15. The appropriation of Biblical knowledge in the creation of new narratives of origin

Introduction

The ancestral knowledge of origins is a fundamental feature of the epistemology of the Rotenese. The knowledge of origins and the formal recitation of this knowledge are considered necessary to account for persons, places and most objects of cultural significance. Thus the origins of fire for cooking, the sourcing of seeds for planting, the first tools for house-building, for weaving and for dyeing as well as the initial colours and design patterns for cloth, the specific derivation of persons and the naming of places—all have their recitations of origin; each is told in a ritual format requiring the pairing of terms in a strict canonical parallelism.

The Rotenese have adopted a similar epistemological stance in relation to Christianity. This stance has resulted in an appropriation of Biblical knowledge and the development of a variety of formal narratives. One of the most important of these narratives recounts conversion to Christianity as an active and eventually successful quest for new knowledge and wisdom. Equally important, however, is the retelling of Genesis in a variety of versions. Here I propose to examine these Christian narratives of origin as distinctive linguistic creations. To do so, however, requires some examination of the conversion of the Rotenese to Christianity.

Although the first royal conversion was made in the early eighteenth century, the subsequent conversion to Christianity of the population of the island was a gradual process that occurred over more than two centuries. The fact that this process was initiated a full hundred years before the first Dutch missionary attempted to establish residence on the island and was propagated predominantly by the Rotenese themselves is what distinguishes contemporary Christian adherence.

The most significant aspect of this process was the linguistic transformation that took place in the transmission of Christianity. Initially and for more than a century thereafter, there was an almost exclusive insistence on the use of Malay as the only appropriate vehicle for the transmission of Biblical knowledge. The appropriation of this knowledge and its assimilation to a Rotenese ritual
canon were a singular historical achievement that is now taken for granted among present-day Rotenese. It is this underlying achievement that needs to be highlighted to appreciate Rotenese creativity in their use of ritual language.

In this chapter, I want to try to identify when ritual language began to be used on Rote not to replace Malay but to enhance its use in the preaching of Christianity. I then want to examine some of the special dyadic lexicon that was developed for this purpose, and finally, but most importantly, I want to present the ritual narrative of origin that recounts the beginnings of Christianity and thereafter compare two ritual-language versions of Genesis. Recitations of this kind are now a critical component of Rotenese oral traditions. As recourse to the traditional canon in ritual language begins to decline, the use of ritual language to convey the Christian canon continues to increase. The origins of these changes can be traced to the Rotenese encounter with the Dutch beginning in the seventeenth century.

Local dynastic politics, schooling and the use of Malay on Rote

Soon after the Dutch East India Company had established itself at Kupang in 1653, Company officers made contact with various Rotenese rulers and became immediately embroiled in local disputes purportedly to strengthen their ‘allies’ against their ‘enemies’ (see Fox 1977:95). In 1662, the first of a succession of contracts was signed between the Company and Rotenese rulers to whom the Company gave official recognition. Among these rulers, the ruler of Termanu, whose domain was strategically located on the north central coast of the island, came to be regarded as the Company’s most loyal ally. In 1677, a fortified enclosure (pagar) was built at a site near Namo Dale in Termanu and two soldiers were stationed there as representatives of the Company. In this same year, the Dutch took the young ruler of Termanu to Kupang to learn Malay (see Fox 2011). This was the beginning of the Rotenese use of Malay as a means of elite communication. This use of Malay expanded when the Company created a Council of Rulers that was convened in Kupang as the forum for hearing local disputes among all the rulers allied with the Dutch in the Timor area.

In 1729, one of the rulers of Rote, Pura Messa, from the domain of Thie, in the south-west of the island, managed, without the knowledge or permission of the Company, to have himself and his family baptised by a dominee/predicant named Da Fonseca. Precisely how this was managed and with what motivation is difficult to determine. Shortly after his baptism, Pura Messa and two of his sons died in a smallpox epidemic that swept the island. Pura Messa’s son, Benjamin Messa, was installed as Radja.
Conversion to Christianity at this juncture transformed the politics of the island. At the time, Thie and a number of neighbouring domains were under pressure from an expanding domain, Termanu, where the Company had located its fortification and exercised its influence.

Benjamin Messa immediately claimed to be accorded the rights of a ‘Christian king’ among the island’s pagan rulers. He formed an alliance with the rulers of several other domains who clamoured to become Christian. By 1741, the Church Council in Batavia had received requests for baptism from almost 900 Rotenese from among this alliance of domains.

More significantly, Benjamin Messa requested that a schoolmaster be sent to his domain to teach Malay—and, in particular, the Malay Bible. The initial call for schools by the alliance of Christian rulers set off a wave of requests from all of the rulers of the island who were determined to have a school of their own as a mark of their status and sovereignty. The Company complied with these requests but at a price that eventually could only be afforded by the larger domains.

By 1754, the six largest domains, none of whose rulers was Christian, had their own schools. Over 3000 children were reported to be enrolled in these schools. The smaller domains, mostly Christian, could not afford the Company’s demands. In response, the Company reduced the payments it demanded for schoolmasters. Eventually the high costs of schools ushered in a further phase in local education. The smaller Christian domains were among the first to take responsibility for instruction in Malay, replacing outside teachers with knowledgeable Rotenese. By 1769, a local Rotenese school system had begun to take shape and payments to the Company declined.

As a result of this process, Malay became the vehicle that provided access to new forms of knowledge—to a Dutch world as represented by the company, and above all, the knowledge of Christianity.

Christianity proceeded in tandem with schooling and the knowledge of Malay. To know Malay, to speak Malay, was in effect to become a Christian and a sign of elite status. In their schools, the Rotenese taught themselves and began the process of assimilating Biblical knowledge. Schoolmasters were also responsible for preaching in local churches—all of this before the arrival of the first Dutch missionaries.
The first mission efforts on Rote

The first missionary delegated by the Netherlands Mission Society (Nederlandsche Zendeling-Genootschap)1 arrived in Kupang in 1819. This missionary, Dr R. Le Bruijn, remained stationed on Timor but he made an effort to reinvigorate the Rotenese school system. With his assistance, by 1825, there were eight domain schools on Rote, all staffed by local Rotenese. In 1827—nearly one hundred years after the first royal conversion—Rote received its first missionary: a young Dutchman by the name of J. K. ter Linden. Although he had married a high-ranking Rotenese woman from Termanu, within a year, he had become so disillusioned with the ‘shameful and godless conduct’ of the Rotenese schoolteachers that he closed all the schools that Le Bruijn had opened. He himself retreated to Kupang. Some years later, Le Bruijn’s successor, G. Heijmering, once more set about reopening the Rotenese schools. Heijmering was also responsible for baptising the first ruler of the royal line of Termanu to become a Christian.

