Chapter 8

Rituals of the *suane*

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Of all Nuaulu rituals, those focussed on the *suane* are the most contingent. Moreover, the component rites of the *suane* cycle are the most infrequently performed, the periodicity between events is the longest, and the time taken to fulfill them the slowest. Despite the similarities between rites of the house and those of the *suane*, emphasis in the former is on place and lineal descent, while with the *suane* the focus is not just on the activity of individual clans, but on all clans and the relationships between them. *Suane* ritual depends on the performance of endless other rituals: those of the individual human person; of the agricultural year; of the clan houses and of sacred objects; and of the ability and willingness of different clans to coordinate and to subordinate their ritual interests to those of the collectivity. Given that all other rituals are also dependent on the hard facts of subsistence, demography and socio-political events, those of the *suane* are, in turn, and maximally, constrained by such imponderabilia, making effective completion and reproduction of the cycle the most precarious of all.

Because of the rarity of *suane* ritual events, I have myself witnessed only two: that involving the opening of the fireplace, and that for the transplanting of the *kokine* (an inedible species of *Musa*). All other descriptions provided here are based on what people have told me happens, or what they have told Rosemary Bolton or Urbanus Tongli; and from their descriptions, it is not at all clear whether either had first hand experience of *suane* ritual. Thus, the accounts of all outside observers are inevitably fragmentary, and must be treated as provisional. But while the direct experience of outside observers is partial, so, and more significantly, is that of the Nuaulu themselves. I have already raised this issue

for scrutiny in Chapter 1, and shall return to its implications again in Chapter 9, but first it is necessary to present what data we have.

8.2 THE SUANE DEFINED

In earlier publications I have described the *suane* as a ‘village (or communal) sacred house’, meaning that it plays a ceremonial and symbolic role in the lives of all clans located in a particular place. It is usually located in the middle of the village where it is visible, accessible and focal – in important respects a microcosm of the entire village. Indeed, another name for the *suane* is *nusa*, meaning ‘island’, a term you will recall is also used to describe the individual clan sacred house, as well as the *hantetane* platform that features during male puberty ceremonies. The symbolism accompanying the location of the *suane* is certainly arresting, and I have elsewhere (Ellen 1978:40) paid attention to how it becomes the central reference point in a concentric spatial symbolism which has as its antithesis the structures of the village periphery, in particular the menstruation hut. However, there is a tension between this concentric symbolism and the symbolic geometry of the individual house – and, by extension, the *suane* – which locates the most sacred orientation to the north-east, rather than to the centre.

As a physical structure, the *suane* is cognate with the building known generally in the central Moluccas as the ‘baileo’.¹ However, simple comparisons with the baileo in other Moluccan (particularly Muslim and Christian) villages may be misleading, as may be the shorthand characterization of the *suane* as a ‘village sacred house’, or even – as we

¹ Cooley (1962:8-13, 93) describes the ‘baileo’ (or ‘baileu’; a word probably derived from Malay ‘bale’ or ‘balai’, a village meeting place) as the most important structure in the centre of a Moluccan village. Not all villages in Ambon-Lease had a baileo, even in the early 1960s. It is also widely found in West and Central Seram, and takes various physical forms, sometimes being built out of traditional, locally available, materials, sometimes from planked timber, cement, stone or brick with wood shingle, thatch or zinc roofs, or a combination of these. In many places it effectively serves the purpose of a secular village meeting place, but it is also still widely considered as a ‘rumah adat’, where clan heirlooms are stored and where adat matters are still discussed. Symbolically and spatially it may be seen to complement or contrast the church or mosque; in addition, it may be associated with sacred stones. In many Christian and Muslim villages where a baileo is found it is as if all matters relating to animist and ancestral devotion concentrate on the physicality of the building. I hope to show that this is a reification of a set of functions that, in the Nuaulu case, are much more distributed and variable, and that it is important not to interpret the Nuaulu *suane* and its rituals simply as a special case of an Ambonese baileo.

shall see – the assumption that it is a necessary and intrinsic part of the ritual of all Nuaulu.

In terms of the cycle of its rituals, and its position in Nuaulu thought, the *suane* is best treated as a special case of the clan sacred house, since its ritual is considered a fulfilment of a process that begins in the individual clan house. Indeed, physically the *suane* and clan sacred houses have the same basic structure, and must go through many of the same stages in their making. In addition, in the same way that the house is in some respects no more than a receptacle for the ritual objects that it protects, so the *suane* is quintessentially the necessary space in which the *kahuae* is performed. However, while clan sacred houses are androgynous in terms of their gendered symbolism, containing complementary male and female spaces and elements and having life-cycle ceremonies where men and women play complementary roles, the *suane* is unequivocally male.

Though I have heard this disputed, the first *suane* in the mountains was said by Komisi Soumori to have been built by Sounaue-aipura, other clans performing the *kahuae* in their own sacred house and only subsequently adopting the *suane* into their ritual practices. Before this, the *kahuae* was performed on the ground. In the mountains the *suane* was known as the *numa rinane* (lit. ‘radiant’ or ‘shining house’), but on coming to the coast it assumed the name *suane*. In this way, the *suane* cycle became part of the customary repertoire of Kamama, Sounaue and Soumori. Indeed, the Watane *suane* (Plates 8.1a-b) belongs to Kamama, guarded by the house Panakeke, even though others may use it. In Aihisuru, and subsequently in Tahena Ukuna, it is the sacred house of the Matoke-hanaie ‘lord of the land’ (called Pinawasa) that is used for *kahuae*. The Bunara *suane* (Plate 8.1c) belongs to Sounaue-aipura, and the Rouhua *suane* (Plate 8.1d) to Matoke-pina. Thus, despite the *suane* apparently transcending clan difference, each belongs to a particular clan, while some clans do not have one at all. It is for this reason that ancestral spirits dwelling in the *suane* vary depending on the village. In Rouhua they are the younger brothers in each generation of the clan Matoke-pina – the so-called ‘lords of the island’ (*nusa upua*) or the ‘red ones’ (*sio msinaea*) – while the souls of elder brothers (*saruana*) dwell in the Matoke clan house. No female spirits dwell in the *suane*. This fits well with what we know about Nuaulu settlement history, as before approximately 1880 all Nuaulu lived in clan-hamlets distributed throughout the central highlands of Seram, and it is difficult to see how the *suane* could have fulfilled the kind

of multiple clan role it now has. Indeed, a *suane* separate from a clan sacred house would hardly have been necessary. With the movement to the coast, its function, like so many other things in Nuauulu life, radically shifted. With multi-clan villages, the *suane* could begin to serve as a focus for rituals that different clans found appropriate to conduct collectively, while in part its construction may have been in keeping with what other coastal villages already had. Therefore, wherever we find a ‘village’ *baileio* in West Seram or in the Ambon-Lease area, it may have its origins as a structure associated with an individual descent group.

Plate 8.1. The completed *suane*: (a) Niamonai (Watane), from the south, June 1986; (b) Niamonai (Watane), from the northeast, June 1986; (c) Bunara, from the southwest, August 1975; (d) Rouhua, from the northwest, September 1970.

