

# Remembering and Recreating Origins: The Transformation of a Tradition of Canonical Parallelism among the Rotenese of Eastern Indonesia<sup>1</sup>

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## Personal Prefatory Remarks

I have been studying an oral tradition of strict canonical parallelism intermittently for nearly half a century. I began my research on this oral tradition based on the island of Rote in eastern Indonesia in 1965, and have continued these efforts, now with greater urgency, to the present. I have also been investigating issues in comparative parallelism for roughly the same period of time. In 2014 I published *Explorations in Semantic Parallelism*, which marked an important stage in this research. This volume is a collection of papers both new and old. For example, I reprinted my first survey of the field in 1977 published in honor of Roman Jakobson together with a longer paper on the “trajectory” of subsequent and continuing developments in the study of parallelism.

*Explorations in Semantic Parallelism* also reprints several of my papers on the study of the Rotenese tradition of canonical parallelism together with various papers that continue to extend my study of this tradition. My personal understanding of the Rotenese tradition of canonical composition has grown over several decades, while the tradition itself has been undergoing change. My perceptions of this change are intimately linked to my increasing comprehension of the tradition as a whole.

In this paper I take stock of the work on that tradition to date and to put it into perspective. I also describe the changes that have occurred in the tradition over the course of my research as I gradually gained new perceptions of its fundamental underpinnings. Much of my general research on Rote has been historically oriented. The island has its own extensive oral historical traditions as well as Dutch archival records that date to the mid-seventeenth

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<sup>1</sup>A version of this paper was presented at the “Parallelism in Verbal Art and Performance” Seminar-Workshop held in Helsinki, Finland on May 26-27, 2014. I was initially prompted to write this paper on reading Timo Kaartinen’s paper, “Handing Down and Writing Down: Metadiscourses of Tradition among the Bandanese of Eastern Indonesia” (*Journal of American Folklore* 126 (502):385-406. Prof. Kaartinen’s paper is a fascinating study of changing modes of discourse in the transmission of the folk traditions of the Eli Banda population—a displaced and dispersed, seagoing Islamic population of eastern Indonesia. This paper could perhaps be considered a study in contrasts. The Rotenese are a long-settled Christian population who retain strong memories of their former “canon” of origin narratives while at the same time, they are actively engaged in the creation of a new “canon” of origin narratives.

century. Some of the changes in Rote's traditions of parallelism that I perceive as most significant were, on good historical evidence, begun a century earlier and have now taken over as ever more influential.

### **Introduction to the Study of Rotenese Ritual Language: The Context of Recitation**

For a period of roughly four decades, all my recordings of the Rotenese "ritual language" were opportunistic. They were made during the course of ongoing fieldwork, primarily in one domain on the island, that of the central domain of Termanu (see Fig. 1). Recordings often occurred at ritual gatherings but just as often they happened when an individual poet or chanter chose to provide me with a particular recitation. One attraction for such recitations was that I always made certain to have a ready supply of native palm gin, which is regarded by the Rotenese as the "water of words," and is both a stimulus and requisite for recitation.<sup>2</sup>

Although these efforts at recording could hardly be considered systematic, they were neither fortuitous nor without plan. During my first fieldwork, I was fortunate in having as my language teacher, an elder master poet, known as Old Meno, who held the ritual office of Head of the Earth. His first male grandson was born shortly after I arrived, and he was taken with the possibility offered by my *Uher* tape recorder of transmitting his knowledge across generations. More than any other poet whom I have recorded, he had a concern for revealing and thus possibly preserving core traditions of origin.

Other poets were stirred to record by the rivalry that existed among them. The fact that I had recorded from a particular poet and let it be known that I valued that recitation would prompt other poets to want to record. Most recordings were of individuals and, if it was at all possible, I would work through the recording and transcription with that poet. Early in my fieldwork, on the advice of the elder brother of the ruler (*Manek*) of Termanu, I declared an interest in recording a particular text, *Suti Solo do Bina Bane*. This became a kind of key signature text that I recorded from many poets over the years. I also sponsored particular mortuary rituals at which recitation was required. Chanters would come to perform and, as was once the case throughout the island, I gave rewards to those who performed. As a result, I have a large and varied corpus of recitations.

The chant recitations in this traditional corpus belong to two broad categories. They are recited either as origin chants or mortuary chants. On Rote, all cultural events and many cultural "goods" have their separate origins. Formerly, on ritual occasions of celebration—for house-building, marriage, the payment of bride-wealth, the initiation of weaving or of planting—origin chants would be recited to acknowledge the events that gave rise to these activities. Although all origin chants are related to one another, each chant recounts an episode in the engagement of the Sun and Moon and their descendants with the Lords of Ocean and Sea,

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<sup>2</sup>A photograph of the gin-still I relied on for a steady flow of eleven bottles per day during my first fieldwork can be found on p.103 of my book, *Harvest of the Palm* (1977b). The film I made with Tim and Patsy Asch, *Water of Words* (Fox et al.1983), documents the role of gin in promoting Rotenese discourse.

represented as Shark and Crocodile. What may once have been a single long epic of cosmic involvement is currently told in bits and pieces that only hint at the possible larger whole.

By the time I arrived on Rote, the ritual recitation of these chants was becoming rare. However, among knowledgeable chanters, the memory of these origin chants was preserved and their recitation, though restricted, was considered the highest form of revelation. To avoid ancestral sanctions, those chanters who revealed an origin chant to me would never reveal the “whole” of their knowledge. A portion of the chant would be omitted or elided or the chant might be retold and recited, without fear of retributions, as a mortuary chant. My first publication of a ritual text (1971)—a remarkable mortuary chant from Old Meno that recounts the theft of a child by ritually paired raptors, “hawk and eagle,” the child’s demise, and his eventual return for burial—is a good example of this re-rendering of an origin chant. Years later, I recorded this same chant told as the “origin” of two prominent rock formations—Sua Lai and Batu Hun—that dominate the north coast of Termanu. A key chant—*Suti Solo do Bina Bane*—is another origin chant that can be rendered either as an origin chant or as a mortuary chant (see Fox 2016 for 19 different versions of this chant recited by 17 different master poets).

There is a considerable repertoire of mortuary chants in the traditional canon that were still being performed when I began my research in Termanu. There are chants to fit all social categories: rich and poor, noble and commoner. Each chant has a double-named “chant character,” whose life is recounted generally from birth to death and to whom the deceased is compared. Although there are some general categories of mortuary chant, which rely on the dual figure of “widow and orphan,” most chants are highly specific: for a rich commoner with herds of livestock, for a young girl who dies prematurely, for a young noble who has spent his time chasing women, and so on. In the Termanu repertoire, there are more mortuary chants than origin chants, and these varied chants are incredibly striking and evocative. An important sociological feature of all mortuary chants is that unlike the genre of historical narratives (*tutui tete’ek*), which are owned or controlled by a specific clan or lineage, these chants are an open resource to be told by knowledgeable chanters (*manahelo*) who have acquired their knowledge generally from some older relative—not necessarily a direct genealogical ancestor.

During my first fieldwork in 1965-66 and again during my second fieldwork in 1972-73, I spent most of my time in Termanu and accordingly made my recordings in this domain. I lived briefly in Korbaffo in 1966 but did not manage to record a single recitation. In 1966 near the end of my stay on Rote, however, I was able to record the blind minister/poet, Manoeain, in his home in the domain of Ba’a. More productively, during both periods of long fieldwork, I made excursions to Oe Handi in the southern domain of Thie where I lived with the remarkable poet and teacher, Guru N. D. Pah. Along with his fellow poet, S. Ndun, Guru Pah provided me with a substantial repertoire of Thie’s origin chants, which served for years as my point of comparative reference to the traditions of Termanu.

Rote was politically divided into domains (*nusak*) by the Dutch East India Company beginning in the middle of the seventeenth century. Since the early nineteenth century, there have been eighteen recognized autonomous domains on the island. Each domain celebrates its separate origin and insists that it possesses its own distinct language. In fact, the languages of the domains form a dialect chain from east to west. Neighboring dialects are mutually

intelligible but this intelligibility declines as the distance increases. As often occurs in dialect chains, distant dialects are almost unintelligible to one another. Although my two domain-two dialect (Termanu-Thie) perspective on Rotenese ritual language provided me with valuable insights, I came to recognize that this framework was too limited for a proper study of the diverse ritual language traditions of the island. Therefore, belatedly, on the eve of my formal retirement, I resolved to try and rectify this inadequacy.



