

Renegotiating Ondoafi's Customary Authority in Performing Isolo: How Does the Sentani Lake Festival Reconfigure Local Tradition?

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Abstract

Isolo is a traditional art of dancing on traditional boats (canoe) on Lake Sentani which has long been practiced by Sentani Customary Community in Papua, Indonesia. This tradition symbolizes the authority and dignity of an Ondoafi, the highest Sentani customary leader. This article examines the transformation of Isolo tradition, by analyzing how the authority of the Ondoafi is renegotiated in the state-managed setting of the Sentani Lake Festival (FDS). Cultural festivals in Indonesia are increasingly used as instruments of tourism and state representation, often reshaping the roles of customary leaders and altering the governance of indigenous traditions. Using participatory ethnography explained by legal pluralism and socio-artistic approaches, the study investigates how Isolo functions simultaneously as a sacred ritual and a cultural performance that constructs Sentani identity. The findings reveals that the repositioning of the Ondoafi during FDS reflects broader tensions between customary authority, state cultural policies, and the continuity of indigenous knowledge systems. The weakening of traditional institutions such as Rumah Kombo further limits intergenerational transmission of customary norms, making cultural sustainability increasingly dependent on state agendas. The study argues that revitalizing customary educational spaces and strengthening the role of the Ondoafi are essential for ensuring that cultural preservation efforts support indigenous agency rather than remain symbolic. Conceptually, the article contributes to debates on cultural policy, customary law, and the negotiation of customary authority in contemporary Indonesia.

1. INTRODUCTION

The *Isolo* tradition (also locally referred to as *Isosolo* or *Isoro* due to dialectal variation)¹ is a distinctive cultural practice of the Sentani customary community in Papua, Indonesia, passed down through generations. *Isolo* is a communal tradition that symbolizes the authority and dignity of an Ondoafi,²

¹ Ida Bagus Gede Surya Peradantha, "Sosioartistik Isolo Pada Festival Danau Sentani, Papua" (Dissertation, ISI Surakarta, 2024), 4.

² "Ondoafi," Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) Online, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://kbbi.web.id/ondoafi>.

the highest customary leader, who holds full legitimacy over the ritual.³ Performed as sacred songs and dances on traditional boats (canoe) sailing across Lake Sentani, *Isolo* functions both as a medium of inter-village communication and as an expression of reverence for ancestors.⁴ (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. One of *Isolo*'s Performances at the Sentani Lake Festival⁵

Since 2007, *Isolo* has operated under both customary and state regimes. As a customary rite, it is performed only when required by ceremonial obligations determined by the *Ondoafi*, following customary law rather than a fixed schedule. At the same time, *Isolo* has been incorporated into the Festival Danau Sentani (FDS) as an annual state-led cultural event, except in 2025 when the festival was cancelled due to budget constraints.⁶ This dual positioning exposes the vulnerability of state-managed cultural frameworks, as cultural continuity becomes dependent on policy and funding rather than customary obligation.⁷ Ultimately, the sustainability of *Isolo* rests on the resilience of customary institutions, even as it is increasingly framed within state cultural policy.⁸

³ Yustus Pondayar, "Ondoafi Power Structure in the Traditional Village Government System in Jayapura District," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 10, no. 10 (2023): 496–98.

⁴ See Ida Bagus Gede Surya Peradantha, "Interactions of Artistic Expressions with Spatial Contexts in the Isolo Performance of Sentani Tribe, Putali Village, Indonesia," *International Society for the Study of Vernacular Settlements* 10, no. 8 (2023): 216; and "Tarian Isoro", Jaringan Desa Wisata Kementerian Pariwisata Ekonomi Kreatif, accessed January 21, 2026, https://jadesta.kemenparekraf.go.id/atraksi/tarian_isoro.

⁵ Data: Photograph taken during ethnographic fieldwork in July 2023, within Authors' longitudinal research on *Ondoafi* authority and Sentani customary law.

⁶ Rohana Wenggi, "Yunus Wonda Tiadakan Festival Danau Sentani Tahun Ini," *Cepos Online*, June 11, 2025. <https://www.Ceposonline.Com/Kabupaten-Jayapura/1996129176/Yunus-Wonda-Tiadakan-Festival-Danau-Sentani-Tahun-Ini>.

⁷ Irwan Rumbiak, "Festival Danau Sentani 2025 Dibatalkan, Digelar Meriah Pada 2026," *Nabire News*, June 19, 2025, <https://nabirenews.com/2025/06/19/festival-danau-sentani-2025-dibatalkan-digelar-meriah-pada-2026/>.

⁸ Law No. 5 of 2017 concerning the Advancement of Culture (Law 5/2017), Art. 5 and its elucidation.

The Sentani customary community is the primary locus for addressing issues concerning the *Isolo* tradition within the FDS. From a legal perspective, a customary community refers to a group of people who live according to a customary legal system that governs various aspects of their lives, including land ownership, marriage, inheritance, and dispute resolution. Although largely unwritten, this system remains binding through social practices transmitted across generations. In Indonesia, the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (the 1945 Constitution) and various national regulations formally recognize the existence of customary law communities, customary land rights (*hak ulayat*), and cultural autonomy.⁹ This national recognition is consistent with international legal standards, particularly the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP),¹⁰ adopted by the UN General Assembly in Resolution 61/295 (2007), which affirms the right of indigenous peoples to maintain their own legal and cultural institutions¹¹ and to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions.¹² In this sense, customary law communities are generally characterized by 4 (four) key elements: a collective identity tied to a specific customary territory; a living customary legal system actively practiced; traditional institutions that function as normative authorities; and a historical and spiritual attachment to ancestral land.¹³

In the context of Papua, the legal definition of customary law communities has been explicitly outlined in Regional Regulation of Papua Province No. 5 of 2022 concerning the Recognition and Protection of Customary Law Communities in Papua Province (Papua Provincial Regulation 5/2022). The regulation defines Papuan customary law communities as “indigenous Papuan citizens residing within the five customary territories, bound by ancestral origin and subject to specific customary laws, with a strong sense of solidarity among members”.¹⁴ It further details seven (7) characteristics of Papuan customary law communities: local language; kinship system; ancestral history; institutional structure; leadership system; customary wealth; and social recognition by other customary law communities.¹⁵ In relation to the Sentani community, all these criteria are clearly met: they speak the Sentani language,¹⁶ maintain a clan-based

⁹ See the 1945 Constitution, Art. 18 (b)(2); Law No. 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights (Law 39/1999), Art. 6 (2); Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning Villages (Law 6/2014), Art. 1 (1), Art. 4 (a), Art. 103 (b) and its elucidation.

