

# 2

## *Suti Solo do Bina Bane:* Version I from the Domain of Termanu

### **Introducing the First Text: *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* I**

This chapter introduces *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* as a narrative text. It examines its internal structure and provides an exegesis on successive passages in it. The composition I have chosen for this purpose is the first version of this text that I recorded in 1965 from the poet ‘Old Meno’ (*Meno Tua*), Stefanus Adulanu. It is a composition of some 299 lines. Of all of the versions of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* that I have recorded, this version remains the longest and, in my view, the most comprehensive version that I have gathered. In retrospect, I believe there were a number of reasons why Old Meno recited this composition for me as he did. I was newly arrived on Rote and had begun visiting him regularly—as a kind of apprentice—not just to learn ritual language, but also to gather the oral history of Termanu and to observe the court gatherings that were regularly held in his presence.<sup>1</sup> I was particularly insistent on recording *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* and had passed to Old Meno the instructions that had been

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1 In the absence of the Lord (*Manek*) of Termanu, who was the *camat* of Rote at the time, the traditional court generally met in the village of Ola Lain because this was Old Meno’s residential settlement; this made it easier for him, at his age, to preside at court with the Deputy *Manek*, Frans Biredoko. See Fox (2007b).

given to me by the elder brother of Termanu's ruler. Old Meno, in turn, saw my 'voice-catcher' as a means of some day passing on his words to his newly born grandson.

The result was a recitation that was more extensive than might otherwise have been the case. This, however, does not make analysis of the text easier. To the contrary, there are significant passages in the text that would—without appropriate exegesis—seem to be largely irrelevant to the core of the composition. These seemingly irrelevant passages are intended to identify the composition as an origin chant and allude to the role of the two creatures from the sea, Suti and Bina (nautilus and bailer shells), in relation to other origin chants concerned with the production of textiles. These internal references to the wider canon of origin chants were characteristic of Old Meno's style of composition and could be considered a hallmark of an elder poet with a mastery of the full poetic canon.

## The Genealogical Introduction

This version of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* begins with a genealogical introduction. This is a critical part of the chant because it recounts the origin of names of the principal chant character(s). For all poets, the knowledge of names—both of persons and of places—is considered paramount. A poet who is able to compose fluently but lacks the knowledge of names cannot be considered an authoritative custodian of tradition: a 'person of knowledge' (*hataholi malelak*). After any recitation, names are invariably the first topic of discussion—and of contention—because when poets dispute among themselves, such disputes are most often focused on differences in the citation of names.

In ritual languages, names are a complex subject. They always have significance, even though they can rarely be translated literally. Names hint at interpretable meaning; they can provide a context for a character or a place and thereby proclaim some intended sense.

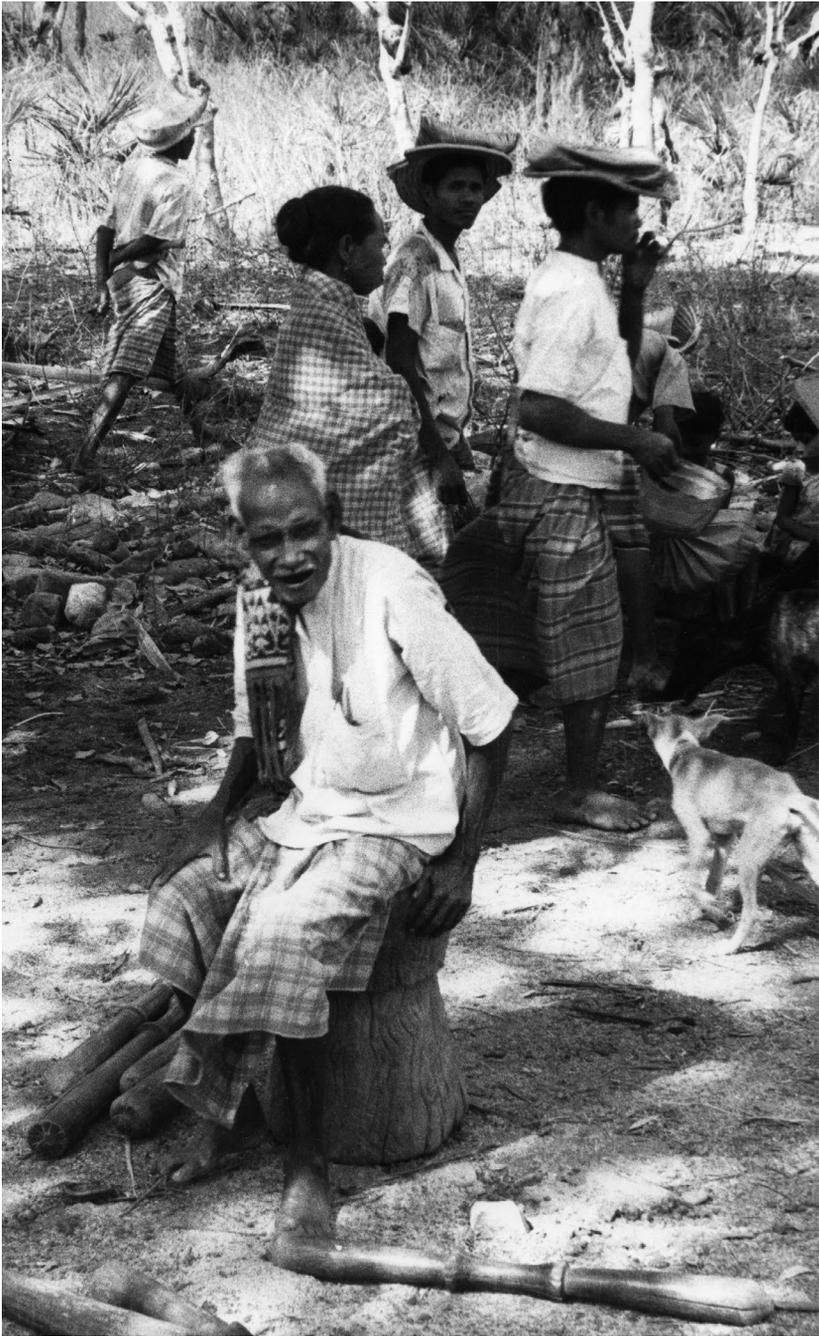


Figure 4: Stefanus Adulanu – ‘Old Meno’

This genealogy follows a common format. The poet announces the name of the focus of his recitation and then identifies the parents of this chant character. The lines describe the physical transfer of a woman from the woods and forests whose dual name, Hali Siku//Manu Koa, suggests a bird-like being. This woman marries a man from the sea whose dual name suggests a shell-like being. From this union of land and sea come the chant characters Suti Solo and Bina Bane, who are identified as nautilus (*suti*) and bailer (*bane*) shells. In Rotenese genealogical reckoning, children take the first name of their father: hence Bane Aka > Bina Bane and Solo Bane > Suti Solo.

- |    |                                      |                                         |
|----|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1. | <i>La-fada Suti Solo</i>             | They speak of Suti Solo                 |
| 2. | <i>Ma la-nosi Bina Bane.</i>         | And they talk of Bina Bane.             |
| 3. | <i>Ala soku Hali Siku nula</i>       | They transfer Hali Siku of the woods    |
| 4. | <i>Ma ala ifa Manu Koa lasi.</i>     | And they cradle Manu Koa of the forest. |
| 5. | <i>Ala tu Bane Aka liun</i>          | They wed Bane Aka in the sea            |
| 6. | <i>Ma sao Solo Bane sain.</i>        | And marry Solo Bane in the ocean.       |
| 7. | <i>De besak a bongi-la Suti Solo</i> | And now they give birth to Suti Solo    |
| 8. | <i>Ma lae la Bina Bane.</i>          | And they bring forth Bina Bane.         |

## The Expulsion of the Two Shells from the Sea

With these introductory lines, the chant proceeds to recount the event that leads to the expulsion of Suti Solo do Bina Bane from the sea. Most other versions of this chant allude to the storm that casts the shells onto land. Old Meno's version describes the insult that provokes the storm.