Fig. 1. The domains of Rote.

### “Master Poets, Ritual Masters” Project

With initial funding from the Australian Research Council, I embarked on what I initially conceived as a three year project to identify the master poets in the various domains of Rote and to invite them to Bali for a week long recording session. My suspicion was that, removed from the ritual restrictions imposed by their local situations and in the company of other notable poets, such poets would feel more free to recite. My suspicions proved correct, especially for the most elder of the poets for whom the plane trip above the clouds was both exhilarating and liberating: “like traveling to heaven.” Initially, I traveled to Rote to enlist the first poets: my oldest living friend and informant, Esau Pono, from Termanu, and Ande Ruy, Rote’s most widely acclaimed poet, from Ringgou. These two poets joined subsequent recording sessions, and in the meantime, helped identify and recruit other master poets.

My first recording session on Bali was entirely experimental and included only four poets from Termanu and Ringgou. Subsequent sessions grew larger and more diverse. The second session had six poets, with new poets from Landu and Ringgou. The third session also had six poets, adding new poets from Dengka and Keka.

By the end of three years, I had just begun. Moreover the recitations in diverse dialects presented a challenge to my understanding, which was based on my knowledge of dialect and traditions of Termanu. Therefore I needed to invite poets, who had already recited in previous years, to come again so that I could work closely with them on their previous recitations. As a result, the fourth session in Bali included poets from Termanu and Ringgou (my old stalwarts, Esau Pono and Ande Ruy), plus a previous poet from Dengka, along with four new poets from the domain of Thie. The fifth session included nine poets, three repeat poets from Termanu, Ringgou, and Dengka plus three new poets from Bilba, two from Korbaffo, and one from Oenale. The seventh session had almost entirely repeat poets, all remarkable master poets from Oenale, Thie, Termanu, Bilba, Ringgou, and Landu, plus one new poet from Oepao. The eighth and ninth sessions included newcomers but concentrated on those master poets who had already provided excellent recitations.

Instead of being able to complete my proposed study in three years, I have had no choice but to continue recording sessions. To date, I have held nine recording sessions on Bali, recording twenty-eight different poets from ten of Rote's eighteen domains. On the basis of what I have learned, I have tentatively divided the domains into six dialect areas (Fig. 2), several of which would qualify, I believe, as different languages. Over the past decade, I have struggled to translate recitations from all of these dialect areas.

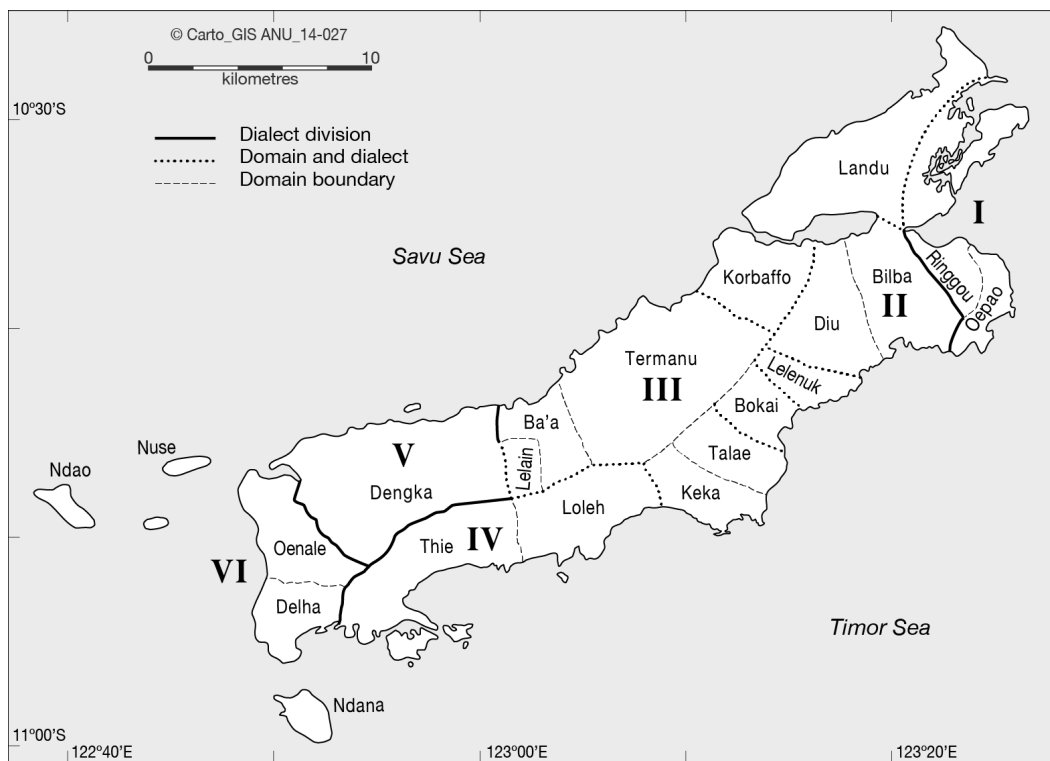


Fig 2. A tentative dialect map of Rote (note: Dialects II and III are closer to one another than they are to any other dialects).

Like all projects, this one was fraught with difficulties. Some poets whom I invited to join the group had to decline on short notice to attend family rituals, or were too ill to travel. Two poets came down with malaria after they arrived in Bali and were in no condition to

recite. A true master poet from Dengka, a man with an enormous repertoire, Simon Lesik, who promised to join our group again for more recordings, died before he could make a return visit to Bali. Other poets from Bilba and Thie also died suddenly. My closest collaborator, Esau Pono, was unable to join us for our ninth recording session and died not long afterwards in his home in Termanu.

However, though this project is still incomplete and with many loose ends, it has generated an enormous collection of diverse recordings. Although I have not yet been able to translate all these recitations and have many questions of interpretation about them, this effort has given me a much fuller comprehension of the tradition of Rotenese ritual language and the developments that are occurring in different local areas where the tradition continues.

### **Defining the Contours of the Rotenese Ritual Language Tradition**

All Rotenese ritual recitations can be linked to the performance of particular rituals. The most important of these recitations, which I have described as “origin chants,” are associated with particular rituals that have ceased to be performed almost everywhere on Rote. Previously each domain held an Origin Celebration (variously referred to as *Hus*, *Sio*, or *Limbe*). The practice of holding these celebrations came to an end in most parts of Rote in the first half of the twentieth century. They are still performed each year in only one small village area in the domain of Dengka. Similarly, all of the major rituals of the Rotenese that initiated and accompanied the building of traditional houses, the planting of rice and millet, the processes of weaving and tie-dying, along with various events of the life cycle have also ceased to be performed. Hence all of the origin chants that are currently recited are based on memories of a ritual world that has passed. Only marriage and funeral ceremonies, on occasion, continue to preserve elements of previous performance and recitation.

During my first periods of fieldwork, I occasionally witnessed the traditional performance of some of the life cycle rituals. I also sponsored two commemorative mortuary ceremonies at which recitations occurred, but the second of these ceremonies, some ten years after the first, was a curious adaptation of the earlier performance. I have argued in several of my publications that the Rotenese are rather indifferent ritualists: speaking is tantamount to performance and saying that such and such has occurred is sufficient to making it so (see for example Fox 1979:147-51 and 1988:174-92).

Hence there is a certain paradox, especially among Rotenese poets: for the most part, they remain intensely committed to the remembrance of a traditional oral canon that is no longer a functional part of their everyday ritual life. Yet knowledge of this canon—or rather, the belief that there is such an ancestral canon that must be preserved—remains fundamental to a perception of Rotenese life and identity.

As a consequence, there is an insistent refrain in Rotenese ritual recitations:

<i>Ndele mafandendelek</i>	“Remember, do remember
<i>Ma neda masanenedak</i>	And keep in mind, do keep in mind...”

### The Formation of a Second Canon

In the meanwhile, the tradition of ritual language has not remained static. It has taken on new dimensions and is in the process of creating a new canon—one that is also focused on redefined “origins.”