¹⁰ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 61/295 (2007), 32 (2007), https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf.

¹¹ The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous, Art.5.

¹² *Ibid.*, Art. 11.

¹³ See Cornelia Beatrice Gabriela Ene-Dinu, “The Presence of Custom as a Legal Source from ‘Country Law’ to Modern Civil Law,” *International Journal of Legal and Social Order* 3, no. 1 (2023):107; and Wayan P. Windia, *Mengenal Hukum Adat Bali* (Pustaka Ekspresi, 2023), 27.

¹⁴ Papua Provincial Regulation 5/2022, Art.1 (6).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Art. 6.

¹⁶ There are 9 (nine) mother tongues as the languages used in communication in daily life by the *Mamta/Tabi* tribe who live in Jayapura Regency which is a reflection of social interaction i.e. *Buyakha*, *Demutru*, *Djou-Wari*, *Elseng*, *Imbhi Numbay*, *Oktim* language, *Tepra*, *Yokari*, and *Moi* languages. See Jayapura Regent Regulation No. 21 of 2021 concerning the

kinship system and ancestral lineage, adhere to an institutional structure led by the *Ondoafi*, preserve customary territories (*tanah ulayat*), and sustain rituals and customary laws that regulate social life across generations.¹⁷

The Sentani customary community resides in the Lake Sentani area, encompassing the districts of Sentani, East Sentani, West Sentani, Waibu, and Ebungfauw in Jayapura Regency, Papua Province. Administratively, the Papua Provincial Government classifies Jayapura Regency as part of the Tabi customary area.¹⁸ Historically and ethnographically, however, this region forms part of the broader Mamta (Mamberamo–Tabi) cultural territory inhabited by the Mamta-Tabi peoples, within which the Sentani constitute a distinct customary community governed by the *Ondoafi* leadership system.¹⁹ This distinction reflects the layered nature of customary territorial classification in Papua, where administrative designations and indigenous territorial histories coexist within a plural legal and cultural landscape.

Regent of Jayapura has issued a decree which recognized 9 (nine) customary community areas in Jayapura Regency, namely Sentani/Buyakha, Moi, Tepra, Ormu, Yokari, Jouwwarri and Tarpi, Demutru, Elseng, and Oktim.²⁰ The decree also protects the rights of these communities, including customary institutions and customary legal norms.²¹ The Regent also issued a later decree which subsequently established 36 (Thirty Six) *kampung adat* (customary villages) in the 9 (nine) customary community areas which determines 2 (two) important matters. First the administration of *kampung adat* is regulated in accordance with the authority of the customary leaders in each *kampung adat*.²² Second, matters concerning the duties, functions, authority, responsibilities and finances of the *kampung adat* are adjusted to the prevailing regional regulations of Jayapura Regency regarding *kampung*.²³

The total population of Jayapura Regency reached 203,772 in 2024.²⁴ Within this regency, the core territorial base of the Sentani customary community is concentrated in the districts surrounding Lake Sentani, particularly Sentani (84,599), Waibu (26,047), Sentani Barat (6,705), Sentani Timur (11,062), and Ebungfauw (3,814). These 5 (five) districts constitute the main socio-territorial space of the Sentani customary community and the

Implementation of Local Content Curriculum Learning in the Mother Language through Traditional Education in Nine Areas of The *Mamta/Tabi* Tribal Council of Jayapura Regency (Jayapura Regent Regulation 21/2021), Art. 8 (1)

¹⁷ Papua Provincial Regulation 5/2022, Art. 6.

¹⁸ Papua Provincial Regulation 5/2022, Art.10 (3) (a) (1).

¹⁹ Jayapura Regent Regulation 8/2016, Art 6 (2).

²⁰ Decree of Jayapura Regent No. 319 of 2014 concerning Recognition and Protection of Customary community in Jayapura Regency (Decree of Jayapura Regent 319/2014), Dictum 1 and its Annex.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Dictum 2.

²² Decree of Jayapura Regent No. 320 of 2014 concerning the Establishment of 36 (Thirty-Six) *Kampung Adat* (Traditional Villages) in Jayapura Regency (Decree of Jayapura Regent 320/2014), Dictum 2.

²³ *Ibid.*, Dictum 3.

²⁴ “Kabupaten Jayapura Dalam Angka 2025”, Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Jayapura, accessed January 21, 2026, <https://jayapurakab.bps.go.id/id/publication/2025/02/28/c6095b4688c11107b7ee1c81/kabupaten-jayapura-dalam-angka-2025.html>.

principal spatial setting of the FDS, where the interaction between customary governance and state cultural administration takes place.

Based on population data for Jayapura Regency (2020–2025), the total population is 68,089 residents, with *Orang Asli Papua* (OAP) remaining demographically dominant at 52,641 people, while the non-OAP population accounts for 15,448 residents.²⁵ Although OAP constitute the majority, the presence of a substantial non-OAP population reflects an increasingly plural social composition in areas surrounding the Festival Danau Sentani. This demographic configuration has significant implications for the continuity of the Sentani customary community, particularly in relation to language transmission, value systems, and the authority of customary institutions. Consequently, cultural preservation cannot be confined to representational expressions within festival settings alone, but must also involve the structural strengthening of indigenous educational spaces and customary authority, especially amid ongoing processes of migration, social assimilation, and modernization.

As a legally recognized customary community, the Sentani people hold normative authority over *Isolo* under the leadership of the *Ondoafi*. However, the incorporation of *Isolo* into state cultural policy through the FDS has shifted authority into a shared and negotiated domain, generating structural tension between customary governance and state programming. Within this context, *Rumah Kombo* occupies a strategic position as a customary institution for transmitting values and reinforcing *Ondoafi* authority. Although many *Rumah Kombo* have weakened or been neglected within cultural policy frameworks, they remain crucial for sustaining *Isolo* and ensuring the intergenerational continuity of Sentani traditional values. The marginalization of institutions such as *Rumah Kombo* highlights the challenges of legal pluralism, where customary authority and state cultural governance intersect without necessarily reinforcing one another in the context of modernization and cultural commodification.²⁶

Accordingly, this study investigates 3 (three) interrelated questions. first, how the authority of the *Ondoafi* is negotiated and recontextualized within the state-managed format of the FDS?. Second, how *Isolo* functions simultaneously as a sacred customary rite and a performative expression shaped by state cultural policy?. Third, why the declining role of institutions such as the *Rumah Kombo* poses a critical challenge to the transmission of customary law and the sustainability of the Sentani customary legal system?. Together, these questions aim to illuminate how cultural transformation and state intervention reshape indigenous authority and knowledge continuity, and why revitalizing customary educational spaces and strengthening the role of the *Ondoafi* are essential for sustaining cultural integrity within the Sentani customary community.

