

The Artistic Meaning of *Isolo* Tradition of Sentani Tribe, Papua in Indonesia's Sustainable Maritime Culture

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to uncover the aesthetic meaning in the Sentani Tribe's Isolo tradition in Lake Sentani, Papua. The study focused on how the artistic aspects of Isolo represent essential creative meanings and what the important implications of artistic meanings in the Isolo tradition are for the development of the archipelago's sustainable maritime culture. This study employs a qualitative technique based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Data was gathered through observation of Isolo performances during the 2023 Lake Sentani Festival, interviews, and literature searches. The following are the study's findings: First, creative components such as dance moves, singing, clothes, property, and body painting motifs demonstrate symbolic connotations of natural prosperity, patriotism, spirituality, and fraternity. Second, the key meanings in Isolo derive from the concept of Rokhabia, a sense of brotherhood of one womb that is deeply established in Sentani tradition. Third, the implications of the Isolo tradition might build Sentani tribe social relationships through the meaning of the elements in its artistic representation. This study contributes significantly to expanding the horizon of the Sentani Tribe's Isolo heritage in preserving Indonesia's sustainable maritime culture.

KEYWORDS

artistic meaning, isolo tradition, sentani tribe, rokhabia, maritime culture, archipelago

Introduction

This study seeks to elucidate the artistic significance of the *Isolo* tradition of the Sentani Tribe in Lake Sentani, Papua, and analyze its implications for the development of a sustainable maritime culture in the archipelago. The need for a thorough understanding of this distinctive and priceless cultural tradition is what drives this research, in addition to being a response to the difficulties of cultural preservation in the age of globalization. The rationale for uncovering the meaning of a traditional performance begins with Martino and Jazuli's [1] intriguing assertion that comprehending the meaning of a performance can prevent misperceptions and misinterpretations. If the true meaning of a performance is not imparted, then the audience cannot appreciate its significant values. Therefore, it is essential that the meaning of a performance be revealed and comprehended.

Several past studies have provided insight into the significance of the performing arts. Leşe [2] argues that performances in athletics and the arts attract attention, make impressions,

elicit responses, and provide beneficial addictions to society. Shkliarenko argues that the performing arts require active audience participation and seek to provoke action or reflection on social issues through interaction and communication with the urban environment. Banisudha [3] explores the implications of performing arts in higher education, arguing that performing arts can stimulate cognitive abilities, nurture self-confidence, and develop communication skills, thereby preparing students for a variety of future careers. In contemporary performing arts, Caruso [4] introduced the concept of co-creation and the role of the active spectator. These papers demonstrate that the performing arts incorporate attention, impression, provocation, interactivity, communication, cognitive development, self-expression, and collaborative creation.

Sentani traditions include *Isolo*. This boat tradition includes dancing and music. Corry Ohey says *'Isolo'* comes from *'Iy'*, which means boat, and *'holo*,' which means merged or placed. The *'Isolo'* custom uses connected boats to convey valuables to different villages (July 10 2023 Interview). Adolf Marweri of Kwadeware Village, West Sentani, says *'Isolo'* is also 'Isoro' due to accentual variances (Interview, October 23, 2022). If numerous groups or tribes perform similar rituals simultaneously, the right name is 'Isosolo,' the plural version of *'Isolo'* (Corry Ohey, Interview, July 10, 2023). When Sentani villages' *'Isolo'* communities show off their beauty, the name *'Isolo'* is used more often. Additionally, the phrases reflect Sentani dialects and recognize West, East, and Central Sentani identities. The Sentani understands and uses all three terms. *Isolo*, a Sentani Tribe performing art, represents Papua cultural legacy and creative value. In Sentani culture, the *Isolo* tradition symbolizes unity, fraternity, and social and spiritual virtues. However, significant social and environmental changes in Papua and globalization have cast doubt on *Isolo'*s principles' validity and understanding.