Clans that do not have a *suane*, and do not use the *suane* owned by other clans, may, when performing the *kahuae*, use a clan sacred house with the walling removed. This is then described as a *numa rinane* (see above) and the ‘radiance’ may allude quite specifically to the light that shines in once the walling is removed. Similarly, in settlements where a *suane* is

part of the ideal ritual life, but where it is physically absent, is in ruins or uncompleted, the *kahuae* will be performed in the house of the clan to which it belongs. In the case of Rouhua, as we have seen, this is the clan Matoke-pina. Alternatively, performances may take place in the sacred house of the clan to which *suane* responsibilities have been devolved by the owning clan. Such a house, especially when it is specifically built to serve the *suane*, is known as a *numa nahate*. If even this does not exist, or is too small for the *kahuae*, a temporary shelter without walls (*tainane*) may be constructed, sometimes known by the Ambonese Malay word 'sabua'.

Where a *suane* is owned by one clan and used by others, some supporting functions for maintaining the cycle may be devolved by the owning clan to other clans, who will then sometimes build an additional sacred house, the *numa nahate*, to support this role. The *numa nahate* serves as the assembly point for anything to do with the *suane*, such as the organization of work parties and performances of the *kahuae*. It is also the repository for any valuables and ritual paraphernalia associated with the *suane* (*numa pakanana suane*), such as shields for the *auwoti*, the *sirimasa* (women's hair ornaments used in *kahuae*), and plates and rings received in compensation for violations against the *suane*. As we have noted the *numa nahate* is also where the *kahuae* may be performed when the *suane* is unavailable. In this latter sense it is the proxy for the *suane* over those long periods when it is either under construction or physically non-existent.

In Rouhua, many of these functions have been devolved by the chief of Matoke-pina to Soumori, thus conferring upon this clan a major responsibility for the *suane* in addition to that which it performs with respect to secular matters affecting all clans. Thus, the Soumori sacred house may serve as the *numa nahate*, though throughout the period that I have worked in Rouhua the *numa nahate* has been the sacred house to the immediate south-east of the *suane* site, belonging to Sounaue-ainakahata. It is here that the *ia onate nahate* or *maritihanna*, the custodian of the *suane*, resides. In 1970 the *maritihanna* was Patiraia Sounaue-ainakahata, a role and status which by 1990 had been inherited by his eldest son, Wairisa. In addition, in Rouhua, the clan Peinisa has a special responsibility for the *suane* fireplace. Thus, ritual responsibilities regarding the *suane* are divided between Nuaulu clans for particular historic reasons and have changed as separate villages have formed with different clan compositions. Indeed, the responsibilities continue to change as adjustments are made following the geographical movement of individual clans.

During the entire time span of my field visits to the Nuauulu area there have only ever been three settlement units conducting *suane* ritual cycles, and even in these, for much of the time, a physical *suane* has not existed. In order to understand what this means, it is necessary to distinguish between physical settlements and ritual groupings. Thus, as far as we know, the original Nuauulu settlement that relocated to Sepa from the mountains in the 1880s consisted of two physical settlements: Watane, on the flat land immediately to the west of Sepa, and Aihisuru, on a hill up a steep incline north-west of Sepa. This was one of the so-called ‘Potemkin’ villages described by Tichelman (1960:188-9), to which Nuauulu would flee the authorities to avoid the census, vaccination, taxation, forced schooling, the missions, the imposition of colonial law and other forms of interference. But it is also clear from more recent construction activity that Nuauulu often prefer to locate their sacred houses away from areas frequented by non-Nuauulu, and as far mountainwards as is sensibly possible – a matter I shall return to later, in the context of a consideration of periodicity. Despite this, and as we have already noted, the first Nuauulu *suane* on the coast was built in Watane and not Aihisuru, and not by the mythologically legitimate *primus-inter-pares* clan Matoke.

My fieldwork began in 1970, some time after a series of population movements, disturbances and relocations associated with the destabilization brought about by the Second World War (1941-45), and, after that, the Republik Maluku Selatan (RMS) insurrection between 1955 and 1965. Although at this time there were only three multi-clan ritual groupings for which a *suane* served as a focus, there were five physical settlements which also had an administrative status within the *kerajaan* and *desa* of Sepa (Figure 1.2): Hahualan had been added to Aihisuru and Watane, to become Nuauulu Lama (the ‘old village’ or ‘original village’; what the Nuauulu themselves called Niamonai); in addition, two quite separate villages had been created on the Bunara River, by 1914, and on the Rouhua River, by the 1930s, each with their own *suane*. Indeed, in Rouhua, as we have seen, the *suane* is owned by Matoke-pina, which had split from Matoke-hanaie and distanced itself sufficiently from the parent clan to consider innovating its own *suane*. In a sense, the creation of a Rouhua *suane* was an assertion of political autonomy of the clans who had moved there. By 1996 Aihisuru had been abandoned, Watane had been partially vacated, and the clans which had once lived there for up to 120 years had moved to Rumah Olat (on the north coast), and Simalouw

and Tahena Ukuna in the Ruatan Valley government resettlement area. Despite these physical movements, *suane* cycles were still associated with Watane, Bunara and Rouhua, thus demonstrating the constancy of *suane* activity, despite physical changes in house distribution.

8.3 THE SUANE AS A PHYSICAL STRUCTURE

Each Nuauulu *suane* has the same basic plan and elevation, best understood as a partial modification of the standard clan sacred house. The parts are homologous and the names are the same as in a clan sacred house (Table 7.1), with *sakanae* (the heavy boards along the base of each raised side), *nutune* (under-floor supports), *hini* (main corner supports), *kakarane* (the sitting platform along the sides), *numanoi* (floor), *ainatae* (roof), and so on. The similarity even extends to the inclusion of a fireplace (*otumatae*), about which more later. The orientation of the *suane* also follows that of the clan house, with the ridge running from east (rising sun) to west (setting sun). The east and west walls are, like those of the house termed *sine*, and the north (mountain) and south (sea) walls, *mitanunue*, even though *mitanunue* is, polysemously, ‘door’, and there are no doors on the *suane*. In contrast with individual clan houses, the primary orientation for ritual purposes is sunset-sunrise rather than mountain-sea. *Suane* are devoid of figurative decoration, unlike, for example, the equivalent structure in the non-Nuauulu animist settlement of Yalahatan, which has carved crocodile, cassowaries and other animals protruding from the corners and along the sides.

The average *suane* is 10-11 metres east to west and north to south, about two metres longer in either dimension than the average Nuauulu clan sacred house. The central *sakanae* are about 54 cm wide, and the main roof supports about 13 cm in diameter, with at least 40 uprights supporting the floor and surrounding the sitting platform. Unlike an ordinary clan sacred house, and because of its size, the *suane* also has an additional *sakanae* which runs from the centre of the mountain side to the centre of the seaward side, and a central post (*hini hunone*), always immediately to the west (sunrise) side of the central *sakanae*. With reference to the Niamonai *suane*, Tongli (1994:173) tells us that the five main (and named) posts are each guarded by a different clan. Moving from sunrise to sunset these are: Panenatu, guarded by a clan from a neighbouring

village; Panenaka, guarded by Sounaue; Paneisa (the central upright), guarded by Soumori, the clan of the *ankarua*; Yarimau, guarded by the *aia*; and Lewaka, guarded by the *ankatika*. These latter (*ankarua*, *aia* and *ankatika*) are the three ranks of hereditary secular power recognized by the Nuauulu in their dealings with Sepa and the outside world; each is vested in a different clan. The central upright in Rouhua is also termed Paneisa, but in Bunara, where there is no Matoke clan, the post is named Panenaka and guarded by Sounaue-aipura.

