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## Announcements

### Temporarily closed for new submissions

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Because of the change of our journal's submission system, the editorial team needs to adjust the work process for benefits of authors. Therefore, we have to temporarily stop accepting new submissions from November 1, 2023 until further notice.

### Changes to the format of published papers

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# “THE SUN IS WATCHING”: UNRAVELING THE SENTANI PEOPLE’S ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE THROUGH FOLKLORE

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## ABSTRACT

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Contrary to the beliefs of the ancient Sentani people, who used myths to protect the environment and avert terrible catastrophes, environmental degradation is a result of land exploitation, illegal mining, and pollution in today’s Sentani, Jayapura Regency, Papua, Indonesia. This research examined the traditional ecological knowledge found in Sentani folklore, i.e., orally sung lyrics known as *ehabla* that young people nowadays have mostly ignored. The data for this study include existing *ehabla*, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) involving Sentani tribal leaders, elderly people, and *ehabla* chanters in Eastern, Central, and Western Sentani. Using ecocritical and sociocultural perspectives as analytical methods, the study focused on the neglected traditional Sentani ecopoetry, highlighting its rich ecological knowledge through consistent references to plant and animal names in its verses. Findings in this study underscore the importance of 1) ongoing revitalization, 2) promotion of this folklore, and 3) reintroducing *ehabla* to contemporary Sentani society. This study’s comprehensive approach may ensure the preservation and dissemination of traditional ecological knowledge for sustainable environmental practices. Thus, given the rapidly dwindling nature of Sentani today and the fact that *ehabla* is rarely known by the younger generation, continuing revitalization and promotion of this folklore form is critical.

**Keywords:** Ecopoetry; ecological knowledge; *ehabla*; conservation; Sentani folklore

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The context of this study is environmental degradation in Sentani, Jayapura Regency, Papua, Indonesia. A devastating flood and landslide occurred in 2019, claiming the lives of hundreds of innocent people and causing the destruction of thousands of homes and the loss of numerous animal lives. Similarly, in 2022, another catastrophic event unfolded, leading to comparable consequences. The Sentani people are among the victims of human-made environmental destruction. Several rivers travel through Sentani on their way to Lake Sentani, the largest lake in Papua, carrying water from Cyclops Mountain to the north of the city. The lake always overflows during torrential rains. Human activities have polluted Lake Sentani with their waste. As part of the larger whole, human beings are not the only species waiting to be set free. All creations

are called to respect and care for the earth and all who live there. It is no secret that the earth is under pressure from the exploitation of its resources. Humans are held responsible for natural disasters with their free sand mining, illegal logging, and bushfires. It is people's bad habits that have accumulatively instigated large unexpected disasters. As a result, in many places, the environment is no longer safe for people to live.

The current gloomy situation of Sentani's environmental disaster betrays the romanticized depiction of indigenous people and culture in the past. Formerly, the Sentani people never faced such large calamities because they valued and kept their environment well. Home to the world's third largest rainforest after the Amazon and the Congo, Papua is rich in natural resources. An interview with some *ondofolo* (tribal chiefs) of Sentani and elderly people disclosed that in the old days, natural disasters caused by human negligence never occurred (E. Deda, personal communication, April 21, 2019; R. Ohee, personal communication, October 10, 2019). Respecting their environment, the Sentani people of old took care of their mountains, lakes, and rivers dearly. Illegal logging was out of the question. They carefully selected the proper trees to cut down for their important needs, i.e., making houses or canoes. Sentani cultural practitioners asserted that old people never chopped up big trees that grew on mountain slopes (I. Puhili, personal communication, February 3, 2021; J. Ibo, personal communication, June 5, 2019). Instead, they planted some new trees to replace the trees they had cut down (Yektiningtyas-Modouw, 2006).

Like any traditional society, the old Sentani people used folklore as life principles. They made use of old myths communicated through oral poems to save nature. They respected nature and their manners of taking care of nature are evident in their traditional narratives, i.e., proverbs, oral poems, and folktales. To quote a Sentani proverb, "*Hilo alu poyae-poyae, makem lau yamba-yamba*," which translates literally as "South wind and north wind blow peacefully," this proverb, according to an elder, refers to a quiet person who did many good things for many people, including efforts in nature conservation (S. Nere, personal communication, September 12, 2021).