After Heijmering’s re-establishment of Rotenese schools, no-one attempted to close them. Although several Dutch missionaries were sent to Rote, none lasted for more than a year. In 1847, the Mission Society appointed a Rotenese from Termanu to supervise the schools on the island. Even as mission support declined, Rotenese rulers—whether Christian or not—continued to give strong support to their domain schools whose activities included a Sunday church service. In fact, the number of schools on the island increased; however, with the withdrawal of the Nederlandsche Zendeling-Genootschap in 1851, schooling on Rote went into a temporary decline.

In 1857, the Dutch Colonial government assumed responsibility for funding one school in each of the 18 domains of Rote. In some domains, however, additional village schools were established with contributions from the local population. By 1871, this number of schools had increased to 34 with a school population of more than 3275. Formal instruction was in Malay.2 In the nineteenth century, schoolmasters were respectfully designated as mese malai (‘Malay masters’). Mastery of High Biblical Malay, with the religious authority it conferred, was conferred upon these Malay masters an elite status. Even after the colonial

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1 The Netherlandsche Zendeling-Genootschap was founded in 1797 on the model of the London Mission Society. Its mission was to preach and instil the Calvinist traditions of the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlandsche Hervormde Kerk), which is today constituted on Rote as the Protestant Evangelical Church of Timor (Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor, GMIT). Peter van Rooden (1996) has provided a useful sketch of the foundation of this missionary organisation. An extended account of nineteenth-century Dutch mission activities in the Timor Residency can be found in Coolsma (1901:823–62).

2 J. A. van der Chrijs (1879) has provided a detailed account of schooling on Rote as he found it in 1871. This account, filled with amusing anecdotes, also includes a list of school locations, their enrolments, and a listing of the Malay texts used for instruction at this time. Van der Chrijs notes that the teachers in all these schools were themselves Rotenese.
government took over most schooling on Rote, schoolmasters were still obliged
to teach catechism on Saturdays and to lead church services on Sundays. Thus
the tasks of teaching and preaching in Malay remained intimately intertwined.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the preaching of
Christianity began to take a new turn. This change was largely the work of two
missionaries, August Jackstein and G. J. H. Le Grand, both of whom resided on
Rote for more than a decade and, as a result of this long residence, acquired a
considerable knowledge of the Rotenese language and of local traditions. The
first of these missionaries, August Jackstein, was a German, originally a member
of the Gossner Mission Society, who lived on Rote—with only a brief interlude
in Kupang—from 1860 until just before his death in 1875. One hundred years
after his death, he was still remembered for the fact that although he became
blind, he continued to preach as he was led on horseback from village to village.
The second of these missionaries, G. J. H. Le Grand, who lived on Rote between
1890 and 1907, had an even greater influence on the preaching of Christianity.

The Le Grand inheritance

In published correspondence with his mission society, Le Grand notably
articulated the critical changes that he was involved in effecting on the island.
He recognised clearly that Malay had become the ‘vehicle of Christian thought’
on Rote but he questioned its use as an exclusive means for the transmission of
Christian ideas. According to his account, after a period of more than 170 years,
only one-fifth of the Rotenese population were baptised Christians and, during
his 10 years, these numbers had grown by only about 35 baptisms a year.

Although visitors to the island remarked on the evidence of Christian influence
on the island, Le Grand’s personal assessment of this influence was frank and
to the point: ‘If you ask me what my total impression of Rotenese Christians is,
I would answer: for many, Christianity is nothing more than Sunday apparel,
which they wear at certain times, while their household undergarment is made
of heathen material and woven with heathen patterns’ (Le Grand 1900:373).

With this view of the realities of conversion, Le Grand set out during his
time on the island to promote the use of Rotenese, in opposition to some of
his predecessors. He was the first missionary to oversee a translation of a
portion of the Bible into Rotenese. This was the Gospel of Luke: *Manetualain*

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3 Le Grand took leave to visit the Netherlands in 1899 but he returned to Rote to resume his duties in
1901. In 1905, he became, for a period, the minister (predicant) for Kupang, but returned to Rote again in
1907 before being transferred in 1908 to Minahassa. In 1912, he again returned to Kupang and in 1912 was
transferred to Batavia.
Explorations in Semantic Parallelism

Dede’a-Kokola Maneni Soda-Molen-a Lukas, translated by J. Fanggidaej into the central dialect of Termanu, Talae and Keka and published by the Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap in 1895.

As Le Grand admitted to his mission society, however, this translation was not the success that he had expected. He attributed this lack of success to the fact that reading of Rotenese was not part of the school curriculum. Both reading and writing were confined exclusively to Malay. What Le Grand, however, appears not to have appreciated was the diversity of the island and the political-linguistic rivalry among the different domains that prevented the acceptance of the Gospel in Termanu dialect in most other domains.

It is evident that Le Grand gained some grasp of the Rotenese language and even managed to acquire some knowledge of Rotenese ritual language. In his letter to his mission society, he included a short excerpt from a Rotenese death chant for which he provided a general paraphrase rather than a precise translation. His stated purpose was to contrast the Rotenese view of death with that of the Christian message. Although the Dutch linguist J. C. G. Jonker may have gathered his single example of Rotenese ritual language—the superlative Manu Kama ma Tepa Nilu text—about the same time as Le Grand, his text was not published until 1911. Le Grand’s 28 lines of ritual language therefore represent the earliest (published) illustration of the Rotenese ritual-language register and are therefore worth translating.

Le Grand’s orthography for the Rotenese is recognisable but idiosyncratic; it does not resemble the far more appropriate orthography used by J. Fanggidaej in his translation of the Gospel of Luke. (To what extent Le Grand’s published text was a product of the mission society editors who worked from Le Grand’s letters cannot be determined.) There are other puzzling features: while most of the text and its formulaic idioms are predominantly those of the central dialect of Rote, several dyadic sets are dialectically anomalous, suggesting that Le Grand’s grasp of Rotenese was a personal mixture of Rotenese dialects. Although there are two lines of Le Grand’s text (1900:363) that I cannot understand, most of the text is composed of dyadic sets and formulae that have continued to the present.