²⁵ SIO Papua, “Data Kependudukan Provinsi Papua,” Application, Pemerintah Provinsi Papua, January 27, 2026. <https://siopapua.papua.go.id/data-pokok/data-kependudukan>

²⁶ Janine Ubink and Joanna Pickering, “The Mine, the Community, and the Chief—Mining Governance and Community Representation in Conditions of Legal Pluralism,” *Legal Pluralism and Critical Social Analysis* 56, no. 2 (2024): 240.

Previous studies on the FDS have largely examined its role in cultural identity representation,²⁷ tourism development,²⁸ and economic.²⁹ However, these studies rarely address the dynamics of customary authority and the interaction between state policy and indigenous governance. Research from other regions in Indonesia similarly demonstrates that cultural festivals intersect with customary law in complex ways, where formal recognition, youth participation, and strong indigenous education systems are crucial for sustaining customary norms.³⁰ Classical legal scholars such as Snouck Hurgronje,³¹ Van Vollenhoven,³² and Soepomo³³ underscore that customary law functions as a living normative system embedded in local power relations. Contemporary perspectives on legal pluralism also highlight the tension and negotiation between state regulations and indigenous authority within legal pluralism settings.³⁴

In Papua, the interplay between customary institutions and state cultural policy has been shown to influence local justice and cultural governance.³⁵ Specific studies regarding *Ondoafi* have also been conducted in

²⁷ Wigati Yektiningtyas, Grace Janice Martha Mantiri, and Meggy Merlin Mokay, "Pembelajaran Bahasa Sentani Menggunakan Folklor Bagi Anak-Anak di Kampung Yoboi Sentani Tengah, Kabupaten Jayapura," paper presented at Seminar Nasional Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat (SNPPM 2025), Jakarta, *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat (SNPPM 2025) Universitas Negeri Jakarta*, 2021, 73.

²⁸ Esmiralda Kogoya et al., "Pengembangan Kawasan Wisata Di Distrik Sentani Kabupaten Jayapura," *Jurnal MEDIAN: Arsitektur dan Planologi* 12, no. 2 (2022): 103.

²⁹ Ditha Mangiri et al., "Dampak Ekonomi dan Strategi Pengembangan Wisata Danau Sentani Di Kabupaten Jayapura," *Journal of Regional and Rural Development Planning (Jurnal Perencanaan Pembangunan Wilayah dan Perdesaan)* 4, no. 1 (2020): 36.

³⁰ Bernadette Quinn et al., "Festivals, Public Space and Cultural Inclusion: Public Policy Insights," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 29, nos. 11–12 (2021): 4.

³¹ Sulastriyono Sulastriyono and Sartika Intaning Pradhani, "Pemikiran Hukum Adat Djojodigoeno Dan Relevansinya Kini," *Mimbar Hukum* 30, no. 3 (2018): 450.

³² See Gerlov Van Engelenhoven, "From Indigenous Customary Law to Diasporic Cultural Heritage: Reappropriations of Adat Throughout the History of Moluccan Postcolonial Migration," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law - Revue Internationale de Sémiotique Juridique* 34, no. 3 (2021): 697; and Franz Von Benda-Beckmann and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann, "Myths and Stereotypes about Adat Law: A Reassessment of Van Vollenhoven in the Light of Current Struggles over Adat Law in Indonesia," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land-En Volkenkunde/ Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 167, nos. 2–3 (2011): 173.

³³ Adriaan Bedner and Yance Arizona, "Adat in Indonesian Land Law: A Promise for the Future or a Dead End?", *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 20, no. 5 (2019): 419.

³⁴ See Mursyid Djawas et al., "Harmonization of State, Custom, and Islamic Law in Aceh: Perspective of Legal Pluralism," *Hasanuddin Law Review* 10, no. 1 (2024): 79; and Laura S. Meitzner Yoder and Sandra Fullerton Joireman, "Possession and Precedence: Juxtaposing Customary and Legal Events to Establish Land Authority," *Land* 8, no. 8 (2019): 3.

³⁵ See Pieter Jefry Baru, "Indigenous Institutional Analysis of the Papuan People's Assembly in Southwest Papua Province," in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Administrative Science (ICAS 2024)*, ed. Ahmad Yani Andi and Ismail Nuralamsyah, Advances in Economics, Business and Management Research (Atlantis Press International BV, 2025), 903-904; and Rosita Dewi, "Hijacking Adat Recognition Through the Establishment of New Customary Community Council in Papua, Indonesia," *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 4, no. 3 (2017): 556.

the context of its historical and cultural role,³⁶ its structure, role and function in the Government System in Jayapura Regency,³⁷ and its authority to resolve customary land conflict.³⁸ This conceptual trajectory provides a foundation for examining how the authority of the *Ondoafi* is negotiated within the FDS and why the declining role of institutions such as the *Rumah Kombo* poses significant implications for the continuity of *Isolo* and the Sentani customary legal system.

This study employs a participatory ethnographic approach combined with socio-legal document analysis to examine the transformation of *Isolo* within the Sentani customary law system and its incorporation into the FDS. The analysis draws on long-term ethnographic fieldwork and engagement with the Sentani customary community since 2022, supplemented by focused data collection carried out between 2024 and 2025 specifically for the purposes of this article. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with *Ondoafi*, customary leaders, *Isolo* performers, cultural activists, academics, and local government officials, as well as through participant observation in both ritual and festival contexts. Additional materials were obtained from customary regulations, regional government decrees, festival programs, and media archives, allowing triangulation between normative frameworks, institutional practices, and lived cultural experience.

Analytically, the study is grounded in a socio-legal framework that conceptualizes cultural performance as a site where law, social norms, and institutional-technological governance interact. Building on the socio-legal model of semi-autonomous fields,³⁹ the analysis treats customary law (*Ondoafi* authority and customary norms), social-cultural values (ritual meaning, kinship, and spiritual legitimacy), and institutional governance (festival organization, scheduling, funding, and staging) as interrelated domains that co-produce regulatory authority over *Isolo*. Within this framework, legal pluralism is used to explain how state cultural policy and customary law operate simultaneously but not always symmetrically, while a socio-artistic perspective situates *Isolo* as a performative practice through which power, legitimacy, and cultural meaning are publicly negotiated.⁴⁰ This combined approach allows the study to move beyond viewing *Isolo* merely as either ritual or performance and instead to analyze it as a socio-legal arena in which customary authority is continuously rearticulated within state-managed cultural institutions.