R. Ohee (personal communication, October 10, 2019) a tribal chief of Waena explained that old Sentani people believed in the existence of gods and goddesses. They believed that big trees and clear water are the dwelling place of, respectively, the "God of the Trees" and "God of the Water". Chopping down trees without replanting the new ones and polluting the lake and the rivers would anger their gods and goddesses, hence depriving people of harvest and fish, to say nothing of natural disasters (Revassy, 1989; Yektiningtyas-Modouw, 2006). Another Sentani proverb says, "*Hu jokho erele*" which means "God is watching". Believing that their gods were watching over them, Sentani people in the past had quite a good ecological sensibility: they were aware of the importance of a good environment and passed this traditional ecological knowledge to the later generation by means of Sentani folklore.

Unfortunately, folklore along with the social and ecological values implied therein is neither recognized nor popular among the young people of Sentani nowadays. People in Sentani, especially the young ones, do not have an appreciation for their folklore anymore. Sentani tribal chiefs and elderly people expressed their concerns about this ignorance of traditional culture (Yektiningtyas & Modouw, 2017; Yektiningtyas & Silalahi, 2020). It is unfortunate that various ecological teaching depicted in folklore is not recognized anymore by the younger generation of the Sentani people. Mindful of the importance of folklore in revealing people's thoughts, ways of life, local wisdom, social values, and other aspects of communal life (Dundes, 1980; Danandjaja, 1984; and Finnegan, 1992), it is critical to conserve Sentani folklore to avoid extinction. Sentani folklore needs to be revived, (re)introduced, and shared with the younger generation because of the oral, transferable nature of folklore, which may become extinct if not continuously spoken or sung. This research, therefore, aims at revealing the ecological knowledge of the Sentani people as seen in their folklore. It limits itself to discussing Sentani oral poems that depict their local wisdom about natural protection.

## 2. THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

The present study contends that the oral legacy of Sentani's indigenous culture may serve as a tool for ecological conservation. Oral traditional literature is a type of verbal folklore which usually communicates ideas about human-nature interactions and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). The ecological interdependence of animals and plants, their life cycles, and the natural occurrences depicted in traditional oral poems all play vital roles in the ecosystem. A careful examination of their folklore reveals that the Sentani people had used TEK before it was gradually lost to modernity. TEK is indeed a crucial aspect of human-environment interactions worldwide. It includes spirituality and human-animal relationships, as well as relationships between humans, plants, animals, natural occurrences, landscapes, and activities. Although indigenous wisdom has been recently making a comeback in the discourse on sustainable development and biodiversity conservation (Nakashima & Roué, 2002; Robinson et al., 2021), numerous case studies reveal its degradation by, to name but two, complex threats at various spatial and temporal scales (Tang & Gavin, 2016)

and globalization (Cámara-Leret et al., 2019). This study is thus noteworthy since it may bring to light the Sentani people's TEK through an analysis of their oral poems with ecological messages.

Various local pearls of wisdom are either explicitly or implicitly taught in folklore, whose authors are generally unknown. One of the local knowledge areas is about the importance of environmental preservation. *Ehabla* is one genre of Sentani oral folklore that frequently tells us about nature conservation. Old Sentani people sang out the poem spontaneously (Yektiningtyas-Modouw, 2021). Ong (2002, pp. 10–11) depicts two kinds of orality, namely primary orality (preliterate) and secondary orality (literate). *Ehabla* is of primary orality since it is composed by the singers directly while they are singing it. Oral poetry is often composed by people who are not able to read and write (Finnegan, 1977). Oral poems' characteristics include (1) employing fixed phrases; (2) having aesthetic form and essence; (3) utilizing meter, rhythm, stylistics, and repetitions (Danandjaja, 1984; Finnegan, 1977; Lord, 1981). Finnegan (1977) specifically points out that oral poems are characterized by their heightened language, metaphorical expression, musical form or accompaniment, structural repetitiveness, prosodic features (e.g., meter, alliteration), and parallelism.

Further, it would seem that *ehabla* is an example of ecopoetry, i.e., a genre of poetry that expresses prominent ecological values, criticizes environmental degradation, and advocates natural ethics (Ryan, 2017). Ecopoetry emerged in the 1990s and questioned the relevance of poetry about nature when nature itself had then been gradually depleted due to global warming and climate change. Subsequently, ecopoetry has become a general term for all types of activities related to sustainability, conservation, and the relationship between humans and nature. In short, all poetry pertaining to ecology, environmental injustice, climate change, flora and fauna, as well as all narratives that have a green message can be defined as ecopoetry (Clark, 2011, p. 139).

