

INTRODUCING HELAEHILI, AN ORAL POETRY FROM SENTANI, PAPUA

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Abstract: This paper is partially taken from my research on Sentani oral poetry, helaehili that is sung in mourning occasions or in funerals. It is also usually known as a song of lamentation. The research was conducted in Sentani, Papua for almost 4 years (2004-2008). The data were taken directly from the field through recording. The data were then transcribed, translated into English and analyzed. Through the research, it is found that helaehili is rarely heard. Not many people, especially people who live near Jayapura city and young generation, know the song. It is predicted that helaehili will extinct in some years. The research finds the composition, formula, theme, and notation of helaehili. Hopefully, this writing can help and motivate young singers (generation) to learn helaehili.

Key words: helaehili, oral poetry, extinct

BACKGROUND

Helaehili (also known as *rimehili* and *dimehili*) is a form of oral poetry found among Sentani people, Jayapura, Papua, which is now rarely heard. *Helaehili* songs, heard only in mourning occasions and

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in funerals, are used to commemorate the kindness, good deeds, and heroism of the deceased as a token of respect and love of the singers.

Helaehili – as a form of folklore among Sentani people, Papua represents the socio-cultural value constructions of the people, in which indigenous life paradigm, social structure, family system, beliefs system, and socio-cultural values are found (Yektingtyas-Modouw 2008). Besides, in a more specific sense, *helaehili* serves functions to teach traditional values invite a deeper exploration (cf. Bascom in Dundes, 1980:21-24). Unfortunately, this song is only known by old generation, especially those who stay in villages. Young generation and old generation who stay in the city do not recognize the songs anymore. Thus, this paper serves to provide written documentation as preservation for the oral tradition, given the fact that nowadays both the *helaehili* singing and the songs are rarely heard. This paper wants to present a short guideline how usually *helaehili* is sung. It serves orality, composition, formula and themes, and notation of *helaehili*.

Theoretically, this study aims at developing the research on folklore, especially Papuan folklore. Practically, this research seeks to (1) reveal and socialize socio-cultural values as represented in *helaehili* with the purpose of maintaining and developing the existing Papuan culture, especially those of Sentani people, (2) document oral poetry of *helaehili* so that the younger generation who are now inadequately exposed to them can take advantage of the documents.

The paper findings are expected to be fruitful in the following areas. Academically, this research may inspire other similar research in Papua. Pragmatically, in line with the regional autonomy, the findings can be used for local-load instructional materials from the elementary to higher education in Papua. Accordingly, the Sentani younger generation can maintain their own indigenous language, learn their own culture, and investigate as well as develop their own unique identity and critical awareness. In addition, the findings also

may serve as reference and comparison related to other research and other practical needs.

The research was conducted in the areas of Sentani, Jayapura, including both the remote islands in the Sentani Lake as well as the lake beach. Sentani is bordered with the mount Cyclops or Dobonsolo (north), Nimboran District (south), Kemtuk District (east), and Arso District (west). The population live in the 25, 5 km² wide of the Sentani Lake beach and in remote islands in the lake. The population is spread in three major areas, namely the East Sentani, the Central Sentani, and the West Sentani.

The data gathered in the study comprised of two kinds, i.e. primary and secondary data. The primary data were the *helaehili* songs gathered from the singers, either done by males or females. The data gathering was conducted in Sentani area, especially in Asei and Waena (representing East Sentani), Nolakla (representing Central Sentani), and Kwadeware (representing West Sentani). Those places are chosen due to the availability of the *helaehili* singers. It is noteworthy that the different dialects – eastern, central, and western Sentani dialects -- were not taken into account in this study, since the different linguistic structures did not substantially change the meaning significantly. The primary data were supported by a series of interviews done with other Sentani people, including the elderly people. The secondary data were obtained from the written documents of previous research, either on culture, language, or folklore of the Sentani people.

Helaehili songs, the data in this paper, were recorded in some mourning occasions and in funerals from the singers (cf. Finnegan, 1977, Dundes 1980, Lord 1981, Danandjaja 2002), then transcribed (cf. Hartzler, 1992, Kleden-Probonegoro 1998), translated (cf. Hewson and Martin, 1991, Bathgate in Widyamartaya, 1989) and analyzed (cf. Lord, 1981, Nagy 1989).