The metrical differences between clan house and *suane* are, however, less significant than a number of qualitative structural differences. The absence of walls (and, therefore, of doors) I have mentioned. In addition, whereas the clan sacred house has two doors facing each other on the mountain and sea aspects, and therefore two ladders (*hantetane*, also meaning 'platform'), the *suane* always has four entrances and ladders. One entrance is set in the centre of the seaward side; a second is located on the west side, between the fireplace and the south-west corner; a third is located in the north-west corner; and a fourth, in the north-east corner. On either side of the entrances are special timbers known as *ai inate*. The *atikanae* (or *sasana*) is a wooden shelf between 160 and 180 cm high, located in the north-east corner (Plate 8.2a-c) and analogous to the *rine* at the east end of a regular clan sacred house. It is here that 'food for the souls of the dead' is placed at the great festival accompanying completion of the *suane*: the bones of cuscus (wrapped in *wainite* leaves), the bamboo in which the sago has been cooked and the *asanate* (skewers) used for cooking the cuscus. On the west side of the seaward entrance is a large drum (*tihane*). In 1970 the drum in the Niamonai *suane* had a diameter of 41 cm at its greatest width (the interior timpanum end), narrowing to 37 cm, a rim 2.54 cm wide, and an overall length of 198 cm. Made of *nahane* (*Syzygium* sp.) wood (*monne* for the clan Soumori, whose permission must first be asked to use it), it carried a snake motif below a *tupu-tupue* motif (Plate 8.2d). When rituals are not being conducted the drum is hung high in the thatch.

There are three sacred places in the village associated with the *suane*. The first, called *amane*, is at the intersection of the seaward and sunset directions, marked by a round stone where Matoke first reached the earth after descending from the sky, and is associated with the younger wife of the supreme deity Pina Muiye (Tongli 1994:58). It signifies the first stage of life, and the first separation of land and water. The second is at the

Plate 8.2. (a) *Atikanae* shelf at northeast corner of Niamonai *suane*, February 1970 (Note carved sun motif, which also - and most importantly - appears on the bark loincloth of elders who have received the *tupu-tupue*); (b) *atikanae* shelf at northeast corner of Bunara *suane*, August 1975 (Note star motif analogous to sun motif in plate 7.5); (c) interior of Bunara *suane*, looking towards the northeast corner and *atikanae*, February 1990; (d) drum (*tihane*) in Niamonai *suane*, February 1970 (Note carved snake and sun motifs).

exterior corner of the *suane*, in the direction where the seaward and sunset lines of both the *suane* and the village as a whole intersect, and where are planted two types of bush: *sonae* (*Cordyline fruticosa*), with red and green leaves, and a variety of *sinsinte* (*Codiaeum variegatum*), with long yellow and green leaves. This area is the *tuaman tiaï*, the ‘stomach of the earth’, and the vegetation that grows on it is only cut before a performance of the *auwoti*, and then only to a moderate length. It is here that the chief of the Matoke dances, evoking the special relationship between this clan and the earth, in his role as ‘lord of the land’. The *tuaman tiaï* not only represents the centre of the village but the centre of the island of Seram, and is associated with the supreme deity, Anahatana. Members of both sexes who have not undergone the earth-anointing ritual as part of their puberty ceremony (see below, Chapter 8.10) are prohibited from entering this area. The third place, called *soue*, is at the intersection between the inland and sunrise directions of both the *suane* and the village. Here are planted *kokine* and *wainite*. Tongli (1994: 61) says that the *soue* is associated with the eldest wife of the supreme deity, Pinaaia, signifying prosperity. All four ritual plants are sometimes also collectively referred to as *soue*, and during the course of building a new *suane* they are moved from their old location to a new location geosymbolically appropriate to the new *suane*. Thus, when the location of a *suane* moves, so the symbolic coordinates of the entire village shift to accommodate the new topography.

8.4 THE SUANE AND KAHUAE

What distinguishes the rituals of the *suane* from those of most other cycles is their intrinsic linkage with *kahuae* and *auwoti* performances. These dances accompany each stage in the building of a *suane*, the ceremony of first entrance, and all subsequent rituals. Though they may be performed in clan sacred houses where there is no *suane*, and were performed regularly in clan houses before the Nuaulu moved to the coast, they are now seen as fundamentally connected with the *suane*.

The morning before a *kahuae* is performed the men involved bathe, after which they must avoid women and even their own children in case they violate pollution rules. The first night of the *kahuae*, in which males only perform, is referred to as *kahua monne*, ‘sacred *kahuae*’. The next morning the males bathe again, this time at the stream where the inland

and sunrise directions intersect north-east of the village, the same place where female puberty celebrants bathe, and where, following a death, some clans bathe on the fourth day. During the afternoon the *maritihanna* or one of his sons beats the ceremonial drum on the *suane* to signify that the *kahuae* will begin that night, and in order to summon both living participants and the dead (*sio saruana*, the dead of the mountain, and *nenusi-netowa*, the dead of the clan-house roofs).

The *kahuae* actually begins towards midnight, outside the *suane*, on the village periphery, at the *amane* (see below), where men dress in the correct attire: batik aprons over barkcloth, strings of beads, armbands festooned with *sinsinte*, and head cloths tied to the side. Precise costume varies between ritual contexts and individuals. Thus, some senior men wear the *tupu-tupue* (such as the Rouhua *maritihanna* from Sounaue-ainakahata), while others who have yet to undergo the earth-anointing ritual secure their hair at the back of the neck with a ring (*tope*) before assuming the usual head cloth. The men dance in single file from the village perimeter to the *suane*, where the elders have been waiting.

If a *kahuae* is for one night only then it may sometimes involve women, but usually it is only on the second and subsequent nights of a longer *kahuae* that women participate. The *sirimasa* hangs down the back of the neck, and contains areca nut, betel pepper and cigarettes for their partner (*tihanane*), who in return exchanges a ring. When not in use, the *sirimasa* are stored in the thatch of the *suane* and removed the following night for the next *kahuae*. *Senie pinamou* (the headdresses used in female puberty ceremonies, but also in some *kahuae*) and *sinsinte* armbands are also stored in the same way, but always on the mountain side.

As dawn approaches, the *kahuae* itself stops and the participants descend through the female (seaward) exit to perform the *auwohi* around the sacred plants of the *tuaman tia*. The performers come from different Nuaulu clans, with the young men dancing seaward, and women separate from men; wives representing different clans dancing towards the sunrise and young women on the seaward side of the *tuaman tia*. The dance involves an initial movement symbolizing the union of living and dead, and, secondly (the dance at dawn on the *tuaman tia*), the protection and prosperity that is the consequence of this union.

