden frame (Plate 3.1), the internal uprights being of hard wood and the external battens holding the thatch in place generally of *suenie* (*Schizostachyum* sp.). Internally, the roof consists of seven bamboo trusses. Like the sacred houses of most clans, the orientation of the ridge is east to west (or rather, sunset to sunrise), though the doors are at the sunset and sunrise end, rather than on the sea and mountain sides. In size, the *posune* varies between two and three metres square, and is occasionally larger. One *posune* measured in 1970 was 225 cm wide at the gable end, with walls each 150 cm high, 400 cm wide and 300 cm long. The doors were about 70 cm wide. The back (sunrise end) is identical to the front (sunset end). The internal structure is much the same as an ordinary house: a raised platform of split bamboo occupying about half the area, on which the occupants eat, sleep and engage in general everyday activities. In contrast to an ordinary house platform, though, this is on the inland rather than the sunrise side. On the opposite side is suspended a shelf (*hotune*), and above the platform on the inland side often hang bamboo containers used when bathing a new born baby. A shallow fire pit about 30 cm wide is used for heating water during the birthing process. The *posune*, like a sacred house, may not be destroyed, and it and its contents are left to rot when they are no longer needed. If a woman goes into labour while she is away from the village working in the gardens a *posune nisi* (garden *posune*) will be constructed by the garden hut, where she will remain until the coming-out or washing ceremony.

As the time of her confinement draws near, there will be discussions as to where the mother will give birth. Especially in the case of a first child, a husband will build a new menstruation hut, though other women often use an empty hut that has been used by someone else. A hut already occupied by a girl awaiting her puberty ceremony is prohibited. The husband goes to the male *nuhune* guardian to inform him that his wife is giving birth and asks him to construct the birth hut. The *nuhune* guardian is the head of the opposite and complementary clan house, either *kapitane* or clan chief. If either of these individuals is dead or incapacitated, a younger brother takes over the functions until the son is of age. The guardian orders the men of the father's clan to construct the birth hut towards the seaward and sunset sides of the village, the same location as the menstruation hut.

(a)

(b)

(c)

(d)

Plate 3.1. Birth ritual in Rouhua: (a) man and woman building *posune*, February 1981; (b) midwife placing hand on head of baby and praying before cutting the umbilical cord, 1993; (c) mother burying afterbirth outside *posune*, 1991; (d) *posune* with newly-erected *asinokoe*, May 1970. Photographs (b) and (c) by Rosemary Bolton.

3.4 BIRTH AND POST-NATAL CARE

While a first pregnancy (*tia tinipae*) is thought to last ten months, subsequent pregnancies (*tia ineue*) are regarded as being nine months in duration. As labour pains intensify and contractions become more frequent, a woman will enter a menstruation hut and she or her husband calls the midwife to assist with the delivery. When the birth hut is ready, the female *nuhune* guardian conducts the mother there accompanied by the midwife, who protects her during the birth. Other women on hand may include the woman's mother, her sisters, her brother's wives and her aunts. For a detailed and graphic ethnographic account of the birthing process, see Bolton (1997a:12-23). Here my main purpose is to concentrate on the ritual actions, many of which focus on the recognition that childbirth is an inherently risk-prone and dangerous process, and a cultural belief that it is by far the worst way to die, especially where both mother and baby die together. These dangers are seen to derive in part from misbehaviour, failure to satisfy the ancestors and irregular human relationships. It is not surprising, therefore, that in order to minimize problems this is a time when ancestral spirits are much consulted. Bolton recalls how she once saw someone go and ask a father to release a tight bow string, as this was making his wife, who was giving birth, tight, and complicating delivery.

The woman in labour sits or lies on the sunset side of the *posune* platform, prohibited from wearing jewellery by the *nuhune* spirit. To encourage the delivery, women bring containers of water that have been made sacred by speaking words of ancestral invocation, by the midwife or others, which they sprinkle over the abdomen, sometimes feet and head, and then drink a little. Used containers must be placed facing upward and not downwards to avoid misfortune. Mediums may be consulted, who come near but not into the hut; if the birth is not imminent, the mother may be taken to the house of a medium. To ease pain a birthing mother may rub *sina* leaf (the nettle *Laportea decumana*) on her body, while a midwife will massage the abdomen with water or coconut oil, pushing downward (*rati*), blowing and spitting ginger, and invoking Anahatana, ancestral spirits and the midwife spirit (*pian upue*), imploring the baby to 'step on to the island' (*heta nusa*) quickly. Midwives administer to the mother a drink of crushed *puku* leaves in water, over which an invocation is made, to turn the baby in the uterus, and hit the split bamboo of the

platform between the legs of the mother to urge the baby to come out. A delayed birth will prompt the women present to loudly call upon both maternal and paternal ancestors.

Once the baby has cried and is clearly alive, the focus shifts to the mother and removal of the placenta. After the placenta has been evacuated, the tension and danger pass, and a fire is lit to warm the mother. The bamboo knife (*kaitimane*) for cutting the umbilical cord is made from *wana hatu* (*Dendrocalamus* poss. *asper*) by the father. The bamboo is first split into two short pieces (*weni*). A knife is cut from one of these by the midwife, and fashioned by the mother of the new child's father. After a name has been decided, the mother supports the baby on her lap using her right hand, while the midwife determines where the umbilical cord is to be severed. This is done by spreading the thumb and index finger (*autuhe*) five times, beginning from the navel. The cord is held at this point and pushed five times towards the baby, and then tied using five pieces of palm leaf, nowadays strands of a plastic rice sack. Placing the right hand on the baby's head (*ahusie*) (Plate 3.1b), the midwife invokes Anahatana and the ancestors (*sopa sau*) to make the child healthy, and give it a long life. The midwife utters the name of the baby, five times waves the bamboo knife over the cord, audibly counting to five, and then cuts it. Directly after the cut is made there follows the *apusaa nahai*, 'the raising of breath', in which the end of the umbilical cord attached to the baby is held to the baby's mouth and then to its heart, while an invocation is made asking for a long life to continue the clan. This is the moment at which the soul (*wanui*) is thought to enter the body. The word for 'breath' is often used for 'soul', and it is significant that the soul is believed to leave the body of a dying person as they stop breathing (*nahai tewa*).

