

8

Paths of life and death: Rotenese life-course recitations and the journey to the afterworld

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Introduction

The idea of the path and of the journey that the path implies is a prominent and persistent conception among the Rotenese. There are many paths, but all such paths are referred to in ritual language by the paired terms ‘path and road’ (*eno ma dalan*). In rituals, paths have a direction, a beginning and an end, and journeying can be from west to east or from east to west: towards sunrise at the ‘head’ (*langa*) of the island or towards sunset at the ‘tail’ (*iko*) of the island.

On Rote, this movement is through a specific nominated space. All of the 17 traditional domains (*nusak*) of the island have their dual ritual names and, within each of these domains, particular places and prominent locations—fields, streams, hilltops—have their ritual names as well. Rotenese ritual recitations rely on topogenies—the formal ordered recitation of ritual placenames—to give direction to movement along a particular path and thus trace a recognised progression. This recitation of topogenies forms an essential part of the knowledge of origins.

Journeying can go beyond Rote to places with ritually designated names on neighbouring islands and further to places about which Rotenese can only speculate. Not only is life full of journeying, but also life itself from birth to death is conceived of as a journey. This conception is particularly prominent in the life-course recitations that mark the main rituals of death.

From a comparative perspective, these Rotenese life-course recitations are remarkable and distinctive. While many Austronesian societies in their mortuary rituals focus on a journey—often complex and precarious—that leads to an afterworld, the Rotenese at their funeral ceremonies focus on selecting one chant from a variety of patterned life-course recitations that is intended to fit the life of the deceased. This life-course chant is then recited in celebration of the deceased on the evening or evenings prior to burial.



Plates 8.1 and 8.2 Rotenese funerals are generally convivial gatherings spent in meeting, talking and feasting, often interspersed with drumming, gong-playing and dancing

Before the burial, the personal affairs of the deceased are discussed, debts are settled and the close kin of the deceased offer their ritual exchanges to presiding maternal relatives. Burial is in the late afternoon before sunset, with Christian prayers for the deceased. There is—or once was—a ritual framework to all these proceedings although it was rarely made evident (see Fox 1988a). Only on the night or nights before burial were life-course chants recited to the accompaniment of circle-dancing.

Photos: James J. Fox.

All life-course recitations in the Rotenese repertoire are conceived of as particular paths that define a diversity of human possibilities. They identify the deceased by a life pattern and, in some cases, by manner of death. Many of these recitations include or invoke journeys within this life-course, producing an array of alternative avenues, some criss-crossing the island or venturing to destinations on other islands. If life is seen as a grand journey, it often consists of a variety of lesser journeys. All these fanciful imaginary biographies are metaphorical excursions for which there can be multiple interpretations.

Following the burial, there can also occur a final dirge that sends the spirit of the deceased on its way. This lament is a simple, sad and succinct instruction of farewell. It, too, describes a journey—a final journey to the afterworld.

This chapter discusses the repertoire of these life-course recitations gathered in the central domain of Termanu on Rote. From this rich repertoire, the chapter considers a selection of these recitations and some of the paths they set forth. It then presents and provides exegesis on one particular recitation entitled *Kea Lenga ma Lona Bala* and concludes by providing an example of the farewell instructions to the deceased for the final journey to the afterworld.

The genre of life-course recitations: Some illustrative examples

Life-course recitations form part of a much larger body of Rotenese oral literature composed in strict canonical parallelism—the specific, obligatory pairing of words to create formal ordered compositions. These different compositions are named after the particular chant character who is most prominent in them. In the case of life-course recitations, this is the chant-name given to the deceased.

In general, compositions are also identified by their ritual use. Thus, what I refer to here as life-course recitations are all simply classified as ‘death chants’ (*bini mamates*). A persistent theme in all of these chants is that of the ‘orphan and widow’ (*ana-mak ma falu-ina*). One enters life as an orphan and widow, journeys through life and departs, as one began, once more as an orphan and widow.

‘Orphan and widow’ can be used as a category to describe a number of general life-course recitations including some origin chants that can be altered, recomposed and recited as life-course recitations. A good example of these possibilities is the chant *Suti Solo do Bina Bane*—a chant known throughout Rote. As an origin chant, *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* recounts the journeying of two shells, a nautilus and a baler shell, that become either clappers to ward off birds from a rice field or the container for indigo and the base for spooling cotton for weaving. With its emphasis on the journeying of the two shells, *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* can also be composed to be told as a general orphan and widow life-course recitation (for 21 versions of this chant in both formats, see Fox 2016).

In the discussion of life-course recitations, there is what would seem to be a proliferation of dual names of persons and places plus the names of various creatures of the heavens, of the earth and of the sea, as well as of plants, especially trees. All of these names carry a weight of symbolic significance defined by implicit cultural conventions. Some of these names can be translated while others are more elusive, with parts that hint at their significance. In the Rotene, because these names are doubled, the verbs that can accompany them can be either singular or plural. In a maddening fashion, which is intolerable in English, singular and plural can alternate even in a short sequence of lines, as if the poet intended to pair them to increase his use of parallelism. In translations and exegesis in this chapter, I have tried to use singular for most persons except where two different creatures or objects are invoked and the plural is critical. I consider, in summary fashion, a number of different life-course recitations and then focus on one particular example, which I present as a good illustrative reference text.

Manu Kama ma Tepa Nilu

Soon after my arrival in Rote in April 1965, I began to study ritual language, working with three master poets from Termanu: Meno Tua (‘Old Meno’), the ‘Head of the Earth’ of Termanu; Seu Ba’i, an already accomplished poet who had attached himself as an apprentice to Old Meno; and Peu Malesi, a fellow clansman of Seu Ba’i but someone whom Seu Ba’i saw as a rival. Most of the first compositions I recorded were life-course recitations.

The first of these was a composition by Peu Malesi that, once I had managed to transcribe it, I took to Old Meno for help in understanding it. Gradually, after several months, when I had begun to comprehend various compositions, I realised that included in a volume of Rotenese texts, *Rottineesche teksten met vertaling*, that the Dutch linguist J.C.G. Jonker published in 1911, there was a beautiful life-course recitation entitled *Manu Kama ma Tepa Nilu*, which Jonker described as ‘obscure’ and had left untranslated, providing instead commentary and notes on its content. When I read the Rotenese text to a couple of elders, their assumption was that it was another of the compositions that I had recorded from Malesi.

I then took the text to Old Meno and offered to read it to him. Instead, he insisted that I read it to an assembled group of elders at the end of a court session. I did this a week or so later, explaining before I began that I was bringing back Rotenese knowledge that the Dutch had recorded from their ancestors. The reading was a success. Old Meno had given me the opportunity of a public performance, which established a degree of credibility and seriousness to my status and opened the way for wider participation for my recording of oral compositions.

More significant for my research was Meno’s reaction. After initially telling me how he had stayed awake at night wondering about my arrival and my motivations for coming to Termanu, he accepted me and my tape recorder as means of transmitting his knowledge to subsequent generations. At one point in another life-recitation, *Lilo Tola ma Koli Lusi*, he interpolated his own commentary on *Manu Kama ma Tepa Nilu* and, in just 28 lines, summarised a Rotenese understanding of all life recitations and their significance.

His lines assert that the human condition is one of dependence, which is expressed as being an orphan and widow. Using a traditional paired phrasing, ‘those who wear black hats//those who wear yellow slippers’—an expression that originally referred to the Dutch and Portuguese but is now applied to anyone who adopts superior airs—Old Meno, as Head of the Earth, whose position is in polar opposition to the Lord of the Domain, gave insistent emphasis to the idea of mortality as the levelling feature of human life that does not differentiate between the great and the weak:

<i>Hu ndia de neda masa-nenedak</i>	Therefore consider, do consider
<i>Ma ndele mafa-ndendelek</i>	And remember, do remember
<i>Basa lesik-kala lemin</i>	All you great ones

<i>Do basa lenana-ngala lemin</i>	Or all you superior ones
<i>Boso ma-tei telu</i>	Do not have three hearts
<i>Ma boso ma-dale dua.</i>	And do not have two insides.
<i>Se neu langa le</i>	Whoever suffers lack and hindrance
<i>Na basang-ngita teu ndia</i>	We all go there
<i>Ma se neu toa piak</i>	And whoever suffers need and distress
<i>Na basang-ngita teu ndia.</i>	We all go there.
<i>Se ana-mak?</i>	Who is an orphan?
<i>Na basang-ngita ana-mak.</i>	All of us are orphans.
<i>Ma se falu-ina?</i>	And who is a widow?
<i>Na basang-ngita falu-ina.</i>	All of us are widows.
<i>Fo la-fada lae:</i>	They speak of:
<i>Manu Kama dala dain</i>	Manu Kama's road to Dain
<i>Ma Tepa Nilu eno selan.</i>	And Tepa Nilu's path to Selan.
<i>Na basang-ngita ta enon</i>	All of us have not his path
<i>Ma basang-ngita ta dalan.</i>	And all of us have not his road.
<i>Sosoa-na nai dae bafak kia</i>	This means that on this
<i>nde bena</i>	earth then
<i>Ana-mak mesan-mesan</i>	Each person is an orphan
<i>Ma falu-ina mesa-mesan.</i>	And each person is a widow.
<i>De manasapeo nggeok</i>	Those who wear black hats
<i>Do manakuei modok ko</i>	Or those who wear yellow slippers
<i>Se ana-ma sila boe</i>	They will be orphans, too
<i>Ma falu-ina sila boe.</i>	And they will be widows, too.