ORALITY OF *HELAEHILI*

Helaehili is sung in a mourning occasion or in a funeral. In general, the singing discloses the singer's memory on the life, work, and kindness of the deceased during his/her lifetime. Anybody may sing *helaehili*, either males or females. However, in reality it is the elderly people (*abu enime*) who can really perform the singing. If it is the traditional leader (*ondofolo*) who dies, only high-class status people are allowed to sing *helaehili*. Common people (*yobu yoholom*) may contribute to sing if permitted by the traditional chiefs (*abu ako*). If the dead is from low-class status (*yobu yoholom*), no restriction applies. Any people from any social status may perform the song. *Helaehili* is not accompanied by musical instruments. In general, an experienced singer will accompany the singing by specific movements like dance. For example, when the singer tells gardening activities that the dead has done during his/her lifetime, the singer imitates them through movements such as cutting trees, fencing, sowing seeds, unweeding garden, harvesting, and others.

In principle, all the singing of *helaehili* is done spontaneously in the singing spot (composing while performing), without memorization and written notes. The singer prepares a theme and plot to explore in the singing site (cf. Lord 1981). Consequently, it never happens that the same *helaehili* songs appear twice exactly the same, even though sung by exactly the same person.

COMPOSITION OF *HELAEHILI*

Thematically, *helaehili* can be divided into some stanzas. Each stanza consists of two or four lines, depending on the ability of the singer to develop particular words and phrases to compose the lines in each stanza. Consequently, the number of stanzas in *helaehili* is not the same. Some are long, some others are short. The stanzas of the songs are dominated by the parallelism in the form of synonyms,

complex words, reduplications, and words/phrases of parallel semantics. For a song consists of two lines, the first line is repeated in the second line, using parallel words/phrases. For a song consists of four lines, the first line is repeated in the third line, and the second line in the fourth, also using parallel words/phrases. In other words, the third and the fourth are essentially the same as the first and the second lines. Please notice the bold words/phrases in the following example of the song (sung by Mr. Cornelis Modouw 2005):

Ra Igwa yono omi menake wa foijaele, Miyae nundaeya
We Ebaeit yonu titili kandeya, ana kandeya
Re Raei yamno maengge menake wa moijaele, Miyae
howalaeya
Wa Hayaere yoha fale-fale kandeya, ana kandeya
(A lady from Igwa village, your kindness, lady, has gone
We, Ebaeit's children, are sad, mother, we are sad
A lady from Raei village, your kindness, lady, has gone
We, Hayaere's children, are crying, mother, we are crying)

The words *Igwa* and *Raei* which refer to names of place are parallel semantically. The words *yo* and *yam* (village) are synonymous. The same with *omi* and *maengge* (lady/woman) are also synonymous). Let us see another example below.

Ra Igwa yono omi ayaele elekoi miyae mewaneya
We Ebaeit yomolo kundang najoijaele kanyeke, Omi
kanyekeya
Ra Raeit yamno maengge faeuwaele huweikoi mewaneya
We Hayaere yammolo wamendang namoijaele kanyeke,
Omi kanyekeya

(A lady from Igwa village, you come with your sweet words

Your husband, Ebaeit's descendent, is respected in the traditional gatherings, lady, you have gone

A lady from Igwa village, you come with your nice words
 Your husband, Hayae's descendent, is respected in the
 traditional gatherings, lady,
 you have gone)

The words *ayaele* and *faeuwale* (sweet words) are synonymous. *Nafojaele* and *namojaele* (respected) are also synonymous. From the two examples above, it is clear that *helaehili* singing depends on the singer's ability in finding words/phrases to develop the plot of his/her song. In the above song, the singer is able to explore the personality of the character as a lady from Igwa village/Raei village with her kindness (*foijaele/mojaele*), and sweet words (*ayaele/feauwale*). Those characteristics then made her husband who come from Ebaeit/Hayae village is respected (*nafojaele/namojaele*) in the traditional gatherings (*kundang/wamendang*). It is challenging that then some experienced singers can develop various songs of long stanzas while some inexperienced ones compose only short songs.

In addition to the words/phrases prepared by the singers, traditionally there are some fixed words/phrases. Lord (1980:30) and Finnegan (1977:64) refer to these as "ready-made phrases" or "stereotyped phrases." A few examples are as follows: *yono/yoha* (the next generation), *meliyaele/mekaiyale* (left/right hand dexterity), *penime/yoinime* (beautiful), *kui-kui/yale-yale* (cheerful), *kelu/maengge* (son/daughter), and the like.

