9. Genealogies of the Sun and Moon

Introductory comment

The poetic imagination of the Rotenese reaches from the heavens to the seas. Their ritual narratives variously recount the encounters of the sons and daughters of the Sun and Moon with the Lords of the Ocean and Sea. My intention here is to consider whether these oral narratives once formed part of a longer literary work of epic proportions.

To do this, I begin with an examination of the oral tradition as it now exists on the island. Once I have outlined the essential features of this oral tradition, I go on to consider the evidence that would link various important narratives within a larger structure. Although this evidence cannot be considered conclusive, the examination of the possible linkages among these different oral narratives does provide some understanding of Rotenese mythology.

The Rotenese oral tradition: Bini

At present, the Rotenese possess no long oral epic. They possess, instead, a variety of specifically named oral compositions in ritual language, the performance of which is or was appropriate to particular occasions. These occasional compositions were of two kinds: mortuary compositions and origin compositions. A growing number of compositions based on Biblical knowledge have been added to this repertoire and these are currently used in prayers and sermons. Although the occasions for traditional performances were ostensibly quite different, the compositions themselves follow basically the same structural format. In Rotenese, these chants are all referred to simply as bini.

1 This chapter was first published in 1997 as ‘Genealogies of the Sun and Moon: interpreting the canon of Rotenese ritual chants’, in E. K. M. Masinambow (ed.), Koentjaraningrat dan Antropologi di Indonesia, Assosiasi Antropologi Indonesia/Yayasan Obor, Jakarta, pp. 321–30. It was dedicated to Professor Dr Koentjaraningrat as a personal acknowledgment of my deep gratitude to him for his continuing support of my research. Professor Koentjaraningrat was the official sponsor of my initial doctoral research, which I carried out on the island of Rote in 1965–66, and he continued, for more than 30 years, as a friend and colleague, to maintain his interest in my research efforts. He took note of my work in his Sejarah Teori Antropologi (1980) and he invited me to contribute a paper describing my Rotenese researches for a volume he was editing on the human aspects of social research (Koentjaraningrat and Emmerson 1982). He also did me the great honour of writing the ‘Pengantar’ (foreword) to the Indonesian translation of my book on Rote and Savu, which appeared under the title Panen Lontar in 1996. In offering this chapter on the Rotenese poetic imagination, I endeavoured to call attention to the notable fact that Professor Koentjaraningrat, in his life’s work, was a research scholar and a gifted artist. It is thus appropriate that the foundations of the anthropology of Indonesia, which he so carefully set in place, should combine research and scholarship directed towards an understanding of all the creative possibilities of the human spirit.
Both kinds of compositions are identified according to their principal chant character and each composition consists of a narrative that recounts various episodes or events relating to the principal chant character. Since these compositions are recited in strict parallel form, all chant characters have dual names. These dual names must be interpreted as references to a single character, otherwise the compositions appear nonsensical.

The performance of a mortuary chant was once required—before reliance on Christian rituals began to eliminate this need—at all funeral ceremonies. The deceased was likened to the principal chant character of the chosen chant and the episodes of the chant were intended as a figurative exemplification of the life course of the dead person.

The mortuary chants are structured to encompass diverse categories of Rotenese society. There are specific chants for nobles and for commoners, for wealthy non-nobles, for the young and for the old, for young girls who died ‘unripe’ and for boys who died in their love-making years. There were also a number of all-purpose ‘orphan and widow’ chants that could, if necessary, be used to cover most other categories of person. Chanters were also able to alter and embellish a standard composition, to a certain extent, to adapt it to the occasion of a particular funeral.

Recitations of origin chants, on the other hand, were considered essential to establish the ‘origin’ of—and the ‘precedence’ for—aspects of Rotenese culture. In Rotenese terms, such recitation was needed to consecrate or ‘to make whole’ (naka-tetema) particular activities or objects.

The single most important origin composition recounts the origin of the house. Its importance lies in the fact that it accounts, not just for the house, but also for the foundations of Rotenese culture. Besides this chant, other chants account for the origin of rice and millet, for the origin of weaving and for the patterns used in the tie-dyeing process and, quite separately, for certain seashells associated with dyeing and spinning. In addition, there is a variety of other origin chants: chants, for example, that recount the origin of specific, ritually important rock formations, the origin of the particular ritual performances and even chants that recount the origin of gold and silversmithing and of the playing of the distinctive Rotenese musical instrument, the sesandu.

