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Foi Habat Mantra in Elaar Let Village Keci Kecil Timur Selatan District Southeast Maluku Regency: An Ecocriticism Literature

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Abstract

This study aims to describe one of the forms of old poetry in Maluku, namely the *foi habat spells* in Elaar Let Village, Kei Kecil Timur Selatan District, Southeast Maluku Regency based on a study of literary ecocriticism. The approach used in this study is a qualitative approach that focuses on the *foi habat spells* which contains literary ecocriticism. For data collection, the techniques used are observation techniques, interview techniques, recording techniques, field note techniques, and documentation techniques. The data analysis technique in this study uses four stages of data collection, namely, the data collection stage, the data reduction stage, the data presentation stage, and the conclusion drawing stage (verificatin). The results of this study indicate the existence of ecocriticism or the relationship between humans and nature contained in the *foi habat* mantra, namely good land and environmental management to produce fertile plants, the use of plants planted for human benefit, not using chemicals that can damage or harm the environment when farming, maintaining and protecting the legacy of plants left by ancestors to the next generation, and the results of the plants can be enjoyed by all groups without distinguishing between male or female gender.

Keywords: *Foi habit spells; Ecociticism, Old poetry*



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INTRODUCTION

Literature is essentially a medium and a guideline that directs authors to produce literary works that are creative and possess aesthetic artistic value. When a literary work is well-structured and rich in meaning, it can serve as a representation of life processes that occurred in the past and may be studied in the future. Times continue to develop and change dynamically. In general, literature is often regarded as a reflection of reality. This means that a literary work should represent the realities of human life in accordance with everyday experiences. Such works are conveyed through language that provides positive impacts on society. In addition, literature is divided into two categories, namely classical literature and modern literature. Classical literature has been passed down from generation to generation. Therefore, these works emerged long ago, and in most cases, the identity of the author is unknown (Hendra, 2024).

Literary genres are divided into three categories: poetry, prose, and drama. Based on its periodization, poetry is classified into two types, namely traditional poetry and modern poetry. According to Sembono (2010:23), traditional poetry is bound by specific rules and conventions. Wahyuni (2014:35) states that traditional poetry consists of seven forms: pantun, karmina, gurindam, syair, seloka, talibun, and mantra. Mantras are often considered sacred and may not be recited by just anyone (Indrastuti & Elga, 2024; Adam, 2025). Only a shaman or a person deemed worthy is allowed to chant them. Furthermore, the recitation of mantras must be accompanied by ritual ceremonies. For example, in the recitation of the *Foi Habat* mantra in Elaar Let Village, if the reciter is a woman, she must not be in a state of menstruation; in simpler terms, the mantra may only be recited when the speaker is considered ritually pure and permitted to perform acts of worship such as prayer. Under such conditions, the mantra is believed to possess supernatural power. Some mantras are recited loudly, while others are whispered softly. Loud recitations are intended to be heard by ancestors and the surrounding natural environment, whereas whispered recitations are directed only to the *toar* and the intended object, as well as to create calmness during the chanting process. This practice is believed to enable individuals to obtain supernatural power through the mantras they recite.

Elaar Let Village possesses several types of mantras, including mantras for curing toothaches, massage mantras, mantras for bringing back missing persons, mantras for extending life expectancy, and the *Foi Habat* mantra. In this study, the researcher focuses specifically on the *Foi Habat* (planting) mantra practiced in Elaar Let Village. The researcher's interest in examining the *Foi Habat* mantra arises from its strong connection to the livelihood system of the Kei community in Elaar Let Village, as reflected in the diction used within the mantra itself. Therefore, the most appropriate analytical approach for this study is ecocriticism theory. The reason for employing ecocriticism as the analytical framework is that ecocriticism examines the relationship between humans, literature, nature or the environment, and the ways humans utilize nature for survival. Etymologically, *Foi Habat* derives from the Kei language, in which *foi* means "to plant" and *habat* means "calm." The term used for mantra in Elaar Let Village is *taroman*, while the person who recites the mantra is called *toar*. The oral recitation of the *Foi Habat* mantra may only be performed by certain individuals or *toar*, and it is governed by various rules, such as the physical and spiritual condition of the *toar* during the recitation, the offerings that must be prepared, and the conditions of the place where the mantra is recited.

