14. To the aroma of the name: The celebration of a ritual of rock and tree

Introduction

The Rotenese are indifferent ritualists. As I have portrayed them, the Rotenese ‘can talk a good ceremony, but they are rarely concerned with actually performing one’ (Fox 1979:148). In what passes as ritual performance, the Rotenese do not ‘preserve’ routinised traditions; rather they continually recreate and reformulate their traditions through elaborate forms of oration. The order of any performance follows a simple set of ‘verbal frames’ that gives the ritual a ‘textual’ underpinning but only hints at how such frames are to be enacted (Fox 1988). Thus paradoxically no two rituals are the same, though they follow the same formulae.

This chapter describes the creation of a new ritual in an old guise. It is an account of my involvement in Rotenese ritual and requires, at the outset, an explanation of this involvement. In recounting my participation in this specific ritual, I propose to examine some of the basic Rotenese ideas about ritual.

Personal preface

During my first fieldwork on the island of Rote in 1965–66, my closest confidant, teacher and advisor on all matters Rotenese was the Head of the Earth in Termanu, Stefanus Adulanu of clan Meno. An old man, severely hobbled by arthritis, ‘Old Meno’, as he was generally referred to, kept to his house in the settlement of Ola Lain.

Since his youth, Meno had served as scribe to the court of Termanu. When the Lord Manek of Termanu, Ernst Amalo, was appointed as district officer (camat) of central Rote and was obliged to reside in the town of Ba’a, Old Meno continued to guide the domain. He and Amalo’s deputy, the Wakil Manek of Termanu, Frans Biredoko, would preside at court gatherings to judge disputes on behalf of the Lord Manek. In deference to Meno, these court gatherings were generally held in Ola Lain rather than in the centre of the domain, Feo Popi.

The figures of Manek (Lord) and Dae Langak (Head of the Earth) represent the polarity on which the domain of Termanu was founded. Together as ruler and ritual authority, the ‘Wakil Manek’ and ‘Old Meno’ possessed sufficient personal
presence to maintain, for a time, the fiction that the traditions of Termanu remained intact, in spite of the past encroachments of the Dutch colonial government and the continuing bureaucratic intrusions of the Indonesian State.

Ernst Amalo, as Lord of Termanu, had granted me permission to conduct my research in his domain and had declared me his 'sister's child', an act that made him personally responsible for my physical welfare. To enable me to learn the traditions of Termanu, he entrusted me to Old Meno. Meno, however, took months to decide whether to take me and my work seriously. When he did, he adopted me as a 'son'. Thus I was curiously situated with the Lord Manek as my 'mother's brother' and the Head of the Earth as my 'father'. My social situation was particularly curious, in terms of Rotenese social conventions, since the Lord Manek represented the pinnacle of royal status from which all nobility was derived whereas the Head of the Earth, in formal contrast, embodied a primordial commoner status.

To complicate matters, Ernst Amalo arranged residence for me and my wife in the village of Ufa Len, near where his deputy, Frans Biredoko, resided. I lived in the house of another man, Mias Kiuk, of the commoner clan Ingu Beuk, whose wife had come from the noble Biredoko line. In time, Kiuk also accepted me as a 'son' and this acceptance provided me with another network of social relationships. Here, too, I had a 'father' of commoner origin and a 'mother's brother' of high noble status.

Ola Lain, where Meno lived, was about 4 or 5 km from where I lived in Ufa Len. At least once or twice a week, I would journey to Meno's residence to see him and to attend court sessions. Through the whole of my stay on Rote, even after I had moved to reside in other domains, I would return to Ola Lain to see Old Meno and to continue our discussions.

When I finished my field research and returned to Oxford to write my dissertation, I would, on occasion, write to Meno and he would usually reply. On one occasion, I wrote to announce the impending birth of my first child and he wrote to propose a Rotenese name for my son. This name eventually formed the basis for the teknonym by which I came to be addressed in Termanu.

As Meno’s son later recounted to me, the old man grew increasingly frail and, on 30 March 1970, he died. By one reckoning, he was eighty-eight. By my estimation, based on his memories of past events, old Meno must have been well into his seventies when he died.

Two years later, in September 1972, I returned to Rote and once more took up residence in Ufa Len. Immediately on my arrival, as Meno's returning 'son', I proposed to hold a concluding mortuary ritual in his honour. I discussed my
proposal first with Meno’s Rotenese son, my ‘elder brother’ Ayub, and, with his concurrence, I publicly announced an intention to erect a tutus and to carry out the ceremonies associated with it.

**Tutus as ritual of rock and tree**

A *tutus* is the union of rock and tree. It consists of a ring of smooth stones set on a foundation of loose rock extending around the base of a large tree. This forms a broad stone seating platform that serves as a monument to the dead, a representation erected only to prominent individuals as the final, optional stage in a succession of mortuary rituals.

![Figure 14.1: Erecting the Tutus in Honour of ‘Old Meno’](image)

All Rotenese rituals of the life cycle are phrased in a botanic idiom that draws multiple metaphoric analogies between human life and the growth of specific plants. Thus a single idiom encompasses both human and agricultural rituals.

