

ORAL LITERATURE OF BAJO TRIBE IN SOUTH HALMAHERA: A DOCUMENTATION OF ORAL LITERATURE AS A REFLECTION OF LOCAL WISDOM

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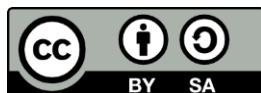
ABSTRACT

The study objective is to describe and analyse the meaning of oral literature of the Bajo tribe and to document oral literature as a reflection of local wisdom for the Bajo tribe. The method used in this research is a qualitative descriptive, which analyses the text one by one according to its meaning using thematic analysis approach. The data processing includes transcribed and documented texts in oral literature found in the Bajo Tribe of South Halmahera, including the original and translation texts. The findings reveal that the Legend of Batu Tolu and Batu Anyur, and the Legend of the Rich People Island are oral literature from the Bajo Tribe in South Halmahera, containing key themes such as: praise for Ternate and Tidore Royal families; hopes and prayers; respect for others; and understanding the ancestral heritage culture to uphold togetherness for the next generation. This study carries significant societal implications, particularly in preserving cultural heritage and strengthening community identity. Ultimately, by documenting and analyzing the oral traditions of the Bajo people, this research highlights the crucial role of storytelling in transmitting local wisdom, moral values, and environmental knowledge across generations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is an art form that pleasures humanity, both created and enjoyed by humans as part of their life experience (Uniawati, 2007). While oral literature refers to literary works that are passed down from generation to generation through oral tradition, before the development of written tradition (Nurgiyantoro, 2010). One oral tradition that is the focus of this research is the oral literature of the Bajo people, or the Bajau or Sama people in some regions. They are one of the most unique ethnic groups in the world. According to the book *Structure of the Bajo Language* (Candrawati et al., 1997), Bajo language is constitutionally recognized as a regional language in the Republic of Indonesia, as outlined in the 1945 Constitution, Chapter XV, Article 36.

The oral literature of the Bajo people still maintains its cultural practices, such as in wedding ceremonies, house-moving rituals, funerals, childbirth celebrations, and other traditional gatherings, even though it is started to be neglected (Rahman & Hasanuddin, 2019). Additionally, several sources indicate that the Bajo people, or the Bajau or Sama, originally came from the Sulu archipelago in the southern Philippines. These nomadic seafaring people, often referred to as "sea



nomads," live on boats. The Bajo people have spread throughout the Indonesian archipelago, particularly in the eastern regions, even before Indonesia's independence. Those who migrated settled in areas such as Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara, and Maluku. In North Maluku, for instance, Bajo people have settled in South Halmahera, especially in Bacan, Kayoa, and Joronga.

Despite the rich oral traditions of the Bajo people, scholarly documentation remains limited, with much of their literature existing only in spoken form. While previous research on Indonesian oral traditions has explored broader ethnolinguistic perspectives (Telle, 2009; Kuipers, 1998), specific studies on the Bajo's unique storytelling traditions, folklore, and linguistic expressions remain scarce. Therefore, this study aims to collect, analyze, and preserve the oral traditions of the Bajo people. The research focuses on identifying the key themes, values, and wisdom embedded in their narratives, examining how these stories contribute to their cultural identity and indigenous knowledge systems. Furthermore, this study seeks to raise awareness about the importance of oral literature in maintaining cultural continuity and strengthening local identity.

Overall, by bridging the research gap, this study can contribute to the broader discourse on oral traditions, indigenous knowledge preservation, and cultural sustainability. The findings will not only enrich anthropological and linguistic studies but also provide educational and policy-related insights for cultural conservation efforts. Ultimately, the research underscores the vital role of oral literature as a living archive of Bajo wisdom, ensuring its transmission to future generations. As Damono (1983:45) stated, literature reflects norms in a form of behavioural rules that members of society follow as the correct way to act and conclude from generation to generation.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research method to document and analyze the oral literature of the Bajo tribe in South Halmahera. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore and understand the object under study in depth (Creswell and Poth, 2016). This method is suitable for providing an overview of the lives of the Bajo people, focusing on aspects related to their oral literature, and describing data based on observed facts, to ensure a thorough analysis of the oral literature data. Besides, it consists of oral language passed down through generations, spoken by native speakers who have detailed knowledge and understanding of the expressions.