Rotenese nobility began converting to Christianity in the early part of the eighteenth century. They adopted the use of Malay as a means of communicating with the Dutch; they established local Malay schools in a majority of their domains, and they took on the use of the Malay Bible as their primary source of learning. As Christians, they claimed equality with the Dutch.

For a period of over a hundred and fifty years, schooling, literacy in Malay, and adherence to Christianity were inseparably bound together. Only toward the end of the nineteenth century—and largely as a result of the efforts of a single Dutch missionary, G. J. H. Le Grand, who arrived on Rote in 1890—were the strict bonds of Christian literacy in Malay undone. Le Grand came to the realization that after 170 years of Christianity on the island, less than a fifth of the population was Christian, and even for them, Christianity was little more than what he called “Sunday apparel” (Le Grand 1900:373). He initiated the use of ritual language as a vehicle for preaching Christianity and devoted much of his effort to teaching a new generation of Rotenese church ministers to use ritual language in their preaching.

Change was slow, but by the 1920s and 1930s some of Rote’s leading poets were Christian ministers. Churches became the venue for ritual language recitations. As such, it was often difficult to disengage the Christian elements from those of the older tradition in ritual language recitations. Many of Rote’s finest and most fluent poets became eminent preachers, even without formal Christian theological training.

The entanglement of the two traditions was initially somewhat perplexing for me. During my first fieldwork, I gathered two superb examples of ritual language from the blind poet-minister, L. Manoeain, when I visited him in Ba’a: one was a beautiful version of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane*; the other was a long recitation on possible life-pathways marked out on the branches of the banyan tree. Only after I had translated it and considered it carefully did I realize that it was a Christian admonition in a wholly “traditional” mode. Peu Malesi was one of the first poets of Termanu from whom I recorded a number of ritual chants. One day, during my second field trip in 1972-73, he came to recite for me the chant on the origin of death. Most of those who heard him took his recitation as a revelation of traditional knowledge; only one school teacher recognized it as a retelling of the Biblical narrative of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.<sup>3</sup>

In many of my publications, I have pointed to the Christian dimension that has been grafted onto Rotenese ritual traditions (for example, Fox 1982, 1983, and 2014). This transformation has involved the “borrowing” of numerous recognizable formulaic phrases and

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<sup>3</sup>The majority of Rotenese poets are versatile. Samuel Ndun from Thie was one of the most remarkable, utterly fluent poets I ever recorded. He, too, was a local preacher. I remember overhearing his initial question at a wedding at which he had been asked to perform: “What do you want, a Christian or traditional (that is, coconut) ceremony?” I discuss and illustrate this formation of a Christian canon at greater length in three chapters (Fox 2014:317-64).

themes whose metaphoric meanings have been extended to new contexts, but it has also involved the creation of a considerable body of new “theological terms” in strict parallelism. This theological lexicon is still in the process of creation, and its creation is occurring in different dialects of Rotenese. Hence there is no standard lexicon; rather, there are many family resemblances among lexical elements. In approaching this lexicon, it is best to identify terms by domain dialect and poet.

### The New Theological Lexicon in Rotenese Ritual Language

The following lines, quoted from the poet L. Manoeain’s description of life’s journey to heaven, provide an idea of a recitation in this new canon. I have translated these as literally as possible to retain the sense of the metaphoric parallelism:

<i>Te dala sodak nde ndia</i>	For this is the road of well-being
<i>Ma eno molek nde ndia</i>	And this is the path of peace
<i>Fo nini o mu losa kapa-sula soda daen</i>	To bring you to the buffalo-horn land of well-being
<i>Ma mu nduku pa-dui molek oen.</i>	And to the flesh and bone water of peace.
<i>Dae sodak nai ndia</i>	The land of well-being is there
<i>Ma oe molek nai na</i>	And the water of peace is there
<i>Fo o hambu soda sio</i>	For you will find the well-being of nine
<i>Ma o hambu mole falu</i>	And you will find the peace of eight
<i>Ma dua lolo ei</i>	And with legs outstretched
<i>Ma kala ifa lima</i>	And with arms cradled on the lap
<i>Fo ifa limam no limam</i>	Cradle your arms upon your arms
<i>Ma lolo eim no eim.</i>	And stretch your legs over your legs.

In these lines, heaven is referred to as “the buffalo-horn land of well-being // the flesh and bone water of life”; or more simply, it is “the land of well-being // the water of life” where one finds “the well-being of nine” and “peace of eight.” The phrases are all adaptations of dyadic (that is, parallel) sets of the kind that regularly occur in traditional origin chants: *kapa-sula* // *pa-dui*: “buffalo-horn” // “flesh-bone”; *dae* // *oe*: “land” // “water”; *sio* // *falu*: “nine” // “eight” (these numbers signify wholeness or completion). On the other hand, the paired terms *soda* // *mole*: “well-being” // “peace” are intimately connected with Christianity—they are in fact used as a greeting among Christians—and do not appear in “traditional” origin chants. Use of these terms is a clear sign of a recitation in a Christian mode.

The poet Esau Pono from Termanu prefers to refer to Heaven as *Nusa Soda ma Ingu Tema: Bate Falu, Tema Sio*: “The Domain of Well-Being and Land of Fullness of Eightfold Abundance and Ninefold Fullness.” In describing the Biblical creator, the poet Yulius Iu from Landu speaks of:

<i>Tou Mana Sura Poi a</i>	The Inscraper of the Heights
<i>Ma Tate Mana Adu Lai a</i>	And the Creator of the Heavens



By contrast, the poet Ande Ruy from Ringgou describes the Biblical creator as follows:

*Tate Mana Sura Bula*  
*Do Tou Mana Adu Ledo*

The Inscraper of the Moon  
Or the Creator of the Sun

The term for the Holy Spirit in Termanu is: *Dula Dale ma Le'u Tein* (“Patterner of the Heart” // “Shaper of the Inside”). The variant term for the Holy Spirit in Ringgou is *Dula Dale ma Malala Funa* (“Patterner of the Heart” // “Former of the Core”).

Christ, for example, is the *Mana-Soi ma Mana-Tefa*: “He who freed and He who paid, that is, “Savior and Redeemer.” This designation is based on the pairing of the verb, *soi*: “to open, to let loose, to free” and the verb *tefa*: “to pay.” Together as a formal dyadic set this pair attempts to capture something of the Christian idea of redemption.

There are numerous expressions used to refer to Christ. Virtually all of them are metaphorically dense and theologically complex. Many of these expressions, which are now taken for granted in ritual language, require careful exegesis.

Christ, for example, can be referred to as *Maleo Lain Pua-na // Masafali Poin Tua-na*: “The Heavenly Lord’s Areca Palm [son] // The High God’s Lontar Palm [son].” Or using another botanic idiom, Christ can be referred to as *Huni ma-lapa litik // Tefu ma-nggona lilok*: “The Banana Stalk with copper blossoms // The Sugarcane with golden sheaths.” Using yet another botanic expression, Christ’s crucifixion can be compared to the withering of taro and yam (*tale // fia*), which is likened to a “temporary death” before these plants revive. Even Golgotha, the place of Christ’s crucifixion, is given a specific dual ritual name, *Lete Langaduik // Puku Pakulima*: “Hill of the Skull” // “Mount of the Nailed Hands.”

There is great variety, and considerable ingenuity, in the creation of this new theological lexicon, but it is always in strict parallelism and invariably draws on traditional formulaic expressions for its effect.

### **Older Origin Chants and the Creation of New Christian Origin Narratives**

All origin recitations concern relations between the Sun and Moon, *Ledo Holo // Bula Kai*, and the Lords of the Sea and Ocean, the Shark and Crocodile, who are known by the exalted titles *Danga Lena Liun // Mane Tua Sain*: “Chief Hunter of the Ocean” // “Great Lord of the Sea.” Each specific recitation recounts an episode in the account of these relations that gave rise to the cultural objects that form the basis of Rotenese life: the knowledge of fire and of cooked food, the seeds of rice and millet and of other crops, tools for building the house and the equipment for tie-dyeing and weaving—including the knowledge of the patterning of cloth.