For example, the marriage overtures to a potential wife-giver are spoken of as ‘a search for seed’. In the dyadic language of ritual, young unmarried women are likened to ‘coconut//areca nut palms’, and the marriage ceremony, in its traditional form, is performed so ‘that the shoot of the coconut may grow and that the germ of the areca nut may sprout’.
The mother’s brother, as the representative of the wife-giving maternal relatives, is referred to as ‘mother’s brother of origin’ (to’o-huk), using the term huk, which designates the ‘base, trunk or stem’ of a tree. The mother’s brother, in turn, refers to his sister’s children as his ‘plants’ (selek).

Maternal relatives represented by the mother’s brother perform the rituals that sustain the life and growth of those whom they have ‘planted’. All rituals from the pre-birth ceremonies that ‘open’ the womb for ‘the eldest sprout/the first fruit’ to the final ceremonies that conduct the deceased to the grave require the participation of maternal relatives. Specific symbolic payments are provided for each of these maternal rituals by those who share most intimately in the ‘name’ (nadek) of the person for whom they are performed. This is generally a group that considers itself a single ‘house’.

All Rotenese possess what is called a nade balakaik (a ‘hard, firm or strong name’). This name is given shortly after birth and remains unchanged throughout life. Unlike a variety of endearing ‘soft or tender names’ (nade mangana’uk) by which an individual may be addressed at different stages in life, a person’s hard name should not be spoken except in a ritual context. Various devices exist to hint at the ancestral basis of this hard name, which is not secret, but because of its intimate connection with the person, nonetheless ought not to be uttered.

A person’s hard name is his or her genealogical name and links that person to a succession of ancestral predecessors. Generally, this succession of ancestral names comprises a line of male predecessors. Female predecessors, however, for whom no bride-wealth was received, can and do provide links in this succession and often constitute critical junctures in lineage formation.

These genealogical names trace another form of ‘origin’ (huk). Unlike the origin traced through the maternal relatives that focuses on a person’s corporeal substance, the line of origin traced through names is identified with the ‘spirits’ (nitu) of those who are named. This origin is also intimately associated with the ‘renown’ (bo-nadek: literally, ‘the aroma of the name’) of one’s group. In this notion, aspects of spirit, name and renown merge as a single concern.

As a consequence of this distinction, when the burial has occurred and the members of the maternal line have been honoured and compensated for their ritual services, their role ends. Thereafter, the remaining mortuary rituals are the exclusive concern of those who share most closely the names of the

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1 In Termanu, this same term, huk, is also applied to designate the prior generation in a line of maternal derivation represented by the ba’i-huk; the ‘mother’s mother’s brother of origin’, while in east Rote (in the domains of Bilba, for example), the term huk is extended even further to a third generation of maternal derivation represented by the solo-huk, the ‘mother’s mother’s mother’s brother of origin’, which in this case denotes a male descendant within this line of origin.

2 Names are a subject of considerable cultural elaboration among the Rotenese. Here, I discuss only the nade balakaik, a person’s ‘hard name’.
To the aroma of the name

deceased. For the most part, these are the direct lineal successors of the dead person who have legitimised their rights of succession by their formal payments to the maternal relatives.

Subsequent mortuary rituals on the third, ninth, fortieth and sometimes the hundredth day after burial are directed to the spirit (*nitu*) of the deceased, who is known by his or her hard name. For the overwhelming majority of Rotenese, the celebration on the fortieth or hundredth day after burial marks the conclusion of these rituals.

For a few prominent individuals, a further *tutus* ceremony may be performed. In the Rotenese botanic idiom, such individuals may be likened to tall hardwood trees. Like their ‘hard names’, these individuals continue as prominent figures even after death. Thus, the chant lines:

- *Pota Popo lalo*  
- *Ma Solu Oebau sapu.*  
- *De late batu kakoli na*  
- *Ma lo ai tangatean na.*

As described in Rotenese chants, these trees provide shade for lowly ‘orphans and widows’, a metaphoric phrase that refers to the bereaved as well as to all those in a dependent status. Thus a prominent image of the ideal society—strong, erect and enduring—is that of a ‘dense forest or a thick wood’ (*toe-ao lasin/lelei nulan*).

**Meno’s tutus chant**

On my first fieldtrip, Meno himself provided me with one short example of a chant that pertains specifically to the ceremony of the *tutus*. The chant focuses on the process of replacement, which is succinctly expressed by a succession of genealogical names (in this case, a double succession of names, as required by the poetic rules of parallel composition). Thus in the chant, Nggongo Ingu Lai (*‘Nggongo of the Highlands’*) is replaced with his successor, Latu Nggongo, and Lima Le Dale (*‘Lima of the Riverbed’*) is replaced with Enga Lima.

This short chant is as follows:

- *Nggongo Ingu Lai lalo*  
- *Ma Lima Le Dale sapu*  
- *De lalo ela Latu Nggongo*

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3 It is possible to speculate that the Rotenese term *balakaik* (meaning ‘hard, stiff, strong’) is in fact a metaphoric expression based on the root (*kaik/ai*) for ‘tree’. Saying that something is *bala-kaik* implies that it is ‘tree-like’.
Ma sapu ela Enga Lima.
Boe te ela batu nangaitun
Ma ela ai nasalain.
De koluk Nggongo Ingu Lai
Te Latu Nggongo nangatu
Ma haik Lima Le Dale
Te Enga Lima nasalai.
Fo lae: Nggongo tutu’u batun
Na tao ela Latu Nggongo
Ma Lima lalai ain
Na peda Enga Lima.