Meno's interpolation is both powerful and personal. It acknowledges that people follow different paths. Not everyone has 'Manu Kama's road to Dain and Tepa Nilu's path to Selan', which is distinctive and remarkable.

This life recitation begins with the marriage of Manu Kama//Tepa Nilu's mother, Silu Lilo//Huka Besi, and his father, Kama Lai Ledo//Nilu Neo Bulan, part of whose names, 'Sun//Moon' (*Ledo//Bulan*), signifies a heavenly origin. As Manu Kama//Tepa Nilu (MK//TN) is growing up, first his father and then his mother dies, leaving him an orphan. Another

woman, Bula Pe//Mapo Tena (BP//MT), offers to be his true mother and aunt but when he asks her to provide bridewealth so he can marry, she is unable (too poor) to do so. This request is metaphorically phrased as a request to buy him ‘a friarbird’s voice and a parrot’s whistle’, but BP//MT replies that she is a ‘woman without a ring on her finger and a girl without copper on her legs’. MK//TN therefore leaves BP//MT, sets forth and meets another woman, Lide Mudak//Adi Sole, who offers to take him in and be his true mother and aunt, but again she, too, is unable to provide him the bridewealth he needs. So, MK//TN grabs his ‘friarbird-hunting bow and parrot-hunting blowpipe’ and sets off once more. Next, he meets the woman Lo Luli//Kalu Palu (LL//KP), who offers to be his true mother and aunt.

One night, he hears the beating of drums and gongs and asks what is happening. LL//KP tells MK//TN that the Sun and Moon are holding a great feast at Rainbow Crossing//Thunder All-Round. So, MK//TN goes to attend the feast that is in progress. He is recognised but then insulted when he is offered millet in a rice basket and lung in a meat bowl. He leaves the feast and meets yet another woman, Leli Deak//Kona Kek (LD//KK), who becomes his mother and aunt. He moves with her to ‘Lini Oe’s birth group and Kene Mo’s descent group’, where he taps lontar palms and prepares fields for his mother and aunt, LD//KK. A perahu appears selling ‘nine fine things and eight delightful objects’ and its captain invites LD//KK to come on board, saying: ‘What pleases you, buy it and what displeases you, put it back.’ While LD//KK is looking through the offering, the owner sets sail, stealing LD//KK to take her to Selan do Dain. When MK//TN returns from the field, he is told that his mother has been carried away to Selan do Dain. He climbs on to a ‘pig’s feeding trough and a giant clam shell’ and sets off to Selan do Dain in search of LD//KK. When he arrives at his destination—now referred to by its full ritual name, Sela Sule ma Dai Laka—he instructs the owner of the perahu to take a message back for him:

<i>Mai leo Lini Oe mu</i>	‘Go back to Lini Oe
<i>Do leo Kene Mo mu!</i>	Or go back to Kene Mo!
<i>Mu mafada lena Lini-la</i>	Go and tell the lords of Lini
<i>Do mafada lesi Kene-la,</i>	Or tell the headmen of Kene,
<i>Mae: “Sek-o makanilu neo-la</i>	Say: “Come to see me

<i>Tasi-oe pepesi-la</i>	Where the water of the sea strikes the land
<i>Dae lai Dain boe</i>	There is a homeland on Dain, too
<i>Ma oe lai Selan boe.</i>	And there is native water on Selan, too.
<i>De au lo-ai kada Selan</i>	My tomb-house shall be on Selan
<i>Ma au late-dae kada Dain.”</i>	And my earthen-grave shall be on Dain.”

As a funeral chant, this life-course recitation, which ends with *Manu Kama//Tepa Nilu*'s journey to Selan do Dain, is open to speculation and interpretation. It is not clear precisely what category of person it can be used to celebrate. As an all-purpose widow and orphan chant, it could possibly be used for any variety of persons. For Meno, *Manu Kama*'s road to Dain and *Tepa Nilu*'s path to Selan was a passage to the grave and a general commentary on all human endeavours that led finally to a tomb-house and earthen-grave.¹

Dela Kolik ma Seko Bunak

Dela Kolik ma Seko Bunak is another fanciful life-course recitation that involves more of a pursuit than a journey. Meno recomposed an origin chant from *Termanu* to create this recitation, which he claimed was appropriate for the funeral of a child who dies as an infant. *Dela Kolik ma Seko Bunak* (DK//SB) is this male child, who is snatched from his mother and is only regained after his death. DK//SB's name includes the paired placename *Kolik//Bunak*, which is a ritual designation for the domain of *Termanu*. This gives the recitation a specific setting from which to trace the pursuit of the child.

This recitation begins with the birth of DK//SB's mother, *Pinga Pasa ma So'e Leli* (PP//SL), to *Koli Faenama ma Bunak Tunulama* (KF//BT). The critical cultural premise that underlies this recitation—and other ritual recitations—is that a mother's cravings in pregnancy reflect and reveal the character of the child to be born. Almost one-third of this recitation is taken up with KF//BT's efforts to satisfy the cravings of his wife. First,

1 The complete reference text of *Manu Kama ma Tepa Nilu* can be found in Fox (1988b) and has been reprinted in Fox (2014: 229–64).

PP//SL craves ‘goat’s liver and buffalo’s lung’; then, ‘bees’ larvae and wasps’ larvae’; then, ‘chucks of turtle meat and strips of seacow flesh’; and then, fatally, ‘a hawk’s egg and an eagle’s child’. KF//BT has to employ ‘a three-toed lizard and a two-toothed mouse’ to obtain the egg and child of a particular named hawk and eagle, Tetema Taenama and Balapua Loni (TT//BL), nesting in two high *nitas* and *delas* trees. These two trees, the *nitas* (*Sterculia foetida*; Indonesian: *Kelumpang*) and the *delas* (*Erythrina Spp.*; Indonesian: *Dedap*), are large, prominent flowering trees of ritual importance in this and other ritual compositions.

Soon after the birth of DK//SB, the hawk and eagle, TT//BL, takes her revenge by stealing the child and carrying him eastward to Sepe Ama Li’s *nitas* tree and Timu Tongo-Batu’s *delas* tree (again, the paired terms Sepe//Timu [‘Dawn//East’] indicate the direction of the hawk and eagle’s flight). DK//SB’s mother, PP//SL, ‘strikes her ribs in anger and beats her thighs in distress’ and sets out in pursuit of her stolen child. When she reaches the place where the hawk and eagle are perched, she kicks the tree but cannot dislodge her child. It is at this point that the eagle and hawk, TT//BL, speak to her, saying:

<i>‘O sue anam leo bek,</i>	‘Just as you love your child,
<i>Na au sue anang leo ndiak</i>	So I love my child
<i>Ma o lai tolom leo bek,</i>	And just as you cherish your egg,
<i>Na au lai tolong leo ndiak boe.</i>	So I love my egg also.
<i>De o muä au-anang-nga so</i>	You have eaten my child
<i>De besak-ia au uä o-anam-ma</i>	Now I eat your child
<i>Ma o minu au-tolong-nga so</i>	And you have drunk my egg
<i>De au inu o-tolom-ma bai.’</i>	So I drink your egg also.’

TT//BL then flies back to her original perch in Taoama Dulu’s *nitas* and Loniamama Langa’s *delas* and from there to Loma-Loma Langa’s *nitas* and Pele-Pele Dulu’s *delas* with PP//SL in pursuit (again, the names of the owners of these trees, both of whom have Dulu//Langa [‘East//Head’] as part of their names, indicate that the flight of the hawk and eagle is in the east of Rote). However, as PP//SL approaches, TT//BL takes wing again and this time flies to the far western end of Rote at Dela Muli//Ana Iko. When PP//SL finally arrives, the eagle and hawk fly out to sea but PS//SL ‘cannot wade the waves nor cross the swell’ and she is forced to return home.

TT//BL then flies into the heavens and perches on the ‘Moon’s *delas* and the Sun’s *nitas*’, where she continues to munch and chew DK//SB. Finally, when all that remains are ‘chicken bones and buffalo sinew’, the eagle and hawk return to earth and drop what remains of DK//SB near two large rock formations off the coast of Termanu, Batu Hun ma Sua Lai, where his mother, PP//SL, can gather them. And so, the recitation ends with the lines:

<i>Besak-ka tetema tapa henin</i>	Now the hawk throws him away
<i>Ma balapua tuu henin.</i>	And the eagle casts him away.
<i>Boe-ma inak-ka Pinga Pasa</i>	The mother, Pinga Pasa
<i>Ma teon-na So’e Leli neu</i>	And his aunt, So’e Leli
<i>De tenga do hele nenin.</i>	Takes or picks him, carrying him.
<i>De la-toi dui manun</i>	They bury the chicken bones
<i>Ma laka-dofu kalu kapan.</i>	And they cover with earth the buffalo sinews.