Helaehili is commenced with a cry and then repeated for several times after the singer sings a theme. The cry is set to provide a period for the singer to think and compose words or phrases to appear in the next stanzas. For the audience, the cry sets to provide a time for comprehending the singing essence. *Helaehili* is based on the traditional region in general, for example *Igwanei Ranyaei* (the Eastern Sentani), *Igwanei Tanyaei* (the Central Sentani), *Igwanei* (Oleu) *Danyaei* (the Western Sentani). The regions become the settings of place for the singings. The settings of place are then

localized by mentioning a particular place in the specific traditional place. The character's name is never allowed to appear in the singing. Instead, the singer uses metonymy to refer to the character, i.e. mentioning where the character was from, for example, *Kamoi yono* (the husband from Kamoi village), *Ro omi* (the female from Ro village), *Fela fa* (the child from Fela village), *Igwa yono omi* (a lady from Igwa village), and so on. Please see the example as follows:

Anayo, anayo, ana nundaeya
(mother, oh mother, mother has gone)

Ra Igwa yono itaeyaele mokoboi miyae mewanaeya
We Baeit yomolo kundang kui-kui jaele omi kanyeke, Omi
kanyekeya
Re Raeit yamno habayaele hareiboi miyae mewanaeya
We Hayaere yamolo wamendang yale-yale kanyeke, Omi
kanyekeya

(A lady from Igwa village, able to do lots of things with your **smartness**, you have come
Your husband, Ebaeit's descendent, **is happy in the traditional gatherings**, lady, you have gone)

Ra Igwa yono wa nakafa foi-foi nekewate
We Baeit yomolo kundang puma-puma kanyeke, Omi
kanyekeya
Re Raeit yamno we paekefa moi-moi nekewate
We Hayaere yamolo wamendang dandam mokainyeke,
Omi mokainyekeya

(A lady from Igwa village, able to **take care of your relatives**, you have come
Your husband, Ebaeit's descendent, **is celebrated in the traditional gatherings**, lady, you have gone)

FORMULA AND THEMES OF HELAEHILI

A. Formula

Lord (1981:30) argues that formula is “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical condition to express a given essential idea. Principally, the formula of helaehili is explicitly seen from the use of parallelism and repetition in each stanza. The words and phrases, either ready-made or prepared by the singers, are used to replace the specific words or phrases in the next stanzas. Adequately comprehending the formula, a novice singer is expected to sing helaehili songs well. For singers, the most important thing to do is to prepare the frame of helaehili songs and to have enough knowledge as well as vocabulary items/phrases and their pairs in order to compose the next helaehili stanzas. The more skillful a singer makes use of pair words/phrases, either synonyms or complex words, the longer the stanzas will be.

As an illustration, the following is a helaehili to mourn the death of Ms. Marice Pepuho (sung by Mr. Cornelis Modouw, 2005). This stanza clearly depicts the singing formula and the replacement of words/phrases. The permanent words/phrases are underlined (_____), and the replaced words/phrases are underlined using dashes (--- --).

iiii iiii iiii (sound of mourning cries)
Anayo, Anayo, ana nundaeya
 (Mother, mother, oh mother has gone)

1

Ra Igwa yono omi menake wa foijaele miyae nundaeya,

_____-----
We Ebaeit yonu tihili kandeya, ana kanendeya
 _____-----

*Re Raei yamno maengge menake wa moijaele miyae
howaleya*

Wa Hayaere yoha fale-fale kandeya, ana kanendeya

(A **kind-hearted** lady from Igwa village, you have gone
These Ebaeit children **are saddened**, mother has gone
A **kind-hearted** lady from Raei village, you have gone,
These Hayae children **cry**, mother has gone)

iiii iiiii iiiii (sound of mourning cries)

2

Ra Igwa yono menake wa nimeyaele miyae, nundaeya

We Ebaeit yonu tiboyaele kanende, ana kanendeya

*Ra Raei yamno maengge menake we habayaele miyae
howaleya*

We Hayaere yoha inseyaele kandeya, ana kanendeya

(A **gentle-hearted** lady from Igwa village, you have gone
These Ebaeit children **are mourning**, mother has gone
An **intelligent** lady from Raei village, you have gone
These Hayae children **are crying**, mother has gone).

