Chapter 9

Managing ritual

9.1 QUANTIFYING AND COMPARING RITUAL EVENTS

In this monograph I aim to compare different categories of ritual event in terms of their frequency and periodicity. The purpose of this is to determine factors influencing the temporal distribution of such events, and the consequences of all these for the effective reproduction of traditional Nuaulu life. This requires a methodology that the conventional organization of ethnographic field research cannot easily accommodate. For example, I have shown the effect of phasing fieldwork inputs on the analysis of categories of event that, by their very character, do not always correspond to the opportunities available to observe them. Apart from a brief visit in 2009, my own Nuaulu fieldwork has so far been spread over a period of 33 years, but was conducted in only nine of those years (27%), for a total of 31 months (8%). I was in the field for only one year when I was able to witness a complete, continuous, twelve-month cycle, and for the rest there were fieldwork stretches of between one and a maximum of four months spread over different times of the year (Table 9.1). The seasonal timing of these episodes has been such that there are periods of the year that have been sampled better than others; and even when I have been physically present in the field, I have not always been in the right place at the right time. Although I have been fortunate in being able to supplement my data with detailed descriptions of events witnessed by Rosemary Bolton, and have heard endless accounts of other specific ritual events at second hand from Nuaulu research subjects and friends, the account is still uneven in terms of categories of ritual observed and reported.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total	months
1970														12
1971														03
1973														03
1975														03
1981														01
1986														01
1990														02
1996														05
2003														01
													Total	31

Table 9.1. Nuaulu Fieldwork episodes conducted by Ellen, 1970-2003.

Despite these problems of representativeness, I have been able to produce a corpus of data for events actually observed in selected categories and (from secondary reports and inferences based on demographic data and informant judgements) of overall frequency. We therefore have fairly reliable figures for actual occurrences for the period January 1970–December 2003, mainly for the village of Rouhua. Thus, for birth rituals the number observed was 20 of an approximate total of 400 occurring during the period; for group male puberty ceremonies, three observed compared with about 20 known to have occurred; one female puberty ceremony observed compared with about 45 known to have occurred; two funerals observed compared with about 60 having taken place; one completed house cycle observed (aggregated from separate stages in different cycles) compared with 20 known to have taken place; and one partial *suane* cycle compared with the four known to have taken place (again, aggregated from separate stages in different cycles).

On the basis of these accumulated data from various fieldwork phases, including work diaries from 1970–71, I have also been able to calculate that the time spent conducting rituals as defined for the project purposes (see Chapter 1) was a minimum of 2.47% of all working time (38 days of 1,538 person-days surveyed), which, when adjusted for seasonality and ritually directed work, probably works out at up to 10% of total activity time. In terms of the annual seasonal cycle, ritual activity peaked during this period on average in July, at about the same time as a peak in hunting, after sago extraction and communal labour peaks in June. The peak in ritual activity also followed peak travel activity in June, and occurred before the agricultural peak in August and a second sago extraction peak in September. I have no reason to think that the seasonal distribution of rituals has altered markedly since 1971, since the environmental constraints on collecting food and construction still apply. However, one might predict some modification due to the growing significance of harvest times for marketable crops (mainly copra and clove) and, between 1999 and 2002, due to political instability preventing most kinds of access to normal markets. Despite modest improvements in the transport infrastructure – mainly metalled roads and bridges – seasonal rain and the conditions it spawns (flooding, surface erosion, rock falls and mud) are a major constraining factor in the preparation of ritual and travelling to ceremonies. Thus, most major rituals are scheduled for

the drier months, if at all possible. El Niño effects no doubt skew the influence of seasonality in particular years, though inferring this from the data is not easy.

I explained in Chapter 1 why the definition of ritual used here must include labour expended on making objects and preparation for events that have a ritual purpose, and each of the chapters has provided evidence to show how much effort goes into the organization of individual events. This is not only because the effort expended in these ways reflects the energy costs of performing ritual, but also because this is how the Nuaulu see it: as ritual. Moreover, the work involved in harvesting sago for a feast or cutting trees for *suane* support-posts is no more or less work than the ‘work’ involved in the conduct of the rituals themselves, such as invoking spirits or sacrificing cuscus. It is ‘work’ in the sense that it is all equally necessary in the struggle for life, and Nuaulu often excuse themselves from participation in some government-directed activity – such as clearing a ‘kebun sosial’ – on the grounds that their time is fully occupied in attending to ritual. Like other forms of work, it is often perceived as banal and tedious, something no less or more important than preparing a meal. This may explain to some extent a matter-of-fact approach to performance, and what might seem, to over-sensitive outsiders used to a more reverential approach to ritual, as complete indifference on the part of the many participants and onlookers.

So, if we were to summarize and outrageously simplify a comparative account of the frequency and periodicity of different categories of Nuaulu ritual, we might conclude with the following observations: (1) The most frequently reported ritual events are for birth. Indeed, it is birth rituals that I have observed most frequently, and can fairly claim to have described most fully. (2) Female puberty rituals (like birth rituals) are conducted for individuals and, because they are also triggered by biological events and cannot be delayed, are more frequent than male puberty rituals, which are collective. (3) By contrast, male puberty rituals (*mata-henne*) are collective mega-rituals (both objectively, and in the reflexive perceptions of all Nuaulu), rituals of reference that not only divide time into socially meaningful stretches, but also articulate the synchronic relations of Nuaulu society at such symbolically charged moments. (4) Most death rituals, being those of pre-pubertal minors, are perfunctory, and

those of inducted old people are not socially visible beyond the circle of close kin.

As frequent as birth rituals – though for quite different reasons – are those rites concerned with the construction of particular parts of houses and their contents, such as sacred shields. At any one time there is at least one house-ritual cycle in play for each clan, and for the larger clans perhaps several. The most infrequent rituals are those of the *suane* cycle, where the intervals may be 30 years or more. Indeed, to repeat what I said in Chapter 8, the *suane* cycle is the most contingent of all cycles,

Figure 9.1. How change in the composition of domestic groups influences the experience of different categories of ritual.

the periodicity between events the greatest, and general temporal duration the slowest. Its contingency determines all these other features, as it depends on the performance of endless other rituals – of the human life-cycle, of the clan houses and of sacred objects – for it to happen at all. Given that all other rituals are dependent on the hard facts of subsistence, demography and socio-political events, so *suane* construction is in turn influenced by all these imponderabilia and more, making its effective completion and reproduction the most precarious of all Nuaulu rituals.

These statements of differential frequency relate to the population as a whole, either a specific local population comprising an individual settlement, or the total Nuaulu population as a group of practising animists. If, however, we look at the experience of a particular household, or an individual person, the opportunities for participating or witnessing particular rituals will vary depending on the overall size of a clan or household, both of which will determine the number of potential events occurring in a particular year. Opportunities will also vary with the age profile of a particular group as determined by the developmental structure, as classically established by Goody (1966) and others. This idea is indicated in Figure 9.1. Thus, in a household at stage (b) a hypothesized ten-year-old ego will have had opportunities to experience intimately funeral events (of grandparents) and birth events (of other, younger siblings). As elder siblings grow older, that same ego (c) will also experience puberty rites of elder siblings. How this works out will depend very much on the particular composition of a household, and the household in the context of the generational demography of a particular *numa* and clan, or village.

9.2 THE COHERENCE OF RITUAL AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF DIFFERENTIAL FREQUENCY

The consequences of performing different kinds of ritual at different intervals, with varying frequencies, are simultaneously structural, cognitive and semantic. The coherence of ritual, particularly that arising from frequency of performance, suggests the hypothesis that people work with a ‘model ritual’ as a kind of recipe for action. Indeed, there is a view that the plethora of lesser rituals are somehow the depleted and partial vari-

ants of some less frequently occurring but culturally salient and complex mega-rituals (such as Nuaulu *matahenne*, Bemba ‘chisungu’ or Javanese ‘slametan’). The extent to which model rituals – if they exist – are based on a temporal distribution of general experience rather than on one type of ritual, less frequently occurring but supremely salient, is a matter I have sought to investigate.

I initially hypothesized that model rituals would derive from what people experience first, as emergent adult persons, reinforced by what they experience most frequently thereafter. Drawing on the schema and cultural model literature (for instance, Shore 1996), it seemed to me that models of ritual performance are formed in the mind through the accumulated experiences of participating in ritual, passively and actively. It is most likely, therefore, that cognitive patterns thereby emerge that specify the relationship between elements of a ritual not so much in terms of symbolic meanings, but as related actions and practices. Such models are unconsciously constructed out of repeated experience, in a language-like way, and only to a lesser extent learned through direct verbal instruction. Indeed, ritual is intrinsically a form of knowledge difficult to express explicitly and verbally in most circumstances, while schemas themselves are flexible constructions and normally will have a default setting. This latter means that whenever there is any doubt about an appropriate procedure, the default mode will be brought into play. As individuals grow older, they learn more about the ritual system, attach new meanings to practices, rearrange elements and alter emphasis. But however young, however much changes, the ritual world will always appear as ‘sufficiently’ coherent. Thus, from the point of view of experience, socialization is a constant restructuring, a reassembling of the ritual world, coherence arising in part from frequency and regularity of occurrence. Goldberg (2005) has argued that what others call schemas in fact free us from the requirement to continually rethink the cognitive practices of life – such as whether or not to brush our teeth in the morning, and how to do it. Indeed, he argues that as we grow older, pattern-recognition as the cognitive response to a decision situation replaces working things out; in other words, we know more templates.

As is now well known, Harvey Whitehouse’s ‘modes of religiosity’ model contrasts two types of ritual transmission: the first (doctrinal) associated with semantic memory; the second (imagistic), with episodic

memory.¹ Although, for Whitehouse (2000:11), both are ubiquitous, he argues that they have different ramifications. The Nuauulu data that I have presented here suggest less contrast in terms of the role of ‘semantic’ and ‘episodic’ memories and in the other features of his model. Thus, routinized rituals (such as those we might assume Nuauulu house-building rituals to be) are mainly encoded in semantic memory, following familiar repetitive scripts, in which people do not easily remember specific previous performances, inferring only from general semantic knowledge what must be accomplished. Whitehouse contrasts these kinds of ritual with the more traumatic kind, best exemplified here by Nuauulu puberty rituals, which engage with episodic memory, and which may actually violate existing semantic knowledge. What is crucial in this imagistic mode for Whitehouse (2000:8, 119, 2004:106) is that ‘in a flash’ of emotional excitement existing assumptions are challenged, and that intense religious revelations are later recalled as autobiographical events, resulting in the re-structuring of neural circuitry (on the history of this idea, see also McCauley and Lawson 2002:47).

For Whitehouse (2002), frequently occurring rituals are unlikely to involve spontaneous components since they are quasi-automatic and fixed by ‘masters of authority’, such as Nuauulu male and female house guardians, and do not concern the ordinary subject. This ‘doctrinal mode’ refers exactly to the role of frequency in creating schematic knowledge.

¹ The model is conveniently summarized in a table of opposites of doctrinal and imagistic modes (Whitehouse 2004:74, Table 4.1), where the first is associated with high transmissive frequency and a low level of arousal, and the latter the opposite; where memory is operationalized in the first in the semantic form, and in the second in episodic form; where meanings are formally learned and acquired in the first, but internally generated in the second; where revelation is rhetorical or narrative or logical. In the first, rituals are multivocal; in the second, iconic and multivalent (Whitehouse 2000:9). A central characteristic of the doctrinal mode is frequent repetition of both ritual and dogma (Whitehouse 2000:112), where routinization is associated with a distinctive style of cognition, specifically, schema-based memory for repetitive observances. In contrast, the experiential quality of imagistic rites is founded on extreme sensual and emotional stimulation.