Four small bamboo tubes, specially cut for the purpose and containing cold water, are used for washing the baby during birth ritual. To do this, the baby is held face up and bathed from one of the tubes and then turned over and bathed from another. The mother is then washed with hot water, which is said to encourage the elimination of any blood remaining inside her, making her stomach hard. But from this moment until she is ritually bathed she is said to be 'living under the *nuhune*', and may not bathe at all. Any contact with water may prompt the *nuhune* spirit to stop protecting her, resulting in possible serious illness. Finally, the midwife performs techniques to heal any damage done to internal organs and to manipulate the uterus, vagina and abdomen back into

their usual shape. One technique involves warming a *tahola* leaf (*Ficus* cf. *septica*) over the fire and then rubbing it over the mother's stomach to reduce the swelling. Another is to heat white stones in a fire and then pour water over them as the mother stoops so that the steam encompasses her stomach. After these procedures a piece of cloth is tied around the mother's abdomen to provide support. Up until the 1970s the bamboo knife used to cut the umbilicus was wrapped in a small, plaited palm-leaf mat by the midwife. By the time Rosemary Bolton was describing the ritual this had been replaced by a piece of plastic rice sack. The bamboo knife, within its sheath, is then placed in the rafters, or in the thatched wall, and the bamboos used to wash the baby are hung on either side, all on the inland (mountain) wall of the *posune*.

The final ritual action of the birthing process is to bury the afterbirth (Plate 3.1c), which takes place directly if day time, or first thing in the morning if the child is born at night. The placenta is referred to as *nahate*, or *kakai*, 'older same-sex sibling', the child being the younger sibling. The reason for this is said to be because the afterbirth provides protection for the growing embryo and must die first for the child to be born. It is washed by the mother with help from the midwife and wrapped in plastic sacking, formerly a piece of plaited leaf. It is 'planted' in a hole about 30 cm deep previously dug by the midwife, together with the first faeces and the leaves used to cleanse the baby. This is located towards the sea, on the right-hand side of the entrance to the *posune*, just inland of the door on the sunrise side of the hut, in the north-east – life-affirming – direction. The mother, or someone else if she is weak, then takes the package outside, places it carefully in the hole, and covers it with soil five times using the right hand. The midwife finishes filling the hole and marks the place with a semi-circular 'wall' of about 12 bamboo sticks (*puku*) against the outside of the hut. For her services, a midwife nowadays receives a small ceramic bowl or cup (*isikotol*) and – in 1990 at least – 10,000 rupiah for a boy, and half as much for a girl.

It is important to avoid pollution caused by parturitional blood. Bolton once observed a dog contaminated with blood from a *posune* platform. Fortunately, the women present noticed it and washed the blood off before it was chased out of the *posune*, afraid that men might see the blood or that the dog would enter a sacred house. A dog contaminated in this way may sometimes be ritually purified so as not to negatively influence success in hunting.

The child is washed in coconut oil shortly after birth, and placed over leaves of the *monone* vine (*Scindapsus* sp.), which in turn is placed over the fire. The vapour rises from the plant and is said to give it a strong backbone. When the umbilical cord falls away, about three days after birth, it is placed in the sheath with the bamboo knife in the roof thatch on the inland side of the hut. At this point the baby is bathed again and a mixture of ground, baked nutmeg and turmeric rubbed on the navel by the mother. The fingers are warmed over the fire and pressed several times over the navel each day to assist in healing the wound.

3.5 ERECTING THE ASINOKOE

The *asinokoe*, or 'crying post', is so-called because it is supposed to prevent crying, to protect a mother and baby from sickness, and to keep away evil spirits. It embodies the protective spirit of a female ancestor invoked by the person who erects it, and is made five days after birth, at the *posune*, in a ritual described as 'placing the *asinokoe*' (*nona asinokoe*) and undertaken by the male *nuhune* guardian.

The *asinokoe is* usually made from *akunin (hanaie)* (*Actinodaphne* sp.), but for Soumori, and perhaps for some other clans, it can be *akunin pina* or *kawasa* (*Archidendron clypaeria*, also used for sacred shields). The term *asinokoe* is also used to refer to the tree species, making it a synonym for *kawasa* or *akunin*. Bolton reports that, at least for some clans, it formerly involved placing a branch on either side of the *puku*, which surrounds the buried placenta. For Matoke-pina it consisted of a single sapling just inside the door of the *posune*. However, in most examples that I have seen – as in the case of Sounaue-ainakahata – it is now a frame construction of branches around the entrance of the birth *posune*, and consists of two young saplings, 180-250 cm in height, which still retain their leaves (Plate 3.1d). These are planted outside the door (that is, on the sunrise side) of the *posune*, one on each side, about 150 cm apart. A third sapling, generally without side branches, is placed in the fork of the branch joining each standing sapling. Over each corner joint of the 'gateway' so formed is placed a double ring of liana (*pepe*) made from *awane metene*, and on the bottom of each *pepe* are bound some leaves. On completion, five leaves from the *asinokoe* are placed in the thatch of the *posune* door, three above and two below.

As soon as possible (on the same or on the following day) the male *nuhune* guardian, having finished erecting the *asinokoe*, must hunt cuscus (of any type or sex), sometimes accompanied by the child's father or, failing that, his brother or wife's brother. If a cuscus is not killed that day he must try the next day, and so on, until successful. The cuscus must be skinned and the skin thrown away whilst in the forest. It cannot be cooked in the normal way, that is, baked in its skin. The entire animal is cooked in green bamboo in the forest (not in the village), discarding only a few internal organs, such as the intestines, and ensuring that there is no spillage during cooking. The guardian then returns to the *posune* carrying the bamboo on a pole over his shoulder. Because he is not permitted to enter the village, he circumnavigates its periphery until he comes to the right place. Holding out the bamboo on the pole, he gives the mother the cuscus, together with the juice used for cooking in the bamboo. The mother is expected to consume the whole cuscus, though in practice she may be helped by other women present. On no account, however, may she drink the blood, which would make her barren; neither should the food be in contact with men or be distributed outside the *posune*. Cuscus prepared in this way are described as *mara susu ntone* (milk-sap cuscus), consumption of which is thought to produce a plentiful supply of breast milk. If a number of cuscus have been killed, only the first is the *mara susu ntone*, the remainder being available as food in the normal way. The bones left from this meal are stored in the *posune*.