1. Pata Dai ao lilo
2. Te Solo Soeti ao engë kala
3. Ma tene besi
4. Langa saä kala.
5. Sila sapoe boï
6. Ma lalo boï
7. Lalo kela soeki bete nala
8. Ma lalo kela lole lada
9. Ma sapoe kela dula doki

Pata Dai with golden body
Solo Suti with leaden body
And iron chest
Hardened head.
They, too, die
And they, too, perish
Perish, leaving their food and wealth
And perish, leaving their tasty goods
And die, leaving their patterned cloths
10. Malole do malaä. This is good or proper.
11. Lalo kela bou toewa la Die leaving lontar vats...
bengoewa
12. Ma neka hade ła batole And rice baskets...
13. Ma sapoe kela ıko mana fifiu And die, leaving tail-waving flocks
14. Ma soela mana mamasuk kala. And horn-lifting herds.
15. Sama lëo faï ia As on this day
16. Ma deta lëo ledo ia And at this time
17. Ita tolo non ia boï. We, relatives, here too
18. Lëo late dae a neu Are heading for an earthen grave
19. Fo dai holun ma batu lunin. For the earth embraces and rock crushes.
20. De ita boï o Oh, we, too,
22. De dai holoe, ita boï The earth embraces us too
23. Ma batu luni, ita boï. And the rock crushes us too.
24. De teman ta dae bafo do batu poi. Order is not of the earth or the world
25. Tebe leo na tebe, Truly it is true:
26. Tetu lele lasi Order...
27. Ma tema toi ao nula And perfection...
28. Teman ta dae bafo Perfection is not of the earth
29. Ma tetu ta batu poi. And order is not of the world.

Hence though he set about to encourage the use of Rotenese for the preaching of Christianity and can be credited with encouraging a local cultural foundation to the understanding of Christianity, the blossoming of this use of Rotenese occurred at a local level in the different dialects of Rotenese, making Rotenese Christianity an even more multifaceted creation.

Le Grand’s most significant contribution to the grounding of a traditional church on Rote was his role in training an entire generation of Rotenese schoolteachers (Inlandsch leeraar) imbued with his views of preaching Christianity. From the time he arrived on Rote, he began a program of training to produce a cohort of teachers who were versatile in their capacities to become preachers and ministers but also to be certified to teach in government schools. (On Rote, Le Grand served as the secretary of the School Commission for both government and church schools.) In 1902, he was instrumental in transforming his personal teaching efforts into a formal teachers’ training school (School tot Opleiding van Inlandse Leraren: STOVIL), which, for two decades, was strategically located on Rote. Although this school was open to students from the region, the overwhelming majority of its intake was from Rote. Its graduates, many of them
drawn from the noble families of Rote, became leading figures on the island and among them were some of the notable preacher-chanters who contributed to the creation of a Christian canon in ritual language.

In 1965, there was one surviving member of Le Grand’s cohort: Laazar Manoeain, who was considered at that time to be one of the master poets of the island. By then, he was blind, which only increased his reputation for oral performance, and living quietly in a house outside the town of Ba’a. His cosmological poem in Christian mode offers a prime example of the infusion of Christian ideas in a traditional format. Although this poem relies heavily on traditional formulae and might be mistaken for part of an ancestral oral canon, the key metaphors at its conclusion that offer the promise of heavenly rest are recognisably part of a lexicon fashioned for the preaching of Christianity (see Chapter 7 for the whole of this poem and a further discussion of its significance).

The poem begins with the lines:

*Sa Lepa-Lai nunun*  
The Waringin tree of Sa Lepa-Lai  

*Ma Huak Lali-Ha kekan*  
And the Banyan Tree of Huak Lali-Ha  

*Keka maba’e faluk*  
The Banyan has eight branches  

*Ma nunun mandana siok.*  
And the Waringin has nine boughs.  

*De dalak ko sio boe*  
These are the nine roads  

*Ma enok ko falu boe*  
And these are the eight paths  

*Fo dala sodak nai ndia*  
The road of wellbeing is there  

*Ma eno mamates nai na*  
And the path of death is there...

The poem expounds on the threats offered along each of the branching paths leading in a different direction. The path leading west is described with the lines:

*Ndanak esa muli neu*  
One branch points west  

*Boso musik ndanak ndia*  
Do not follow that branch  

*Te nitu hitu dalan ndia*  
For this is the road of seven spirits  

*Ma mula falu enon ndia*  
And this is the path of eight ghosts  

*De mate nituk nai ndia*  
The death of the spirits is there  

*Ma lalo mulak nai ndia*  
And the decease of the ghosts is there

After detailing these different threats, the poem describes the one path—the path of life and road of wellbeing (*eno molek/\dala soda*)—that leads to Heaven and the Heights (*ata/\lain*) where there is eternal rest and salvation (*soda sio/\mole falu*). The use of the numerals eight and nine (*falu/sio*) to indicate an eternal completion, as indeed the use of the even more striking (and difficult to translate) description of Heaven as the ‘buffalo-horn land of wellbeing and the flesh and bone water of life’ (*kapa sula soda daen/\pa duik mole oen*), is part of a new interpretative coding of older dyadic metaphors.
The role of the *utusan* as messenger, preacher and cultural interpreter

When the role of the schoolteacher became circumscribed within a more formal system of colonial education, teachers themselves became differentiated. By 1871, the Dutch recognised three classes of teachers on Rote, each of whom was at a different payment scale (van der Chrijs 1879:14). When in 1857 the colonial government took over the schooling system, it allowed only one school in each of Rote’s 18 domains. In the larger and more populous domains, there was a demand for additional schools. Initially when these village schools were established, teachers in them were supported by the local populations. Eventually, however, all of the teachers received government support, but a hierarchy was set in place: first-class teachers were those who taught in the domain school. The records for 1871 show that 12 of Rote’s 18 domains had more than one school; eight of these domains—Dengka, Oenale, Thie, Loleh, Termanu, Korbaffo, Bilba and Ringgou—had two village schools in addition to their main domain school. As a result there were almost as many village schools (16) as domain schools (18) on the island. In the years that followed, as school numbers continued to increase, the expansion of the system was in village schools with lesser-ranked teachers.
As the knowledge of Malay increased as a result of schooling, the role of the lay preacher—the *utusan* who was educated in the Bible and with considerable fluency in Malay—came to the fore. Teachers could be *utusan* and many were, but the position of *utusan* was not exclusively the prerogative of such teachers. In the later part of the nineteenth century through to the 1960s, the preaching of Christianity was carried forward by these *utusan* as evangelical ‘messengers’ and local church leaders. Although they had limited theological training, these *utusan* were often accorded the title of ‘minister’ (*pendeta*) by their church congregations. Since preaching required considerable fluency, individuals with impressive speaking capacities were attracted to becoming *utusan*. Often this speaking ability included a command of the Rotenese ritual language. The role of ritual leader could merge with that of the preacher. Among the *utusan* as well as among schoolteachers high Biblical Malay was appropriated, adapted and translated into the Rotenese ritual-language register. This process was facilitated by the fact that much of the Old Testament was based on similar formal features of parallelism—the duplication of expression in a dyadic format.

