

Formula And Functions of *Nkabyeu* in the Orangkay Inauguration Ceremony

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Abstract

Nkabyeu is a form of oral literature in the Arma community that is performed in traditional ceremonies, particularly in the Orangkay inauguration ceremony. This study aims to describe the formulas and functions of Nkabyeu in the Orangkay inauguration ceremony in Arma Village, Nirunmas Subdistrict, Western Southeast Maluku Regency. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. The data consist of Nkabyeu folk songs performed during the Orangkay inauguration ceremony. Data were collected through observation, interviews, field notes, documentation, and recording. The data were analyzed by identifying recurring words, phrases, lines, performance patterns, and the functions of Nkabyeu within the ceremonial context. The findings show that Nkabyeu contains formulaic expressions manifested through the repetition of words, phrases, and lines. These patterns are found in several forms of Nkabyeu, including *lele-lele*, *Frai silai*, *Myama*, and *Kruma*. Each form also has a distinct performance pattern, including antiphonal singing between male and female groups and singing performed individually or collectively. In addition to its aesthetic function, Nkabyeu serves as a medium for conveying advice, hopes, cultural values, religious expressions, and messages concerning the responsibilities of the Orangkay. Thus, Nkabyeu is an integral part of the Orangkay inauguration ceremony and represents an important form of oral cultural heritage that needs to be preserved and transmitted across generations.

Keywords: *Formula; Formulaic Expression; Nkabyeu; Orangkay Inauguration; Oral Literature*



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INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, oral literature constitutes an important part of cultural heritage because it is closely connected with the social and cultural life of the communities that maintain and transmit it. Oral literature is transmitted primarily through oral performance and is embedded in the cultural practices, values, and traditions of its supporting communities (Ariyani *et al.*, 2023). In Indonesia's multilingual and multicultural context, oral literature contributes to the preservation of community knowledge, cultural identity, and intergenerational transmission. In Maluku, oral literature continues to occupy an important position in local cultural life. Recent studies of Maluku oral traditions, including *Kapata* in Central Maluku and Wemale oral literature in traditional royal inauguration ceremonies, demonstrate the continuing relationship between oral literature, local languages, cultural identity, and ceremonial practices (Potimau *et al.*, 2023; Rahim *et al.*, 2023). This context is particularly relevant to the community of Arma Village, Nirunmas Subdistrict, Western Southeast Maluku Regency, where oral literary traditions are associated with traditional ceremonies and other forms of cultural expression maintained by the community.

One form of oral literature maintained by the Arma community is *Nkabyeu*, a folk song performed in traditional ceremonies, particularly in the Orangkay inauguration ceremony. *Nkabyeu* is performed in the local language and contains advice and messages for the community. In its performance, *Nkabyeu* may be accompanied by the traditional musical instrument *tifa* and performed by children, community members, or traditional figures. Its presence in the Orangkay inauguration ceremony demonstrates that *Nkabyeu* is not merely an artistic expression but is also integrated into the community's traditional ceremonial practices. The relationship between oral literature and traditional inauguration ceremonies is also documented in research on Wemale oral literature in Maluku, where folk songs and local-language oral expressions form part of the traditional ceremony for the inauguration of a king (Potimau *et al.*, 2023).

In the study of folklore, folk songs constitute a form of oral cultural expression. Folk songs combine verbal and musical elements and may convey cultural meanings and values that contribute to the identity of the communities that maintain them (Nasution *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, the study of folk songs should consider not only their verbal expressions but also their performance practices and cultural contexts. Research on Indonesian oral traditions likewise demonstrates the importance of examining oral literary forms through their actual performance and social context (Ariyani *et al.*, 2023; Djalius, 2023). This perspective is particularly relevant to *Nkabyeu* because its verbal expressions, patterns of repetition, performers, and performance arrangements constitute integrated aspects of its existence within the Orangkay inauguration ceremony.