Ecocriticism is interdisciplinary in nature. On the one hand, it employs literary theory, while on the other hand, it draws upon ecological theory (Muliadi, Firman, & Rabiah, 2024). Both literary theory and ecological theory are multidisciplinary approaches. Literary theory is based on the assumption that literature is closely related to reality (Larasati & Manut, 2022). This relationship allows literary works, as forms of social criticism, to become objects of research. Similarly, ecocritical theory develops through the application of ecological approaches within literary studies (Fawareh, Dakamsih, & Alkouri, 2023; Yadav & Sinha, 2024). Since ecological theory can function as a critical tool, its intersection with literary theory gives rise to ecocriticism (Harsono, 2008). One example of a *Foi Habat* mantra that contains ecocritical elements is as follows: *U foi enbal fo* (I plant enbal). This phrase indicates that the mantra is closely connected to ecological and environmental aspects.

METHODS

The method employed in this study is a descriptive qualitative method with an ecocritical literary approach. This method was chosen because the research focuses on understanding and describing the meaning, function, and ecological relationship contained in the *Foi Habat* mantra practiced by the community of Elaar Let Village, Southeast Kei Kecil District, Southeast Maluku Regency. Qualitative research is considered appropriate because the data analyzed are in the form of oral expressions, words, phrases, and cultural meanings embedded in the mantra, rather than numerical data. Through this approach, the researcher seeks to interpret the relationship between humans, literature, and the natural environment as reflected in the *Foi Habat* mantra. The ecocritical approach was employed to examine the interaction between humans and nature represented in the mantra. Ecocriticism emphasizes how literary works portray

environmental awareness, ecological values, and the utilization of nature within human life. In this study, the *Foi Habat* mantra is viewed not merely as an oral literary expression, but also as a cultural representation of the Kei community's relationship with nature, particularly in relation to agricultural activities and traditional livelihood systems.

The research was conducted in Elaar Let Village, Southeast Kei Kecil District, Southeast Maluku Regency. The data sources consisted of four native inhabitants of the village who possess knowledge and mastery of the *Foi Habat* mantra. These informants were selected purposively based on their understanding of the mantra tradition and their active involvement in the ritual practices associated with the recitation of the mantra. The primary data of this study were the oral texts of the *Foi Habat* mantra, while the supporting data included information obtained from interviews, field observations, and related documentation. Several techniques were employed in collecting the data, namely observation, interviews, audio recording, field note-taking, and documentation. Observation was conducted to understand directly the social and environmental context in which the mantra is recited. Interviews were carried out with the informants to obtain detailed explanations regarding the meaning, function, and procedures of the mantra recitation. Audio recording techniques were used to accurately preserve the oral form of the mantra, while field notes were utilized to record important findings during the research process. Documentation techniques were also applied to collect supporting data in the form of photographs, written records, and other relevant materials related to the research object. The data analysis technique in this study employed the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman (2002). This model consists of four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data collection stage, the researcher gathered oral texts, interview results, and observational data from the field. The data reduction stage involved selecting, classifying, and focusing the data relevant to the objectives of the study. The selected data were then organized and presented systematically in the data presentation stage to facilitate interpretation and analysis. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the findings obtained throughout the research process, particularly concerning the ecological values and the relationship between humans and nature reflected in the *Foi Habat* mantra.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the stages of data collection, six *Foi Habat* mantras in Elaar Let Village were identified as containing ecological elements. These mantras are traditionally used by farmers during agricultural activities and planting processes. The mantras include the *Foi Enmaf* mantra, *Foi Tangun* mantra, *Foi Enbal* mantra, *Foi Manad* mantra, *Foi Mu'u* mantra, and *Foi Nur* mantra. One of these, namely the *Foi Enmaf* mantra, involves the use of ritual offerings during the planting process. The offerings consist of betel leaves, lime paste for betel chewing, Javanese tobacco, areca nuts, and coins. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher discusses comprehensively each *Foi Habat* mantra that contains elements of literary ecocriticism in Elaar Let Village, Southeast Kei Kecil District, Southeast Maluku Regency. The data of the *Foi Habat* mantras are presented sequentially according to the planting seasons considered suitable for cultivating particular types of crops. The researcher analyzes the *Foi Habat* mantras using the theory of literary ecocriticism by examining the words, phrases, and sentences within the mantras that reflect ecological elements. Ecocriticism is a theoretical approach that examines the relationship between humans, literature, and the natural environment. In this study, the researcher highlights and emphasizes every word, phrase, and sentence in the *Foi Habat* mantras that contain ecological meanings. The following section presents all data related to the *Foi Habat* mantras.