This study reveals the existence of an essential concept in the social system of the Sentani, namely *Rokhabia*. According to Levinus Philemon Modouw, a Sentani academic and cultural expert from Waena Village, the term signifies a sense of brotherhood within the same womb (Interview, July 8, 2023). This concept arose as a result of the historical circumstances surrounding the settlement of the northern and southern Lake Sentani coastlines by human populations. They are thought to have migrated from Papua New Guinea centuries ago. Their entry into the waters of Lake Sentani was not instantaneous but rather gradual; collectively, they established a social system. Some arrived as a single family, while others came separately and formed social solidarity based on the similarity of the region, a sense of destiny and neighborliness, and a shared objective in the Lake Sentani region [5]. One could say that the concept of *Rokhabia* is the glue of kinship for the awareness of residing in the same area. Therefore, a medium is required to actualize the concept of *Rokhabia* in Sentani culture to sustain social relationships.

Isolo is critical to Sentani societal stability. How Rokhabia manifests in Isolo's art must be shown. Therefore, one must examine its meanings and values to understand how Rokhabia manifests in artistic pieces. Thus, the study examined Isolo's aesthetic aspects at the 2023 Lake Sentani Festival at Kalkhote Pier, Jayapura Regency. The variability of Isolo's looks allows for analysis of his impact on the Sentani Tribe's current and future social structure. Research has highlighted Isolo multiple times. Peradantha et al. [6] found that Ohey Village's Isolo song emphasizes social solidarity (akha rely). The conversation has focused on song lyrics and not other art forms. More research is needed to establish how other creative aspects create meaning. In addition, Peradantha et al. [7] studied Isolo's aesthetic value in Putali Village. Isolo in Putali Village showed solidarity, brotherhood, and simplicity in its art. The study was confined to one sample; hence, it needs further research samples. These studies allow for additional research into Isolo's artistic value and effects on the Sentani tribe's social structure. This study overcomes Isolo study restrictions, making it novel.

Method

This study employs a qualitative methodology with an emphasis on ethnocoreology. This method permits researchers to investigate the cultural and social implications of the Isolo tradition of the Sentani Tribe's understanding of artistic meaning. Ethnocoreology examines artistic aspects in a cultural context and infuses performance with cultural elements [8]. This investigation focuses on the presentation of the Sentani Tribe's Isolo Tradition at the Lake Sentani Festival in 2023 at Kalkhote Pier, Asei Village, Javapura Regency.

Ohey Village, Putali Village, Babrongko Village, and Abar Village are four Isolo-performing communities with physically unique creative manifestations. These settlements' variety of artistic expressions allows for thorough explanations of their significance. Cultural experts and actors in Isolo performances Corry Ohey, Naftali Felle, Fredy Ondy, and Jimmy Sokoy from Ohey, Abar, Babrongko, and Putali villages were questioned. Researchers also learned more about Isolo from Adolf Marwery and Levinus Philemon Modouw. The study used in-depth interviews with cultural influencers and Isolo practitioners. Isolo's 2023 Lake Sentani Festival performances were observed and recorded to determine artistic elements. Researchers also reviewed pertinent publications as part of the literature review. To ensure that this research continues untapped *Isolo* aspects.

This study examines Isolo as a symbolic artistic expression. To obtain an explanation of the denotative and connotative meanings of each element, the artistic elements of Isolo are deconstructed using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. Important values that animated Isolo's artistic expression were derived from the deconstruction of the meaning of these artistic elements [9], [10]. The values in *Isolo*'s artistic expression are further analyzed and interpreted using the Interpretative Sociology Analysis (ISA) approach, which distinguishes this study from previous comparable studies that also analyze the meaning of performing arts [11]. This method is used to obtain an in-depth comprehension or "Verstehen" of the fundamental reasons why Isolo is still performed and preserved [12]. This methodology enables the researcher to interpret the artistic meaning within the cultural and social context of the Sentani Tribe in depth. The results of the analysis were then validated against the original sources to ensure consistency between the results and findings of the analysis. Using qualitative methods, an ethnocoreological approach, and semiotic theory, this study provides the opportunity to investigate the artistic significance of Isolo of the Sentani Tribe in the context of Sentani culture and the maritime civilization of the archipelago more broadly.

