

The lake, the birds, and the people

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I saw my *nene* in my dream last night.
She was beautiful with her *kerudung*.
She said to me, “*Nou, donggo motota yio mohulondalo?*”
I said “*motota watiya nene, openu bo ngoputu ngoputu.*”
She smiled.

She left, leaving me awake for the rest of the night.
I talk in my silence.
O you, the daughter of *Holondalangi*. Have you found your
dream yet?
Your tongue must have been numb. Does it still dance as it
should be?
“*Moalato.*” It said to me.
Dan akupun terdiam.

I hear the mother, *Limboto* lake, calling my name from
faraway.
“*No’u, pohuwalingo pomayi.* I am drying, dirty, and
dying.”
The lake cries as her water dries up.
Leaving her alone with mud and stone.
I paused.
I sob.

I hear the *Bondula* sings a sad ballad. The saddest one I
have ever heard.
They have been hunted, trapped, and killed.
“*Alas, tingga pongolomu*” *kata mereka.*
The wind blows their melody to this majestic land tackling
the same fate.
I grieved.

Gathering my sense, I walked my mind passing the time.
I heard a little boy counting “*satu, dua, tiga.*”
His grandma asked him, “what language is it?”
He said, “it is the language on TV, a language that unifies
us.”
Grandma weeps and walks away.
Enough I told. But, It is not the end yet.

My *nene* is there, singing *Lohidu lo Hulondalo*.
“Strangers in our door,” she began.
Asked us to repeat our words.
We said them once, twice, thrice. But they asked for more
and more.
Till our tongue got bitter and sore. No more.
The *Bone* River flows in your vein, but you just watch us
from faraway.
Pain. *Mongoto.*

The canting is still there, *wunugo lo Hulondalo*.
Calling the name of *Bulalo lo limutu, Bandula lo limutu,*
Holondalo nga’a mila.

But still the lake cries its water,
the bird sings its song,
and the language calls its people.

This poem describes the author’s experiences as a speaker of
Gorontalo, one of Indonesia’s Indigenous languages. This
language is listed as a threatened language in Indonesia by
the Ethnologue (Eberhard et al. 2021) and the Indonesian
Ministry of Education and Culture (2020). In this poem, she
uses Gorontalo, Indonesian, and English to raise awareness
of biodiversity and language endangerment in her
community and the world.

Works cited

- Eberhard, David, et al. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*.
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