Foi Enmaf Mantra

Duad nit e
Miliik batang nung ve'e yab
U foi wad bena enmaf afahirya
Fo meran ini hasil bok
Ihin yanam vuan yanam vangled
Ihin yanam vuan vangled
Fo umat ra ba ken-ken

The mantra above is closely related to ecocriticism, particularly in the second stanza through the phrase *ve'e yab*, which means "garden land." This phrase in the second stanza of the *Foi Enmaf* mantra indicates that the people of Elaar Let Village cultivate crops in gardens rather than in fields or rice paddies. This practice is influenced by the fact that the plants grown in the gardens are daily consumptive crops, such as sweet potatoes, bananas, taro, red beans, *enbal* (poisonous cassava), and coconuts. In the second stanza,

the sentence *foi wad bena enmaf afahirya* contains the words *foi* and *enmaf*, meaning “to plant” and “sweet potato.” These words represent elements of ecology and nature. The meaning of this stanza is that the *toar* or farmer recites the mantra to inform God and the ancestors that he is planting crops in his garden and to ask for protection so that the plants will grow well and produce abundant harvests in the future. This idea is also reflected in the third stanza, *fo meran ini hasil bok*, which means “to obtain good results in the future.” The third stanza of the *Foi Enmaf* mantra demonstrates that farmers place their hopes in God and their ancestors through the mantra, particularly as expressed in the first stanza, *Duad nit*, asking for protection over the garden and the *enmaf* plants from pests, wild animals, and the greed of people who steal, so that the crops may grow abundantly and provide good yields to be consumed by everyone. Sweet potato is one of the staple consumptive crops of the people in Elaar Let Village. Therefore, the recitation of the *Foi Enmaf* mantra is considered important because the crop is closely related to the sustainability of community life. Farmers even perform special rituals before planting *enmaf* or sweet potatoes.

There is also a repetition of words in the fifth and sixth stanzas, namely *Ihin yanam vuan vangled*, which means “abundant contents, shoots, and fruits.” The repetition in these stanzas indicates the farmers’ hopes for plentiful harvests when reciting the *Foi Enmaf* mantra. Such repetition reflects one of the characteristics of mantras according to Waluyo, namely the repetition of sounds and words to strengthen meaning and suggestion within the mantra. This implies that the farmer intentionally repeats the fifth and sixth stanzas because they are considered highly important, and it is believed that the *enmaf* plants will follow the spoken words of the *toar*. Farmers recite the *Foi Enmaf* mantra with the expectation of obtaining abundant crops that may be consumed by the people of Elaar Let Village. This idea is further emphasized in the seventh stanza, *fo umat ra ba ken-ken*, meaning “for people who come peacefully to receive it,” and in the eighth stanza, *ra ren ra an nikmati ni hasil*, meaning “they drink and eat while enjoying the harvest.” These lines reflect the sustainability of life among the people of Elaar Let Village, who depend on the crops they cultivate and utilize nature according to their daily needs. In other words, they do not exploit nature greedily, since they plant crops based on their subsistence needs.