As a form of oral literature, *Nkabyeu* also exhibits characteristics associated with oral transmission. Dunkel (2021) states, that oral literature generally lives within traditional communities, is regarded as collective property, has no clearly defined individual author, may exist in several versions, and is characterized by aesthetic and poetic expression that is often delivered repeatedly. Repetition is particularly important in oral literary performance because it is part of the way oral expressions are structured and transmitted. In *Nkabyeu*, repetition can be observed in words, phrases, and lines that recur within particular songs. These repetitions form patterns that contribute to the structure and performance of the songs.

The repetition found in *Nkabyeu* is closely related to the concept of formula and formulaic expression in oral literature. Haymes (2021), places formulaic expression within the study of oral composition and performance, particularly in relation to recurring verbal patterns used by oral singers (Kayla *et al.*, 2023). In the context of *Nkabyeu*, formulaic expressions can be identified through the recurrence of particular words, phrases, and lines. For example, the expression *lele-lele* is repeated in the *lele-lele* song, while *Molan bungar matonablai* is repeated in *Frai silai*. Similarly, the word *Ratu* and particular sounds are repeated in *Myama*, while the phrase *Kruma yo amang faret beberi* recurs in *Kruma*. Such repetitions are not simply ornamental but contribute to the organization and emphasis of the messages conveyed through the songs.

The meaning of an oral literary performance cannot be separated from its cultural context. Kolawole (2023) emphasizes that the study of oral tradition needs to consider context because context contributes to the determination of meaning and function for the community that supports the tradition. This perspective is particularly relevant to *Nkabyeu*, which is performed within the specific context of the Orangkay inauguration ceremony. The meaning conveyed by the songs is related to the social position of the performers, the ceremonial situation, and the messages addressed to the Orangkay and the wider community. Thus, *Nkabyeu* needs to be examined not only as a textual form but also as a performance embedded within a particular cultural context.

In addition to its structural characteristics, *Nkabyeu* has important functions within the life of the Arma community. Bascom, as cited in (Warnisa *et al.*, 2023), identifies four general functions of oral literature: entertainment, the validation of cultural institutions, education, and the enforcement of social norms. These functions provide a useful basis for understanding the role of *Nkabyeu* within traditional ceremonies. In the Orangkay inauguration ceremony, the songs contain advice, hopes, religious expressions,

and messages concerning leadership and community life. The *Frai silai*, for instance, expresses the idea of ancestors as protectors of the younger generation, while *Myama* contains an expression of praise and devotion to God. *Kruma*, meanwhile, conveys expectations concerning the responsibilities of the Orangkay as a community leader.

The performance patterns of *Nkabyeu* further demonstrate its collective and contextual character. Oral literary performance involves interconnected components, including the text, performer, audience, music, and other performative elements, whose configuration may vary according to the context in which an oral form is performed ([Kolawole, 2023](#)). Some forms are performed antiphonally between male and female groups, while others can be performed by one person or collectively. In *lele-lele*, for example, the male group performs a line twice and is followed by the female group, while some subsequent lines are performed together. In *Myama* and *Kruma*, the songs may be performed by one or several people without the same antiphonal pattern. These variations indicate that the formulaic structure of *Nkabyeu* is closely connected to the way the songs are performed within the ceremonial setting.

Although *Nkabyeu* has an important position in the cultural life of the Arma community, its preservation remains a concern because only some members of the community continue to understand its meanings in depth. Similar challenges have been identified in the preservation of oral traditions, particularly when younger generations become less familiar with traditional cultural knowledge and practices ([Djalius, 2023](#); [Praminatih & Koeswiryono, 2023](#)). The original study emphasizes the importance of maintaining *Nkabyeu* as a valuable cultural inheritance and recommends continued documentation, preservation, and utilization of its cultural content in educational contexts. Such efforts are important not only for maintaining the existence of *Nkabyeu* but also for ensuring that the cultural knowledge contained within it can be transmitted to younger generations ([Attas et al., 2023](#); [Sukirno & Wardianto, 2022](#)).