The spread of Christianity throughout Rote has curtailed the opportunities for performance of many of these origin chants. Previously, each of the domains of the island carried out a series of post-harvest origin ceremonies, which were

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2 As a consequence of this use of dual names, it is difficult, when writing in English, to decide whether to refer to chant characters in the singular or in the plural. This difficulty is often compounded by the fact that some chanters create further parallelism by alternating between singular and plural pronouns in reference to these characters. In this chapter, for the sake of consistency, I shall refer to all double-named chant characters in the singular.
known collectively as *hus* (from the root *hu*, meaning ‘origin, base, cause’). In some areas of west Rote, these *hus* ceremonies were performed until the 1950s; in one small area, they continue to be performed to this day. Elsewhere, however, these ceremonies had all but ceased by the 1930s. The demise of these ceremonies has made it impossible to recover all of the specific chants performed at these festivities. What chants remain are fragments of cultural knowledge that exist without the appropriate occasion for their performance.

## Domains, dialects and ritual-language variation

Chants are intended to convey something of the Rotenese conception of an idealised order of knowledge. A chant, in this sense, is identified by the name of its principal chant character. Thus in the domain of Termanu the chant of the origin of rice and millet is known by the double-named chant character *Doli Mo ma Lutu Mala* (or, sometimes, simply *Doli do Lutu*); similarly, the chant of the origin of the patterns used in making textiles is known by the name(s) *Pata Iuk ma Dula Foek*. In this same way, particular mortuary chants are referred to, for example, by names such as *Pau Balo ma Bola Lungi* or *Ndi Loniam ma Laki Elokama*.

All such named chants are intended to reflect a common understanding, which a chanter attempts either to express or, if the need arises, to alter for a particular purpose. Chanters often disagree among themselves over key elements of a chant, but generally insist that their particular version reflects a valid ancestral inheritance. Despite this personal insistence on a particular version, there is a tact recognition and subtle tolerance of variation, within limits, in compositions. As a consequence, there can be as many versions of a chant as there are performances. Versions of a chant are considered the personal—always imperfect—efforts of the chanter who performs them. (This conception accords well with Rotenese insistence that perfection is a heavenly quality that can never be attained on Earth.) The authority of the chanter and the coherence of his chant are invariably considered in evaluating the merits of a particular composition.

There are 18 domains on the island of Rote and all but one, Bokai, are said to have their own separate dialect or language (*dede’ak*). The idea of a single named version of a chant extends, however, beyond the limits of the speech community of the domain. This means, in effect, that the same—or nearly the same—names occur for the designation of many chants throughout Rote.3

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3 One project that I have undertaken is to gather as many versions of the text named *Suti Solo ma Bina Bane* as I can. This collection includes almost two dozen compositions from most of the main speech communities on Rote. I have also recorded the same chanter on different occasions and at different stages of his career. My aim is to publish this compilation with analysis and commentary to give an idea of variation in composition and performance.
This is, in itself, significant because so much else of Rotenese cultural life is circumscribed by domain boundaries. For example, the recitation of socially significant genealogies is confined to relationships within the domain, and all oral historical narratives—the hallmark of which is their distinct *dedé’ak*—trace precedence only among the clans within the domain.

Ritual language utilises dialect differences as one of its resources for the creation of its dyadic sets or paired terms. Although ritual language can be used, and understood, in formal communication among domains, it does not constitute a common linguistic register for the entire island. The patterning of ordinary speech is evident in the ritual speech of each domain.

Reports from the first half of the nineteenth century indicate that some chanters would travel from area to area to compete with one another in ritual performances, particularly at funerals. (The indication is that chanters moved from domain to domain but how extensive the wanderings of these chanters were is, in fact, impossible to ascertain.) Formerly, the rulers of domains would sponsor chanting ‘contests’ that would draw chanters from different domains.