Mother and baby remain secluded for another week or two after consuming the *mara susu ntone*. During this time preparations are made for the bathing ceremony, and for the feast or feasts that accompany it. These preparations entail the father hunting and collecting sago, generally with some relatives from his clan. After the mother and child have been ritually bathed and leave the *posune*, the *asinokoe* goes with them to the relevant sacred house, or sometimes into the *numa nuhune* (see below), where it is placed along the inland wall. It is quite usual to keep all *asinokoe*, and to tie them under the eaves of the house, to promote the health of the children for whom they were first erected. In some instances the *asinokoe* of an earlier child may be replaced by that for the next child, and so ad infinitum.

3.6 THE WASHING CEREMONY AT THE POSUNE

The event of birth is something over which humans have little control, but the subsequent rituals can be, and are, manipulated. Once the mother's 'blood is dry', or, as Nuaulu figuratively put it, when 'the leaf tips lighten' (*ai totu haha karahirina*), a day is determined for the bathing ceremony (*sohu sio ikina*). This decision is taken in the clan house of the father, and the ceremony is usually performed two to four weeks after birth. If the child is born into the house of the chief, then it is the *kapitane* and his wife who officiate as *nuhune* guardians; if the child is born into the house of the *kapitane*, then it is the chief and his wife who perform this function. This structural logic can be seen in Figure 3.1 as it applied to the ritual held for Kaune Sounaue-ainakahata in 1971. The preparations include men and women going to the forest to collect kenari nuts, to extract sago starch and to hunt. Meanwhile the women weave baskets for carrying the food gifts for the new mother's sacred house. The male and female *nuhune* guardians, together with the men who will go hunting for the feast, assemble before leaving, and the male *nuhune* guardian informs Anahatana and the ancestors about what they are to do and asks for their help in securing a kill, admitting to any contravention of *monne* by the mother while in the *posune*, such as using a paraffin lamp rather than a resin torch. Failure to do so may mean that hunting will be unsuccessful. The male *nuhune* spirit accompanies the men.

The evening prior to the washing ceremony, the female *nuhune* guardian presents the mother with sago flour and part of a cuscus. These she eats before first light and then fasts until the feast the next evening. Before daybreak the father and the *nuhune* guardians also eat part of the cuscus (the *mara nuhune*), fasting until the feast. If there is no cuscus, *peni* (that is pig, deer, or cassowary) may be an acceptable substitute (except for the mother, for whom eating *peni* in the *posune* is prohibited), as may be – increasingly - fish. When the men return from the forest, they present what they have collected to the baby's mother's sacred house.

On the morning of the ceremony, unmarried women cut two lengths of bamboo (a large one and a smaller one) and carry them along the beach to the point where fresh water enters the village. One length is kept separate and prepared just before the washing of the child. The chips and shavings are collected in a basket and later buried near the *posune*. The filled bamboos are then taken round the outside of the village to the

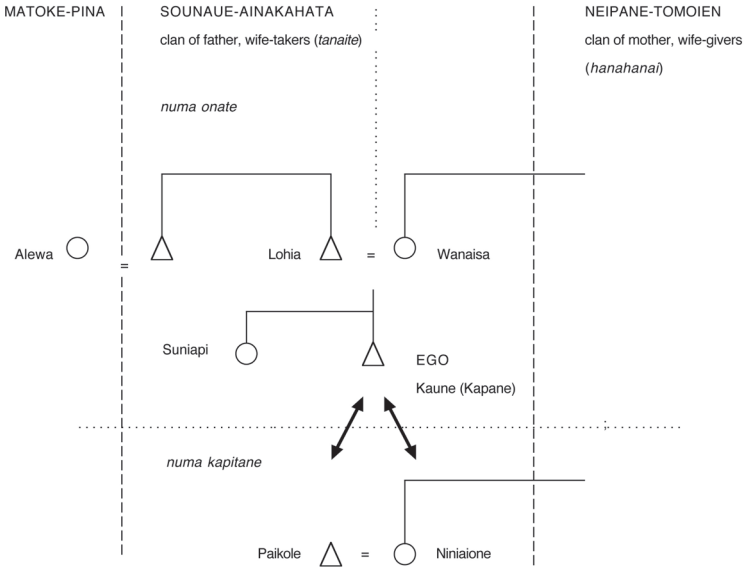

Figure 3.1. Genealogical connections between main actors in the bathing ceremony for Kaune Sounaue-ainakahata, 1 March 1971.

The thick, two-ended arrows indicate the reciprocal and life-long *nuhune* relationship.

relevant *posune*. Women from the clan, or who have husbands from the clan, of the baby's father, congregate at the sacred house of the father or at the *numa nuhune* (see below) after midday, each bringing a plate, bowl or cup (*isikotol*), which they deposit on the house verandah. At the ceremony for Pikamaru, the daughter of Tapone Sounaue-ainakahata, in July 1986, each married and unmarried adult woman presented a small *isikotol* wrapped in a cloth. When everyone is present the female *nuhune* guardian departs by the inland door, and the other women by the seaward door. Accompanied by the women of her group, the female *nuhune* guardian goes to the birth hut where the mother is waiting, neither of whom will have eaten since the previous night. The newborn child is termed *nuhun upue* (*upu* being a term of respect) by the elder and his wife who perform the ritual, and the child (and his mother) will use the same term reciprocally for the couple.