Suti Solo do Bina Bane's father, Bane Aka//Solo Bina, hosts a lively origin feast. The woman Po'o Pau Ai//Latu Kai Do, who is, like Suti Solo do Bina Bane's mother, from the Forest and Wood, comes to dance at the feast and asks to dance with Suti Solo do Bina Bane. The shells refuse; the woman is shamed and expresses her outrage to the Heavens and Heights, who grow angry and create the storm that rages on the sea, forcing the shells to escape.

Here again the names provide some understanding. A possible translation of the names for the woman Po'o Pau Ai//Latu Kai Do, who is, in some way, a maternal relative, would be 'Mouldy Pau Trees//Withered Kai Leaves'. Although Suti Solo do Bina Bane's rejection might appear appropriate in regard to these less than attractive female relatives, the insult nonetheless constitutes a breach in relations between the sea and the upper world of the Heavens and Earth. Po'o Pau Ai//Latu Kai Do's complaint to the Heavens and Heights prompts the Heavens and Heights to create a cyclone that casts Suti Solo do Bina Bane from the sea.

- |     |                                        |                                                            |
|-----|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 9.  | <i>Faik esa manunin</i>                | On a certain day                                           |
| 10. | <i>Ma ledok esa mateben</i>            | And at a particular time                                   |
| 11. | <i>Boe ma Bani Aka liun hun</i>        | Bani Aka in the sea has his origin feast                   |
| 12. | <i>Ma Solo Bina sain sion na</i>       | Solo Bina in the ocean has his feast of nine               |
| 13. | <i>Sio lakadoto</i>                    | The feast of nine boils lively                             |
| 14. | <i>Ma hus-sala lakase.</i>             | The origin feast bubbles noisily.                          |
| 15. | <i>Boe ma inak Po'o Pau Ai la</i>      | The woman Po'o Pau Ai [Mouldy Pau Trees]                   |
| 16. | <i>Po'o Pau Ai lasi</i>                | Po'o Pau Ai of the Forest                                  |
| 17. | <i>Ma fetok Latu Kai Do la</i>         | And the girl Latu Kai Do [Withered Kai Leaves]             |
| 18. | <i>Latu Kai Do nula</i>                | Latu Kai Do of the Woods                                   |
| 19. | <i>Leu pela sio</i>                    | Comes to dance at the feast of nine                        |
| 20. | <i>Ma leu leno hu.</i>                 | And comes to turn at the origin feast.                     |
| 21. | <i>Boe ma ala pela sio kokolak</i>     | While dancing at the feast of nine, they talk              |
| 22. | <i>Ma ala leno hu dede'ak ma lae:</i>  | And while turning at the origin feast, they speak and say: |
| 23. | <i>'Te Suti Solo nai be?</i>           | 'But where is Suti Solo?                                   |
| 24. | <i>Fo au pela akasusudik</i>           | For I wish to dance next to him                            |
| 25. | <i>Ma Bina Bane nai be?</i>            | And where is Bina Bane?                                    |
| 26. | <i>Fo leno akaseselik.'</i>            | For I wish to turn beside him.'                            |
| 27. | <i>Boe ma Bina Bane na-fada ma nae</i> | Then Bina Bane speaks and says                             |
| 28. | <i>Ma Suti Solo na-fada ma nae:</i>    | And Suti Solo speaks and says:                             |
| 29. | <i>'Oo ina Po'o Pau Ai la</i>          | 'Oh the woman, Po'o Pau Ai                                 |

- |     |                                                |                                          |
|-----|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 30. | <i>Po'o Pau Ai lasi la</i>                     | Po'o Pau Ai of the Forest                |
| 31. | <i>Au senang ta no ndia</i>                    | I am no friend of hers                   |
| 32. | <i>Ma fetu Latu Kai Do la</i>                  | And the girl Latu Kai Do                 |
| 33. | <i>Latu Kai Do Nula la</i>                     | Latu Kai Do of the Woods                 |
| 34. | <i>Au tiang ta no ndia.'</i>                   | I am no companion of hers.'              |
| 35. | <i>Boe ma Ina Po'o Pau Ai la</i>               | The woman Po'o Pau Ai                    |
| 36. | <i>Ala mae leu dedein</i>                      | There is shame on her forehead           |
| 37. | <i>Ma Feto Latu Kai Do la</i>                  | And the girl Latu Kai Do                 |
| 38. | <i>Ala bi neu mataboan.</i>                    | There is fear in her eyes.               |
| 39. | <i>Boe ma leu la-nosi Poin</i>                 | They go to talk to the Heights           |
| 40. | <i>Ma leu la-fuda Lain</i>                     | And go to speak to the Heavens           |
| 41. | <i>Lain manakoasa</i>                          | The Heavens who have power               |
| 42. | <i>Ma Poin manakila.</i>                       | The Heights who see overall.             |
| 43. | <i>Boe ma Lain nggenggele</i>                  | The Heavens rage                         |
| 44. | <i>Ma Poin namanasa.</i>                       | And Heights grow angry.                  |
| 45. | <i>De sangu nala liun dale</i>                 | A storm strikes the ocean's depths       |
| 46. | <i>Ma luli nala sain dale.</i>                 | A cyclone strikes the sea's depths.      |
| 47. | <i>Hu ina Po'o Pau Ai la</i>                   | Because the woman Po'o Pau Ai            |
| 48. | <i>Po'o Pau Ai lasi</i>                        | Po'o Pau Ai of the Forest                |
| 49. | <i>Ma fetu Latu Kai Do la</i>                  | The girl Latu Kai Do                     |
| 50. | <i>Latu Kai Do nula nae-a:</i>                 | Latu Kai Do of the Wood says:            |
| 51. | <i>'Ala mamaek Po'o Pau Ai la</i>              | 'They shame Po'o Pau Ai                  |
| 52. | <i>Ma ala lakabibik Latu Kai<br/>Do la.'</i>   | And they frighten Latu Kai Do.'          |
| 53. | <i>Boe ma Poin namanasa</i>                    | The Heights grow angry                   |
| 54. | <i>Ma Lain nggenggele.</i>                     | And the Heavens rage.                    |
| 55. | <i>Neme ndia mai</i>                           | From this comes                          |
| 56. | <i>Boe ma sangu nala liun dale</i>             | A storm striking the ocean's depths      |
| 57. | <i>Ma luli nala sain dale.</i>                 | And a cyclone striking the sea's depths. |
| 58. | <i>Boe ma besak ka Suti lama-<br/>edo nggi</i> | Now Suti exudes his pods                 |
| 59. | <i>Ma Bina lamatoko-isi</i>                    | And Bina puts out his insides            |
| 60. | <i>De ana toloru sasali</i>                    | He escapes quickly                       |
| 61. | <i>Ma nalai lelana.</i>                        | And he flees hastily.                    |

## The Arrival of the Shells in the Tidal Flats of Tena Lai ma Mae Oe

The next lines tell of the arrival of Suti Solo do Bina Bane in the tidal shallows on the coast of Rote. The place of arrival, Tena Lai//Mae Oe, is a ritual site of great importance. Virtually all Rotenese chants identify this same site as the place where the various gifts from the sea reach Rote.<sup>2</sup>

62. *De mai Tena Lai Loek lutun*      He comes to the fish wall in the shallows at Tena Lai
63. *Ma Mae Oe Nggolok dean na.*      And the stone weir at the promontory at Mae Oe.
64. *Bina mai ndia*      Bina comes there
65. *De ana babi mafo neu ndia*      He conceals [himself] in the shade there
66. *Ma Suti mai ndia*      And Suti comes there
67. *De ana sulu sa'o neu ndia.*      He covers [himself] in the shadows there.