According to the research of Yektiningtyas-Modouw (2006), the Sentani people's myths demonstrate how important environmental preservation is to their way of life. Sentani folklore reflects the Sentani people's awareness, attitudes, and actions in preserving their environment. It would seem here that folklore has shaped them to be obedient to ecological laws. Folklores and taboos teach people not to exploit nature. Indeed, several studies have already highlighted the role of folklore in imparting valuable teaching for natural conservation (e.g., Osemeobo, 1994; Pierotti, 2016; Chiparausha & Mavhunduse, 2018). Old Sentani people sang out *ehabla* to reveal history, philosophy, and pedagogical values such as hard work, cooperation, respect, honesty, and nature conservation.

This current study employed a qualitative-interpretative approach to research. Data in the form of transcribed *ehabla* were collected from previous research (Yektiningtyas-Modouw, 2006; Yektiningtyas, 2019) and interviews with 7 people (two tribal chiefs, three elderly people, and two experts in Sentani linguistics and culture) were conducted in Jayapura Regency, Papua, Indonesia, between May and August of 2020. In order to collect authentic and representative data, a series of focus group discussions (FGD) were held in late August 2020. The FGDs were attended by *ehabla* chanters between the ages of 65 and 75 from the Sentani region, notably Isele, Kabu, Yabansai, Klimbe, Klimbai, and Asei (East Sentani), Nolakla (Central Sentani), and Kwadaware. The moderator was one of the researchers. Both interviews and FGDs were used to investigate Sentani community characterization, thorough descriptions of each *ehabla*, and knowledge linked to the TEK shown in the oral poems. FGDs and interviews were transcribed throughout 2021 to become data. Following that, ecocritical and socio-cultural techniques were used to examine the data. This theoretical method was useful in disclosing phenomena in order to completely appreciate Sentani cultures without interpreting them via the researchers' personal prejudice.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Structure of *Ehabla*

Literally, *ehabla* is derived from the Sentani words *eha* (something) and *bla* (song). *Ehabla* is sung orally and spontaneously without any written notes in such social get-togethers as parties, traditional meetings, and youth gatherings. Usually, the performance is accompanied by musical instruments, like *tifa* (traditional drums) and a trumpet made of dried pumpkin called *wong*. Like other oral literature, *ehabla* is characterized by orality, song-like qualities, and memory-enhancing features such as repetition. The themes of *ehabla* cover all aspects of life: history, social life, love affair, family affair, environmental education, etc. The length of *ehabla* depends on the ability of the singers in exploring the themes (Yektiningtyas, 2019). Since *ehabla* is sung spontaneously, the singers only prepare the plot and themes that will be elaborated in the performance. Finnegan (1977) argued that the singers memorize the songs before the performance. Later, Finnegan (1977) and Lord (1981) claimed the unlikelihood of people memorizing all the existing words in oral poetry—they only prepare the theme and plot that will be elaborated in the performance. As it is, there is no exactly the same oral poem, even though it is sung by the same singer. Ibo, the cultural practitioner interviewed confirmed this (J. Ibo, personal communication, September 5, 2021). According to Ibo, unlike the singing of

*ehabla* in the past, Sentani youth today are incapable of composing *ehabla* given the limited mastery of the Sentani language, to say nothing of their knowledge of metaphorical expressions. Thus, they sing the existing *ehabla* by memorizing what they once heard from the previous generation.

*Ehabla* can be transcribed into stanzas. Each stanza consists of four lines. There are some *nos* in *ehabla*. Literally, *no* in Sentani language means “tree”, but *no* in *ehabla* is the minor theme that will be explored by the *ehabla* singers. The number of *no* in *ehabla* varies in accordance with the singers’ ability in exploring the theme by using parallel words/phrases, synonyms, homonyms, and reduplications that have semantic parallelism as follows.

No  
Igwa yo hubayo, Igwa yo manjo  
Raei jo hubayo, Raei jo manjo

(Igwa the dream village, Igwa the prosperous village  
Raei the dream village, Raei the prosperous village)

Emere uyi rane oro hebale  
Aka, kabo ohoro ayae weitemae  
Raimere uyi rane oro rawale  
Aka, kabo ohoro ayae weitemae

(I stepped on my feet in a canoe made of *eme* wood  
Brother, it is only *nibong* wood, please tell me  
I stepped on my feet in a canoe made of *raime* wood  
Brother, it is only *nibong* wood, please tell me)

The words *eme* (1) and *raime* (3) in the above stanza have the same meaning, that is, a local fruit tree called *matoa* (*pometia pinnata*). The word *hebale* (1) is synonymous with *rawale* (3) meaning “to step on”. The singer uses the same expression in line 2 and line 4: “Brother, it is only *nibong* wood, please tell me”. *Nibong* (*oncosperma tigillarum*) is the cheapest wood in Sentani. In an interview with J. Modouw an elder (personal communication, 2021, May 5–6), it was found out that another singer might use the synonym for *weit* (to tell), namely *khoite* or *oloite* for the same meaning. Singers may replace *weitemae* with *khoitemae* or *oloitemae* without changing the meaning as follows.