### The creation of a dyadic lexicon for conveying the Christian canon

The translation of Biblical knowledge into the Rotenese ritual register called for the creation of a new vocabulary in dyadic form. This involved not simply the creation of new concepts but also the creative refashioning of existing idioms to convey new meaning.

Because this translation process took place in different dialect areas and in different congregations at different times, the theological lexicon created to convey Biblical knowledge varies from one dialect area to another but is still generally recognisable throughout the island.

Thus, for example, in the domain of Landu, God the Father as Creator can be referred to as

- *Tou Mana-Sura Poi a* The Inscriber of the Heights
- *Ma Tate Mana-Adu Lai a* And the Creator of the Heavens

while in the nearby domain of Ringgou, God the Creator is referred to as

- *Tate Mana-Sura Bula* The Inscriber of the Moon
- *Do Tou Mana-Adu Ledo* Or the Creator of the Sun.

Throughout most of Rote, metaphoric terms that allude to the tie-dye patterning of cloth are used to describe the Holy Spirit; however, the specific dyeing terms
used in the different dialects vary. In Termanu, the Holy Spirit is referred to as the *Dula Dalek ma Le’u Teik* (‘Patterner of the Spirit and Marker of the Heart’), while in Ringgou, this expression is *Dula Dale/Malala Funa* (‘The Patterner of the Spirit and the Shaper of the (Woven) Core’).

For Christ, there are many designations, most of which draw on traditional metaphoric phrases and imagery. In Termanu, for example, Christ can be described simply as the *Tou Mana Soi ma Ta’e Mana Tefa* (Redeemer and Ransomer: literally, ‘The Man who redeems and the Boy who ransoms’), but Christ can also be referred to, using another common metaphor, as a healer and repairer of injury:

- **Touk Mana-So Sidak**
  - The Man who sews what is torn
- **Ta’ek Mana-Seu Saik**
  - The Boy who stitches what is ripped
- **Seu naka tema saik**
  - He stitches to make whole what is ripped
- **Ma so naka tetu sidak.**
  - And sews to make complete what is torn.

Heaven, in this dyadic lexicon, is:

- **Nusa Soda ma Ingu Tema**
  - Domain of wellbeing and land of fullness
- **Bate Falu ma Tema Sio.**
  - Eightfold abundance and ninefold fullness.

### The Rotenese narrative of the coming of Christianity

The Rotenese trace the beginnings of Christianity on their island to the conversion of the rulers of three domains in the central south of the island. Primacy in this process is generally attributed to the ruler of the domain of Thie but just as often all three rulers are given credit together. The rulers referred to in this narrative—Foe Mbura from Thie, Ndi’i Hua from Loleh, and Tou Deng Lilo from Ba’a—are all historically identifiable individuals whose names appear in Dutch archival records for the 1720s.

A version of this narrative was first recorded in the nineteenth century from Rotenese schoolteachers living in Timor by the Dutch linguist J. C. G. Jonker, and was published with a Dutch translation in a collection of texts in 1905. Since this time, this particular tale has been used in schools and churches and has been accorded an almost canonical status. The original version was a locally embedded text—what would normally be described as a ‘standing-tale’ (Fox 1979)—told in the distinctive dialect of central Rote. Today this narrative has become the only ‘standing-tale’ that has island-wide recognition and is recounted in all dialects on the island. Even more significantly, this tale has been taken up and rendered into ritual language and actually used as part of church liturgy.
This radical shift to another speech genre gives this tale a form like that of the origin narratives of the island. It requires the strict use of parallelism but also the adaptation of a variety of traditional metaphors in a new context, imbuing these metaphors with new Christian meaning.

In the nineteenth-century telling of this narrative, the three rulers set sail for Batavia where they meet the Dutch Governor-General and obtain from him, in return for the payment of 30 slaves, the knowledge of Christianity. At the same time, they also obtain the knowledge of gin distilling, which has become for the Rotenese an indispensable feature of social interaction. In some dialects of Rotenese, the word for God, Allah, resembles the word for distilled gin, *ala* (from Malay, *arak*), thus allowing them to claim, by a play on words, that the journey of the rulers to Batavia resulted in the acquisition of two Al(l)ah. This double gain is made symbolically appropriate by long-established tradition, whereby locally distilled gin is dyed a reddish colour and used in the communion service.

In the narrative, each of the rulers is given a staff of office and, as a result of their journey, Dutch East India Company rule is installed on the island, protecting the rulers of the small domains at the south-western end of Rote against the expanding domain of Termanu. In the ritual telling of this tale as an origin narrative, much of this political dimension is elided to concentrate on the spiritual quest for Christianity.

To illustrate the ritual telling of this narrative of origin of Christianity, I have selected passages from the liturgy prepared for the ‘Yubileum’ ceremony of the Protestant Evangelical Church of Timor, which was held at Fiulain in the village of Danoheo in the domain of Thie on 1 October 1997. This ritual passage can be divided into three segments: 1) an introductory passage that focuses on the pre-Christian period on Rote; 2) the passage that describes the journey of the rulers of Rote to Batavia and their return with the knowledge of Christianity; and 3) the progressive ‘planting’ of Christianity throughout the island. The chant is given the dual chant name *Sanga Ndolu ma Tunga Lela* (‘To Seek Counsel and to Stalk Wisdom’). In this passage, as in other versions that I have recorded, the knowledge of Christianity is represented as two species of tree: the *Tui*-tree and the *Bau*-tree—both large trees that grow in close proximity to water. These trees representing Christianity are what are then ‘planted’ from place to place on the island. Each part of the island is designated by its dual ritual name, and the ‘planting’ of Christianity follows, in form, the origin chant for the dissemination of the seeds of rice and millet on Rote. As an ordered recitation of placenames, the spread of Christianity from one domain to the next is recounted as a Rotenese topogeny (see Chapter 10).