8.5 THE PRE-LIFE OF THE SUANE

I have called this section the ‘pre-life’ of the *suane*, but in a sense it is best approached from its after-life. Because the time period involved in constructing a *suane* is so long, some of the materials begin to deteriorate even before it is completed, and in this case, as might be expected, old thatch and split-bamboo flooring may be replaced with new, as required. Once a *suane* is finished, it will also be repaired in part over a number of years, through, say, the replacement of rattan bindings. Similarly, the pegs or deer-drum skin of the *tihane* may be replaced several times during the life of a *suane*, while taking the appropriate ritual precautions. After 10 to 15 years, when small minor repairs are insufficient to maintain it as a viable structure, a *suane* will be allowed to quietly deteriorate (Plate 8.3a). It is easy to conclude, on seeing such structures decaying, that this is evidence of a religion in terminal decline. However, the way in which the *suane* decays is seen by Nuauulu themselves as a natural part of its life cycle. During my period of research I have seen two *suane* in Niamonai decay in this way, only to be resurrected within a matter of years. There comes a time, however, when it is generally agreed by the elders, at the suggestion of the chief of the owning clan, that the dilapidated *suane* be dismantled, and the *tihane* or other major serviceable parts, such as *hini*, be stored until they can be used for a new structure. Sound timbers are placed in a *heute* (Plate 8.4a; see Chapter 7.2), which itself replicates the life of the *suane* by falling into disrepair and eventually crumbling away altogether (Plate 8.3c). Exceptionally, some *hini* may actually be left in situ (Plate 8.3b), but whatever happens to them, they may never be destroyed. The ring that was placed under the *suane* at its birth is not recovered, but left where it lies; the old *suane* is said to be ‘dead’, like a human, and a new one must be erected in its place.

A new *suane* begins life with a meeting (*loue*) of all diarchic clan heads in the sacred house of its owning clan, or of the clan to which responsibility has been devolved by the owning clan. It is usually the chief rather than *kapilane* who takes the initiative to convene such a meeting, who mobilizes support and who is thereafter eponymously associated with that particular *suane* and accepted as its builder (cf. Valeri 1990a:69). This is not always a straightforward process. We have an example of this in a text collected by Rosemary Bolton in Rouhua that describes how, in the 1950s, ‘Nauhua planned to build a *suane* [...] but [...] ran away to the

Plate 8.3. (a) Niamonai *suane* at initial stage of decline, from the southeast, February 1970; (b) site of the dismantled *suane* in Niamonai from the south, January 1971 (Note the three tall uprights remaining standing and the store (*heute*) of old retrievable timbers immediately behind); (c) old *heute suane* in Rouhwa in an advanced state of decay, together with the *hini* it originally contained and felled in the early 1960s, February 1990.

Plate 8.4 (a) *Heute suane* in Rouhwa, February 1981; (b) Bunara *suane* from the southwest, immediately prior to roofing, August 1973. Note young bushes of *sinsinte* (*Codiaeum*) and *sonae* (*Cordyline*) to right.

forest [this was during the RMS period], and on returning Iako built a *suane*. But while building it he was not able to finish and ran away and became a Muslim.’

The same planning meeting determines the responsibilities of the various clans. In Rouhwa, for example, it is customary that, though Matoke owns (and through the person of the Matoke chief provides masters of) the *suane*, it is the clan Soumori that undertakes much of the

ceremonial work. This is because the authority possessed by Soumori with respect to secular matters (providing the *ankarua*) also confers a major responsibility for the *suane*. It is Sounaue-ainakahata, however, which, as we have seen, has the greater ritual responsibility for the *suane*, and which provides the *maritihanna* (who Bolton calls the ‘overseer’). It is the *maritihanna* who leads the *kahuae*, maintains and operates the drum, and who guards a sacred house (*numa nahate*) situated close to and particularly associated with the *suane*. At *suane* ceremonies in Rouhua the chief of Soumori and the *maritihanna* Sounaue-ainakahata wear, in addition to *tupu-tupue*, a red sash (*amahate* or *nahate*) diagonally across the chest, or a ‘patola’ worn around the waist (as in the *kahuae*), to indicate their authority in relation to matters to do with the *suane*. Moreover, from the time the first ritual is performed for a new *suane* – the harvesting of the *hini* – until the big *kahuae* that terminates the ritual cycle, those officiating must wear the blue batik *karanunu*, after which they resume wearing the usual red *karanunu naka*. As with a clan sacred house, two supervisors (*matue*) are selected to oversee construction and maintenance: *matue uai*, ‘the one who walks in front’, and *matu emuye*, ‘the one who walks behind’. Both offices are inherited, passing from father to son.² Between them they are responsible for the physical well-being of the *suane*. It is they who decide when repairs are necessary and who will organize the work, and they who cannot rest until it is completed.

A *kahuae* is performed over a number of nights prior to gathering the main supporting posts (*hini*) and other building materials from the forest, and even the activities themselves are accompanied by special shouts (*seki*), drumming and singing, in which one person responds to another (*nohi*). As with the house ritual-cycle, materials are gathered from an area of forest protected by a *sin wesie* prohibition, which provides resources especially for use in building the *suane*. Such areas ensure the availability of sufficient materials and are often established many years in advance (Ellen 2010). In addition to the timbers themselves, materials (most usually sago, rattan and *Canarium* nuts) are transported on a kind of stretcher (*semane*), and the work parties often incorporate people from nearby non-Nuauulu settlements, such as Sepa, Nueletetu (before 2000) and Yalahatan, or from villages in ‘pela’ relationships (see for instance

² In Rouhua, in 1970, the *matue uai* was Sauute Neipane-tomoien and the *matu emuye*, Sahunete Peinisa.

Bartels 1977). Once in the village, the *hini* are stored in a covered *heute* similar to that used for a clan sacred house.

8.6 PLANTING THE FIRST POST

As with a clan sacred house, when a new *suane* is erected, a ring is buried by the chief of the clan Matoke, together with *wainile* leaves, under the first post in the north-east corner. The spot was described to me as being on the left side of the entrance, entering the *suane*. This puzzled me until I discovered that when the ring is planted the chief is facing the sun, and the ring is thus on his right hand side. On no account may the chief ever enter the *suane* with the sun behind him; he must always face the sun and thereby Anahatana. This side, facing the rising sun, is regarded as the front. The chief must approach the spot from the west (sunset direction), taking five paces in the prescribed manner. As we have seen, performance according to exact detail is very important and ritual specialists cannot afford – literally – to put a foot wrong. The left foot is placed directly behind the right, the one touching the other. First, the right foot moves forward one pace, followed by the left foot, until the feet are back in their initial position. This movement (the *yeukone*) is repeated five times. The chief kneels and lays a betel pouch to his right, in front of the hole that is to take the right-hand entrance post. He then takes a *wainile* leaf, places the ring on the leaf, touches the earth in the hole five times with the ring, and then places it in the hole with the leaf on top.

On other ritual occasions involving the *suane* the seaward entrance is used. On these occasions the Matoke chief takes five paces towards the entrance in the manner described above, makes a gesture of respect to the ancestors by touching his head and chest five times, takes five further steps to the central point of the *suane* and offers up an invocation to Anahatana and the ancestors (the *sionata* Matoke). The invocation involves asking permission to enter the *suane* and to use it, and appeals to the ancestors to bring those who use it health.

Following installation of the first post, work on the *suane* proceeds intermittently, as time and materials are available, under the direction of the *matue*. The organization and sequence of work follows the pattern of construction for a clan sacred house: first the frame, then the roof, followed by the floor. All work in itself is treated as ritual activity, and all

those participating must wear the correct clothing, undertake the correct preparatory purification rites and maintain all appropriate prohibitions. However, beyond this, the actual ritual performance involved is minimal and perfunctory, but on all days devoted to working on the *suane*, a feast is held in the evening to reward those doing the work.

Work on the *suane* is obligatory. If a person fails to work when expected to do so, or does not attend an accompanying *kahuae*, he must pay a fine of one ring, effectively to the *sionata* of the *suane*, who he has thereby offended. However, the rings are not considered *monne* and, when all work has been completed, will be returned to the houses of the clans involved in the construction process.