## The Quest for the Ritual Fish

The following lines then set the scene for the ‘gathering’ of Suti Solo do Bina Bane and the transfer of these shells onto dry land. This passage introduces a number of new named characters without a full genealogical introduction. The characters in question are: 1) Manupui Peda//Kokolo Dulu, who, like Bane Aka//Solo Bina, wishes to hold an origin feast; 2) Bafa Ama Laik//Holu Ama Daek; and 3) his wife, Nggiti Seti//Pedu Hange. The character who is not yet mentioned is Lole Holu//Lua Bafa, the daughter who becomes the companion of Suti Solo do Bina Bane. She is introduced in a succeeding passage. Since Rotenese names follow a consistent pattern whereby the first name of the father becomes the last name of the child—Bafa Ama > Lua Bafa and Holu Ama > Lua Lole Holu—the relationship would be self-evident to a Rotenese listener.

<sup>2</sup> These gifts include, among others, rice and millet, which are also gathered at Tena Lai ma Mae Oe and then transferred and propagated throughout Rote. For the chant that recounts these origins, see Fox (1997b).

Although none of these names can be fully translated, they consist of words whose meaning is suggestive. Manupui//Kokolo, for example, connotes a bird-like being: *manupui* is the term for ‘bird’ and *kolo* (or *kokolo*) is a word used in the names for specific birds. Similarly, *nggiti* is the verb for ‘working a loom’ and *hange* is a variant of *henge*, the verb for ‘tie-dyeing threads’. Thus the name Nggiti Seti//Pedu Hange indicates a character who is involved in weaving and dyeing, a connection that signals later developments in the composition and links this chant to another origin chant that recounts the origin of dyeing and weaving.

In this passage and throughout this composition, there is a clear opposition between the origin feast held on land and on sea. In this passage, Manupui Peda//Kokolo Dulu’s feast is not lively. A divination is held and it is determined that a key ritual, *peda poil/fua bafa*, has not been carried out as part of the agricultural rituals for receiving harvested rice and millet into the house. Literally, these terms translate as ‘placing at the tip’/‘loading the mouth’; they require that an offering be made of two specific fish, referred to, in ritual language, as Tio Holu//Dusu La’e. As a consequence, Nggiti Seti//Pedu Hange has to prepare her scoop-net and go to the stone fish traps that are set out in the sea to catch fish as the tide recedes. These fish walls form a boundary between the land and the sea and therefore provide the point of contact between these worlds.

- |     |                                   |                                                             |
|-----|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| 68. | <i>Faik esa manunin</i>           | On a certain day                                            |
| 69. | <i>Ma ledok esa mateben</i>       | And at a particular time                                    |
| 70. | <i>Boe ma Manupui Peda hun-na</i> | Manupui Peda holds his origin feast                         |
| 71. | <i>Hus ta laka-doto</i>           | The origin feast is not lively                              |
| 72. | <i>Ma Kokolo Dulu sio-na</i>      | Kokolo Dulu holds his feast of nine                         |
| 73. | <i>Sio ta laka-se.</i>            | The feast of nine is not noisy.                             |
| 74. | <i>Boe ma ala kani batu dodo</i>  | They divine by shaking the stone                            |
| 75. | <i>Ma ala lea te ndanda.</i>      | They consider by measuring the spear.                       |
| 76. | <i>Boe ma lae:</i>                | They [the diviners] say:                                    |
| 77. | <i>‘O peda poin bei ta</i>        | ‘You have not yet placed a fish on top<br>of the rice       |
| 78. | <i>Ma fua bafa bei ta.’</i>       | And you have not yet laid a fish on the<br>basket’s mouth.’ |
| 79. | <i>Boe ma ina Nggiti Seti</i>     | The woman Nggiti Seti                                       |
| 80. | <i>Ma fetok ka Pedu Hange</i>     | And the girl Pedu Hange                                     |

- |      |                                    |                                                     |
|------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 81.  | <i>Bafa Ama Laik tun</i>           | Bafa Ama Laik's wife                                |
| 82.  | <i>Ma Holu Ama Daek saon</i>       | Holu Ama Daek's spouse                              |
| 83.  | <i>Ala kedi la mau don</i>         | They cut a <i>mau</i> plant's leaves                |
| 84.  | <i>De mau mana'a don</i>           | A <i>mau</i> with a mouthful of leaves              |
| 85.  | <i>Ma ala pena-la pole aban</i>    | And they pluck a <i>pole</i> plant's cotton tufts   |
| 86.  | <i>De pole masapena aban.</i>      | A <i>pole</i> bursting with cotton tufts.           |
| 87.  | <i>De ala teli kokolo ndai</i>     | They string and wind a fishnet                      |
| 88.  | <i>De ndai mahamu lilok.</i>       | A fishnet with a gold-weighted belly.               |
| 89.  | <i>Ma ala ane seko bui seko</i>    | They braid a scoop-net, twine a scoop-net           |
| 90.  | <i>De seko matei besik.</i>        | A scoop-net with iron-weighted insides.             |
| 91.  | <i>De ana ndae ndai neu alun</i>   | She hangs the fishnet over her shoulder             |
| 92.  | <i>Ma ana su'u seko neu langan</i> | And she balances the scoop-net on her head          |
| 93.  | <i>De leo Tena Lai neu</i>         | And goes to Tena Lai                                |
| 94.  | <i>Ma leo Mae Oe neu,</i>          | And goes to Mae Oe,                                 |
| 95.  | <i>Neu nafa-nggao lutu limak</i>   | Goes to grope in the 'arms' of the fish wall        |
| 96.  | <i>Ma neu nafa-dama dea eik</i>    | Goes to probe in the 'legs' of the stone weir       |
| 97.  | <i>Dea ei manalek</i>              | The 'legs' of the stone weir that hold good fortune |
| 98.  | <i>Ma lutu lima mauak.</i>         | The 'arms' of the fish wall that bear good luck.    |
| 99.  | <i>Nafanggao dea eik</i>           | She gropes in the 'legs' of the stone weir          |
| 100. | <i>Ma nafadama lutu limak.</i>     | And probes the 'arms' of the fish wall.             |

## The Encounter with Suti Solo do Bina Bane

The next passage describes Nggiti Seti//Pedu Hange's encounter with Suti Solo and Bina Bane. Although Nggiti Seti//Pedu Hange is determined to catch only Tio Holu//Dusu La'e fish, all that she is able to scoop up is Suti

Solo do Bina Bane, who declares himself ‘an orphan wronged//a widow mistaken’. So, in the end, Nggiti Seti//Pedu Hange agrees to take the shells back to her daughter, Lole Holu//Lua Bafa.