The Sun and Moon have numerous children, all of whom are identifiable by the inclusion of “Sun” and “Moon” (*Ledo* and *Bula*, respectively) in their names. One of the most important origin recitations recounts the initial encounter between *Mandeti Ledo // Patola Bula*, sons of the Sun and Moon, and the Lords of the Sea and Ocean. They encounter each other in a hunt for wild pig // civet cat. When they have succeeded in their hunt, they argue whether to hold

the sacrificial feast of these animals in the Heavens or the Sea. In the end, the Lords of the Sea prevail and they all descend into the Sea.

When Patola Bulan and Mandeti Ledo descend into the sea, they discover there the use of fire and the cooking of meat with rice and millet. This is described in a recitation that I recorded from the poet Peu Malesi in 1965. A brief excerpt from this long narrative is as follows:

<i>Besak-ka dilu leu liun dalek</i>	Now they turn and go down into the ocean
<i>Ma leo neu sain dalek</i>	And they descend and go down into the sea
<i>Ma leu Man'tua Sain lon-na</i>	And they go to the house of <i>Man'tua Sain</i>
<i>Ma Danga Lena Liun uman-na.</i>	And the home of <i>Danga Lena Liun</i> .
<i>Nana-sini kea louk</i>	Decked with turtle shells
<i>Ma nana-heu hai iko.</i>	And roofed with rayfish tails
<i>De na-ndela liti data</i>	It flashes like ancient copper
<i>Do na-sa'a engge oe.</i>	Or it shines like wetted lead.
<i>Boe ma ala dilu doli nai liun</i>	So they prepare rice in the ocean
<i>De fina kue nai liun</i>	To hold the sacrifice of civet cat in the ocean
<i>Ma tutu lutu nai sain</i>	And they pound millet in the sea
<i>De fati bafi nai sain.</i>	To offer wild pig in the sea.
<i>La'a te feo filu</i>	They eat but also wind a leaf-container of food
<i>Ma linu te poti latu.</i>	And they drink but also wrap a bundle of food.
<i>De leni fe Ledo Holo</i>	They carry this to <i>Ledo Holo</i>
<i>Ma leni fe Bula Kai.</i>	And they carry this to <i>Bula Kai</i> .
<i>Besak-ka Bula Kai na'a nita</i>	Now <i>Bula Kai</i> eats to see what it is
<i>Ma Ledo Holo ninu nita.</i>	And <i>Ledo Holo</i> drinks to see what it is.
<i>Boe ma nae:</i>	He says:
<i>"Ladak ia nai be</i>	"From where is this taste?
<i>Ma lolek ia nai be?"</i>	Where is this goodness?"
<i>Boe ma lae:</i>	They say:
<i>"Ladak ia nai liun</i>	"This taste is in the ocean
<i>Ma lolek ia nai sain."</i>	And this goodness is in the sea."

In another telling of this origin chant, also recorded in 1965, but from Old Meno, the poet Stefanus Adulanu describes the discovery of the lontar palm juice, which they take with the cooked food to the Sun and Moon (in this version, however, the sons of the Sun and Moon are identified as *Pala Ledo // Ndu Bulan*). Meno then goes on to describe what occurs in Heaven when the Sun and Moon have eaten and drunk the food from the sea. In this version, when they have eaten, the Sun and Moon propose making war upon the Lords of the Sea to obtain tasty cooked food and sweet lontar juice, but they are counseled against this idea by their sons:

<i>De Bulan no Ledo</i>	The Moon ( <i>Bulan</i> ) and Sun ( <i>Ledo</i> )
<i>La'a ma linu lita.</i>	Eat and drink and they see.

*Boe ma ala do-do.*

*De lafada anan nala,*

*Fo Ndu Bulan ma Pala Ledo lae:*

*“Malole ata le’a tafa neu sain*

*Ma loe dongi neu liun.”*

*Boe te Ndu Bulan*

*No Pala Ledo lae:*

*“Malole ndia boe.*

*Te hu pela oe leu-leu*

*Ma tasi oe lama-lama.*

*De ita tesik enok-ka nde be?”*

Then they think to themselves.

They speak to their children,

*Ndu Bulan* and *Pala Ledo*, saying:

“It would be good if we stretch a sword over the sea

And lower a barbed spear on the ocean.”

But *Ndu Bulan*

And *Pala Ledo* say:

“That would be good.

But the ocean’s surface wanders all about

And the sea’s water spreads everywhere.

What path would we take?”

Instead of war, a marriage is proposed with the sea. Here, however, versions differ significantly. In Old Meno’s telling, the Sun and Moon marry with the woman *Lole Liuk* “Goodness of the Ocean,” and the girl *Lada Saik*, “Tastiness of the Sea.” This pair brings a rich dowry, including the tools (axe and adze) for building the house. In Malesi’s version (and other versions I have gathered), the Sun and Moon give one of their daughters to marry with the Lords of the Sea. In these versions, there occurs a long passage on the negotiation of bridewealth. The following passage is from Malesi’s recitation:

*Besak-ka ala fifino neu liun*

*De tu neu liun dale*

*Ma ala lelete neu sain*

*De sao neu sain dalek.*

*Besak-ka ana sao Danga Lena Liun*

*Ma tu Mane Tua Sain*

*Boe ala doko-doe fae-tena*

*Ma ala tai-boni beli-batun.*

*De ala fe lilo ma-langa munge*

*Ma ala fe kapa ma-ao foek.*

*Te ala bei doko-doe*

*Ma ala bei tai-boni.*

*Besak-ka ala fe bo pa’a-bela*

*Ma ala fe taka tala-la.*

*Ala fe sipa aba-do*

*Ma ala fe funu ma-leo.*

*Te hu ala bei doko-doe*

*Ma ala bei tai boni.*

*Boe-ma ala fe nesu maka-boka buik*

*Ma alu mata-fia tongok.*

*Te ala bei doko-doe*

*Ma ala bei tai-boni.*

*Besak-ka ala fe kutu-ana nau-poin*

Now they make a way to the ocean

To wed within the ocean

And they bridge a path to the sea

To marry within the sea.

Now she marries *Danga Lena Liun*

And she weds *Mane Tua Sain*

They demand a payment of livestock

And they claim a bridewealth of gold.

They give a gold chain with a snake’s head

And they give buffalo with pied-white bodies.

But still they continue to demand

And still they continue to claim.

Now they give the bore-tool and flat-chisel

And they give the axe and the adze.

They give the plumb line markers

And they give the turning drill.

But still they continue to demand

And still they continue to claim.

They give the mortar whose thudding shakes its base

And the pestle whose thrust blisters the hand.

But still they continue to demand

And still they continue to claim.

Then they give the little flint-set with loose tinder grass

*Ma una-ana ai-nggeo.*

*Besak-ka ala lae:*

*“Dai te ta dai*

*O nai ta dai liman*

*Ma no’u te ta nou*

*O nai kuku no’u nen.”*

*Besak-ka lenin neu poin*

*Ma lenin neu lain.*

And the little black-sticked fire drill.

Now they say:

“Whether enough or not enough

What’s in our grip is enough in our hand

And whether sufficient or insufficient

What’s in our fingers is sufficient in our grasp.”

Now they carry everything to the Heights

And they carry everything to Heaven.

All versions of this origin chant—whatever the direction of marriage—continue with the building of the house. This is seen as a central creative activity in Rotenese culture. Although I have heard parts of this chant recited during a bridewealth payment ceremony, it is probable that the recitation of this chant, in some form or other, was once critical to the building of the house. This particular origin chant provides the background to other episodes that involve relations between the Sun and Moon and the Lords of the Sea. As an account of origins, it is fundamentally different from various Christian origin narratives and, in particular, from the telling of the Genesis narrative.

Not surprisingly, the chief origin chant now recited among the Rotenese is that of Genesis but, as in all oral cultures, the telling of Genesis among the Rotenese varies from poet to poet. In some instances, it is a richly metaphoric interpretation of Genesis with curious cultural interpolations, while in other instances, it is a relatively close retelling of the Biblical account.

Two illustrative recitations follow (see Fox 2014a:317-41). The first of these is by Ande Ruy, an extraordinarily capable poet from the domain of Ringgou (but not someone who would, in Rotenese terms, be considered a preacher). I have selected three passages from a long recitation that continues on to the creation of Adam to whom he gives the ritual name, *Tou Manupui Dulu // Tate O’oro Laka*. (The name is obtuse and translates literally as “The Man who is the Manupui-bird of the East” // “The Boy who is the O’oro-bird of the Headland.” The name implies someone at the dawn of time.)