In the *Foi Enmaf* mantra, there are repetitions of the phrase *ihimyanan vuan*, repeated twice in the fifth and sixth stanzas, and the word *ra*, repeated three times in the seventh and eighth stanzas. These repetitions contain supernatural elements intended to influence the crops or to make the plants follow the commands of the mantra reciter or *toar*. The *toar* hopes that the *enmaf* plants will produce abundant harvests that can be consumed by anyone. The researcher also identifies a form of criticism within the *Foi Enmaf* mantra, particularly in the second stanza, *mi liik batang nung ve’e yab*, which means “you see and guard my garden land.” This stanza is addressed to God and the ancestors, asking them to protect the *enmaf* plants and other crops in the garden because the *toar* or farmers often experience theft committed by irresponsible individuals. Therefore, the researcher emphasizes the importance of not taking the rights or property of others, since such actions constitute theft, especially when the stolen crops are intended for the welfare of the community. This principle is also consistent with the life philosophy of the Kei people: *hera ini in tub fo ini, afa it did in tub fo it did*, which means “what belongs to others remains theirs, and what belongs to us remains ours.” Simply put, people should not take the property rights of others, and vice versa.

Foi Tangun Mantra

O mel muf’ar
O fi’i wenak ya’a liman riban-banan
U heheak u ket-ketar
O mel muf’ar
Fo umat besa ra ren ra pak o

The *Foi Tangun* mantra is closely related to ecology, particularly in its depiction of the relationship between humans and nature or the environment. This can be observed in the first stanza through the phrase *o mel muf’ar*, which means “you grow and develop.” The diction *o* (“you”) in this mantra refers to the mung bean plant. In the Indonesian Dictionary (*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*), the word “you” functions as a second-person pronoun; however, within the context of this mantra, it does not refer to a human being but rather to the plant being cultivated, namely the *tangun* plant. The phrase *mel muf’ar* (“grow and develop”) represents ecological and environmental elements. The *toar* employs this phrase with the hope that the *tangun* plant will grow and thrive rather than die before producing healthy mung beans. The fourth stanza of the mantra also illustrates the relationship between humans and nature through the phrase *o mel muf’ar*, meaning “you grow and develop.” Here again, the word “you” does not refer to humans but to the *tangun* plant cultivated by farmers. Meanwhile, the phrase *mel muf’ar* clearly indicates that the mantra is connected to ecological and environmental aspects. The *toar*, or the person reciting the mantra, expresses hope that through the recitation of the *Foi Tangun* mantra, change and fulfillment of wishes will occur—specifically,

that the *tangun* plants will grow abundantly and develop well, producing plentiful mung beans that may be consumed by the people of Elaar Let Village. Considering that the livelihood system of the Elaar Let community is primarily based on agriculture, the crops produced in the gardens serve as daily food consumption.

There is repetition within the *Foi Tangun* mantra, particularly in the first and fourth stanzas through the phrase *o mel muf'ar* ("you grow and develop"), while the word *o* ("you") is repeated four times. In this mantra, the meaning of "you" does not refer to humans but to the mung bean plants, which are portrayed as if they can understand the words of the *toar*. It is as though the *toar* gives spiritual energy or life force to the mung bean plants so that they follow the commands expressed in the *Foi Tangun* mantra. This repetition functions to strengthen meaning and suggestion and also contains supernatural elements within the mantra. In other words, the repetition and emphasis used by the *toar* are intended to produce magical or supernatural power so that the *tangun* plants may grow abundantly and develop well, enabling their harvest to be consumed by everyone. The researcher also identifies positive criticism within the *Foi Tangun* mantra, particularly in the final stanza, *fo umat besa ra ren ra pak o*, which means "for all people to consume you." This mantra is recited by the *toar* with the expectation of obtaining fertile and productive *tangun* plants, with the ultimate purpose that the harvest may be consumed by anyone in need. The mantra therefore reflects positive values because it prioritizes the welfare of the community rather than personal interests or individual ego. This idea is closely connected to the local wisdom of the Kei people, who uphold the philosophy of *ain ni ain*, meaning "we belong to one another" or "one belongs to all." In essence, despite differences, people remain united. This philosophy contains values of togetherness, mutual cooperation, and social care, emphasizing that life should not be lived solely for personal interests but for the benefit and well-being of many people.