Whitehouse emphasizes that these modes, as theorized, are ‘attractor positions’, and that in the real world particular rituals cannot be necessarily specified as one or the other, or conform to a particular string of associated cognitive and socio-political features (Whitehouse 2000:1). Modes of religiosity constitute tendencies towards particular patterns of codification, transmission, cognitive processing and association. The imagistic mode consists of the tendency within certain small-scale or regionally fragmented ritual traditions and cults, for revelations to be transmitted through sporadic collective action, evoking multivocal iconic imagery, encoded in memory as distinct episodes. The doctrinal mode, on the other hand, consists of a tendency, within many regional and world religions, for revelations to be codified as a body of doctrines, transmitted through routinized forms of worship and memorized as part of ‘general knowledge’ (Whitehouse 2000:125). It is not that religions gravitate towards either the doctrinal or the imagistic mode, but rather that transmission mode is different from type (Whitehouse 2000:135).

However, it may be that it is not the frequency of an event that is important in making it a model, and providing it with long-lasting impact, but rather its salience. Salience might be purely visual, related to size, or complexly synaesthetic; it might be the amount it is talked about, or its refractions in other events, but also its psychological significance for individuals. Nuauulu male puberty ceremonies are, at least superficially, like the Melanesian initiations that Whitehouse describes (2001:218)² in being frightening, and supposedly previously unknown to the neophytes themselves. However, in practice the form of the ritual is well known, as young pre-pubescent boys witness them from an early age, and even women know much more than they will let on. Although a ritual may only take place once in a lifetime for an individual subject, that same subject may have many opportunities to witness the life-crisis rituals of other individuals. Where local populations are small, imagistic transmission may be more important as initiations occur less frequently and are witnessed by fewer (especially pre-pubescent) males. Where there are larger numbers, transmission is more easily accomplished in its liturgical mode.

It is, of course, possible that the *matahenne* that I witnessed between 1970 and 2003 were eroded forms, and that in the past male ceremonies were much more secretive and frightening, especially where they involved severed heads. However, I somehow doubt this. Moreover, we need to distinguish the ritual experience of the subject from that of the other participants. For the former, the ritual may well be episodic and traumatic, while for the other participants it is memorable, certainly, but otherwise routine. Krige (1943) describes how Lovedu girls are not considered fully initiated until they have witnessed six female initiations, and certainly the meanings of Nuauulu puberty ceremonies (both for males and for females) that children experience as they grow older change and become more complex. These features, of course, are by no means incompatible with Whitehouse's (2004) account of 'spontaneous exegetical reflection', and he has made similar points.

Since rituals are first encountered in childhood, both by children as the subjects of ritual (say, hair-cutting) and as onlookers, just how they experience them and what they remember of their formal structure will have a crucial role in subsequent adult encounters with ritual. It is very difficult to disagree with Toren (2002) when she argues in favour of the

² On some formal ethnographic similarities between puberty-ceremony practices on Seram and New Guinea, see Deacon 1925.

importance of the ethnographic study of children for understanding social organization and cultural values more generally, and we have certainly no reason to think that this would be any different with respect to ritual. It is thus childhood encounters that shape subsequent transmission, and earliest memories must establish a template that, for good neurological reasons, is difficult to dislodge (Ellen 2006:14). Nevertheless, the mind is not immune to modification through subsequent experience and we might suppose that second, third and later experiences of the same event will serve to reinforce certain repeated features and modify others. Though unlikely, if subsequent experiences are so different from initial experiences, the template will alter accordingly. The template will also be adjusted by indirect inputs from other individuals between the experience of actual events, so that (just as with the processing of ethnographic learning by the anthropologist), the template itself is the outcome of an interplay between experience of particular events and generalized, detached and semi-detached accounts (Figure 9.2). A crucial additional factor in fixing a template, schema or script is derived from so-called deference theory, namely, acceptance both of the motivations for meaning provided by others (both organizers and co-participants) that less experienced participants can trust, and trust in the authority of the knowledge of the actions, regardless of meaning (Bloch 2004).

I have explored the extent to which frequent rituals provide a performative and interpretative guide to more infrequent rituals. I have also discussed the extent to which (increasingly) infrequently performed but culturally more important rituals provide a 'virtual' organizational grid of potential components and actions, of which commoner rituals are simplified versions, and knowledge of which provides a crucial framework for understanding key beliefs and practices more generally. I conclude that, historically and in the lives of individuals, all rituals constantly interact to reinforce commonalities and disseminate innovation, but that by their frequency of occurrence (and perhaps also, their relative simplicity) certain rituals are reinforced more effectively than others. It is these frequently performed rituals that inevitably serve as cognitive models for the larger rituals of house and *suane*. In a sense, this is reminiscent of the observation that the 'slametan' represents a basic module of which all other Javanese folk rituals are no more than transformations (Beatty 1999). So, in asserting that the most frequent rituals become the models for others, we return to Whitehouse's (2000) argument that routine prac-

Memorate knowledge or model of a notional ritual type:

Figure 9.2. How individual cultural models are reinforced and modified over time through the interplay of repeated experience and generic information inputs.

tices of ritual are substantially encoded in semantic memory and that through endless repetition participants find it difficult to remember individual performances. My view, based on the Nuauulu evidence, is that, although rituals in different categories constantly interact to reinforce commonalities and to disseminate innovation, the early life-cycle and minor house-construction rituals are reinforced more frequently and, therefore, inevitably serve as models for the larger rituals of the human life-cycle and of ceremonial houses. If this process is one for which we have evidence at the level of the participating and engaging mind, then it will be reflected in the shared generic recollections of particular events, and of particular categories of event, that move between minds underpinned by a shared material and representational experience. Knowledge of how to do technical things, whether it is participating in a ritual or acquir-

ing the skills involved in knot-tying or making baskets (Ellen 2009), is rarely transmitted as a complete package of rules and representations, ‘independently and in advance of their practical application’ (Ingold 2001:358). We might say that the process occurs more through ‘abductions’ than through inductions or deductions (Vayda 2007).

Overall, my data suggest that in a Nuaulu context a strong contrast between liturgical and imagistic modes is difficult to justify, especially when there is evidence to suggest (Neisser 1982) that, apparently, imagistic events may be less spontaneous than we think, as they are sometimes the artefact of repeated rehearsal and narration. This is not necessarily to refute Whitehouse’s thesis, since he himself (2000:149) admits that in some cases the two modes become so enmeshed as to undermine the analytical power of the distinction. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that the theory is now so qualified, and so expanded to include such a wide nexus of interconnected variables, that his original hypotheses cannot be ‘sufficiently specified to submit to the kinds of tests he would like’ (Bloch 2004:65).

9.3 SUBSISTENCE RITUALS AS DEFAULT MODELS

If we are concerned to take the longer view and see how certain rituals cohere, are reproduced and serve as models for others, we must look at the frequency of particular events in relation to the generational cycle. The most commonly produced Nuaulu rituals are those associated with hunting episodes (Ellen 1996), but these are not widely shared – only between hunters. Much more visible are agricultural rituals, which children will witness from an early age and with which women will also have much familiarity. These occur with a frequency that matches birth rituals, but they are very understated compared with, say, those of the rice-cultivating Kasepuhan (Soemarwoto 2007) or Baduy (Iskandar and Ellen 1999), or indeed some other eastern Indonesian populations (for instance, Barraud 1985; Barraud and Platenkamp 1990; Van Dijk and De Jonge 1990; Fox 1979; Friedberg 1980; Pauwels 1990; Traube 1986:155-99; Visser 1989:74-89, 145-68). In these examples the character of a large part of an entire ritual practice is shaped by a cycle of agricultural activities, which in turn give meaning to calendrical categories. The under-development of Nuaulu agricultural ritual (Ellen 1988c,

and elsewhere), which we might also observe amongst the Huaulu (Valeri 2000:13, n19) and, perhaps to a lesser extent, on Buru (Grimes 1993), can be mostly accounted for by the importance of sago extraction and hunting. However, we need to additionally note the context of a history in which endemic swidden crops, demanding specific rituals (taro and yam), are being replaced by crops that do not (cassava, sweet potato and *Xanthosoma*). It is tempting to infer from this a history in which in the past Nuaulu relied even more on hunting and collecting, but this history cannot be a reason for excluding gardening as a statistically prominent experiential mode for transmitting some basic scripts involved in the performance of ritual.³

The basic Nuaulu agricultural rite is the *seute*. The cultivation cycle itself begins with a *pokue*, in which, prior to clearing, spirits are politely asked whether the land is available for cultivation and, if so, to vacate the land before it is cut (Ellen 1973:186-7). A *pokue*, therefore, occurs within the context of a *seute*. It is generally performed by the individual who is about to establish a garden, but in cases where the threat of supernatural interference is regarded as being severe, a more senior figure will conduct the ritual. It may occur when clearing new forest for gardens, or between the stages of clearing and planting. The following was performed on 26 February 1990, when clearing a collective plot for cash crops as instructed by the government. In the absence of the village head, who had business elsewhere, the *kapitane* Sounaue officiated:

The *kapitane* Sounaue (10.20) located the middle point of the projected garden and we gathered round for the ritual. He first cut a length of *nanae* wood (*Heritiera littoralis*) and chopped it into five pieces (*ai otua nima*), placing them into a kind of *hantetane* [the platform used in the male puberty ceremony] on the ground. Behind them on the sunset side were placed five smaller sticks, stuck upright in the ground with a notch in the top of each. A *kau* leaf (*Rhodamnia cinerea*) was cut into five pieces and on each of

³ We can see allusions to the swidden cycle and its rituals in the ceremony conducted periodically to ‘wash the village’, in Ambonese Malay ‘adat cuci negori’ (in Nuaulu, *aunene usa kotua rerehoni niane haha*, ‘to burn the back of the village’). In this ritual all areas covered in grass are cut and burned, simulating the cutting and burning of a garden. The remaining ash must be washed away to prevent the village remaining hot, and all clan chiefs walk around the village sprinkling water from large bamboo internodes on all structures, including the *suane*. When the bamboo is cut, an invocation is made and *sinsinte* wiped round the lip of each container by the chief of the clan on whose territory the village stands, in the case of Rouhua, Neipane-tomoién.

them was placed some betel nut, pepper, mineral lime and tobacco. The leaves were then wrapped and placed in each of the notches. The invocation then began. The ritual finished about 11.10 and we started cutting trees towards the bottom half of the garden. A small *nasae* was consumed on the fringes of the partly cleared area at 13.00.

The performance, therefore, involves placating the spirits with gifts of betel-chewing requisites and fine scrapings from a gold ring invested with the magical properties of the house of the officiant. In some versions (yellow) turmeric replaces the ring shavings and *wainite*, the *kau* leaf. Bolton says the gold makes the garden cool, a condition conducive to growth, perhaps because of the connection between shining and coolness. An invocation is uttered by the senior elder present, which is said to ‘buy’ the land from the spirit that inhabits it (*hehane otoi re*), and the scrapings are scattered over the ground for about 300 square centimetres at the centre of the proposed garden. Thus, the elements are those common to many other rituals; in particular the *ai otua nima* are the parallel of the five logs used in the male puberty ceremony.

The invocation itself is addressed to Anahatana and the ‘lords of the forest’ (*wesie upua*), ancestors of the clan for whom the land is traditional territory, and any malevolent spirits in the area. The spirit with jurisdiction over the area where the garden is to be planted is said to vacate the immediate vicinity of the area to be cut, and move to the head of a nearby stream, or even to some convenient tree or stone. More specifically it is said to protect the person or persons clearing the land, ensuring that he will not be bodily damaged or fall sick, that the crops will flourish and that they will not be harmed by pigs or other pests and predators. One invocation recorded for Rouhua is as follows:

Lord Anahatana, sky and earth,
Ancestors of the clan Neipane-tomoien;
Give strength of speech.
This land is being cleared for *wasi*.
Do not hinder him that works it
Do not endanger in any way the crops he plants.

The entire ritual lasts less than an hour and, in cases where there are a number of persons engaged in clearing, most of those present simply

ignore it. Its importance lies not in the fact that people are involved, but in the fact that it takes place at all. In this respect, it is like most Nuauulu ritual concerning economic activities: collectively necessary, but performatively asocial.

