



## Meaning and Character Values in the Dero Verses of the Etu Tradition of the Boawae Community of Nagekeo District

Hermania Bupu; Suminto A. Sayuti

Master of Arts Education Program, Faculty of Language, Arts, and Culture, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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### **Abstract**

This article aims to reveal the meaning contained in the dero verses of the etu tradition, as well as examine the character values contained in the dero verses of the etu tradition. This research is a qualitative research using an ethnographic approach. Data sources are primary data sources obtained from the etu tradition structure, as well as secondary data sources obtained from several relevant writings. Data collection techniques are in the form of observation, interviews conducted at the research site. The results showed that the etu tradition is one of the traditions owned by the Boawae village community to express gratitude for the abundant harvest. Etu tradition symbolizes the strength, courage, and maturity of Nagekeo men. It is done to increase brotherhood and solidarity in the community. The Etu tradition is usually carried out after the rice harvest, around June to August. In the etu tradition, there are poems that are chanted where the poems contain prayers and respect for ancestors who are considered to bring harvest blessings and protection to the community. Poetry can be used to explain the purpose of the Etu ritual, reinforcing the values contained therein. In addition, poetry can be used as a tool to pass on knowledge and cultural values related to the Etu tradition to the younger generation. The character values contained in the dero etu poem have relevance to the character values contained in the Pancasila student profile, namely fear of God Almighty, mutual cooperation, responsibility, mutual respect and respect, and discipline.

**Keywords:** *Etu; Oral Tradition; Poetry; Meaning; Character Value*

### **Introduction**

Indonesia has a variety of different languages, cultures, races and customs due to its diverse ethnic patterns. Various rules and norms grow and develop in each society due to the variety of languages, cultures, races and customs that exist in Indonesia. Each community in the Indonesian region has its own traditional games, which differ from each other and have customary rules. This shows that each ethnicity has its own local wisdom. This local wisdom is an important cultural heritage that must be preserved. One of the cultural heritages that can represent the cultural diversity of society is oral tradition. Oral tradition, according to Finnegan, is a term commonly used in everyday life. (Wati, 2023). Oral

tradition is one form of local cultural expression and a component of the nation's cultural strength. In traditional ceremonies, indigenous communities use oral traditions as a means of communication to convey their intentions in accordance with their customary rules and language. (Kartika & Soraya, 2021).

Although its meaning varies, tradition is usually defined as culture, which is a way of doing things in a predetermined way or the process of passing on practices, ideas or values. Traditions are usually not owned by a particular individual or group, but by the community as a whole. Oral tradition, as a form of local culture that has a strong connection to its inheriting community, plays an important role in the lives of Indonesian people. (Wibowo, n.d.). The function of tradition is to instill the characteristics of a culture through the medium of oral tradition. This is because humans have had oral traditions since time immemorial, so oral traditions are almost as old as humanity itself.

Oral traditions include not only literacy, such as speech that is later written down, but also patterns and forms of literacy that can become community knowledge and be passed down from generation to generation. To this day, oral traditions still exist and are linked to people's lives and cultures. This is what makes Indonesian society unique and also multicultural. (Wibowo, n.d.). Nonetheless, the cultural and moral messages transmitted through oral tradition are hereditary. However, due to the lack of interest of the current generation, the oral tradition is beginning to be threatened. This is due to technological advances and the influence of incoming foreign cultures.

Oral tradition can be said to be a picture of the life of Indonesian society in the past. This oral tradition provides an overview of the dynamics of life experienced by ancestors that are passed down from generation to generation. In this modern era, oral traditions are increasingly forgotten, especially among the millennial generation. Many people have never heard of oral traditions in their villages. This may be because the message of oral traditions has been replaced by social media such as television, cell phones, the internet, newspapers, and so on. (Ulfa Hasanah, n.d.).

One of the oral traditions that has been passed down from generation to generation from the ancestors is traditional poetry. Poetry belongs to the category of oral literary works that are valuable or have religious meaning. Poetry usually talks about religion. However, it then develops by raising new issues, such as social and societal issues. (Fitriani & Bahry, n.d.). Syair usually contains advice addressed to anyone, both young and old.