Foi Enbal Mantra

U foi enbal fo

Mu mel harbum in hof ihin yanam vangled

Fo ra var umat anbe naba ken-ken

Fo ra ren ra an

The mantra above is closely related to ecology, particularly in its depiction of the relationship between humans and nature or the environment. In the first stanza, the mantra reciter or *toar* begins with the diction "plant" and "enbal," as seen in the phrase *u foi enbal fo*, which means "I plant enbal for." The words "plant" and "enbal" function as ecological markers within the mantra. The *enbal* plant, also known as poisonous cassava, belongs to the category of tuber crops. *Enbal* is a crop consistently cultivated by the Kei community because it serves as their staple food substitute for rice. The *enbal* plant contains cyanide poison; therefore, its processing must be carried out carefully and correctly. *Enbal* is commonly processed into various products for commercial purposes, such as *enbal love*, peanut *enbal*, cheese *enbal*, chocolate *enbal*, cyanide *enbal*, or banana *enbal*, along with many other processed forms. Due to the many uses and benefits of the *enbal* plant, the people of Elaar Let Village recite the *Foi Enbal* mantra when planting *enbal* in order to achieve specific goals, particularly to obtain fertile crops whose harvest can fulfill the needs of the Kei community. The second stanza, *mu mel harbum in hof ihin yanam vangled*, which means "you grow fertile and produce abundant yields," also demonstrates ecological elements. The word *mu* ("you") in this mantra refers to the *enbal* plant cultivated by the farmers. In the Indonesian Dictionary (*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*), "you" functions as a second-person pronoun; however, in the context of the *Foi Enbal* mantra, the *toar* uses the word "you" not to address humans but to address the *enbal* plants being cultivated. Through this diction, the *toar* speaks as if the *enbal* plants can understand and follow the commands expressed in the mantra. This illustrates the close relationship between humans and plants, in which humans depend on the crops they cultivate for survival.

The line *mel harbum in hof ihin yanam vangled*, meaning "grow fertile and produce abundant yields," contains ecological markers through the phrase *mel harbum* ("grow fertile") and the phrase *ihin yanam* ("contents and offspring/shoots"). The *toar* employs this mantra with the expectation that wishes and hopes will be fulfilled, namely that the *enbal* stems planted by the farmers will grow fertile and not die before producing abundant harvests that may be consumed by everyone. This meaning is further reinforced in the third stanza, *fo ra var umat anbe naba ken-ken*, which means "to be carried by anyone who travels peacefully." The implied meaning of this line is that *enbal* is often brought as provisions by individuals who travel far from home, such as children leaving their parents to pursue education or seek knowledge in other regions. Thus, *enbal* serves as a vital source of sustenance for people living away from their homeland. In the fourth stanza, *fo ra ren ra an*, meaning "for them to eat and for them to drink," the word *ra* ("they") refers to the people of Elaar Let Village as well as future generations who travel and consume *enbal* as a staple food.

substitute for rice in their daily lives. This reflects the sustainability of life among the Kei people, who rely heavily on the crops cultivated in their gardens. The third and fourth stanzas of the *Foi Enbal* mantra demonstrate the farmers' selfless attitude, as the crops they cultivate are intended not only for personal consumption but also for the benefit of many people.

The *Foi Enbal* mantra also contains repetition. The word *fo*, meaning "for," is repeated three times in the first, third, and fourth stanzas, while the word *ra* ("they") is repeated three times in the third and fourth stanzas. In the context of the mantra, the repetition of *fo* expresses the purpose and intention of the *toar*, namely that the *enbal* plants may grow abundantly and produce plentiful harvests. Meanwhile, the repeated use of *ra* refers to the entire community of Elaar Let Village, who will benefit from the abundant *enbal* harvests as a staple food substitute for rice. These repetitions strengthen the meaning of the mantra and are believed to contain magical or supernatural power capable of influencing the growth of the *enbal* plants. The third stanza, *fo ra var umat anbe naba ken-ken*, meaning "to be carried by people who go peacefully," also contains an implied criticism. The stanza suggests that *enbal* crops are often stolen by irresponsible individuals. Therefore, the researcher emphasizes the importance of refraining from theft or taking the property rights of others, especially because the crops are intended for the welfare of the community. This idea is closely aligned with the local wisdom and life philosophy of the Kei people, expressed in the saying *hera ini in tub fo ini, afa it did in tub fo it did*, which means "what belongs to others remains theirs, and what belongs to us remains ours." In simple terms, individuals should not take what belongs to others, and this principle applies mutually to everyone.