A second ceremony is held at the point of first harvest, when an offering of some produce is made to the ‘lords of the forest’, who in return agree to protect the garden from pigs and ensure an abundant yield. Following this, a small feast (*nasae nisi*) is held in the garden. The content of the offering varies depending on the spirits controlling the area, but will always include three kinds of tuber: the yams *hueni* (*Dioscorea alata*) and *siahue* (*Dioscorea esculenta*) and the taro *sikeue* (*Colocasia* spp.), as well as cassava, other types of taro and sweet potato.⁴ The first three tubers were those familiar to the Nuauulu long before the arrival of the latter tubers of American origin. In addition, those who are ‘lords of the forest’ associated with a Nuauulu clan will be given cuscus or pig meat, depending on the outcome of a hunt immediately preceding the ritual. If, however, the relevant ancestral spirits are from Sepa or Tamila, only items not ‘haram’ to Muslims are used, usually including salt and coconut, and maybe fresh-water shrimp. Nuauulu ‘lords of the forest’ may also receive all of these things if meat is unavailable. The food is cooked in bamboo, spread out on banana leaves and placed on a shelf in a garden hut. With a laying on of hands the benevolent *saruana* are invoked, including the ‘lords of the forest’: to come and consume the first fruits, to continue to guard the garden from the depredations of pigs and other pests that make the produce bad, and to guard those who will continue to harvest the garden. In return, the harvesters undertake to share the produce with the spirits when a new garden is made; they warn, though, that if the spirits do not honour their side of the contract, they may not receive future offerings. Those who planted the garden then consume the food. The consumption of food, consequently, takes on a form reminiscent of rituals performed as part of the cycles for both sacred houses and for humans.

In the 1970s these rituals were common and obligatory. I knew of no one who did not perform them, even if they posed practical problems in

⁴ It should be noted, however, that there are many named folk-varieties of *siahue*, *hueni* and *sikeue* recognized, and from which to select for a pre-planting offering. Moreover, there are other endemic species of *Dioscorea* (for instance, *loloio*, *akae* and *kawasine*), some of which are further subdivided, and which are not prescribed for such offerings.

terms of scheduling what to plant. Bolton, reporting on the late 1980s and 1990s, says that the offerings are rarely made. She suggests that a reason given for this is that obligatory tubers mature later than some other crops and therefore restrict planting options and the maximization of yields. By the late 1990s the clan Neipani-tomoien had started to plant a ritual garden (*nisi monne*), following demands made by clan 'lords of the forest' for whom the *kapitane* is medium, and where offerings can be properly made. In this case, the final offerings were presented to the *numa kapitane* and involved rubbing the *sokate* where the spirits resided with coconut oil and placing a food offering for them on top. A larger feast was held for both men and women in the house, with a smaller feast spread out for the spirits and eaten by the elders after the women – who, if they had eaten it, would have become barren – had departed. This is an interesting innovation for several reasons. Firstly, it inverts the older pattern where ordinary gardens were all subject to ritual with a few gardens occasionally foregoing the ritual, with a pattern whereby most gardens forego the ritual except for one, where in a sense it is performed on behalf of the rest. Secondly, it brings the rituals of the gardens much closer, physically, within the orbit of other rituals performed in the house. Finally, it demonstrates how Nuauulu can pragmatically manipulate their ritual to adjust to the requirements of new crops, planting constraints and other exigencies of the modern world.

In a single lifetime most individuals will, from the age of about five, generally witness as many agricultural cycles as they experience years, and certainly at least one first-fruits ceremony a year. Although a swidden cycle might take 15-20 years, assuming at least one new plot is cleared by each household each year (each with a *seute*), then perhaps 130 will be performed in a whole village over the cycle. In addition, there will nowadays be other agricultural rites undertaken for collective gardens or orchards orchestrated at village level, often as a result of government initiatives. Therefore, in an average lifetime a person will have seen in excess of 60 such rituals, and a mature male might have seen about 20 before he first performs one.

Subsistence rituals such as these, performed in otherwise mundane contexts, thus provide a site in which many of the scripts, the formulaic patterns of words and physical procedures will first be encountered. For example, most invocations begin with the generic honorific greeting *Upuku Anahatana nante tuamane mo* ('Lord Anahatana, of sky and earth'); or

there are requests (*ainisi*) uttered in the forest when things are not going well: *Upuku Anahatana ruiwai marane, esa mai* ('Lord Anahatana, give cuscus [or some other specified game animal] to us'). Similarly, *hokamu mai, bota kanai, ruku matapako* ('come hither, chew this betel') is the formulaic beginning to many invocations. Many of the phrases occur in invocations used in a wide number of different kinds of context, large ceremonies as well as subsistence ritual, providing many opportunities for people to acquire them, in the same way that other language elements are acquired.

9.4 PLANNING, SEQUENCING AND COORDINATING INTERLOCKING CYCLES

Transmission of repeated symbolic conventions, physical actions and linguistic phrases, individually or in variously composed schemata incorporating parts of each of them, tends to be influenced by exposure to the most frequently occurring rituals. This is the case whether these are subsistence rituals or the more frequent life-cycle and house-cycle rituals. However, a major practical problem for those Nuaulu who have to organize ceremonies – and a theoretical problem for anthropologists who seek to understand them – is just how the experience of the performance feeds into other events. This is because rituals must take place in a particular order that reflects their perceived urgency, organizational possibilities and accepted notions of precedence. The timing of some rituals is determined by the stars and by the agricultural situation. Some rituals seem to flow almost imperceptibly and mechanically from subsistence events. A Nuaulu *seute*, for example, is triggered at some point between August and November as it becomes necessary for land to be cleared for a swidden. A first-fruits ceremony will then automatically follow about eight months later, the taro being ready to harvest at about 150-200 days and various kinds of yam at 200-250 days.

If the agricultural year provides the most readily accessible potential template for ritual organization, by virtue of its physicality, frequency and predictability of occurrence, in terms of the wider picture, and on the basis of the language used to describe it, most cycles of ritual are more obviously modelled on the developmental cycle of the human body. Each human developmental cycle takes 50-60 years. When we group individual cycles together and overlay them, we generally speak of

‘generations’ as some kind of bounded unit of reproduction. However, since human births do not normally occur in steps or spurts of a kind that would generate real cohorts of similar individuals, but are staggered and continuous, generations have to be created, and imposed on that reality of virtual continuity. We can see this in the generational groups formed at male puberty ceremonies. In this respect, males are different from females in forming these virtual generational collectivities, whereas women are isolated as individuals, or, at best, form groups of siblings and cousins of a similar age.

As Sillitoe (2006:136) notes, the very term ‘life cycle’ can be misleading – or, we might add, any cycle in the context of successions of interconnected rituals – if we wish to best represent how the system is working. Each generation of lifespans is perhaps more appropriately represented as one full turn of a helix or a spiral, achieving a circulation of similar events without returning to the same real-time starting point. And, of course, each turn will overlap the other, so that such a model captures both repetitions and non-repetitions. Nevertheless, and overall, we envisage what could be described as a ‘clockwork’ model of ritual coordination, in which – metaphorically speaking – the bigger cycle will not turn until it is triggered by an event in a smaller cycle, and vice versa. We can see this idea expressed graphically in Figure 9.3. The clockwork metaphor is apposite in another respect, for like a clock the mechanism can run fast or slow, break down, or stop altogether when it is not wound.

Rituals, therefore, follow each other in sequence. There cannot be a death ritual without there first having been a birth ritual. This may seem obvious with respect to life-cycle rituals, but the same is true for non-human things that are the focus of ritual, such as houses or sacred objects, and most ritual is based on the model of the human developmental cycle. Few ritual events are really freestanding, and the necessity for correct sequencing may sometimes lead to problems. People may wish to hold a *matahenne*, but certain other preparatory rituals (the responsibility of perhaps another clan) will not yet have taken place. We can, therefore, trace unique ‘causal histories’ (Vayda 2007) for particular events, one of which is set out in Figure 9.4. The evidence for variation and for irregularity in frequency and periodicity presented in some Melanesian ethnographies (Barth 1975, 1987; G. Lewis 1980) has suggested a kind of anti-structuralist ‘disorder’, which is what might be thought to be found in the Nuaulu case also. However, these manifest opportunities for disorder arise only as

Figure 9.3. The interconnections between different cycles of Nuauulu ritual activity. Note that the cycles are not indicated on a scale commensurate with the stated durations, while the durations are mostly highly approximate.

a consequence of attention to an underlying kind of order, namely, the importance attached to the correct sequencing. The apparent disorder is the outcome of causal histories which themselves arise from the strict adherence to a different kind of order.

Apart from rituals that cannot be avoided – for example, those for birth and death – elders have a responsibility to determine the order in which ritual events occur and the detail of the timing. Most effort will be put into arranging those regarded as having top priority. Once these are complete, those that make decisions about rituals can begin all over again with the next event. Amongst the problems that they have to juggle are those of scheduling and of provisioning. Thus, although plans for a puberty ceremony may begin at a particular point, there are many other competing ritual demands, as well as the demands of everyday life,

which tend to delay the ceremony, sometimes for years at a time. For example, someone will have a baby. The consequence of this is that the accompanying birth ritual will take priority for some people in the clan. And then a girl will get her first menstrual period and require a *pinamou* ritual, preparation for which will take several months; then more babies, a national election, a clove season once a year and the copra season twice a year, and the exigencies of the subsistence agricultural calendar.

Problems in scheduling can arise from the need for particular clans to coordinate their activity. Thus, in March 1996 Numapena and Patioka of the clan Sounaue-ainakahata were due to receive their *tupu-tupue*. However, while Numapena could serve as an officiant for Patioka, it would have been taboo for Patioka to have received his barkcloth from Numapena. Instead, Numapena received his from the chief of Matoke, and this in turn led to further delay. The long delay in holding certain rituals, especially *suane* rituals, can also be attributed to beliefs in the necessity of taking heads for them to be successful. Head-taking had been ostensibly defunct for 50 years or more, until incidents occurred in 1996 and 2005 (Ellen 2002). In retrospect, one can see a delay between the cessation of head-taking activity and the loss of the belief. As problems accumulated (bad death, illness, infertility, poor harvests) these were attributed to not having taken heads. Rituals were thus delayed, but eventually a head was seen as the only way of perpetuating the cycle. Substitutes, modifications or depleted practices were not seen as good enough.

Scheduling problems can also arise due to external events. Thus, in February 1996 there were problems with the appointment of the new raja of the Muslim 'desa' of Sepa, to which the Nuauulu are collectively subject. Adat leaders were complaining that the correct customary procedures were not being followed. The whole process was challenged. The inability to settle this matter was, in turn, delaying the appointment of the *ia onate ankarua* ('kepala dusun' in Ambonese Malay) in Rouhua, leaving the secular governance of the Nuauulu village in abeyance. The result was a slowing down in the organization of all events that required village-wide coordination, with the creation of a considerable backlog.

Planning for ritual is a constant process, and the general frameworks people use provide a context in which this can be done. We can distinguish two phases in the planning: the first, often implicit; the second, much more explicit. To begin with, since every ritual is part of a

sequence, so in conducting one ritual what comes next in the sequence is somehow implicit, even though the precise timing may be very indeterminate, depending on endless other variables. The performance of one ritual, therefore, will provide the opportunity to agree on what is to follow. Thus, Bolton describes how, in the case of the puberty ceremonies for the two girls described in Chapter 4, the clan chief had explained to her some time before the ritual washing that the elders had agreed that the clan ceremony to follow would be for a first hair-cutting ceremony. Such decisions trigger the mid-term activity of collecting the materials necessary for performance and making objects such as baskets, barkcloth and mats. The second phase takes place at much shorter notice. A date is only set for ceremonies four or five days before the actual event. This is to ensure that all the necessary preparations have been made, and allows men to hunt and women to collect sufficient firewood and to prepare food. A large festival, such as a male puberty ceremony, is preceded by a period of preparation or prelude (*aunutu muelene*), sometimes described using the Ambonese Malay phrase ‘taro hari’, ‘placing the day’. The declaration of an *aunutu muelene* signals that the preparation of food must now begin in earnest for the festival. It may involve a period of preparation from as little as five days (*onona nima*) to as long as one month (*onona hulane*), or even more.