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4 This text in Termanu dialect (with others in different dialects) was published in a four-page supplement in the newspaper *Pos Kupang* on 30 September 1997.
5 The *Bau*-tree is known as a *waru* in Indonesian (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*); the *Tui*-tree remains unidentified.
To provide a sense of how traditional metaphors and imagery are adapted, I quote several lines from the mortuary chant *Ndi Loniam ma Laki Eloka ma*. In this mortuary chant, the deceased is given voice to advise his living descendants before he sets sail on his voyage to the west (see Chapter 13 for an extended discussion of this mortuary chant and its significance). He speaks as follows:

1. ‘De neuk-o se au balung ta diku-dua’ Now my boat will not turn back
2. *Ma au tonang ta lolo-fali.* And my perahu will not return.
3. *Te sadi mafa-ndendelek* But do remember
4. *Ma sadi masa-nenedak* And do keep in mind
5. *Heo Ingu-fao baun* The Bau-tree at Heo Ingu-fao
6. *Ma Dolo Sala-Poi tuin na,* And the Tui-tree at Dolo Sala-Poi,
7. *Bau maka-boboik* A Bau-tree to care for
9. *De tati mala bau ndanan* Cut and take a branch of the Bau-tree
10. *Ma aso mala tui baen* Slice and take a limb from the Tui-tree
11. *Fo tane neu dano Hela* To plant at the Lake Hela
12. *Ma sele neu le Kosi* And to sow at the River Kosi
13. *Fo ela okan-na laalae* That its roots may creep forth
14. *Ma samun-na ndondolo* And its tendrils may twine
15. *Fo ela poek-kala leu tain* For shrimp to cling to
16. *Ma nik-kala leu feon,* And crabs to circle round,
17. *Fo poek ta leu tain* For it is not for shrimp to cling to
18. *Te ana-mak leu tain* But for orphans to cling to
19. *Ma nik ta leu feon* And not for crabs to circle round
20. *Te falu-in ta leu feon.*’ But for widows to circle round.’

Prominent also in these lines is reference to the image of ‘orphans and widows’, a recurrent theme in virtually all Rotenese mortuary compositions. At one level, at a funeral, ‘orphans and widows’ refer to the family of the deceased, but more often this notion is generalised: all humans are ‘widows and orphans’—a condition of loss and separation that is the basic state of humankind.

The introductory section of this chant describes Rote in its pre-Christian period when offerings were made to the spirits and ghosts and there were only weeping and sadness. Then the Holy Spirit—in Rotenese: the *Dula Dalek*//*Le’u Teik* (‘The Patterner of the Spirit and the Marker of the Heart’)—appears in order to effect a change upon the island. The Holy Spirit speaks to announce a new pathway for a life of peace and wellbeing of life.
Explorations in Semantic Parallelism

I

Sanga Ndolu ma Tunga Lela

1. *Hida bei fan*  
   At a time in the past
2. *Ma data bei don*  
   And a period long ago
3. *Ingu manasongo nitu*  
   The land offering to spirits
4. *Ma nusa manatangu mula*  
   And the domains sacrificing to ghosts
5. *Soda ta nai daen*  
   Wellbeing was not in that land
6. *Ma tema ta nai oen.*  
   And harmony was not in those waters.
7. *De falu-ina lasakedu*  
   The widows cry
8. *Ala lasakedu bedopo*  
   They cry continually
9. *Ma ana-mak lamatani*  
   And the orphans sob
10. *Ala lamatani balu-balu.*  
    They sob steadily.
11. *Nai Lino daen*  
    In the land of Silence
12. *Do Ne Oen.*  
    Or the waters of Quiet
13. *Benga nafafada,*  
    The Word is spoken,
14. *Benga neme Dula Dalek*  
    Word from the Patterner of the Spirit
15. *Ma dasi natutuda,*  
    And the voice falls down
16. *Dasi neme Le’u Teik:*  
    The voice from the Marker of the Heart:
17. ‘*Soda dae nai ata*’  
    ‘The land of wellbeing is on High
18. *Ma mole oen nai lain.*  
    And the waters of life are in Heaven
19. *Sanga dala soda*  
    Seek the road of wellbeing
20. *Ma tunga eno molek*  
    And follow the path of life
21. *Fo hapu soda sio*  
    To gain the wellbeing of nine
22. *Ma hapu mole faluk*  
    And gain the peace of eight
23. *Nai Lote daen*  
    In the land of Rote
24. *Ma Kale oen.*’  
    And the waters of Kale.’

In this second section, the rulers from three small domains are inspired by the Holy Spirit to build a perahu and sail it to Batavia. In the first section, the Holy Spirit speaks; in this next section, the rulers speak, explaining their mission: ‘to seek Counsel and stalk Wisdom’. This—the wisdom of Christianity—is represented as two species of trees: the *Tui*-tree of Wellbeing and the *Bau*-tree of Life, which the Rotenese rulers bring back to the island.