Several of the chanters I have recorded had lived for some time in another domain or on Timor and had learned a portion of their repertoire from chanters outside their own area. It is also still quite common for chanters to come from neighbouring areas, even neighbouring domains, to take part in large funeral ceremonies. All of these factors, past and present, have undoubtedly contributed to the sharing of the knowledge of chants in ritual language. Variations in versions of different chants, as well as the commonalities of the tradition, can be shown to have a historical and a sociological basis.

In the course of my research on Rote, I gathered an extensive collection of chants in two domains: Termanu and Thie.\(^4\) Termanu is on the north central coast, whereas Thie is located on the south-western coast of the island. Other domains separate these domains from one another. Their dialects are quite distinct, as is their political and social organisation. For much of the past 300 years, these two domains have been in opposition to one another but their rulers have also concluded mutual marriage alliances (see Fox 1979).

If there were some underlying structure to the diverse chants that make up the repertoire for the performance of rituals on Rote, this structure would have to be evident in domains as different from one another as Termanu and Thie.

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\(^4\) I have also a considerable collection of texts from the domain of Talae, which were gathered from chanters of this domain in Kupang. Talae once formed part of the realm of Termanu and its dialect is very close to that of Termanu. Because chants from Talae are closely related to those of Termanu, they are not as suitable as those from Thie for the purposes of the comparison I undertake in this chapter.
Tracing chant genealogies: Termanu and Thie

Chants from Termanu and Thie have much the same format. This format comprises similar oral formulae, including the formula of the ‘genealogical introduction’—a kind of prologue that serves to identify the principal chant character and to give an account of the connubial relations that led to his or her birth. The correct identification of important chant characters is critical to the recitation of most ritual chants. Since the recitation of long genealogies as a means of establishing relations of precedence is an essential aspect of Rotenese social life, it is in no way surprising that this same method should be utilised as part of the narrative structure of chants.

There are, however, differences in the way in which genealogies are traced in Termanu and in Thie and these differences would seem to have their counterpart in the structuring of ritual chants in the two domains.

The main genealogy of Termanu is the dynastic genealogy of the royal clan of Termanu. For the most part, the genealogies of the other clans have separate origins and thus no necessary connection to the genealogy of the royal clan. As a result, there is no overarching genealogy to link all of the clans of the domain. Most of the clans of Termanu have been united within the domain either through alliance with, or through conquest by, the royal clan (see Fox 1971).

In contrast, in Thie, there is a single branching genealogy that purports to embrace all of the clans of the domain. In addition, the clans of Thie are organised in a basic moiety structure. A combination of genealogy and moiety unites the domain of Thie (see Fox 1979).

Although genealogy is equally important in both domains, the way it is used is significantly different. Correspondingly, in Termanu, no chanter whom I recorded ever attempted to draw genealogical connections from one text to another. Like the clans of Termanu, each chant constituted a separate entity. Only in Thie did I encounter the claim that there were genealogical connections between the chant characters of all major ritual texts. In Thie, therefore, there exists something of the idea of an epic, even though the parts of this epic are—as in Termanu—segregated to different ritual occasions.

In Thie, the idea of an epic is more than an assertion. Genealogical introductions for important chant characters, whose names are known in Termanu and Thie, are ‘extended’ in Thie to connect these characters to one another. A good example of this genealogical elaboration is the case of the chant character known in Termanu as Manu Kama ma Tepa Nilu and in Thie (following ‘n’ > ‘l’ and ‘l’ > ‘r’ sound shifts) as Malu Kama ma Tepa Niru. The first eight lines of the genealogical introduction to the chant of this same name from Termanu is as follows:
**Manu Kama ma Tepa Nilu**

*Soku-lala Silu Lilo*  
Their hands lift Silu Lilo  

*Ma lali-lala Huka Besi.*  
And they carry Huka Besi.  

*Lelete neu sao*  
She joins the path to marry  

*Do fífino neu tu*  
Or joins the way to wed  

*Sao Kama Lai Ledo*  
To marry Kama Lai of the Sun  

*Do tu Nilu Neo Bulan.*  
Or to wed Nilu Neo of the Moon.  

*De bongi-nala Tepa Nilu*  
They give birth to Tepa Nilu  

*Ma lae-nala Manu Kama.*  
And they bring forth Manu Kama.  