Given the nature of oral traditions, ethnographic methods are used, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and audio-visual recordings to collect primary data from Bajo elders, storytellers, and cultural practitioners. Purposive sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2018) is applied to identify key informants, ensuring that the narratives collected represent a diverse range of oral traditions, including folklore, myths, proverbs, and ritualistic chants. The general procedure for ethnographic research is to identify the location of the cultural group to be studied. Ideally, the group should consist of people who have been together for an extended period, focusing on the patterns of behaviour, thoughts, and beliefs they share (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

The data collection techniques used are based on Kerat (2004), including Observation, Interviews, and Documentation. Next, to analyze the collected data, the analysis in qualitative research will follow certain organized procedure (Saldaña, 2021). Hence, this study adopts thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method is a systematic approach



to identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. There are six key steps: (1) familiarization with the data, to transcribe and review recorded narratives multiple times; (2) searching for themes, to identify recurring ideas, values, and cultural symbols; (3) reviewing themes, to ensure datasets coherence and consistency; (4) defining the themes, to refine and contextualize themes related to Bajo identity and wisdom; and (5) producing the report, to interpret and link the findings to existing literature on oral traditions and indigenous knowledge.

This methodological approach ensures that the richness of Bajo oral literature is systematically captured and analyzed, highlighting its role in preserving local wisdom and cultural identity. Ethical considerations are also prioritized, including informed consent, respect for indigenous knowledge ownership, and community participation in the research process. By employing thematic analysis, this study provides an in-depth understanding of the meanings embedded in Bajo oral narratives, contributing to broader discussions on cultural preservation and identity formation.

Additionally, the research participants consisted of two native Bajo speakers from the Bajo Island of South Halmahera who are carefully selected based on their deep knowledge and active role in preserving oral traditions within their community. These individuals were identified using purposive sampling, ensuring that they possess extensive familiarity with the oral literature of the Bajo people, including myths, folklore, proverbs, and ritualistic chants. Given the oral nature of Bajo storytelling traditions, these participants serve as key cultural informants who have inherited and continue to transmit their community's historical and philosophical narratives.

The selection of two participants is sufficient for this qualitative study due to the depth and richness of data collected from each informant. Furthermore, in ethnographic studies, even a small number of well-informed, native speakers can provide valuable, authentic data that represent a community's cultural expressions. Lastly, to support the primary data from the aforementioned two participants, this study also reviews recordings from several native Bajo speakers to categorize the literary genres, such as poetry, songs, short stories, or fables. Thus, the Bajo language will be translated into Indonesian with the help of a native translator, allowing the researchers to understand the meaning of the oral literature data for analysis by illustrating efforts to preserve local wisdom through the oral literature maintained by the Bajo people in South Halmahera.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data collected, two titles of oral literary works were identified: (1) *The Legend of Batu Tolu and Batu Anyar* (Batu Sasarao' and Batu Luttu) and (2) *The Legend of Pulau Orang Kaya* (Puloi Orang Kaya). Accordingly, this research aims to describe the meaning of these oral literary works in the form of themes and document them as a reflection of local wisdom for the Bajo people of South Halmahera. The findings of this research reveal that these texts convey various meanings, including praise for the royal families of Ternate and Tidore, expressions of hope and prayer, respect for others, and the understanding of ancestral cultural heritage, all of which emphasize the importance of unity for future generations.

The oral literature in *The Legends of Batu Tolu and Batu Anyar* and *Pulau Orang Kaya* from Bajo Tribes in South Halmahera likely includes a variety of traditional forms that reflect the



rich storytelling traditions of the region. Oral literature refers to the forms of storytelling, verbal art, and oral tradition used to pass down cultural values, history, and folklore through spoken word. Additionally, culture and society are inseparable components, and oral literature serves as one of the cultural legacies that must be preserved because it contains ancestral values that reflect local wisdom. These noble values are upheld and revered as life norms, ensuring the harmonious coexistence of society and their natural environment.

Moreover, oral literature from the Bajo Tribe in South Halmahera, specifically in the legends of *Batu Tolu and Batu Anyar* and *The Legend of Pulau Orang Kaya*, can be categorized into forms of oral traditions, namely Folktales (Legends or Myths). The Legends likely exist as folktales that describe how certain symbolism or supernatural significance to the Bajo people. These folktales usually contain moral lessons, creation stories, or explanations of natural phenomena that are rooted in the tribe's understanding of the world. Also, the detailed stories of individuals associated with wealth, power, or societal influence, reflect the socio-cultural norms of the Bajo people.