And perishes leaving Enga Lima.
But he leaves a stone to sit on
And he leaves a tree to lean on.
Plucked is Nggongo Ingu Lai
But Latu Nggongo sits
And taken is Lima Le Dale
But Enga Lima leans.
They say: Nggongo’s sitting stone
Was made for Latu Nggongo
And Lima’s leaning tree
Was set for Enga Lima.

A *tutus* is concerned with succession and with the remembrance of names. The term ‘*tutus*’ is derived from the root *tu,* ‘(to) sit’; *nanga-tu* is the verb ‘to sit’; *tutuk* is ‘a seat’ (Jonker 1908:646). A *tutus* is, however, a special kind of ‘seat’: a ring of raised stones set around a large tree. Formerly, *tutus* were used as ceremonial points for the performance of clan ‘origin rituals’ known as *hus* (a term, like *huk,* derived from the root *hu,* meaning the ‘base’ or ‘stem’ of a tree, ‘origin’ or ‘cause’). It was at these annual origin ceremonies that the full list of genealogical names of the group was recited, beginning from the ‘origin’ (*hu*) of the group and continuing, in proper succession, to the generation of the living. The earliest clan *tutus* were monuments to the origin of the clan and the *tutus* itself was the locus of the names that derived from this origin. It was a fundamental point of genealogical reckoning.

In Termanu, *hus* ceremonies ceased to be performed in the 1920s or early 1930s. For many Rotenese of the present generation, however, the association of *hus* and *tutus* is so strong that these two distinct celebrations have come to be regarded as if they were a single ritual. Indeed, for Rotenese Christians in 1972, a *tutus* ceremony was, like the *hus,* a relic of the past.

### The Christian polemic against hus and tutus ceremonies

Already in the nineteenth century, *tutus* and *hus* ceremonies were denigrated in Christian preaching. Both ceremonies were viewed with suspicion because they involved contact with the spirits of the dead, who, in Christian eyes, were designated as *setan.* An example of this association can be seen in the brief text recorded by the Dutch linguist J. C. G. Jonker from the local Rotenese ‘religious teacher’ D. A. Johannes at the turn of the century. In this text, Johannes rejects
any association of *tutus*-building with Biblical practice or with Dutch custom. Instead, by linking the *tutus* with offerings to the spirits, Johannes insinuates that such ceremonies are opposed to proper Christian practice:

For particular individuals, a *tutus* is erected. Some say that the purpose of the *tutus* is the same as in the Bible where it is said that the Jews erected stone monuments of honour, and some say it is the same as Dutch plastered graves. But the Rotenese do not erect *tutus* on graves, but at the base of trees set apart from the graves of the dead. When they erect a *tutus*, they make a feast at the base of the tree and they beat gongs, race horses, and dance. Some say that the purpose of the *tutus* is to recall and remember the one who has died. This could be but I think not. Those who erect a *tutus*, whenever they pass it, leave betel and areca nut at the *tutus* and then go on. What is the purpose of that? I think that this comes close to the truth and I suspect that the betel and areca nut is left so that the dead may partake of it and this is the purpose of the *tutus*: for the spirits of those who have died and who wander around and are tired, that they may rest at the *tutus*. (Jonker 1911:84, 112)

Eventually, this kind of polemic had its effect and *tutus* and *hus* ceremonies were effectively ended in Termanu. Thus, at the time of my precipitous announcement that I would erect a *tutus* in Meno’s honour, there had been no *tutus* ceremony held in Termanu for several decades—perhaps for as long as 50 years. Precisely what this ceremony would involve was therefore by no means clear.

No-one questioned the suitability of performing such a ritual for Meno since he was an esteemed figure in the domain, nor did anyone reject my claim of an obligation to sponsor such a performance. If, however, it is true that Rotenese prefer to ‘talk’ a good ceremony rather than actually perform one, my proposal provided potential for an ideal ritual. Meno died on 30 March 1970 and, based on Rotenese ritual requirements for sequences of multiple threes, a minimum of three years had to elapse before a *tutus* ceremony could be performed. At the time of my announcement of the ceremony in September, it was clear that there would have to be six months before the ceremony could be performed.

As an initiator of the ceremony, it might be presumed that I held a privileged position to be able to direct its performance. In fact, my chief task was getting various participants to cooperate. Preparation and organisation were paramount. The ceremony was a topic of endless conversation but most of the talk focused on practical matters: how much rice, how much palm gin, how many horses would race, what gifts would be given to the horsemen and to the chanters? That there would be a great feast, horseracing and chanting was clear but what

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4 Elsewhere on Rote, these ceremonies continued for much longer. Now the celebration of the *hus* is confined to ceremonies in one area of west Rote.
the ‘ceremony’ would consist of was never discussed in any detail. To a great extent, the ‘performance’ was left to an uncertain number of ‘performers’ at the time of the ceremony.