The path of pursuit in this recitation transverses the island of Rote, shifting heavenward to the Sun and Moon before returning to the coast of Termanu at the centre of the island. As an imaginary biography to celebrate the death of an infant, this recitation presents a moving life-course where there has been little of life to celebrate.²

Ndi Lonama ma Laki Elokama

Ndi Lonama ma Laki Elokama is a life-course recitation for the death of a rich man. This recitation was gathered from Old Meno’s contemporary, the master poet Stefanus Amalo. It is remarkable for its long personal admonition from the deceased addressed to the members of his family. The genealogical introduction to this recitation begins with the marriage of the woman Lisu Lasu Lonak//Dela Musu Asuk to Ndi Lonama//Laki Elokama (NL//LE), who in this case is the principal chant character and

2 The complete reference text for *Dela Koli ma Seko Bunak* can be found in Fox (1971) and has been reprinted in Fox (2014: 91–128). Knowing that Old Meno had composed this version as a funeral chant, Seu Ba’i, years later, provided me a version of this same chant that recounts the origin of the rock formation Sua Lai//Batu Hun, on Termanu’s north coast. This version initially follows Meno’s version, but then diverges significantly. The eagle and hawk do not drop Dela Koli//Seko Bunak back in Termanu but fly on to Timor and drop the child there. The child survives, marries and gives rise to the rocks Sua Lai//Batu Hun. Eventually, these rocks return to their place of origin and fix themselves on Termanu’s coast.

subject of this recitation. The recitation continues with the birth of their children: a son, Solu Ndi//Luli Laki (referred to in ritual language as ‘a cock’s tail feathers and a rooster’s plume’), and a daughter, Henu Ndi//Lilo Laki. NL//LE’s wealth in herds of animals is described at length:

<i>Te hu touk Ndi Lonama</i>	But the man Ndi Lonama,
<i>Ma ta'ek Laki Elokama</i>	And the boy Laki Elokama,
<i>Tou ma-bote biik</i>	Is a man with flocks of goats
<i>Ma ta'e ma-tena kapak.</i>	And is a boy with herds of water buffalo.
<i>De basa fai-kala</i>	On all the days
<i>Ma nou ledo-kala</i>	And every sunrise
<i>Ana tada mamao bote</i>	He separates the flock in groups
<i>Ma ana lilo bobongo tena</i>	And forms the herd in circles
<i>Na neni te tada tenan</i>	Bringing his herd-separating spear
<i>Ma neni tafa lilo bote-na ...</i>	And bringing his flock-forming sword ...
<i>Fo bote-la dai lena</i>	For the flock is great
<i>Ma tena-la to lesi ...</i>	And the herd is extensive ...

NL//LE is suddenly struck down by illness and, as he is about to die, he gives instructions to his son and daughter on how to use his wealth. These instructions are long and elaborate injunctions to recognise and care for widows and orphans. When they are concluded, NL//LE sets out in poignant detail his journey to the afterworld:

<i>Te au touk Ndi Lonama</i>	For I am the man Ndi Lonama
<i>Ma au ta'ek Laki Elokama</i>	And I am the boy Laki Elokama
<i>Na au tonang sanga sosokun</i>	My boat is about to lift
<i>Ma au balung sanga sasaën</i>	And my perahu is about to rise
<i>Fo au ala u tunga inang</i>	For I am going to search for my mother
<i>Ma ala u afi teong</i>	And I am going to seek my aunt
<i>Nai muli loloe</i>	In the receding west
<i>Ma iko tatai.</i>	And at the tail's edge.
<i>Fo au leo Dela Muli u</i>	For I go to Dela in the west

<i>Ma leo Ana Iko u.</i>	And I go to Ana at the tail.
<i>De se au tonang ta diku-dua</i>	My boat will not turn back
<i>Ma au balung ta lolo-fali</i>	And my perahu will not return
<i>Tē dae saon doko-doe</i>	The earth demands a spouse
<i>Ma batu tun tai-boni</i>	And the rocks require a mate
<i>De se mana-sapuk mesan-mesan</i>	Those who die, this includes everyone
<i>Mana-lalok basa-basan</i>	Those who perish, this includes all men
<i>De neuk-o fai a neu fai</i>	As day follows day
<i>Ma ledō a neu ledō.</i>	And sun follows sun.
<i>Tē au dilu Ana Iko len</i>	I turn down to the river of Ana Iko
<i>Ma au loe Dela Muli olin</i>	I descend to the estuary of Dela Muli
<i>Nde be na iu sio lai dalek</i>	There are nine sharks down below
<i>Ma foe falu lai dalek.</i>	And eight crocodiles down below.
<i>De ala silu dope lai dalek</i>	They show their knife teeth down below
<i>Ma ala dali noli lai dalek</i>	And they sharpen their fangs down below
<i>De neuk-o se au balung ta diku-dua</i>	Now my boat will not turn back
<i>Ma au tonang ta lolo-fali.</i>	And my perahu will not return.

At a funeral ceremony, these sad words of departure foreshadowing the personal journey to the afterworld were intended to be sung as a message from the deceased to his descendants.³

3 The complete reference text for *Ndi Lonama ma Laki Elokama* was first published in Fox (2003) and reprinted in Fox (2014: 283–95).

Pau Balo ma Bola Lungi

Pau Balo ma Bola Lungi is yet another life-course recitation, intended for the funeral of a young man who dies before he has married and had a family. It is an explicitly erotic celebration of the many illicit loves of a Don Juan–like figure, who, in the version from Termanu, comes to a violent end. This chant is popularly known throughout Rote in many diverse versions, some even more explicitly adulterous than Termanu’s.

This version was also obtained from the master poet Stefanus Amalo. It is one of the longest chants in my collection of life-course recitations. *Pau Balo ma Bola Lungi*’s exploits take him on lengthy journeys to and through the domains of Rote.

This recitation begins with an extended genealogical introduction starting two generations before the birth of *Pau Balo ma Bola Lungi* (PB//BL). The woman Henu Elu//Bula Sao marries Lai Lota//Sina Kilo and gives birth to Malungi Lai//Balokama Sina (ML//BS). When ML//BS reaches maturity, he sets off in search of a noble wife, sailing first to the island of Savu, referred to as *Seba Iko ma Safu Muli*, in the west. When he is unable to find a wife on Savu, he returns to Rote, *Kale do Lote*, and encounters the woman *Si Solu Hate Besi//Kona Boi Kado Lofa*, whom he marries. When she becomes pregnant, she craves ‘chunks of turtle meat and strips of seacow flesh’. These cravings can be interpreted as a sign of PB//BL’s eventual character. In the Rotenese mythological imagination, the turtle and seacow were originally women who were condemned for their adultery to their sea creature condition. While seeking the food to satisfy his wife’s cravings, ML//BS also gathers small sharks and stingrays to give to her—again, signalling PB//BL’s future nature. PB//BL is born, twisting and lashing like a shark and stingray.

When PB//BL is growing up, he plays with some young girls who mock his claim to nobility. Stung by this taunt, PB//BL asks his mother to provide him with the variety of bamboo he needs to fashion a blowpipe and a bow to hunt parrots and friarbirds—a metaphorical declaration that he is ready to seek a woman to marry.

PB//BL sets off with his parrot-hunting blowpipe and his friarbird-hunting bow. The first woman he encounters is *Liu Pota//Menge Solu* (LP//MS), whose father has died. She sits upon her father’s grave grieving

<i>Boe ma ta'ek-ka Pau Balo</i>	The boy Pau Balo
<i>Ma touk-ka Bola Lungi</i>	And the man Bola Lungi
<i>Lole halan no meko</i>	Lifts his voice with the gongs
<i>Ma selu dasin no labu.</i>	And raises his words with the drums.
<i>De hala filo fani-oen na</i>	His voice as fragrant as bees' honey
<i>Nafeo fani-lasi</i>	Spreads round like forest bees
<i>Ma dasi loloa tua-nasun na</i>	And his words as sweet as lontar syrup
<i>Naleli bupu timu.</i>	Wander round like hovering wasps.

Women drop their fishing nets and come running to make love with him:

<i>'Hala Pau Balo ia</i>	'That is Pau Balo's voice
<i>Ma dasi Bola Lungi ia.'</i>	And those are Bola Lungi's words.'
<i>Boe te ala nggafu heni nafi tasi nala</i>	So they shake sea cucumbers back into the sea
<i>Ma ala toko heni si meti mala.</i>	And they throw the molluscs back into the tide.
<i>De lalai lelana</i>	They come dashing
<i>Ma tolomu sasali.</i>	And they come running.
<i>De leu te Paung loloi aon</i>	They go for Pau's rayfish twisting body
<i>Ma Bolang fefelo aon.</i>	And Bola's shark lashing body.
<i>Boe ma ala tu lal'ak Paun</i>	They wed by ravishing Pau
<i>Ma ala sao lanolek Bolan.</i>	And they marry by forcing Bola.

