

10

Suti Solo do Bina Bane as a Personal Composition

This is a version of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* that belongs within the speech community of Termanu. It is entirely in the dialect of Termanu, but as a composition, it is not grounded in Termanu's traditional ritual knowledge. It is a beautiful, personal composition by an unusual poet, Zet Apulugi.

Zet Apulugi, as his name indicates, is a Ndaonese, the descendant of settlers from the tiny island at the western end of Rote.¹ I first encountered Zet in 1973 as a young man who was then living in the Mok Dae, a settlement in the village of Ono Tali. At the time, with Old Meno's son, I sponsored a final mortuary ceremony for Old Meno. The ceremony, known as *Lutu Tutus*, involved the creation of a raised stone platform surrounding a living tree as a monument in Meno's honour.²

The night before the main ceremony and feast was dedicated to chanting in remembrance of Old Meno. A number of leading chanters came from Termanu and from the neighbouring domain of Korbaffo and engaged, as was expected, in competition with one another. Pe'u Malesi was a prominent figure among these chanters because he was considered the representative

1 Ndaonese are settled in virtually every domain on the island of Rote. In some domains, Ndaonese are assimilated to a specific clan; in other domains, as in Termanu, individual Ndaonese settlers are incorporated in various clans. In Zet Apulugi's case, he retains his Ndaonese name: Apulugi. This suggests that his family is in an early stage of the process of assimilation to being considered fully 'Rotenese'.

2 I have described this ceremony and the preparations leading to its performance in Fox (1989).

of the village where I was living, Nggodi Meda. A particularly focused competition developed between Pe'u Malesi on behalf of Nggodi Meda and Zet Apulugi on behalf of Ono Tali. To me, Zet was clearly the more fluent speaker but in the judgement of all the elders who listened intently, Malesi's chanting was far superior. Repeatedly I was told that Zet's words were empty. He did not have ritual knowledge for proper chanting. At the time, I attributed these opinions to the fact that Zet was a young man in his early 20s and hardly of the age to be allowed to speak at a ceremony.

Although I had no chance to meet him after the ceremony in 1973, I remained interested in recording him at greater length. Fortunately, more than 30 years later, in 2006, I was able to invite him to join the first group of poets whom I recorded on Bali. On Bali, he related to me his background and the origins of his ritual language fluency. Unlike other Rotenese poets, for whom the transmission of ritual knowledge is crucial and who therefore invariably related their family situation and from which specific relative they learned their knowledge, Zet explained that his knowledge and fluency had come in a dream when he was still in school. An old man appeared to him holding a staff; slowly he prepared betel and areca nut and began to chew. After chewing for a while, he took a portion of the betel and areca nut from his mouth and put it into Zet's mouth. This was the spiritual transmission that transformed him. After the dream, Zet became fluent in ritual language. He told me that he would regularly join the older men of Termanu when they would gather and speak in ritual language. He would insist on speaking in their company, even though they objected to his impertinence. Thus, from an early age, Zet defined himself as an insistent ritual speaker but one who had little ritual knowledge to support his ritual speech.

Zet, it would seem, has little or no concern with the ritual underpinnings of the compositions that he produces. His compositions can be beautifully clear and uncomplicated. He knows enough to be able to fabricate ritual names to enhance his compositions. This is particularly maddening for those Rotenese who regard ritual knowledge as both the reason and the basis for composition. For this reason, Zet is more often shunned than he is appreciated.



Figure 10: Zet Apulugi

This recitation, recorded on 4 July 2006, is a good example of Zet Apulugi's oral artistry.

Zet's *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* narrative is straightforward compared, for example, with Old Meno's recitation, with its complex interweaving of sites and relations linking the Heavens, the Earth and the Sea. A woman with the ritual name Masi Bisa//Bisa Oli is credited with scooping

the shells from the sea. (These names resemble the names used by Joel Pellondou, Ole Masi//Bisa Oli, in his recitation during the same recording session in 2006.) Suti Solo//Bina Bane speak up and declare that they are widow and orphan, having lost their mother, Solo Saik//Suti Liun ('Solo of the Sea'/'Suti of the Ocean'), who has died in the depths of the sea. Zet emphasises the weeping and sadness of being orphaned and being left to float on one's own in the sea. In response, Masi Bisa//Bisa Oli offers to scoop up the shells and to place them on the earth but as Suti Solo//Bina Bane insist, in their reply, being on earth is insufficient without companionship. Suti Solo//Bina Bane ask for this companionship but also ask that eventually they be returned to the sea. Masi Bisa//Bisa Oli agrees to be a companion but, after a certain time, she returns the shells to the sea.