- |      |                                              |                                      |
|------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 101. | <i>Siluk bei ta dulu</i>                     | When morning is not yet in the east  |
| 102. | <i>Ma hu'ak bei ta langa dei</i>             | And dawn is not yet at the head      |
| 103. | <i>Boe ma ana ndai ndano,<br/>ndai ndano</i> | She fish-catches, fish-catches       |
| 104. | <i>Ma ana seko toko, seko toko.</i>          | And she scoop-throws, scoop-throws.  |
| 105. | <i>Boe ma ana seko nala Suti Solo</i>        | She scoops up Suti Solo              |
| 106. | <i>Ma ana ndai nala Bina Bane</i>            | And she fishes up Bina Bane          |
| 107. | <i>Boe ma lae:</i>                           | They say:                            |
| 108. | <i>'Au seko Tio</i>                          | 'I scoop for a Tio fish              |
| 109. | <i>Ma au ndai Dusu dei</i>                   | And I fished for a Dusu fish         |
| 110. | <i>Fo Dusu La'e dei</i>                      | A real Dusu La'e                     |
| 111. | <i>Ma Tio Holu dei</i>                       | And a real Tio Holu                  |
| 112. | <i>Tao neu peda-poik</i>                     | To place on top of the rice          |
| 113. | <i>Ma tao neu lua-bafak.'</i>                | And to lay on the basket's mouth.'   |
| 114. | <i>Boe ma nae:</i>                           | Then he says:                        |
| 115. | <i>'O ndai ndano meni au</i>                 | 'Oh, fish me forth and take me       |
| 116. | <i>Ma seko toko meni au</i>                  | And scoop me up and take me          |
| 117. | <i>Fo ela tao neu namahenak</i>              | To create expectation                |
| 118. | <i>Ma tao neu nakabanik.'</i>                | And to create hope.'                 |
| 119. | <i>Boe ma ana ndai ndano<br/>[heni] Suti</i> | But she fishes and throws Suti away  |
| 120. | <i>Ma ana seko toko heni Bina.</i>           | And she scoops and throws Bina away. |
| 121. | <i>Te hu inak Pedu Hange</i>                 | But when the woman Pedu Hange        |
| 122. | <i>Ma fetok ka Nggiti Seti</i>               | And the girl Nggiti Seti             |
| 123. | <i>Seko nala lek dua</i>                     | Scoops in two waterholes             |
| 124. | <i>Na Bina nala lek dua</i>                  | Bina is there in the two waterholes  |
| 125. | <i>Ma ndai nala lifu telu</i>                | And when she fishes in three pools   |
| 126. | <i>Na Suti nala lifu telu.</i>               | Suti is there in the three pools.    |
| 127. | <i>Boe ma Suti, ana kokolak</i>              | Then Suti, he talks                  |
| 128. | <i>Ma Bina, ana dede'ak nae:</i>             | And Bina, he speaks, saying:         |
| 129. | <i>'Ndai ndano muni au</i>                   | 'Fish me forth and take me           |

2. VERSION I FROM THE DOMAIN OF TERMANU

130. *Ma seko toko muni au dei.* And scoop me up and take me then.  
131. *Au ana-ma ma-salak* I am an orphan wronged  
132. *Ma au falu-ina ma-singok.'* And I am a widow mistaken.'  
133. *Boe ma nae:* The she says:  
134. *'Te au ndai ndano uni o* 'I will fish you forth and take you  
135. *Ma au seko toko uni o* And I will scoop you up and take you  
136. *Fo mu mo Lole Holu* That you may go with Lole Holu  
137. *Ma mu mo Lua Bafa.'* And you may go with Lua Bafa.'



Figure 5: Woman casting her scoop-net

'She fish-catches, fish-catches  
And she scoop-throws, scoop-throws.  
She scoops up Suti Solo  
And she fishes up Bina Bane.'

## The Dialogue Directives to the Shells

The next passage begins a remarkable dialogue between the two that is generally regarded as the defining component of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* as a composition, whether it is recited as an origin narrative or as a mortuary chant. This dialogue extends for more than 80 lines and consists of a number of possibilities phrased in poetic formulae. For example, Suti//Bina agree to befriend Lole Holu//Lua Bafa but ask what would happen if the leaf container in which they were being carried broke. If this were to happen, Suti//Bina exclaim: ‘Then, I, Suti, with whom would I be and I, Bina, with whom would I be? With whom will I talk and with whom will I speak?’ This is the cry of the displaced orphan and widow.

- |      |                                     |                                                  |
|------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 138. | <i>Boe ma Suti, ana kokolak</i>     | Then Suti, he talks                              |
| 139. | <i>Ma Bina, ana dedè'ak ma nae:</i> | And Bina, he speaks, and says:                   |
| 140. | <i>‘Te o ndai muni au</i>           | ‘If you fish and take me                         |
| 141. | <i>Fo au atia Lole Holu</i>         | I will be a friend to Lole Holu                  |
| 142. | <i>Ma seko muni au</i>              | And if you scoop and take me                     |
| 143. | <i>Fo au asena Lua Bafa.</i>        | So that I will be a companion to<br>Lua Bafa.    |
| 144. | <i>De malole-la so</i>              | These things are good                            |
| 145. | <i>Ma mandak-kala so.</i>           | And these things are proper.                     |
| 146. | <i>Te leo hai-paik la-tato</i>      | But if the ends of the leaf bucket bump          |
| 147. | <i>Ma leo lepa-solak la-bebi</i>    | And if the corners of the water<br>carrier crash |
| 148. | <i>Fo ala hika setele benin</i>     | So they laugh with a shriek at losing me         |
| 149. | <i>Ma eki mata-dale benin,</i>      | And they scream with a startle at<br>losing me,  |
| 150. | <i>Na Bina, au o se</i>             | Then I, Bina, with whom will I be                |
| 151. | <i>Ma Suti, au o se</i>             | And I, Suti, with whom will I be                 |
| 152. | <i>Fo au kokolak o se</i>           | With whom will I talk                            |
| 153. | <i>Ma au dedè'ak o se?’</i>         | And with whom will I speak?’                     |

In response to Suti//Bina’s query, Nggiti Seti//Pedu Hange proposes another possibility: an alternative resting place—to reside with the syrup vat and the rice basket. For Suti//Bina, however, this also offers only a transient possibility.

154. *Boe ma inak-ka Nggiti Seti* The woman Nggiti Seti  
 155. *Ma fetok-ka Pedu Hange nae:* And the girl Pedu Hange says:  
 156. *'Te eki setele henin* 'If they scream with a shriek at  
 losing you  
 157. *Ma hika mata-dale henin na,* And laugh with a startle at losing you,  
 158. *Suti mo tua bou* Then Suti, go with syrup vat  
 159. *Ma Bina mo neka hade.'* And Bina, go with the rice basket.'  
 160. *Boe ma nae:* Then he says:  
 161. *'O malole-la so* 'Oh, these things are good  
 162. *Ma mandak-kala so.* And these things are proper.  
 163. *Te leo bou lamakako fude* But if the vat overflows with froth  
 164. *Ma soka lamalua bafa* And the sack runs over at the mouth  
 165. *Fo bou lo totonon* So that the vat must be overturned  
 166. *Ma soka no lulunun* And the sack must be rolled up  
 167. *Na Suti au o se* Then I, Suti, with whom will I be  
 168. *Ma Bina au o se?'* And I, Bina, with whom will I be?'

To each proposal that Nggiti Seti//Pedu Hange makes, Suti//Bina responds by emphasising its impermanence. This refrain accords with the Rotenese view of the human condition as transient and uncertain. In each response, Suti//Bina lays stress on the lack of someone with whom to speak. Thus, all of the various different settings that are proposed are botanic metaphors for community.