PB//BL continues on his way, making love to a married woman whose husband threatens to kill him but instead curses him. PB//BL makes light of this curse and continues his lovemaking:

<i>Boe ma Paung sosoa lali</i>	So Paung makes love once more
<i>Ma Bolang piao seluk.</i>	And Bolang takes pleasure again.
<i>De leo dulu oen neu</i>	To the eastern water, he goes
<i>Ma leo langa daen neu.</i>	And to the headland, he goes.

Finally, he meets a woman planting rice, Nggeo Lao//Pila Selu, who rejects his overtures by refusing to share betel–areca nut with him. She sends him on his way and, as he strides forward into yet another village, the curse takes effect: the rainbow cuts across him and lightning spears him.

<i>De ana sapu no tene-tuk</i>	He perishes quickly
<i>Ma ana lalo no ha'e-laik</i>	And he dies suddenly
<i>Nai Bafi Sole dulu mon</i>	In Bafi Sole's eastern field
<i>Ma nai Diu Ama langa fuan.</i>	And in Diu Ama's headplain.
<i>De late-dae neme ndia</i>	The earthen grave is there
<i>Ma lo-ai name na.</i>	And the wooden tomb is at that spot.

Although his death is sudden and violent, PB//BL remains something of a heroic figure among Rotenese men and references are frequently made to him as a recognised cultural figure.⁴

Life-course recitations as literary compositions

All life-course recitations are literary compositions. Composed according to cultural norms that require the strict pairing of words, these formal recitations are formulaically structured and follow an array of recognised conventions. Journeys are ordered according to a directional template that looks east or west, north or south through a landscape clustered with ritually designated dual names. The dual names of chant characters overlap with placenames, adding to the evocative significance of each recitation. The names of other creatures from the heavens, the earth and the sea as well as the names of plants form part of this same system. By convention, some creatures and some trees are specifically male or female. Their associations are the literary vehicle for cultural understandings.

For the Rotenese today, these recitations are literary compositions in another sense. They continue to be preserved by the poets and elders of the island, but they are rarely performed at rituals. Virtually all funerals

4 I have already gathered several versions of *Pau Balo ma Bola Lungi* recited in different dialects that provide varying accounts of Pau Balo//Bola Lungi's exploits. I am still hoping to gather at least another two versions to be able to compare them with one another with a particular focus on their erotic language.

are now conducted with Christian rituals, which allow, at best, fragments of the past—snatches and segments of a recitation—to emerge. That these recitations are still maintained as an oral tradition is a tribute to the perseverance of the past and the recognition of a rich ancestral tradition that continues to evoke cultural respect.

Attempting to interpret any single life-course recitation requires careful attention to the conventions on which it draws. It is therefore instructive to consider one life recitation in detail—one that, like many similar recitations, involves journeying back and forth across the island with messengers and messages sent to convey sentiments of symbolic significance about the nature of life, death and memory.

Kea Lenga ma Lona Bala: A life-course reference text

Kea Lenga ma Lona Bala is perhaps an inappropriate name for this life-course recitation. *Kea Lenga//Lona Bala* is the chant character who figures most prominently in the recitation but, as a funeral chant, this composition concerns the chant character *Delo Iuk//Soma Lopa*, a woman who dies in childbirth. This composition offers an excellent example of many of the chief features of a life-course recitation, including the journeying and messaging that link its protagonists.

Unlike most life-course recitations, this composition, gathered from the master poet *Seu Ba'i* in 1965–66, does not begin with a genealogical introduction. Its opening lines posit a time when *Kea Lenga//Lona Bala* is old enough to begin the search for a spouse.

Kea Lenga//Lona Bala hears that there are beautiful women to be wed on the tiny island of *Ndao*, referred to as *Ndao Dale//Folo Manu*, and he sets off in a *perahu* to find a wife:

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|----|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. | <i>Touk-ka Kea Lenga</i> | The man <i>Kea Lenga</i> |
| 2. | <i>Ma ta'ek-ka Lona Bala.</i> | And the boy <i>Lona Bala</i> . |
| 3. | <i>Faik esa manunin</i> | On one certain day |
| 4. | <i>Ma ledo esa mateben</i> | And at one particular
time [sun] |
| 5. | <i>Ndii na namanene</i> | Ears hear |
| 6. | <i>Nggata na namania</i> | Hearing listens |

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| 7. | <i>Benga lafafada</i> | Words are spoken |
| 8. | <i>Dasi lakatutuda</i> | Voices let fall |
| 9. | <i>Ina lena Ndao Dale la</i> | There are extra women
on Ndao Dale |
| 10. | <i>Feto lesi Folo Manu la</i> | Additional girls on
Folo Manu |
| 11. | <i>Dani la lahe lolek</i> | Unmarried girls of rivalling
loveliness |
| 12. | <i>Leo lutu lahe lolek</i> | Like smooth stones
of rivalling loveliness |
| 13. | <i>Sopa laka'i kalek</i> | Unwed girls of imposing
beauty |
| 14. | <i>Leo dongi laka'i kalek.</i> | Like barbed spears of
imposing beauty. |
| 15. | <i>Boe ma touk-ka Kea Lenga</i> | The man Kea Lenga |
| 16. | <i>Ma ta'ek-ka Lona Bala</i> | And the boy Lona Bala |
| 17. | <i>Nakandolu tona ofan</i> | Builds a perahu ship |
| 18. | <i>Ma nalela balu paun.</i> | And designs a sailing craft. |
| 19. | <i>Faik esa matetuk</i> | On one right day |
| 20. | <i>Ledok esa matemak</i> | On one perfect time |
| 21. | <i>Boe ma laba nala tona ofan</i> | He mounts the perahu ship |
| 22. | <i>Ma tinga nala balu paun.</i> | And steps aboard the
sailing craft. |
| 23. | <i>De ana pale uli titidi de neu</i> | He guides the splashing
rudder |
| 24. | <i>Ma leko la kukulu de neu</i> | And manoeuvres the
flapping sails |
| 25. | <i>Neu tasi Ndao balu buin</i> | Toward Ndao's sea anchorage |
| 26. | <i>Ma neu meti Folo beu te'en.</i> | And toward Folo's tidal
harbour. |

When Kea Lenga//Lona Bala (KL//LB) arrives in the harbour of Ndao, he meets the man Ndao Eli-Sama//Folo No-Do'o (NE//FN), who is fishing. NE//FN interrogates KL//LB and KL//LB asks him about marriageable women on Ndao. NE/FN tells him that all the women of Ndao have married except for one woman in the house of Iu Ai//Lopo Maka. This turns out to be the woman Delo Iuk//Soma Lopo:

27. *Boe ma neu tongo lololo* There he meets with his arms
28. *Tou Ndao Eli-Sama* The man Ndao Eli-Sama
29. *Ma neu nda lilima* And he encounters with his hands
30. *Ta'e Folo No-Do'o* The boy Folo No-Do'o
31. *Pili lide tetele* Bending over to pick out *lide*-fish
32. *Nai tasi Ndao balu buin* In Ndao's sea anchorage
33. *Maku moka luluku* And stooping to spy minnows
34. *Nai meti Folo beu te'en.* In Folo's tidal harbour.
35. *Boe te ana lole halan neu* He raises his voice
36. *Ma a'e dasi neu, nae:* And lifts his words, saying:
37. *'Baluk se balun o* 'This boat, is it your boat
38. *Tonak se tonan o?'* This ship, is it your ship?'
39. *Boe te touk-ka Kea Lenga* So the man Kea Lenga
40. *Ma taëk-ka Lona Bala nae:* And the boy Lona Bala says:
41. *'Baluk au balung ia* 'This boat is my boat
42. *Tonak au tonang ia.* This ship is my ship.
43. *Ndii nga namanene* My ears hear
44. *Ma nggata nga namania* My hearing listens
45. *Ina lena Ndao Dale la* There are extra women on Ndao Dale
46. *Feto lesi Folo Manu la* Additional girls on Folo Manu
47. *Sopa la kai kalek* Unwed girls of imposing beauty
48. *Ma dani lahe lolek.* Unmarried girls of unrivalled loveliness.
49. *De au pale uli titidi* I guide the splashing rudder
50. *Ma au leko la kukulu* And I manoeuvre the flapping sails
51. *Fo sanga leo Ndao Nusa u* To seek Ndao Nusa
52. *Ma sanga leo Folo Manu u.'* And to seek Folo Manu.'
53. *Boe te taë Folo No-Do'o* The boy Folo No-Do'o