The equivalent, but far longer, genealogical introduction of this same chant character in Thie is as follows:

**Malu Kama ma Tepa Niru**

*Hida bei na fan*  
Still at an earlier time  

*Dalu bei na don*  
Still in a previous period  

*Dote Dai Lenak anan,*  
Dote Dai Lenak’s child,  

*Soku ina Dila Dote*  
They lift the woman Dila Dote  

*Neu tu touk Bula Kai*  
To go to marry the man Bula Kai  

*Leo na, Teti So Resik anan,*  
Similarly, Teti So Resik’s child,  

*Lali fetok Fafo Teti*  
They carry the girl Fafo Teti  

*Neu sao taek Ledo Horo.*  
To go to wed the boy Ledo Horo.  

*Bonggi heni touk,*  
She gives birth to the man,  

*Niru Neo Bulan*  
Niru Neo of the Moon  

*Ma rae heni taek,*  
And she brings forth the boy,  

*Kama Lae Ledo.*  
Kama Lae of the Sun.  

*Hu na de ara lali rala*  
After that, they carry  

*Besi Nggeo Liun anan,*  
Besi Nggeo of the Sea’s child,  

*Inak kia Hu’a Besi*  
The woman Hu’a Besi  

*Soku rala*  
And they lift  

*Lilo Modo Sain anan,*  
Lilo Modo of the Ocean’s child,  

*Fetok kia Silu Lilo.*  
The girl Silu Lilo.  

*Leu tu Niru Neo Bulan*  
They go to marry Niru Neo of the Moon  

*Ma ana sao Kama Lae Ledo.*  
And she weds Kama Lae of the Sun.  

*Ana bonggi heni Malu Kama*  
She gives birth to Malu Kama  

*Ma rae heni Tepa Niru*  
And she brings forth Tepa Niru  

*Bei rumu Timu Dulu*  
Still in Timu in the east  

*Ma Sepe Langga.*  
And still in Sepe at the head.  

The names cited in Rotenese genealogies follow a clear order. Each name has two parts: the first part is an ancestral (or heavenly) name determined by divination; the second part is the first name of the father, if bride-wealth has been paid, or the first name of the mother, if bride-wealth has not been paid. The names of the chant characters follow the same order but in a double construction.
In the lines from the Termanu chant, only two generations are recorded and only one marriage is cited. In the passage from the chant from Thie, three generations are recorded and two marriages cited. In fact, elsewhere in the chant, Malu Kama//Tepa Niru’s marriage is also recorded. The genealogy of this chant character therefore encompasses four generations in the male line and recognises three different marriages, in each of which her chant names and those of her father identify the bride.

The genealogies and marriage relations cited in the two chants are as follows.
The genealogy in the chant from Thie is of particular interest because it extends, in a single composition, for four successive generations from Ledo Horo//Bula Kai to Mata Malu//Idu Tepa, the son of Malu Kama//Tepu Niru. It identifies the father of a woman who marries a man in each generation within the male line.

**The genealogy of the Sun and Moon**

In Thie and in Termanu, the chants that account for the origin of cultural objects and practices recount the exploits of chant characters who belong to one of two groups: those of the Sun and Moon (Ledo do Bulan) and those of the Ocean and Sea (Liun do Sain). In Thie, in particular, it is the genealogy of the Sun and Moon that provides the structure that connects ritual chants with one another. This genealogy begins with the figure Kai Mangaresi//Horo Mangaru. The whole of the genealogy, however, is difficult to piece together because of the numerous marriages of the key chant character, Bula Kai//Ledo Horo. The genealogy of Malu Kama//Tepa Niru, for example, derives from one such marriage by Bula Kai//Ledo Horo.

The following is a portion of this genealogy, as told to me by the chanter S. Ndun. It refers to another marriage by Bula Kai//Ledo Horo. From this marriage, there were four offspring, all of whose double names bear, as their last names, the initial names of their father (Bulan//Ledo: ‘Moon//Sun’) (Figure 9.3).

![Figure 9.3: A Genealogy of the Grandchildren of the Sun and Moon](image)

The crucial figure in this group of children is the chant character Patola Bulan//Mandeti Ledo, who gives his name to the single most important ritual text in Rotenese, the text that recounts the ‘origin’ of the house.