Discussion

Isolo is boat-based singing and dancing. This ritual shows the delight of one village's people as they send goods to another. Two to four canoes are combined to transport dozens of people and necessary commodities like game animals, fruit and tubers, and valuables for wedding dowries or traditional purposes like building a new residence for the tribal chief. Each community shows happiness uniquely. The 2023 Lake Sentani Festival, with the theme "Sago is my Life," chronicled numerous groups' artistic representations (Figure 1). Kampung Ohey translated "Sejarah Kampung Ohey" into English. The main property was placed in the boat's centre to symbolize the sun. Corry Ohey (Interview, 10 July 2023) says the property is essential to the performance's theme and community character. Next, Kampung Babrongko reinterpreted "Delivery of the King's Pole". The group used hukulu, the chief's dwelling pole, in a canoe. Fredy Ondy (4 August 2023 Interview) says this theme symbolizes the Sentani Tribe's tight ties with extended family. The diversified Isolo display was enhanced by Kampung Abar's "Negeri Gerabah Kampung Abar" troupe. According to Naftali Felle, the women's primary possession, ceramics, was shown with its values and meanings (Interview, 9 July 2023). In addition, Putali Village performed an Isolo on "hunting wild boars." Daily hunting, especially for traditional events,

differs from this theme. They hide the boar's property in the boat's centre with forest-like foliage. The complete *Isolo* show has a powerful symbolic meaning that is exciting to explore.



Figure 1. The various forms of the Sentani Tribe's *Isolo* performance at the 2023 Lake Sentani Festival.

Top left: Ohey Village; Top right: Babrongko Village

Bottom left: Abar Village; Bottom right: Putali Village.

[Source: Peradantha, 2023]

There are always artistic elements in every form of performing art [2], [3]. A dance performance's artistic elements include *Isolo*, gestures, facial expressions, costumes, music, and cosmetics. The core of a dance performance is body movement, in which performers use body movements, steps, and poses to communicate a specific story, emotion, or message [4]. The dancers' facial expressions reinforce the movements' significance and can convey profound emotions. The costumes and cosmetics are meticulously selected to reflect the cultural context of the performance. Whether through instruments or vocals, music provides an accompaniment that blends and generates atmosphere with the other elements. Together, these elements create a rich visual and auditory experience for the audience during the dance performance, conveying profound meanings and messages. Each performing group at the *Isolo* performance at the Lake Sentani Festival in 2023 displayed distinct artistic manifestations. These expressions are communicated utilizing particular elements that are symbolic. Roland Barthes's semiotic approach is used to decipher the meaning of these artistic elements. In general, the following components convey these artistic expressions.

Table 1. The meaning of each visual artistic element of *Isolo*. [Source: Peradantha, 2023]

[Jource: Feraudalitia, 2025]					
No.	Artistic Elements	Signs	Denotative	A symbol of pride and preser-	
1.	Dance Movement	Rowing Move- ment	Dancers play <i>khayalo</i> (traditional Sentani oars)	vation of the Sentani tribe's maritime lake culture.	
		"Khmea" Movement	Shaking the Croton leaves in unison.	A symbol of friendliness, beauty, happiness, and joy of Sentani women.	
		Archery Movement	Dancers play with bows and arrows.	The symbol of the guardian of the <i>Ondoafi</i> or the highest customary leader of the Sentani Tribe.	
		Spear Move- ment	The movement of dancers playing spear weapons	Symbolizes the preservation of the hunting culture of the Sentani people.	
2.	Musical instru- ments	Tifa	It is a rhythmic musical instru- ment of the membranophone type	Social communication symbols in traditional events and <i>Ondoafi regalia</i> .	
		Fuu	It is a rhythmic instrument made of bamboo and is an aerophone.	Symbols of communication and social interaction in tradi-	
		Triton	It is a rhythmic instrument made from seashells and is an aerophone.	tional events	
3.	Costume	Rumbai- rumbai	A typical traditional Papuan costume element is the brightly coloured waist.	A symbol of joyful expression, cheerfulness, and excitement.	
		Crown head- dress	Headdresses made of casso- wary feathers and chicken feathers in bright colours and ornaments made of preserved real birds of paradise.	Gender symbols and roles in performance, as well as <i>Ondoafi regalia</i>	
		Haninggesa headdress	Vine headdress made like a bird's nest	Symbol of hunters and camou- flage in hunting (specifically used by the <i>Isolo</i> group from Putali Village)	
		Beads	Accessories on the bodies of male and female dancers made from natural stones and seeds of the Jali-jali plant	Symbol of the prosperity of the Sentani Tribe's property	
	Body Painting	Fouw	Body painting motifs in the form of interlocking circles	Symbol of the Sentani Tribe's brotherhood	
4.		Kino	Stylized leech-shaped motif Body painting motif in the	Symbol of masculinity, can only be used by male dancers	
		Khieka	shape of a split lake shell	Symbol of feminism, can only be used by female dancers	
5.	Property	Sun	The main property motif of Ohey Village is in the shape of a sun with the words "Iuwga yo Raiy jo."	A symbol of pride in the mother village blessed by the ancestors.	
		Pottery	The main property of <i>Isolo</i> Kampung Abar in the form of a clay pot	A symbol of pride and grati- tude for the blessings of na- ture and the special identity of Abar Village as the only vil- lage with a pottery-making culture on Lake Sentani.	
		Wild boar	The use of a real boar property hung in the middle of the boat between the dancers.	This symbol signifies wild animals and a sustainable hunting tradition. Wild boar can be consumed by Putali villagers	