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| 54. | <i>Tou Ndao Eli-Sama</i> | And the man Ndao Eli-Sama |
| 55. | <i>Ana selu dasi neu</i> | He raises his words |
| 56. | <i>Ma ana aë balan neu, nae:</i> | And he lifts his voice, saying: |
| 57. | <i>'Ina lena Ndao Dale la</i> | 'The extra women on
Ndao Dale |
| 58. | <i>Tu lama-noü so</i> | Have all wed |
| 59. | <i>Feto lesi Folo Manu la</i> | The additional girls on
Folo Manu |
| 60. | <i>Sao lama-dai so.</i> | Have already married. |
| 61. | <i>Ala dani lai to'on lon</i> | There is a girl unwed in her
mother's brother's house |
| 62. | <i>Sopa lai aman uman</i> | And a girl unmarried in her
father's home |
| 63. | <i>Lai Iu Ai Ndaok uman</i> | In the house of Iu Ai of Ndao |
| 64. | <i>Lai Lopo Maka Folo lon.'</i> | And in the home of Lopo
Maka of Folo.' |

Kea Lengal/Lona Balo marries Delo Iuk//Soma Lopo and she becomes pregnant. Unexpectedly, KL//LB hears that Pele-Pele Dulu//Loma-Loma Langa has died and he has to board his perahu to return home. The paired terms *Dulu//Langa* ('East//Head') in the name Pele-Pele Dulu//Loma-Loma Langa indicate that KL//LB must traverse the island from Ndao at the western tip of Rote to somewhere at the eastern end of the island. He returns to the 'Dawning East//Reddening Head' (*Timu Dulu//Sepe Langa*):

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|-----|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 65. | <i>Nadeka tu nala Delo Iuk</i> | Now he weds Delo Iuk |
| 66. | <i>Sao nala Soma Lopo</i> | And marries Soma Lopo |
| 67. | <i>Boe ma tu nala Delo Iuk</i> | He weds Delo Iuk |
| 68. | <i>Ma sao nala Soma Lopo.</i> | And he marries Soma Lopo. |
| 69. | <i>Faik esa mateben</i> | One particular day |
| 70. | <i>Ma ledok esa manunin</i> | And one certain time [sun] |
| 71. | <i>Boe te inak-ka Delo Iuk</i> | The woman Delo Iuk |
| 72. | <i>Ma fetok-ka Soma Lopo</i> | And the girl Soma Lopo |
| 73. | <i>Tei-na daä -fai</i> | Her womb enlarges |
| 74. | <i>Ma su'u-na nggeo-lena</i> | And her breasts darken |
| 75. | <i>Nggeo-lena bobongin</i> | Darken to give birth |

76. *Ma daa-fai lalaen.* Enlarge to bring forth
[a child].
77. *Boe te halak-kala mai* But voices come
78. *Ma dasik-kala mai* And words come
79. *Touk Pele-Pele Dulu* The man Pele-Pele Dulu
80. *Ma taek Loma-Loma Langa* And the boy Loma-Loma
Langa
81. *Ana lalo ma ana sapu.* He has died and he has
perished.
82. *Boe ma taek-ka Kea Lenga* So the boy Kea Lenga
83. *Tinga-nala balu paun* Steps aboard his sailing craft
84. *Ma touk-ka Lona Bala* And the man Lona Bala
85. *Sae-nala tona ofan.* Climbs on top his
perahu ship.
86. *Ana leo Timu Dulu neu* He goes toward Dawning East
87. *Ma leo Sepe Langa neu.* And toward Reddening Head.

Time passes and the father of KL//LB's wife, Lopo Maka//Iu Ai, on Ndao asks the Tiny Bat of the Dawning East and the Flying Fox of the Reddening Head to fly to the east to find out about KL//LB. There, where two roads form a circle and three paths come together, they meet Lani Pea//Siti Si'u:

88. *Tēuk lakalaladik* Time passes
89. *Bulak lakaseseluk* Moons change
90. *Tē balun ta lolo-fali* But the boat does not return
91. *Ma tonan ta diku-dua.* And the ship does not
come back.
92. *Boe ma ta'ek Lopo* So the boy Lopo Maka
Maka Folo of Folo
93. *Ma touk lu Ai Ndao* And the man Iu Ai of Ndao
94. *Ana tetenin Bau Ana* He questions the Tiny Bat
Timu Dulu of the Dawning East
95. *Ma ana tata Soi Ana Sepe* And asks the Flying Fox
Langa of Reddening Head
96. *Nai dala batu sepe langa* On the stone road to
Reddening Head

97. *Ma eno dae timu dulu, lae:* And on the earthen path to
Dawning East, saying:
98. *'O eno daen sila boe* 'You on the earthen path
99. *Ma o dala batu sila boe* And you on the stone road
100. *De o leo timu dulu mu* Go to Dawning East
101. *Ma o leo sepe langa mu.'* And go to Reddening Head.'
102. *Boe ma Bau Ana Timu* So the Tiny Bat of Dawning
Dulu la leu boe East goes
103. *Ma Soi Ana Sepe Langa* And the Flying Fox of
la leu Reddening Head goes
104. *Tē leu dala dua bobongon* He goes to where two roads
form a circle
105. *Ma leu eno telu tai-lolon.* And goes to where three
paths come together.
106. *Boe te leu tongo lololo* There he meets with arms
107. *Ma leu nda lilima* And encounters with hands
108. *Lani Pea ma Siti Si'u.* Lani Pea and Siti Si'u.

Lani Pea//Siti Si'u tells the Tiny Bat and the Flying Fox that she is mourning the death of her father, Pea Pale-Sama//Si'u Lele-Lai. They sit at the gravesite, which is marked by two hardwood trees, a *tanga-tea* and *ka-koli*. These trees are, by convention, the signs of a poorly tended grave disturbed by roving animals. In her grief, LP//SS tells the Tiny Bat and Flying Fox to travel further and pose their questions again:

109. *De natane neme ndia* He asks there
110. *Ma teteni neme na.* And questions at that spot.
111. *Boe te ala selu dasi neu* They raise words
112. *Ma a'e halan neu:* And they lift voices:
113. *'Mu manosi seluk bai* 'Go inquire once again
114. *Ma mu matane seluk bai* And go, ask once again
115. *Tē Si'u Lele-Lai sapu* For Si'u Lele-Lai has died
116. *Ma Pea Pale-Sama lalo.* And Pea Pale-Sama has
perished.
117. *De lalo ela Lani Pea* He has perished leaving
Lani Pea

118. *Ma sapu ela Siti Si'u.* And he has died leaving
Siti Si'u.
119. *De ami mangatu late dae* We sit on the earthen grave
120. *Ma ami masalai lo ai* And we lean on the wooden
tomb
121. *De lo ai tanga-tea la* A tomb of wood-hard *tanga-*
tea tree
122. *Ma late batu ka-koli la.* And a grave of rock-hard
ka-koli tree.
123. *Ala pila bala dededen* It is now a deep-burnt red
124. *Ma ala nggeo lasa kekenin.* And is now a dark, glossy
black.
125. *Ami mangatu tunga seli* We sit on one side
126. *Na manu kali tunga seli* While chickens scratch
on one side
127. *Ma ami masalai tunga seli* And we lean on one side
128. *Bafi tofi tunga seli.* While pigs uproot the
ground on one side.
129. *De mu teteni seluk bai* Go, question once again
130. *Ma mu tata seluk bai.'* And go, demand once again.'

The Tiny Bat and the Flying Fox fly on to another site where two roads form a circle and three paths come together and there they meet Dano-La Lalata//Beu-La O'oko, part of whose names (*dano*: 'lake') and actions evoke an aquatic scene. This spot attracts the Tiny Bat and Flying Fox to stay and they do not return to Ndao:

131. *Boe ma neu natane seluk* So he goes to ask again
132. *Ma neu tata seluk.* And he goes to demand
again.
133. *De neu dala dua bobongon* He goes to where two roads
form a circle
134. *Ma eno telu tai-lolon.* And where three paths come
together.
135. *Boe te neu nda lilima* There he encounters
with hands
136. *Ma neu tongo lololo* And he meets with arms
137. *Dano-La Lalata* Dano-La Lalata

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| 138. <i>Ma Beu-La O'oko.</i> | And Beu-La O'oko. |
| 139. <i>De oko lo dene buna</i> | They wade there with kapok
flowers |
| 140. <i>Ma lata lo mea lilo.</i> | And they float there with
golden red buds. |
| 141. <i>De Soi Ana Sepe Langa</i> | The Flying Fox of Reddening
Head |
| 142. <i>Ma Bau Ana Timu Dulu</i> | And Tiny Bat of Dawning
East |
| 143. <i>Ala lili dene leme ndia</i> | They love the kapok plants
there |
| 144. <i>Ma neka dano leme na.</i> | And crave the lake plants
at that place. |
| 145. <i>De ala ta tulek Ndao</i> | They do not go back to Ndao |
| 146. <i>Ma ala ta falik Folo.</i> | And they do not return
to Folo. |

When the Tiny Bat and the Flying Fox do not return to Ndao, Iu Ai//Lopo Maka (IA//LM) demands that the Friarbird and Green Parrot fly off to the Dawning East and Reddening Head to find Kea Lenga//Lona Bala and tell him to come back to Ndao because his wife has died giving birth. This initiates a dialogue: the Friarbird and Green Parrot explain that they need two specific trees—a *nitas* tree and a *delas* tree—on which to alight. IA//ML then instructs them to alight on Timu Tongo-Batu's *nitas* tree and Sepe Ama-Li's *delas* tree. Again, the terms Timu//Sepe ('East'/'Dawn') in these names indicate a location in the east of Rote. By convention, the Friarbird and Green Parrot are considered to be female. Their gentle, sweet song is an important aspect of the message they are intended to convey:

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| 147. <i>Boe ma ta'ek Iu Ai Ndaok</i> | So the boy Iu Ai of Ndao |
| 148. <i>Ma touk Lopo Maka Folo</i> | And the man Lopo Maka
of Folo |
| 149. <i>Ana tata Koa Ndao</i> | He demands of the Friarbird
of Ndao |
| 150. <i>Ma teteni Nggia Folo</i> | And requests the Green
Parrot of Folo |
| 151. <i>Fo leo Timu Dulu neu</i> | To go to Dawning East |
| 152. <i>Ma leo Sepe Langa neu</i> | And to go to Reddening
Head |

153. *Do na-lo Kea Lenga* To call Kea Lenga
 154. *Ma na-nggou Lona Bala* And to shout for Lona Bala
 155. *Fo falik Folo Manu mai* To return to Folo Manu
 156. *Ma tulek Ndao Nusa mai* And to come back to
 Ndao Nusa
 157. *Te Delo Iuk bongi* For Delo Iuk was giving birth
 158. *Te ana lalo* But she died
 159. *Ma Soma Lopo lae* And Soma Lopo was
 bringing forth
 160. *(Te) ana sapu.* But she perished.
 161. *Boe te Koa lole halan* But the Friarbird raises
 her voice
 162. *Ma Nggia aë dasin, nae:* And the Green Parrot lifts
 her words, saying:
 163. *'Au koa mana taidok* 'I am a leaf-clinging Friarbird
 164. *Ma au nggia manasae baëk.* And I am a branch-perching
 Green Parrot.
 165. *De au u Timu Dulu* If I go to Dawning East
 166. *Fo au sae baëk u be* On what branch will I perch
 167. *Ma au(u) Sepe Langa* And if I go to Reddening
 Head
 168. *Fo au tai dok u be?'* To what leaf will I cling?
 169. *Boe ma taëk Iu Ai Ndaok* The boy Iu Ai of Ndao
 170. *Ma touk Maka Lopo Folo* And the man Lopo Maka
 of Folo
 171. *Ana lole halan neu* He raises his voice
 172. *Ma a'e dasin neu, nae:* And lifts his words, saying:
 173. *'Mu Timu Tongo-Batu*
nitan ba'en 'Go to a branch of Timu
 Tongo-Batu's *nitas* tree
 174. *Ma Sepe Ama-li delan poin* And go to the top of Sepe
 Ama-Li's *delas* tree
 175. *Fo sa'e baek mu ndia* Go, perch on the
 branch there
 176. *Fo bebenu mu ndia* Go, balance there
 177. *Ma tai dok mu ndia* And go, cling to the leaf there
 178. *Fo dodoko mu ndia.'* Go hang there.'

The Friarbird and Green Parrot fly off to the east to perch on *nitas//delas* trees. There they meet the woman Buna Sepe//Boa Timu (BS//BT: ‘Reddening Flower//Eastern Fruit’), who asks them who they are. They explain that they are the Friarbird and Green Parrot of Ndao and have come to look for Kea Lenga//Lona Bala to tell him that his wife has died giving birth. BS//BT tells them that the mourning is continuing for the death of Loma-Loma Langa//Pele-Pele Dulu (LL//PD), who has left his child, Ka Loma//Pua Pele, an orphan. (It was the news of LL//PD’s death that prompted Kea Lenga//Lona Bala to leave Ndao and come back to the east.) BS//BT instructs the Friarbird and Green Parrot to be aware of this situation when they go on to speak to KL//LB:

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| 179. <i>Boe te ana leo Sepe
Langa neu</i> | So she goes to Reddening
Head |
| 180. <i>Ma leo Timu Dulu neu.</i> | And goes to Dawning East. |
| 181. <i>De ana sae ba'ek neu Nitas</i> | She perches on the branch
of the <i>nitas</i> |
| 182. <i>Ma tai dok neu Delas.</i> | And clings to the leaf
of the <i>delas</i> . |
| 183. <i>De siluk bei ta dulu</i> | Dawn is not yet in the east |
| 184. <i>Ma huak bei te langa</i> | And light is not yet at
the head |
| 185. <i>Te ana kako doko-doe balan</i> | But she sings pleadingly with
her voice |
| 186. <i>Ma hele tai-boni dasin.</i> | And whistles requestfully
with her words. |
| 187. <i>Boe ma inak-ka Buna Sepe</i> | The woman Buna Sepe
(Reddening Flower) |
| 188. <i>Ma fetok-ka Boa Timu</i> | And the girl Boa Timu
(Eastern Fruit) |
| 189. <i>Ana kona boke dae mai</i> | She climbs down to the
ground |
| 190. <i>Ma tuda nggodi dae mai.</i> | And slips down to the
ground. |
| 191. <i>De ana lelu nalamula dulu</i> | She looks intently toward
the east |
| 192. <i>Ma lipe nakanae langa.</i> | And stares carefully toward
the head. |

193. *De ana selu halan neu* She lifts her voice
 194. *Ma lole dasin neu, nae:* And raises her words, saying:
 195. *'Koa be nde o* 'What sort of friarbird are you
 196. *Ma nggia hata nde o?* And what kind of green
 parrot are you?
 197. *De siluk bei ta dulu* Dawn is not yet in the east
 198. *Ma hu'ak bei ta langa,* And light is not yet at the
 head,
 199. *Tē o mu amang nitan-na* But you go to the top of my
lain father's *nitas*
 200. *Ma to'ong delan-na lain.* And to the top of my
 mother's brother's *delas*.
 201. *De o kako doko-doe halam* You sing pleadingly with
 your voice
 202. *De mahala hataboli* You have a human voice
 203. *Ma o hele tai-boni dasim* And you whistle requestfully
 with your words
 204. *De madasi daehena.'* You have a person's words.'
 205. *Boe ma Koa a'e dasin neu* The Friarbird lifts her words
 206. *Ma nggia lole halan* And the Green Parrot raises
neu, nae: her voice, saying:
 207. *'Koa Ndao nde au* 'I am the Friarbird of Ndao
 208. *Ma Nggia Folo nde au.* And I am the Green Parrot
 of Folo
 209. *Au eme Folo Manu mai* I come from Folo Manu
 210. *Ma au eme Ndao Nusa mai* And I come from Ndao Nusa
 211. *Fo mai a-lo Kea Lenga* I come to call out for Kea
 Lenga
 212. *Ma a-nggou Lona Bala.* And I shout for Lona Bala.
 213. *Tun Delo Iuk bongi* His spouse, Delo Iuk, was
 giving birth
 214. *Tē ana lalo* But she died
 215. *Ma saon Soma Lopo lae* And his wife, Soma Lopo,
 was bringing forth
 216. *Tē ana sapu.'* But she perished.'
 217. *Boe ma inak-ka Boa Timu* The woman Boa Timu

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 218. <i>Ma fetok-ka Buna Sepe</i> | And the girl Buna Sepe |
| 219. <i>A'e halan neu</i> | Lifts her voice |
| 220. <i>Ma lole dasin neu:</i> | And raises her words: |
| 221. <i>'Bei huas-sa ia</i> | 'Just yesterday |
| 222. <i>Ma bei nakas-sa ia</i> | And just a little while ago |
| 223. <i>Loma-Loma Langa lalo</i> | Loma-Loma Langa died |
| 224. <i>Ma Pele-Pele Dulu sapu.</i> | And Pele-Pele Dulu perished. |
| 225. <i>De sapu ela Pua Pele</i> | He perished, leaving Pua Pele |
| 226. <i>Ma lalo ela Ka Loma.</i> | And he died, leaving
Ka Loma. |
| 227. <i>De leo Kea Lenga uman mu</i> | When you go to Kea Lenga's
house |
| 228. <i>Ma leo Lona Bala lon mu</i> | And to Lona Bala's home |
| 229. <i>Fo mafada nai ndia</i> | Speak there |
| 230. <i>Ma manosi nai na.'</i> | And talk at that place.' |

The Friarbird and Green Parrot fly on to speak to Kea Lenga//Lona Bala to tell him of the death of his wife in childbirth. He explains that he is in mourning for LL//PD and then gives them an areca nut and coconut, instructing them to plant the coconut at the head of his wife's grave and the areca nut at the foot of her grave so that he will recognise the grave when he returns to Ndao:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 231. <i>Boe ma ana la lida neu</i> | So she flies wings |
| 232. <i>Ma ana meli ei neu.</i> | And she hastens legs. |
| 233. <i>De nafada Kea Lenga</i> | She speaks to Kea Lenga |
| 234. <i>Ma nanosi Lona Bala, nae:</i> | And talks to Lona Bala,
saying: |
| 235. <i>'Saom-ma Delo Iuk bongi</i> | 'Your wife, Delo Iuk, was
giving birth |
| 236. <i>Te ana lalo</i> | But she died |
| 237. <i>Ma tum-ma Soma Lopo lae</i> | And your spouse, Soma
Lopo, was bringing forth |
| 238. <i>Te ana sapu.'</i> | But she perished.' |
| 239. <i>Boe ma touk-ka Kea Lenga</i> | The man Kea Lenga |
| 240. <i>Ma ta'ek-ka Lona Bala</i> | And the boy Lona Bala |