Emere uyi rane oro hebale  
Aka, kabo ohoro ayae weitemae  
Raimere uyi rane oro rawale  
Aka, kabo ohoro ayae khoitemae  
or  
Emere uyi rane oro hebale  
Aka, kabo ohoro ayae weitemae  
Raimere uyi rane oro rawale  
Aka, kabo ohoro ayae oloitemae

Here, old Sentani people used fixed words/phrases that Lord (1981, p. 30) called “stock in trade”, which are traditionally employed to build stories in *ehabla*. Some examples are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Interchangeable Words Used in *Ehabla*

| Stock in trade        | Parallel             | Meaning                             |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Igwa yo hubayo</i> | <i>Igwa yo manjo</i> | ideal/ prosperous kampong           |
| <i>kounging</i>       | <i>yebeining</i>     | cape/bay                            |
| <i>buyebei</i>        | <i>ayebei</i>        | cape/ beach                         |
| <i>buiso</i>          | <i>ayiso</i>         | water surface/beach                 |
| <i>ani</i>            | <i>eha</i>           | garden produce                      |
| <i>kandei</i>         | <i>kahe</i>          | names of local fish in Lake Sentani |
| <i>himem</i>          | <i>kayou</i>         | names of local fish in Lake Sentani |
| <i>buru</i>           | <i>kara</i>          | wilderness                          |
| <i>okla</i>           | <i>hakla</i>         | forest                              |
| <i>kongkla</i>        | <i>kalikla</i>       | jungle                              |

### 3.2 Vegetal *Ehabla*

The Sentani people are especially rich in folklore and use them as media to teach people about philosophy, history, sociocultural values, and natural conservation (Yektingtyas-Modouw, 2006). Old Sentani people believed in the three sacred relations shown in their day-to-day practices: (1) people to *hu* (God), (2) people to people, and (3) people to nature (Yektingtyas-Modouw, 2006, p. 73). People paid respects to the Divine by not doing evil things; people did not hurt other people nor destroyed their environment. Sentani elders E. Ongge (personal communication, May 5. 2021) and M. Puraro (personal communication, September 17. 2021) said in an interview that they looked after nature because they trusted in *hu* who watched their deeds and poured them with *onomi* (blessing) for those who were good and loyal and gave them curse (*pelo*) for those who were bad and not loyal. E. Ongge (personal communication, May 5. 2021) and M. Puraro (personal communication, September 17. 2021) asserted that the old Sentani people believed in reciprocity. Their gods would bestow those who looked after nature well with rich, successful harvests. Likewise, famine and natural disasters would befall those who destroyed nature. It is also highlighted by Ahi et al. (2014) that traditional people believe that if nature was damaged they would experience famine, sickness, and even death. This close relationship of the old Sentani people to nature is reflected through the use of natural terms in their proverbs. One of the proverbs "*Hinebu robongbu yae filele ani-eha reyolo faeu yolo hebenafene*" (when the dew of Cyclops wets the earth, the garden is fertile) exemplifies people's peaceful and prosperous life due to the contribution from the dew, earth, and garden. Their closeness to nature makes them have a good relationship with nature: they live because of nature and in return, they have to take care of nature (C. Ohee, personal communication, December 22, 2021).

Likewise, people-nature relations are present in *ehabla*. The oral poem below is replete with words associated with plants which Ryan (2017, p. 148) would call "plant-thinking" in ecocritical reading.

Holli uyi rane oro hebale  
Aka, kabo ohoro ayae wetemae  
Kanbai uyi rane oro rawale  
Aka, kabo hahoro ayae mokoiteimae

(I stepped my feet on a canoe made of *holli* wood  
Brother, it was only a nibong wood, please tell me  
I stepped my feet on a canoe made of *kanbai* wood  
Brother, it was only a nibong wood, please tell me)

Other than *eme* and *raime* discussed in the previous section, here we see the presence of other wood species *holli* and *kanbai* that are also of good quality and suitable for building sturdy canoes. Their names are repeated time and again as a reminder, hence functioning as teaching materials for later generations. They look after *nibong* for its wood. People should let the trees grow until the time they really need them. They cut trees for canoe building as needed. By reciting this *ehabla*, the elderly reminds people not to cut down, for example, fruit trees, for different purposes other than for their fruit. They grow *matoa* for people's consumption.