The mother emerges through the sunrise door of the *posune*. As she does so, the leaves used to wipe the first faeces from the baby (*ai nahana*) are pulled through the side of the sago thatch wall behind the *puku* and placed inside. The mother is washed just outside the door, kneeling on banana leaves, a coconut frond or a piece of sago thatch, and surrounded by all the females present. The woman crouches as she is washed. The female *nuhune* guardian invokes the ancestors (*sopa sau*) to ensure the health and life of mother and baby, by speaking into a notched bamboo container addressed as the *tihu tinipae*, 'first water', or *tihu nuhune*. The water is poured over the mother five times, and the rest emptied over her. She then pours water from a second notched bamboo (the *tihu mampusue*, the 'following water') and continues to wash the mother in front of the birth hut. Certain close relatives help by pouring water over her and washing her with soap, and with grated coconut for her hair (Plates 3.2a and b).

All materials associated with the washing – such as dirty water, soiled clothes and used coconut – are not permitted to touch the ground, which they would contaminate. Instead they are thrown onto the *posune* roof. The clothes the baby has worn in the *posune* are subsequently burned, and those of the mother washed the following day at the river. All who have assisted at the *posune* must wash their hands and feet before leaving to signify removal of potential pollution. The two bamboo containers used for washing the child, along with the bamboo used to cut the cord and the piece of the cord left attached to the baby, are tied to the inside of the *posune* roof by the mother or her proxy, to ensure the health of the child. Many such containers are to be found in existing huts and serve as a reminder of the births with which they are associated.

When the bathing is complete the *nuhune* guardian opens a new sarong, usually the gift of her brother, moves it five times towards the mother, and on the fifth movement places it over the mother's head. Because a new child cannot be exposed to the sky until it has undergone a ritual in the clan sacred house or *numa nuhune* the following day, a second sarong or red cloth is placed by the father, so that it entirely covers the baby and the woman who cradles it. This is the *nipa nahate*, which represents and replaces the placenta buried at the *posune*. It is eventually given to the clan of the mother as compensation for the blood lost in childbirth, and in acknowledgement that the receptacle for the developing child was of a different clan. The party then processes in a mountainward direction

from the birth hut to the special *numa nuhune* or the sacred house serving as such, accompanied by the female *nuhune* spirit, where the baby will be presented to the gathered guests.

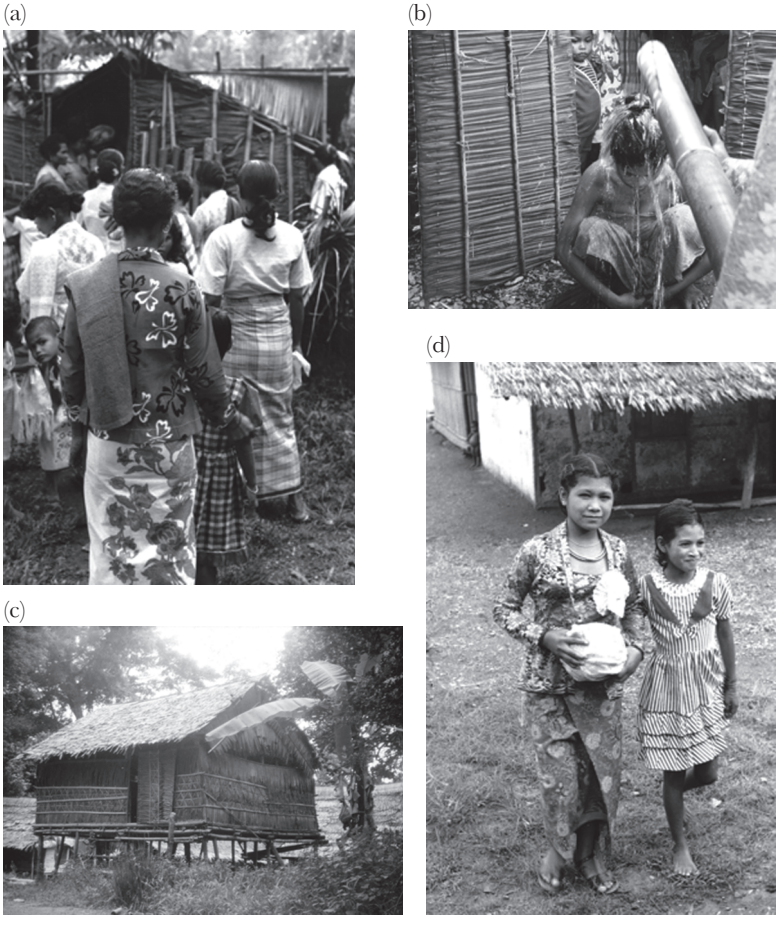

Plate 3.2. Birth ritual: (a) group of women and children assembling outside *posune* for ceremonial washing of the new mother, Niamonai June 1986; (b) ceremonial washing of new mother at door of *posune*, Rouhua March 1990; (c) *numa nuhune*. Aihisuru, September 1970; (d) Pinasapa Soumori bringing plate as part of the *nuhune* ritual for Pikamaru Sounaue, Rouhua June 1986. Photograph (b) courtesy of Rosemary Bolton.

3.7 REINTEGRATION RITUAL: FIRST DAY

Many Nuaulu clans have a *numa nuhune* (Plate 3.2c), a house used specifically during parts of the birthing ritual, the importance of which varies between clans. For most clans this means no more than carrying out the birth ritual in a house designated for the purpose, and the place where the *asinokoe* erected at the *posune* are eventually stored. In Rouhua, Matoke-pina and Soumori have a special *numa nuhune*, while Sounaue and Neipani use existing sacred houses, either the house of the chief or that of the *kapitane*, depending on which is providing the *nuhune* guardians. But in every case where it is used, the *numa nuhune* symbolically reproduces the features of a regular sacred house, with fireplace, *rine* and, in ground-level houses, a raised platform. For some clans, from the time the new child enters the house until it leaves the following day, no fire is lit, lest it 'overheat' the proceedings and adversely affect the ritual.