So, if the first consideration in planning ritual is that an event occurs at the correct point in a sequence, preparation becomes mainly a matter of managing material and human resources – though we should not underestimate the often physically demanding and extensive labour involved. Material factors can play a crucial role, and the sheer economic outlay required for some Nuaulu rituals may delay them, or prevent them entirely. But others require long planning horizons, often spanning several generations, such as setting up a *sin wesie* or a *heute* for building a *suane* (Figure 9.4). Nuaulu rituals, like those in the New Guinea highlands or in Bali (Howe 2001:105, following Strathern 1969:43), depend on a combination of production and resourcing strategies. The production involves the accumulation of food and materials and is the easiest to manage, as it can be for the most part distributed over a long period. More difficult are the labour-mobilization strategies, as one household can only provide a small proportion of labour needed. I have plenty of evidence in my field notes of delays in the occurrence of rituals for provisioning rather than scheduling reasons. The earliest of these is from 3 March

Figure 9.4. The causal history of a ritual event:
planting the first posts for a *suane*.

1970, when I noted that a *kahuae* at Bunara had been delayed because not every man had returned from the forest. Eighteen days later, on 21 March, the *kahuae* was held for two nights, but then had to be postponed for another four nights so men could fetch more sago for the accompanying feasts. Labour, in other words, is more uncertain than materials.

Thus, to summarize and reiterate, the availability of people and objects influences coordination between celebrating groups, and the differences between rituals that must be performed immediately and those that can be delayed. While the performance of some rituals is forced by natural events – birth and death, or first menstruation – and cannot be delayed, others can be delayed for inordinate amounts of time. A major

ritual, such as a male puberty ceremony, requires complex sequences of contributory rituals (and other rituals in turn contributing to them) in which material preparations are made. These, therefore, might all be described as ‘enabling rituals’, though not quite in the sense specified by McCauley and Lawson (2002:27-8). Moreover, because I am concerned with the emergent properties of entire systems of interlocking rituals, reference to any role for their ‘principle of superhuman immediacy (PSI)’ or ‘a CPS-agent’ is not obviously relevant. Whether or not it should be, the number of enabling rituals necessary to permit another ritual to happen is some measure of the centrality of the ritual in an overall system of rituals, and also of its relative dispensability. The fewer enabling rituals it presupposes, the more fundamental and indispensable the ritual might be supposed to be.

To summarize, I have not only compared rituals in terms of their frequency and periodicity and examined the consequences of any emerging patterns of difference, but have also explored how periodicity and frequency serve to connect rituals into a series of interlocking cycles, cycles that determine channels of information flow required to reproduce the ritual. I have been concerned with the sequencing of ritual events, and have suggested that correct sequencing might be more important than other aspects of performative content. I have demonstrated that, because of the necessity of rituals to follow particular sequences, those further down the line are more vulnerable and more at risk of delay, modification and erosion. I have also demonstrated that the more frequent ritual events tend to be those most effectively transmitted in terms of content, and that their frequency informs the interpretation of less frequent types of ritual.

Finally, we must remember that ritual cycles are sequences of real flows of energy and information, with a measurable valency and trajectory in the physical world, and connecting with other real world events and processes. They have material consequences. Ever since Rappaport rather overstated the case, we have tended to shy away from saying as much, lest we be accused of being cultural materialists, or worse, neo-functionalists. More recently, Lansing (2006) has shown us how in Bali ritual performance is part of a complex system where ritual determines physical outcomes through particular events, literally inscribed in the landscape, while any one ritual is determined by the performance of another ritual elsewhere in the system. Although it might not be appro-

priate to speak of this as ‘a system of rituals’ (since ritual is not a separate sub-system of the totality), it is a social system in which cycles of rituals articulate and define the whole. Indeed, it has become an anthropological commonplace to see ritual as a way of providing a framework for understanding the passing of time; but, once in place, that framework is the basis for planning and coordinating other specific rituals that contribute towards that framework, simultaneously both agency and structure.

9.5 THE PRECISION OF PERFORMANCE: SOCIAL TENSION, RETRIBUTION AND REDEMPTION

More than anything else, the efficacy of Nuaulu ritual depends on correct performance. In the first instance rituals must be performed. In the second instance all the elements must be performed in the correct order, at the correct time, in the correct place and in the correct context. This correctness guarantees a direct line of transmission from those ancestors who initiated the ritual and who therefore legitimate it. The same might be said to apply to words, but these do not have the same collective visibility in Nuaulu rituals, and it is difficult to judge when they are uttered incorrectly and, if so, what the consequences might be. Writing of the Huaulu, Valeri (1994b:207) states: ‘The truth of a story or of any other piece of knowledge [...] depends on its faithful transmission. Any change or embellishment would make it less true. The condition of truth for mythical tradition thus makes it officially untouchable and discourages elaboration. Furthermore, the parsimoniousness with which the tradition is handed down produces losses, as the Huaulu constantly note.’ Emphasis on the importance of correct ritual physical performance, down to the smallest detail, is what Geertz (1964a:288) has called ‘orthopraxy’, rather than ‘orthodoxy’, where the accent is on the correctness of belief (cf. Staal 1990). But this attention to correctness of performance, precise choreography, counterpoint of direction and sequence, relationship between objects and words, is itself the cause for much delay.

Failure to perform a ritual, or failure to perform it correctly, or the intervention of some confounding factor, such as gender pollution, are described by Nuaulu as *sana monne*. The root *sana*, from *isanae*, is cognate with Indonesian ‘salah’ and refers to any kind of mistake, but a concatenation of circumstances may in turn result in *siraka*, cognate with

Indonesian 'celaka'. *Siraka* may refer to a mundane disaster, such as a fight (particularly with a neighbouring village), the death of someone, a serious wound and, more rarely, stealing. Bolton takes the view that sickness or failure to catch anything when hunting or fishing are not *siraka*, but the word is used in the context of the failure of ritual. A similar meaning attaches to *rosa*, used, say, for not filing a girl's teeth before she falls pregnant, or not handling a corpse in the correct fashion. While in some cases the consequences of failed ritual appear simply to be understood as the mechanistic outcome of some cosmological causal logic, like an engineering failure resulting from a faulty calculation, the most usual explanation is that such failure is noted by ancestral spirits and that their anger results in retributive action. In order to understand the force of retribution it is useful to refer to some specific cases:

Case 1: Totemic infringement – 1 (June 1970):

When a snake prohibition is violated, one metre of red cloth and one medium-size plate (*piru mane*) must be paid to the chief of the appropriate local clan, otherwise women will be barren. This morning at about 7.30 Hotena (the *kapitane*), Naunepe and Konane (the chief) gathered in the *numa kapitane* Neipane-tomoien. Only Konane was in ceremonial dress. Before the latter had arrived, Naunepe had placed one medium-size plate and one metre of red cloth on the *rine* shelf. When Konane arrived he stood in front of the shelf and took the plate containing the cloth, and laid the cloth over his right shoulder. He then replaced the plate on the shelf and hung the cloth over the rattan line running parallel to the shelf, where it joined a series of other cloths put there on previous occasions. He offers up an invocation to the ancestors. This completed the ritual. The reason for this short ceremony was that some time previously (and the time lapse is significant), one of Naunepe's sons had killed a snake, *monne* for Neipane. Naunepe's son is now ill, on account of the fact, they believe, that he killed a snake. Last night the clan met in the *numa kapitane* to witness Naunepe paying the fine, which was placed on the shelf. This morning the cloth was moved to the abode of the ancestors.

Case 2: Totemic infringement – 2 (August 1970):

After the evening meal was over I (RFE) went to the *numa onate* Soumori to pay Komisi a fine for having kept snakes in the house I had borrowed, which had – amongst other things – been divined as the cause for the loss

of some money. As instructed by Masoli, I entered the house carrying one metre of folded red cloth on a plate underneath my right arm, both of which I had previously purchased at Ince Sun's store in Sepa. I walked towards Komisi, who was sitting down cross-legged, wearing ceremonial costume. I took one deliberate pace towards him with my right foot, took the plate and cloth from under my arm and with both hands presented it to Komisi. He received it with due reverence and put it to one side. Then the normal evening conversation continued. I discovered that two other similar fines were being paid at the same time by Soumori males from Bunara, who had also killed snakes. I asked Komisi why the fines could not be paid in Bunara and he said that the chief of Soumori there did not know the appropriate ritual for snake fines. After a short while, Komisi took my plate and cloth and came towards where I sat cross-legged on the floor. He placed the plate on my head with his right hand and offered up an invocation:

O [spirit of the] snake [which dwells within this plate], thou has witnessed that Tuan Roy has paid a fine of one *karanumu* and one *piruna msinae*. Let this be a sign that no ill should befall him again on account of snakes present in the house of Soumori. If it is the snake [spirit] that has hidden the money from us return it soon. If not we shall know it was a human who thieved. Send him [RFE] health and may the snake not trouble him again.

He then touched my head with the plate five times, blew in my right ear and then in my left and moved away. After blowing in my ear I had been instructed to exclaim *hae!*, meaning 'I hear' or 'I understand'. Standing on a small stool, Komisi then placed all three plates on the *rine* and hung the red cloths over the rattan line under the shelf. He made the traditional gesture of respect to the ancestors (*sinu onari hohua*) by bowing and touching the forehead and chin five times, uttered another long invocation, this time on behalf of the men from Bunara, and terminated the proceedings with another *sinu onari hohua*.

Case 3: Incorrect status of ritual officiant (March 1971):

Komisi thought that the cause of death of Aharena, the wife of Inane Matoke, was *monne sana*, in that previously Inane had assumed the ritual responsibilities of a *kapitane* (for example, in planting the *kokine*) though

he had not yet received the *tupu-tupue*. Earlier, Inane had maintained in a fit of grief that it was Iako, the chief of Matoke, who was responsible for her death by not performing ritual correctly during her preceding illness. He was annoyed that as soon as she had died the chief did not visit the corpse. Inane went round hitting the house, shouting insults and crying. He threatened to kill the chief and wielded his parang as if to give substance to the threat. He also threatened to destroy the sacred house. He said that he no longer wished to live under the jurisdiction of Iako and went to live in Aihisuru. (But in Aihisuru the problems of ensuring correct transmission of the title were also mounting, and by 2003 the old chief of Matoke-hanaie from Aihisuru had handed over to Sahune in the new settlement of Tahena Ukuna.)

Case 4: Delay in the performance of post-natal ceremony (February 1971):

Mariam is angry with her husband Retaone Soumori because she believes she has been in the *posune* too long after having a child – almost exactly one month. Retaone is reciprocally angry with Mariam because she is complaining. He maintains it is he alone who must do all the work, collecting the food and building the *numa nuhune* required to satisfy Soumori *monne*. Because his heart was angry he did not attend a clan *matahenne* or the subsequent feast.

As was explained to Bolton, the living are the limbs of the *nuhune*, responsible for carrying out *monne*, and failure to do it at all, or failure to perform it correctly (*sana nuhune*) can result in elbow or knee pains in an offender. Ritual failure, omission or incorrect actions can, in a pregnant female, make the uterus hot, causing birth defects such as a cleft palette, deafness or muteness. Such conditions may be triggered by a female marrying into a clan where women from other clans are expected to maintain their prohibitions, by religious conversion (*amanu nuhune*) or by failure to perform ceremonies that originate from the clan Matoke, which are incumbent upon all women. Using items banned in the menstruation hut, removing a baby from the birthing hut before the appropriate ritual has been undertaken or washing the old cloth in which it is wrapped may all lead to hunting failure for the men preparing for a feast, unless the women admit their wrongdoing beforehand.