Based on this background, the present study focuses on the formula and functions of *Nkabyeu* in the Orangkay inauguration ceremony in Arma Village, Nirunmas Subdistrict, Western Southeast Maluku Regency. The study aims to describe the formulas and formulaic expressions found in *Nkabyeu* and to explain its functions within the ceremonial context. By examining both aspects, this study seeks to contribute to the documentation of oral literature in Maluku and to the preservation of *Nkabyeu* as a cultural heritage of the Arma community. The findings are also expected to provide a reference for the development of local-content learning materials related to language, literature, and local culture ([Alifuddin et al., 2022](#); [Sukirno & Wardianto, 2022](#)).

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to describe the formulas and functions of *Nkabyeu* in the Orangkay inauguration ceremony in Arma Village, Nirunmas Subdistrict, Western Southeast Maluku Regency. A qualitative approach was selected because the data consist primarily of oral expressions, performance practices, and cultural meanings that need to be described and interpreted within their natural context. Qualitative research produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words and observable behavior ([Nirwan et al., 2024](#)). The research was conducted in Arma Village, Nirunmas Subdistrict, Western Southeast Maluku Regency. The research data consisted of *Nkabyeu* folk songs performed during the Orangkay inauguration ceremony. The selection of informants was based on several criteria relevant to the research context. The informants were required to be able to speak Yamdena well, understand Indonesian, be physically and mentally healthy, have knowledge of *Nkabyeu*, and participate in traditional ceremonies. These criteria were used to ensure that the information obtained was relevant to the cultural practices and performance of *Nkabyeu*.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, field notes, documentation, and recording. Observation was conducted to identify the performance of *Nkabyeu* and aspects related to its formulas and functions during the Orangkay inauguration ceremony. Interviews were conducted through direct oral interaction with informants to obtain information concerning the songs, their performance, meanings, and functions. Field notes were used to record information that could not be captured through recording. Documentation was used to collect materials related to the performance of *Nkabyeu*, while recording was used to preserve the verbal and performance data for further analysis. The data analysis followed a systematic qualitative procedure. Data obtained from interviews, field notes, documentation, and recordings were organized and classified according to the research focus. The analysis first identified the verbal patterns occurring in the *Nkabyeu* texts, particularly repeated words, phrases, and lines. These patterns were then examined to identify formulas and formulaic expressions. The analysis subsequently considered the performance patterns and the meanings conveyed through the songs in relation to the Orangkay inauguration ceremony. The functions of *Nkabyeu* were interpreted based on the messages contained in the songs and their use within the ceremonial context. The process of organizing, classifying, and drawing conclusions from qualitative data follows the principles of qualitative data analysis proposed by ([Neale, 2021](#)). The analysis

was conducted by connecting the textual data with the context of performance. Particular attention was given to the relationship between repetition and formulaic patterns, the way the songs were performed, and the cultural messages expressed through them. This procedure was intended to provide a comprehensive description of the formulas and functions of *Nkabyeu* as an oral literary tradition within the Orangkay inauguration ceremony.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that *Nkabyeu* contains recurring verbal patterns in the form of repeated words, phrases, and lines. These repetitions form formulaic expressions that support the structure and performance of the songs. The formulaic patterns are particularly evident in four forms of *Nkabyeu*: *lele-lele*, *Frai silai*, *Myama*, and *Kruma*. Each form has its own pattern of repetition and performance. The existence of repeated expressions in *Nkabyeu* is consistent with the characteristics of oral literature, in which repetition constitutes an important feature of oral performance (Dunkel, 2021). In oral tradition, recurring verbal patterns can support the continuity of performance and help maintain expressions that have been transmitted collectively. Similarly places formula and formulaic expression within the relationship between oral composition and performance. Thus, the repetitions found in *Nkabyeu* can be understood not merely as stylistic repetition but as part of the oral structure through which the songs are performed and transmitted.

Lele-lele

The first form of *Nkabyeu* analyzed is *lele-lele*. The song is performed antiphonally, involving male and female groups. The first line is performed twice by the male group, represented by the code L2X, and is followed by the female group, represented by P2X. The third and fourth lines are performed together.