			or shared with kindred or brotherhood villages in tradi- tional events.
	The main pil- lars (Hukulu)	The main property of <i>Isolo</i> Kampung Babrongko is the <i>hukulu</i> or the core pillar of the tribal chief's traditional house.	Babrongko and the kin village show togetherness and respect. When building the new chief's residence, the kin village brought the hukulu property as respect. It also shows the chief's culture and the tribal unit's close ties between villages.
	The vessels	A number of 2-4 motorized boats combined into one series.	Each Sentani tribal village's para-para or courtyard is reflected in the boats. It shows people performing ceremonies before the chief give orders. Traditional leaders from several communities unite by uniting their boats. The combined boats represent the Sentani Tribe's maritime civilization's culture and unity.
	Arrows	Consists of traditional bow and arrow elements A long spear made of wood	Symbol of the attributes of Ondoafi bodyguards or warri-
	spears	that is tapered.	ors or weapons in hunting.
	Traditional Paddle	Symbol of maritime culture artifact Reflecting the maritime culture of the Sentani Tribe with the traditional motif of "fouw."	This paddle symbolizes fishing activities on Lake Sentani and is an important element in the <i>Isolo</i> dance.
	Young coco- nut leaves	Decorating the boat with young coconut leaves.	Reflects the prosperity of nature and the sincerity of the people.
	Sago leaves	Decorating the boat with young sago leaves.	
6. Decorations	Ау	Symbolic decoration in the form of a pair of wooden poles decorated with young coconut leaves	The "ay" decoration on the boat symbolizes the success of the hunters. This decoration is exclusive to the Putali Village <i>Isolo</i> group.

Table 2. Meanings in the verses of *Isolo* songs of the Sentani tribe [Source: Peradatha [6], [7]]

No.	Artistic El- ements	Signs	Denotative	Conotative
1.	<i>Isolo</i> song lyrics	luwga yo re mande, Raiy jo re mande. Yo hena re mande, yan sena re mande	luwga refers to the original name of Ohey village. Raiy jo refers to the blessed land. Yo hena yan sena means the oldest land.	The Sentani tribe in Ohey village is proud of their community, which is the oldest and blessed by their forefathers.
		Bhuyakha bhuyakha, (bhuyakha ya) Bhuyakha bhuyakha, (bhuyakha ya) Bhuyakha e a, eee Bhuyakha ya o, ooo Ejo ejo, ejo ya Ejo ejo, ejo ya	Bhuyakha is the common name for the Sentani tribe. Meanwhile, Ejo means beloved village, and fela means arrow.	The song's lyrics acknowledge having an extended Sentani family through Bhuyakha. Ejo means each residential hamlet is important,

		Ejo e ya, eee Ejo yo o, o Oooo Fela fela, fela ya Fela fela, fela ya Fela e ya, eee Fela ya o, ooo		and fela means hunting together.
2.	Rhythm of the song	Melody and rhythm	Demonstrate a sense of enthusiasm and joy	It symbolizes that <i>Isolo</i> is done with great joy to celebrate unity and brotherhood.