169. *Boe ma nae:* Then she says:  
 170. *'Oo na mo bete pule* 'Oh, go with the millet grains that the  
*kode ketuk* monkey plucks  
 171. *Ma pela po'o bafi ka'ak.'* And with the ears of maize that the  
 pig chews.'  
 172. *Te hu Suti bei namatane* But Suti continues to cry  
 173. *Ma Bina bei nasakedu.* And Bina continues to sob.  
 174. *Boe ma nae:* So he says:  
 175. *'Te leo kode ketu neni betek* 'But if the monkey plucks the millet  
 176. *Ma bafi ka'a neni pelak,* And the pig chews the maize,  
 177. *Na Suti au o se* Then I, Suti, with whom will I be  
 178. *Ma Bina au o se?'* And I, Bina, with whom will I be?'

179. *Boe ma Suti Solo na-fada* Then Suti Solo speaks  
 180. *Ma Bina Bane na-nosi* And Bina Bane answers and says:  
*ma nae:*  
 181. *'Oo ndia bei ta au* 'Oh, that I do not yet know at all.'  
*alelak ndia.'*

Once more, Nggiti Seti//Pedu Hange suggests a possible place to rest: in the trees' shade and the lontar palms' shadow, but such shade is fleeting.

182. *Boe ma nae:* Then she says:  
 183. *'Na mo sa'o tua* 'Then go with lontar palms' shadow  
 184. *Ma mo mafo ai.'* And go with trees' shade.'  
 185. *Boe ma nae:* Then he says:  
 186. *'Te leo mafo ai la hiluk* 'But if the trees' shade recedes  
 187. *Ma sa'o tua la keko* And the lontars' shadow shifts  
 188. *Na Suti au o se* Then I, Suti, with whom will I be  
 189. *Ma Bina au o se* And I, Bina, with whom will I be  
 190. *Fo au kokolak o se* With whom will I talk  
 191. *Ma au dede'ak o se* And with whom will I speak  
 192. *Tao neu nakabanik* To create hope  
 193. *Ma tao neu namahenak?'* And to create expectation?'

Finally, Nggiti Seti//Pedu Hange proposes yet another possibility, but this is also rejected specifically because it offers no community, no fellowship.

194. *Boe ma nae:* Then she says:  
 195. *'Te na mu mo peu ai* 'Then go with boundary tree  
 196. *Ma mu mo to batu.'* And go with border stone.'  
 197. *Boe ma Suti boe kokolak* Still Suti talks  
 198. *Ma Bina boe dede'ak ma nae:* And still Bina speaks and says:  
 199. *'Te hu ai dede'an ta* 'But a tree does not talk  
 200. *Ma batu kokolan ta.'* And a stone does not speak.'  
 201. *Bina boe nasakedu* Still Bina sobs  
 202. *Ma Suti boe namatani.* And still Suti cries.

Finally, Nggiti Seti//Pedu Hange proposes a return to the sea.

- |      |                                        |                                                   |
|------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 203. | <i>Besak-ka nae:</i>                   | Now she says:                                     |
| 204. | <i>'Mo doa lasi</i>                    | 'Go with the forest cuckoo                        |
| 205. | <i>Ma mo koloba'o le</i>               | And go with the river watercock                   |
| 206. | <i>[Fo] fa tunga-tunga le</i>          | So that as current passes down the river          |
| 207. | <i>Ma fo ela udan tunga-tunga lasi</i> | And rain passes through the forest                |
| 208. | <i>Fo mu oli tatain</i>                | You may go to the edge of the estuary             |
| 209. | <i>Ma mu le bibifan,</i>               | And you may go to the lip of the river,           |
| 210. | <i>Fo ela fa oek ana mai</i>           | So that when the current's water arrives          |
| 211. | <i>Ma ela epo oek ana mai</i>          | And when the eddy's water arrives                 |
| 212. | <i>Na bonu boa fo mu</i>               | That bobbing like <i>boa</i> wood, you may go     |
| 213. | <i>Ma ele piko fo mu,</i>              | And drifting like <i>piko</i> wood, you may go,   |
| 214. | <i>Leo sain dale mu</i>                | To the sea, you may go                            |
| 215. | <i>Ma leo liun dale mu.</i>            | And to the ocean, you may go.                     |
| 216. | <i>Te hu mu posi makamu mekon</i>      | Thus go to the sea's edge, resounding like a gong |
| 217. | <i>Fo nene fno tata</i>                | To stop and listen there                          |
| 218. | <i>Ma mu unu mali labun</i>            | And go to the reef, rumbling like a drum          |
| 219. | <i>Fo dei dongo meme ndia</i>          | To stand and wait there                           |
| 220. | <i>Fo dei loe sain dale mu</i>         | And then descend into the ocean                   |
| 221. | <i>Ma dilu liun dale mu.'</i>          | And turn downward into the sea.'                  |

In many compositions in which *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* is told as a mortuary chant, the shells' return to the sea provides an appropriate ending. This version by Old Meno, however, is an origin chant and thus belongs to a larger set of interconnected chants. What follows is a long passage that makes specific connections to another chant about the origin of the particular tie-dye patterns that appear on traditional cloths. The actual subject of these lines is never stated but only alluded to: Suti, the nautilus shell, becomes the container for dye, particularly indigo dye; and Bina, the bailer shell, becomes the base on which the spindle for winding thread is turned. The two shells are ritual icons for the processes of preparing a cloth for weaving.

## The Return of the Shells to the Sea

The following passages first establish the close connection between Lua Bafa//Lole Holu and Suti Solo//Bina Bane and then emphasise her capacities as an extraordinary weaver of traditional cloth. The narrative proceeds in stages. Suti//Bina must return to the festivities in the sea and formally declare companionship with Lua Bafa//Lole Holu.

- |      |                                              |                                                              |
|------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| 222. | <i>Boe ma besak ka</i>                       | Now it is that                                               |
| 223. | <i>Ina Po'o Ai la bei pela</i>               | The woman Po'o Pau Ai is still dancing                       |
| 224. | <i>Ma fetu Latu Kai Do la<br/>bei longe.</i> | And the girl Latu Kai Do still does the<br><i>ronggeng</i> . |
| 225. | <i>Ala teteni Suti Solo</i>                  | They request Suti Solo                                       |
| 226. | <i>Ma ala tata Bina Bane.</i>                | And they ask for Bina Bane.                                  |
| 227. | <i>'Boe ma oo te nakas sa ia</i>             | 'Oh, just a while ago                                        |
| 228. | <i>Fo Suti namaedo nggi</i>                  | Suti exuded his pods                                         |
| 229. | <i>Hu inak nde</i>                           | Because of this woman                                        |
| 230. | <i>Oo bei huas a ia</i>                      | Oh, just yesterday                                           |
| 231. | <i>Fo Bina lamatoko isi</i>                  | Bina put forth his insides                                   |
| 232. | <i>Hu inak ka nde.</i>                       | Because of this woman.                                       |
| 233. | <i>O de au senang ta no o</i>                | Oh I am no companion of yours                                |
| 234. | <i>Ma au tiang ta no o.</i>                  | And I am no friend of yours.                                 |
| 235. | <i>Au atia Lua Bafa Au a</i>                 | I am a friend of Lua Bafa                                    |
| 236. | <i>Ma asena Lole Holu dei.'</i>              | And I am a companion of Lole Holu.'                          |

As in the beginning of this chant, here there is an occurrence of origin feasts both on land and in the sea. Instead of Nggiti Seti//Pedu Hange going in search of the ritual fish needed for the feast on land, Lua Bafa//Lole Holu goes to the sea in search of these creatures. What is indicated here is that Suti Solo//Bina Bane's relationship with Lua Bafa//Lole Holu has re-established a harmonious relationship between the land and the sea. This is signalled by the fact that when the Ruler of the Sea holds his celebration of origin, Lua Bafa//Lole Holu is able to gather the ritual fish that allow Kokolo Dulu//Manupui Peda to hold his origin feast.