8.7 INSTALLING THE FIREPLACE

The series of rituals for completing a *suane* are known collectively as *sa suane* (or *onon ate*, literally ‘four nights’). These begin with the installation of the fireplace (*otumatae*). This involves a set of actions in which earth is taken from an area just seaward of the *tuaman tiai* and placed in the wooden fire base of the *suane*, at the west end. The earth is spoken of as a ‘gift of the Matoke’, to whom it belongs, affirming the literal translation of *ia onate* Matoke as ‘tuan tanah’ in Ambonese Malay. The fire of the *suane* is only used once, in the festival of ‘raising the fireplace’, *hunuhatae otue*, which perhaps occurs every five to ten years. It is lit each night by the chief of the clan Soumori, during the ritual sequence, and its extinction (*hunu usa*) signals the end of any ritual.

The occasion I witnessed, in February 1970, began at about two o’clock in the afternoon with the greeting of visiting dignitaries and guests from Sepa at the entrance to the village by the *ia onate* Matoke, the *maritihanna*, the *ia onate ankarua* (who is also the chief of the clan Soumori) and the heads of the other clans (Plate 8.5a). The assembly gathered in the temporary open meeting house with raised platforms on all sides (*tainane*) to a drum accompaniment and the chanting of *ahinae*. A slow procession was led by the *maritihanna* to the *suane*, who stood at the seaward entrance for a few moments before entering (Plate 8.5b-d). He walked over to the opposite side and placed a red cloth on the rafters and uttered an invocation to the ancestors, performing the usual *sinu onari hohua* (Plate 8.5e). The same procedure was followed for a stick

Plate 8.5. Installing the *suane* fireplace, Rouhua February 1970: (a) greeting distinguished visitors from Sepa; (b) preparing to enter the *suane*; (c) *maritihanna* entering *suane*; (d) *maritihanna* offering invocation to ancestors of *suane*; and (e) young men removing earth from surface of main village thoroughfare on seaward side of *suane*.

with rings attached (the *sapauu kananamate*, ‘fine rings’). This hangs in the *suane*, at the middle of the mountain side, until the cycle is complete. The procedure was repeated for two sacred betel pouches provided by the Matoke chief for each *matue*, containing all the necessary chewing and smoking requisites for the *sionata suane*. They are hung alongside the cloth and rings; and if ever removed, a *kahuae* may never be performed in the *suane* again.

All sit down, following the example of the *maritihanna*. At this point the drumming and chanting stops and the ‘tuan tanah’ of Sepa addresses the *maritihanna* and presents him with a red cloth. A male who has yet to go through the *matahenne* puberty ceremony brings a basket with smoking requisites to the guests and dignitaries. The *ia onate ankarua* gives orders and his assistant supervises a group of five uninducted but ceremonially clad younger men, who remove their beads and armlets, and proceed to break a patch of earth with hoes on the seaward side of the *suane* (Plate 8.5e). The loosened earth is brought into the *suane* and laid on top of the split banana leaves that form the base of the fireplace. Other banana leaves are laid out in rows, parallel to the seaward side, on the floor, for a meal that will later be eaten. Meanwhile, plates and cups containing betel requisites are arranged on the sitting platform on the mountain side.

The next element of the ritual is the washing of the *suane* drum (the *tiha onate*). According to Iako, the chief of the clan Matoke in 1971, before the drum can be used it must be purified with *sinsinte* leaves and coconut oil, to placate potentially malevolent spirits from the forest where the wood was hewn. A red cloth is placed on top of the drum which is approached by the Matoke chief. A second man picks *wainite* leaves and gives them to the *maritihanna*, who places them in the open, mountainward end of the drum. The *maritihanna* offers an invocation to the ancestors, performs the *sinu onari hohua* and, taking the leaves, wipes round the inside of the drum several times, finally wedging them under the rattan holding the skin to the top of the drum. He takes the red cloth from the drum together with the drumstick. One man hits the stick on the platform (da-didi-da-didi-da-didi-da) and then holds the sticks while the *maritihanna* takes the same hand and offers another invocation. The drum is beaten and, at the same time, another man chants an *ahinae*. The main drum, and a series of smaller hand drums also made specifically for the *suane*, are then beaten in unison, and the assembled men chant fur-

ther *ahinae* verses. Betel requisites and food are handed round to guests. The ritual is complete by three o'clock in the afternoon, occupying one hour in all.

Throughout the remainder of the afternoon active preparations are made for the evening feast. Sago porridge is brought to the *suane* from all houses by unmarried, uninducted men, and periodically the *suane* drum is beaten to forewarn participants of the approaching feast and *kahuae*. The feast over, the *kahuae* begins at about quarter past ten in the evening and continues until six thirty the following morning, extending over four nights. This is a *kahuae* in which women are permitted to participate, and they begin to arrive just before midnight, sitting along the seaward side. Firecrackers are set off at various points during the dancing.

8.8 PLANTING AND TRANSPLANTING KOKINE

As we have seen, associated with each *suane* are growing clumps of four ritual plants (Plate 8.6), the gift of ancestral Matoke: *sinsinte* (a sign of maturity), *sonae* (a sign of virility), *kokine* (a sign of fertility) and *wainite* (a sign of purity). If these plants do not already exist adjacent to the *suane*, they have to be planted; if older plants already exist in this location, but are in poor condition, they must be replaced. I have witnessed one ceremony involved in this process, in January 1971.

The ceremony begins at the Matoke clan house, the owners of the Rouhua *suane*. As this is a ritual in which all clans participate there are a large number of adult men present, 35 on my calculation. Seating arrangements, as we have learned from accounts of other rituals, are scripts that can usually be relatively easily enacted, and on this occasion (Figure 8.1) reflect the special requirements of precedence that might be expected given the roles of individual clans in the maintenance of *suane* ritual.

After a general discussion of procedures, most of the assembled party walk to a point on the Santapi Nunu stream where a sacred *kokine* (*Musa* sp.) had been planted by Nauhua, the father of the Sounaue-ainakahata clan chief in 1971. It is the responsibility of the two senior *kapitane*, from the clans Sounaue-ainkahata and Neipane-tomoien (on this occasion Hatarai and Kotahatu, respectively) to transplant the *kokine*, and before departing for Santapi Nunu they go to the River Yoko where Sounaue

Figure 8.1. Seating arrangement in the Matoke clan sacred house for principal actors involved in the *kokine* transplanting ceremony, Rouhua, January 1971.

Key: 1. Inane Matoke-pina; 2. Kotahatu Neipane-tomien; 3. Iako Matoke-pina (*ia onate* Matoke-pina); 4. Hatarai Sounaue-ainakahata; 5. Komisi Soumori (*ia onate* Soumori, and *ia onate ankarua*); 6. Tapone Sounaue-ainakahata (*ia onate* Sounaue-ainakahata); 7. Konane Nepane-tomoien (*ia onate* Nepane-tomoien); 8. Patiraia Sounaue-ainakahata (*maritihanna*); 9. Lohia Peinisa (*ia onate* Peinisa); 10. Paikole Sounaue-ainakahata.

have an old *soue*.³ Earth is taken from the old *soue*. At the point on the Santapi Nunu where the *kokine* had been planted, the immediate undergrowth is cut back and Hatarai takes the dibble; he utters an invocation, moves the dibble five times towards the ground and, on the fifth time, breaks the earth. The plant and its offshoots are lifted and taken in

³ Prior to Pacification, each Nuauulu clan hamlet had a small piece of land near the village on which was built a structure to contain the skulls of enemies taken during headhunting. Both the structure and the land upon which it was erected was – and still is – known as a *soue*. At the present time, its purpose is to host ceremonially important shrubs required for ritual activities associated with the *suane*. The *soue* is in the guardianship of, and maintained by, Matoke.