II

The Journey in Quest of Christianity

1. *Faik esa manunin*  
   On one particular day
2. *Ma ledo dua mateben*  
   And on a second certain time
3. *Mane dua lakabua*  
   Two rulers gathered together
4. *Ma boko telu laesa*  
   And three lords gathered as one
5. *Lakabua fo lamanene*  
   Gathered together to listen
6. Ma laesa fo lamania And gathered as one to hear
7. Benga neme Dula Dalek Word of the Patterner of the Spirit
8. Ma dasi neme Le’u Teik. And the voice of the Marker of the Heart.
9. Ita lakabua sanga ndolu We gather together to seek knowledge
10. Ma ita laesa tunga lela And we gather as one to seek wisdom
12. Mane dua ma boko telu The two rulers and three lords
13. Neme Tada Muli ma Lene Kona From Tada Muli and Lene Kona
14. Neme Ninga Lada ma Heu Hena From Ninga Lada and Heu Hena
15. Neme Pena Bua ma Maka Lama From Pena Bua and Maka Lama
16. Boe ma ala lakandolu tona ofan They conceive of a sailing boat
17. Ma ala lalela balu paun. And they fashion a sailing perahu.
18. Tehu latane: But they ask:
19. ‘Ita fe tona nade hata? ‘What name will we give the boat?
20. Ma ita fe balu tamo be?’ And what designation will we give the perahu?’
21. De ala fe nade Sanga Ndolu They give the name: ‘To Seek Counsel’
22. Ma ala fe tamo Tunga Lela. And they give the designation: ‘To Stalk Wisdom’.
23. De malole nai Lote It was good on Rote
24. Ma mandak nai Kale. And proper on Kale.
25. Faik esa matetuk On one determined day
26. Ma ledo esa matemak And at one appropriate time
27. De ala laba lala tona ofa They climb upon the boat
28. Ma ala tinga lala balu paun And they board the perahu.
29. Ala hela tuku telu-telu They pull the oars three-by-three
30. Ma ala kale kola dua-dua. And shake the oar-rings two-by-two.
31. Ala pale uli titidi They guide the splashing rudder
32. De leu They go
33. Ma ala la kukulu And they manoeuvre the flapping sail
34. De leu They go
35. Fo sanga ndolu sio To seek thorough counsel [counsel of nine]
36. Ma tunga lela falu And to stalk full wisdom [wisdom of eight]
37. Nai Batafia daen In Batavia’s land
38. Ma Matabi oen. And Matabi’s water.
39. Losa meti Batafia daen Arriving at the tidal waters of Batavia’s land
40. Ma nduku tasi Matabi oen And reaching the sea of Matabi’s water
41. Ala leu tonga lololo They go to meet
42. Ma ala leu nda lilima And they go to encounter
43. Lena-lena nai ndia The great figures there
44. Ma lesi-lesi nai na, lae:  And the superior ones there, saying:
45. ‘Ami mai neme Lote Daen  ‘We come from Lote’s Land
46. Ma ami mai neme Kale Oen  And we come from Kale’s Waters
47. Sanga Tui Sodak fo tane  Seeking the Tui-tree of Wellbeing to plant
48. Ma tunga Bau Molek fo sele  And stalking the Bau-tree of Life to sow
49. Nai Lote Daen ma Kale Oen.’  On Lote’s Land and Kale’s Waters.’
50. Hapu Tui Sodak ma Bau Molek  They gain the Tui of Wellbeing and Bau of Life.
51. Ala lolo-fali leu Sepe Langak  They return to Reddening Head
52. Ma diku-dua leu Timu Dulu  And go back to the Dawning East
53. For tane Tui lakaboboin  To plant the Tui-tree with care
54. Ma sele Bau lasamamaon.  And sow the Bau-tree with attention.

The next section of this liturgy consists of a topogeny: an ordered succession of dyadic placenames that identify different domains on the island of Rote. Christianity is first planted in the domain of Thie (Tuda Meda ma Do Lasi), and then in Loleh (Teke Dua ma Finga Telu) and then in Ba’a (Tanga Loi ma Oe Mau). The trees of the knowledge of Christianity spread their roots and tendrils in the centre of Thie at Dano Hela ma Le Kosi and the inhabitants of other domains come and take these trees and plant them in their domains. What follows is a further topogeny that proceeds east along the southern coast of Rote and then from the furthest eastern domain tracks back along the north coast of the island and on to the offshore island of Ndao. An excerpt from this topogeny is as follows.

III

The Topogeny of the Planting of Christianity on Rote

1. Tane leu Tuda Meda  They plant at Tuda Meda
2. Ma sele leu Do Lasi  And they sow at Do Lasi
3. Tane leu Teke Dua  They plant at Teke Dua
4. Ma sele leu Finga Telu  And they sow at Finga Telu
5. Tane leu Tanga Loi  They plant at Tanga Loi
6. Ma sele leu Oe Mau.  And they sow at Oe Mau.
7. Tui Sodak nai Dano Hela  The Tui of Wellbeing at Dano Hela
8. Okan na lalae  Its roots spread out
9. Ma Bau Molek nai Le Kosi  And the Bau of Life at Le Kosi
10. Samun na ndondolo.  Its tendrils spread forth.
11. Boe ma hataholi neme ba sa daen  People from all the lands
12. Ma dahena neme ba sa oen  And inhabitants from all the waters
13. Tati lala Bau ndanan  Cut the Bau-tree’s branches
14. Ma aso lala Tui ba’en  And slice the Tui-tree’s boughs
15. Fo tane nai Lote ingu  To plant in Lote’s domains
The appropriation of Biblical knowledge in the creation of new narratives of origin

17. Tane leu Pila Sue They plant at Pila Sue
18. Ma sele leu Nggeo Deta And they sow at Nggeo Deta
19. Tane leu Tufa Laba They plant at Tufa Laba
20. Ma sele leu Ne’e Feo And they sow at Ne’e Feo
21. Tane leu Meda They plant at Meda
22. Ma sele leu Ndule And they sow at Ndule
23. Tane leu Soti Mori They plant at Soti Mori
24. Ma sele leu Bola Tena And they sow at Bola Tena
25. Tane leu Tunga Oli They plant at Tunga Oli
26. Ma sele leu Namo Ina And they sow at Namo Ina
27. Tane leu Koli They plant at Koli
28. Ma sele leu Buna And sow at Buna
29. Tane leu Tefu Buna They plant at Tefu Buna
30. Ma sele leu Nggafu Huni And they sow at Nggafu Huni
31. Tane leu Dae Mea They plant at Dae Mea
32. Ma sele leu Tete Lifu And they sow at Tete Lifu
33. Tane leu Tasi Puak They plant at Tasi Puak
34. Ma sele leu Li Sona And sow at Li Sona
35. Tane leu Dela Muri They plant at Dela Muri
36. Ma sele leu Anda Iko And sow at Anda Iko
37. Tane leu Ndao Nusan They plant at Ndao Nusa
38. Ma sele leu Folo Manu. And sow at Folo Manu.
39. Tui Soda nadi The Tui-tree of Wellbeing comes forth
40. Ma Bau Mole na tola And the Bau-tree of Life appears
41. Boe ma ana-mak leu tai The orphans gather round
42. Ma falu-inia leo feon And the orphans encircle it
43. Fo hapu soda sio To obtain complete wellbeing
44. Ma hapu mole fau And obtain full life
45. Tao neu nakabanbin To create great promise
46. Ma tao neu namahenak And to create great hope
47. Losa faik ia dale Up to this day
48. Ma nduku ledo ia tein And until this time

The retelling of Genesis as a Rotenese origin narrative

Although ritual language is commonly used in Christian liturgical contexts in Termanu, there is a tendency to keep traditional origin narratives distinct from Christian narratives. In contrast, in some eastern domains of Rote, particularly in Ringgou and Landu, there is a greater fusion of ritual-language genres. As in
any oral genre, there are no fixed texts but a variety of compositions purporting to convey the same message. As such, it is useful to contrast two versions of Genesis, the one from Landu and the other from Ringgou, that differ in the degree to which they appropriate Biblical texts and fuse—or perhaps, more accurately, infuse—them with traditional ideas and metaphors.