Nagekeo Regency is one of the districts in East Nusa Tenggara, which has one famous tradition, namely *Etu* or traditional boxing. Traditional boxing "*etu*" differs from conventional boxing because of the equipment used and the rules. (Ajito et al., 2022).. *Etu*, or traditional boxing, creates a sense of brotherhood and kinship among fellow Nagekeo citizens, rather than winning or losing as in conventional boxing. Nagekeo people performed this ritual for a long time with certain traditional rites. In addition, the ceremony which is held once a year is not done carelessly. The Nagekeo government designated *etu* as one of the tourist attractions because it is unique. One way to preserve cultural heritage is to establish it so that it remains and benefits the local community.

In the *etu* tradition, there is one of the traditional arts that is performed on the night before boxing is held. The traditional art is *Dero*. *Dero* is a term for two types of activities, namely dancing and singing. (Citra Pendidikan et al., n.d.). This time, the author focuses more on the singing or accompaniment of the *dero*. *Dero* is part of Nagekeo culture. This dance only uses vocal music as accompaniment, not instruments or a combination of instruments and vocals. The dancers must sing as proof that they are involved in the *Dero* dance.

Before the traditional boxing event, the traditional *dero* dance is usually performed. Many people now favor the *dero dance*, which has evolved considerably. However, it is unfortunate that the *dero that*

people are interested in is the *dero* that uses musical instruments rather than the *dero* that uses vocal instruments, which makes the *dero* a true type of dance. For example, the influx of modern musical instruments replacing traditional music, combined with an adequate sound system, greatly disrupts its authenticity, which should be preserved.

*Dero* poems have a very important role for the indigenous people of Boawae village. They contain values, history and traditions that are passed down from generation to generation, and by preserving *dero* poems, indigenous communities can maintain their cultural identity and pass on their traditions to the next generation. *Dero* poems also often contain important moral messages for life, which can help community members learn about values such as kindness, wisdom and justice. These poems are often sung together in traditional rituals and celebrations, which can help strengthen the sense of unity and solidarity among community members.

Nowadays, many young people are less interested in *dero* poetry and consider it to be old-fashioned and uninteresting for today. Many factors cause this to happen. The dominating influence of popular culture, the difficulty in understanding the language and meaning of traditional poetry, the lack of relevance of *dero* poetry to young people's lives, the negative stigma towards traditional culture, and the lack of education about *dero* poetry. Whereas in the *dero* poem itself, there are meanings of life and character values that can guide the lives of young people in society. Based on this phenomenon, the purpose of this study is to reveal the meaning contained in the *etu* tradition *dero* poem, and to examine the character values contained in the *etu* tradition *dero* poem of the Boawae community of Nagekeo Regency.

## **Research Methods**

This research was conducted in the Boawae traditional village, Natanage Village, Boawae District, Nagekeo Regency. This research is a qualitative descriptive research using an ethnographic approach. According to Walidin, Saifullah, Tabrani, qualitative research is a research process that aims to understand human or social phenomena by producing in-depth and complex descriptions, reporting detailed perspectives from informant sources, and doing so in a natural environment. (in Rijal Fadli, 2021).

Using an ethnographic approach, qualitative research aims to gain a deep understanding of human and social problems so that researchers can interpret the meaning of the environment and how the environment affects their behavior. In addition, researchers use literature studies. Concepts or theories that will be used in research are made through literature studies. To determine its range, the literature study in this research is based on the investigation of oral traditions (Wati, 2023). (Wati, 2023).

In qualitative research, data collection techniques can be carried out by means of observation, documentation, and interviews as stated by Sugiyono (in Pancasila and Citizenship Education et al., 2021). In this study, the data collection techniques used by researchers were observation, documentation, and interviews. Observations were made to directly observe Boawae village, as well as all activities carried out by the community. Interviews were conducted with the customary leader, customary functionaries, customary elders, cultural experts, and also teachers at one of the schools close to Boawae village. Meanwhile, documentation in this study was carried out when the *etu* ritual was taking place, sacred places, and also the relics of the ancestors in the traditional house,

## Results and Discussion

### 1. The Meaning of *Dero's* Poem

*Dero* is the signature dance of each region in Nagekeo Regency. The song is different because of its melody and language. *Dero* songs are sung with different types of voices, although the melody is the same. To make the singer's singing more lively, this is done based on the singer's creativity. This creativity does not change the meaning and joyful feel of *Dero*; it is different from other regions because of its language and the same melody, but sung with different types of voices. The singer's creative purpose in singing a *Dero* song is to make it more festive. *Dero* is free and fun.