³⁶ Ibrahim Kristofol Kendi and Muhammad Akmal Ibrahim, "Forms and Historical and Cultural Roles of Traditional Governance (Ondoafi/ondofolo) in the Governance of Indigenous Communities in Jayapura Regency, Papua Province," *KnE Social Sciences* 10, no.18 (2025): 426.

³⁷ Hendrik Krisifu, "The Power Structure of Ondoafi in the Adat Village Government System of Jayapura Regency," *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization* 91 (2019): 68.

³⁸ Tri Mulyadi et al, "The Legitimacy of Ondoafi in Conflict Settlement of Customary Land Tenure in Sentani, Papua". *Jurnal Media Hukum* 26 (2019): 118.

³⁹ Michael Anthony C. Dizon, "Socio-Legal Study of Technology: A Norms and Values Approach to Hacking and Encryption Law and Policy," *Computer Law & Security Review* 52 (April 2024): 5.

⁴⁰ Peradantha, "Sosioartistik Isolo..." *Op. Cit.*, 33; and Manuel Munoz Bellerin, "Interdisciplinary and Creative Embodiment: The Socio-Artistic Method in the Production of Democratic Knowledge," *ArtsEduca* 37 (2023): 24.

2. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

2.1. The Meaning of *Ondoafi* Authority in the Context of Customary Law

Customary law is an unwritten rule or norm that exists within customary law communities, which regulates, binds, and is upheld, and carries sanctions.⁴¹ It holds a central position as a moral, cultural, and institutional foundation in regulating communal life in Papua as it governs all aspects of community life, including land issues, traditional marriage, norm violations, and conflict resolution through customary deliberation or mediation.⁴²

Within the Sentani customary system, the *Ondoafi* holds the highest position of authority under customary law. *Ondoafi*, as the head of clan/tribe,⁴³ is the supreme leader of customary community which has charismatic power and great power determine the direction of policy in governing the community.⁴⁴ Its task covers all aspects of life in the village such as the fields of religion, economy, social welfare, security, and justice.⁴⁵

The *Ondoafi* functions as guardian of values, mediator, and customary judge, whose decisions carry binding legal force recognized by the community.⁴⁶ While the enforcement of customary law was generally carried out with customary council meeting,⁴⁷ customary decisions have legal force that is recognized and respected by the community.⁴⁸ This authority is hereditary and patrilineal, rooted in ancestral lineage rather than individual charisma, distinguishing it from the Big Man model found elsewhere in Melanesia.⁴⁹ Operating within a collective governance system (see Figure 2), the *Ondoafi* is supported by a structured hierarchy of customary officials, including advisors, messengers, and clan heads, which ensures the coherence and continuity of Sentani customary law.⁵⁰

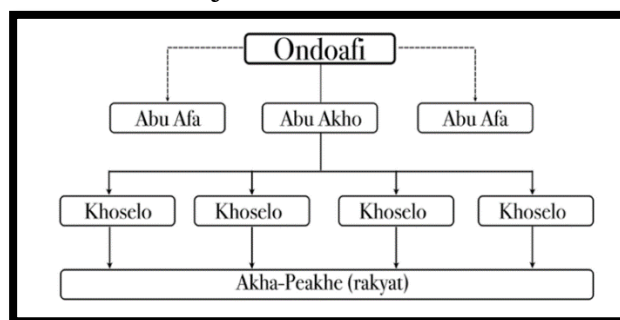


Figure 2. Functional structure of the *Ondoafi* in Sentani customary governance.⁵¹

⁴¹ Law No. 2 of 2021 concerning the Second Amendment to Law No. 21 of 2001 concerning Special Autonomy for Papua Province (Law 2/2021), Art. 1 (19).

⁴² Kendi and Ibrahim, *op.cit.*, 425.

⁴³ Krisifu, *op.cit.*, 59, 62.

⁴⁴ Mulyadi et al, *op.cit.*, 117.

⁴⁵ Frans Reumi, "Local Leadership Legal of Etnography in Traditional Area in Papua (Legal Anthropology Perspective)," *Papua Law Journal* 2, no.2 (2018): 146.

⁴⁶ Kendi and Ibrahim, *loc.cit.*

⁴⁷ Mulyadi et al, *op.cit.*, 117.

⁴⁸ Kendi and Ibrahim, *loc.cit.*

⁴⁹ Johszua Robert Mansoben, *Sistem Politik Tradisional di Irian Jaya*, 5th ed. (LIPI-RUL, 1995). 46-47.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 208.

⁵¹ Data: this functional structure is conceived by Authors, but also combined with other studies. See also Yustus Pondayar, "Ondoafi Power Structure in the Traditional Village

The *Ondoafi* holds patrilineally inherited authority rooted in the founding lineage of the village, exercising final control over social, ecological, economic, and religious life under customary law.⁵² As noted by Naftali Felle of Abar Village, the *Ondoafi*'s decisions are believed to bring blessing or misfortune, reflecting his role as a spiritual intermediary between the human and ancestral realms.⁵³ This authority is symbolically affirmed through ritual regalia and inauguration rites, reinforcing the binding social and spiritual force of customary law within the Sentani community.⁵⁴

2.2. Law and Art in Context: *Ondoafi*'s Relationship Within the *Isolo* Tradition

The relationship between law and art is typically conceptualized through a disciplinary divide, framing art as an instrument within legal practice and scholarship, or positioning law as a context for artistic engagement.⁵⁵ Traditional scholarship on the intersection of law and art has primarily concentrated on substantive legal domains most relevant to art, including copyright and cultural heritage law. Alternatively, some studies address general legal principles and their specific application to art, such as the relationship between art and freedom of expression.⁵⁶

Field interviews show that *Isolo* functions not only as ritual but as a public enactment of customary authority within the Sentani community.⁵⁷ Under the patrilineal leadership of the *Ondoafi*, *Isolo* operates as both an aesthetic practice and a juridical space that affirms legal, spiritual, and territorial authority through regulated roles, symbols, and ritual sequencing, including the central positioning of the lead dancer in the canoe (see Figure 3). When incorporated into the state-managed FDS, this juridical function is partially obscured as emphasis shifts toward aesthetic and touristic representation, placing *Isolo* at a negotiated intersection of customary governance, state cultural policy, and artistic expression.⁵⁸

Government System in Jayapura District," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 10, no. 10 (2023): 494.

⁵² Mansoben, *op. cit.*, 207.

⁵³ Naftali Felle, "Ondoafi Authority in Sentani." interview by Ida Bagus Gede Surya Peradantha, conducted as part of doctoral dissertation on "Sosioartistik *Isolo*..." in Pascasarjana Institut Seni Indonesia Surakarta, 2024 fieldwork, Jayapura, July 10, 2023.