Foi Nur Mantra

U foi nur fo

Muslimin muslimat anbe yanam ufun

Ra ba kennya ra seb ra na su fo ra an ra ren

This mantra is closely related to ecocriticism, particularly in its depiction of the relationship between humans and nature or the environment. This can be observed in the first stanza through the phrase *foi nur*, which means "planting coconut." The mantra indicates that coconut trees in Elaar Let Village are among the plants most commonly cultivated and widely grown within the surrounding environment of the community. Coconut trees are considered one of the primary commodities of the Kei people in Elaar Let Village. Therefore, coconut trees are planted along the coastal areas as well as in the community gardens. When planting coconut trees, the *toar* recites the *Foi Nur* mantra to fulfill hopes and achieve desired outcomes, namely that the coconut trees will grow well and produce benefits that may be enjoyed by everyone. This idea is reflected in the second stanza, *muslimin muslimat anbe yanam ufun ra ba kennya*, which means "men and women, all descendants, may obtain it." In this stanza, the phrase *muslimin muslimat* ("men and women") indicates that the ecological values of the people of Elaar Let Village do not recognize gender discrimination or distinctions between men and women. In other words, through the *Foi Nur* mantra, farmers plant coconut trees so that the harvest may be enjoyed by all members of society regardless of gender.

The line *anbe yanam ufun ra ba kennya*, meaning "all descendants may see or obtain it," is closely related to the sustainability of community life in Elaar Let Village. The meaning conveyed is that the coconut trees planted today are intended to be enjoyed by future generations or by anyone who encounters and benefits from them. This idea also reflects the concept of inheritance for children, grandchildren, and future generations, emphasizing the importance of preserving and maintaining the coconut trees planted by their ancestors so that they may continue to support human survival and communal welfare. There is also repetition within the *Foi Nur* mantra, particularly the word *ra*, which is repeated five times in the second and third stanzas. The word *ra* refers to the entire community of Elaar Let Village, who are expected to enjoy and consume the coconuts cultivated by farmers through the recitation of the *Foi Nur* mantra. According to the mantra reciters, selflessness is an essential principle in the use of the *Foi Nur* mantra. If the purpose of the mantra is not directed toward the welfare of many people, then the mantra is believed to lose its supernatural or magical power.

The researcher identifies positive criticism within this mantra, particularly in the phrase *yanan uvun*, meaning "children and grandchildren." This phrase is directed toward future generations, encouraging them to enjoy the benefits of the coconut trees planted by their parents and ancestors. However, they are not only expected to enjoy the harvests, but also to preserve and protect these inherited crops for the welfare of future communities. This principle is consistent with the local wisdom and philosophy of the Kei people known as *ain ni ain*, which literally means "one belongs to all." In essence, despite differences, all people remain united. This philosophy embodies the values of togetherness, mutual cooperation, social care, and collective responsibility, emphasizing that life should not be lived solely for personal interests but rather for the benefit and welfare of the wider community.

CONCLUSION

Based on the ecocritical literary analysis conducted on the six *Foi Habat* mantras, it was found that there is a significant relationship between humans and nature that must be maintained and recognized as part of the environmental awareness of landowners in Elaer Let Village for the sustainability of life and the future of coming generations. Nature, as a source of food and livelihood, must be managed and preserved properly in order to produce fertile and sustainable crops. Likewise, the utilization of cultivated plants for human welfare should not involve the excessive use of chemical substances that may damage or harm the environment during agricultural activities. By preserving and protecting the inherited crops passed down by the ancestors to future generations, the harvests can continue to be enjoyed by all members of society without distinctions based on gender, whether male or female. The understanding of the meanings contained within the *Foi Habat* mantras can foster environmental awareness among the community members who preserve and practice these mantras, encouraging them to use and maintain them wisely and responsibly.

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