At the time of the ceremony, my responsibility in attending to the demands of an improvised organisation, the requirement of having to perform a specific role (rather than being able to move more freely as an observer) and the need to respond to contingencies during the celebration limited my ability to study what I was sponsoring. In the end, several thousand people attended the celebration and most of the work involved in it was either delegated or simply assumed by the appropriate individuals. In so far as I succeeded in carrying out my expected role, I was unable to observe all that went on. Much of what occurred I learned only after the fact, when those delegated with particular tasks informed me of what had happened.

This chapter is by no means a complete record of all the events that followed my announcement of the proposed ceremony; it is not a detailed account of all the activities involved in erecting the tutus; and it is not an analysis of all the chants spoken in celebrating its construction.

Instead, in this chapter, I wish to offer comment on Rotenese ritual as a creative process—on how ‘tradition’, defined in its broadest sense to include the full cultural resources of a community, can be called on to create an appropriate performance. The tutus ceremony, which I proposed for enactment, was performed, after a long hiatus, by a wholly Christian population. This critical factor, my peculiar involvement in the ceremony and a complex set of changes that had been imposed on the domain of Termanu all prompted a substantial restructuring of the social and symbolic underpinnings of the ritual. The ceremony that eventuated, however, satisfied the expectations of a Rotenese ritual and, to judge from general comments after the ceremony, was regarded as ‘traditional’.

**Preparation for the tutus ceremony**

Between the time of my first fieldtrip and my second trip, the domain of Termanu ceased to be recognised as an official unit within the Indonesian governmental structure. The domains of Termanu, Keka and Talae were joined to form a single district (kecamatan) and ‘village areas’ consisting of a number of scattered settlements were designated as desa (‘villages’). To emphasise this transformation, all desa were accorded new names. Although the domain remained the popular focus of social and personal identities, these changes formally ended the role of the Manek as Lord of the Domain and the Dae Langak as Head of the Earth. Moreover, these changes introduced divisions within the domain.
The settlement of Ufa Len, where I had resided on my first trip, had become part of Desa Nggodi Meda, while Meno’s settlement at Ola Lain had become part of Desa Ono Tali. The new names for these villages were explicitly chosen to express a complementarity. Nggodi Meda and Ono Tali allude to wealth measured in gold and water buffalo. They are dyadic names taken from a short poem that is quoted widely in various versions:  

\[
\begin{align*}
Lilo &\text{ ta dai oma} & \text{If the gold is not enough to make an oma’s weight} \\
Nggodi &\text{ meda fo dai oma.} & \text{Smelter a bit to make an oma.} \\
Kapa &\text{ ta dai fadi} & \text{If the buffalo is not old enough to have a sibling} \\
Ono &\text{ tali fo dai fadi.} & \text{Draw a rope to add a sibling.}
\end{align*}
\]

The poetic allusion here is to a supportive mutuality that completes what is lacking in the other, and the names Nggodi Meda (‘Smelter a bit’) and Ono Tali (‘Draw a Rope’) signify this mutuality.

A further complementarity between the villages was established in the choice of their ‘new’ headmen. Frans Biredoko, the former Wakil Manek, became the village headman of Desa Nggodi Meda and Ayub Adulanu, who had succeeded his father, became the village headman of Desa Ono Tali. Together they recreated the fundamental opposition (between the Lord and the Head of the Earth) that structured the domain, but in this case as the leaders of separate units at the same level in a new bureaucratic structure. It was within this new framework that the ordering of the tutus ritual had to be accommodated.

The first issue that had to be settled was where along the road joining the two villages the tutus was to be located. Old Meno’s grave was at Ola Lain in Desa Ono Tali. A tutus, however, must always be erected at a distance from the grave. There was a good site with an excellent tall tree near the border between Ono Tali and Nggodi Meda but definitely on the Nggodi Meda side of the ‘border’. This location, my involvement and the insistence of Frans Biredoko on having the tutus in Nggodi Meda were persuasive but the issue had to be deliberated at length and alternative possibilities considered. Ultimately, an argument based on symbolic complementarity prevailed. Since Old Meno’s grave was in Ono Tali, where it was the primary responsibility of his elder son, Ayub, it was considered appropriate that his tutus should be in Nggodi Meda, where I as the ‘younger son’ was to have principal responsibility. In concurring on the matter of location, Ayub himself articulated this formulation of responsibility. Other factors—for example, that the largest and wealthiest branch of clan Meno resided within the boundaries of Nggodi Meda—were clearly relevant but not alluded to in discussions.

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5 For another version of this poem, which refers to the two main rivers of the domain of Ba’a, see Fox (1980:58).
A major obstacle to the performance of the ceremony centred on this branch of clan Meno. One of Biredoko’s sons wanted to marry a woman from this branch of the Meno clan. The woman’s family was agreeable since this offered a marriage of high status; but perhaps for the converse reason, Frans Biredoko opposed the marriage. As a result, Ayub, as the head of Meno, was placed in a position of opposition to Frans, although personally the two men were close friends. For more than six months, the position remained deadlocked and, for this period, no planning could proceed for the tutus.

Most of the community at Ufa Len was in favour of the marriage, including the boy’s mother. In terms of my adopted kinship position, Fran’s son was my ‘father’s sister’s son’. Thus I was called on to intervene. This, however, was hardly necessary. Everyone, including Frans Biredoko, realised that I had only limited time on Rote. My evident need to get on with preparations for the ceremony was thus used by others as one of the arguments to persuade Frans to relent in his opposition. In the end, he did relent and negotiated bride-wealth for the marriage. This cleared the way to resume preparations.