After the ceremony at the *posune*, the women proceed to the seaward door of the *numa nuhune* or its proxy, where they wait for the men to arrive, especially the baby's mother's brothers. The mother and child enter the house, where the father is waiting, and turn towards the sunrise end. The baby and the person holding it enters first, then the mother and then the female *nuhune* guardian. The mother rejoins her husband, who remains in the house unless he later accompanies men hunting. Inside, near the main post, the male *nuhune* guardian lays two parangs, one woven sarong, and five porcelain dishes containing betel. This latter is destined for the baby's mother's house as a gift in exchange for the baby. Both *nuhune* guardians sit with the baby's father, and invite the women and the baby's mother to sit down. The baby is then presented to the *nuhune* guardian, who in turn re-presents it to the mother, who in turn presents it to the father, who holds it for the first time for a few minutes before passing it to another male, generally the father or paternal grandfather of the mother. After this, other women may take the child and fondle it. This signals that the child has now entered the father's clan. After that, the young men of the father's house distribute betel requisites (*papuae*) to the women who will take part in the feast that night.

Up until this point both the *nuhune* guardians and the mother have abstained from betel since dawn. The female *nuhune* guardian cuts open a young areca fruit of a small variety, holds the right hand of the mother, makes an invocation to the ancestors, moves it forward and backward

five times, and finally lets the fruit drop into the hand of the mother. Alternatively, she may chew the betel quid and then drop the juice from her mouth into the right palm of the mother. The remainder of the participants then chew betel, but take most of it home when they leave. A gift of the betel requisites is made to the Matoke chief, the *onate ankarua* (the secular village headman of Rouhua), and to other clans, if there is sufficient to go round. Plates containing betel-chewing requisites from the mother's clan are given to the *nuhune* guardians, and afterwards the men, and then women and children of the *tanaite*. In the ceremony for Kaune Sounaue, 32 *papuae* were prepared, but only a few actually used. Quite quickly the guests shift the contents of the plates on to the others in order to retrieve their loaned property. Most of the requisites are taken away by the guests and consumed later. Meanwhile, the women of the mother's group return to their own households to prepare the feast for the women of the father's group. Later that night the young men of the father's group visit the other houses to summon the women to the sacred house for feasting. There are two feasts: the first for the women of the father's clan; the second, which follows it, for the baby's mother and father and his parents.

After the opening ceremony, each woman from the father's house receives a dish containing 500 rupiah from the mother's house. The gifts must be clearly visible and not obscured during the ceremony. On the occasion of the birth of Nekaiea Sounaue, daughter of Numapena Sounaue, in June 1970, I observed a total of about six plates. On the occasion of Pinaroi Neipane's birth, in July 1970, the gifts consisted of five plates or bowls and one sarong. At the ceremony for Pikamaru Sounaue, in June 1986, 80 plates were accumulated, and this was thought to be very good. When most of the participants have departed, the wife-takers count the plates brought by the women attending the washing ritual. The total of the two types of plate must come to a multiple of twenty (hence also of five), and if they are short of this number they will add more. A first child commands more plates (about 100) than a subsequent child (about 40-60). The *nipa nahate*, the cloth used to cover the baby, is placed with the plates, and these are collectively called the *aratae*. If the wife-takers agree that there are sufficient plates, then the women who have counted them take the *aratae* to the child's mother's brothers or mother's parents, or whoever is preparing the feast to be served the following evening. The plates are then divided up between the recipients. While at

the wife-givers house, the wife-takers share betel, and, if available, drink liquour made from the aren palm (*sopi*). When they return all share betel once again.

The afternoon begins with the wife-givers preparing the sago and meat given by the father, and later the wife-takers are invited to the feast held in the sacred house or *numa nuhune*, which the child's mother's brother hosts. The food is prepared by the mother's brothers or parents, but if a mother has no brothers, or if they are unmarried, then other siblings of the mother's parents substitute. The food includes sago porridge, rice, and meat or fish with vegetables. Meat (pig, deer or cuscus) is preferred over fish, as this is regarded as the food of the ancestors. Most guests are women and women eat first, though the father and male *nuhune* guardian, and sometimes a few other men, also eat. The couple who own the *nuhune* sit at the head and eat first. As with the betel, the leftovers from the feast are taken home, and later shared with members of the domestic group and other relatives who were not present at the feast. This is followed by

(a)

(b)

Plate 3.3. Birth ritual, Rouhua: (a) encircling *nuhune* house during ritual for the birth of Kaune Sounaue: the mother Wanaisa is followed by the female *nuhune* guardian Niniaione carrying the baby, March 1971; (b) ceremonial receiving of betel quid by Heteiane, mother of Sahuraka Neipane, as part of the process of reintegration, Mon, February 1990.

a feast at which men and women eat together. Those who hunted the meat (which includes the father) and those who host the feast (that is, the mother and her brother's clan), however, do not eat. After the meal, the women go home and the guardian on the father's side remains to mind the baby, which is wrapped in a sarong and hung from the roof. Though there is no lit fire, on its seaward side a resin lamp burns continuously.

Thus there are two exchanges on the first day: plates (and betel) are brought from the house of the baby's father to the natal house of the baby's mother, while food moves from the mother's house to the father's house. The making of these prestations and counter-prestations consolidate the ancestral union, or *nuhune sainikane*. The baby stays in the house for a number of days, though nowadays the child usually comes out of the *nuhune* house the day following that which it entered. Its parents, however, are allowed out as necessary.

3.8 Reintegration ritual: second day

The morning following the washing and feast (that is, on the second day), the *nuhune* guardians, the new child and its parents, and several other women assemble once again at the *numa nuhune*. The women on the father's side gather together in the sacred house with gifts of food (bananas, sago porridge and sago biscuits) placed in the newly woven baskets. This is a gift to the baby's mother's house.