Using the same pattern, the *ehabla* continues to tell the importance of preserving nature by naming more types of wood while calling for forest preservation. It goes as follows.

Emere uyi ranne oro hebale  
Igwanei yokla holei kenanae hebale  
Hakum uyi ranne oro wawale  
Raeinyei yamkla narei kenane rawale

(I stepped my feet on a canoe made of *eme* wood  
to conserve forest of Kampong Igwa  
I stepped my feet on a canoe made of *hakum* wood  
to preserve forest of Kampong Raei)

Pulir uyi ranne oro hebale  
Igwanei yokla holei kenanae hebale  
Kambai uyi ranne oro wawale  
Raeinyei yamkla narei kenane rawale

(I stepped my feet on a canoe made of *pulir* wood  
to conserve forest of Kampong Igwa  
I stepped my feet on a canoe made of *kambai* wood  
to preserve forest of Kampong Igwa)



Along with *eme* (1), other types of woods are *hakum* (3), *pulir* (5), and *kambai* (7). The verbal phrases “*yokla holei*” and “*yokla narei*” mean “to conserve forest”, hence revealing how old Sentani people were able to manage their natural resources in a wise manner. We are told here that the people knew very well that trees and land were to be utilized. With their sacred myths that believed in the god of trees, they hardly cut down trees. As pointed out by one Sentani cultural practitioner (J. Ibo, personal communication, June 5, 2019), people did not chop big trees on the mountain slopes. Two elders, S. Nere (personal communication, September 12, 2021) and C. Ohee (personal communication, December 22, 2021) during the FGD added that the old Sentani people, unlike other communities in Papua, never burned their land when they opened space for planting. They let the big tree grow. In addition to paying respect to the god of the tree, they understood that trees were important for holding water to ensure the fertility of the soil. Although at that time Sentani people of old did not have scientific knowledge about the functions of big trees to keep water, reduce erosion, and moderate the climate, M. Puraro (personal communication, September 17, 2021) further explained, that the TEK preserved in Sentani folklore had positive impacts with which they managed to evade disasters like flood, erosion, and landslide. Larson (2012) and Finnegan (1992, p. 76) also highlighted that wisdom and indigenous traditional knowledge have helped traditional people in conserving nature. To quote Bringhurst in Pierotti (2016, p. 6), “Myth is an alternative form of science: an alternative form of investigation [...] it aims, like science, at perceiving and expressing ultimate truths.” By comparison, Hubbell and Ryan (2021, pp. 173–174) argue that differently from works by British Romanticist poets with their pastoral poetry, ecopoetry tells us about and advocates an eco-friendly way of life and social activism. Here we see that the old Sentani people gave us what we know now as ecopoetry.

Below is another *ehabla* about the Sentani people’s appeal to save trees for essential needs. It tells about replanting more trees for the benefit of their future generations.

Buhoning neiboi oro hebale  
Ra Iwa o mel-mel moloi kenane hebale  
Klaning neiboi oro rawale  
Ra Raeit ha mel- mel herawei kenane rawale

(I stepped my feet in the deep forest  
I planted a tree seed in Kampong Iwa  
I stepped my feet in the deep forest  
I planted a tree seed in Kampong Iwa)

Here, Sentani people in the past urged tree conservation for essential needs, replanting for future generations. This oral poem incorporates advocacy for forest preservation. In the next stanza, the speaker-singer specifically mentions what trees to plant for their offspring.

Ra Iwa rowu fi nu molale  
Ra Iwa rolow holei kenane molale  
Ra Raeit rowu ko nu herawale  
Ra Raeit ro-ohobi narei kenane herawale

(I planted sago in Kampong Iwa  
I planted for my children and grandchildren  
I planted sago in Kampong Raei  
I planted for my children and grandchildren)

This *ehabla*, therefore, suggests that by planting new trees after cutting down the old ones, the Sentani forest is duly preserved. Planting new trees is believed as a saving act to preserve nature either for their own sake or for *rolow* (2) and *ro-ohobi* (4) meaning the next generation. Old Sentani people did not selfishly use all-natural sources for their own benefit, but instead preserved them for future generations. They knew how to look after the bounty of nature for their future children and grandchildren by using it judiciously. Given the underlying environmental ethics in this, *ehabla* may also serve as an educational tool. For comparison’s sake, numerous studies demonstrate that literary works with ecological themes benefit research beyond literature, heightening students’ imagination and understanding of sustainability, honesty, moral integrity, justice, and many more (e.g., Dewi et al., 2019; Wiyatmi et al., 2023).