Yamdena Language	Indonesia Language
<i>Lele lele</i>	<i>Pengharapanku</i>
<i>Lele lele yo makulele kondre la</i>	<i>Pengharapanku hanya kepadamu mama</i>
<i>Lele leleyo makulele kondre se</i>	<i>Pengharapanku hanya kepadamu papa</i>
<i>Ooo maku lele enang amang kondre se</i>	<i>Pengharapanku hanya kepadamu</i>
<i>Ooo maku lele enang-enang amang kondre la</i>	<i>Segalanya ku serahkan padamu</i>

The formulaic expression in this song is visible in the repetition of *lele-lele* and *kondre*. The phrase *lele-lele* means “my hope,” while *kondre* refers to “you.” The repetition of *lele-lele* emphasizes the message of hope directed toward parents. The repeated expression therefore functions to strengthen the meaning of the song and make the central message more prominent for the listeners.

The performance pattern is also significant. The alternation between male and female groups creates a call-and-response structure that characterizes the performance of *lele-lele*. The repetition of lines does not occur independently of the performance but is integrated into the way the song is delivered. This illustrates that the formulaic structure of oral literature is closely connected with performance. In this respect, the verbal formula becomes meaningful not only through the words themselves but also through their repetition and arrangement in performance (Dunkel, 2021).

Frai Silai

The second form is *Frai silai*, which is performed collectively. The song contains repeated words and phrases, particularly *Molan bungar matonablai*.

Yamdena Language	Indonesia Language
<i>Frai silai</i>	<i>Para leluhur</i>
<i>Frai silai ongir medase</i>	<i>Para leluhur dan tua-tua adat</i>
<i>Molan bungar matonablai</i>	<i>Bagaikan pagar untuk melindungi taman bunga</i>
<i>Nin silayar nin makenar</i>	<i>Sehingga tidak pernah layu</i>
<i>Molan bungar matonablai</i>	<i>Bagaikan pagar untuk melindungi taman bunga</i>

The repetition of *Molan bungar matonablai* constitutes the central formulaic expression in this song. *Molan* refers to a fence or barrier, while *bungar* refers to a flower. The repeated expression constructs a metaphor in which ancestors and traditional elders are represented as a protective fence for the “flower,” referring to children or the succeeding generation. The repetition consequently emphasizes the relationship between ancestors and the younger generation. The phrase is not repeated merely for aesthetic purposes; it

reinforces the principal message concerning protection and continuity between generations. This finding corresponds with the view that oral literature may function as a medium for preserving collective values and transmitting cultural knowledge within a community.

Myama

The third form is *Myama*. Unlike *lele-lele* and *Frai silai*, *Myama* does not require an antiphonal performance between male and female groups. It may be sung by one person or by several people. The performance is therefore represented by the code S, indicating that anyone may perform the song. Its performance pattern can consequently be formulated as S + S.

Yamdena Language	Indonesia Language
<i>Myama</i>	<i>Mari</i>
<i>Myama dalmindrar Ratu fenlese</i>	<i>Mari kita menyatu satu hati untuk Tuhan</i>
<i>Tatafibar Ratu ngaran tyaur bungar o</i>	<i>Berkibar bersama untuk memuji nama Tuhan</i>
<i>O kesning kesar o kamayel o</i>	<i>Teman-teman kita berkumpul</i>

The formulaic expressions in *Myama* include the repetition of the word *Ratu* and the repetition of the sound *O*. The repetition of *Ratu* occurs across lines and functions as an emphasis on the expression of hope and praise directed toward God. Meanwhile, the repeated sound *O* contributes to the aesthetic quality of the performance.

The song is explicitly associated with religious expression. Its content invites the community to unite in praising God. *Myama* may be performed repeatedly and can be used in different ceremonial contexts, including the Orangkay inauguration ceremony. Its relatively flexible performance pattern demonstrates that formulaic structure does not necessarily produce a single rigid mode of performance. Rather, formulaic expressions can remain stable while the number and identity of performers may vary. This finding is relevant to the understanding of oral literature as a cultural practice that is simultaneously textual and performative. Kolawole (2023), emphasizes that oral tradition needs to be understood in relation to its context because context contributes to the meaning and function of oral performance. In *Myama*, the religious content becomes particularly meaningful when the song is performed in a ceremonial context involving the community.