Zet's version is a unique telling of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane*. It is well composed with the full dyadic conventions of ritual language. Although it does not have the set of successive directives that are prominent in other versions of this composition from Termanu, it nevertheless constructs its own dialogue and beautifully conveys the theme of the orphan and widow.

Introduction: The Search for the Ritual Fish

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| 1. | <i>Inaka Masi Bisa</i> | The woman Masi Bisa |
| 2. | <i>Ma fetoka Bisa Oli</i> | And the girl Bisa Oli |
| 3. | <i>Ana lu'a na ndai tasin</i> | She lifts the fishnet for the sea |
| 4. | <i>Ma ana lo'a na seko metin</i> | And she takes the scoop-net for the tide |
| 5. | <i>Neu ndai sanga Dusu La'e</i> | Goes to fish in search of Dusu La'e |
| 6. | <i>Ma neu sanga Tio Holu</i> | And goes to seek for Tio Holu |
| 7. | <i>Fo Dusu la la'e ao</i> | For the Dusu that support themselves |
| 8. | <i>Fo Tio la holu ao.</i> | For the Tio that embrace themselves. |

Suti Solo do Bina Bane's Lament

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| 9. | <i>Te ana seko nai lifu be,</i> | But in whatever pool she scoops, |
| 10. | <i>Na Suti bonu nai lifu ndia</i> | Suti bobs in that pool |

11. *Ma ana ndai neu lek be,* And in whatever waterhole she fishes,
 12. *Na Bina ele nai lek ndia.* Bina floats in that waterhole.
 13. *Te kada ana bonu nai lek ndia* But he just bobs in that waterhole
 14. *Te ana bonu no nama-tani* But he bobs, crying tearfully
bobolu
 15. *Ma nasakedu dodopo.* And sobbing weepingly.
 16. *Boe ma Suti Solo mulai dede'ak* Then Suti Solo begins to speak
 17. *Ma Bina Bane mulai* And Bina Bane begins to talk, saying:
kokolak, nae:
 18. *'[Au] asa-kedu ma ama-tani* 'I am sobbing and crying,
nana,
 19. *Au momoli ana-mak* I have turned into an orphan
 20. *Ma au dadadi falu-ina.* And I have become a widow.
 21. *Au ina tebengo ta* I have no true mother
 22. *Ma au te'ong hungo ta.* And no origin aunt.
 23. *Au inang Solo Saik* My mother, Solo Saik
 24. *De ana sapu nai sain dalek* She has perished in the depths of the sea
 25. *Ma au te'ong Suti Liun* And my aunt, Suti Liun
 26. *De ana lalo nai liun dalek.* She has died in the depths of the ocean.
 27. *Besak ia au bonu boa nai* Now I bob like *boa* wood on top of
li poik the waves
 28. *Ma au ele piko nai tasi bafak,* And I drift like *piko* wood on the sea's
 surface,
 29. *Au ele piko o nasakeduk* I drift like *piko* wood, sobbing
 30. *Ma au bonu boa o namatanik,* And I bob like *boa* wood, crying,
 31. *Lu ko-boa nau-na* Tears like *bidara* fruit in the grass
 32. *Nama titi ate-lasi* Drip like sap as from an old *ate* tree
 33. *Ma pinu kaitio telana* Snot like *kaitio* [leaves] in the
 underbrush
 34. *Nama nosi oba-tula.* Pour forth like juice from a tapped
gewang.
 35. *Au mole duanga* My welfare is in twos
 36. *Ta tona kale hade* Does not sprout like proper rice
 37. *Ma au soda telunga* And my well-being is in threes
 38. *Ta le'a bu'u bete.* Does not grow like good millet.