241. *Lole halan neu* Raises his voice
242. *Ma aë dasin neu:* And lifts his words:
243. *'Bei beni huas-sa ia* 'Only just yesterday
244. *Ma bei liti nakas-sa ia* And barely a little while ago
245. *Loma-Loma Langa lalo* Loma-Loma Langa died
246. *Ma Pele-Pele Dulu sapu.* And Pele-Pele Dulu perished.
247. *De sapu ela Pua Pele* He perished, leaving Pua Pele
248. *Ma lalo ela Ka Loma* And died, leaving Ka Loma
249. *Bei doe-doe nita osi* Still succulent as a *nitás* garden
250. *Ma bei nula-nula nupu no.* And still unripe as a coconut shoot.
251. *De o tulek diku [-dua] Ndao* You go turning back to Ndao
252. *Ma falik lolo-fali Folo* And return back to Folo
253. *Fo muni pua nde ia* Carrying this areca nut
254. *Ma muni no nde ia* And carrying this coconut
255. *Fo Delo Iuk sapu so* For Delo Iuk has died
256. *Na sele pua neu ein* So plant this areca nut at her feet
257. *Ma Soma Lopo lalo so* And Soma Lopo has perished
258. *Na tane no neu langan* So sow this coconut at her head
259. *Fo ela no laboa langan* And let the coconut grow fruit at her head
260. *Ma ela pua langgi ein* And let the areca grow flower stalks at her feet
261. *Fo ela au falik leo Ndao u* So that when I return to Ndao
262. *Na au lelu u late dae* I may go to look upon her earthen grave
263. *Ma au tulek leo Folo u* And I go back to Folo
264. *Na au lipe u lo ai.'* I may stare at her wooden tomb.'

The final journey to the afterworld

Just as life is conceived of as a journey, so, too, is death. Rotenese life-course recitations celebrate the possibilities of many different paths for life's journeying. These celebrations were given voice by a chanter (or sometimes a succession of chanters), who would lead a long night's round-dancing before the burial. The dirge that accompanied or immediately followed the burial recounted a different journey—a perilous journey on a single path to an unknown land westward, where the sun sets and from which there is no return.

The dirge has long since ceased to be performed in Termanu. In eastern Rote, particularly in Ringgou, such dirges (*boreu*) are still carried out to instruct the dead on this final journey. This long dirge was recorded from the master poet Ande Ruy. To perform it, he had to imagine for himself a setting and chose to remember the death of an elderly woman to whom he refers as 'grandmother' (*besa*). It constitutes an extended dialogue between the chanter and the deceased, remembering her life but at the same time firmly instructing her on her journey to the afterworld.

This long lament heaps image upon image, mixing the remembrance of moments of joy with the stark realities of departure, describing the coffin as the ship of the dead about to set sail. To emphasise the nature of the journey to the afterworld, the chanter states that when one goes to Kupang (referred to, in grandiose terms, as Kota Batu//Di'i Lilo: 'the Stone-Wall Town//the Golden Pillars'), one can return, but from the journey to the afterworld, there is no return.

In pre-Christian beliefs, it was thought that some aspect of the person did return briefly to partake of the food offerings left for the dead. In this chant, that belief is evoked and the deceased is referred to as a remnant creature with the eyes of a bumble bee. However, even this visitation is fleeting. At its conclusion, the deceased is described as 'a fallen coconut//a withered areca nut' and instructed: 'Just fix your eyes on your path and direct your nose to your way.'

Hèe àu we o besa o

Ah, wee ... O Grandmother

Mana-sue o nei

Who was so loving ...

Ma mana-lai o nei

And so affectionate ...

Masa mao o nei

So caring ...

<i>Boi o nei.</i>	So supporting ...
<i>He'e a'u we</i>	Ah wee ...
<i>Ua ia tao le'e boe</i>	What fortune is this
<i>Ma nale ia tao le'e, besa?</i>	What fate is this, Grandmother?
<i>De rina basa nusa ara boe</i>	There through all the domains
<i>Ma basa iku ra boe, besa</i>	And all the lands, Grandmother
<i>Bei ro dudi no-nara</i>	Still with relatives
<i>Ma ro tora tuke-nara</i>	And with kin,
<i>Fo au afarene lolo, besa ei</i>	For I remember, Grandmother
<i>Do ameda rara.</i>	Or I ponder.
<i>Au ia isa apa</i>	Here I am like a single buffalo
<i>Boe ma au ia mesa manu.</i>	Here I am like a lonely chicken.
<i>Te nae:</i>	It is said:
<i>Dale leo pila lolo</i>	An inside like stretched red threads
<i>Ma tei leo keo tenu,</i>	And a heart like black woven threads,
<i>Tei mamadai dulu</i>	Your heart reaches to the east
<i>Soa neu buna</i>	Taking care of (your) flowers [children]
<i>Ma dale mamano'u laka</i>	Your inside extends to the head
<i>Bati neu boa leo.</i>	Fending for (your) fruit [descendants].
<i>Te nae:</i>	It is said:
<i>He'e a'u we, mana-sue o nei</i>	Ah wee ... one so loving
<i>Ma mana-lai o nei,</i>	And one so affectionate,
<i>Mata malua ia</i>	The eye of the day is dawning now
<i>Ma idu maka ledo ia</i>	The hint ('nose') of the sun is shining now
<i>Te neuko su'i besi neu ko</i>	But the coffin nails are for you
<i>Ma koe riti neu ko.</i>	And the coffin lock closes for you.
<i>O besa, londa asa neu dulu</i>	O Grandmother, drape cloth at the east

<i>Ma ba pou neu laka.</i>	And wrap the cloth at the head.
<i>He'e au we o neu ko</i>	Ah wee ... for you
<i>Tika mala balum lain,</i>	Climb aboard your perahu,
<i>Balu pao-ma lain</i>	Aboard your sailing perahu
<i>Ma bene mala tondam lain</i>	Mount aboard your boat
<i>Tonda ufa-ma lain,</i>	Aboard your sailing boat,
<i>Ma neuko hapa nunu balu</i>	Your banyan-wood sailing
<i>paom</i>	perahu
<i>Ma ba e'a tonda umam.</i>	Your waringin wood sailing boat.
<i>De au afarene lololo</i>	I do continue to remember
<i>Ma asa neda rara, besa.</i>	And I do continue to ponder, Grandmother.
<i>Na neuko au dale boe rasala</i>	Here my heart feels wrong
<i>Ma teik boe rasiko.</i>	And my stomach feels off target.
<i>He'e au we mana-sue o nei</i>	Ah wee ... one so loving
<i>Ma mana-lai o nei</i>	And one so affectionate
<i>Fo hida bei leo hatan</i>	At a time long ago
<i>Ma data bei leo don</i>	At a time since past
<i>Honda rolam papa</i>	Your walking stick creaking
<i>Ma te aim boboto</i>	And your wooden spear sounding
<i>Ifa mala buna leo</i>	You cradled the flowers of your clan
<i>Ma o'o mala soro mala leo.</i>	And you carried the descendants of your clan.
<i>Faina ledo neu peu tua</i>	During that day, going to tap the lontar
<i>Fo [ami] mala meu peu tua</i>	We went to tap the lontar
<i>Te hu dadi mu nama hena.</i>	This became our hope.
<i>Ma fai neu lele hade,</i>	And on that day, going to tend the rice
<i>Na ami mala meu lele hade</i>	We went to tend the rice
<i>Tebu dadi mu nabani, besa a.</i>	This became our prospect, grandmother.
<i>Nai lo a dale</i>	Within the home