Kruma

The fourth form is *Kruma*. This song is performed in traditional ceremonies, particularly the Orangkay inauguration ceremony. *Kruma* can be sung by one person or by several people and is represented by the code S. Its performance pattern is therefore formulated as S + S.

Yamdena Language	Indonesia Language
<i>Kruma yo amang faret beberi</i>	<i>Pelantikan bapa kepala desa</i>
<i>Kamuflyair nimlangtwar</i>	<i>Atur langkah bae-bae</i>
<i>Fen ngamone nam basir dalam ye</i>	<i>Atur bae-bae dalam natir</i>
<i>Kruma yo amang faret beberi</i>	<i>Pelantikan bapa kepala desa</i>
<i>Kamalele mamkokoran ko amo</i>	<i>Kita harap kekuatan bapa di desa Arma</i>
<i>Nam basir dalam ye</i>	—
<i>Kruma yo amang faret beberi</i>	<i>Pelantikan bapa kepala desa</i>
<i>Kit nin sori nayeban namsos resi</i>	<i>Prau saya sudah hancur sekali</i>
<i>Mpot mamfwayar ndela</i>	<i>Ambil dia la gendong</i>
<i>Enang amang ko</i>	<i>Mama papa</i>
<i>Mangfaret beberi</i>	<i>Pemerinta baru</i>
<i>Suse ndesenang e</i>	<i>Susah dan senang</i>
<i>Kamu bare amo</i>	<i>Pemerintah pikul sendiri</i>

The principal formulaic expression in *Kruma* is the repetition of *Kruma yo amang faret beberi*, which occurs in several lines. The expression is used to emphasize the context of the Orangkay inauguration. Another repetition occurs in the form of *ko-ko*, which contributes to the aesthetic construction of the song. The repeated expression also strengthens the message directed toward the Orangkay. The song conveys expectations concerning the Orangkay's duties and responsibilities as a leader. Therefore, the formulaic repetition in *Kruma* has both structural and semantic significance. Structurally, it provides continuity within the song; semantically, it reinforces the principal message concerning leadership. The performance of *Kruma*

also demonstrates the relationship between repetition and audience comprehension. The song may be repeated according to the performer and the circumstances of the performance. Repetition can therefore strengthen the message so that listeners can understand the meaning conveyed by the song. This characteristic corresponds with the importance of repetition in oral performance and the transmission of traditional verbal expressions ([Dunkel, 2021](#)).

Functions of *Nkabyeu* in the Orangkay Inauguration Ceremony

The analysis indicates that *Nkabyeu* has functions that extend beyond aesthetic expression. Its functions are closely related to the social, cultural, religious, and ceremonial context of the Orangkay inauguration. Bascom identifies several general functions of oral literature, including entertainment, validation of cultural institutions, education, and the enforcement of social norms ([Warnisa et al., 2023](#)). Within the Arma community, these functions can be observed through the messages and performance practices of *Nkabyeu*.

Conveying Advice and Moral Messages

One of the important functions of *Nkabyeu* is conveying advice and moral messages. The songs contain expressions directed toward parents, ancestors, the community, and the Orangkay. In *lele-lele*, the repeated expression concerning hope toward parents emphasizes the importance of parental position. In *Frai silai*, ancestors are represented as protectors of the younger generation. In *Kruma*, the song contains expectations concerning the responsibilities of the Orangkay. These messages demonstrate that *Nkabyeu* operates as a medium for transmitting values from one generation to another. Oral literature can preserve social norms and collective knowledge because the messages are repeatedly performed in culturally significant situations. In this sense, the performance of *Nkabyeu* contributes to the continuity of cultural knowledge within the Arma community.

Expressing Religious Values

Myama demonstrates the religious function of *Nkabyeu*. The song contains an invitation to unite and praise God. The repeated use of *Ratu* reinforces the religious orientation of the song, while the performance can involve one or several members of the community. The religious dimension of *Myama* shows that oral literature may function as a medium through which a community expresses its relationship with the sacred. Its use in the Orangkay inauguration connects religious expression with the traditional ceremonial context. This supports the view that the meaning of oral tradition is inseparable from the context in which it is performed ([Dunkel, 2021](#)).