#### *I. The Initial Creation: Darkness to Light*

*Hida bei leo hata na*

*Ma data bei leo dona*

*Bei iu-iu kima lou*

*Ma bei hatu-hatu data feo.*

*Ma lua bei taa*

*Ma makaledo bei taa*

*Ma bei pela oe leleu*

*Bei tasi oe lala.*

*Ma tate mana sura bula*

*Fo nai Tema Sio*

*Do tou mana adu ledo*

At a time long ago

And at a time since past

Still dark as the inside of a clam

Still gloom wrapped all round.

And Sunlight was not yet

And Daylight was not yet

Still surface water throughout

Still the water of sea surrounding.

And the Inscraper of the Moon

In the Fullness of Nine

Or the Creator of the Sun

<i>Fo nai Bate Falu</i>	In the Abundance of Eight
<i>Bei ise-ise leo apa</i>	Still isolated as a buffalo
<i>Ma bei mesa-mesa leo manu.</i>	Still lonely as a chicken.
<i>Bei iku nonoi</i>	Still in the heights
<i>Dula Dale namaleu</i>	The Patterner of the Heart comes
<i>Bei malalao</i>	Still hovering above
<i>Do Malala Funa bei leu-leu</i>	Or the Former of the Core still comes
<i>Do bei lala-lala rae</i>	Or still hovering over the earth
<i>Pela oe leleu</i>	Moving over the water
<i>Do tasi oe lalama.</i>	The waters of the sea extending.
<i>Ma Tate mana sura bula</i>	The Insciber of the Moon
<i>Do Tou mana adu ledo</i>	Or the Creator of the Sun
<i>Lole hara na neu</i>	Raises forth His voice
<i>Fo hara eke na neu</i>	The leaden voice comes forth
<i>Ma selu dasi na neu</i>	Lifts forth his words
<i>Fo dasi lilo na neu, nae:</i>	Golden words go forth, saying:
<i>“Makaledo a dadi ma</i>	“Let there be sunlight
<i>Ma malua a mori.”</i>	And let daylight appear.”

## II. *The Creation of the Earth*

<i>Selu dasi na neu</i>	He lifts forth his words
<i>Ma lole hara na neu</i>	And raises forth his voice
<i>Fo hara eke na neu</i>	The leaden voice comes forth
<i>“Dadi mai Batu Poi a”</i>	“Let there be the Rock’s Point”
<i>Ma dasi lilo na neu</i>	And the golden words come forth:
<i>“Mori mai Dae Bafo a.”</i>	“Let there appear the Earth’s Surface.”
<i>Boe ma mana mori, ara mori</i>	What appears, appears
<i>Ma mana dadi, ara dadi.</i>	And what comes forth, comes forth.
<i>Fo biti ne ara dadi do mori</i>	Plants come forth or appear
<i>Fo mori reni hu ana</i>	Appear with tiny trunks
<i>Ma dadi reni hu ina.</i>	And come forth with large trunks.
<i>Boe ma feli nade neu</i>	So He gives them their name
<i>Ma beka bon, rae:</i>	And their aroma, saying:
<i>“Hu mana rerebi do</i>	“Trunks that grow thick
<i>Do mana sasape ara</i>	Leaves that hang down
<i>Fo rabuna bitala</i>	That flowers bud forth
<i>Ma raboa bebeku</i>	And that fruit droop
<i>Fo buna nara, mafa modo</i>	Flowers of half-ripe green
<i>Ma boa nara, latu lai</i>	And fruit of over-ripe yellow
<i>Fo ono rule Dae Bafo a</i>	Coming down on to the earth
<i>Ma refa feo Batu Poi a.”</i>	And descending round the world.”

III. *Continuation of Creation: The Sea and the Creatures of the Sea*

<i>Selu dasin neu Sain</i>	His voice goes to the sea
<i>Ma lole haran neu Liun</i>	And His words go to the ocean
<i>Fo ela rai tasi a dadi</i>	So that the sea comes forth
<i>Ma seko meti a mori.</i>	And the ocean appears.
<i>Boe ma nahara neu sain, nae:</i>	He speaks to the sea, saying:
<i>“Moka Holu o dadi</i>	You, Moka Holu fish, come forth
<i>Na dadi mo tia tasim</i>	Come forth with sea clams
<i>Fo ela tia tasi mai tai</i>	That the sea clams may cling
<i>Ma Dusu Lake o mori</i>	And you Dusu Lake fish, appear
<i>Na mori mo lopu le</i>	Appear with the river moss
<i>Fo ela lopu le mai feo</i>	That the river moss may come round
<i>Nai sai makeon</i>	In the darkened sea
<i>Do nai liu ma momodo na</i>	Or the deep green ocean
<i>Fo ela oli seu meu esa</i>	So that in the estuary, you go as one
<i>Ma Nase te meu esa</i>	And as small Nase fish, you go as one
<i>Ma nura nai meu esa</i>	And in the forest, you go as one
<i>Fo ode rane meu esa.”</i>	So as playful monkeys, you go as one.”

This recitation of Genesis is suffused with expressions from the traditional canon. One striking example is the reference to the Creator as “isolated as a buffalo” // “lonely as a chicken”—a common ritual language phrase. It also includes references to the creation of particular fish species, *Moka Hulu* and *Dusu Lake*, that are ritually significant in recitations from the traditional canon. These ritual fish are required for the performance of the annual origin ceremony after the harvest. As a recitation, this rendering of Genesis resonates with older origin chants.

For comparison, I quote passages from an equally long recitation by the poet Yulius Iu from the domain of Landu, who is considered as much a poet as a preacher. In fact, he is a lay preacher in the Evangelical Church on Rote. His recitation is also suffused with expressions from the traditional canon. The passages I quote tell of the creation of the world and then of the creation of first Adam, then Eve, and then of God’s injunction to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Fox 2014a:334-36):

I. *The Initial Creation*

<i>Au tui ia nana, nae:</i>	I tell of
<i>Tui dae ina dadadi</i>	Tell of the creation of the world
<i>Masosa na le mauulu a</i>	Its beginning and commencement
<i>Tou Mana Sura Poi a</i>	The Insciber of the Heights
<i>Ma Tate Mana Adu Lai a</i>	And the Creator of the Heavens
<i>Adu neme lalai no dae ina.</i>	Created heaven and earth.
<i>Boema adu do tao nalan</i>	Then He created and made them

*Tehu bei kiu-kiu kima rou*  
*Ma bei hatu-hatu do tafao*  
*Bei nafaroe dea ei*  
*Bei nafadama lutu lima.*  
*Basa boema adu nala malua a*  
*Ma riti ndala makaledo a*  
*De malua nala dulu*  
*Ma makaledo nala laka.*  
*Basa boema adu do tao nala*  
*Tada nala oe mamis a no tasi oe.*  
*Basa boema adu do tao nala*  
*Adu do tao basa-basa*  
*Hu marerebi ma ara ma do masesepe a.*  
*Basa boema adu do tao nala*  
*Malua a do makaledo a*  
*Ialah bula a, fandu ara, ma ledo a.*

But still there was darkness like the inside of a shell  
 And still there was gloom all round  
 As if still groping in the legs of a fish weir  
 Still fumbling in the arms of a fish trap.  
 When he created the brightness  
 And generated daylight  
 The sun rose in the east  
 And the daylight appeared at the head.  
 When this had been created and made  
 He separated fresh water and sea water.  
 When this had been created and made  
 He created and made all  
 Tree plants and leaved plants.  
 When this had been created and made  
 There was daylight and sunshine  
 That is the moon, the stars and the sun.