- |      |                              |                           |
|------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 237. | <i>Faik esa manunin</i>      | On a certain day          |
| 238. | <i>Ma ledok esa mateben,</i> | And at a particular time, |
| 239. | <i>Boe ma la-fada,</i>       | So they say,              |

240. *Danga Lena liun hun-na* The Ruler of the Ocean holds his origin feast
241. *Hus sala lakadoto.* The origin feast boils.
242. *Ma Mane Tua sain sion-na* And the Lord of the Sea holds his feast of nine
243. *Sio la laka-se.* The feast of nine bubbles.
244. *Boe ma besak-ka inak-ka Lole Holu* Now the woman Lole Holu
245. *Ma fetok-ka Lua Bafa* And the girl Lua Bafa
246. *Neu sanga Dusu peda-poik* Goes to seek a Dusu to place on top
247. *Ma neu sanga Tio fua-bafak* And goes to seek a Tio to lay on the mouth
248. *Fo ana tao neu peda-poik* That she might do the ‘top-placing rite’
249. *Ma tao neu fua-bafak* And she might do the ‘mouth-laying ritual’
250. *Neu Kokolo Dulu hun* For Kokolo Dulu’s origin feast
251. *Ma Manupui Peda sion na.* And Manupui Peda’s feast of nine.

The next passage identifies Lua Bafa//Lole Holu as a weaver: a woman who knows how to spin, dye and weave bright-coloured cloths.

252. *Boe ma besak-ka inak-ka Lua Bafa* Now the woman Lua Bafa
253. *Ma fetok-ka Lole Holu* And the girl Lole Holu
254. *Lima ku’u dao kin* The left fingers of her hand
255. *Na leleak ifa lolek* Know how to cradle the winding rack
256. *Ma pu lete lai konan-na* And the right side of her thigh
257. *Na-lelak dipo ine.* Knows how to turn the spindle on its base.
258. *Boe ina besak ka ana tenu dedele pou* Now she weaves a woman’s sarong tightly
259. *Fo dula kakaik lo pana-dai esa,* A patterned sarong with multi-coloured design,
260. *Boe ma ana henge dedele lafa* She ties a man’s cloth tightly
261. *Fo sidi soti busa-eik,* A supplemented cloth with dog-leg stitch,
262. *Ma pou leu pana-dai* A woman’s sarong with multicoloured design
263. *Ma sidi soti busa-eik.* And a supplemented cloth with dog-leg stitch.

Lua Bafa//Lole Holu appears at the great feast in the sea and is proclaimed the good friend and proper companion of Suti//Bina. This is essentially a restatement of restoration of the continuing good relationship between the land and the sea.

- |      |                                       |                                                       |
|------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| 264. | <i>Besak-ka leu pela sio nai liun</i> | Now they go to dance at the feast of nine in the sea  |
| 265. | <i>Ma leu leno hun nai sain.</i>      | And they go to spin at the origin feast in the ocean. |
| 266. | <i>Boe ma besak-ka lae:</i>           | So now they say:                                      |
| 267. | <i>'Oo Suti tian nde ia</i>           | 'Oh, that is Suti's friend                            |
| 268. | <i>Ma Bina senan nde ia</i>           | And that is Bina's companion                          |
| 269. | <i>Ma inak-ka Lua Bafa</i>            | The woman Lua Bafa                                    |
| 270. | <i>Fo Bafo Ama Laik anan</i>          | Bafa Ama Laik's child                                 |
| 271. | <i>Ma fetok-ka Lole Holu</i>          | And the girl Lole Holu                                |
| 272. | <i>Fo Holu Aina Daek anan.'</i>       | Holu Ama Daek's child.'                               |
| 273. | <i>Ma nae:</i>                        | And it is said:                                       |
| 274. | <i>'Sena mandak kia</i>               | 'This is a proper companion                           |
| 275. | <i>Ma tia malole ia.'</i>             | And this is a good friend.'                           |

## Origin References and Ritual Outcomes

The final passage in this chant is not so much a continuation of the previous passage as a statement of a ritual outcome. Because of the relation of Lua Bafa//Lole Holu with Suti Solo//Bina Bane, relations between the land and the sea are restored and the origin feasts on land can be celebrated properly. However, with the further knowledge of dyeing and weaving, these feasts can be performed with dancers arrayed in multi-coloured cloths. The chant concludes with a direct reference to the chant *Pata Iuk ma Dula Foek*, which recounts the origin of weaving.

- |      |                                         |                                                    |
|------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| 276. | <i>Besak-ka ala kokolak sio bafi la</i> | Now they talk of the pigs of the feast of nine     |
| 277. | <i>Ma ala dede'ak hu kapa.</i>          | And they speak of the buffalo of the origin feast. |
| 278. | <i>Hu kapa la tola</i>                  | The buffalo of the origin appear                   |
| 279. | <i>Ma sio bafi la dadi,</i>             | And the pigs of nine come forth,                   |
| 280. | <i>Hu Holu Ama Daek hu-na</i>           | There at Holu Ama Daek's origin feast              |

281. *Ma hu Bafa Ama Laik sion-na.* And Bafa Ama Laik's feast of nine.
282. *Ma besak ka neu pela sio* Now they go to dance at the feast of nine
283. *Ma leno hu.* And spin at the origin feast.
284. *Besak-ka neni pou la mai* Now they bring women's sarongs
285. *Ma neni sidik la mai,* And bring supplemented cloths,
286. *Sidi soti busa eik* Supplemented cloth with dog-leg stitch
287. *Ma pou le'u pana dai.* And women's sarongs in multicoloured strips.
288. *Pela ngganggape liman-na* They dance with outstretched arms
289. *Pana-dai la tuda* The multicoloured cloth falls
290. *Ma leno sosodo ein-nala* And they turn with shuffling feet
291. *Ma tola-te-la monu.* And the spear-patterned cloth drops.
292. *Besak-ka lae:* Now they say:
293. *'Ninga do Hena bei nde ia* 'This is still Ninga do Hena
294. *Fo lae Dula Foek* So they say: Dula Foek [Pattern Crocodile]
295. *Fo lae Pata Iuk* Thus they say: Pata Iuk [Figure Shark]
296. *Pata Iuk tete'ek* Truly, Pata Iuk
297. *Ma Dula Foe tete'ek.* And truly, Dula Foek.
298. *De pana-dai la tuda* The multicoloured cloth falls
299. *Ma tola-te la monu.'* And the spear-patterned cloth drops.'

Old Meno's chant is a complex but subtly structured composition: a narrative that both reveals and hides its meaning. It provides an appropriate starting point for the analysis of ritual language composition.

## Initial Composition Analysis

Old Meno's *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* comes to 299 lines and is composed on the basis of a full 103 dyadic sets, including a number of compound dyadic sets. In it is a great variety of oral formulae and a number of these formulae recur, at intervals, in the composition. It is useful therefore to begin the analysis of this composition by focusing on some of these recurrent formulae.

## Formulae for Speaking: *-fada//-nosi; kokola(k)// dede'a(k)*

Speaking is at the core of Rotenese culture. Speeches, sermons and ceremonial presentations—tale-telling, debate, repartee, argument—are all essential elements of sociality. Among Rotenese, talk never ceases. In a class society, however, with hierarchies of order, there are some constraints on speech. In gatherings, nobles speak more than commoners, men more than women, elders more than juniors; yet commoners, women and youth, when given the opportunity, invariably display the same prodigious fondness for speaking.