iiii iiiii iiiii (sound of mourning cries)

3

*Ra Igwa yono omi menake wa puma-puma yaele miyae,
nundaeya*

We Ebaeit yono kenane bam kanende, ana kanendeya

*Re Raei yamno maengge menake we dandam maele miyae
howaleya*

We Hayaere yoha une bam kandeya, ana kanendeya

(A supporting lady from Igwa village, you have gone
These Ebaeit children are sad, mother has gone
(A supporting lady from Raei village, you have gone
These Hayae children are sad, mother has gone

iiii iiiii iiiii (sound of mourning cries)

4

Ra Igwa yono omi menake wa iteiteiyaele miyae, nundaeya

We Ebaeit yonu mehiyaele folanende, ana folanendeya

*Re Raei yamno maengge wa waka-wakayaele miyae,
nundaeya*

We Hayaere yoha hakoyaele kandeya, ana kanendeya

(A cheerful lady from Igwa village, you have gone
These Ebaeit children are sorry, mother has gone
A cheerful lady from Raei village, you have gone
These Hayae children are sorry, mother has gone)

As shown in the *helaehili* presented above, the replacements in the first stanza involve two aspects, i.e. the adjectives referring to the personality of the character in the first and the third line (*foijaele/moijaele*), which mean “kind-hearted” and the verbs in the second and the fourth line (*tihili/fale-fale*), which mean “are saddened and cry.” *Foijaele* and *moijaele* are synonymous, while *tihili* and *fale-fale* refer to mourning situation. In the second stanza, the adjectives explaining the personality of the female character, namely *foijaele/moijaele* (kind-hearted), are replaced by other adjectives, namely *nimeyaele/habayaele* (gentle-hearted/intelligent) (the first and third line, of stanza 2). Meanwhile, the verbs *tiboyaele* and *inseyaele* (the second and fourth line) are used to replace *tihili/fale-fale*. This pattern remains the same until the end of the singing.

B. Themes

In the mean time, the themes in *helaehili* are the topics revealed in the singing. Referring to Lord (1981:69), a theme is a grouping of ideas. Lord divides themes into two, namely major and minor themes (66-71). The major theme is the main idea that underlies the whole story or part of the story. The minor theme is a part of the major theme, which serves to elaborate the topics. For example, in the *helaehili* to mourn the death of Ms. Marice Pepuho, there are two major themes, the first referring to her being kind-hearted during her lifetime (stanzas # 1--4), and the second referring to her activities (stanzas # 5--9). Her being kind-hearted is elaborated into a number of minor themes, such as her being gentle, good personality, and others. Meanwhile, her activities are also broken into a number of minor themes, such as the activities in the household, in the field, in the lake, and in the sago field. Please see the scheme in appendix 1. With regards to the example of *helaehili* notation, see appendix 2. Principally, *helaehili* has similar notation, but some singers,

especially the experienced ones, make some various improvisation (Yektingtyas-Modouw 2008).

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Helaehili is one of Sentani oral poetry that is now rarely heard. Only old generation who live in villages or remote islands recognize the song. It is usually sung in mourning occasions or in funerals. Structurally, different from Lord's theory (1981), the structure of *helaehili* shows some characteristics: (1) the character's name is metonymically mentioned by relating it to the character's home, (2) the songs can be transcribed into two or four lines each stanza, (3) the formula of *helaehili* is enriched by parallelism in each line of the song in form of synonym, reduplication, and other complex words, (4) in *helaehili*, setting of place is related to the character's name, and (5) *helaehili* is commenced with a cry.