Plate 8.6. (a) Sacred plants growing to the Southeast of the Rouhua *suane*, July 1975; (b) Hatarai Sounaue-ainakahata replanting *kokine* in the *soue* northeast of the Matoke clan house in Rouhua, January 1971; (c) Inane Matoke uprooting *wainite* from a place northeast of the Matoke clan house to be replanted near the Rouhua *suane*, January 1971; (d) Hatarai Sounaue-ainakahata planting *wainite* near the Rouhua *suane* that has been moved from northeast of the Matoke clan house, January 1971.

procession to the site of the new *soue*, on Matoke land near the Rouhua River. Here the undergrowth is cleared, a pit dug and an invocation offered. The plant is moved in and out of the pit five times and on the fifth time placed firmly within it (Plate 8.6b). Earth from the old *soue* on the Yoko is sprinkled around it and the rest of the soil placed firmly on top. Water is diverted from the conduit to irrigate the plant.

The party then moves to another location on the Rouhua stream, where there are some self-planted *wainite* (*Phrynium* sp.). These are uprooted (Plate 8.6c) and taken to the *suane*, where they are planted with the other sacred plants. An invocation is offered and the plants moved up and down five times before they are inserted (Plate 8.6d-e). The opportunity is taken to clear the grass round the clump of sacred plants. The participants then retire to the Matoke clan house to chew betel.

8.9 ENTERING THE SUANE FOR THE FIRST TIME

The *suane* is officially entered for the first time through the performance of a ceremony in which the Soumori clan chief shares food with the ancestral spirits that protect it, consisting of a sago biscuit and a cuscus claw, again following the pattern of the clan sacred house. The items associated with the *suane* that have been temporarily stored in the *numa nahate* or in the Soumori sacred house are then taken to the *suane*. Portions of betel-chewing requisites are given to those present; later that evening a feast is held, the most significant comestible of which is *maea*.

Before the *suane* can be used for a *kahuae*, an offering must be made to the ancestors who protect it. Formerly this was the head of a young, non-Nuaulu male taken by a *kapitane*, and it was around this that the dancers were reputed to circle. The head could be from Manusela, Kanikeh, Sepa, Ruta, Amahai or Tamilau, but never from Huaulu. Other heads were formerly hung in the roof space. Since Pacification the head has been replaced by a large porcelain plate (*hanainae*) and a red cloth, which in Rouhua the *kapitane* Sounaue-ainakahata and Neipane-tomoien must fetch from the raja of Sepa. Other *kapitane* accompany them, but, as with the responsibilities regarding sacred plants, these are the two prescribed by *monne*. Although, in terms of the operation of the Indonesian state, the raja of Sepa is administratively superior, his 'adat' status in this con-

text is an inversion of secular status, and he is required to give a plate that represents the head of one of his subjects. This is still referred to as ‘taking a head from the raja of Sepa’. The plate is placed on the sitting platform around the perimeter of the *suane*.

Later the same night a *kahuae* is performed. The circle dance begins at the *numa nahate* and then moves to the *suane*, where it continues until morning, when the *auwoti* is performed for the first time as part of *suane* ritual, first by the older men and then by inducted younger men. For the five nights over which the *kahuae* and *auwoti* are performed, the chief of the clan Soumori lights the fire in the *suane* fireplace. Thereafter, throughout the life of the *suane*, the *kahuae* will be performed periodically. The barkcloth (*kasopete*) worn by men involved in *suane* ritual differs from that used in male puberty ceremonies in that a black waist band (*iene*) is worn over it.

8.10 COMPLETING THE CYCLE

From the time the new *suane* is first entered to the time of the first *kahuae erereta* the *auwoti* may not be performed. Sekanima, whom I questioned on this, had never witnessed such an occasion, but said he was familiar with the details from what others had told him. The *maritihanna* takes a lead in *suane* ritual and it is his role to smear the blood of a cockerel on the forearms and hands of participants (as in the *tupu-tupue* ceremony) at the beginning of a great *kahuae*, and to remove the same with water after five days. During this period the blood may not be removed, there must be no contact with females and all meals are taken in the *suane*. This final event is preceded by the performance of a *kahuae* for a period of up to five nights, held to introduce the newly inducted men to the *auwoti*. Up until this time young, uninducted men wear the *karanunu onate* (*marae*), but after this they revert to the normal red *karanunu*. The first night of the *kahuae* is followed the next day by an offering made by the clan chief of Soumori in the fireplace (*hunu hata otue*), in which the Matoke ancestors are fed a meal of cockerel bones saved from previous cockerel sacrifices, the right leg of a cuscus, a *sikenae* and baked sago (*ute-ute monne*). As we have seen, during the completion ritual for a clan sacred house it is a woman who makes the fireplace offering, but in the case of the *suane* it involves cooperative work between clans, just as in the making of the

fireplace itself. The chief of the clan Peinisa directs these proceedings, as to him is delegated overall authority for the fireplace.

In an echo of the male puberty ceremony, the other main part of the festival is the capture of ten live cuscus of any description and their sacrifice in the *suane* by the men using the back of a parang blade. The cuscus are then cooked in green bamboo on the *suane* fireplace and consumed as a *marane sonaute* (thin stew) together with *maea* and other ceremonial foods during a feast held the same night. The food is spread out, not on banana leaves, but on leaves from the *kokine* transplanted when the *suane* was being constructed. Similarly, the cuscus bones are placed in *wainite* leaves from the bush planted on the inland side of the *suane*, and stored carefully on the *atikanae*, the shelf located above the sunrise entrance to the *suane*. The following night unmarried girls join the men in the *kahuae*.

This ritual marks the completion of the *suane* cycle, and the completion of the puberty ceremonies of those males who have gone through them since the last time the *suane* cycle has reached this point. Completion transforms the village from a state of 'heaviness' to one of 'lightness'. Indeed, *kahuae* and *auwoti* can only re-commence in a completed *suane* once 'lightness' is achieved for all clans of the village, through expiation or atonement (*usi*) for behaviour that gives offence to the ancestors (*rosa*). This includes certain violations of gender-pollution prohibitions, such as women admitting to having had an illegitimate child or having menstruated while outside the *posune*. The expiation ritual involves collecting kindling sticks and lighting a small fire, with the help of menopausal women, underneath the *suane* while the men sit above. Women making the fire mock and humiliate those still in violation of the prohibition, shouting at them, and warning them not to remain in the house having broken a pollution rule, an action that might likely result in their death. The fire allows the smoke to purify the men, removing any 'heaviness' induced by pollution violations and bringing health and hunting success. The wind then carries the smoke and pollution out to sea. Heaviness due to gender pollution also falls away from men during the *kahuae* as they stamp their feet, falling under the house to where the fire has been lit. As a result, the inside of the *suane* acquires lightness.