According to this text, while hunting pig and civet cat on Earth, Patola Bulan//Mandeti Ledo encounters the Lord of the Ocean and Sea and descends with him to his ‘house roofed with ray-fish tails’ and his ‘home decked with turtle shells’. There, Patola Bulan//Mandeti Ledo discovers the cooking fire and the taste of roasted meat as well as rice, millet and the utensils for building and
for pounding rice. The litany of these objects includes the ‘bore tool and flat chisel’, the ‘axe and adze’, the ‘plumbline and turning drill’, the ‘rice mortar and pestle’ and the ‘flint set and fire-drill’. Marriage is concluded between the Sun and Moon and the Ocean and Sea and in the exchanges that result from this marriage these objects pass from the Sea to the Heavens.

Patola Bulan//Mandeti Ledo is recognised as a chant character in Thie and in Termanu but there are divergent views about the women who are given in marriage in the chants. In one version from Termanu, Patola Bulan//Mandeti Ledo’s sister, Tao Senge Bulan//Kudu Kea Ledo, is given in marriage to the Lord of the Sea, Danga Lena Liun//Mane Tua Sain. In another version from Termanu, Bula Kai//Ledo Holo marries a woman of the sea, Lole Liuk//Lada Saik. In Thie, it is another child of the Sun and Moon, Sao Ledo//Mani Bulan, who marries not the Lord of the Sea but his son, Tio Danga//Ruse Mane.

Similar problems arise in relation to other chants. In Termanu, one version of the origin of weaving mentions the heavenly figure Henge Ne Ledo//Feo Futu, who gives the first shuttle and loom to her counterpart in the sea. In Thie, the candidate for the role of Henge Ne Leo//Feo Futu Bulan is the woman (mentioned in the previously cited genealogy) Hinge Heu Bulan//Lafa Lai Ledo.

**The structure of the canon of Rotenese ritual chants**

If there was once a greater coherence to the ritual chants and if this coherence was once sufficient to constitute some kind of epic then the narrative structure of this epic told of relationships between the realms of Heaven and Sea. By their names, the creatures of Heaven are identified with the Sun and Moon, stars, rainbow, lightning and other similar heavenly phenomena. The Lord of the Sea is identified with the shark and crocodile and his retinue includes specific creatures such as turtle and sea cow, ray-fish and dolphin as well as numerous smaller (and more difficult to identify) kinds of fish and crustaceans. Earth serves as the meeting place for members of these two realms, and human beings on Earth are the ultimate beneficiaries of intercourse between these realms.

In most instances, the cultural wealth named in the chants, such as the seeds of rice and millet or the special shells associated with spinning and dyeing, come from the sea. Women searching for the offspring of Heaven and Sea scoop up these objects in their fish-nets. Women also make offerings to attract objects to remain and to grow and prosper in their locality. Significantly, the women who
perform these actions bear chant names that personify places on Rote and it is through these personified placenames that the ritual chants are specifically ‘grounded’ in a recognisable landscape.

Placenames thus provide yet another critical dimension to the structure of the chants. These names create a ritual geography of their own, quite apart from the everyday geography of the island. Rote and all of its domains have special ritual names. Similarly, all of the surrounding islands have ritual names; and there are also ritual names for places beyond the confines of ordinary geography—realms to the east and west and beyond the horizon.

Equally important are the specific ritual names of virtually every locality on the island. It is at the level of these localities that placenames are, depending on context, personified. Such names, like all ritual names, are doubled; and, like the names of chant characters, these double names can be based on limited genealogies. Some chants consist largely of a recitation of placenames, personified as women, who transfer objects and the knowledge of their cult from place to place on Rote.

**Conclusion**

If the chants in ritual language were to be considered as a single, long literary work, this epic creation would indeed have a cosmic scope. It would have no single hero but rather two families whose members each have a special role to play. As a work shaped to ritual occasions, ‘naming’ would be one of the critical literary features of this work. It would not necessarily provide political authority to support the rule of any particular dynasty on the island but it could be used to enhance and uphold the idea of a noble order. In a genuine sense, this grand composition would have to be considered as a religious, rather than a political, work of art.