During the afternoon, the women of the two sides gather together in the *nuhune* house to conclude the birth ritual with the encircling of the house. This begins with the sharing of betel, which is first given to both *nuhune* guardians; it is the male guardian, though, who gives the sign for betel to be chewed. The women circulate five times round the house. They exit on the first round by the inland male mountain door, keeping the sacred house on the right-hand side, and re-enter on the fifth round by the seaward (female) door. During the procession all smoke tobacco leaves and carry fire from the resin lamp. This procession is led by the female *nuhune* guardian. The mother or younger sister of the mother carries the baby, who is entirely covered in a red cloth. In some clans, for example Neipane, as the party leaves the house the male *nuhune* guardian blows and sprinkles mineral lime (*nosa*) over the red cloth to protect the baby, and as they perambulate the mother holds in her right hand a red

bead necklace made from bamboo and leaves from the *asinokoe,* and a *mauna* charm to protect the baby from sickness. The *mauna* is made by the clan chief and given to a newborn child after it comes out of the *posune*, guarding it from malevolent spirits for the next three or four months, after which it is lodged on the *rine* shelf. It consists of leaves of *sinsinte* and leaves from the *asinokoe*. These are wrapped in red cloth and bound with twine made from pineapple fibre. As this is the first prolonged perambulation outside the *posune*, the baby is considered especially vulnerable to attack from malevolent spirits. Betel is shared again once they are inside the house and later everyone departs for a feast in the house of the *nuhune* guardians.

The next day the mother goes to the clan sacred house where the baby is presented. After this, the male *nuhune* guardian and the father take the baby to the clan sacred house of the father (*siha*), accompanied by everyone else. Here the ancestral spirits reside, and here it is that the clan leader and his wife greet them on their arrival. The baby is covered with a red cloth and the mother holds the beads and *mauna.* They chew betel on arrival and after the lapse of an appropriate time return home. The red cloth is removed from the baby, and the beads are left at the sacred house, which is where they usually originate. The *mauna* continues to accompany the baby wherever it goes for some while afterwards, providing protection.

An important ritual item in some *nuhune* houses is the *oha kokune*. This is a ramp made from *kokune* stem (*Callicarpa longifolia*), which the mother and child must use when ascending and descending from the house-platform. When the party have re-entered the house after encircling it, the ramp is removed and placed on the *rine*. It is thereafter taken to the clan sacred house if the *nuhune* house is not a permanent fixture. The bead necklaces, the bamboo internodes used in washing the child, and other paraphernalia are placed in the south-east corner of the *nuhune* house, while the *asinokoe* is laid along the outside of the house under the sunrise eaves, until they also are eventually re-moved to the clan sacred house.

In those clans where the *nuhune* house is a temporary structure, after the ritual is complete the materials of the house are given – ordinarily – to the sister's husband or to the father, in exchange for a small offering to the ancestors of the house of the *nuhune* guardians. This comprises, variously, one small plate and a red cloth, one red cloth, one plate and two bracelets, or two *nitianae* anklets. The thatch and the wood are used

to repair existing dwellings, and in so doing ensure the well-being of those living within, especially their children. If the *nuhune* house is not exchanged in this way, it is believed that the child will be continually sick.

3.9 FIRST HAIR-CUTTING CEREMONY

After birth, it is forbidden to cut the first growth of hair (*koma unue*) until a special ceremony (*isa nuhune*) has been held. The hair-cutting ceremony is not strictly part of the suite of birth rituals, but, then, neither does it belong to the rituals of puberty. It exemplifies well the point made in Chapter 1 about the difficulties of placing boundaries around parts of ritual processes that are continuous sequences. However, given that the name and focus of the hair-cutting ritual relate to the *nuhune* spirits, it is better considered here than in Chapters 4 or 5.

A day is fixed for the hair-cutting, and preparations are made. These involve the mother or paternal grandmother making a basket (*nuite*) for each child, except in the case of the clan Sounaue-ainakahata. Although an accompanying feast is not a prerequisite, when held it is primarily for women, especially for the mothers of the children involved. In this case a preparatory hunt will be organized to secure pig, deer or cuscus meat, while sago must be processed.

Participants assemble in the clan sacred house in the afternoon of the day of the ceremony. This must not start any later, as daylight is required to penetrate into the sacred house where the first cutting is undertaken. For each clan, children of the *kapitane* house have their hair cut by the head or *nuhune* guardian of the house of the chief, and children of the house of the chief by the head or *nuhune* guardian of the *kapitane* house. The hair of *numa onate* children is cut before that of *numa kapitane* children; boys are cut before girls and, within gendered groups, cutting takes place in birth order – older before younger. This is a matter of *manaoneta*, 'precedence', and reflects the unfolding of events in Nuaulu creation mythology. This is the first ritual in which the sexes are differentiated and therefore the point at which we might say that gender is first ascribed. Apart from the matter of precedence, males are generally distinguished by the wearing of a red *karanunu,* or a piece of such, around the chest, in anticipation of the role this will play when they reach puberty.

I observed two hair-cutting ceremonies between 1970 and 1971, for Soumori and Sounaue-ainakahata. In the 1980s and 1990s Bolton observed the ceremony performed for Neipani-tomoien, Peinisa and Sounaue-ainakahata. It is instructive to compare our descriptions of these events, the first recorded by me for the Soumori ceremony conducted in August 1970, and the second for Neipani-tomoien recorded by Bolton (1997a, 1999) in April 1995:

1. 7 August 1970: Soumori (Ellen):

   11.30 Five Soumori children, who are the focus of the ceremony, sit in the middle of the floor of the Soumori sacred house: two girls – Urai and Amnaeia – and three boys – Saete, Tukanesi, and Sakaso. The three boys have a *karanunu* tied round their chest. Komisi – the clan chief – sits on a stool wearing ritual attire. He takes the first cup containing coconut oil, a plate and a knife (there is one set for each child) and holds the knife. The first child, Saete, his own son, sits in front of him and both Komisi and Retaone (the *kapitane* Soumori) hold the handle of the knife and slowly cut a piece of hair from the very top of the child's head. Komisi softly utters an invocation as the knife is drawn across the head five times.

   Upuku Anahatana
   Spirits of our ancestors
   Hear us!
   This is the birth hair which is cut.
   Make the body of this child strong.
   May he suffer little illness.

   And when the hair is placed on the shelf:
   Spirits of our ancestors.
   This hair which is placed here
   Is that of the clan Soumori, and of no other clan.
   Guard it diligently and never let it leave this place.