In the Isolo tradition of the Sentani Tribe, artistic elements consist of dance movements, musical instruments, costumes, makeup in the form of body painting, main property, and decorations that reflect essential values. The dance movements depict the spirit of togetherness, unity between customs from various villages, and the escort and preservation of hunting culture. Musical instruments such as Tifa, Fuu, and Triton function as a means of social communication and respect for traditional leaders [13]. Costume elements reflect the joy, gender, social strata and specificity of each village. According to the interviewees, the headdress with the original bird of paradise motif can only be worn by the tribal chief. However, lately, there have been many violations where anyone is now free to use the sacred decoration. Therefore, the Lake Sentani Festival is also a means to reorganize the use of the headdress by the Sentani Tribe's customs. Body painting motifs express the value of brotherhood social and cultural wealth. Properties such as the sun, pottery, wild boar and king's pole reflect greatness, distinctiveness, brotherhood and cultural identity. Isolo's song verses reinforce unity and brotherhood by honouring the home village and blessed land and expressing a sense of pride in cultural heritage and tradition. Isolo is a powerful medium for knitting together a solid social system within Sentani society and supports the concept of *Rokhabia*. The values in all these elements, such as unity, solidarity, spirituality, and social and cultural solid identity, are essential for maintaining the sustainability of Sentani Tribal culture and maritime civilization in Indonesia.

Isolo has major significance for improving the Sentani Rokhabia-based social structure. Isolo is the main way Sentanis practice Rokhabia in their social and cultural life. Isolo has major effects on Sentani society: Besides being an art performance, Isolo symbolizes Sentani fraternity and solidarity. Isolo symbolises fraternity, connection, and the sensation of one womb, which are crucial to Rokhabia. Sentani dances, songs, and costumes unite people, create social bonds, and celebrate their culture. Second, the Lake Sentani Festival's diversified Isolo display honours Sentani culture. This tradition offers aesthetic aspects that show their rich culture. This acknowledgement of cultural identification is crucial to Rokhabia's concept because the geographically and culturally diverse Sentani people realize the importance of identifying their shared purpose and identity within the outstanding Sentani civilization. Third, Isolo is vital to Sentani culture and heritage. This presentation teaches younger generations about their culture and traditions to preserve it. The Isolo supports Rokhabia, which entails cultural growth and continuity. Fourth, Isolo helps establish a sustainable maritime civilisation in the archipelago [14]. It showcases the Sentani Tribe's maritime culture and promotes environmental and resource conservation. The preservation and enrichment of this culture by *Isolo* can motivate the local youth and nautical communities in other areas of the archipelago to perpetuate maritime civilization.

Conclusion

This study's discussion yielded findings concerning the artistic significance of the *Isolo* tradition of the Sentani Tribe in Lake Sentani, Papua, and its implications for developing a sustainable maritime civilization in the archipelago. Specifically, the findings of this study demonstrate:

- 1. *Isolo* is not only an artistic performance but also a form of cultural heritage and recognition of the cultural identity of the Sentani Tribe. The artistic elements of *Isolo*,
- 2. Such as dance movements, songs, musical instruments, costumes, body painting, and property, have symbolic solid meanings regarding the prosperity of nature, love for the country, spirituality, and brotherhood;
- 3. The artistic meaning of *Isolo* explicitly reflects the realization of the concept of *Rokhabia*, which is a sense of brotherhood of one womb within a society with diverse geographical backgrounds;

Isolo plays a crucial role in constructing a robust social system and fostering a deeper comprehension of the concept of Rokhabia. Therefore, this research contributes significantly to the comprehension, preservation, and appreciation of Papua's cultural diversity and the maintenance of a sustainable maritime civilization. This research illuminates Isolo and its principles and how it enhances Sentani social cohesion through promoting Rokhabia. These findings suggest supporting Isolo and preserving Sentani culture as part of the archipelago's sustainable marine civilization. This research has revealed the artistic significance of Isolo and its effects on the Sentani social system. However, more research into the migration history of the Sentani would improve our understanding of Sentani culture and its preservation.

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