A sickness deemed to be caused by spirit entities in this way must be expiated (*nahu*) with an appropriate invocation, confessing the wrong done and requesting healing to enable the protagonists to continue the performance of *monne*. This often involves ‘uplifting’ (*apusaa*) a fine (*sakati*), in the sense of raising the objects involved to the *rine* of a clan sacred house to appease those ancestral spirits who have been offended. Though fines are considered appropriate for minor violations, their form and size depend on the failure of performance involved. Minimally, they consist of an ordinary plate for the *rine* and a metre of red cloth, though for more serious breaches a large porcelain plate (*hanainae*) is necessary. Sometimes the plate, with the cloth upon it, is circulated five times over the head of an offender before being placed on the *rine*. The sickness is said to move away as the plate and cloth are moved away. Red cloth is appropriate where the violation is against a male founding ancestor of a clan. Minor offences against female *nuhune* spirits require two kinds or bracelet, a *piniae* made from shell and a *nihianae* made from metal. Such fines are the small currency of redemption, but increasingly they may also be acceptable – at least as an interim measure – when ancestors are displeased by land sales, or when children are sent to school. When it comes to the trade-off between short-term material advantage and mid-to-long-term disadvantage, Nuaulu are utterly pragmatic, in that they often take a calculated risk of offending the ancestors, but are prepared to make amends once the consequences of ancestral disapproval begin to kick in. They take the view that it is sometimes possible that the ancestors will ignore a minor violation.

There are common complaints about how young males fail to perform the rituals of hospitality traditionally accorded them, and are negligent in ensuring that all people in the village are invited to ceremonies. In one case, Bolton records how a ceremony at the *hatu pinamou* did not begin until almost six thirty in the evening, by which time it was getting dark. There are perceptions that such casualness and laziness is more common than it used to be, resulting in poor hunting returns.

Contrary to the functionalist axiom that rituals integrate social groups, Nuaulu ritual, seemingly, often has the opposite short-term effect; its preparation, organization and performance providing plenty of opportunities for tension and disagreement over who should be doing what, and when. The conflict may be evident both within and between clans. Tensions arise because rituals cannot happen unless certain ma-

terial conditions are satisfied, and yet, if they do not happen there is a risk that non-performance will incur ancestral wrath and increase the likelihood of misfortune. There is no reason to think that this is a particularly recent phenomenon, but on several occasions during the 1980s and 1990s tensions between clans increased, as when Neipani-tomoien performed a *kahuue* in a clan sacred house rather than in the *suane*, as stipulated by Matoke; and in the failure of the chief of Sounaue to allow the Matoke chief to present the *kapitane* Sounaue with his *tupu-tupue*. Attempts are made to resolve problems of this kind in the long-term interest of all clans, and in this case there were extensive negotiations several months later about performing the ritual required to make amends. Such conflicts are often presented in terms of tensions between the living, who are not averse to change, and the ancestral dead, who are.

9.6 HOW AND WHY RITUALS CHANGE

Anthropologists have paid some attention to how rituals change over the long term. For example, Fardon (2006) has looked at the changes in the 'lela' ritual in Cameroon over a period of 100 years, while we have Bloch's (1986) celebrated study of Merina circumcision ceremonies for a period of some 200 years. There has also been some attention to the erosion of rituals under contemporary conditions, utilizing notions such as Jensen's (1951) concept of semantic depletion. Though I do not have the time depth that Bloch was able to access in his analysis, it will come as no particular surprise that in this study I am inclined to endorse his argument that to understand the properties of ritual it is helpful to view them over a longer timescale than that afforded by conventional ethnographic study. However, I cannot, on the basis of my material, also follow Bloch in asserting the stability of symbolic content despite changing social contexts. In fact, I rather think that if content changes, for whatever reason, then so must the structure, and vice versa; for context and content are always part of what Ardener (1989:171-3, 207-8) called a 'simultaneity'. Having said as much, the kind of 'cognitive architecture' that I described in Chapter 2 as the 'underarching structure of ritual' – bodily form and orientation, sensory qualities and movements in accordance with a specific geographic deixis – has, rather remarkably, endured over a period of 30 years, despite many changes of other kinds, including the physical

structure of villages, population movement and conflict. There is no doubt that Nuauulu ritual has changed over the course of two hundred years. Nuauulu are themselves aware of this and discuss it. It is recognized, for example, that the suite of rituals relating to the *suane* were not shared by all people calling themselves Nuauulu until the period after the 1880s, when clans began to congregate in the vicinity of Sepa.

Permanent and measurable changes are rooted in variation in the practice and interpretation of particular performances, and changes in the frequency and periodicity of events. I have reviewed all case material in order to detect patterns of variation in practice for particular categories of ritual, and how we might account for this. I have paid special attention to variation between clans and the toleration of inconsistency, and also to the planning phase and to people's negotiation of problems which they encounter, for example, acquisition of materials required for ritual, problems arising from the absence of key specialists, and inauspicious impediments. I have tried to explain why rituals were not held in particular cases, and to monitor negotiations between key participants on the detailed conduct of rituals, on why and how they might be permitted to vary, or why the status quo should be respected.

In examining the kinds of factors underlying change in Nuauulu ritual, influencing the distribution of events and their relative density through time, the first and most obvious must surely relate to time-budgeting. We have noted how the Nuauulu themselves see the rituals they have to perform as work and as a 'burden', increasingly so as governments, markets and new activities put pressure on existing time budgets. The temptation is always, therefore, to delay or simplify. Another factor is the availability of sacred valuables and other materials, and also the labour necessary to stage certain complex kinds of performance, including the building of sacred houses, and the demography and mobility of participating and contributing groups.

9.6.1 SIMPLIFICATION, SUBSTITUTION AND ELABORATION

It would be misleading to represent change in Nuauulu ritual as persistent erosion and depletion. New technologies require new rituals, as with the ceremonies now performed for outboard motors on adapted canoes. Similarly, various forms of content substitution have not been the consequence of the kind of short supply I will discuss below, but have

rather been encouraged because of their increased symbolic effect. For example, this is what is happening when bows and arrows were partially replaced, for a short time, by rifles in the *matahenne*, sometimes with the addition of firecrackers. Similarly, while in 1970 absolutely no alcohol was consumed on the second day of male puberty festivities, it has now – subject to availability – become almost a standard feature, characterized by displays of affable male drunkenness. Moreover, short-term changes due to the exigencies of particular situations – such as the movement of clans to Simalouw and Tahena Ukuna – have led to changes in the use of materials, such as planked boards for clan sacred houses and even for *posune*, that have subsequently reverted to traditional materials once these and the time to collect them have become available. In such cases it is clear that the time was found partly due to perceptions of ancestral displeasure.

But the overall trend is admittedly one of simplification. At the present time the number of nights over which a *kahuae* is performed is much reduced, due to pressure of other work, and sometimes it has been dropped altogether for rituals where it was previously *de rigueur*. It was once standard for men's teeth to be filed as part of the *suane* completion ceremony, but this now rarely happens – partly because *suane* completion itself is such a rare event. Here we have an example of the simplification of ritual not only because of the difficulty in finding time to perform all of it, but also due to the unpleasantness of the experience for participants. When Bolton asked why sleeping out for the *matahenne* was no longer done in Rouhwa, one informant told her that people were 'lazy'; again, it would seem a case of ritual changing because the pressure to perform all that is required has eased under conditions of modernization.

There is a pressure to homogenize ritual when several clans live together. There is a tension between different clans who live together with slightly differing rituals. Sharing social space and cooperation in ritual has led to convergence in performance. This has been an issue in recent years in regard to birth ritual and, as far as I am aware, has not been completely resolved. For example, the clan chief of Neipani-tomoien, Konane, was attempting during the last decade to simplify birth ritual, so that Neipane women need not spend all their time cooking for women who have married out. Many rituals once performed by individual clans for their separate hamlets (Ellen 1988b:120), with their slightly different symbolic and expressive content, are now shared and performed col-

lectively, having accommodated the practice of different clans, adopted the practice of one clan or arrived at some compromise between these two – an accommodation that continues as complications occur in Nuaulu attempts to strive for health and life.

There are constant attempts to simplify ceremonies or even abandon them. However, this is not always successful and can result in conflict between participants and perceived retribution from ancestral spirits. Thus, Neipani-tomoien have frequently tried to simplify practices, but have been thwarted by the anger of the ancestors who chastised them for not performing essential rituals. Thus, Bolton reports that in the mid 1990s, Neipani reverted to performing female puberty ceremonies in the same way as other clans, having previously attempted to simplify them. More recently the same clan has considered reinstating the feast following first-hair shaving due to increased sickness. They are thus caught in a dilemma: on the one hand, ritual is burdensome and time-consuming and people are under pressure to simplify and fast-track it; on the other hand, this risks social and supernatural displeasure, which may be reflected in higher levels of misfortune. As the population continues to increase, ceremonies furthermore have to be performed more frequently. In this respect we might be seeing an intensification of traditional activity as a result of a self-amplifying loop that can only culminate in an undermining of the system itself.

9.6.2 EXTERNAL EVENTS AND CONVERSION

Political and regional events have also impacted on ritual occurrence and form. The first ten years of my association with the Nuaulu were years of continued stability, reflected in regular, increasing and confident ritual cycles, with small changes in content to accommodate new possibilities and constraints. During the 1980s, however, there was much in-migration of non-local Butonese and, during the 1990s, the movement of Nuaulu to inland resettlement sites. This led to some disruption of cycles and modifications of practice. Intercommunal conflict beginning in 1999 led to the fleeing of Christian Nuaulu from old villages to settlements in West Seram. I shall return to these events below. Conversion to Islam or to Christianity generally means the cessation of involvement in animist rituals. However, because of continuing kinship ties with animists, Christians (and, to a lesser extent, Muslims) may continue to participate

in the life-cycle rituals of animist kin. In addition, Christian women residing in animist villages are still expected to enter the *posune* at childbirth. I have also witnessed an occasion – in 1971 – when Muslims returned and participated in *kahuae*, something barely imaginable by 2000.

9.6.3 AVAILABILITY OF OBJECTS

For Nuaulu, objects are regularly the currency, and sometimes the explicit focus, of rituals: Chinese porcelain, European plates, Asian cloth. If these items cannot be obtained, or are in short supply, problems emerge and the ritual may not take place. Timorese textiles, also in demand, are obtainable with difficulty; but the much-coveted ‘patola’ cloths of Indian origin are now not available at all. Where objects are locally produced, delays arise mainly through lack of time to engage in ritual production; where objects are imported, even where resources are available to acquire them, their availability is ultimately not under local control.

Thus, some changes take place because the material objects required are in short supply or unavailable altogether. This is especially the case when it comes to objects derived from trade. Nuaulu exchange and religion is very much historically dependent on the circulation of trade objects, and the symbolic value accorded them is reflected in myth and stories about the relationship between insiders and outsiders. They are very much the currency of ritual and vital for their effective execution. The main objects in this category are textiles and plates and, to a lesser extent, objects made from metal, pottery and shell.

Of the textiles, *karanunu* has not so far been a problem. Although not always of the desired quality, red cotton cloth, usually manufactured in Java, is available in local shops, and as Nuaulu become more mobile through the improvement of the transport infrastructure and the availability of cash, so increasingly red cloth can be bought in Ambon. ‘Kain Timor’ are available from itinerant sellers, but their price has been inflated by the tourist demand and the quality is not always thought to be appropriate given the increasing use of cheap imported thread and commercial dyes. ‘Kain patola’ (*patona aie*), however, are a much greater problem. In 1990 there were only perhaps six in the entire Nuaulu area, as follows: Rouhua: Matoke (1); Sounaue (2); Bunara: Sopanane (1); Sounaue-aipura (1); Tahena Ukuna: Kamama (1). Unlike other trade textiles, *patona aie* are not exchanged between clans, but are for a clan

sacred house alone, inalienable, and necessary for initiating the building rituals of the clan house and *suane*. The present tattered Matoke cloth in Rouhua was acquired by Solatu, grandfather of Tuisa, the chief of the clan in 2003, and both Tuisa and his father before him have been concerned that the inability to acquire replacement cloths will threaten their ability to undertake the rituals.

There is a similar issue relating to large porcelain plates. The Nuaulu have been under pressure to sell these over the years to itinerant traders, and most of the plates in non-animist villages have long been sold. At the same time there is loss through breakage. The plates that have been sold disappear into middle-class Indonesian homes and on to the international antique market. The traditional source of such plates has long dried up, and replacement of such items represents a real problem. Some are available for sale in Ambon – the very ones acquired from people like the Nuaulu – but because of market pressure these are now available only at prices that Nuaulu cannot afford.