39. *Au doi doso an'seli* I am suffering terribly
 40. *De au ele piko mai meti-ia* I have drifted like *piko* wood to this tidal site
 41. *Ma au bonu boa mai namo ia.* And I have bobbed like *boa* wood to this harbour.
 42. *Sueka mateik lai se* Who will have pity on me
 43. *Madalek lai se,* And who will have sympathy with me,
 44. *Na ana lipa nita au sodang* To look and see to my well-being
 45. *Ma ana mete nita au moleng* And focus and see my welfare
 46. *Nai lu mata pinu iduka,* With tears from my eyes, snot from my nose,
 47. *Nai nasakeduk dodopok dale.'* Sobbing, inwardly weeping.'

The Reply to Suti Solo do Bina Bane's Lament

48. *Boe ma inaka Masi Bisa* So the woman Masi Bisa
 49. *Ma fetoka Bisa Oli* And the girl Bisa Oli
 50. *Ana ndai toko nan* She fishes him up
 51. *Ma ana seko toko nan.* And she takes him up.
 52. *Boe ma nae:* Then she says:
 53. *'Au o o leo batu poi* 'I will take you to dwell on the top of the rocks
 54. *Ma au o o leo dae bafaka* And I will take you to dwell on the earth's surface
 55. *Te o soda ma nai li poik* Instead of your being on top of the waves
 56. *O soda ma nai tasi bafak.* Instead of your being on the sea's surface.
 57. *De o mu dae bafak* So you will go to the earth's surface
 58. *Ma o mu batu poi o* And you will go to the top of the rocks
 59. *O se masa kedu dodopo ia* You will continue to sob weepingly
 60. *Fo lu ta mada matam* For your tears will not dry from your eyes
 61. *Ma pinu ta meti idum.* And your snot will not ebb from your nose.
 62. *De o dudu'a fe au dudu'ak esa* Your pondering gives me to ponder

63. *Ma o kokolak fe au kokolak esa,* And your talk gives me to talk,
64. *Fo au bei dudu'a dalanga* For I am still pondering a way
65. *Ma au bei a'afi enong* And I am still thinking of a path
66. *Fo au amopo o lu matam* That I may dispel the tears from your eyes
67. *Ma au amopo o pinu idum.'* And I may dispel the snot from your nose.'

Suti Solo do Bina Bane's Reply

68. *Boe ma Suti Solo nahala ma nae:* So Suti Solo gives voice and says:
69. *'Faik ia o ndai ndano ma au* 'This day you fish me forth
70. *Ma o seko toko ma au.* And scoop me up.
71. *Nde ndia tehu hataboli mai seko metina* When someone comes to scoop in the tide
72. *Ana sanga du'u lalu-na* That person seeks morsels for their beer
73. *Ma ana sanga eke nggeto na* And that person seeks snacks for their drink
74. *Tehu losa na sona* But for that reason
75. *Boso nasu hibilu au,* Do not put me aside,
76. *Te au ia momoli ane-ana [?]* For I am here to grow into a person
77. *Ma au dadi hataboli.* And to become a human.
78. *De au leo dae bafok* So that I may dwell on the earth's surface
79. *Ma au leo batu poi.* And I may dwell on the top of the rocks.
80. *Te neuko-se au ta lili do neka* But if I am not attached or cared for
81. *Au sodanga nai liun mananggengeon* Then my well-being will be in the dark ocean
82. *Ma [au] molanga nai sain manatatana.* And my welfare will be in the pounding sea.
83. *De o ndai muni au nde ia* So when you fish and carry me here
84. *Tehu [au moli] neu tiak esa* I [will grow] to be a companion
85. *Ma au dadi neu senak esa.* And I will become a friend.
86. *De faik esa mate'ena* But on one particular day
87. *Ma ledo dua ma nuni* And at a certain time

88. *Na sona mo fali au leo liun dale* You will return me to the ocean's depths
89. *Do mo fali au leo sain dalek.* Or will return me to the sea's depths.
90. *Fo o po'i fali au* You will throw me back
91. *Leo liun do sain dalek.'* To dwell in the ocean and sea's depths.'