To illustrate the first of these compositions, I quote a succession of passages from the Genesis chant of the poet Julius Iu, who is himself a lay preacher in the Protestant Evangelical Church of Timor (Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor: GMIT). His chant begins with the initial creation of the world.

I

Initial Creation of the World

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Timor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Au tui ia nana, nae: I tell of</td>
<td>Tui dae ina dadadi The creation of the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tui dae ina dadadi The creation of the world</td>
<td>Masosa na le maulu a Its beginning and commencement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tou Mana Sura Poi a The Inscríber of the Heights</td>
<td>Ma Tate Mana Adu Lai a And the Creator of the Heavens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma Tate Mana Adu Lai a And the Creator of the Heavens</td>
<td>Adu neme laíai no dae ina. Created Heaven and Earth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adu neme laíai no dae ina. Created Heaven and Earth.</td>
<td>Boema adu do tao nalan Then He created and made them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boema adu do tao nalan Then He created and made them</td>
<td>Tehu bei kiu-kiu kima rou But still there was darkness like the inside of a shell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tehu bei kiu-kiu kima rou But still there was darkness like the inside of a shell</td>
<td>Ma bei hatu-hatu do tafeo And still there was gloom all round</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma bei hatu-hatu do tafeo And still there was gloom all round</td>
<td>Bei nafaroe dea ei As if still groping in the legs of a fish weir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bei nafaroe dea ei As if still groping in the legs of a fish weir</td>
<td>Bei nafadama lutu lima Still fumbling in the arms of a fish trap.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bei nafadama lutu lima Still fumbling in the arms of a fish trap.</td>
<td>Basa boema adu nala malua a When He created the brightness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basa boema adu nala malua a When He created the brightness</td>
<td>Ma riti ndala makaledo a And generated daylight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma riti ndala makaledo a And generated daylight</td>
<td>De malua nala dulu The sun rose in the east</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De malua nala dulu The sun rose in the east</td>
<td>Ma makaledo nala laka. And the daylight appeared at the head.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II

The Command from God not to Eat of the Tree in the Garden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Timor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boe ma Tou Mana Adu Lai a The Creator of the Heavens</td>
<td>Ma Tate Mana Sura Poi a And the Inscríber of the Heights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma Tate Mana Sura Poi a And the Inscríber of the Heights</td>
<td>Ana hara no heke nè He spoke with binding command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana hara no heke nè He spoke with binding command</td>
<td>Ma dasi no bara tada: And He gave voice to a prohibition:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma dasi no bara tada: And He gave voice to a prohibition:</td>
<td>‘De basa-basa hata ‘All things growing there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘De basa-basa hata ‘All things growing there</td>
<td>Nai oka ma nai dea dale ia In that garden and in that precinct</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 This chant was recorded in 2007 and its translation is a joint effort by myself and Dr Lintje Pellu, who did her research in Landu. The chant is a particularly long and interesting text that Dr Pellu and I hope to examine in greater detail in a future publication.
Bole upa ma tesa tei a  You can eat to your full
Ma minu a tama dale a  And drink to your satisfaction
Te noi ai esa nai oka talada  But there is a tree in the middle of the garden
Nai ia nade ai pala keka  Its name is the Keka-tree of prohibition
Ma batu ndilu ndao.  And the Ndao-stone of regulation.
Boso tai lima  Do not lay your hand
Ma ei na neu.  Nor your foot upon it.
De fai bea o tai lima ma neu  On the day you put your hand on it
Ho dua kemi upa sama-sama  For if the two of you drink together
Ma mia sama-sama  And eat together
Sono neu ko fai esa na ndia  Then on that day
Ma ledo dua nai na  And at that time
Te lu mata mori  Then tears will grow
Ma pinu idu a dadi neu ko emi dua  And mucus will originate for both of you
Dadi neu tu’e tei  Becoming a heart’s regret
Ma mori neu sale dale.’  And growing into inner disappointment.’

III

The Snake’s Dialogue with Eve

Tehu no nitu a duduku na  But with the devil’s seduction
Ma no mula a o’oti na  And with the ghost’s persuasion
Na neu no naneta no Hawa  He came and met Hawa
Lima nda lima pua  Hand met hand like an areca nut
Ma laka toko laka no  And head touched head like a coconut
Selu dasi na neu  Raised his voice
Ma lole hara na neu  And brought forth his words
Neu Hawa nae:  Saying to Hawa:
‘Hu ubea tao  ‘What was the reason
Ma sala ubea  And what was wrong
Ma siko ubea  And what was the matter
De ndi na basa-basa hata fo rai oka  That all things in this garden
Ma dea dale ia  And inside this precinct
Emi dua bole mi’a ma minu  You two may eat and drink
Hu ai nai oka a talada  But the tree in the middle of the garden
Emi dua ta mia?’  You two may not eat?’
Boema Hawa nae  Then Hawa said:
‘Kalau hara heke ne ara mori  ‘The words of binding command have been given
Ma dasi bara tada ara dadi  And the voice of prohibition has been raised
Nae kalau ami dua upa ma mia minu  That if we two eat and drink
Sono meu ko ami dua  Then for both of us
Lalu mula a mori The spirit death will appear
Ma sapu nitu a dadi.’ And deathly demise occur.’
Boe ma meke ana selu dasi a neu Then the snake raises its voice
Ma lole hara na neu: And brings forth its words:
‘Nai kalau emi dua mia ‘If both of you eat
Sono neu ko dadi matafali ao Then you will transform
Ma masadua ao And you will change
Dadi neu Tou Mana Sura Poi To become the Inscriber of the Heights
Ma Tate Mana Adu Lai…’ And the Creator of the Heaven…’

IV

God’s Dialogue with Adam

Tou Mana Adu Lai a The Creator of the Heaven
Ma Tate Mana Sura Poi a And the Inscriber of the Heights
Mai teteni ma mai natane Come to see and come to ask
Seluk dasi a neu Again raising His voice
Ma lole hara a neu: And bringing forth His words:
‘Adam-Adam, te o nai bea?’ ‘Adam-Adam, where are you?’
Adam seluk dadae dasi Adam replies in a humble voice
Ma lole mamale hara nae: And speaks with weakened words:
‘Ami dua nai ia. ‘Both of us are here.
Tehu ami dadi nai masala But we have become guilty
De oli bui masala In a wide estuary of guilt
Ma ami mori nai masiko And we have grown sinful
De le tende masiko In a wide river of sin
De ami dua lao soro funi ao Both of us walk hiding our bodies
Ma amii dua hae bubui ao And we two rest covering ourselves
De ami dua nai bea na For the two of us are in this situation
Bina do ta palu paun Bina-leaves cannot wrap the thighs
Ma ta palu ami dua paun And cannot wrap both our thighs
Ma kode-ke ta ndule kere And kode-ke-bark cannot cover the loins
Te ta ndule mai dua keren.’ Nor can it cover round both our loins.’