## II. *The Creation of Adam and then the Creation of Eve*

*Basa boema adu tao*  
*Laihenda daebafo a*  
*Ma hataholi batu poi.*  
*Adu tao nala Adam*  
*Tehu tou a kise apa*  
*Ma tate a mesa manu.*  
*De neu fai esa nai ndia*  
*Ma ledo dua nai na*  
*Boema Adam suku dodoko lakan*  
*Ma ana peu ailunu lima.*  
*Boema Tou Mana Adu Lai a*  
*Ma Tate mana Sura Poi a*  
*Neu leo de hai na Adam ai usu kise na.*  
*Boema adu na neu lahenda*  
*Ma tao na leo hataholi.*  
*Boema mon nai Adam neu*  
*De neu de nahara ma nadasi*  
*“Nai ia nana hu nata ndia na so*  
*Ma ndana nasarai na ndia so*  
*Dadi neu sao uma a leo*  
*Ma mori neu mo tu lo a leo.*  
*De leo matalolole*  
*Ma iku matabebesa*  
*De losa duas*

Then He created and made  
 A person on the earth  
 And a human in the world.  
 He created Adam  
 But he was a man like a lone buffalo  
 And a boy like a solitary chicken.  
 Then on a particular day  
 And at a certain time  
 Adam fell asleep  
 And napped with his hands as a pillow.  
 Then the Creator of the Heavens  
 And the Inscraper of the Heights  
 Went and took from Adam a rib from his side.  
 Then He created a human  
 And made a person.  
 Then He brought her to Adam  
 Then he spoke and said  
 “Here is the proper trunk  
 And branch to lean upon  
 To become a wife in the house  
 And to live as household spouse.  
 Such is a proper life  
 And an ordered living.  
 So that (you) both

<i>Leo ma iku rai mamana</i>	Live and reside at a place
<i>Si seu ma so'e dode</i>	Tear, then sew; and scoop then serve
<i>De hi'a fo setele</i>	Laughing happily
<i>Ma eki fo natadale."</i>	And crying for joy."

III. *The Creator's Injunction to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden*

<i>Tehu, mai fai esa nai ndia</i>	But on a certain day
<i>Boema ledo dua nai na</i>	And at a particular time
<i>Boema Tou Mana Adu Lai a</i>	The Creator of the Heavens
<i>Ma Tate Mana Sura Poi a</i>	And the Insciber of the Heights
<i>Ana hara no heke ne</i>	He spoke with binding command
<i>Ma dasi no bara tada</i>	And he gave voice to a prohibition:
<i>"De basa-basa hata</i>	"All things growing there
<i>Nai oka ma nai dea dale ia</i>	In that garden and in that precinct
<i>Bole upa ma tesa tei a</i>	You may eat to your full
<i>Ma minu a tama dale a</i>	And drink to your satisfaction
<i>Te noi ai esa nai oka talada</i>	But there is a tree in the middle of the garden
<i>Nai ia nade ai pala keka</i>	Its name is the <i>Keka</i> tree of prohibition
<i>Ma batu ndilu ndao.</i>	And the <i>Ndao</i> stone of regulation.
<i>Boso tai lima</i>	Do not lay your hand
<i>Ma ei na neu.</i>	Nor your foot upon it.
<i>De fai bea o tai lima ma neu</i>	On the day you put your hand on it
<i>Ho dua kemi upa sama-sama</i>	So that you both drink together
<i>Ma mia sama-sama</i>	And eat together
<i>Sono neu ko fai esa na ndia</i>	Then on that day
<i>Ma ledo dua nai na</i>	And at that time
<i>Te lu mata mori</i>	Tears will grow
<i>Ma pinu idu a dadi neu ko emi dua</i>	And snot will emerge for both of you
<i>Dadi neu tu'e tei</i>	Becoming a heart's regret
<i>Ma mori neu sale dale..."</i>	And growing into inner disappointment..."

These passages are a good illustration of the rendering of Genesis in the Christian canon. The narrative is recognizable but the parallel language, and indeed most of the imagery, harks back to an older tradition. In this version, it is Adam who is like "a lone buffalo" // "a solitary chicken" until he is presented with Eve. Rotenese traditional religious practices were based on the "union of rock and tree." Hence the tree in the garden of Eden is transformed into "the Keka tree of prohibition" and "the Ndao stone of regulation." The language, for the most part, is that of strict canonical parallelism.



### Creative Additions to the Canon of New Origins

The Bible is not the only source of new narratives of origin. Equally prominent are recitations that recount the origins of Christianity on Rote. In 1905, in his collection of *Rottineesch Verhalen*, probably gathered before the turn of the century, the Dutch linguist J. C. G. Jonker published a seven-page tale of how certain Rotenese rulers sailed to Batavia and purchased the knowledge of Christianity with a payment of thirty slaves, acquiring at the same time the knowledge of how to distill gin. This tale, which has more than a century's historical provenance, has itself been "distilled" and disseminated through most of the island as another crucial origin narrative in the new Christian canon.

The narrative has the ritual name, *Sanga Ndolu ma Tunga Lela*: "To Seek Counsel and To Stalk Wisdom." Versions of this narrative have now become part of the repertoire of poets in most domains. As an illustration, I have selected several short passages of this chant from a version that formed part of the Yubileum Liturgy of the Evangelical Church of Timor performed on October 1, 1997 in the village of Fiulain in the domain of Thie, the place credited with the first Christian congregation on Rote.

In this origin narrative, the three Rotenese rulers from the domains of Thie, Loleh and Ba'a are identified by the ritual names of their respective domains. (The whole of the Rotenese landscape, including all of its domains, have well-known dual names.) Inspired by the Holy Spirit, *Dula Dalek // Le'u Teik* "Patterner of the Spirit" // "Inscriber of the Heart," these rulers conceive the idea of a *perahu* ("boat") that will take them to Batavia. They sail to Batavia and confront Dutch officials, *lena-lena nai ndia // lesi-lesi nai na* "the Great Ones there" // "Superior Ones there," and announce that they have come *Tui Sodak ma Bau Molek*, that is, seeking "the *Tui*-tree of Well-being and the *Bau*-tree of Peace" to plant and sow on Rote and on Kale.

Although the *Tui* and *Bau* trees are prominent botanic images in the traditional canon, here in this recitation, the *Tui*-tree and *Bau*-tree are invoked as botanic icons for the knowledge of Christianity. As such, this recitation, like many Christian narratives, involves a reinterpretation and reestablishment of older imagery in a new guise.

Having obtained these trees, the three rulers return to Rote and begin a process of planting. What follows thereafter in this recitation is a long topogeny—a recitation of specific (village) place names—that begins in the domain of Thie and extends throughout the island.

This "topogeny of the planting of Christianity on Rote" follows closely the topogeny of the planting of rice and millet in the traditional canon of origins. Here I quote only a short segment of this long topogeny:

*Sanga Ndolu ma Tunga Lela*

<i>Faik esa manunin</i>	On one particular day
<i>Ma ledo dua mateben</i>	And on a second certain time
<i>Mane dua lakabua</i>	Two rulers gather together
<i>Ma boko telu laesa</i>	And three lords gather as one
<i>Lakabua fo lamanene</i>	Gather together to listen

*Ma laesa for lamania*  
*Benga neme Dula Dalek*  
*Ma dasi neme Le'u Teik.*  
*"Ita lakabua sanga ndolu*  
*Ma ita laesa tunga lela*  
*Nai Batafia ma Matabi."*  
*Mane dua ma boko telu*  
*Neme Tada Muli ma Lene Kona*  
*Neme Ninga Lada ma Heu Hena*  
*Neme Pena Bua ma Maka Lama*  
*Boe ma ala lakandolu tona ofan*  
*Ma ala lalala balu paun.*  
*Tehu latane:*  
*"Ita fe tona nade hata?*  
*Ma ita fe balu tamo be?"*  
*De ala fe nade Sanga Ndolu*  
*Ma ala fe tamo Tunga Lela.*  
*De malole nai Lote*  
*Ma mandak nai Kale.*  
*Faik esa matetuk*  
*Ma ledo esa matemak*  
*De ala laba lala tona ofa*  
*Ma ala tinga lala balu paun.*  
*Ala hela tuku telu-telu*  
*Ma ala kale kola dua-dua.*  
*Ala pale uli titidi*  
*De leuma ala la kukulu*  
*De leufo sanga ndolu sio*  
*Ma tunga lela falu*  
*Nai Batafia daen*  
*Ma Matabi oen.*  
*Losa meti Batafia daen*  
*Ma nduku tasi Matabi oen*  
*Ala leu tongo lololo*  
*Ma ala leu nda lilima*  
*Lena-Lena nai ndia*  
*Ma Lesi-Lesi nai na, lae:*  
*"Ami mai neme Lote Daen*  
*Ma ami mai neme Kale Oen*  
*Sanga Tui Sodak fo tane*  
*Ma tunga Bau Molek fo sele*  
*Nai Lote Daen ma Kale Oen."*  
*Hapu Tui Sodak ma Bau Molek*