Below is the analysis of meanings found in the two oral literary works of the Bajo tribe in South Halmahera, that can be identified in these legends:

1. Batu Tolu and Batu Anyar (Batu Sasarao' and Batu Luttu)

Once upon a time, amidst the blue waves of the Maluku seas, Sultan Tidore and Sultan Ternate, along with their queens, embarked on a grand journey toward the land of Irian aboard a magnificent kora-kora boat. The sky was clear, but as they approached Tawabi Island, Sultan Tidore became anxious. Their followers had fallen far behind, and a fierce war was raging between Gani Tai and Jouronga Island. Sultan Tidore's heart was filled with worry. Amid this anxiety, Sultan Tidore made a wise decision. He removed his farmer's hat—something he often wore during his travels—and threw it into the sea near an unnamed island. His hope was simple: that the hat would serve as a sign to his followers, showing that they had passed the island. However, fate had other plans. Having merged with the wind and water, the hat transformed into a large stone shaped like a farmer's hat. The once-nameless island became known as Pulau Tolu, a lasting symbol of their journey.

Despite leaving this sign, the Sultan and his entourage continued their voyage. Not long after, they arrived at Karama Island, a place steeped in history for them. This island bore witness to their ancestors, who once carved majestic kora-kora boats on Jouronga Island. Their ancestors were also buried there. They stopped briefly, reflecting on the legacy of their forebears before resuming their journey. After leaving Karama Island, they stopped at Tabisasu Island, waiting for the followers who had not yet arrived. However, time passed, and the Sultan decided to press on, eventually reaching Sidoboino Island, a place of mystery and peace in the middle of the vast ocean.

Their journey neared its end when they reached the open seas, approaching the boundary of Jouronga Island. Suddenly, an unexpected event occurred. The queen of Sultan Ternate's hairpin fell into the sea as her hair came undone. Overcome with sadness, as the hairpin was not just an accessory but a symbol of love and strength, she prayed to the Almighty, "If I am truly a blessed child of the king, may this hairpin serve as evidence for my descendants that I once crossed these seas." Her prayer was answered. From the depths of the ocean where the hairpin



had fallen, a large stone slowly rose, shaped like the hairpin itself. This stone stood tall in the middle of the sea, becoming a symbol of the queen's eternal love and prayer. The stone became known as Batu Anyur, and to this day, it is a place where fishermen gather to catch fish as if the sea itself honors this tale of love.

Nowadays, Batu Tolu and Batu Anyur still stand tall, silent witnesses to the grand journey of the Sultans and their queens. Their story lives on, passed down through generations, becoming a part of the legend that flows with the waves of the Maluku seas, which never cease.



Picture 1: Batu Tolu dan Batu Anyur

2. Pulau Orang Kaya (Rich People's Island)

In ancient times, a large ship sailed toward South Halmahera, traversing the calm waters surrounding the North Maluku Islands. The ship was filled with wealthy individuals from various regions. Upon arriving at a long, unnamed island, they decided to settle there. The island was uninhabited but brimming with natural beauty—white sandy beaches and lush, shady trees.

The newcomers quickly built luxurious homes along the island's coast. With all the wealth they brought, the island soon developed into a magnificent settlement. However, beneath the surface of this beauty and wealth, these rich people were known for their stinginess and never helped anyone, including the nearby residents of the whole Island. The Island was home to many simple fishermen. Occasionally, they would visit the rich people's island to request help—such as fresh water, food, or shelter from storms. However, each time they asked for assistance, the wealthy people refused harshly, closing their doors, and some even mocked the fishermen with cruel words. The wealthy residents preferred to throw grand parties every night. Golden lights illuminated the entire island, and music and laughter echoed through the night air. From afar, the people of Jouronga Island could see the gleaming lights of these lavish parties, making them feel increasingly alienated and unacknowledged.

One day, a sudden, powerful storm struck the waters of South Halmahera. Strong winds and towering waves crashed against the shores of the wealthy island. Yet, strangely, the wealthy



residents continued their partying undeterred. Amidst the storm, they danced and laughed, seemingly unaffected by the calamity.