The Return to the Sea

92. *Boe ma ledo la soko muli* The sun inclines to the west
93. *Ma fai la loe iko* And the day descends at the tail
94. *Ledo soko leo muli* As the sun inclines toward the west
95. *Fo leo iko beku-ten* So that its tail hangs down
96. *Ma fai loe leo iko* And the day descends toward the tail
97. *Fo leo langa loloen.* So that its head is lowered.
98. *Boe ma inaka Masi Bisa* Then the woman Masi Bisa
99. *Ma fetoka Bisa Oli* And the girl Bisa Oli
100. *Ana dudu'a neu dalen* She ponders in her heart
101. *Ma ana a'afi neu tein.* And she thinks within herself.
102. *Ia momoli na momoli ana-mak* He grows, indeed grows as an orphan
103. *Ma ia dadadi na dadadi falu-ina.* And he becomes, indeed becomes a widow.
104. *Tehu esako mamana leleo napa lasan* But now in these surroundings
105. *Ndia neu oe manaleleuk* He goes to the winding waters
108. *Ma au nai dae bafak.* While I am on the earth's surface.
109. *Ami dua de'a-de'a* We two converse together
110. *Ma ami dua kola-kola.* And we two speak together.
111. *Nafada nae:* She speaks and says:
112. *'Ami dadi neu tiak* 'We have become companions
113. *Ma ami dadi neu senak.* And we have become friends.
114. *Te hu ana ta lili-neka nai dae bafak* But he has no attachment to the earth's surface
115. *Ma ana [ta] ingu-leo nai batu poi.* And he has no clanship on top of the rocks.

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| 116. | <i>De malole lenak,</i> | It would be far better if, |
| 117. | <i>Au uni falik la loe iko</i> | I bring him back to the lowered tail |
| 118. | <i>Meti sai-kala nggonga</i> | The tidal seas sounding |
| 119. | <i>Ma unu pedakala mada.</i> | And the edge of the dry reef |
| 120. | <i>Neni falik ana neu tasi tatain</i> | Taking him back to sea's edge |
| 121. | <i>Ma neni falik ana neu oli
bibifan.</i> | And taking him back to estuary's lip. |
| 122. | <i>Ana ele piko de neni leo liun</i> | That he may drift like <i>piko</i> wood to
the ocean |
| 123. | <i>Ma ana bonu boa de neni
leo sain.</i> | And bob like <i>boa</i> wood to the sea. |
| 124. | <i>De ana fali leo liun</i> | So that he may return to the ocean |
| 125. | <i>Ma ana fali leo sain.'</i> | And that he may return to the sea.' |
| 126. | <i>Boe ma besaka ana le'a
bu'u bete</i> | Now he sprouts like good millet |
| 127. | <i>Ma ana tona kale hade.</i> | And grows like proper rice. |
| 128. | <i>Nama tua kada nai liun dalek</i> | Grows large only in the ocean's depths |
| 129. | <i>Ma nama nalu kada nai
sain dalek.</i> | And grows long only in the sea's depths. |
| 130. | <i>Te ta nama-nalu nai batu poi</i> | He does not grow long on the top of
the rocks |
| 131. | <i>Ma ta nama-tua nai dae
bafak.</i> | And does not grow large on the earth's
surface. |
| 132. | <i>De ana losa kada ndia</i> | He has only gone there |
| 133. | <i>Fo besaka ita tuti popo
selukana.'</i> | So that now we may be connected again. |

Compositional Analysis and Comparison

Zet's recitation of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* is composed of 52 dyadic sets expressed in 133 lines. As a formal composition, Zet's version is well constructed: lines pair beautifully and successively. Nonetheless, compared with the versions of the other poets of Termanu, it is notably different. The differences are not so much in what the composition does but what it does not do. There is, for example, very little ritual grounding to the composition. Apart from *Suti Solo//Bina Bane*, the only ritual name

evoked is that of the woman who scoops up the orphaned shells, Masi Bisa//Bisa Oli. More significantly, there is relatively little of the recurrent formulaic phrasing that characterises most compositions. Suti Solo//Bina Bane's plaintive refrain is a pertinent example because it is considered one of the distinguishing features of the chant.

Old Meno uses the refrain:

<i>'Na Bina, au o se</i>	'Then I, Bina, with whom will I be
<i>Ma Suti, au o se</i>	And I, Suti, with whom will I be
<i>Fo au kokolak o se</i>	With whom will I talk
<i>Ma au dede'ak o se?</i>	And with whom will I speak?