   Retaone then completes cutting Saete's hair by himself. As the hair is cut it is carefully placed on the plate. When Saete's head has been completely shaved he sits in front of Komisi again, and he and Re-

taone together place their right hands on Saete's head while pouring coconut oil over the head and massaging it into the scalp. Komisi makes another short invocation and Retaone completes the massage. A little coconut oil is also poured over the hair in the plate and each portion is wrapped in a *wainite* leaf and tied with bamboo slivers.

Komisi then goes through the same procedure for the eldest girl, Urai, but this time by himself. He then passes her on to another individual to complete the shaving. The same procedure is repeated for the remaining children. Not all are as passive as the first two. Tukanesi puts up considerable resistance and cries, but is restrained and the hair is cut forcibly. When the hair of all children has been cut, Komisi takes all the packages of hair to the *rine* shelf. Retaone stands on his right-hand side and hands Komisi the packages. He then places them in a small basket with a lid (*takanasi*), gestures to the ancestral spirits that inhabit the shelf and makes another invocation. In the afternoon there is a feast which relatives and affines attend. No women, the hosts, or the children who have had their hair cut are allowed to participate. A basket is given to the mother's brother of the child.

2 14 April 1995: Neipane-tomoien (Bolton 1999:160-1):[1]

Hotena, the Neipane *kapitane* sat on a *katira* stool inland side of the sacred house facing seaward. A piece of red cloth folded several times in a square shape was placed on the sunrise side of him on the flooring and then a metal plate was taken from the *rine* (ritual shelf) and placed on top of it. The father of the oldest boy sits in front of Hotena who parted the child's hair in the middle, looked at the corner of the ritual shelf located in the direction where the inland and sunrise directions intersect, and prayed

> He, he. My Lord God. Lord of the island. My mother down there, my father up there. My red lords of *suite* house, *para* rock, *marue* rock. My *nuhune* lord with white hands, white feet. I will put this knife on the child's head wanting to shave his original hairs. O, these hairs will come away from his head,

[1] The entire indented subsection based on Rosemary Bolton's account is reproduced here almost verbatim (with her permission), including the translation of the invocation. A few small changes have been made to enhance readability.

> he will grow healthy and firm. He will be healthy and live long, be strong and guard *suite* house, *para* rock, *marue* rock. His face will be red. He will be strong. His hands, his feet will be strong so that he will take care of *suite* house, *para* rock, *marue* rock and all the Nuaulu people. He will be strong working and speaking sunsetward, sunriseward. He will govern like a slave sunsetward, sunriseward (transcribed by Bolton from S. Matoke in 1994).

A *nuite* basket containing a *wainite* leaf on a plate and a glass of water is taken from the platform and placed beside Hotena who takes some water and rubs it on the spot to be cut. It is said this makes it soft and easier to shave. Before shaving he takes a knife, moves it forward five times, and scrapes some hair from the top of the child's head five times, moving the knife from the crown of the head towards the forehead. He puts the hair on the *wainite* leaf in the basket. Hotena then does the same to each of the other children in turn in order of precedence. One child from the house of the *kapitane*, and who is shaved last, has this done by Nesia, the *nuhune* guardian of the big house.

Although Hotena starts the cutting for the first child, this is completed by someone else, often the child's mother's brother doing at least some of it. The father continues to hold the child and may even do some of the shaving which may be finished outside where there is more light but only on the porch or under the overhanging roof. The child's head must not be exposed to the sky. The child's *nuite* basket and its contents are taken by the person continuing the shaving who also uses the water and places the hair on the *wainite* leaf. A razor is used to finish the shaving although it is not permitted for the initial shaving. Only men do the shaving.

Once the first child's head was bald he was brought back to Hotena. His hair was wrapped in the *wainite* leaf, tied up, and placed back on the plate in the *nuite* basket. Hotena then took coconut oil mixed with basil and other fragrant herbs (*weketisi akaronae*) from a bottle and poured it into an ornate cup. He put some oil on the palms of both hands and held a hand near each side of the child's head. He prayed

> and then moved his hands towards the head, touching it the fifth time. He rubbed the head up the sides, then in the front and back, and then up the sides again. He then did the same with the other children from the *numa onate* in order. Nesia then did the same for the child from the house of the *kapitane*.
>
> When each child's head had been rubbed with coconut oil the bundles of hair were gathered and tied together. This bundle was placed on the metal plate on the red cloth and the red cloth folded over it. It was put on the platform in a *nuite* basket until the next day when it is placed in a basket on the ritual shelf. Any water remaining in the glasses or bowls is poured on the fireplace as it is forbidden to pour it outside, even through the split bamboo flooring so that it falls under the house. There is a feast that evening.

Until the ceremony is held, cutting a child's hair is forbidden. If this occurs, a *sakati* fine comprising a plate, a *pinae* bracelet and a *nitianae* anklet are given to the offended *nuhune* spirits as compensation, and the hair kept until the next ceremony is performed, when it, too, is placed on the *rine*. After the ceremony, the hair may be cut as many times as might be necessary for the convenience of the child and its parents. However, as puberty approaches, the hair must be left to grow long again. In the case of a male approaching his puberty ceremony, this long hair is described as his *haha'une*.

3.10 VARIATION AND CHANGE

There are circumstances which prompt ritualized birthing practices to deviate from the normative arrangements described in this chapter. Thus, if a baby is born illegitimate it is not bathed in the way described; rather, after a week or so, when the mother's discharge of blood has ceased, she and the baby will bathe in the hut and then go home without ceremony. Other examples include where premature births are treated by rubbing milk from a young coconut fruit on the anterior fontanelle (*nori-nori nione*), and where a father has yet to go through the puberty ceremony, when the child is not given first to him but instead to the paternal grandfather. Similarly, in those clans requiring a special *nuhune* house, this

may have to be constructed away from the village if this is where a child is born, for example, in garden areas.