Once the way was cleared, my next task was to acquire the animals that would be needed for the feast. My other task was to dispel worries that the ceremony—however it was to be performed—was going to be conducted without Christian blessing. To resolve this problem, I was able to barter a watch for a large pig owned by the Christian preacher and local chanter Esau Pono. On agreeing to provide an animal for the ceremony, he also agreed to preside at the ceremonies on the day of the feast.

All feasts require a calculation of needs. These calculations are reckoned more in terms of meat than in rice since an invitation to a feast is phrased, in Rotenese, as an invitation ‘to eat meat’. Since feasts are generally open affairs, one can never be certain how many people will come. It was assumed that a majority of the two villages would come and it was considered likely others would come from further away. Since the tutus involved a single feast and there were to be no meat distributions, which often double the number of animals slaughtered, I was advised to acquire one large water buffalo, five good-sized pigs and a goat for any Muslims who might attend the celebration. If more animals were needed on the day of the feast, it would always be possible to conclude a quick deal, generally at a higher than normal price, to acquire the necessary animals from stocks at hand in the village.

Besides the expectation of rice, which is brought as a contribution to a feast, there was the possibility that there would be an additional contribution of animals. Uncertainty, however, about the nature of social obligations for this kind of ceremony made calculations difficult. In this context, however, village Nggodi Meda was considered the ‘feast-giver’.
In the end, members of Nggodi Meda contributed more than 400 kg of unhusked rice to the feast, with prominent members of clan Meno from Nggodi Meda contributing rice and animals. At dawn on the day of the feast, H. Tupuama, the head of the branch of clan Meno in Nggodi Meda, whose daughter was to marry Fran’s son, brought a large water buffalo, which he slaughtered as his personal contribution to the ceremony.6

Another major task was to acquire sufficient palm gin for the feast and for the night’s celebration that was to precede it. As Mias Kiuk assured me, ‘If there is enough gin, people don’t even remember if they have eaten’. Securing a sufficient supply meant contracting an entire week’s production from the main licensed stills in Termanu and in the neighbouring domain of Ba’a. This production came to more than 100 L of palm gin. Besides the gin, I had to acquire a substantial supply of tobacco, betel and areca nuts, coffee, sugar, spices, kerosene and spiritus for pressure lamps as well as a variety of ‘gifts’ to bestow on the chanters and horse riders who would take part in the performance. Additional rice and animals were required to feed the men who erected the tutus and the women who pounded rice in preparation for the main feast.

Erecting and naming the tutus

A tutus is a model of construction simplicity. It is an enduring structure built to accommodate the tree it surrounds. There is enough loose rock around the tree to allow for years of growth without any disturbance to the general structure. Erecting the tutus entailed no special ceremony and work was organised by Frans Biredoko as a collective village effort. The only heavy labour required was in carrying flat river rocks from the nearby riverbed. At one stage, village schoolchildren were given several hours’ free time to join in the carrying of smaller rocks to place around the tree. These loose rocks formed the inner core of the construction on which and around which the heavier flat river rocks were set. Once erected, the tutus had to be named. Mias Kiuk assembled the elders and ritual chanters of Nggodi Meda and Ono Tali for a special meeting. The Indonesian word sidang, associated with a special church gathering, was used to underline the seriousness of the discussion. Only in retrospect did I realise that this ‘naming’ was the single most important step in all the preparations for the

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6 The only exception to this pattern of contributions was Ayub Adulanu, who contributed a large quantity of rice although he was not from Nggodi Meda. A tally was kept of all individual contributions and was given to me after the feast as a record. Members of Nggodi Meda also contributed all the cooking equipment and other utensils that were used for the feast. A record was kept of these contributions as well. As for animals, as far as I was able to ascertain after the feast, two water buffalo, five pigs and two goats were slaughtered to feed the assembled guests. Although I acquired most of these animals, the slaughtering was delegated. To this day, I am uncertain whether one of my five pigs was slaughtered for the sidang to decide the name of the tutus or whether this was an animal that Mias Kiuk supplied himself.
ceremony. Mias Kiuk slaughtered a pig and provided the rice for the evening’s gathering at which various individuals proposed different names and everyone argued about the significance and merits of these names.

In the end, the name ‘Dale Sue’ was agreed on. This name, like all of the names proposed, consists of half of a complementary set. In ritual language, Dale Sue pairs with Tei Lae. Dale//Tei forms a dyadic set meaning ‘inside, stomach’ and Sue//Lae another set meaning ‘affection, love, empathy’. Thus one possible translation of Dale Sue would be ‘inner affection’. Although I did not enter into the debate about the choice of the name, the debate was carried out in my presence and for my benefit since the ‘inner affection’ alluded to in the name was my affection for Meno that prompted the tutus celebration.