Seu Ba'i follows Meno closely:

<i>'Au dede'ak o se</i>	'With whom will I speak
<i>Ma au kokolak o se?</i>	And with whom will I talk?

Pe'u Malesi uses a variation on this refrain:

<i>'Na au asalai o se</i>	'Then with whom will I recline
<i>Ma au angatu o se?</i>	And with whom will I sit?

Mikael Pellondou's refrain is like that of his cousin Seu Ba'i:

<i>'Nah, au kokolak o se</i>	'Then with whom will I speak
<i>Ma au dede'ak o se?</i>	And with whom will I talk?

Even in Joel Pellondou's short version of this chant, this refrain is used:

<i>'Fo au kokolak o se</i>	'With whom will I talk
<i>Ma au dede'ak o se?</i>	And with whom will I speak?

Pak Pono alternates between two refrains. One is the familiar refrain:

<i>'Na ami dede'ak mo se</i>	'Then with whom will we speak
<i>Ma ami kokolak mo se?</i>	And with whom will we talk?

The other, like that of Malesi, is a variant on this refrain:

<i>'Na ami mama bena neu se</i>	'Then on whom will we depend
<i>Ma ami maka bani neu se?</i>	And on whom will we rely?

Where one might expect this refrain to occur, Zet provides a multiline peroration, rather than the simple, expected formulaic phrase. Thus, for example, Zet's phrasing is:

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| 16. | <i>Boe ma Suti Solo mulai
dedè'ak</i> | Then Suti Solo begins to speak |
| 17. | <i>Ma Bina Bane mulai
kokolak, nae:</i> | And Bina Bane begins to talk, saying: |
| 18. | <i>'[Au] asa-ke-du ma ama-
tani nana,</i> | 'I am sobbing and crying, |
| 19. | <i>Au momoli ana-mak</i> | I have turned into an orphan |
| 20. | <i>Ma au dadadi falu-ina.</i> | And I have become a widow. |
| 21. | <i>Au ina tebengo ta</i> | I have no true mother |
| 22. | <i>Ma au tè'ong hungo ta.</i> | And no origin aunt. |

This is not a trivial difference. In ordinary discourse, a repetition of the phrase 'with whom will I speak, with whom will I talk' can be used to allude to this composition. In Termanu, no other lines are more evocative of this chant.

There are other stock formulaic phrases that one might expect in a *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* composition but that do not occur in Zet's composition. Old Meno, along with the other poets, often uses some variant of the formulaic phrase that asserts that something is 'good and proper'. This is not a formula that is distinctive to this composition. It is in fact a formulaic phrase that occurs in most compositions.

In Meno's composition, this formula is phrased as:

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| <i>'De malole-la so</i> | 'These things are good |
| <i>Ma mandak-kala so.'</i> | And these things are proper.' |

In Seu Ba'i's recitation this phrase occurs as:

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| <i>'De malole ndia so</i> | 'This is good |
| <i>Do mandak ndia so.'</i> | Or this is proper.' |

Malesi makes use of this formula in various ways; one such example is:

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| <i>'Ab, malole la so</i> | 'Ah, that would be good |
| <i>Ma mandak kala so'</i> | And that would be proper' |

Mikael Pellondou's phrasing is:

'Boe ma malole lai ndia 'Such things would be good
Ma mandak lai ndia' And such things would be proper'

Joel Pellondou twice uses only the orphan line, which can be understood to invoke its pair:

Malole la so That is good

Pak Pono has yet another variation on this recognisable formula:

Malole basa sila All this is good
Ma mandak basa sila. And all this is proper.

In Zet's recitation, this formula does not occur at all. The absence of this formula and other similar formulae, however, does not mean that Zet's recitation is completely without such standard formulaic phrasing. Zet, for example, utilises a common time-marking formula as follows:

86. *De faik esa mate'ena* But on one particular day
87. *Ma ledok dua ma nuni* And at a certain time

Some variation of this formula is used by several of the poets in their compositions.