⁵⁴ I Made Sudayasa, Simon Abdi Kari Frank, and Enos Hosea Rumansara, "Pergeseran Sistem Kepemimpinan Tradisional Pada Masyarakat Adat Kampung Ayapo Kabupaten Jayapura," *Cenderawasih: Jurnal Antropologi Papua* 2, no. 2 (2021): 107.

⁵⁵ Amin Parsa and Eric Snodgrass, "Legislative Arts: Interplays of Art and Law," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 14, no.1 (2022): 1.

⁵⁶ Jani McCutcheon and Fiona McGaughey, "Introduction to the Research Handbook on Art and Law," in *Research Handbook on Art and Law*, eds. Jani McCutcheon and Fiona McGaughey (Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2020), 1.

⁵⁷ Adolf Marweri, "The Meaning of *Isolo*," interview by Ida Bagus Gede Surya Peradantha, Jayapura, October 22, 2022.

⁵⁸ Peradantha, "Sosioartistik *Isolo*..." *op.cit.*, 289.



Figure 3. An *Isolo* performance at the FDS, 2024⁵⁹

2.3 Negotiating Authority within the State Performance Arena

2.3.1 The Emergence of the Sentani Lake Festival

The FDS is a state-led cultural revitalization initiative introduced in 2007 as part of a culture-based development strategy.⁶⁰ While the inclusion of *Isolo* as a central performance reflects a commitment to public cultural expression, relocating the ritual into a state-managed festival has reconfigured its governance.⁶¹ Authority that once rested exclusively with the *Ondoafi* is now shared with administrative actors, replacing ritual obligation with event scheduling and bureaucratic coordination, and gradually weakening the customary values that traditionally governed *Isolo*.

The festival is consistently held at Kalkhote Pier, Asei Village, in East Sentani District. Each year, participating villages interpret selected themes through creative presentations. Spanning three to four days, the FDS features not only dance and *Isolo* as core performances, but also serves as a venue for local entrepreneurs to showcase and sell crafts, clothing, traditional Sentani garments, and local cuisine. Table 1 presents the thematic variations of *Isolo* performances from 2007 to 2024, compiled from multiple sources. For year 2025, *Isolo* performances were not implemented due to budget efficiency.⁶²

⁵⁹ Data: Field documentation by Marshel Ongge, member of the research team, under the author's supervision, 2024.

⁶⁰ Fred Modouw, "The Initiation of the Festival Danau Sentani", interview by Ida Bagus Gede Surya Peradantha, Jayapura, October 11, 2022.

⁶¹ Tukan, Peter, "Inspirator Festival Danau Sentani Habel Melkias Suwae Sudah Beristirahat Dalam Damai," *Papua Inside* (Jayapura), September 8, 2020, <https://papuainside.id/inspirator-festival-danau-sentani-habel-melkias-suwae-sudah-beristirahat-dalam-damai/>. <https://papuainside.id/inspirator-festival-danau-sentani-habel-melkias-suwae-sudah-beristirahat-dalam-damai/>

⁶² Wenggi, Rohana, "Yunus Wonda Tiadakan Festival Danau Sentani Tahun Ini." <https://www.ceposonline.com/kabupaten-jayapura/1996129176/yunus-wonda-tiadakan-festival-danau-sentani-tahun-ini>

Table 1. Variety of Themes for FDS From 2007-2024⁶³

FDS No.	Year	Theme
1	2007	Not yet using a theme
2	2008	Welcome to the Culture Event
3	2009	Sound of Tifa, Sound of Life
4	2010	Loving Culture for Our Future
5	2011	Love, Peace and Harmony
6	2012	One for All
7	2013	<i>Bertahan di atas Goncangan Badai</i> (free translation: Surviving the Storm)
8	2014	My Culture is My Life
9	2015	Unity in Diversity to Achieve Glory
10	2016	My Culture, My Prosperous
11	2017	Creating Culture Harmony
12	2018	<i>Khenambai Umbai: Satu Hati, Satu Jiwa Untuk Indonesia</i> (free translation: <i>Khenambai Umbai: One Hear, One Soul for Indonesia</i>)
13	2022	There is no specific theme as it is combined with the Congress of the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN).
14	2023	<i>Sagu adalah Kehidupanku</i> (free translation: Sago is My Life)
15	2024	Isosolo is Our Culture

The formation of the FDS reflects evolving state–customary relations within a culture-based development agenda. Initiated in the early 2000s, the festival created new spaces for indigenous participation while simultaneously introducing negotiations over authority between customary institutions and government actors. Although the FDS has unified diverse cultural expressions, it also exposes ongoing tensions between ritual authenticity and the logic of modern festival governance, revealing how cultural space is regulated and contested within contemporary power structures.

The Sentani Lake is not only meaningful for the local community in Jayapura Regency but has a strategic value as it becomes a national Priority conservation area which needs to be utilized wisely to achieve a prosperous and sustainable life.⁶⁴ In terms of spatial planning, a tourism zone may be developed in Danau Sentani as a spatial allocation that is part of a cultivation area that is developed to develop tourism activities that include natural tourism, cultural tourism, and artificial tourism.⁶⁵

⁶³ Data: See Peradantha, “Sosioartistik Isolo.....”, *op. cit*, 129; and First Author’s additional direct observation on 19 June 2024.

⁶⁴ Regulation of Jayapura Regent No. 74 of 2021 concerning Control of Space Utilization in the Lake Sentani Area and Its Surroundings (Jayapura Regent Regulation 74/2021), Consideration letter b.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Art. 1 (37), 18 (b), 27 (a).

2.3.2 Reactualization of Ondoafi Authority in Sentani Lake Festival

The reconfiguration of *Ondoafi* authority within the FDS is reflected in the transformation of *Isolo* from an unscheduled, village-based ritual led by the *Ondoafi* into an annually programmed public performance. While customary *Isolo* operates through inter-village communication and ritual boat processions governed by internal needs, its festival form is shaped by administrative planning and shared authority among customary leaders, government actors, and festival organizers. Fieldwork highlights clear differences between customary and festival-based *Isolo* in terms of leadership roles, communication processes, and governance principles, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Transformation of *Ondoafi* Authority in the Context of *Isolo*: Tradition and FDS Format⁶⁶

Aspects of <i>Ondoafi</i> Authority	In the Context of Custom	In the Context of Festivals (FDS)
Authority Status	Center of power and full customary legitimacy	Symbolic, consultative, not part of the executive structure
Mechanism for Granting Approval	Mandatory and determines the validity of rituals	Invited to give approval, but does not determine the implementer.
Role in Determining Participants	Directly determines who performs	Does not determine, usually determined by the studio or committee
Involvement in the <i>Isolo</i> Narrative	Determines the content of the narrative, ritual structure, and characters	Not directly involved in the content of the performance narrative
Relationship with the Event Organizer	The main leader, no external structure	Symbolically connected to the government committee

This comparison indicates a shift from a collectivist customary system to a structure shaped by state facilitation and art studios. In customary practice, *Isolo* unfolds organically under the *Ondoafi*'s blessing and clan coordination, with community members directly involved in preparation and participation. Within the FDS framework, participation is organized through art studios and government-managed schedules, reducing the *Ondoafi*'s role to symbolic approval rather than substantive authority.