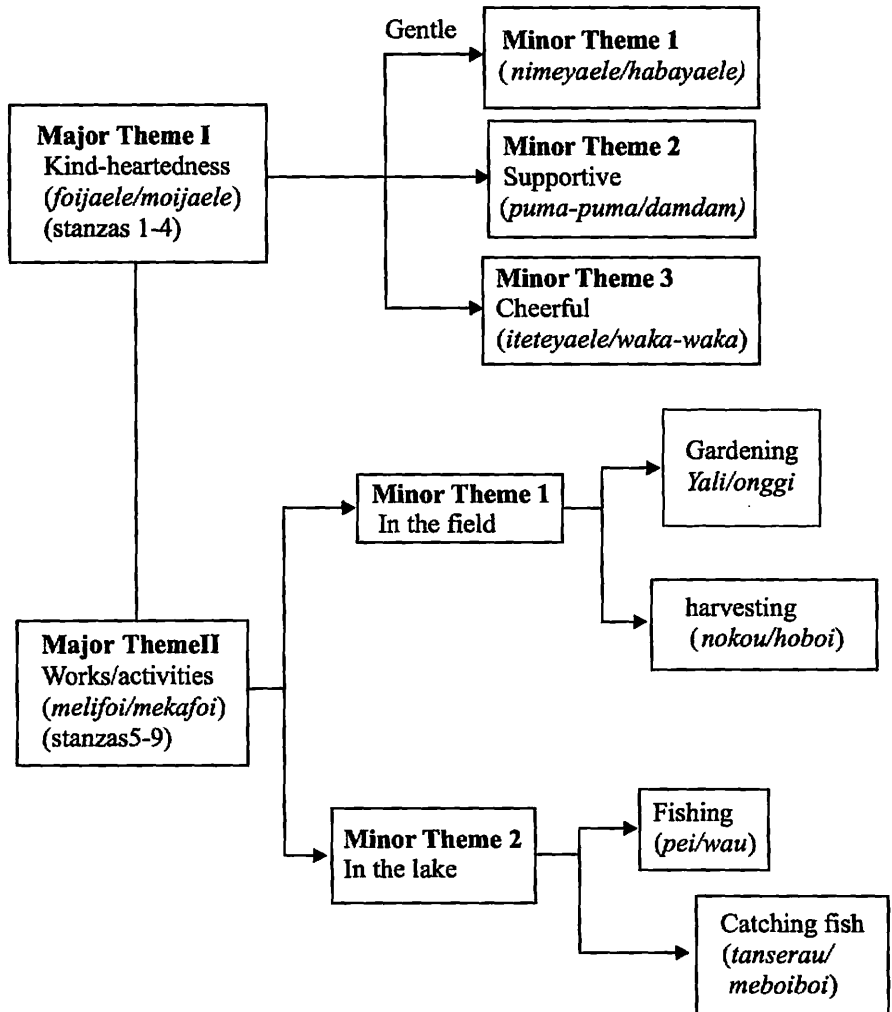
The singing of *helaehili* as social product of Sentani people, manifesting one of the cultural assets, is supposedly maintained since it reveals the social and moral values that can be used as a learning medium as well as a reflection of the socio-cultural dynamics of the Sentani people.

The current decreases as well as the loosening of the social and traditional values that take place in villages close to cities are very likely to spread to other societies living in remote islands. Accordingly, this research sets to propose the importance of maintaining the singing of *helaehili* and strengthening moral values as represented in the songs through a number of activities: (1) teaching the singing in the schools; (2) conducting singing dramatization shows; (3) holding singing contests without neglecting its unique characteristics, i.e. spontaneity.

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Appendix 1:



Appendix 2:

$\text{♩} = 100$

ANA RANIME

1

l... l... l... ra-ni - me a - na - ra-ni -

5

me 1. Ra l - gwa yo - no o - mi me - li - yaele mo - khol - bol mi -
 Re Rae - it yam - no maeng - ge me - khal - jae - le he - rei - bol mi -
 2. Ra l - gwa yo - no o - mi i - tae - yaele mo - khol - bol mi -
 Re Rae - it yam - no maeng - ge ha - bae - yaele he - rei - bol mi -

9

1. yae mawa - naeya We(E)baelite - yo - mo - lokhun - dangpu - mapuma khanye -
 yae mawa - naeya We(Ha)yae yam - mo - lo(wa)mendangya - le - ya - le khanye -
 2. yae mawa - naeya We(E)baelite yo - mo - lokhun - dangnei - si - jae - le khanye -
 yae mawa - naeya. We(Hayas)reyam - mo - lo(wa)mendang(khae)wei - boi - jae - le khanye -

13

1. khe, o - mi kha - nys - khe - ya D.S. D.C. al Fine
 khe, o - mi kha - nys - khe - ya
 2. khe, o - mi kha - nys - khe - ya
 kha, o - mi kha - nys - khe - ya