*Dero* is usually performed during traditional ceremonies, harvest thanksgiving, weddings, and welcoming guests. It is one of the ways Nagekeo people show their gratitude to God and their ancestors. *Dero* was basically a youth social dance in the past, with the main purpose being to mingle and interact with other local communities. In the past, *dero* was played and sung by teenagers in the past to find a mate and had the main purpose of interacting with local indigenous people. *Dero* dancers besides singing also often make strange sounds such as screeches or shouts. These sounds are also part of the *Dero* chant. The *Dero* chant consists of rhyming verses sung by different groups of dancers in turn.

*Dero* in Boawae village has verses that are sung by alternating groups of men and women. Many *Dero* rhymes contain advice, riddles or satire. Often, these rhymes are sung in a witty and humorous way. In addition, *Dero* verses often describe gratitude for bountiful harvests, health, and happiness, supplications, youthful romance, and supplications and prayers for elders.

Some *Dero* poems describe popular Nagekeo legends or folklore. *Dero* verses can also contain moral messages about principles of morality and kindness. *Dero* poems vary depending on the region and group of dancers. The people of Nagekeo usually preserve these poems from generation to generation by performing them during traditional ceremonies, rituals, and also other traditional feasts.

In this study, the author conducted research on the meaning of verses and character values contained in *dero* verses in the *etu* ritual of the Boawae community. In the *etu* art ritual, there are verses sung by yair singers as well as dancers. *Dero* verses sung in the *etu* tradition have many meanings and moral messages to convey to the audience and also the youth. Keep in mind that the meaning of *Dero* verses can change depending on each person's interpretation. However, in general, the poems contain positive values that the Boawae community wants to instill.

In the *etu* tradition, the *dero* poems that are usually sung are on the themes of parents, youth, togetherness, supplication, and also thanksgiving, each of which will be explained as follows:

#### a. Parent Theme

Dero poem

*O ine soba ola modhe sepu dhi mona*  
*Ooo ame pawe ola pawe ta bhia mata ae*  
*Ate miu bha bhia wula dia kisa nata*  
*Ngai zede modhe, modhe jeka ta nipi ola kobe*  
*We ana mo gelu mona ngala gha*  
*Ola modhe kema miu kami edi dhada jeka mata*

Indonesian Translation:

O infinitely good mother  
 O infinitely good father

Your hearts are clean like the full moon  
 Your kindness will be carried until death  
 We were unable to reply  
 Your kindness and love carry over until death

The meaning contained in the poem above is how children return the favor of their parents. Honoring parents means following their directions, speaking politely, and helping them when they are in distress. Parents have a wealth of knowledge and life experience. As a result, it is very important to listen to and follow the advice they give. Parents have knowledge and wisdom that can help their children find the right path. Children should always be grateful and filial to their parents because the work they do to raise them is priceless.

The *dero* poem containing "Advice to always respect parents and ancestors" serves as a reminder to everyone of the importance of respecting and appreciating their parents and ancestors, which is a noble value that must be preserved in the culture of the Boawae people.

#### b. Youth Theme

Dero's poem:

*Weta ewwww nara ew...  
 Sa'i ma'e de bu'e hoga ewwww  
 Oooo Nuzu dhu nenga gena- gena  
 Ooo geze ne'e sa'o teda he molo mema  
 Ooo ngusa kungu bubu eee ngusa logo una  
 We are so haki mona the pedo kom what*

Indonesian Translation:

Miss ew nyong ew  
 While you are still very young  
 O Think and weigh well  
 Think carefully before settling down  
 Must be able to work hard  
 Don't leave nothing behind

#### c. Theme of Togetherness

Dero poem

*Aoooo moni ooo riwu mai moni  
 O riwu mai moni ew  
 Aooo solo redu nenu ae  
 O redu nenu modhe tei zeu  
 Aeeee mema dhoma*

Indonesian Translation:

*Ao let's go watch  
 O we want to come watch  
 Don't just watch from afar  
 Just make us watch for sure  
 This is common*

In the theme of togetherness, the *dero* poem focuses on the togetherness of the Boawae community which shows how important unity is to build a strong and harmonious society. In the poem above, there are several things that are meaningful to the Boawae community itself, namely the invitation to participate in witnessing traditional activities or rituals, the importance of maintaining harmony and

tolerance, the importance of the spirit of gotong royong, the importance of fostering unity in dealing with something, and the invitation to always actively participate in society.