The formation of *Isolo* groups within the FDS reflects a shift in participation and authority from customary governance to festival administration. While ritual approval by the *Ondoafi* remains symbolically important, operational control over performers and organization has moved to art studios with state support. This shift illustrates a renegotiation of collective rights in which customary norms are partially displaced by

⁶⁶ First author's original analytical synthesis based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted since 2022, combined with interviews and document analysis (2023–2024).

bureaucratic scheduling and incentive-based participation, signaling a deeper transformation of the normative foundations of the Sentani customary legal order.

2.4. The Sociocultural Impact of FDS on the Sentani Customary Community

This study finds that the transformation of *Isolo* within the FDS has significantly reconfigured the relationship between customary law and state cultural policy in the Sentani community. Traditionally, *Isolo* functioned as a ritual governed by customary law under the authority of the *Ondoafi*, serving not only as a cultural expression but also as a mechanism for transmitting spiritual values, social norms, and legal legitimacy. Within the FDS framework, however, the *Ondoafi*'s authority is no longer exclusive and must be negotiated with state administrative structures, placing *Isolo* within a policy-driven cultural arena.⁶⁷ While the FDS expands participation and cultural visibility, it prioritizes aesthetic spectacle over ritual depth, marginalizing spiritual values in the absence of active customary education, particularly through the weakened role of *Rumah Kombo*.⁶⁸

Field data reveal that the decline of *Rumah Kombo* has disrupted intergenerational transmission of customary values. Formerly, *Rumah Kombo* provided structured initiation through which young men acquired social legitimacy, ritual competence, and the right to participate in *Isolo*.⁶⁹ Today, these functions have largely disappeared due to the expansion of state-based education systems and religious transformation,⁷⁰ leaving younger generations without an internal mechanism for learning Sentani language, spiritual values, and customary norms.

The sociocultural vulnerability of this condition became evident with the cancellation of the FDS in 2025 due to government budget cuts.⁷¹ This event exposed the dependence of *Isolo* on state-sponsored cultural programming and the absence of autonomous customary institutions capable of sustaining the tradition independently.⁷² Although renewed policy efforts toward FDS 2026 demonstrate continued state commitment, these measures

⁶⁷ Matina Magkou, Alice Borch, and Maud Péliissier, "The Rise of the Commons, Cultural Spaces and Policy in Southern Europe: Why Did This Happen and Why Do We Care?", *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, (2025): 14.

⁶⁸ The picture of *Rumah Kombo* can be seen in Salama, *loc.cit.*

⁶⁹ Muhammad Irfan Mahmud, "Arsitektur Rumah Tradisional Sentani Papua", 1st ed. (Direktorat Tradisi, Direktorat Jenderal Nilai Budaya, Seni dan Film, Kementerian Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata, 2010), 49–50.

⁷⁰ I Made Sudayasa, Simon Abdi Kari Frank, et al., "Pergeseran Sistem Kepemimpinan Tradisional Pada Masyarakat Adat Kampung Ayapo Kabupaten Jayapura," *Cenderawasih* 2, no. 2 (2021): 113.

⁷¹ Imel, "Disbudpar Jayapura Kumpulkan Seniman Dan Pelaku Pariwisata," *Pemerintah Kabupaten Jayapura*, November 28, 2025. <https://jayapurakab.go.id/disbudpar-jayapura-kumpulkan-seniman-dan-pelaku-pariwisata/>.

⁷² Putri Nurjannah Kurita, "Lokasi Festival Danau Sentani Direnovasi, Pemkab Jayapura Harap Dukungan Masyarakat," *Tribun-Papua*, Desember 13, 2025, <https://papua.tribunnews.com/pemkab-jayapura/121861/lokasi-festival-danau-sentani-direnovasi-pemkab-jayapura-harap-dukungan-masyarakat>.

reaffirm the festival as an administratively managed cultural regime rather than a system grounded in customary obligation and indigenous education.

The decline of *Rumah Kombo* has increased the Sentani community's dependence on state cultural frameworks and weakened intergenerational transmission of spiritual values, social norms, and customary law. Community leaders report a sharp decline in Sentani language use among youth,⁷³ reflecting the loss of traditional education spaces and the erosion of internal cultural learning mechanisms. These observations are reinforced by the first author's ethnographic experience during the reconstruction of the *Ibhea Obhea* dance in Doyo Lama Village.⁷⁴ Efforts to involve local youth in rehearsals were unsuccessful, and even when traditional song lyrics were translated, university students struggled to grasp their meaning. Such instances reveal the structural consequences of losing active customary education spaces and highlight a growing disconnection between younger generations and their cultural heritage.⁷⁵

This rupture has become a serious concern among Sentani elders. According to Corry Ohey, *Rumah Kombo* plays a vital role in transmitting Sentani cultural knowledge to younger generations, particularly in introducing customary legal systems. Rituals still maintained by the community require a sound understanding of tradition, including fluency in the Sentani language.⁷⁶ Fred Modouw, both a cultural insider and government official, agreed that *Rumah Kombo* should be revitalized within a more modern framework. He admitted that the government has yet to provide specific attention to its restoration.⁷⁷

The weakening of customary authority and institutions such as *Rumah Kombo* reflects a broader pattern of structural marginalization experienced by indigenous communities globally. As Roy argues, colonial legacies, territorial appropriation, and forced integration into national economic systems have accelerated the erosion of customary values and legal norms.⁷⁸ In Sentani, this pressure is evident in the shift from *Ondoafi*-based leadership toward state-managed cultural governance through the festival framework. Strengthening customary institutions is therefore essential not only for cultural preservation but also as a form of resistance to deeper structural assimilation.

⁷³ Dian Irmanda Tokoro, "The Decline of Sentani Language Proficiency", interview by Ida Bagus Gede Surya Peradantha and Sara Ida Magdalena Awi, Jayapura, June 12, 2025.

⁷⁴ Field notes from the first author's ethnographic engagement during the reconstruction of the *Ibhea Obhea* dance in Doyo Lama Village, Jayapura Regency, November 2020.