The consequence of the unavailability of a particular category of item has been, in the short term, delay in executing ritual and, therefore, ancestral wrath on account of tardiness. In the long term, objects can be substituted with others, or the ritual requirement may be abandoned altogether. The ease of the process of substitution, though, depends very much on the importance of the item in the ritual. It is thus easier to substitute plastic bracelets on a headdress for the traditional Goromese shell bracelets, than to replace the ‘kain patola’ with a second rate piece of ‘ikat’ or printed cloth. In addition, a social system articulated through the circulation of red cloth and plates is lubricated and inflated by the entry of new objects into the system through the increasing willingness to pay fines as a way of relieving the immediate and growing burden of ritual work. This means that infractions of the rules underlying the system are, paradoxically, required to maintain it.

9.7 SIZE MATTERS: DEMOGRAPHY, MOBILITY AND VIABILITY

I have provided numerous hints at various points in this analysis as to how demography impacts on the performance of ritual. It is, of course, self-evident that it must, but there have been few attempts to show exactly how it might work in particular ethnographic cases, and I shall

now provide an overview for the Nuaulu. Barth (1975:260) reports a case where almost an entire senior generation died in a very short time, resulting in the extinction of the final three stages of a male initiation ritual. Depending on the range of age included, small numbers can make for extremely infrequent performance and thereby risk extinction, and in the Baktaman case we are talking extremely small numbers (183 in 1968). For this reason it is not at all surprising that Barth should be drawn to frequency as a phenomenon, especially as he claims that what shapes a performance is the ability of seniors responsible for staging initiations to recall events. In a sense, demography shows us how a form of natural selection impacts on the Nuaulu cultural population, leading to the extinction of certain rituals due to the inability of the performing units to conduct them and, indeed, in some cases the extinction of ritual-performing units themselves. Countering this tendency is the ability of other clans, through demographic growth, to increase the frequency of production and their material ability to resource rituals and, therefore, to more effectively reproduce cycles and social groups.

In 1972 the population of the island of Seram was 164,626; by 1983 it had risen to 247,990; by 2000, it was 346,391 – a doubling over a 30 year period. The high percentage increase for the subdistrict of Amahai (and also for Kairatu), and within that the desa of Sepa, and within that the population of ethnic Nuaulu, are all broadly comparable (Figure 9.5, Table 9.2). We can attribute this to a combination of rising fertility, decreasing mortality due to improved medical attention, and in-migration through both spontaneous and government-planned transmigration. In the Wahai and Kairatu subdistricts the transmigration programmes had brought in over 31,000 Javanese and other peoples from outside the province by 1990 (Kantor Statistik Provinsi Maluku 1989:155). Since 1980 there has been a major programme of transmigration, which has opened up, in particular, the lower reaches of the Ruatan and Nua valleys to local migrants from Ambon-Lease and from other parts of the Moluccas. Indeed, an entire new administrative subdistrict with a population, in 1983, of 6,421 has been created on the Wae Siru tributary of the Nua to accommodate the inhabitants of the islands of Teon, Nila and Serua, displaced by chronic seismic activity (Kantor Statistik Kabupaten Maluku Tengah 1984:24). The difference between the subdistrict and Seram as a whole is therefore largely accounted for by it being the destination of large numbers of in-migrants from the 1980s onwards. In the

case of Sepa, the desa absorbed some of this increase as a result of the re-drawing of boundaries to incorporate part of the new transmigration zones, but it was also on the receiving end of high levels of spontaneous immigration. Nuauļu areas, too, have received immigrants, but these are not included in the figures used for the graph.

Figure 9.5. Growth in Nuauļu population compared with Seram as a whole, 1970-2000.

Key: a = Nuauļu population; b = Seram as a whole.

Our particular interest is with the Nuauļu, but also with the sub-set of animists as a whole. I explained in Chapter 1 how use of the term ‘Nuauļu’ in South Seram tends to focus on animists, but may also include some convert Christians – though rarely Muslims. Of the 1983 population figures for Seram as a whole, about 67% were Muslim, well over half of which were distributed between the subdistricts of West Seram and East Seram. Official figures at this time place the number of animists at 312. Even if we confine ourselves to those individuals who self-report as animists (using terms such as ‘animisma’, ‘suku adat’, ‘hindu’) – that is, ignoring the large number of persons effectively engaged in various animist practices alongside formal confession to a canonical religion – this is a gross underestimate. Looking at central Seram alone, although in 1969

	Rouhua	Nuauulu	Sepa (local unit)	Amahai (subdistrict)	Seram Island
1971	180	496	2667	18,538	
1972					164,626
1973		544			
1975		575			
1980				30,693	
1981		747			
1983					247,990
1985			5955		
1986	218	744	5976		
1987			5989		
1988			6081		
1990		1256			312,839
1993			6902		
1994				53,928	
1996					
1998					
2000					346,391
2001	624 ¹	1686 ²		61,185	

Table 9.2. Growth of Nuauulu population in south Seram compared with that at other levels of administrative grouping, 1970-2001.

Sources: Rouhua and Nuauulu data: Ellen, field surveys; Sepa (desa) data: Kantor Camat, 9 March 1990 (unpublished), Kantor Wilayah Kecamatan Seram Selatan 1993; Amahai (kecamatan) data: Kantor Sensus dan Statistik Propinsi Maluku 1971; Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Maluku Tengah 2001, 2002; Seram data: Ellen 1978: 10; Kantor Statistik Kabupaten Maluku Tengah 1984: 24; Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Maluku Tengah 2001.

Notes: 1: includes 350 animists, 147 Muslims, 100 Protestants and 27 Catholics. 2: estimate based on projection of Rouhua figures.

the number of animist Huauulu was reported at 139 (Valeri 1980:180), a number hardly viable for the reproduction of most traditional rituals, south-coast Nuauulu numbered 496 in 1970, and I estimate that since then the population of animists alone has probably doubled. In 1971

the population of Rouhua was 180, which included no more than two or three Christian households. Muslim converts, of whom there were a few, had moved out of the village altogether, as had some Nuaulu who had married Christians. By 1998 the overall figure for Rouhua had risen to 624 inhabitants, 350 of which were animists. Of the 147 Muslims, most were incoming Butonese, a few of which had married animist women. The 100 Protestant and 27 Catholics were all Nuaulu animist converts. In 2003 I was able to consult the raw data for the 2000 census for all Nuaulu animist villages other than Rouhua, thanks to Hunimora Neipane-tomoien in Nuaulu Lama, though the figures were not disaggregated according to village. I was able to add to this the official figures for Nuaulu animists (350), giving a total of 2,200. Since 2000 the population will have increased still further. But despite local resistance, the underlying trend suggests continuing decline and eventual extinction of non-syncretic animist beliefs. The paradox faced by Nuaulu is that, despite their desire to remain neutral in terms of religious politics, their children continue to marry Christians and Muslims, and are therefore marrying into potential demographic trouble.

Table 9.3 summarizes population figures in relation to different Nuaulu settlements, indicating village abandonment and the establishment of new settlements. As we have seen, the period 1970-1980 saw the first major influx of transmigrants into Seram, mostly to West Seram, though the first ten years of my fieldwork was one of continued stability for Nuaulu in terms of settlement. By the early 1980s, transmigration was becoming important in the Amahai subdistrict. In addition, there was much in-migration of non-local Butonese to the Sepa area, and a movement of Nuaulu to the transmigration sites of Kilo Sembilan and Kilo Duabelas. The first permanent residents of Simalouw (the Nuaulu section of Kilo Sembilan) arrived in 1983. By 2003 there were over 56 Nuaulu households in the transmigration area.

It is important to note that this movement was in terms of clans (see Table 1.1). Firstly, the clans in Aihisuru – including, crucially, Matokehanaia – moved to Kilo Sembilan, eventually moving in 1985 to Tahena Ukuna. This is a Nuaulu settlement within the large, ethnically and religiously mixed transmigration complex of Kilo Duabelas, comprising also Bandanese and Bugis. When I visited Aihisuru in 1990, all that remained were fruit trees, charred and rotting house timbers and other debris. One Niamonai clan, Numanaeta, moved away to the north coast, though it

had returned to Kilo Duabelas by 2001. Other Nuaulu in other villages followed between 1996 and 2003, though the intercommunal conflict of 2000 led to the fleeing of Christian Nuaulu from Rouhua, Hatuheno, Nuelitetu and Kilo Sembilan to Waraka and Wai Pia. Some of the living space vacated in the vicinity of Sepa led to the re-establishment of a settlement at Iha, of refugees from Saparua, with whom Sepa has a special relationship. More Nuaulu drifted from Kilo Sembilan to Kilo Duabelas, such that Simalouw was eventually incorporated into Tahena Ukuna. In 2003 there had been less movement from clans and households formerly in Rouhua, though two Matoke-pina households (Saniau and Saune) were already there, partly reflecting an ongoing and long-term dispute between Soumori, Neipane-tomoien and Matoke-pina concerning the succession of secular leadership in Rouhua. There was talk of the rest of the village moving, though an alternative scenario envisaged moving to a site on the River Mon, where there is more space, away from the complications of interactions with migrants. This is reminiscent of what the Dutch colonial officer Tichelman (1960:188-9) reported for the early twentieth century, of Nuaulu establishing 'Potemkin villages' inland from Sepa, where they could practise their rituals undisturbed.

Geographical movement and dispersal of clans has proved to be a major impediment to ritual reproduction. Historically, we know that Nuaulu before 1880 lived in clan hamlets distributed throughout the highlands. Sometimes these may have been individual *numa*. After 1880 Nuaulu moved to Sepa, and we have seen that this process of concentration had major implications for Nuaulu ritual: cessation of headhunting, more cooperation between clans (perhaps more convergence between clans) and the increasing importance of the shared *suane*. Thus, by 1980 a certain stability of settlement had been achieved, and people had come to rely on the close proximity of different houses and clans for the performance of ritual. They were interdependent, yet continuing to assert a theoretical autonomy. As we have seen, an entire village is often involved in certain categories of ritual performance, and even more so in the preparation of rituals for other clans (for example, in matters regarding food and ritual objects), partly because some of the smaller clans do not have the internal resources. This drawing in of other clans is practically effected and socially legitimated through emphasis on the morality of kinship and affinal linkage, and the injunction that 'all must help' is felt binding. When the clan Numanaeta moved to Rumah Olat

it faced major problems in arranging those rituals that required the involvement of other clans, and its return by 2003 was attributed partly to the logistical difficulties the separation created for ritual performance. The position was similar with the movement of clans to Simalouw and Tahena Ukuna.

Administrative unit	Local settlement	Year							
		1971	1973	1975	1981	1986	1990	1996	2001
Niamonai (Nuaulu Lama)		166							
	Watane	61	+	+	+	+	+	+	185
	Aihisuru	44	+	+					
	Hahualan	61	+	+	+	+	+	+	180
Bunara		150	+	+	+	+	+	+	455
Rouhua		180	+	+	+	218	+	+	624
Simalouw (Kilo Sembilan) Tahena Ukuna (Kilo Duabelas)									242
Total		496	544	575	747	744	1256	+	1686

Table 9.3. Population of different Nuaulu settlements, indicating mobility between settlements and the creation and abandonment of settlements.

Source: Figures are taken from field censuses conducted in 1971 and 1986, and official local census figures held in Watane and Rouhua; + indicates habitation at named settlement location where figures are unavailable.

So, the overall size of a clan may be crucial for effective reproduction of rituals and, therefore, for the ritual reproduction of the clan itself. Nuaulu are well aware of the importance of clan fecundity. Elders of Sounaue-ainakahata and Soumori, for example, note that once they were both large clans, but now they are much smaller. Napuae attributes this decline to less effective *monne*. A clan on the verge of demographic collapse may not be able to afford the luxury of a *nemakae* marriage between cross-cousins. However, Nuaulu measure the importance of a clan partly in terms of the fecundity of its imported women, but also in terms of its symbolic standing in mythic history, as shared with other clans. Serious loss of absolute numbers has historically led to incorporation by

others through the merging of descent groups, most recently Neipane-nahatue with Neipane-nesinopu in Bunara.