*The dero* poems are chanted with enthusiasm and cheerfulness. *Syair dero* with the theme of togetherness among the people of Boawae is a reminder of how important unity is to build a strong and harmonious community. It is hoped that the moral message of togetherness can be applied in the lives of the Boawae people. For the Boawae people to live safely and happily, the younger generation must learn these noble values.

d. Gratitude Theme,  
Dero poem

*Dewa zeta ga'e zale*  
*Ine ame ebu kajo*  
*Miu ta mata ulu wa muzi*  
*Our Miu teva nizo*  
*Kmi dhou tei nuka nee peni wesi*  
*Miu negha tii pati kami mae ala wali*  
Indonesian meaning:  
Almighty God  
Ancestors who have gone before  
You bless us  
Get to and from the garden safely  
You have given to us do not take more

In the Boawae community, *Dero* poems with the theme of thanksgiving contain meanings about gratitude and thanks for the blessings given by God Almighty. There are several meanings of gratitude contained in the poem, namely an expression of gratitude for the abundant harvest, an expression of gratitude for health and happiness, an expression of gratitude for peace and harmony, an expression of a sense of unity in the community itself,

The expression of gratitude in these poems is intended to increase the gratitude and concern of the Boawae community for the blessings that have been given by God and also the ancestors. *Dero* poems with the theme of thanksgiving in the Boawae community are a way to show gratitude and thanks for all the blessings that have been given by God Almighty. These religious and spiritual values must be instilled and maintained by the younger generation.

e. Application Theme  
Dero poem

*Enga uza o enga uza*  
*Mai wae o mai wae*  
*Enga uza, uza mai wae*  
*Wae o wae o*  
Indonesian Translation:  
Call the rain o call the rain  
Water oh water come down  
Call the rain come the water  
Water oh water

*Dero etu* poems about the Boawae community's request for fertility and rain contain prayers and hopes to God Almighty for fertile land and rain. In the *dero etu* poem above, there are hidden meanings

expressed by the community to God, namely a request for rain, expecting a bountiful harvest, asking for soil fertility and also plants, expressing a condition of resignation to the dependence of the Boawar community on nature, as well as an expression of a request for crop survival in the next season.

This tradition shows the local wisdom of the Boawae people about respecting nature and being grateful for what God has given them. The *Dero* poem about the Boawae people's request for fertility and rain is a prayer to God Almighty for fertile land and rain. To realize a Boawae community that is peaceful and harmonious with nature, these religious, spiritual and local wisdom values must be preserved and instilled to the next generation.

## 2. Character Value in *Dero* Poetry

Education practitioners have been talking about the value of character education because education has been preoccupied by unreasonable interests, namely education that emphasizes the development of intellectual intelligence, reason, and reasoning rather than the development of inner intelligence, feelings, and emotions. Although education has produced many intelligent people, they have lost their piety, responsibility, honesty, loyalty, respect, and mutual cooperation. As a result, respect for humanistic values, nobility of mind, and conscience are lowered. (Values & By, 2016).

In connection with this fact, education must be changed and adjusted to what is missing and less attention to the world of education. Education that focuses more on the formation of a child's character should be carried out in the family, school and community environment. The process of transferring character values should start as soon as possible to enable character building through various activities. Character education is more important than moral education because it does not only teach right from wrong but leads to the cultivation of habits, or habituation, of good things, which helps children and young people understand right from wrong.

The environment and family have a very important and strategic role in providing guidance, awareness, cultivation, and development of character values. In addition, families teach how to behave well, in accordance with the social norms and values adopted by the family and the environment in which they live. One of the activities that can be done so that the transfer of character values can be implemented in the daily lives of young people today is through strengthening rituals and traditions. Cultural traditions and rituals contain many important character values. Even in rituals or traditions, there are traditional poems that contain many hidden meanings, and if studied more deeply, there are character values.