Finally, when the name had been set, a formal announcement of the ceremony could be made. Informally, everyone over a wide area had long been aware of the target date that had been set for the celebration: Saturday, 30 June 1973. Nevertheless, an announcement had to be sent to the relevant government officials: the Camat and the Wakil Bupati. A special document was prepared in proper, formal Indonesian with the heading Berita Hus/Tutus Dale Sue (‘Announcement of the Hus/Tutus Dale Sue’). In providing a brief summary of Meno’s life and work as grounds for holding the ceremony, this document explicitly identified the ceremony to be performed as a composite of a hus and a tutus ceremony—thus combining two distinct and separate rituals. At this point, after the Berita was sent, the stage was set for the celebration itself.

The celebration of Hus/Tutus ‘Dale Sue’

The night before the feast was devoted to a major part of the ceremony: the inauguration of the tutus by ritual chanting accompanied by the beating of a drum or gong (bapa). The chants for this kind of occasion are known as hahate bini. They recount a eulogised origin. Verbal invitations had gone out to chanters in the surrounding area and five prominent chanters came forward to vie with one another: Mesak Bedak and Johannes Bauanan from the domain of Korbaffo and Ta’e Dau, Peu Malesi and Set Apulungi from Termanu. (Other capable chanters were present but chose not to take an active part in the chanting.) Each of these chanters took turns reciting and responding to the other, each recounting a version of an origin that would often take its lead from another chanter’s poetic imagery.

The chanter Peu Malesi, who was a participant in the debate about the name of the tutus, represented the village of Nggodi Meda. Since he was aware of local ideas about the intention of the performance, his initial chanting set the direction for the other chanters. The young chanter Set Apulungi, a Ndaonese
resident from Mok Dae in Ono Tali village, turned out to be particularly fluent. There was a strong alternation between these two, which left the other chanters to draw their themes from these two contenders. From time to time, one or another chanter, especially the two from Korbaffo, would withdraw to lead the circle-dancing that went on simultaneously with the reciting on the *tutus* around the tree.

![Figure 14.2: Peu Malesi leading the chanting on the night before the Tutus Celebration](image)

Those chants that I was able to record amid other activities ran to hundreds of lines. They form a small corpus with an internal structure of its own, collectively shaped by the way particular chanters responded to each other’s language. Here I will refer only to Malesi’s chanting, which guided the rest. This chanting was consciously worked in advance to express the intentions of the ceremony as it was conceived by the Nggodi Meda community. Malesi took various turns. Each successive turn, however, rephrased the same constructed narrative. Following the Rotenese convention of naming chants after their principal chant character, the narrative fashioned to fit the occasion was named *Funu Feo ma Tepa Doki*. The chant told of Funu Feo//Tepa Doki’s journey to Rote, his encounter with Sio Meda//Lepa Lifu, their ‘sharing of thoughts’, Funu Feo//Tepa Doki’s departure for his own land, Sio Meda//Lepa Lifu’s death, Funu Feo//Tepa Doki’s return and his decision to erect a *tutus* in honour of Sio Meda//Lepa Lifu. Essentially, it was a straightforward narrative, in ritual-language form, of my relationship with Meno from the time of my first visit and thus of the origin of the *tutus* itself.
Malesi’s narrative begins with a formulaic opening that places events in a specific symbolic setting in the ritual past. In Rotenese rituals, the symbolic coordinates of north//west are opposed to those of south//east. To identify my place of origin, Malesi created the new dyadic set, Amerika//Olana (America//Holland).7

Funu Feo//Tepa Doki speaks, saying:

At one point of his chanting, Malesi inserted an explanation for the different peoples of the world based on a common Rotenese interpretation of the Biblical tale of Noah. In Rotenese, Noah has become Nok Bulan (literally, ‘Coconut of the Moon’) and his three sons, Ham Nok, Sem Nok and Jafe Nok. The Rotenese claim to derive from Sem Nok, whereas the Dutch and others are said to derive from Jafe Nok. As a descendant of Jafe Nok, living in America//Holland, Funu Feo//Tepa Doki sets out in his boat to sail to Rote (Lote do Kale), passing the dangerous straits of Puku Afu that separate the island from Timor.

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7 In the domain of Thie, in southern Rote, another chanter faced with the need to identify my place of origin created the poetically pleasing new dyadic set, Amerika//Afrika (America//Africa).
Eventually, Funu Feo//Tepa Doki reaches Termanu (Buna Dale ma Koli Dale) and anchors at a site on the northern coast, Oe No ma Kedi Poi. There, Funu Feo//Tepa Doki meets two characters who stand watch and are likened to Frans Biredoko and Mias Kiuk. In various origin chants—as, for example, that for the origin of rice and millet—personified objects are washed ashore where they are then picked up and carefully carried around the island. Malesi uses a similar imagery, but in a figurative fashion, to emphasise the desire for knowledge that brought me to Ufa Len:

\[
\begin{align*}
Ko’o manganana’un & \quad \text{They cradle him softly} \\
Ma ifa tapandondo’en… & \quad \text{And they lift him gently…} \\
Ko’o lo ndolu ingu & \quad \text{Cradling with knowledge of the land} \\
Ma ifa lo lela leo. & \quad \text{And lifting with wisdom of the clans} \\
Mai Ufa Lai Ama & \quad \text{Coming to Ufa Lai Ama [Ufa Len]} \\
Ma mat Latuk Oe No… & \quad \text{And coming to Latuk Oe No…}
\end{align*}
\]