The *ehabla* also mentions several species of sago trees, i.e., *eli*, *nahem*, *yeba*, *follo*, *ninggi*, *yameha*, *otekulu* and *para*. These names confirm that there is a connection between people and sago trees. People give a name to each sago tree because they know exactly their characteristics. They know the ones that need to be cut down for food processing and the ones that may stay for different purposes. All types of plants mentioned

in the *ehabla* implicitly depict the Sentani people’s close relationship with nature. An ecocritical reading of this *ehabla* perceives this personification of the sago trees as evidence of ecological concerns shown by Sentani people in olden times. The TEK inherent in *ehabla* clearly informs the Sentani people in the past about food security. A recent study conducted in Tawangmangu district in Central Java province is worthy of comparison. In Tawangmangu, people practice non-rice food security through folktales, taboo words, and symbolic rituals. TEK includes communication, inheritance, philosophy, and natural resource sustainability by maintaining non-rice plant commodities, terraced agricultural land, intercropping systems, water resource management, and traditional house architecture (Sumarwati, 2022). Thus, the wealth of TEK encoded in *ehabla* must be studied more deeply.

Further evidence that the Sentani people have interacted with other living creatures is shown by the presence of several types of lake weeds. They are *neli*, *fako*, *hului* and *faewake* that live under the lake water. People believe that these weeds play their role to support the underwater ecosystem from which people’s source of fish and other aquatic life comes. The harmonious life between people and nature is thus based on their mutual relationship. People need nature as their natural reserves: land, forest, water, and food. Consequently, they conserve nature by not exploiting them at will.

The ecological conservation message is seen in another *ehabla* that talks about the migration of the Asei people from Yabansai to Ebutakho. The song lyrics are presented below.

Nelibu neiboi aweimeyande  
Maeko Ebutako yohena yoreya aweimeyande  
Fakobu neiboi rilemeyande  
Maeko Ebutako yansena yandeya aweimeyande

(I rowed passing through lake weed *neli*  
I rowed to Ebutako, our ancestor’s old kampong  
I rowed passing through lake weed *fako*  
I rowed to Ebutako, our ancestor’s old kampong)

After the next stanza repeats itself with a replacement of the name of the lake, i.e., *hului* and *faewake*, the *ehabla* continues with a *no*. The *no* here depicts the setting of the place, namely Cape Elemo and Cape Osay where the singer begins the new theme of the song.

No:  
Elemo yobole bubae, ranele bubae  
Osaito yobole bubae, ranele bubae

(The stream of Elemo Cape  
Pulling hard to Osai Cape)

Eli yam nei rorale  
Aka, ra yo nare mokanale  
Nahem yam nei hebale  
Aka, ra yam nare hebanale

(I made a hut from the roof of *eli* leaves  
Brother, I have built a village  
I made a hut from the roof of *nahem* leaves  
Brother, I have founded the village)

The stanza repeats by naming different foliage people use to make roofs. Other than *eli* leaf and *nahem* leaf, people make use of all kinds of leaves for roofs the likes of *yeba*, *follo*, *ninggi*, *yameha*, *otekulu*, and *para*.

Words associated with nature proliferate in this *ehabla*: *kounging/yebeining* (cape/bay); *neli*, *fako*, *hului*, *faewake* (lake weeds); *eme*, *raime*, *holli*, *kanbai*, *keke*, *hakum*, *ru* (fruit trees); and *yeba*, *follo*, *ninggi*, *yemaha*, *otekulu*, and *para* (a variety of sago). Throughout the journey through land and water, people come across various trees and vegetation. They discover that in addition to sago being the staple food, trees like *eme* and *ru* are also sources of food. There is no way to document all the names but to keep them in their minds through folklore. In so doing, these trees can be remembered in their life repertoire. Implicit in the *ehabla* is a request for not cutting down trees because they are people’s sources of food. On their water trip, people see the life under the lake water represented by the weeds.



Like any indigenous peoples around the world, the Sentani people emphasized the animated human-nature relationship as represented in their *ehabla* discussed. Plants of various kinds are given important places that occurred between people and their land.