I have examined the sex ratios for each clan and the implications in each case. If the sex ratio is such that a clan produces few female offspring, it may be many years between first-menstruation rituals; if there are insufficient young men of an age to warrant performance of a male puberty ritual, then it will not happen. In other words, the demography of individual and exchanging clans will have an impact on the frequency and periodicity of rituals. This can lead to various paradoxes, such as a clan being on the verge of demographic collapse (such as Matoke-pina) but rich in terms of valuables. If there are lots of females these will bring in wealth, but it is males that are needed to effectively reproduce the house and clan. Tensions arise because rituals cannot happen unless certain material conditions are satisfied; yet, if they do not happen, there is a risk that non-performance will incur ancestral wrath and increase the likelihood of misfortune (Howe 2000).

What is crucial for a clan is not simply its total size at any one moment, but the age and sex profile. Figure 9.6 shows the sex ratios for different Rouhua clans in 1971; note, however, that the females are those for which the clan is their natal home and not those who provide offspring to perpetuate their natal clan. This accounts for the discrepancy with the total population published earlier (Ellen 1978:224), as in 1971 there were two additional females who had natal clans (Sopanani and Pia) from outside the village. As the male population grows, *matahenne* become more frequent (Figure 9.7), their performance is witnessed by more people and performers are more confident. Also, the age range of neophytes shortens, as there are more youths of a suitable age. There is also less necessity to hold joint ceremonies with other clans. The frequency of *matahenne*, therefore, in a crude way, reflects male birth rate. I have been able to show, on the basis of Nuaulu recall, census data and demographic extrapolation, that numbers of individuals inducted, and the ceremonies themselves, doubled for the village of Rouhua between 1945 and 1975; while numbers rose steeply to a high point of 25 individuals for the most recent five-year interval, that is, up to 2003. A complicating factor, however, is how these figures translate into clan membership, since the number of eligible neophytes per clan tends to determine the urgency of the ritual.

Figure 9.6. Population pyramids for five clans in Routhua, 1971.

Figure 9.7. Number of males available for puberty ceremonies in successive generations 1971-1991.

Source: Projection of figures from 1971 Rouhua census. The figures assume no child mortality after the age of 5.

Clan women, of course, do not contribute to the reproductive success of their natal clan, but to that of other clans. Nevertheless, females are important for regenerating the material and symbolic wealth of the clan and, therefore, its effective reproduction. Only through distributing women can you accumulate wealth in plates and red cloth. As I have already noted, though numerous females provide more opportunities for acquiring symbolic wealth, only males can ultimately reproduce the clan, as it is constituted around a patriline. The problems faced by individual clans are therefore due to sex ratio rather than overall size. There has also been a growing tension between women, who increasingly prefer to

curb their unrestrained fecundity through birth control, and the ancestors (voiced through the elders), who want the clans to grow. Indeed, the side effects of birth control technology are sometimes blamed on the ancestors. The 1971 census figures for Rouhwa indicate little difference between males, at 93, and females, at 87. Early mortality of females must surely be largely accounted for in terms of death in childbirth or complications of female reproductive health. The figure of 22 females and 25 males between 0 and 5 might just be explained through differential neglect of female babies, though there is no evidence of selective female infanticide, and – as we have seen – there is an incentive to maximize the number of clan women in order to obtain those valuables necessary to reproduce the clan. The slightly lower number of females would not appear to influence performance in rituals overall, though skewed ratios in particular clans may be an issue. The most frequently reported ritual events – birth rituals – occur with equal frequency for male and female offspring, suggesting that gender-specific induced natal mortality is not an issue. Birth rituals are also, as one might predict, most common during periods of rising fertility.

Finally, the overall demographic health of a clan may conceal differences between its constituent sacred houses, and these may have consequences for ritual reproduction. Thus, some houses are more fecund and resource-rich than others and will be able more easily to mobilize for house-oriented ceremonies, including the building of new physical houses. I showed in Chapter 7 how the number and pattern of clan houses has varied between 1971 and 2003. Thus, individual sacred houses may, and indeed have, suffered from demographic collapse, while clans as a whole have prospered.

So, these are the kinds of observations we can make about how demographic factors influence the transmission of ritual practice for a period of approximately 30 years at the end of the twentieth century. We can only speculate about how demography impacted on ritual reproduction at an earlier period, though we can be sure that it had a significant – if not a more significant – effect. Early reports of Nuauulu population figures are clearly speculative, although what we know of the history of Nuauulu interaction with the Muslim domain of Sepa, and in particular oral histories of absorption of Nuauulu clans into the domain of Sepa, suggest a decline from the late seventeenth century onwards. By the nineteenth century the numbers mentioned in official reports

are very low; for example, Van der Crab (1862:188-9) gives 164 Nuaulu compared with 588 Muslims in Sepa. However, this was before Nuaulu concentration on the coast and, therefore, given the wide distribution of Nuaulu clans at this time in hamlets throughout the central highlands, may be a considerable underestimation. After 1880, with most Nuaulu close to Sepa, the occasional figures provided continue to be low. Perhaps we should therefore infer from this that, with such small numbers, ritual reproduction was even more problematic than observed for the period after 1970. Indeed, the period since 1970 may be extremely atypical given the substantial expansion of population that characterised it.

9.8 THE CONSEQUENCES OF CIVIL DISTURBANCE, 1999-2003

I have noted above the pattern of in-migration, both of spontaneous migrants and of migrants settling in the new Ruatan transmigration zone. The former have tended to arrive as individual families and settle in the Nuaulu areas through a process of negotiation with the desa of Sepa and the relevant Nuaulu village and clan heads. They have bought or rented Nuaulu land and, although there has been some friction over resource issues, a *modus vivendi* was established during this period, with settlers adopting some Nuaulu customs and subsistence practices and generally respecting their traditions. The situation with the government migrants in the transmigration zones is very different. While the zones themselves were created with some degree of recognition that they were on Nuaulu traditional land, and Nuaulu were compensated financially and by being offered plots and houses in the various transmigration areas along the Ruatan Valley, the relations they have established with particular groups of newcomers have not always proved to be smooth, particularly with Christian settlers from the nearby islands of Ambon, Haruku, Saparua and Nusalaut. I have reported in detail on a head-taking incident that occurred in 1993 (Ellen 2003) which received a lot of distorted publicity at the provincial level, and which followed at least 50 years of apparent abstinence from the taking of heads. I was able to show that whatever else this episode tells us about the latency of head-taking beliefs, it had at its roots a quarrel over resources, in this case regarding access to sago groves between people from Rouhua and Christian Saparuans. It is clear that resource-access issues have a bearing on the performance of ritual,

but equally we might argue that, in some way, the events influenced the ritual practice more directly, since the decapitated heads that were returned to the village had to be dealt with in the context of a 'semantically depleted' tradition and led to some rapid reformulation of appropriate ritual management, in this case burying the heads in the post-hole of the north-east corner of a clan sacred house. At the time, and certainly during my subsequent field visits of 1996 and 2003, it was assumed that this was a one-off incident erupting as some kind of cultural default mechanism or aberration, and that, as Saete said, Nuaulu are now committed to 'a religion of plates and red cloth'. However, in July 2005 a second incident occurred, this time not involving Nuaulu from Rouhua, but instead, from Tahena Ukuna. Two mutilated bodies of Ambonese men from Holoa village were found in the Ruatan River, with their heads, hearts, tongues and hands removed. The three culprits (Patti Sounaue, Sekeranane Soumori and Nusi Sounaue) were said by the prosecution at their trial to have been instructed to bring back two heads required for a sacrifice connected with the repair of a Sounaue sacred house. They were subsequently sentenced to death for murder by the Masohi district court, while three others (Saniau Sounaue, Tohonu Soumori and Sumon Sounaue) were sentenced to long prison sentences. My information on the 2005 incident is entirely based on press reports⁵ and in comparing these reports with those of the 1993 incident it is clear that certain information on the motivations of the culprits is inaccurate. Nevertheless, the incident, again, reflects Nuaulu existential angst as to their vulnerability as a group – being not only a material vulnerability, but also a fear that their ritual cycles will not be reproduced.

I have examined above, some general kinds of change in Nuaulu ritual practice, though the special circumstances of fieldwork, planned for 2002 and postponed until 2003, invite some comment on how the events that precipitated the postponement have influenced Nuaulu ritual cycles. In 2003 I was able to examine at first hand the consequences for ritual performance and religious continuity of communal unrest in the province of Maluku since early 1998. These disturbances mainly involved (and continue to involve to a lesser degree, at the time of writing) conflict between Muslims and Christians. The destruction of much effective infrastructure at the provincial centre in Ambon led to increased

⁵ *Jakarta Post*, Ambon; Radio Vox Populi, Ambon, 1 February 2006. I am grateful to Watze Kamstra (personal communication, 14 February 2006) for drawing my attention to these reports.

administrative and economic independence on the periphery, reinforcing traditional practices and the security people find in them (see for instance Soselisa 2007). As Nuaulu animists do not belong to either of the two main confessional groups involved in the conflict, it is an open question as to how they perceive it, and the extent to which they are caught up in it. Animists in Rouhwa were not affected directly, though those married into Christian or Muslim families were drawn in more than others. Historically, Nuaulu have maintained equally strong allegiances with the Muslim settlement of Sepa (the domain of which they are formally a constituent part) and with Christian villages, with which there has been most intermarriage and conversion. One sacred house was burned down in Kilo Duabelas, probably by aggrieved migrants from the village of Porto on Saparua, following the 1993 head-taking affair, but the house had been rebuilt by 2003. The conflict has, therefore, raised intriguing identity issues for the Nuaulu who, as animists, claim to be neutral, and which I have discussed elsewhere (Ellen 2004). Nevertheless, the events might also have been thought to have had severe repercussions on the effective reproduction of ritual cycles.

As the conflict unfolded from 1999 onwards, local populations which had previously been religiously mixed, and which in part accounted for their peaceful coexistence in terms of a shared underlying symbolic world view ('agama Nunusaku'; see Bartels 1977, 1978, 1979), began to fragment, with Christian minorities fleeing to areas where Christians were in the majority, and Muslim minorities fleeing to the safety of areas with a Muslim majority. Nuaulu Christians fled from the Muslim *kerajaan* of Sepa to Waraka and Wai Pia, although the animist majority remained, most importantly because no pressure was put upon them by either side. Caught in the middle, they were able to continue their rituals. Population displacement had an obvious impact on timing and on mobilizing potential participants from different settlements separated by militia and government activity, while market disruption affected the ability to acquire materials necessary for ritual and feasting. Contrary to what might be expected, the frequency of male puberty rituals did not decline during the period 1999 and 2003, but remained stable.

The religious conflict between 1999 and 2003 was a kind of interlude for Nuaulu, in which they were able to observe some of the advantages of not being embroiled in one kind of intercommunal violence. But the events themselves took place against a backdrop of what Nuaulu have

long regarded as government discrimination against their religion and ritual practices that found its ideological roots in the requirement to observe the national doctrine of Pancasila (for similar accounts, see Tsing 1987). Nuaulu regularly complain that this results in them finding work (by which they mainly mean office work) only with difficulty. The same applies to recruitment to the armed services, access to tertiary education, and to obtaining government documents such as identity cards, marriage and birth certificates, and certificates of land entitlement. This they widely attribute to their religion not being recognized under the rubric of Pancasila, but this has not always been such a pressing issue for them as it has become in recent years. One reason for this is that Nuaulu were for a long time mistakenly described by the Dutch and by some fellow Indonesians as ‘orang Hindu’, bracketing them with Hindu Balinese. As Geertz (1964b) observes, being Hindu Bali has been a major problem for the Balinese in the context of Pancasila, with its emphasis on monotheism and religions of the book, but as Geertz (1972) was also able to subsequently point out, Balinese Hinduism was finally admitted as an official religion in 1962. I have described elsewhere (Ellen 1988b) how this recognition and the conflation of ‘Hindu Bali’ with ‘orang Hindu’ had the unintended and unexpected consequence in certain contexts of granting privileges to Nuaulu during the 1970s. By the 1980s, however, Pancasila had become an impediment for animists in the subdistrict of Amahai in particular, as well as in the religious politics of Indonesia more generally. The situation resembled that evoked by Atkinson (1987:172) in her characterization of Pancasila as being, paradoxically, a model of cultural inclusiveness, but one of exclusiveness in its application.