There, in Ufa Len, Funu Feo//Tepa Doki explains his purpose for coming. Here, the Rotenese metaphors are particularly dense and elusive. To share one’s thoughts is said to make the ‘head of gold grow tall and the tail of iron grow wide’. This sharing of thoughts is associated with the sharing of ‘blood or fluid’, a relationship that is likened figuratively to the dripping of lontar juice into a single bucket. All of these images are compressed in Funu Feo//Tepa Doki’s statement:

\[
\begin{align*}
Au mai sanga dudu’ak falu & \quad \text{I come to seek eight views} \\
Ma sanga a’afik sio & \quad \text{And to seek nine thoughts} \\
Fo ela au tao neu besi ikok & \quad \text{That I may make an iron tail} \\
Ma au tao neu lilo langak & \quad \text{And I may make a gold head} \\
Fo lilo langan nama-tua & \quad \text{That the gold head may grow tall} \\
Ma besi ikon nama-nalu. & \quad \text{And the iron tail may grow wide.} \\
Boso ladi lilo langan & \quad \text{Don’t snap the gold head} \\
Ma boso ketu besi ikon. & \quad \text{And don’t break the iron tail.} \\
Boso ketu titi-nonosin & \quad \text{Don’t break the dripping juice of relations} \\
Boso ladi da-fa & \quad \text{Don’t snap the flow of blood} \\
Bei nai Kale daen & \quad \text{While still in the Land of Kale} \\
Ma bei nai Lote oen… & \quad \text{And still in the Water of Lote…}
\end{align*}
\]

In response to this request, Funu Feo//Tepa Doki is directed to meet Sio Meda//Lepa Lifu, with whom he becomes a ‘friend and companion’ (sena//tia), who shares with him ‘eight views and nine thoughts’. These thoughts Funu Feo//Tepa Doki takes with him when he returns to the North Land and West Water.
In 1973, according to Malesi’s chanting, Funu Feo//Tepa Doki returns and searches for his friend and companion, but the ‘Heights have requested and Heaven has demanded, requested his friend and demanded his companion’, Sio Meda//Lepa Lifu. On learning this, Funu Feo//Tepa Doki responds, saying:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Au afi taon na le'e} & \quad \text{I am thinking about what to do} \\
\text{Ma au dua taon na le'e} & \quad \text{And I am pondering about what to do} \\
\text{Tianga sapu nitu} & \quad \text{My friend has died a spirit death} \\
\text{Do senanga lalo mula.} & \quad \text{Or my companion has met a ghostly demise.} \\
\text{Ma leo au idung nai ia} & \quad \text{Yet my nose is here} \\
\text{Ma au matang nai ia} & \quad \text{And my eyes are here} \\
\text{Fo au sue fo to lesi} & \quad \text{For I have great affection} \\
\text{Ma au lae fo dai lena.} & \quad \text{And I have overwhelming love.}
\end{align*}
\]

Funu Feo//Tepa Doki thinks for a while and then says:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Au daeng nai dame do} & \quad \text{My land is far away} \\
\text{Te tao-tao au ela ho kuen} & \quad \text{But what if I leave the odour of the civet} \\
\text{Ma oeing lai sei sala} & \quad \text{And my waters are at a distance} \\
\text{Te tao-tao au ela piu moka.} & \quad \text{But what if I leave the smell of the moka-fish.} \\
\text{De lane ai mai dalak} & \quad \text{Set a tree along the road} \\
\text{Ma tutu batu mai enok} & \quad \text{And pile rocks along the path} \\
\text{Tao neu koni-keak} & \quad \text{To serve as a remembrance} \\
\text{Ma tao neu hate-haik.} & \quad \text{And to serve as a memory.}
\end{align*}
\]

Here, strong odours—those of the civet cat and of a particularly pungent-smelling fish—signify remembrance. Both creatures mark their passing with powerful smells. In this case, the implication is that the lingering odour is that of Funu Feo//Tepa Doki rather than that of Sio Meda//Lepa Lifu.

At another point in his chanting, Malesi used an entirely different set of metaphors comparing the tutus with the burial cloths given by the mother’s brother to wrap the sister’s child. In the process, he was able to signal the name given to the tutus:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Dale sue Sio Meda boe} & \quad \text{Inner affection for Sio Meda} \\
\text{Ma tei lae Lepa Lifu boe} & \quad \text{And heart’s love for Lepa Lifu} \\
\text{Tehu dae lai dame do} & \quad \text{Although the lands are far away} \\
\text{De palu pita ta losa} & \quad \text{The winding sheet does not reach} \\
\text{Ma oe lai sei salak} & \quad \text{And the waters are at a distance} \\
\text{De la soni ta losa…} & \quad \text{The burial cloth does not reach…} \\
\text{De ala lane ai mai dalak} & \quad \text{So they set a tree along the road} \\
\text{Ma tutu batu nai enok} & \quad \text{And pile rocks on the path} \\
\text{Fo tao neu palu pita} & \quad \text{To make a winding sheet} \\
\text{Ma tao neu la soni.} & \quad \text{And make a burial cloth.}
\end{align*}
\]
Finally, having erected the *tutus*, Funu Feo/Tepa Doki boards his boat and returns to his land in the north-west. Thus, according to the chant, my primary reason for returning to Rote was to perform the *tutus* ceremony and when I had done this, I could depart.