### 3.3 Literary Fauna of *Ehabla*

Recognition of fauna significance is, likewise, characteristic of ecopoetry. The *ehabla* examined in this section exemplifies the principles of ecojustice and the interconnectedness of all living things. In particular, pigs and dogs are valuable animals for the Sentani people in their daily life. Culturally, people use pigs as wedding gifts, whereas dogs are their useful companions in hunting (Yektiningtyas-Modouw, 2006, p. 357). Seeing the worth of pigs and dogs, people take care of them by providing them with food. They grew plants to feed *obo* (pigs) and *yoku* (dogs). They planted seeds of *pololi nu* (apple-rose) for pigs and *waei nu* (seeds of mangos) for dogs. In fact, pigs and dogs do not eat fruits. Metaphor is used here to convey the meticulous efforts in taking care of animals as part of preserving nature. The singer says,

Ra Iwa rowu pololi nu molale  
 Ra Iwa tha-obo holei kenane molale  
 Ra Raeit rowu waei nu herawale  
 Ra Raeit tha-yoku narei kenane herawale

(I planted seeds of rose-apple in Kampong Iwa  
 I planted for the life of pigs in Kampong Iwa.  
 I planted seeds of manggo trees in Kampong Raei  
 I planted for the life of dogs in Kampong Raei)

Not only is farming important to feed cattle, but it is also an important activity to help *hinebam/hanebam* (poor people) as expressed in the following lines.

Ra Iwa rowu yengge nu molale  
 Ra Iwa tha-hinebam holei kenane molale  
 Ra Raeit rowu pelau nu herawale  
 Ra Raeit tha-hanebam narei kenane herawale

(I planted seeds of *gayam* in Kampong Iwa  
 I planted for poor people in Iwa  
 I planted seeds of areca nut in Kampong Raei  
 I planted for poor people in Raei)

In terms of ecojustice, in old Sentani culture, poor individuals were frequently homeless and landless. They frequently had insufficient food for themselves. As a result, the Sentani people were previously responsible for providing them with food. *Gayam* (*Inocarpus edulis*) and areca nut seeds are symbols for food in this song. We can see here that the old Sentani people's thinking and actual actions are to help the needy, but they do not intend to make them dependent. Compassion for the poor is implied in the *ehabla*. On the contrary, such a relationship between humans and nature may be lacking in today's setting. Today's marginalized groups, such as the homeless, are frequently victims of inequitable social structures such as land use, land enclosure, and socio-political conflicts as well as (human-generated) natural disasters mentioned at the beginning of this article. Natural calamities nowadays are attributed to humans because of their illegal activities such as sand mining and deforestation. This is to say that studying *ehabla* oral heritage with ecological themes may help to restore people's consciousness of environmental conservation and justice.

Next, the Sentani landscape is home to not only vegetation but also numerous types of fish. Various fish like *kandei*, *kahe*, *kayou*, and *hebei* are important characters in a journey to Kwadeware narrated in the *ehabla* below. Kwadeware is a village in Waibu District, Jayapura Regency, Papua. The magnificent Lake Sentani is located in Kwadeware. Around the shallow area, this lake is overgrown with *pandan* and sago plants. Here is the depiction of what Lake Sentani is like.

No  
 Buyaka hiyo-hiyo, bu yayole  
 Buyaka maye-maye, bu peyole

(Quiet and calm lake  
 Quiet and calm lake)

Igwabun neiboi manende  
The Ebaeit yo miyae hew holo ereijae ereyole  
Thaibun neiboi manende  
The Hayaere yam miyae kha holo haleijae haleyole

(Approaching the Igwa area  
A woman from Ebaeit village saw a flock of fish  
Approaching the Thai region  
The woman from Hayae village saw a flock of fish)

The speaker first describes the pristine beauty of the lake in *no* (1–2). The next stanza depicts the bountiful lake by mentioning that it teems with fish in general (1–4). The next stanza is an exact repetition but names of fish are given: *hew* (3) and *kha* (4). The flock of fish is then specified into different names of fish as sung in the subsequent lines.