Another self-referential role of the *suane* is as a site for making recompense for offences against the founding Matoke ancestors (*sio onata roe nusa*, 'elders of the island'), including mistakes incurred during *suane*

construction. Such violations require that a red plate and metre of red cloth be given either to the Soumori chief or *matue*. The objects are kept in the relevant clan sacred house until the next *kahuae* performance, when the objects are placed in the *suane* on two sections of coconut palm trunk, and when the offences are verbally reported to the ancestors. Once these sources of heaviness have been removed, the *suane* is open for other rituals, including several associated with the male life-cycle ceremonies, such as the *ahurara tapuna* (earth-anointing) ritual (not described here) or the cuscus sacrifice. In the past, the teeth of men were filed during the ceremony to complete the *suane*. But, as noted in Chapter 4, because the *suane* is so often absent or incomplete, few men have undergone these rituals. In Rouhua, in 2001, only one man had undergone them.

Concluding symbolic actions which reinforce this condition of lightness include, as with the clan sacred house, the rubbing of coconut oil on the upright posts of the *suane*, and the sweeping by women of all rubbish around the village space and throwing it (together with heaviness, pollution, accumulated infringement of ancestral prescriptions and proscription, and the sickness which has resulted from them) beyond the village perimeter. These actions resemble those found in ‘adat cuci negeri’ ceremonies described by Cooley (1962:60) for Ambonese villages. The festival ends with the ‘killing’ of the fire (‘*kasimati api*’ in Ambonese Malay) in the *suane*, the clearing away of the ashes (*hunu usa*), the silencing of the large drum and the return of the smaller drums to the houses of their owners. This latter signifies that a *kahuae* cannot be held in the *suane* again until the big *kahuae* festival, approximately three months later.

8.11 THE GREAT KAHUAE FESTIVAL

In August 1973 the great *suane* festival to complete the cycle was being actively discussed and planned. It was explained to me that it was similar to that described for clan sacred houses, involving the placing of decorative elements along the roof ridge (*hunu hata nikata*). Patterns of bamboo latticework are arranged along the roof apex, augmented by the feathers of cassowary, parrot (usually *Lorius domicella*) and cockatoo (*Cacatua moluccensis*). Five white cloths hang from beneath the bamboo latticework at the west (sunset) end and five red cloths at the east (sunrise) end (traditionally, silk ‘kain Sorong’). On the ridge, at the west end, is placed a

white flag (signifying Sepa); at the east end, a flag made from a 'kain Timor'; in the middle, a red flag.

One of the important features of this ritual is that all men from outside the village who have married women from the village (bride-takers) must return with their wives and families. The men must pay a fine to the *suane* of the following: five red *karanunu* (representing the original coastal settlement of Watane), five *nipai putie* (representing the raja of Sepa) and one 'kain Timor' (representing Matoke and Aihisuru). This is said to be payment to the village for taking away its women, and is analogous to the payment of 'kain berikat' in Ambonese villages. From amongst the gifts of cloth given by the bride-takers, two red and two white cloths and a 'kain Timor' are taken by the husband, who must climb to the top of the *suane* and make a pendant from them (*saene*). The affines of the men who have taken women from the village participate in a large *kahuae*, in which they hold a large plate against the backside of their brother-in-law. This is known as *nehe ain* (*ain* being the term for the pelvic area and loins (*ain ain sisane*). The plate is then presented to the wives' brothers by the exogamous husbands.

After the great *kahuae suane* has been performed over five nights, the soles of the feet and the palms of the hands of those men involved are placed over a fire of *kokine* leaves to signify the end of the period of ritual separation. They can then return to everyday affairs.

8.12 VARIATION, CHANGE AND PERIODICITY

The fact that *suane* are so few in number and that the cycles progress so slowly, suggests considerable opportunity for incomplete transmission of knowledge and practices, for change and even for widespread 'reinvention'. Indeed, the parallel that comes to mind is of the way in which British coronation ritual was reinvented after the long reigns of Elizabeth I and Victoria, in part because it had been forgotten (Cannadine 1983). It is, of course, very difficult to test this hypothesis, particularly as the same empirical features might be thought to result in some convergence between villages, as those involved seek appropriate models, clues and precedents in order to conduct their own rituals.

One feature we can measure is the main physical dimensions of different *suane* existing at various times between 1970 and 2003. The

derelict Watane *suane* that I measured in 1970 was 8.7 metres long (west-east) and 8.6 metres wide (north-south), while that which had been constructed by my return in 1975 was 11.25 by 11.25 metres. The Rouhua *suane* that was being completed in 1970 was 13.3 metres long by 12.7 metres wide, and that completed in Bunara around 1973, 9.7 by 9.6 metres. Thus, while there is little variation in the ratio of length to width, there is variation of up to four metres along both dimensions between the old and new Watane *suane*, and of over three metres in any dimension between the smallest (Watane in 1970) and the largest (Rouhua). All have basically the same elevations and ground plan, though there are some small differences. For example, the roof of the Rouhua *suane* is not nearly as steeply pitched as that of Niamonai, and the joinery of the *atikanae* (a kind of shelf) in Niamonai is quite different from that of Bunara. While such small differences may be within a range of acceptable variation, we should set this inference against the importance – one might almost say, compulsion – of ensuring that a new *suane*, like a new house, replicates the one it replaces in every detail, and that any difference serves to mark its uniqueness in contrast to the *suane* of other villages. Some physical differences relate to the clans who are masters of the *suane*. Thus, the snake, a reticulate python (*Python reticulatus*), depicted on Niamonai and Rouhua *suane* drums (Plate 8.2d) represents one of the totems of both the clans Kamama and Soumori. There is variation in ritual content, too. Thus, Tongli's account of the ritual transplantings, obtained in Tahena Ukuna, not only involves visiting three sacred places in the village and planting the sacred plants, but also the accompaniment of the beating of drums and recitation of the Nunusaku Paratama, an enactment of the creation myth.

Those connected with the *suane* are the most infrequent of all Nuaulu rituals (Figure 8.2). Maximally, there can only ever be as many *suane* as there are Nuaulu ritual communities – in modern times, three. We do not know for sure the situation in the mountain settlements occupied before circa 1880, but when Nuaulu first came to the coast the only *suane* in existence was at Niamonai. With the expansion of Nuaulu coastal settlement and the growth in the population, the number of potential *suane* increased. But one limit on the number was that they were ritually proscribed in two settlements: Aihisuru and Hahualan. So, we may assume that before the foundation of Bunara, there was one, which increased to two with the founding of Bunara, and to three with the founding of

Rouhua in the 1930s. This was the situation I encountered on arriving in 1970. Since the founding of new settlements in Tahena Ukuna and Simalouw in the 1980s there had been talk of building a new *suane* there, which actually materialized after 1996.

Figure 8.2. *Suane* cycles for three Nuaulu settlements, 1970-1996. The continuous line indicates the period during which all stages in the building cycle occur, from the planting of the first post to the removal of the last post.

One may wonder what the purpose is of a building which is itself the focus of ritual, but which has no shrine within it that is the focus of daily, or even monthly, attention; which is regarded as inessential by some clans; which stands empty for most of its life; and which is in decay for the second half of its life. However, the number of possible *suane* is not the same as the actual number at any one time. This is because a *suane* has to be built, and it is the ritual work of the building which itself is in large part its purpose. The *suane*, if you will, is the end product, or artefact, of ritual process, which it materializes and reifies.