And gather as one to hear  
 The word of the Patterner of the Spirit  
 And the voice of the Inscraper of the Heart.  
 "We gather together to search for knowledge  
 And we gather as one to seek wisdom  
 In Batavia and Matabi."  
 The two rulers and three lords  
 From Tada Muli and Lene Kona [Thie]  
 From Ninga Lada and Heu Hena [Loleh]  
 From Pena Bua and Maka Lama [Ba'a]  
 They conceive of a sailing boat  
 And they think of a sailing *perahu*.  
 But they ask:  
 "What name will we give the boat?  
 And what designation will we give the *perahu*?"  
 They give the name: "To Seek Counsel"  
 And they give the designation: "To Stalk Wisdom"  
 This is good on Rote  
 And proper on Kale.  
 On one determined day  
 And at one appropriate time  
 They climb upon the boat  
 And they board the *perahu*.  
 They pull the oars three by three  
 And shake the oar-rings two by two.  
 They guide the splashing rudder  
 They go and they maneuver the flapping sail  
 They go to seek thorough counsel  
 And to stalk full wisdom  
 In Batavia's land  
 And Matabi's water.  
 Arriving at the tidal waters of Batavia's land  
 And reaching the sea of Matabi's water  
 They go to meet  
 And they go to encounter  
 The Great Ones there  
 And the Superior Ones there, saying:  
 "We come from Lote's Land  
 And we come from Kale's Waters  
 Seeking the *Tui*-tree of Well-being to plant  
 And stalking the *Bau*-tree of Peace to sow  
 On Lote's Land and Kale's Waters."  
 They obtain the *Tui* of Well-being and *Bau* of Peace.

<i>Ala lolo-fali leu Sepe Langak</i>	They return to the Reddening Head
<i>Ma diku-dua leu Timu Dulu</i>	And go back to the Dawning East
<i>Fo tane Tui lakaboboin</i>	To plant the <i>Tui</i> -tree with care
<i>Ma sele Bau lasamamaon.</i>	And sow the <i>Bau</i> -tree with attention.
<i>Tane leu Tuda Meda</i>	They plant at Tuda Meda
<i>Ma sele leu Do Lasi</i>	And they sow at Do Lasi
<i>Tane leu Teke Dua</i>	They plant at Teke Dua
<i>Ma sele leu Finga Telu</i>	And they sow at Finga Telu
<i>Tane leu Tanga Loi</i>	They plant at Tanga Loi
<i>Ma sele leu Oe Mau.</i>	And they sow at Oe Mau.
<i>Tui Sodak nai Dano Hela</i>	The <i>Tui</i> -tree of Well-Being at Dano Hela
<i>Okan na lalae</i>	Its roots spread out
<i>Ma Bau Molek nai Le Kosi</i>	And the <i>Bau</i> -tree of Peace at Le Kosi
<i>Samun na ndondolo.</i>	Its tendrils spread forth.
<i>Boe ma hataholi neme basa daen</i>	People from all the lands
<i>Ma dahena neme basa oen</i>	And inhabitants from all the waters
<i>Tati lala Bau ndanan</i>	Cut the <i>Bau</i> -tree's branches
<i>Ma aso lala Tui ba'en</i>	And slice the <i>Tui</i> -tree's boughs
<i>Fo tane nai Lote ingu</i>	To plant in Lote's domains
<i>Ma sele nai Kale leo.</i>	And sow among Kale's clan.

### The Beginnings of a “National” Canon

As Christian ceremonies have come to replace traditional ceremonies, so too ritual language of the island has followed suit. Since Independence poets have been called to recite at national ceremonies in addition to Christian ceremonies. For these ceremonies, particularly the annual Independence celebrations on August 17, the beginnings of a new canon are taking further shape. As in the traditional canon as well as the Christian canon, these recitations must have an essential “narrative” component.

As an illustration, I quote from a recitation that I gathered from my closest friend and informant, Esau Pono, who began as a preacher but, as he grew older, came to be regarded as Termanu's most respected poet. It is a recitation in honor of Sukarno and Hatta, the founding fathers of independent Indonesia—a ritual chant that would be appropriate for August 17 celebrations. It describes a struggle not against the Dutch but against the Japanese, who are given the dual ritual name *Funu Feo Doko // Fuji Ama Lete*. Further, it uses a device common in many mortuary chants when the deceased is explicitly compared and identified with a specific named chant character. In this recitation, Sukarno and Hatta are compared to the chant character, *Lopa Boe // Mau Boe*. The narrative tells of their physical opposition to the Japanese. Much of the chant is filled with exhortations to fellow Rotenese to rise up and join in the struggle to create a prosperous Indonesia. Here I quote just one of several such exhortations in the recitation:

<i>Hida bei leo fan</i>	At a time past
<i>Ma data bei leo dona</i>	And at a time long ago
<i>Ita bei ta fiti-fulik</i>	We did not yet shoot marbles
<i>Do ita ta selu soek</i>	Nor target the coconut
<i>Hu ndia de ita nana lumu esek</i>	Because of this we were pressed
<i>Do ita nana tuni ndeni</i>	Or we were put down
<i>Neme Funu Feo Doke mai</i>	By the coming of Funu Feo Doke
<i>Ma neme Fuji Ama Lete mai.</i>	And the coming of Fuji Ama Lete.
<i>Te hu main amanga Bung Karno</i>	Then came my father, Bung Karno
<i>Do to'onga Bung Hata</i>	Or my mother's brother, Bung Hata
<i>Fo sama leo Lopa Boe</i>	Just like Lopa Boe
<i>Fo Lopa buna tetein</i>	Lopa with a flower belly
<i>Te Lopa malanga sak</i>	But Lopa had a head of stone
<i>Ma deta leo Mau Boe</i>	Just like Mau Boe
<i>Fo Mau ba'u nanasun,</i>	Mau with the swollen face
<i>Te Mau matene besik.</i>	But Mau had ribs of steel.
<i>De silo feon tenen ta naka bebe</i>	He was not fearful of guns near his chest
<i>Poka ndulen paun ta ma lini.</i>	He was not afraid of shots at his thighs.
<i>De ala tati mila ana le</i>	They cut pieces of river bamboo
<i>Ma ala lo'o o ana fui</i>	And they hewed pieces of wild bamboo
<i>De tao neu kokouk</i>	Then made them into bows
<i>Ma adu neu sisilo.</i>	And formed them into rifles.
<i>De ala kou neu Funu Feo Doke</i>	They shot at Funu Feo Doke
<i>Do ala silo neu Fuji Ama Lete.</i>	Or they fired at Fuji Ama Lete.
<i>De ala sengi leni Funu Feo Doke</i>	They attacked Funu Feo Doke
<i>Do ala ndefa leni Fuji Ama Lete</i>	Or they fell upon Fuji Ama Lete
<i>De ita ta nana tuni ndenik so'ok</i>	So that we would not be pressed
<i>Ma ita ta nana lumu esek so'ok.</i>	And we would not be oppressed.
<i>Hu ndia de lunu badum neu limam</i>	So roll up your shirt to your arms
<i>Fo lima bu'u sisikum</i>	To your elbows
<i>Ma lele poum neu lungu langam</i>	And raise your sarong to your knees
<i>Fo lungu langa fafa'en</i>	To the knee caps
<i>Fo ma ue ma le'di</i>	Working and tapping
<i>Fo ta fo'a ita nusan</i>	Let us raise our land
<i>Do ita namon ia,</i>	Or our harbor here
<i>Fo na napu ta-ta</i>	Whose excellence continues
<i>Do na lole seku-seku</i>	Or whose beauty carries on
<i>Losa nete na neu.</i>	To this period forward.

Unlike recitations in the Christian canon, this patriotic poem relies on dyadic sets that accord with the traditional canon. It does not have to introduce new dyadic sets for theological purposes. The names Bung Karo // Bung Hata are appropriately presented as dual names and

names for the Japanese, *Funu Feo Doko* // *Fuji Ama Lete*, also follow traditional naming patterns. (*Fuji Ama Lete* alludes to Mt. Fuji, that is, “Mountain Father Fuji”).