Igwabun neiboi manende  
The Ebaeit yo miyae kande holo ereijae ereyole  
Thaibun neiboi manende  
The Hayaere yam miyae kahe holo haleijae haleyole

(Approaching the Igwa area  
Woman from Ebaeit village saw a flock of *kande* fish  
Approaching the Thai region  
The woman from Hayae village saw a flock of *kahe* fish)

Igwabun neiboi manende  
The Ebaeit yo miyae kayou holo ereijae ereyole  
Thaibun neiboi manende  
The Hayaere yam miyae ka hebei holo haleijae haleyole

(Approaching the Igwa area  
Woman from Ebaeit village saw a flock of *himem* fish  
Approaching the Thai region  
The woman from Hayae village saw a flock of *kayou* fish)

In the above stanzas, the speaker introduces the names of the fish in even-numbered lines: *kande*, *kahe*, *himem*, and *kayou*. Indeed, name-giving is an act of assigning agency to the object, that is, the non-human character in the text (Ryan, 2017). Here this *ehabla* draws attention to the non-human subjects that a discipline called Environmental Humanities helps to locate for its worth (Hubbell & Ryan, 2021). The *ehabla* features various nature-related words, including bay, lake, and fish. It also highlights the life under lake water represented by weeds. People encounter various aquatic beings. The lyrics indicate that the ecosystem works well in Sentani. Birds need fish and fish need both clean water and weeds to survive, and people take care of the lake because they need water and fish from it. As revealed by Sentani elders interviewed throughout this study, flora and fauna could not live in dirty lakes or polluted environments (R. Ohee, personal communication, October 10, 2019; C. Ohee, personal communication, December 22, 2021). This explained why the old Sentani people always maintained the cleanliness of the lake and the river to obtain fresh and healthy water as well as fish. They believed that a clean environment made them physically and mentally healthy. Folklore helps us remember these water creatures and encourages us not to exploit them.

Sentani also has a diverse bird population, including *kaleisolo* (seagull) and *ayeboholo* (crane). The next lines go as follows.

Nalikayi thanda manende  
The Ebaeit yo miyae kande ayeholo ereijae ereyole  
Walfokayi thanda manende  
The Hayaere yam miyae ayeboholo haleijae haleyole

(By using a foreign boat  
Women from Ebaeit village visited and saw cranes.  
By using a foreign boat  
Women from Hayae village visit and admire various kinds of birds.)

Amekayi thanda manende

The Ebaeit yo miyae kaleisolo ereijae ereyole  
Wlandakayi thanda manende  
The Hayaere yam miyae ka ayebohola haleijae haleyole

(By using a motorboat made in America  
Women from Ebaeit village visited and saw seagulls.  
By using a motor boat made in the Netherlands  
Women from Hayaere village visit and admire various kinds of birds.)

The lyrics imply that the Sentani region has been a popular destination for travelers from far and wide since the good old days. A tourist promotion might say today that traveling to Papua is not complete if people have not enjoyed the beauty of the Papuan birds. For the local government, these birds are also a tourist attraction. But in light of ecocriticism, sustainability may be under threat because of tourism. One study on the Youtefa Bay Tourism Park in Jayapura City, Papua, for example, is helpful here. While tourism is vital for biodiversity conservation and livelihoods, information on mangrove biological diversity is limited. Conducted from August 2019 to February 2020, the study revealed a diverse faunistic diversity of birds, reptiles, and macrozoobenthos, with birds having the highest density and reptiles being the most common species (Sari et al., 2022). It is obvious here that ecojustice is a hard-won battle against commodification, a situation foreshadowed by the oral heritage of *ehabla*.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study has shown several noteworthy findings. First, it confirms the previous theory that the Sentani people acknowledged three sacred relationships in the past: people to gods, people to humans, and people to nature. The three-pronged relationships have continued to govern their minds, attitudes, and actions to guarantee ecological equilibrium. In particular, they were able to uphold and balance their peaceful interactions with nature. This harmony helped them avoid natural disasters such as floods, landslides, and drought. The expression “*hu jokho erele*” (God or the Sun is watching) is a magic expression that naturally directed them not to cause water and land pollution as well as illegal logging.

Secondly, an orally sung poetry called *ehabla*, openly and implicitly states Sentani customary knowledge that taught people not to damage nature. This type of folklore is frequently used to convey TEK and environmental ethics. Through *ehabla*, it is clear how the connection to nature shaped the old Sentani people's views, attitudes, and behaviors toward the natural environment. Treating the natural world with the utmost respect, indigenous peoples like the Sentani make ideal custodians of nature.

Thirdly, the *ehabla* discussed is replete with words associated with nature, i.e., plants, animals, birds, and fish. Regrettably, the younger Sentani generation no longer understands the important ecological lessons conveyed in folklore. To conclude, given the gradual importance of environmental conservation, natural disaster mitigation, and the threats of modernity, Sentani folklore related to TEK and local wisdom needs to be revitalized and socialized, especially to the later generations. Hopefully, the revival of *ehabla* with environmental teachings may help in the reduction of natural calamities, which is where this article begins.

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