Rain, sometime after midnight, interrupted the chanting, which would otherwise have continued until dawn, and eventually everyone dispersed to await the next day’s activities. For their efforts, four chanters received fancy pocketknives and Malesi received a large hunting knife.

In comparison, the next day’s formal ceremonies were brief, modern and Christian. Someone, at great effort, brought several woven-plastic chairs and set them on top of the *tutus* for honoured guests. The preacher, Esau Pono, led a prayer and then spoke eloquently but briefly. Ayub’s eldest daughter, with a fluency learned mainly from her grandfather, spoke on behalf of clan Meno. I then spoke briefly.¹ My simple chant harkened back to the links between Nggodi Meda and Ono Tali, evoking some of the same images that Malesi had used the night before:

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¹ I have briefly described my involvement in this *tutus* ritual in an earlier paper published in Indonesia (Fox 1982).
After my short chant, the ceremony concluded. For the main participants, traditional costume was required and all speeches were in ritual language. None of these speeches followed the narrative format of the night before. Instead, they focused on the *tutus* as a form of remembrance and monument of succession (thus, much like the poem that Meno had provided to me for such a *tutus* ceremony).

Thereafter, most of the day’s attention was directed to feasting and to the running of the horses. This racing originated from a ritual circumambulation on horseback that was the equivalent during the day of circle-dancing at night. Since for the feast people sat scattered around the *tutus*, there was too little room to race the horses in a circle around the tree. It was therefore decided to hold the races along a straightway on the road near the *tutus*. This gave everyone the opportunity of a good view of the racing.

There were two categories of racing: 1) *lala’ok*, a dignified trotting style of race in which the horse carries its tail high and may not break its stepping gait; and 2) *kukuak*—what Rotenese call ‘dog running’—an exciting but undignified outright gallop. *Lalaok* requires skill in handling and usually the owner rides his own horse; for *kukuak*, young boys ride most of the horses with an abandoned recklessness. There were at least 12 horses in each category, including horses from the domains of Ba’a and Korbaffo, and a succession of races were run at intervals, leading to the final race in each category in late afternoon as the day’s activities were coming to an end. Almost as if to complete the complementarity that had characterised all of the stages of the *tutus*, the horse of a schoolteacher from the village of Ono Tali took first place in the *lala’ok* category and a horse from the village of Nggodi Meda took first place in the *kukuak* category. With the final race and the giving of the prizes—different-quality sarongs, dishes or cigarette lighters for the top four winners in each category—the day’s festivities ended.

**Conclusion: Constructing ritual in retrospect**

A ritual on Rote does not end with its performance. It is, as it were, ‘re-performed’ in discussions afterwards and often in this re-performance it is given a more ordered representation.

My initial reaction after the ceremony was simply one of relief in having been able to carry out my proposal in spite of initial obstacles and continuing uncertainties about what would happen. Local attitudes, however, were more positive. The *hus/tutus* ceremony was judged a major success. The chanting and dancing of the preceding night and the morning’s brief ritual speaking were considered the mark of tradition. It was seen as important that no-one had used Indonesian, which is
a permissible, though non-traditional, ritual register for ceremonial gatherings. Furthermore, contributions to the feast were substantial and numerous. This was clear evidence of widespread local support and an assurance of sufficient food for the feast. The quantity of gin that I had provided satisfied the ‘elders’ and added a glow to guests’ perceptions of the proceedings. Enough horses had come for the racing and the racing was seen as exciting. Everyone seemed satisfied by the outcome of the races and with the gifts that had been awarded. Also, quite importantly, Ernst Amalo, the ‘retired’ Lord Manek of the domain, had come and pronounced his satisfaction with the day’s activities.

In retrospect, the symbolic duality of the proceedings was re-emphasised. The complementarity between the villages of Nggodi Meda and Ono Tali was confirmed in a series of oppositions: Ono Tali::Nggodi Meda, elder brother::younger brother, grave::tutus.

The fact that complementarity is a modality of argumentation and that these oppositions were arrived at to settle a disagreement about the location of the tutus did not lessen their validity once they had been agreed on. These oppositions had become part of a dual symbolic order. Even the outcome of the horseracing could be viewed as an appropriate confirmation of this order.

The chief resource for the creation of this order is a rich and varied poetic tradition based on canonical parallelism. With this resource, it is possible to vest any set of complementary oppositions with a full panoply of dyadic representations.

Once this has been accomplished, the whole system can be alluded to in terms of its parts. The ‘Dale Sue’ would be sufficient, in the local context, to invoke the hus/tutus ceremony and the relationships that went into producing it. In pointing to this power of invocation, one approaches an understanding of the creativity of Rotenese ritual.

Several years after the tutus ceremony, in 1977, I returned once more to Termanu, this time with the filmmaker Timothy Asch. By this time, the tutus had become an integral part of the local landscape, so that when a site was required to film Peu Malesi reciting the origin of his ancestor’s discovery of lontar juice, the tutus was chosen as the appropriate location.

The beginning and the end of the film, The Water of Words, focuses on the tutus, with Malesi, Ayub Adulanu, Frans Biredoko and Mias Kiuk sitting on it: ‘Nggongo’s sitting stone//Lima’s leaning tree.’ The aroma of the name lingered.