Reinforcing Leadership Values

The function of *Nkabyeu* is particularly evident in *Kruma*, which is directly associated with the Orangkay inauguration. The song contains messages concerning the responsibilities and expectations placed upon the leader. The repeated phrase *Kruma yo amang faret beberi* reinforces the relationship between the song and the inauguration of the village leader. The performance therefore functions as a cultural medium for communicating expectations about leadership. The Orangkay is not represented merely as an individual being formally inaugurated but as a person who receives social expectations from the community. Through *Kruma*, these expectations are expressed collectively in an artistic and ceremonial form.

Strengthening Communal Participation

The performance patterns of *Nkabyeu* demonstrate collective participation. *Lele-lele* is performed through an exchange between male and female groups, whereas *Frai silai* is performed collectively. *Myama* and *Kruma* may be performed by one person or several people. These variations provide opportunities for members of the community to participate in the ceremonial performance. The collective nature of the performance strengthens the position of *Nkabyeu* as communal oral literature. It is not the possession of an individual performer but belongs to the cultural practice of the community. This characteristic is consistent with the general characteristics of oral literature as collective cultural expression ([Eze et al., 2021](#)).

***Nkabyeu* as Oral Cultural Heritage**

The findings indicate that *Nkabyeu* represents more than a collection of traditional songs. Its formulas, repetitive expressions, performance patterns, and cultural messages constitute an interconnected oral tradition. The songs preserve knowledge about relationships between parents and children, ancestors and descendants, leaders and communities, as well as the community's religious orientation. The continued

existence of *Nkabyeu* is therefore important for cultural transmission. Oral traditions may become vulnerable when their performers and bearers decrease. The preservation of *Nkabyeu* requires not only documentation of its verbal texts but also documentation of its performance patterns, meanings, and ceremonial contexts. Such documentation is particularly important because oral literature is transmitted through performance and may exist in different versions within the community. The findings also indicate the potential use of *Nkabyeu* as a source of local cultural learning. Its verbal expressions can introduce students to local language and oral literature, while its cultural messages can provide opportunities to understand values related to family, leadership, religious life, communal solidarity, and respect for ancestors. Thus, preservation and educational utilization can become complementary strategies for maintaining *Nkabyeu* as part of the cultural heritage of the Arma community.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that *Nkabyeu* is an important form of oral literature that is closely integrated with the Orangkay inauguration ceremony in Arma Village, Nirunmas Subdistrict, Western Southeast Maluku Regency. The analysis identified formulaic expressions in the form of repeated words, phrases, and lines in several forms of *Nkabyeu*, namely *lele-lele*, *Frai silai*, *Myama*, and *Kruma*. Each form has distinctive patterns of repetition and performance, including antiphonal singing between male and female groups and individual or collective performance. The formulas and formulaic expressions in *Nkabyeu* contribute not only to the aesthetic structure of the songs but also to the emphasis and transmission of their cultural messages. The repeated expressions in *lele-lele* emphasize hope toward parents, *Frai silai* conveys the protective role of ancestors toward succeeding generations, *Myama* expresses religious praise and communal unity, while *Kruma* communicates expectations concerning the duties and responsibilities of the Orangkay as a community leader. The study further demonstrates that *Nkabyeu* performs important social and cultural functions within the inauguration ceremony. It functions as a medium for conveying advice and moral values, expressing religious beliefs, reinforcing leadership values, strengthening communal participation, and transmitting cultural knowledge across generations. Therefore, *Nkabyeu* should be understood not merely as a traditional folk song but as an oral cultural practice that preserves the collective values and identity of the Arma community. The preservation of *Nkabyeu* requires continued documentation and intergenerational transmission, including the documentation of its verbal texts, formulaic patterns, performance practices, meanings, and ceremonial contexts. Its incorporation into local cultural and language-literature learning may also support the continuity of this oral heritage and introduce younger generations to the cultural knowledge embedded in *Nkabyeu*.

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