<i>Ma nai uma a dale</i>	And within the house
<i>Ifa mara upu mara</i>	Cradling your grandchildren
<i>Ma o'ò mara soro mara.</i>	And carrying your descendants.
<i>Au dalek boe dola edu</i>	My heart is full of sorrow
<i>Ma au teika boe koko redo</i>	And my insides are filled with regret
<i>Besa a, maka ledò ia leo</i>	Grandmother, the sunlight has past
<i>Ma malua ia leo.</i>	And the daylight has gone.
<i>Neuko mori mu hapa nunu</i>	Now is time to lay the <i>waringan</i> [coffin]
<i>Ma dadi mu ba e'a.</i>	And the moment to set your banyan [coffin].
<i>De fain nea peu tuan</i>	The day to watch the lontar tapping
<i>Na bea neu mete upuma</i>	Then to see your grandchildren
<i>Ma ledò neu lele haden</i>	The time to tend the rice
<i>Na bea neu relu soro mara.</i>	Then to look after your descendants.
<i>Fain a beka ra-fafada</i>	On that day, voices might say
<i>Ma dasi rama-tuda, rae:</i>	And words might fall, saying:
<i>'Seo dai Kota Batu</i>	'Go to the Stone-Walled Town [Kupang]'
<i>Seo dai te fali</i>	If you go, you can come back
<i>Ma deru dai Di'i Lilo</i>	'And journey to Golden Pillars [Kupang]'
<i>Na deru dai te tule.</i>	If you journey, you can return.
<i>Tehu balakai ia leo.</i>	But now stiff like this ...
<i>Ki kalutu Folo</i>	Green Parrots caw on Folo
<i>Ki' rae malua</i>	Green Parrots speak to the dawn
<i>Ma dolo kateu Ndao</i>	Friarbirds twitter on Ndao
<i>Dolo rae makaledo.</i>	Friarbirds speak to the sunlight.
<i>Neuko hene mala tondam lain</i>	Now climb on board your boat
<i>Tonda ufama lain.</i>	On board your boat and perahu.
<i>Idu maka ledò ia</i>	The nose of dawn is here

<i>Dolo kateu Ndao</i>	Friarbirds twitter on Ndao
<i>Neuko dolo rae maka kedu</i>	Now the Friarbirds speak sobbingly
<i>Na hene mala balum lain</i>	Now step on board your vessel
<i>Balu pao ma lain.</i>	On board your vessel and canoe.
<i>He'e au we mana-sue o nei</i>	Ah wee, one so loving
<i>Ma mana-lai o nei</i>	And one so affectionate
<i>Neuko leko la fo mu</i>	Now set sail to go
<i>Ma pale uli fo mu</i>	And turn your rudder to go
<i>De neuko leko la Safu Muri</i>	Set sail for Savu in the West
<i>Ma pale uli Seba I'o.</i>	And turn your rudder to Seba at the tail.
<i>De tule ta di'u dua so</i>	Do not return, having turned your back
<i>Ma fali ta soro lele so.</i>	And do not come back, having turned round.
<i>De nae:</i>	It is said:
<i>Ela dea-dea, besa o</i>	Let's speak and speak, O Grandmother
<i>Ma ela ola-ola dei, besa o.</i>	And let's talk and talk, O Grandmother.
<i>Sadi rene mafa-rene</i>	Only remember, do remember
<i>Te nai oe ma so</i>	Where your water once was
<i>Ma sadi neda masa neda</i>	And only recall, do recall
<i>Te nai dae ma so.</i>	Where your land once was.
<i>Tehu au dalen boe dola edu</i>	But my heart is also full of sorrow
<i>Ma teik boe koko redo</i>	And my insides are filled with regret
<i>Afa rene lololo</i>	I continually remember
<i>Ma ameda rara</i>	And I constantly recall
<i>Mata esa ko matan</i>	Eye to eye
<i>Ma rolu esa ko rolu</i>	Knowing each other
<i>Ma idu esa ko idu</i>	Nose to nose
<i>De lela esa ko lela.</i>	Understanding each other.

<i>De mana-sue o nei</i>	One so affectionate
<i>Ma mana-lai o nei.</i>	One so loving.
<i>Te neuko fati ara tao lada</i>	But in the middle of the night
<i>Ma boro ara tao do</i>	And late in the night
<i>O tule di'u dua mai</i>	You can return, turning back
<i>Ma fali soro lele mai</i>	And come back, turning round
<i>Te ma-mata bupu timu</i>	But with the eyes of a bumble bee
<i>Fo mahara bupu timu</i>	The voice of a bumble bee
<i>Ma ma-idu fani lasi</i>	And the nose of a honeybee
<i>Fo madasi fani lasi.</i>	The sound of a honeybee.
<i>He'e au we mana-sue o nei</i>	Ah wee ... one so affectionate
<i>Ma mana-lai o nei</i>	And one so loving
<i>Au ameda neu upu mara</i>	I recall your grandchildren
<i>Ma au afarene neu soro mara</i>	And I remember your descendants
<i>Buna bei nai bui</i>	Flowers not yet at the tip
<i>Modo bei nai odan.</i>	Green not yet at the head.
<i>De dila bei ta nasa-e'e</i>	Wings not yet able to fly
<i>Ma ei bei ta na-pa'i.</i>	Legs not yet able to crawl.
<i>Ledo esa nai ria</i>	One time like this
<i>Ma fai esa nai na</i>	One day like that
<i>Besa, te doko doe reu dua</i>	Grandmother, begging twice
<i>Ma tai-boni reu telu</i>	And requesting thrice
<i>Ratane reu dua</i>	Questioning twice
<i>Ma teteni reu telu.</i>	Asking thrice.
<i>He'e au we mana-sue o nei</i>	Ah wee ... one so affectionate
<i>Ma mana-lai o nei</i>	And one so loving
<i>Te idu bara te tasi</i>	As close as the spines of a sea urchin
<i>Ma idu esa ko idun</i>	Nose to nose
<i>Ma mata soro siu meti</i>	And as close as the <i>gewang</i> -leaf ocean net
<i>Mata esa ko matan.</i>	Eye to eye.

<i>Na neuko tei boe o dola edu</i>	Now [our] insides are filled with regret
<i>Ma dale boe koko redo</i>	And hearts are full of sorrow
<i>Tè hu sale dale taa na</i>	But regret does nothing
<i>Ma tue tei taa ria.</i>	And sorrow does nothing.
<i>He'è au we mana-sue o nei</i>	Ah wee ... one so loving
<i>Mana-lai o nei</i>	And one so affectionate
<i>Mori mu batu tue</i>	You go to the stone of regret
<i>De ami tue tei meu dua</i>	Our inner regret is doubled
<i>Ma mori mu ai sale</i>	And you go to the tree of sorrow
<i>De ami sale dale meu telu.</i>	Our hearts' sorrow is tripled.
<i>Tè se manu oa lasi</i>	The noisy chicken of the wood
<i>Se o sala so</i>	What has gone wrong
<i>Ma dilu bafi noli nura</i>	The tusked pig of the forest
<i>Dilu o siko so?</i>	What is mistaken?
<i>He'è au we mana-sue o nei</i>	Ah wee ... one so loving
<i>Ma mana-lai o nei</i>	And one so affectionate
<i>Sama leo nura Lole</i>	Like the forest of Loleh
<i>De tati heni nura Lole</i>	Cut down the forest of Loleh
<i>De ami ode Lole be kako?</i>	Then where will our Loleh monkey hoot?
<i>Ma sama leo nura Dela</i>	And like the forest of Dela
<i>De dede heni nura dela</i>	Burn down the forest of Dela
<i>De ami bafi Dela be tofa?</i>	Then where will our Dela pig root?
<i>Tèhu sale dale ta'a na, besa</i>	Regret of the heart is not here, Grandmother
<i>Ma tue tei ta'a ria.</i>	And inner sorrow is not there.
<i>Tè hekene basa so</i>	Promises are past
<i>Ma bara-tà basa so</i>	Restrictions are past
<i>Ua esa ko ua</i>	Fortune with fortune
<i>Nale esa ko nale</i>	Fate with fate
<i>Ami mafarene lolo</i>	We continually remember
<i>Ma masaneda rara</i>	And bear in mind

<i>Ua leo besak ua</i>	Fortune like the present fortune
<i>Ma nale besak nale.</i>	Fate like the present fate.
<i>Mama lasi leo no</i>	Mother, old as a coconut
<i>Fo ono aom leo no</i>	Your body falls like a coconut
<i>Ma mama latu leo pua</i>	And mother, withered as an areca nut
<i>Fo refa aom leo pua.</i>	Your body drops like an areca nut.
<i>Mita mai leo be a</i>	We will see what happens
<i>Fo balaha leo be a</i>	What tomorrow will be
<i>Ma ami bulu mai leo be a</i>	And we will learn what will be
<i>Fo binesa leo be a.</i>	What the day after next will be.
<i>Ria neme ria leo</i>	Let this be as this
<i>Ma na neme na leo.</i>	And let it be as it is.
<i>Tule di'u dua mu</i>	Go, turning, turning back
<i>Mu oe ma leo</i>	Go to the waters and onward
<i>Ma fali soro lele mu</i>	Go, go back, turning round
<i>Mu dae ma leo</i>	Go to [your] lands and onwards
<i>Sadi pasa mata neu eno</i>	Just fix your eyes on your path
<i>Ma sunda idu neu dala</i>	And direct your nose to your way
<i>Besa ei.</i>	Grandmother.

Conclusion

Rotenese life-course recitations convey a vital imagined world. Although there are references to ordinary everyday activities in these recitations, much of what they portray is far from ordinary. In this chapter, I have focused on the world of movement these life-course recitations recount: messaging and journeying across the island and to destinations beyond Rote. This is a world of many possible paths. The possibility of many paths is the epitome of life, in contrast to the one-way journey into death.

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This text is taken from *Austronesian Paths and Journeys*, edited by James J. Fox, published 2021 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/APJ.2021.08