In the context of culture and one type of culture that must be preserved and an effective way to instill noble values to the younger generation is by using traditional poetry. Beautiful and meaningful language can touch the hearts and minds of children and young people, making the character values contained in them easier to understand and remember. Traditional poetry gives people guidelines to behave properly in daily life. The younger generation can recognize and appreciate the nation's culture by learning and preserving traditional poetry. Traditional poetry can also be used as a tool to develop the character of the younger generation. Traditional poetry has principles that can be used in daily life to build individuals with noble character.

In the *etu* tradition of the Boawae community, there is an ancestral legacy that is still carried out by the Boawae village community, namely *dero etu*. On the night before the traditional tunju art is performed, the traditional art of *dero* will be performed. In this *dero*, traditional poems will be chanted. Unfortunately, nowadays, the participation of young people is lacking. This is because young people have very little interest in traditional arts such as the *dero*. The younger generation is more comfortable and

more interested in social media and technological developments so that traditional arts that become cultural heritage look unattractive in the eyes of young people.

Syair Dero provides life guidance for the Boawae community in dealing with various situations and problems. Values such as mutual cooperation, discipline, responsibility, piety to God Almighty, and mutual respect contained in the meaning of *Dero* poems can help Boawae people in living their daily lives. In addition, *Dero* poetry has the power to transform the people of Boawae into better people. Syair *Dero* has values such as perseverance, hard work, and never giving up that can encourage Boawae people to achieve their goals in the future.

The Boawae community can unite through *Dero* poems, which contain values such as a sense of unity, oneness and tolerance. The character values contained in *Dero poems* have an important function for the Boawae community because they help shape the character of the younger generation, strengthen cultural values, provide guidelines for life, motivate people, and become a guide for life.

## Conclusions

A tradition that is passed down through generations through oral language is called oral tradition. This tradition can be in the form of folklore, songs, poems, or mantras. Its function is very important to maintain and preserve the culture and noble values of a nation. The *Etu* tradition of the Boawae village community is one of many oral traditions that still exist in Indonesia. Many other oral traditions related to poetry are the cultural heritage of the Boawae community. Both in the past and now, oral traditions play an important role in culture and society.

In society, oral tradition is often used as a method of informal education. Traditional stories and songs often contain moral lessons that can shape people's character and ethics. Oral tradition also serves as a source of entertainment and recreation for the community. To enliven the atmosphere and provide entertainment, traditional stories and songs are often used in traditional ceremonies, celebrations and other social events. Because people in the past were not familiar with the writing system, oral tradition was very important. However, with today's technological advances, oral traditions remain important. Oral traditions are still seen as part of cultural heritage and as a way to maintain cultural identity and traditional values, even though information can now be transmitted and stored through various electronic media.

The *etu* tradition is an oral tradition told orally by the ancestors and passed down orally. The stories that are usually told are usually about the origin of the Boawae community, the struggle of the ancestors to get a territory or village, and the moral values that apply in society. The *Etu* tradition is part of the Nagekeo community culture that has been passed down from generation to generation. In the *etu* tradition, on the night before traditional boxing is performed, there will be a *dero* performance night to entertain the audience and also the villagers. *Dero* poems in the *etu* tradition of the Boawae community, passed down from generation to generation, are chanted in various traditional rituals, such as harvesting and building traditional houses.

In *dero* poetry, there are many hidden meanings of life. There is the meaning of expressing gratitude for the abundant harvest and this shows how much the community appreciates God's gifts and the inclusion of ancestors. In addition, there is the meaning of attachment to nature, where people are invited to protect and preserve nature. The meanings contained in the poems can vary according to the themes chanted by the dancers and singers. In addition to the meanings mentioned above, *Dero* poems contain moral messages and cultural values that are unique to the Boawae community. Studying and



understanding *Dero* poems can provide an overview of the values and perspectives on life adopted by the Boawae community.

In addition, in the poems that are full of meaning, there are character values that are very relevant to the profile of Pancasila students. There is the value of piety to God Almighty, mutual cooperation, discipline, responsibility, and mutual respect. These character values serve to shape the character of the younger generation. In order for the younger generation to grow into people with morals and character, these values should be instilled from an early age. Character values also help to strengthen existing cultural values in the community and maintain harmony and identity as an indigenous community.

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