As lightning flashed across the sky and thunder roared, something strange happened. One by one, the rich people began to disappear. Their grand houses crumbled, swept away by the wind and sea. Their wealth vanished in an instant, as if it had never existed. When the storm passed, all that remained was silence on the island. Not a single resident was left, except for the large ship stranded on the shore, abandoned. The people of Jouronga Island whispered that the wealthy residents had been cursed for their greed and arrogance. Some believed they had turned into supernatural beings, disappearing along with their possessions. The island is now known as Pulau Orang Kaya, a reminder of the greed that led to their downfall.



Picture 2: Pulau Orang Kaya

To this day, Pulau Orang Kaya remains uninhabited. The large ship left behind on its shore stands as a silent witness to this tragic tale. Fishermen from Jouronga and the surrounding islands often sail past the island, recalling the legend that continues to live on in the waters of South Halmahera.

Therefore, here are the several meanings of this oral literature in each legenda will be shown in the following table:

Table 1: Themes contain meanings of the Oral Literature of Bajo People in South Halmahera

| Themes contain meanings of Oral Literature | | | | | |
|--|--|------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|---|
| No. | Oral Literature of Bajo People | A Compliments for the Royal Family | Faith and Praise | Respect for Others | Understanding Ancestral Cultural Heritage |
| 1. | <i>The Legend of Batu Tolu and Batu Anyar</i> (Batu Sasarao' and Batu Luttu) | √ | √ | | √ |



-
2. The Legend of *Pulau Orang Kaya*

√

√

Based on the data above, the four key themes consist of praise for leadership, hope, and prayer, respect for others, and upholding ancestral heritage. Below are the details of each theme:

1. *The Legend of Batu Tolu and Batu Anyar*

The Legend of Batu Tolu and Batu Anyar reflects the deeply ingrained cultural and historical values of the Ternate Sultanate and its relationship with the royal family. The legend not only tells a mythical story but also reinforces the social and political order that has long been a part of the history of Ternate and Tidore, the two powerful sultanates in the Maluku Islands. Here's a historical and cultural analysis related the legend to Ternate's history and the role of royal family.

a. A Compliments for the Royal Family

This legend is defined by its focus on attitudes and actions within the community. The story conveys values that demonstrate responsibility toward the kings of Ternate and Tidore. Throughout the narrative, the expressions clearly show respect for the royal family. The Legend itself, along with compliments toward the royal family serves several important cultural functions for the Bajo Tribe. By praising the royal family's role as protectors of both the people and the natural environment, oral literature strengthens the bond between the leaders and their subjects while preserving the cultural values of the Bajo Tribe. However, the legend reveals a deep cultural, spiritual, and social significance. The focus on key traits of the Bajo Tribe admires in their leaders, such as bravery, wisdom, and generosity. These virtues are not only seen as personal traits of the ruler but also seen as essential qualities for the prosperity and protection of the entire community.

b. Faith and Praise

This story narrates the generosity and kindness of the sultans of Ternate and Tidore toward their people, portraying them as greatly blessed rulers. This is evidenced by the symbolic act of the sultan casting his hat (tolu), which transformed into an island, now known as Pulau Tolu. It reflects deeply rooted cultural elements of faith and praise, which are often intertwine with spiritual beliefs, social structures, and moral teachings conveyed through the story. In this legend, the concepts of faith and praise are central to the Bajo Tribe's understanding of their world. Faith in the supernatural, nature, and leadership serves as a guiding force that helps maintain social order and spiritual balance. Praise, on the other hand, is the outward expression of this faith, honoring the royal family, the sacred stones, and the spiritual forces that protect the tribe. Moreover, both faith and praise play a vital role in preserving the cultural and spiritual values of the Bajo Tribe, ensuring their continued relevance across generations.

c. Understanding Ancestral Cultural Heritage

The cultural theme conveyed in *The Legend of Batu Tolu and Batu Anyar* emphasizes that society should remain humble, avoid arrogance, and treat others with kindness. This cultural lesson, rooted in the legend's origins of the story in South Halmahera, reflects the values upheld by the Bajo people, who integrated kindness as part of their Islamic traditions. The story also highlights the importance of faith in God and respect for the royal family. This is illustrated in the episode where the Sultan of Tidore, the Sultan of Ternate, and his wife visit Karama Island, where



their ancestors are believed to be buried. Their ancestors, who once crafted boats on Jouronga Island, add to the cultural significance of the legend. For the Bajo Tribe, Oral literature serves as a medium to pass down identity, history, and values. This legend likely functions as a reminder of the Bajo people's roots, ensuring that the younger generation understands and respects their connection to the sea, land, and ancestors.