In addition to those variations dictated by circumstance, which are common to most clans in some form or another, many default practices vary between clans, some of which have already been mentioned. These may relate to the form of the *asinokoe*, and how and when it is later stored. Then there is the presence or absence of the *nuhune* house. Not only is the *nuhune* house constructed for some clans and not for others; for those clans that have them there may be specific, but nonetheless significant, construction differences. Most are built directly on the ground (for example, Soumori), though that for Matoke-pina in Rouhua is raised on piles, and is used exclusively for birth ritual. Some have the permanency of sago-leafstalk walls, while temporary structures may have a frame that is almost wholly bamboo, with walls of either thatch or roughly arranged coconut fronds, giving only rudimentary protection from the elements. The more permanent *nuhune* houses contain sacred objects associated with birth ritual, but may also accommodate a living space for a family between ceremonies, while others are only used at times of ritual. In Rouhua during the 1990s, the Matoke *nuhune* house was inhabited and guarded by the unmarried adult Lihuta; that of Soumori, by Masoli and his family; the Neipani *nuhune* house, by Retanusa and his family. There is variation also in terms of whether the *nuhune* house is used for one or for all births, or just the first birth for a particular mother, or the first birth of a particular gender.

Another area of variation between clans is in relation to ritual procedures for entering and encircling the *nuhune* house after the ceremony at the *posune*. In Matoke a *koa msinae* mat is held over the baby by the male *nuhune* guardian before entering, and the steps into the house are made from a piece of *kokune* with cut notches, up which the baby has to be carried, followed by the mother and the *nuhune* guardian. In the perambulation of the house some clans have two bead necklaces rather than one, and vary in the practice of sprinkling lime. In some clans, after encircling the house, there is another procession to a *Ficus* (*nunu*) tree in the forest, where the party sit down under the tree, rest and share in the chewing of betel, in communion with the ancestors, after which they return to the village. The women go home while the baby remains with his father and his mother, who enter their sacred house, where they stay for a few days.

There is variation in the gifts received by *nuhune* guardians (the *aratae*), which in the case of Matoke must include a parang. On the day of the washing ceremony most clans usually hold two feasts – the first shortly after the ceremony and the other in the evening – given by the father, prepared by the wife-givers and eaten by wife-takers for the mother and father of the baby, for the sisters of the mother, the wives of her brothers, and the men assisting the father in the hunt. But not all clans have an accompanying feast, Sounaue and Neipani not appearing to do so.

In Soumori, five days after a birth, in the morning, the male *nuhune* guardian puts on his ceremonial attire and goes to the clan *nuhune* house to greet the father of the child by sharing tobacco and betel. From there he goes to the *posune* and, while holding a parang in his left hand, puts his right hand on the closed sunrise door of the hut. He requests the female *nuhune* spirit to accompany him from the hut so she can protect the child, who is in danger from malevolent spirits who hear it crying. He then returns to the *nuhune* or clan sacred house and awaits the father.

Of those variations in birth ritual between clans, and between individuals within clans, the most salient, however, and the one most often and voluntarily discussed, is the duration of seclusion – both in the *posune* and in the *nuhune* house. Thus, for Matoke, seclusion in the *nuhune* house is five days; for Soumori, it is one, three or five days. The status previously associated with long birth seclusion has over the last 40 years eroded in the face of persuasive competing economic and practical reasons for minimizing the period. In 1970 birth seclusion was on average of one month's duration; by the 1990s, Rosemary Bolton was reporting it to be around two weeks. In addition to the negative economics of seclusion, under contemporary conditions the work involved in building a special *nuhune* house is regarded as excessive. In some cases the practice has been abandoned entirely, with an increasing number of ordinary residential dwellings being used instead. Alternatively, where in the past a *nuhune* house was built for each birth, nowadays it may be shared between several. But there are cases of considerable resistance to change. Thus, as recently as January 1990, the Soumori clan in Rouhua required a *nuhune* house for every birth, one for each child (except in the case of twins); in Matoke and Peinisa, however, where this was also formerly the case, it is now only required for the first birth of each union. There have also been small changes in the material paraphernalia accompanying birth ritual,

the replacement of the vegetable fibres used to tie the umbilicus and to weave small mats in which are wrapped the used bamboo knife and afterbirth, with strands and pieces of polypropelene rice sacking. There have also been changes in clothing at the *posune*. Until the 1990s, both Matoke and Soumori in Rouhua held a second feast, prepared on four or five low tables (*anau*). This has since been discontinued because of the work involved, and because of the refusal of Neipane wife-givers to cook when their women had babies. Average attendance is also declining, especially where relatives have to travel from other settlements.

Thus, some of the birth-related practices that started as co-variation between clans, and those that apply generally in special situations, appear to have formed the basis for more permanent changes. By comparison, haircutting is historically a relatively new ritual, introduced as a result of outside governmental pressure to have children's hair short. In the past hair was not cut, except for some clans where a patch (*saneo*) was removed from young males. Since hair must now be cut, so the ritualization of the ceremony, the exchanges and gifts to the ancestors associated with pre-pubertal haircutting, constitute a major innovation, drawing on familiar elements from other rituals – a kind of compensation for infringing the ancestral will. When the hair of an illegitimate child is shaved, his or her hair will not be stored with that of other children.

3.11 FREQUENCY AND PERIODICITY

Birth rituals occur most frequently during periods of rising fertility and decreasing mortality. For obvious reasons, of all Nuaulu life-cycle rituals it is these that I have observed more than any other, have heard discussed most often, and which I can fairly claim to have described most fully. By contrast, a hair-cutting ceremony is held for each clan at irregular intervals, when there is a sufficiently large group of children who are ready and who have been born since the last ceremony was held. The children may, therefore, range in age from a few months to three or more years. At a ceremony that I attended in 1970 most children were four or five years old. As with other rituals it may often be postponed if other, more pressing rituals are imminent, or where subsistence demands intervene. For most clans, the ceremony does not require the preparation or resources typical of other life-cycle rituals, and is more easily delayed than birth

or female puberty ceremonies if there are other commitments. However, this degree of permitted freedom in planning can sometimes result in difficulties in finding a suitable time slot at all. As we shall see, numbers of participating children, frequency and periodicity, therefore, resemble that for male puberty ceremonies, without quite the same urgency or degree of prescription.