Only in certain rituals is silence required. Yet Rotenese find even these occasional ritual injunctions hard to observe. In ordinary situations, a lack of talk is an indication of distress. Rotenese repeatedly explain that if their ‘hearts’ are confused or dejected, they keep silent. Thus, the act of speaking is critical to all human engagement, and from an early age, every Rotenese engages in the rhetorical presentation of self.

The composition *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* emphasises this central feature of Rotenese life. The shells repeatedly ask:

Then I, Bina, with whom will I be  
 And I, Suti, with whom will I be  
 With whom will I talk  
 And with whom will I speak?

From this perspective, ‘being’ is equated with ‘talking’.

The vocabulary of speaking in ritual language is both extensive and elaborate. In the lexicon of ritual language, there are no less than 25 different verbs for speaking, cajoling, requesting, stating, asserting and conversing.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore perhaps significant but in no way surprising that this first version of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* begins with an assertion based on a key dyadic set for speaking, *-fadall-nosi*:

1. *La-fada Suti Solo*                      They speak of Suti Solo
2. *Ma la-nosi Bina Bane.*              And they talk of Bina Bane.

3 I examine the semantic network of these verbs of speaking in Fox (1974: 77–79).

Here Old Meno is following a convention used by most poets to assert that they are simply recounting the words of the elders and ancestors. Although they are the ones who ‘speak’, what they say has come down from past generations. Meno uses a succinct formula to make this assertion, whereas some poets offer substantial perorations to their compositions to make this same point. The dyadic set that he uses combines the verb *-fada*, which is the most general term ‘to speak’, with the verb *-nosi*, which is a term that, in ordinary speech of Termanu, means ‘to drip’. Thus, in ritual language, *-nosi* takes its meaning from its pair, *-fada*. Both verbs are the third-person plural without a preceding pronoun.<sup>4</sup> This is intended to convey a sense of general agency.

The same set occurs elsewhere in the composition. The first of these occurrences is when the women dancers who are insulted by the shells raise their complaint to the Heavens:

39. *Boe ma leu la-nosi Poin*                      They go to talk to the Heights  
 40. *Ma leu la-fada Lain*                              And go to speak to the Heavens

A further occurrence is when the two shells make a direct statement. In this case, another verb for ‘speaking’, *nae* (third-person singular: ‘to say’), is added.

179. *Boe ma Suti Solo na-fada*                      Then Suti Solo speaks  
 180. *Ma Bina Bane na-nosi*                              And Bina Bane answers and says:  
       *ma nae:*

4 Rotenese has three kinds of verbs: 1) those with formative prefixes, all of which indicate person, number and form of action; 2) those without formative prefixes; and 3) a small number of irregular verbs whose formative elements, indicating person and number, are part of the verb itself. Rotenese has the following verbal formative prefixes (third-person singular): *na-*, *nama-*, *nafa-*, *nasa-*, *naka-*. The paradigm for the verb ‘to speak’ (*-fada* in Termanu dialect, *-fade* in Dengak dialect), with appropriate pronouns, offers an illustration:

	Termanu		Dengka	
I speak	<i>au</i>	<i>a-fada</i>	<i>au</i>	<i>u-fade</i>
You (sg.) speak	<i>o</i>	<i>ma-fada</i>	<i>bo</i>	<i>mu-fade</i>
(S)he/it speaks	<i>ana/ndia</i>	<i>na-fada</i>	<i>eni</i>	<i>na-fade</i>
We (incl.) speak	<i>ita</i>	<i>ta-fada</i>	<i>hita</i>	<i>ta-fade</i>
We (excl.) speak	<i>ami</i>	<i>ma-fada</i>	<i>hai</i>	<i>mi-fade</i>
You (pl.) speak	<i>emi</i>	<i>ma-fada</i>	<i>hei</i>	<i>mi-fade</i>
They speak	<i>alalsila</i>	<i>la-fada</i>	<i>sila</i>	<i>la-fade</i>

The textual presentation utilises hyphenation to highlight the root terms that constitute canonical sets.

Generally, in ritual language compositions, *nae* is used to indicate that what follows is a direct statement.<sup>5</sup> As such, *nae* (singular) and *lae* (plural) occur frequently throughout the *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* compositions because of their emphasis on dialogue. *Naellae* occur in ‘orphan’ lines that lack a corresponding line. All these orphan lines introduce the next statement in a dialogue.

The same phrase, *Boe ma nae* (‘Then he or she says’), occurs eight times in Meno’s composition (lines 114, 133, 160, 169, 174, 182, 185 and 194) with two other occurrences in variant form, *Besak-ka nae* (‘Now he says’) (line 203), or simply as *Ma nae* (‘And it is said’) (line 273). It also occurs in plural form, *Boe ma lae* (‘Then they say’), in two lines (76 and 107) and once in the variant form *Boe ma besak-ka lae* (‘So now they say’) (line 266) and again as *Besak-ka lae* (‘Now they say’) (line 292).

There are also two occurrences of *nae* on its own where it functions to introduce statements by specific chant characters:

50. *Latu Kai Do nula nae-a:*           Latu Kai Do of the Wood says:  
 155. *Ma fetok-ka Pedu Hange nae:*   And the girl Pedu Hange says:

Some poets combine *nae/lae* with *-fada* to form a dyadic set. Although acceptable, this is generally judged as unsuitable among some poets. Meno appears to do this in his recitation, but it is also possible that he has simply repeated *-fada* where he should have used *-nosi*:

27. *Boe ma Bina Bane na-fada*       Then Bina Bane speaks and says  
     *ma nae*  
 28. *Ma Suti Solo na-fada ma nae:*   And Suti Solo speaks and says:

Another dyadic set that denotes ‘speaking’ also occurs strategically throughout this composition. This set combines the term *kokola(k)* with *dede’a(k)*. Both verbs in this set are in reduplicated form. Their root form is *kola//de’a*. Neither verb takes a formative prefix. Both of these verbs are commonly used in ordinary language, more often in their reduplicated

5 The paradigm for this verb is:

I speak	<i>au</i>	<i>ae</i>
You speak	<i>o</i>	<i>mae</i>
(S)he/it speaks	<i>ndialana</i>	<i>nae</i>
We (incl.) speak	<i>ita</i>	<i>tae</i>
We (excl.) speak	<i>ami</i>	<i>mae</i>
You (pl.) speak	<i>emi</i>	<i>mae</i>
They speak	<i>silalala</i>	<i>lae</i>

form. *Kokolak* describes conversational speech whereas *dede'ak* refers to a more directed form of speech, involving turn-taking, argument and debate. As a noun, *dede'ak* is the term for a court case or ongoing litigation.

The same set occurs twice (lines 127–28 and 138–39) to describe the speech of the two shells:

<i>Boe ma Suti, ana kokolak</i>	Then Suti, he talks
<i>Ma Bina, ana dede'ak nae:</i>	And Bina, he speaks, saying:

The set also occurs twice (lines 152–53 and 190–91) as part of the plaintive refrain of the shells in response to the possibility of a lack or loss of fellowship:

<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?’

And it occurs again towards the end of the composition:

276. <i>Besak-ka ala kokolak sio bafi la</i>	Now they talk of the pigs of the feast of nine
277. <i>Ma ala dede'ak hu kapa.</i>	And they speak of the buffalo of the origin feast.

