



Fig. 4: Dressing the dancers, Vavua (1997).

in Koimumu, Vavua, Makasili, and Kerapi people always stressed that it was only in their own particular village that people still knew how to make good *valuku*, whereas in other places they were of inferior quality, if not forgotten altogether. Admittedly men from East New Britain who had married into the area claimed the same when I was sitting together with them privately: our *tumbuan* are better than they are here, since we still use paint that comes from the bush and not from the store, and also, unlike here, we still fully observe the rules associated with the *tumbuan*.

All in all, my interview partners were willing, frequently even enthusiastic, in thoroughly describing to me the various types of *valuku*, each one of which had its own specific name. At the start of the masked dances, several *biriri* run through the village, these being simple masks that chase after women and children as the embodiments of angry spirits, and which are supposed to frighten and discipline the spectators, in order to prepare them for the following group of "small *valuku*" (*valuku bisisi*). To these belong mask types that are characterised as either merry or angry, and

which reenact particular scenes from day-to-day life or that represent specific animals (Fig. 5).

The "little *valuku*" are followed by the "proper" ones, that is, by the "big *valuku*" (*valuku ururu*). First the mask type called *Sivava* is seen, followed by *Ilesi*, with *Kasoso*, described by one Big Man as the "government of all *valuku*," being the crowning conclusion. The "big *valuku*" are not only described as comparatively large and "heavy"; unlike the other mask types their decoration is also reserved exclusively to a small circle of suitable specialists. Altogether, therefore, the masked dances consist of several stages following and to some extent surpassing one another, which, according to my interview partners, in earlier times each lasted several weeks. Earlier too, it is said, all these stages would be held every year, shortly before the rainy season. The inhabitants of the most northerly villages, which are laid out like a string of pearls along the coast, started the sequence; after they had finished the last stage, it was the turn of the next village to the south. This continued, until Koimumu, as the last village (TP: *las ples*), brought things to an end, the whole process beginning again the following year.