Reconstructing the histories of individual *suane* is not easy. The Rouhua *suane* that I first encountered in 1970 was ‘new’, in the sense of having had its first posts inserted in 1964, that is, six years previously. We can be confident about the accuracy of this date. The first *suane* ritual that I witnessed was, as we have seen, during 1970: the installation of the fireplace. At this time, the *suane* in Watane was in a state of total disrepair, having reached the end of the cycle some years previously, while in Bunara the *suane* was at an early stage of construction (Ellen 1978:34-5, Map 6, Figure 3). By 1975 there was a new *suane* in Watane, and a complete *suane* in Bunara. By 1981 the Watane *suane* was fully operational, but there was no longer a *suane* in Rouhua. In 1986, following the move of the clan Kamama to Kilo Sembilan, the *kapitane* Peinisa who had planted the first post of the *suane* had to remain in Watane to guard it. By January 1990, the Watane *suane* was decomposing, and in Rouhua all

that remained was a rotting *heute suane* (Plate 8.3c) and the sacred bushes that I had seen transplanted in 1971. By contrast, in the same year, the Bunara *suane* was in good order, some fresh timbers indicating recent repair work. By 1996 there was still no Rouhua *suane*. In 2003 I witnessed a new *suane* at Kilo Duabelas (Tahena Ukuna), in good condition, which was said to have been completed two years previously. In the same year there was still a *suane* in Bunara (though with a missing drum skin), but not in Rouhua, where the posts covered by the repaired *heute* were already rotten.

What is typical of the whole process are the inordinate and continual delays. The process of building may be delayed because other, contributory, rituals have not been performed, or because the circumstances for work are not auspicious, or because the work itself requires the coordination of large numbers of people who must, therefore, cease other, often more pressing, work. There is much more resistance these days to the demands of ritual work than there used to be, which in turn slows down the process. Organizational problems may mean that a village may go for many years without a *suane* at all; though perhaps, with a virtual *suane* of the mind, the empty physical space being a constant reminder of its conceptual continuity.

This is what we would expect given the fact that *suane* ritual is contingent upon the performance of virtually all other rituals, which also have priority in terms of perceived urgency. But it is reasonable to wonder whether there has also been a historical increase in the length of such delays due to new economic and political pressures. Thus, in March 1990 Komisi told me of the plans that were at that time afoot for the new Rouhua *suane*, to be built west of the present Soumori clan house, and south of the Sounauc-ainakahata clan house, on land that was otherwise empty and reserved for this purpose. I was solemnly informed that the first ceremonies would take place in about two months. When I returned in 1996 the plans had not progressed. Indeed, many times during the last 20 years there has been talk of building a new *suane* in Rouhua. In 1996 the explanation for further delay was that priority had to be given to completion of a new clan sacred house, and the proposed site of the new *suane* had shifted to an area east of the new Peinisa clan house and south of the Sounauc-ainakahata clan house. The political instability that gripped Maluku between 1998 and 2002 was perhaps obvious grounds for further delay, though, as we shall see in the final chapter, in

other respects these events did not seem to impact on Nuaulu ritual life to the extent that one might have expected. What is more likely is that delay was exacerbated by the long-running dispute between Soumori and other clans regarding succession to the position of village headman following the death of Komisi. In August 2003 Kaiisa told me that a *kahu* was imminent for the new *suane*, now apparently to be constructed in front of the Matoke clan house – perhaps in a few weeks time. By the time I left at the end of the month they had still not begun to collect any timber. At the same time Tuisa, the current chief of the clan Matoke, had said that a new *suane* would be built in Rouhua when all elders agreed. During a brief visit in 2009, there had still been no agreement.

The absence of a *suane* altogether might well be thought a major cause of misfortune by Nuaulu – and so, in a sense, it is – but there are theological as well as social and economic reasons for delaying. People say that since it is so closely connected with headhunting, it can no longer be built effectively. The substitutes for human heads are not regarded as efficacious as real heads, leading to neglect of the rituals and delay in construction. In 1992 Nuaulu from Rouhua who were arrested for murdering transmigrants near Somau were first suspected of being motivated by the need to obtain heads for a new *suane*, since the heads of the victims were removed and taken to the village where they were buried (Ellen 2002). Moreover, the inability of clans and their leaderships to live amicably impacts on *suane* affairs and has resulted in delays in making decisions, even though the delay itself is often presented as having been responsible for sickness visited by the ancestors during the period 1985-1995.

Calculating the length of a *suane* cycle is hazardous, as with just three *suane*-making groupings there are so little data to go on. However, looking at the cycle of building and decline since 1970, one may conclude that the life of a *suane*, from first post to the onset of permanent decline, is optimally about 15 years, a lot longer than the 7-8 years suggested by Tongli. The gap between destruction and the onset of rebuilding probably varies much more, since, without the presence of physical structures, there is less incentive to undertake the work. Though the Niamonai *suane* was dilapidated in 1970, at the time of my first visit, it had been substantially rebuilt by 1975, a period of less than five years. Given other time pressures, this is a remarkable achievement. Bunara was never without a *suane* during my visits between 1970 and 1996, though a *suane* must have

been absent briefly at some time between 1982 and 1990. By comparison, the Rouhua *suane* that I had seen installed in 1970, was no longer there in 1981, and has not been rebuilt since, a period of some 30 years. The talk is always that it will be rebuilt, and, indeed, the timbers are collected and stored – but whether historical change has made this more difficult, only time will tell.

As has been suggested, the *suane*, in good Durkheimian fashion, can be said to represent the coming together of Nuaulu clans, as when members of living clans collaborate in its construction, and when the spirits of the dead are gathered in from different mother-houses to perform the *kahuae*. In the present circumstances the absence of *suane* in some villages stands as a powerful symbol of the inability of contemporary Nuaulu to come together politically as a single body. While the rotting *suane heute* in Rouhua says something important about the fact that anything sacred can never be destroyed, it also makes one wonder whether the collective effort will ever be found again to replace it.

What are the consequences of the infrequency of *suane* rituals for their effective reproduction? Whereas life-cycle and house rituals occur with sufficient frequency for many people to remember the correct actions and their sequences, and, to a lesser extent, the invocations, for the *suane* many residents in Rouhua less than 40 years old have never seen the rituals for that phase of the cycle prior to the insertion of the fireplace; despite occasional invitations, they may never have seen these rituals performed in other settlements, where there have been full cycles over the last 40 years. If they are younger than 30, they may never have seen a *suane* ritual at all in their own village. Of those in Rouhua who witnessed a *suane* ritual before 1980 – say, those between 10 and 80 at the time – half are now dead, so that those with direct memories and knowledge comprise no more than ten men and ten women. Of course, the knowledge transmission and experience that really matters for *suane* rituals in Rouhua is that associated with Matoke-pina, Soumori and Sounaue-ainakahata, which even further restricts the likelihood of effective reproduction. Though most other rituals are sufficiently frequent to ensure that the knowledge base and experience needed to perpetuate them is sufficiently shared for us to conclude that they are culturally robust, we cannot be so sure about *suane* rituals. Of course, the basic components comprise many of the elements of other rituals: the *yeukone*; the *sinu onari hohua* sequences, physical movements and gestures; the spatial

movements within the village area; a common overall cognitive infrastructure; the way *suane* rituals mirror or complement other rituals (such as the cockerel sacrifice and cuscus offerings that we find in clan-sacred-house rituals and male puberty ceremonies, respectively). But some of the key elements are unique. The consequences of this are twofold. On the one hand, in practice elders are reluctant to entertain performing rituals where there is room for error, and this will lead to further delay. On the other hand, if the pressure to perform them is overwhelming, then there is a greater likelihood that the parts of the ritual will be reinvented. Fortunately, that reinvention takes place in the context of a *habitus* of rules and practices that increases the likelihood that the rituals will have some logical resemblance to what they replace.