## Formulae for Marking Time: *fai(k)//ledo*

The first of these is a set marker of time that is regularly used by poets throughout Rote to define the occurrence of a particular event. In Old Meno’s chant, this formula occurs in lines 9–10, 68–69 and 237–38:

<i>Faik esa manunin</i>	On a certain day
<i>Ma ledok esa mateben</i>	And at a particular time

Meno’s use of this formula, however, is interesting in that it does not follow strict canonical rules. Were these lines to follow canonical rules, they would be composed as follows:<sup>6</sup>

<i>Faik esa manunin</i>	On a certain day
<i>Ma ledok dua mateben</i>	And at a particular time

6 This is the formula used, for example, by the poet Petrus Malesi, whose composition will be considered in Chapter 4.

Thus, in formal terms, the formula should be made up of three dyadic sets:

- 1) *fai(k)//ledo(k)*: 'day'/'sun'
- 2) *esal//dua*: 'one'/'two'
- 3) *ma-nunin//ma-teben* 'certain, exact'/'particular, true'

Old Meno's usage, which in this case is a minor deviation from the rules of composition, is in fact one of the 'key signatures' that distinguishes his compositions from others.

### Formulae for Scoop-Net Fishing: *seko//ndai*

Another set of formulae of significance in all *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* compositions is formed by those based on the dyadic set *seko//ndai*, which occurs both in noun and verb forms.<sup>7</sup> The terms *seko//ndai* refer to a simple fishing apparatus: a stretch of net set between two poles. This is the principal device that women use for fish gathering in tidal flats along the shore. Women use the poles of the net to plunge the net into the water, then lift it out. If nothing of value has been caught or the net contains only useless detritus from the sea, women simply lift the poles further, turn the net with a flip of the wrist to clear it, and then once more plunge it into the water.

On Rote, stone weirs are built out into the sea. As the tide goes out, these weirs trap small fish, which women can gather up in their nets as they walk through the receding waters. The monthly cycle of tides is named and determines the time of day or night when fishing occurs.<sup>8</sup>

In the chant, this simple Rotenese fishing net is described in poetic terms:

88. *De ndai mahamu lilok.* A fishnet with a gold-weighted belly.
90. *De seko matei besik.* A scoop-net with iron-weighted insides.

The formula, which occurs in other versions of the chant, is made of three dyadic sets:

- 1) *ndai//seko* 'fishnet'/'scoop-net'
- 2) *ma-hamul//ma-tei* 'belly'/'inside, stomach'

7 In strict terms, *ndai* refers to the net itself while *seko* is the verb for fishing with this net. Linking these terms in a single dyadic set allows them to be used as both noun and verb.

8 See Fox (2008: 145–54, particularly p. 148).

- 3) *lilo(k)//besi(k)* ‘gold’//‘iron’

The dyadic set *seko//ndai* occurs more frequently in verbal form—for example, this set can be found in lines 103–4 and again in lines 105–6:

103. *Boe ma ana ndai ndano,* She fish-catches, fish-catches  
*ndai ndano*
104. *Ma ana seko toko, seko toko.* And she scoop-throws, scoop-throws.
105. *Boe ma ana seko nala* She scoops up Suti Solo  
*Suti Solo*
106. *Ma ana ndai nala Bina Bane* And she fishes up Bina Bane

The combination set *ndai ndano//seko toko* beautifully describes the fishing process of plunging, lifting and then casting out debris from the net.

Twice Suti Solo do Bina Bane ask the woman Pedu Hange//Nggiti Seti to scoop them up from the sea. The phrasing of their request is nearly identical:

115. ‘*O ndai ndano meni au*’ ‘Oh, fish me forth and take me
116. *Ma seko toko meni au*’ And scoop me up and take me’
129. ‘*Ndai ndano muni au*’ ‘Fish me forth and take me
130. *Ma seko toko muni au dei.*’ And scoop me up and take me then.’

Finally Pedu Hange//Nggiti Seti relents and scoops them up.

134. ‘*Tè au ndai ndano uni o*’ ‘I will fish you forth and take you
135. *Ma au seko toko uni o*’ And I will scoop you up and take you’

Perhaps the most notable feature of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* as a composition is the extended dialogue that occurs between the shells and the woman who has scooped them from the sea. She proposes different possible symbolic sites to which she directs the shells but each of these possibilities is rejected as transient or ephemeral. Every *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* composition contains a number of these ‘dialogue directives’, each of which is largely formulaic.

Old Meno’s chant contains the following six such dialogue directives, which are identifiable by their opening lines:

### 1) Lole Holu//Lua Bafa

134. ‘*Tè au ndai ndano uni o*’ ‘I will fish you forth and take you

135. *Ma au seko toko uni o* And I will scoop you up and take you  
 136. *Fo mu mo Lole Holu* That you may go with Lole Holu  
 137. *Ma mu mo Lua Bafa.'* And you may go with Lua Bafa.'

## 2) Syrup vat//rice basket

158. *'Suti mo tua bou* 'Then Suti, go with syrup vat  
 159. *Ma Bina mo neka hade.'* And Bina, go with the rice basket.'

## 3) Millet grains//ears of maize

170. *'Oo na mo bete pule kode ketuk* 'Oh, go with the millet grains that the monkey plucks  
 171. *Ma pela po'o bafi ka'ak.'* And with the ears of maize that the pig chews.'

## 4) Palm shadow//tree shade

183. *'Na mo sa'o tua* 'Then go with lontar palms' shadow  
 184. *Ma mo mafu ai.'* And go with trees' shade.'

## 5) Boundary tree//border stone

195. *'Te na mu mo peu ai* 'Then go with boundary tree  
 196. *Ma mu mo to batu.'* And go with border stone.'

## 6) Forest cuckoo//river watercock

204. *'Mo doa lasi* 'Go with the forest cuckoo  
 205. *Ma mo koloba'o le'* And go with the river watercock'

Four of these dialogue passages end with the similar formulaic refrain, in either shorter or longer format.

The shorter format is the same.

167. *'Na Suti au o se* 'Then I, Suti, with whom will I be  
 168. *Ma Bina au o se?'* And I, Bina, with whom will I be?  
 177. *'Na Suti au o se* 'Then I, Suti, with whom will I be  
 178. *Ma Bina au o se?'* And I, Bina, with whom will I be?'

The longer format expands on this.

2. VERSION I FROM THE DOMAIN OF TERMANU

- |      |                               |                                    |
|------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 150. | <i>'Na Bina, au o se</i>      | 'Then I, Bina, with whom will I be |
| 151. | <i>Ma Suti, au o se</i>       | And I, Suti, with whom will I be   |
| 152. | <i>Fo au kokolak o se</i>     | With whom will I talk              |
| 153. | <i>Ma au dede'ak o se?'</i>   | And with whom will I speak?'       |
| 188. | <i>'Na Suti au o se</i>       | 'Then I, Suti, with whom will I be |
| 189. | <i>Ma Bina au o se</i>        | And I, Bina, with whom will I be   |
| 190. | <i>Fo au kokolak o se</i>     | With whom will I talk              |
| 191. | <i>Ma au dede'ak o se</i>     | And with whom will I speak         |
| 192. | <i>Tao neu nakabanik</i>      | To create hope                     |
| 193. | <i>Ma tao neu namahenak?'</i> | And create expectation?'           |

Once, however, when told to go with 'boundary tree//border stone', another formulaic reply is offered.<sup>9</sup>

- |      |                             |                              |
|------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 199. | <i>'Te hu ai dede'an ta</i> | 'But a tree does not talk    |
| 200. | <i>Ma batu kokolan ta.'</i> | And a stone does not speak.' |

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9 This couplet uses noun forms of the set *kokolak//dede'ak*, so it might be more appropriate to translate these lines as:

- |      |                             |                             |
|------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 199. | <i>'Te hu ai dede'an ta</i> | 'But a tree has no talk     |
| 200. | <i>Ma batu kokolan ta.'</i> | And a stone has no speech.' |

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.