In Meno's composition, this phrase occurs as:

Faik esa manunin On one certain day
Ma ledok esa mateben And at one particular time

In Mikael Pellondou's composition, he uses

De faik esa manunin At a certain day
Do ledok esa mate'ena Or at a particular time

Pak Pono begins his 2008 recitation with this formula:

Faik esa manunin On one particular day
Do ledok esa mate'e-na Or one certain time

Although Zet's composition has none of the familiar directives to the shells that punctuate the other versions of the *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* composition, he does, however, utilise the dyadic phrasing associated with

the directive that returns the shells to the sea. Old Meno's directive is illustrative of how this extended formula is phrased with its metaphoric reference to two kinds of light wood like *balsa*—*boa* wood and *piko* wood—that float on the sea's surface. Meno's directive is as follows:

<i>Fo ela fa oek ana mai</i>	So that when the current's water arrives
<i>Ma ela epo oek ana mai</i>	And when the eddy's water arrives
<i>Na bonu boa fo mu</i>	That bobbing like <i>boa</i> wood, you may go
<i>Ma ele piko fo mu,</i>	And drifting like <i>piko</i> wood, you may go,
<i>Leo sain dale mu</i>	To the sea, you may go
<i>Ma leo liun dale mu.</i>	And to the ocean, you may go.

Zet uses similar phrasing to describe both the arrival of the shells and their return to the sea, thus shaping a recurrent refrain in his composition. At the beginning of his composition, Suti Solo do Bina Bane describe their condition as follows:

27. <i>'Besak ia au bonu boa nai li poik</i>	'Now I bob like <i>boa</i> wood on top of the waves
28. <i>Ma au ele piko nai tasi bafak,</i>	And I drift like <i>piko</i> wood on the sea's surface,
29. <i>Au ele piko o nasakeduk</i>	I drift like <i>piko</i> wood, sobbing
30. <i>Ma au bonu boa o namatanik'</i>	And I bob like <i>boa</i> wood, crying'

Much the same phrasing is used again 10 lines later:

40. <i>'De au ele piko mai meti-ia</i>	'I have drifted like <i>piko</i> wood to this tidal site
41. <i>Ma au bonu boa mai namo ia.</i>	And I have bobbed like <i>boa</i> wood to this harbour.
42. <i>Sueka maeik lai se</i>	Who will have pity on me
43. <i>Madalek lai se'</i>	And who will have sympathy with me'

And again this phrasing is used towards the end of the composition as the shells are returned to the sea:

121. <i>Ana ele piko de neni leo liun</i>	That he may drift like <i>piko</i> wood to the ocean
122. <i>Ma ana bonu boa de neni leo sain.</i>	And bob like <i>boa</i> wood to the sea.

123. *De ana fali leo liun* So that he may return to the ocean
 124. *Ma ana fali leo sain.*' And that he may return to the sea.'

In the context of this composition, a more curious formula that Zet uses twice in his recitation is the invocation of sprouting rice and millet. The first use of this formula is combined with another formula that portrays the condition of being in an unfortunate or uncomfortable position—that is, literally being at ‘twos and threes’:

35. *Au mole duanga* My welfare is in twos
 36. *Ta tona kale hade* Does not sprout like proper rice
 37. *Ma au soda telunga* And my wellbeing is in threes
 38. *Ta lè'a bu'u bete.* Does not grow like good millet.

The same formula is used again to confirm that, on their return to the sea, the shells do indeed prosper.

125. *Boe ma besaka ana lè'a* Now he sprouts like good millet
 bu'u bete
 126. *Ma ana tona kale hade.* And grows like proper rice.³

It is not the case that Zet is less formulaic in his composition than the other poets, but rather that he is, as he has always tried to be, idiosyncratic. Although he adheres to the formal canons of dyadic composition, he does not use the formulae that are expected in such compositions nor does he follow the narrative schema of those compositions. From a Rotenese—or more specifically, a Termanu—perspective, he has never had ancestral training in these matters. He is what he is: a fluent outsider.

3 Literally, this expression refers to the fact the grains on a millet stalk stretch straight upward while the panicles of a rice stalk droop with grain.

This text is taken from *Master Poets, Ritual Masters: The Art of Oral Composition Among the Rotenese of Eastern Indonesia*, by James J. Fox, published 2016 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.