⁷⁵ Ida Bagus Gede Surya Peradantha and Luh Kompyang Sri Wahyuni, "Cultural Dynamics in The Evolution of Ibhea Obhea Dance in Doyo Lama Village, Papua: From Sacred Ritual to Secular Performance," *Mudra Jurnal Seni Budaya* 40, no. 1 (2025): 38.

⁷⁶ Corry Ohey, "The Role of Rumah Kombo in Customary Education," interview by Ida Bagus Gede Surya Peradantha and Sara Ida Magdalena Awi, Jayapura, June 16, 2025.

⁷⁷ Fred Modouw, "Interview with a Cultural Official and Sentani Cultural Insider," interview by Ida Bagus Gede Surya Peradantha, Jayapura, September 15, 2025.

⁷⁸ Raja Devasish Roy, "Traditional Customary Laws and Indigenous Peoples in Asia (Minority Rights Group International)", [13]. <https://minorityrights.org/app/uploads/2024/01/download-131-traditional-customary-laws-and-indigenous-peoples-in-asia.pdf>.

Within the Sentani customary system, *Isolo* and the authority of the *Ondoafi* constitute an integrated normative order that links spiritual legitimacy, social organization, and regulatory authority. These interrelated functions sustain ethical leadership, collective identity, and customary law, making them essential to cultural governance beyond mere heritage preservation. The findings demonstrate that revitalizing *Rumah Kombo* is critical not for maintaining ritual form, but for restoring customary education, internalized values, and social authority in everyday life. While the FDS enhances visibility and economic exchange, its emphasis on spectacle has weakened the transmission of customary law and spiritual responsibility. Without reintegrating public performance with structured customary education, *Isolo* risks remaining culturally visible yet normatively hollow.

2.5. Comparative Insights

Similar forms of state intervention in cultural expression can be observed across various festival contexts, where governments actively shape cultural formats through administrative regulation and cultural policy. In Banyuwangi, East Java Province, cultural representation is systematically supported by creative economy policies and globally oriented promotion.⁷⁹ Through the Banyuwangi Ethno Carnival (BEC), the Banyuwangi Regency Government of East Java Province, as a state actor at the local level, curates festival formats and visual narratives aligned with tourism agendas and cultural diplomacy, emphasizing spectacle, youth creativity, and contemporary reinterpretation of tradition.⁸⁰

A different configuration emerges in Bali Province through the Bali Arts Festival (*Pesta Kesenian Bali*/PKB). Held annually since 1979 at the Bali Arts Centre (*Taman Budaya Bali*) in Denpasar, PKB is embedded within a cultural infrastructure developed by the provincial government in the early 1970s to preserve and advance Balinese arts.⁸¹ Studies indicate that PKB functions not merely as an annual cultural showcase, but as a mechanism of cultural revitalization that sustains artistic production beyond the festival itself.⁸² Regular staging has generated continuous demand for art, encouraged the formation of art groups at the village (*desa/banjar*) level, and fostered intergenerational transmission by actively involving children and adolescents in performances and preparations. Classical and contemporary expressions are negotiated within a stable institutional framework, allowing cultural commodification to coexist with value continuity and customary learning. As

⁷⁹ Albert Tallapessy, "Making the Local Transformative: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Banyuwangi's Cultural Policy," paper presented at Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Arts, Language and Culture (ICALC 2018), Surakarta, Indonesia, *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Arts, Language and Culture (ICALC 2018)*, 2019, 131.

⁸⁰ Novi Anoegrajekti et al., "Banyuwangi Ethno Carnival as Visualization of Tradition: The Policy of Culture and Tradition Revitalization through Enhancement of Innovation and Locality-Based Creative Industry," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2018) .

⁸¹ I Gusti Ayu Agung Mas Triadnyani, Lily Tjahjandari, and Turita Indah Setyani, "The Public Space Management Strategy Atthe Bali Arts Centre during the AnnualBali Arts Festival," *Jurnal Kajian Bali (Journal of Bali Studies)* 14, no. 2 (2024): 541.

⁸² I Gusti Agung Ayu Wulandari, Anak Agung Sri Purnami, and I Gusti Agung Oka Mahagangga, "Bali Arts Festival: A Contributor to Sustainable Development?," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 824, no. 1 (2021): 5.

noted by Foley and Sumandhi, “the arts are the festival, not an enhancement of a ceremony,” underscoring that PKB is not a ritual extension but a deliberate cultural platform where artistic practice becomes the core event rather than a subsidiary of religious rites.⁸³

Unlike PKB, where artistic practice is institutionally framed as the core of the festival and deliberately detached from ritual obligation, *Isolo* cannot be separated from customary authority without fundamentally altering its legal and spiritual foundations. In the Sentani context, artistic performance is inseparable from the legitimacy of the *Ondoafi* and the normative order of customary law. Consequently, the transformation of *Isolo* within the FDS represents a far more sensitive and consequential process than in Banyuwangi or Bali.

Comparable dynamics can also be observed in major international festivals such as the Edinburgh International Festival (EIF) in Scotland and *La Mercè* in Barcelona, Spain. The EIF is an annual state-supported international arts festival founded in the post-war period, presenting curated programmes of music, theatre, dance, and opera across formal venues and public spaces in Edinburgh.⁸⁴ *La Mercè*, by contrast, is Barcelona's largest civic festival, held annually in honour of the city's patron saint and characterised by large-scale street performances, parades, and participatory cultural rituals embedded in the urban fabric.⁸⁵ Empirical studies from Edinburgh and Barcelona show that the intensification of festival governance brings cultural expression under administrative control, producing tensions over public space and participation.⁸⁶ In these cities, festivals increasingly serve external reputational and tourism interests, often at the expense of locally embedded cultural practices and citizens' rights to public space. While these festivals are not lake festivals and do not involve customary legal authority in the same sense as indigenous societies, they demonstrate how state intervention restructures cultural meaning, participation, and governance in contemporary festival settings.

In the FDS, negotiation extends beyond performance aesthetics and spatial organization to encompass customary legal authority itself. While Banyuwangi demonstrates a relatively stable integration between state policy and cultural creativity, and Bali reflects a mature institutionalization of cultural sustainability, Sentani faces a fragmentation of meaning due to the weakening of value transmission institutions such as the *Rumah Kombo* and the dominance of state-centered festival planning. The central challenge in Sentani therefore lies not only in festival format, but in the fractured

⁸³ Kathy Foley and I Nyoman Sumandhi, “The Bali Arts Festival: An Interview with I Nyoman Sumandhi,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 11, no. 2 (1994): 289.

⁸⁴ “12 Highlights of the Edinburgh International Festival 2025,” Edinburgh Festival City.Com, Accessed January 21, 2026, <https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/inspiration/459-highlights-of-the-edinburgh-international-festival-2025>.