## Conclusions

I have tried to present here a brief case study of a ritual tradition of composition based on strict canonical parallelism. When I first arrived on the island of Rote in 1965, I was told with some regret that I had come too late to be able to record several of the greatest poets of the past. Despite my late arrival, I have never in the course of nearly fifty years of recording failed to find master poets of enormous ability. My renewed efforts since 2006 in the study of this tradition have brought me into close contact with a great number of new poets from different parts of the island, some of whom I would not hesitate to call true masters of Rotenese parallel composition. In fact, I would argue that some of the recitations I recorded as recently as 2014 are as well composed as the recitations that I first recorded in 1965.

In a recent publication, *Master Poets, Ritual Masters* (2016), I examine seventeen recitations of what is considered the same ritual composition. I gathered these various recitations over a period of fifty years from sixteen separate poets from different dialect areas. The composition that I focused on for this comparison, entitled *Suti Solo do Bina Bane*, recounts the journey of two shells—a nautilus and baler shell—that are cast out of the sea onto land and make their way through a human landscape before, in most versions, returning once more to the sea. The composition is intended as an allegory of the human condition. Certainly, judging from these recitations, some of the present master poets are as clear, fluent, and consistent—and possibly as versatile—as their predecessors whom I recorded years earlier. As I have indicated in this essay, however, the subjects of many present day compositions, though steeped in the language of the past, are new creations intended to fit different ceremonial contexts. Over the past century, an entirely new Christian canon has been created and a new lexicon of theological pairs has been added to an earlier dyadic lexicon. A new “national” canon has also begun to appear. The formulation of these new canons is an achievement in local creativity.

I have now held ten recording sessions on Bali between 2006 and 2017, and have recorded 28 different poets during this time. What has impressed me most about the poets whom I have recorded is their diversity and individuality—they come from different backgrounds, different ritual communities, and different dialect areas; they share much in common, yet each has his own personal style. A good number of the best poets are equally capable in reciting from both traditional and Christian canons. Some of the true masters insist on reciting only from the traditional canon, while one particularly fluent poet-preacher insists on reciting only from the Christian canon and endeavors to produce recitations that paraphrase specific passages in the Bible.

Surprising, too, is the fact that ritual recitations remain oral recitations despite the consultation and occasional readings from the Bible that generally mark the ceremonial beginnings and endings of our recording sessions. The Rotenese are one of the oldest literate populations in eastern Indonesia. They began using the Malay Bible in the early eighteenth

century, and by the nineteenth century they had created the most extensive schooling system in the Timor area (Fox 1977b). Despite this intimacy with writing, ritual language remains an oral tradition. I discovered two poets, whom I recorded, who kept simple school notebooks that they consulted. One notebook had more genealogies than it had ritual texts. Interestingly, however, both notebooks contained abbreviated versions of recitations in their repertoire. The poets used their notebooks as a kind of *aide-memoire*. The oral recitations that they produced were far more extended than what their notebooks contained.

Perhaps even more surprising is that the “ritual” recitations of the Rotenese traditional canon have, for as long as I have been recording them, been largely disassociated with the performances with which they were supposed to be associated, such as house-building, first-planting, weaving and dyeing, and the various specific annual “origin” ceremonies that were once conducted in each domain. Instead, these recitations are told as revelation, ancient knowledge of the first beginnings. Their ritual settings may have disappeared but they continue to be valued and recited.

This situation stands in contrast to other traditions of ritual speech in eastern Indonesia, such as those on Sumba, for example, where the use of ritual language is intimately associated with particular performances (Kuipers 1990 and 1998; Keane 1997). As a consequence, the use of ritual language on Sumba seems to be in decline as the social performance of ceremonies gradually recedes.

While it is possible to glimpse aspects of the development of the Christian canon since the end of the nineteenth century, we have no record of the even longer (almost 300 year) accommodation of the traditional canon to the presence of Christianity on Rote. It is possible to speculate that the traditional canon came to be treated as a local equivalent to the Christian scriptures—to be preserved as a powerful sacred knowledge rather than as performative recipes.

### **A Postscript on Comparative Parallelism: Rotenese to Tetun**

Even as the recording of Rotenese poets is coming to an end, the next phase of my study of regional parallelism has begun. In 2013 at the eighth of our recording sessions, I invited three Tetun speakers to join us, two of whom were master poets from Wehali, the ritual centre of the Tetun-speaking people on Timor. Tetun is one of the languages closely related to Rotenese.

The Tetun poets fit into the group with consummate ease and took part with the Rotenese poets in comparing particular dyadic sets, many of which they shared in common. They grasped one of the underlying notions of the Rote project, which was to bring poets from different domains and dialect areas to compare their recitations. The recitations they provided for their part were considerable!

On their return to Timor, these poets contacted me through a spokesman and asked me to convene another recording session with more master poets from different Tetun dialect areas. They promised to select their contemporaries beginning with poets from the dialect to the north of Wehali. I urged them to be patient, explaining that I needed to conclude my

recordings of the Rotenese poets. They persisted in the request and so it was decided that we would hold our first all-Tetun recording session in October 2015. The Tetun recording can be considered as a further extension of the study of parallelism under conditions of local dialect divergence or, in this case, language divergence.

This situation points to another fundamental feature of canonical parallelism: the distinction that can be made between lexical pairing and semantic pairing. Rotenese ritual language, for example, retains many basic semantic pairings even as lexical pairing continues to diverge. Semantic pairing is categorical pairing; lexical pairing is the contingent aspect of semantic pairing. The canonical pairs in Rotenese are categorically based on semantic pairings made up of various, often different, lexical pairs. This distinction is fundamental to an understanding of the continuing traditions of canonical parallelism. Here one can draw a comparison between the traditions of Rotenese parallelism and that of the Mayans who also possess formidable traditions of canonical parallelism.

In an examination of the opening stanzas of the Mayan “Book of Counsel” (*The Popol Vuh*), Munro Edmonson (1973) attempted to assign the canonical pairs that begin this composition to a categorical continuum from universal to particular. Some pairs he classified as “widespread categories” and thus common to many but not all cultures. Many of the canonical pairs in *The Popol Vuh* were, in his view however, distinctive to the traditions of Middle America, while others were more specifically categories pertinent to the culture of the Quiche Maya of the sixteenth century.

Kerry Hull and Michael Carrasco have recently edited a critically important publication in the comparative study of Mayan parallelism, *Parallel Worlds: Genre, Discourse, and Poetics in Contemporary, Colonial, and Classic Maya Literature* (2012). In his crucial contribution to this volume, Kerry Hull has traced the continuity—or what he calls the “poetic tenacity” of various general Mayan canonical pairs from the now deciphered early Mayan hieroglyphic inscriptions through texts preserved in the colonial period to present-day Mayan ritual performances. Although the lexical items that make up these canonical pairs may vary, the continuity of these general Mayan categories provides evidence for a tradition of shared parallel categorization that extends over more than a millennium (see Hull 2012:73-132).

A similar exercise can be done with the canonical pairs in Rotenese ritual language. For many canonical pairs, the semantic pairing could be considered universal: “sun” // “moon,” “head” // “tail,” “rock” // “tree” or “trunk” // “root.” The numerical pairs “two” // “three,” “seven” // “eight,” or “eight” // “nine” could be considered as general categories, though most traditions of parallelism rely on only a few possible numerical pairs. In other cases, this categorization is less general but certainly widespread, and thus could be common to many Southeast Asian cultures: “pestle” // “mortar,” “drum” // “gong,” “spear” // “sword,” “betel” // “areca nut,” or “orphan” // “widow.” For many other canonical pairs, however, pairing is more specific. Thus, for example, “shame” forms a pair with “fear,” “lung” forms a pair with “liver,” while a great number of specific plants and animals form specific (and highly symbolic) pairs: “banana” // “sugarcane,” “yam” // “taro,” “friarbird” // “parrot,” “turtle” // “dugong,” or particular trees: “*dedap*” // “*kelumpang*.” This list of specific pairs could be substantially extended to particular Rotenese verbs, adverbial terms, and many other nouns (see Fig. 3 for a more extensive list of canonical pairs).





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