Julius Iu’s composition follows, in recognisable fashion, the Genesis narrative. Another composition, this one by Ande Ruy from the domain of Ringgou, offers a narrative of creation that has a more specific traditional content. Ande Ruy is a well-known ritual-language performer who is steeped in the traditions of his domain. Unlike Julius Iu, he is not a lay preacher and his version of Genesis is more idiosyncratically his own.
Another telling of a Rotenese Genesis

Of particular note are the specific acts of creation and the way in which God the Creator speaks and calls forth the creation of particular animals: ‘You, Moka Holu fish, come forth//You, Dusu Lake fish, appear…Lizard of the Sun come forth//Gecko of the Moon, appear…Swallows of the Sun come forth//Kestrels of the Moon appear.’

The following are excerpts from this composition by Ande Ruy.

I

Initial Creation: Darkness to light

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Hida bei leo hata na} & \quad \text{At a time long ago} \\
\text{Ma data bei leo dona} & \quad \text{At a time since past} \\
\text{Bei iu-iu kima lou} & \quad \text{Still dark as the inside of a clam} \\
\text{Ma bei hatu-hatu data feo.} & \quad \text{Still gloom wrapped all round.} \\
\text{Ma lua bei taa} & \quad \text{Sunlight was not yet} \\
\text{Ma makaledo bei taa} & \quad \text{Daylight was not yet}
\end{align*}
\]
Ma bei pela oe leleu

Still surface water throughout

Bei tasi oe lala.

Still the water of the sea surrounding.

Ma tate mana sura bula

The Inscriber of the Moon

Fo nai Tema Sio

In the Fullness of Nine

Do tou mana adu ledo

Or the Creator of the Sun

Fo nai Bate Falu

In the Abundance of Eight

Bei ise-ise leo apa

Still isolated as a buffalo

Ma bei mesa-mesa leo manu

Still lonely as a chicken

Bei iku nonoi.

Still in the heights.

Dula Dale namaleu

The Patterner of the Heart comes

Bei malalao

Still hovering above

Do Malala Funa bei leu-leu

Or the Shaper of the Core still comes

Do bei lala-lala rae

Or still hovering over the Earth

Pela oe leleu

Moving over the water

Do tasi oe lalama.

The waters of the sea extending.

Ma Tate mana sura bula

The Inscriber of the Moon

Do Tou mana adu ledo

Or the Creator of the Sun

Lole hara na neu

Raises forth His voice

Fo hara eke na neu

The leaden voice comes forth

Ma selu dasi na neu

Lifts forth His words

Fo dasi ilo na neu, nae:

Golden words go forth, saying:

‘Makaledo a dadi ma

‘Let there be sunlight

Ma malua a mori.’

And let daylight appear.’

II

Creation of the Earth

Selu dasi na neu

He lifts forth His words

Ma lole hara na neu

And raises forth His voice

Fo hara eke na neu

The leaden voice comes forth

‘Dadi mai Batu Poi a.’

‘Let there be the Rock’s Point.’

Ma dasi ilo na neu:

And the golden words come forth:

‘Mori mai Dae Bafo a.’

‘Let there appear the Earth’s surface.’

Boe ma mana mori, ara mori

What appears, appears

Ma mana dadi, ara dadi.

And what comes forth, comes forth.

Fo biti ne ara dadi do mori

Plants come forth or appear

Fo mori reni hu ana

Appear with tiny trunks

Ma dadi reni hu ina.

And come forth with large trunks.

Boe ma feli nade neu

So He gives them their name

Ma beka bon, rae:

And their aroma, saying:

Hu mana rerebi do

Trunks that grow thick

Do mana sasape ara

Leaves that hang down
15. The appropriation of Biblical knowledge in the creation of new narratives of origin

**III**

Continuation of Creation: The sea and the creatures of the sea

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

**IV**

Further Creation: Specific creatures of the Earth

- **Boe ma lole hara na neu**
  - His word goes forth
- **Ma selu dasi na neu,**
  - And His voice goes forward
- **Nadasi neu dae bafo a**
  - The voice directed to the Earth
- **Ma hara mai batu poi a, nae:**
  - And words directed to the world, saying:
    - ‘**Korofao ledo o dadi**’
      - ‘Lizard of the Sun, come forth
    - **Dadi mai dae bafo a**
      - Come forth upon the Earth
    - **Dadi mo basa tia dedena mara**
      - Come forth with all your friends
    - **Ma teke labo bula o mori**
      - And gecko of the Moon, appear
    - **Mori mo basa sena mara**
      - Appear with all your companions
    - **Fo dari meu mana tu dasi**
      - To come forth with those who give voice
    - **Do mori meu mana malosa hara.’**
      - Or appear with those who give word.’
In this version of Genesis, God is involved in the creation of a Rotenese world: monkeys and geckos, swallows and kestrels, goats and water buffalo appear at the beginning of creation. This is less a theological retelling of Genesis than a personal synthesis of elements of two canons, fusing ancestral knowledge in a Christian format.

**Conclusions**

The Rotenese adopted the Malay Bible as a critical cultural text and as the means of establishing themselves as a literate and educated Christian people. In time, as Christianity took hold on the island, they engaged in the retelling of this prime text as an oral narrative. Genesis, in particular, offered the opportunity to add to the all-important knowledge of origins. The ancestral canon, which recounts a host of origins, had no account of the physical creation of the world but only an account of the first meeting upon the Earth of the children of the Sun and
Moon with the Lords of the Sea and Ocean. For this reason, it would seem Genesis as a narrative was readily incorporated within a corpus of traditional origin narratives. This account as an iconic beginning, in conjunction with the appropriation of Biblical knowledge in general, is central to present-day Rotenese identity.