2. The Legend of Pulau Orang Kaya

a. Respect for Others

This story tells the tale of a wealthy island inhabited by rich individuals who were unwilling to share their wealth with nearby villages. Despite their riches, these individuals were notoriously stingy, refusing to assist local fishermen in need of food, water, or shelter. When the storm subsided, all that remained on the island was silence; no residents survived, except for the large abandoned ship stranded on the shore. However, the main message of this legend is to emphasize the importance of building positive relationships with others, regardless of familial ties. Additionally, this legend carries rich cultural messages, one of which is the value of respect for others. In the context of oral literature, respect is often closely tied to social harmony, hierarchy, and mutual interdependence within the community.

The theme of respect for others is an essential value that weaves through the social, moral, and cultural teachings of the Bajo people. In contrast, the legend illustrates how the wealthy people use their wealth and influence within the community. Through storytelling, it could emphasize that disrespect or greed leads to negative consequences, while humility and respect for others foster prosperity and peace. Thus, the Bajo people ensure that their cultural values and social structures are upheld, fostering a sense of unity and continuity across generations.

b. Understanding Ancestral Cultural Heritage

The people of Jouronga believed that the wealthy residents had been cursed for their greed and arrogance, transforming into supernatural beings. The island, now known as Pulau Orang Kaya, remains uninhabited, with its silent, stranded ship serving as a lasting symbol of the consequences of greed. Additionally, fishermen from the nearby islands still recall the legend as they pass by this deserted island, sharing its cautionary tale.

Therefore, the cultural values depicted in this story highlight manners and the application of ancestral wisdom to future generations. The legend serves as a tool for imparting lessons to prevent similar misfortunes, highlighting the importance of cultural heritage. Like many pieces of oral literature, this legend functions as a living narrative that transmits the values, beliefs, and practices of the Bajo people, particularly in their efforts to maintain social harmony.

The story aids the Bajo community in understanding the significance of leadership, cooperation, and respect for established social norms. However, it plays a vital role in shaping the cultural identity of the Bajo Tribe by preserving the collective memory, and allowing current generations to remain connected to their ancestral past. Moreover, the community nowadays continuous to uphold the traditions, values, and historical experiences that have defined their identity across generations, ensuring that the ancestral teachings remain the Bajo people's identity and their way of life.



4. CONCLUSION

The oral literature of the Bajo people is one of the ethnic oral traditions in the Indonesian archipelago that has been eroded by time. Knowing that it provides not only entertainment but also serves as a means of passing down values that are believed to be true by the community, this form of literary work must be protected, preserved, and safeguarded for future generations in North Maluku. Considering the value of these legends contains metaphorical meanings that contribute to local wisdom. Four key themes or meanings represented in the legends include praise for the royal family, faith and praise, respect, and understanding of cultural heritage.

Additionally, this research concurs with recent findings from Melati and Rahardi (2022); Laughland's (2024) which attested that the revitalization of oral traditions is essential to prevent the erosion of cultural values in the face of modern influences. In relation to cultural identity, the results are in line with the studies from Mulyani and Hapsari (2024); Fatmawati and Dewantara (2024) which highlighted the function of these oral literature in transmitting cultural values and social norms, emphasizing their importance in maintaining local identity amidst globalization. All in all, the end-results of this research is both theoretically and practically important, given the fact that Bajo people's identity as a seafaring community –which has spread across several provinces in Indonesia, each with distinct characteristics that serve as environmental knowledge– must be preserved across generations.

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Sulmi Magfirah is a lecturer at the English Literature Study Program, Universitas Khairun and English Tutor at Universitas Terbuka. Her current academic pursuits around Children Literature, Comparative literature, English Literature History, Literature in Translation. Next, Hudan Irsyadi is a Vice Dean of Cultural Science Faculty and also a lecturer at Anthropology Study Program, Universitas Khairun. He is currently conducting academic research focused on Oral Literature in Maluku Utara. Last, Ahmad Rifani Talaohu is a Lecturer at the English Literature Study Program, Universitas Khairun, while concentrates in Linguistics. His field of research focuses on Morphology and Semantics, and he is currently interested in Endangered Language. This makes both of his focus and interest align with this study which reflects the importance of preserving Oral Literature of Bajo Tribe that is considered on the brink of extinction.



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