Nuaulu have long interacted with Christians and Muslims – a recorded history that we can at least push back to the late seventeenth century. However, the period since has seen a gradual decline in the number of animists, a decline that accelerated after the 1880s. As the Nuaulu population has declined, certain of their rituals have come to play an increasingly important role in their identity. Thus, Nuaulu are widely renowned for their puberty rituals, known in Ambonese Malay as ‘kasimandi pinamou’ and ‘adat cidako’. With the outbreak of unrest between Maluku’s Muslim and Christian populations these rituals, like the wearing of distinctive red turbans by adult males which had long been an ethnic marker (Ellen 1988b), began to actually afford some degree of protection against physical harassment.

9.9 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this monograph I have been able to demonstrate frequency and periodicity in ritual performance using data acquired over a period of almost 40 years of intermittent ethnographic research in the same place. I have demonstrated that ritual is a material activity that operates and is scheduled within a framework of constraints that include ecological factors (both seasonal and historical), limitations imposed by time-budgeting for a range of other activities, and changing economic circumstances. In this chapter in particular, I have reviewed the way in which frequency and periodicity vary according to different categories of ritual activity, and how individual life cycles – the developmental cycles of domestic groups, clans and wider collectivities – influence occurrences and opportunities and, thereby, the fidelity of transmission. I have also reviewed how differential frequency impacts on the coherence of ritual, whether learning rituals is based on the continual reassembling of quasi-modular elements, or whether there are ‘model rituals’ which serve as templates for the reproduction of others, with more frequent influencing less frequent categories of event. Reproducing ritual, it would seem, is not simply a matter of vertical transmission within a particular category of event, but of oblique experience of both subjects and observers in witnessing rituals throughout their lives, and of the transfer of generic ‘schemes’ (or scripts or recipes) of ritual performance from one ritual to another – as much a ‘tangled web’ as descent with modification. In this context, the ‘modes of religiosity’ distinction, while helpful in thinking things through, becomes rather fuzzy.

I have examined how ritual cycles interlock, how they are sequenced in terms of series of ‘enabling’ rituals, and how a blockage in one part of the system can have ramifying repercussions. Timing issues are critical. I have also tried to show how all this is relevant to understanding how and why rituals change, and how viability of ritual transmission is affected by simplification, substitution, elaboration, external impact and conversion, the availability of what we might call ‘*materia ritualis*’, and the importance of demography and population mobility. Finally, I have suggested that the civil disturbances on Seram between 1998 and 2001 provide us with some unexpected insights into the resilience of the Nuaulu ritual system.

My main concern throughout has been primarily with the emergent properties of ritual systems rather than with the cognition of ritual on its own account. However, there are moments when these properties can only be explained in relation to the effectiveness of ‘soft’ cognitive architecture. Whitehouse on the one hand, and McCauley and Lawson on the other, have over a period of years engaged in an exchange of ideas on this subject, with qualified acceptance and rejection of the other, such that their disentanglement is not always easy for the interested outsider. Although my work converges with some of the theoretical work of both, it does not set out to test their ideas as a coherent body, and certainly does not try to fit data into one or the other of their frameworks, or resolve the differences between the two. I concur with both in ascribing paramount importance to frequency as a general explanatory concept (Whitehouse 2004:142-4, McCauley and Lawson 2002:16) – a major theme of this monograph. However, the formulation offered by Lawson and McCauley (1990), perhaps both because and in spite of their initial attempt at multiple-variable algebraic formalization, does not account adequately for variations in transmissive frequency, while their proposed causal pathways are difficult to operationalize ethnographically. The more complex the model becomes, the less explaining it seems to do.

9.10 POSTSCRIPT: THE END OF RITUAL?

How can we generalize about the resilience of systems of ritual practices to innovation, about the depletion of their parts and, ultimately, about the conditions for their collapse? The sequence of events that lead to the extinction of traditional religious systems has been discussed often enough, and one way of looking at it is in the context of themes developed in this book, as collapse is the failure to reproduce ritual effectively through the infrequency of its performance. One model involves a gradualist process of attrition and conversion to some world religion – what we might call ‘the cultural depletion’ model. Opposed to this is the ‘cultural collapse’ model, in which there may be an initial period of attrition, but where this inevitably leads to collapse, either because of the cultural contradictions that build up through some encounter between the old and new regime of ideas and power, or because of an accumulation of practical problems related to the performance of traditional rituals to an unbearable level.

The moderate version of this model is provided by Firth (1970:304-406) for Tikopia, in which gradual attrition culminates in a 'tipping point', followed by a shorter period of further depletion until 'final conversion'. Firth (1970:305) illustrates this using demographic data on the relative numbers of traditionalists and converts for a series of years between 1901 and 1956. The more extreme version of the 'collapse' model is presented by Sahlins (1981:55) for Hawaii, quoting Kroeber (1948:403), for whom the cause was 'cultural fatigue':

Abruptly, so it has seemed to students of Hawaiian history: a whole religion destroyed in a day, the nineteenth of November 1819.

One can appreciate that in such remote Oceanic systems, long separated from exposure to other systems of alternative ideas and practices, the collapse model is an understandable response. What is interesting and different about Seram and other traditional religious systems in many parts of eastern Indonesia is that they have been part of, or on the fringes of, the world system of commodities and ideas for a long time (Ellen 2003). The Nuaulu first came into contact with the Dutch in the late seventeenth century, and we might reasonably assume that this was preceded by a long period of contact with other traders with whom they exchanged local products for textiles and metals. In the case of those animist populations and ritual systems that have survived there has been, therefore, a long period of accommodation. We can see in the Huauulu (described by Valeri) and in the Nuaulu (described by Ellen) two radically different responses to increased pressures on traditional ritual practices.

Nuaulu, since the late seventeenth century, have sometimes responded to cultural contact through conversion. Conversion for Nuaulu has always been of two kinds: pragmatic and confessional. Nuaulu have quite regularly married non-Nuaulu or Nuaulu Muslims and Christians, and part of the contract in such cases is conversion. But then, equally, I have known cases where Christian girls have married animist men and 'converted' to animism for much the same reason. Acknowledgement of a broader consensual 'agama Nunusaku', embracing Christians, Muslims and animists (Bartels 1977, 1978, 1979, 2000), had, until the events of 1999-2002, made these shifts in ritual practice and belief relatively easy and flexible. Before 1999, both Christian and animist residents of Yalahatan assisted in the building of the new mosque in Tamilau, while

during the 1970s Nuaulu visitors to North Seram helped build a mosque in Rumah Olat. I have described some other aspects of how Nuaulu participate in the rituals of other religions elsewhere, and how non-Nuaulu reciprocally participate in Nuaulu rituals (Ellen 1988b).

The second strategy has been what Geertz (1964b), speaking of Bali, has called ‘internal conversion’, that is, the adjustment of practices to a degree that makes them acceptable within the wider sphere of contemporary ‘Indonesian civil religion’ (Atkinson 1987:174). But well before the advent of Pancasila, Nuaulu religion was engaged in a process of accommodation: with the local Muslim *kerajaan* in Sepa, and under the Pax Neerlandica. The most obvious accommodation was the suppression of head-taking, but Nuaulu religion also adopted a shared Indonesian culture of modesty, and truncated ceremonies and their organization to fit the convenience of new economic and political necessities. Over the last four decades, this accommodation has taken a more subtle and bureaucratic form, with the Nuaulu drawn into the world of education, politics and electronic media that places them in touch with people of their own kind (‘masyarakat adat’) elsewhere in the country. Although there has been nothing like the process of ritual rationalization that Geertz has described for Bali, or of the kind that others have described for different animist traditions elsewhere in Indonesia, and no ‘conceptual sorting out of “agama” from “adat”’ (Kipp and Rodgers 1987:23), there is clearly a process of internal and very evident external negotiation, which indicates a movement in this direction. By 2003 Kaiisa could assert in a conversation with me that Nuaulu were not animists (‘animis’), and neither were they ‘Hindu’, and that the ‘ulu’ (conventionally meaning ‘upriver’) rather means ‘dulu’ (formerly, ancient), and that what Nuaulu practised was an ‘agama sendiri’ (‘a religion by itself’).

The third option is not a collective response, but reflects what has happened elsewhere amongst traditional peoples of Seram: individuals have simply converted in a gradual fashion, leading to the serial erosion and eventual disappearance of animism, whether for pragmatic or for confessional reasons. In travelling around the island of Seram between 1970 and 2000 it was common to find individual ‘animists’ surviving amongst groups of younger people who were otherwise Christian. Grzimek (1991:37) reports this for the Wemale. However, there is a social resistance to conversion amongst Nuaulu, since for many it represents a kind of weakness. Napuae, for example, once told me, in reference to

Menai (who had converted following an episode in which he was not prepared to work on a sacred house) that those who convert are usually 'lazy'. Menai later reverted to animism.

The final option is accelerated collapse of the ritual system, as the completion and perpetuation of cycles becomes ever more difficult for material reasons, and as internal contradictions increase. Thus, Nuaulu are under pressure to alienate land as a means of income, and to delay ritual in order to prioritize economic activity. But the consequence of both is an increased accumulation of dissatisfaction amongst the ancestors, reflected in illness and other forms of misfortune. Until now, what has distinguished Nuaulu from the Huaulu of the Manusela area has been a willingness to compromise in order to maintain a traditional way of life. For Valeri (2000), Huaulu had always explained to him that there could be no compromise, and although Huaulu are known not to have taken heads for many decades, the logic of head-taking was intrinsic to their ritual practice, particularly the *kahuae*. The Nuaulu by contrast, have – at least for the period of time I have been living amongst them – always stressed that they are now a religion of 'plates and cloth'. And yet, within the space of ten years, six individuals have been convicted for acts of violence that involved the removal of heads followed by the enactment of associated ritual processes. These contradictions and the accumulation of misfortune uncompensated by ritual action might elsewhere provide the conditions for collapse of the kind that Sahlins reports for Hawaii, and that Valeri predicts for the Huaulu. The fact that this has not so far materialized for the Nuaulu is largely due to the demographic trend that keeps reproducing large numbers of animist Nuaulu. This, more than anything else, is a vindication of the view that the reproduction of religious ideas, and the ritual cycles through which they are reinforced, are only viable where the population profile of the social groups that generate the cycles is compliant.

Anything involving head-taking and violence must, by any stretch, be regarded as 'imagistic'. 'Emotional provocation' no doubt increases the probability that rituals will prove more memorable than might otherwise be the case, and increase the likelihood of the transmission of their representations to others (McCauley and Lawson 2002:103). However, it also seems that when traditional systems of ritual do collapse, it is those rituals that are more 'imagistic' that are – on the whole – the first to go, leaving the more routinized procedures encoded in semantic memory to

persist and hybridize – in the Nuaulu case – with Christianity and Islam. And this has been the pattern for some four hundred years.

I visited the Nuaulu area for ten days in August 2009. The clan Kamama had moved from Watane to Tahena Ukuna since my last visit in 2003, and part of the clan Sounaue-ainakahata from Rouhua to Tahena Ukuna, taking two sacred houses with them, with one remaining in Rouhua. The animist population of Rouhua stood at 402, a reduction on the 2003 figure, accounted for largely through the clan movements indicated and through conversion, mainly to Christianity. The number of sacred houses in Rouhua currently stands at 11, and there is still no *suane*. Nuaulu have continued to perform their rituals through varied and adverse socio-economic and political conditions for over 40 years, and although the number of animists is no longer increasing, there is equally no evidence that their ritual cycles overall are under immediate threat.