⁸⁵ “La Mercè, Barcelona's Biggest Festival,” Barcelo Experiences, accessed January 21, 2026, <https://www.barcelo.com/guia-turismo/en/spain/barcelona/things-to-do/fiestas-de-la-merce-la-fiesta-grande-de-barcelona/>.

⁸⁶ David McGillivray, Iba Colombo, and Xavier Villanueva, “Tensions and Disputes over Public Space in Festival Cities: Insights from Barcelona and Edinburgh,” *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events* 14, no. 3 (2022): 234–237.

relationship between customary authority, cultural transmission, and state cultural strategies.

Comparisons with other lake-based festivals further reinforce this pattern. Festivals such as the Lake Toba Festival in North Sumatra,⁸⁷ the Lindu Lake Festival in Central Sulawesi,⁸⁸ the Lake Çıldır Festival in Turkey,⁸⁹ and the Lake of Stars Festival in Malawi,⁹⁰ demonstrate how aquatic cultural landscapes are increasingly mobilized as tourism assets. Yet in many of these cases, ritual meanings are selectively retained or symbolically represented, while governance structures remain largely state-driven. The Sentani case stands apart in that *Isolo* continues to function as a customary legal practice rather than a purely cultural performance, rendering questions of authority, legitimacy, and cultural sustainability inseparable from legal pluralism.

These comparative insights demonstrate that festivalization does not yield uniform effects. Where customary education and institutional continuity remain strong, festivals can reinforce cultural sustainability; where they are weakened, festivalization risks transforming living customary law into representational display. Across cases, state intervention consistently reshapes the form and authority of cultural expression, producing negotiated and often contested relations between customary law and cultural policy. In the case of *Isolo*, this negotiation is especially critical, as festivalization intervenes directly in a living customary legal system rather than in symbolic heritage alone.

2.6. Integrating Legal Frameworks in Strategies for Cultural Sustainability and Indigenous Authority in the Festival Danau Sentani

In response to these findings, four legal principles are essential to ensure that *Isolo* is governed as a living customary practice rather than reduced to symbolic display. First, *Isolo* must be legally recognized as living customary law that carries binding norms regulating leadership, participation, and ritual legitimacy. Second, the *Ondoafi* must be acknowledged as a customary legal subject whose authority extends beyond ceremonial representation to substantive juridical decision-making within cultural governance. Third, participatory mechanisms grounded in free, prior, and informed consent are required to ensure that festival adaptation does not override customary logic.⁹¹ Fourth, legal protection must safeguard not only

⁸⁷ Aditiya Pratama Daryana, Vina Gabriella Saragih, and Amalia Akita, "Strategy for Developing Lake Toba Tourism Potential," *Journal of Indonesian Tourism, Hospitality and Recreation* 8, no. 1 (2025): 106.

⁸⁸ "Festival Danau Lindu," Indonesia Travel, accessed January 21, 2026, <https://www.indonesia.travel/id/id/events/event-detail/lake-lindu-festival/>.

⁸⁹ Özgür Zaric, Abuzer Çelekli, and Sidar Yaygır, "Lakes of Turkey: Comprehensive Review of Lake Çıldır," *Aquatic Sciences and Engineering* 0, no. 0 (2023): 60.

⁹⁰ Ano Shumba, "Lake of Stars Festival: Celebrating Malawi's Culture on a Global Stage," *Music in Africa*, October 15, 2025. <https://www.musicinafrica.net/magazine/lake-stars-festival-celebrating-malawis-culture-global-stage>.

⁹¹ Sumarni Sumarni, Muhammad Ery Wijaya, and Astrid Meilasari Sugiana, "Safeguarding Indigenous Rights and Territories: Integrating Dayak Ngaju Wisdom in Peatland Ecosystem Management," *Udayana Journal of Law and Culture* 7, no. 2 (2023): 131–132.

aesthetic expression but also the spiritual, social, and regulatory dimensions that constitute *Isolo*'s normative core.

Current cultural policy frameworks tend to privilege aesthetic presentation and economic impact, while overlooking the normative values that sustain customary order. Protecting *Isolo* therefore requires regulatory sensitivity to its role in affirming ancestral relations, organizing inter-village solidarity, and regulating collective rights. Contemporary international legal scholarship similarly emphasizes that the protection of local and indigenous communities must extend beyond symbolic recognition to include substantive safeguards for social, cultural, and normative interests against external interventions.⁹² These dimensions constitute the core of *Isolo*'s legal and social significance.

The cancellation of the FDS in 2025 further demonstrates the vulnerability of relying on state-driven cultural platforms, reinforcing the urgency of strengthening internal customary institutions. In this context, revitalizing *Rumah Kombo* emerges as a legal and institutional necessity for sustaining customary education, indigenous authority, and intergenerational transmission of values. To operationalize these principles, this study proposes a hybrid governance model through a Sentani Cultural Network that strengthens village-based customary institutions while coordinating with state agencies. Formalized through a Regent's Decree, this network would position the state as facilitator rather than substitute, allowing the FDS to function as a complementary platform. Without such integration, the festivalization of *Isolo* risks transforming a juridical and spiritual practice into a representational artifact, undermining the very authority and values it seeks to sustain.

3. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the authority of the *Ondoafi* is reshaped when the *Isolo* tradition moves from its customary domain into the state-managed FDS, where ancestral legitimacy becomes reduced to symbolic participation and customary decision-making is absorbed into administrative structures. The findings show that *Isolo* continues to operate as both a sacred rite and a juridical performance through which norms, kinship obligations, and territorial authority are expressed, yet these legal meanings become increasingly diluted when ritual knowledge is reinterpreted for festival choreography that prioritizes visibility over customary substance. The decline of the *Rumah Kombo* further weakens the legal and moral foundations of Sentani customary life, since the loss of these educational spaces disrupts the transmission of customary law and undermines the institutional base that supports *Ondoafi* authority. These insights reveal that legal pluralism in practice involves continuous renegotiation of power, where state cultural policies can reconfigure indigenous authority and reshape the legal significance of cultural performance. What remains uncertain is how younger generations internalize customary authority when festival-oriented representations dominate public experience, how communities navigate

⁹² Putu Purwaningsih, "Protection for the Rights and Interests of Local Communities Adversely Affected by Multinational Energy Companies' Activities," *Udayana Journal of Law and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2022): 1.

tensions between ancestral law and state-managed cultural formats, and which legal or institutional mechanisms are most effective for supporting the continuity of customary governance. Future research should examine these dynamics across indigenous communities, assess long-term impacts of cultural festivals on legal transmission, and evaluate regulatory models that strengthen Indigenous authority within evolving state cultural frameworks.

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