

## PLAYING TO PREPARE FOR ADULTHOOD: THE GAMES OF KANOME CHILDREN

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### ABSTRACT

This research focuses on Kanome children's traditional games aims to answer several questions: what are the traditional children's games in Kanome? What are the functions of the traditional games for the lives of the children? Why are the traditional games played today? This study aims to identify and document the types of games, the functions and the cultural values embodied in the Kanome traditional games. The data is taken through qualitative method by conducting in-depth interviews and observation. The research finds that games such as *tai-tai*, *kiri mbal-bal*, and *mbanti* have the following functions: (i) to prepare a child for adulthood (ii) as a means of recreation, (iii) as a means of media learning, (iv) to flourish the children's creativity (developing intellectual character), (v) to teach honesty and sportsmanship; (vi) to show a friendly and mutual cooperation, (vii) to sharpen the skills of the children, (viii) to give meanings of social, environmental, and natural interactions. (ix) to enjoy *kumbili* harvests.

**Keywords:** kanome, malind, marind, traditional games, merauke, papua

### INTRODUCTION

Traditional games are a subject that is taken seriously by a number of scientists and experts in anthropological folklores in this century. Inspired by the writings of Tylor on *pachisi* and the popularity of the game in America, a number of authors have contributed to document games of Indian children in North America. Newell (1883), Gomm (1894), and Culin (1891, 1895, 1898, 1907) have published a collection of writings on games (Schartzman, 1976:289).

Yuzo, through *The Youth Friendship Association in Japan Culture Research Institute of Field*, has also published a book on traditional games from 71 countries. In his book, Yuzo argues that for the hunting and gathering societies, living was an activity. With minimum daily necessities and clothing, people frequently moved to get animals, plants and fish for food. Their moving life needed no more than the simplest shelters with a vague demarcation between indoors and outdoors (Yuzo, 2006:10).

The *Marind* people are the inhabitants of Merauke, along with 16 other Papuan tribes, namely *Kanume*, *Muyu*, *Mandobo*, *Awuyu*, *Yagai*, *Asmat*, *Moraori*, *Yei*, *Kimaam*, *Jair*, *Kuruwai*, *Kombai*, *Citak*, *Mitak*, *Yaghai*, *Wiyagar*, and *Yelmek*, who has settled there since the 17th Century. Marind people still hunt and gather foods. Their settlements spread across the Merauke district, both in urban or rural Merauke. Sometimes they are constrained by the access to transportation. One of the sub-tribes, *Malind* (*Malind* or *Marind* refer to the same ethnic group in the mentioned distinct), is called *Malind Kanume*, which is often referred as *Kanume* or *Kanome*. In this paper, I

am writing about Kanome. The people of Kanome occupy most part of Sota District which is located very close to Papua New Guinea (PNG).

The research aims to answer the following questions: (i) What are the traditional games of Kanome children, and how do they play the games? (ii) What are the functions of the traditional games for the children's lives? (iii) Why are the traditional games played today?

This research on Kanome children's traditional games aims to: (i) document the types of games that are played by children in Yanggandur Village, Sota district, Merauke; (ii) know the traditional games of Kanome children, ranging from how to play the games and the game equipment needed; (iii) know the functions of the traditional games; (iv) Know the cultural values embodied in traditional games.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Study of play began in the late nineteenth century. G. Stanley Hall, a psychologist, was one of a number of scholars who believed that play reflected adults' activities of earlier eras. Hall's recapitulation theory suggests that children's play offers an important guide to the past. Meanwhile, Tucker quote in 1938, the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga published his important study *Homo Ludens* [Playing Man], which identifies play as a key component of culture. According to Huizinga, "play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life' " (Tucker, 2008:20).

Another significant study by the French scholar Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games* (1961), suggests that play is essentially free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, rule-bound, and make-believe (9–10). Caillois divides games into four main categories: *agon* (competition), *alea* (chance), *mimicry* (simulation), and *ilinx* (vertigo). He emphasizes the importance of *paidia* (joyful improvisation), which motivates children to do new and exciting things (Tucker 2008:21).

The Anthropological Association for the Study of Play (TAASP) began in the early 1970s under the leadership of Alyce Cheska and Brian Sutton-Smith. Helen B. Schwartzman's *Transformations: The Anthropology of Children's Play* (1978) offers representative ethnographic reports from Asia, Oceania, the Americas, Africa, the Near East, and Europe. Schwartzman covers the main areas of play study through the late 1970s, including evolutionary and developmental studies, diffusionism, functional analysis, studies of culture and personality, communication studies, structural and cognition studies, ecology, and ethology (study of animal behavior). Recent play studies have reflected openness to new approaches, as well as multiculturalism and globalization. In *The Future of Play Theory* (1995), edited by Anthony D. Pellegrini, scholars consider play as progress, power, and fantasy; this collection of essays honors Brian Sutton-Smith's accomplishments as a leading scholar of play. Another significant study, *Play and Intervention* (1994), edited by Joop Hellendoorn, Rimmert van der Kooij, and Brian Sutton-Smith, explores how play therapy helps children with various needs. *Play Today in the Primary School Playground* (2001), edited by Julia C. Bishop and Mavis Curtis, examines play among children of different nationalities and ethnicities; it also classifies play traditions by verbal, imaginative, and physical content (Tucker 2008:21).

The writings of James Danandjaja in his book Indonesian Folklore, the science of gossip, fairy tales, etc. are important works because they cover various genres of folklore from ethnic groups in Indonesia. The genre of folk games with examples of the Trunyan folk game supports R.E's statement. Herron and B. Sutton-Smith about the function of folk games to prepare children so that they can participating in the lives of adult people (Danandjaja 2007: 181).

Dundes in his book *The Meaning of Folklor analyzes*, the structure of children's playing in motifs as in folklore. Quote Dundes and Bronner, S. J. (2007 :161) Specifically, I have tried to demonstrate that at least one non verbal form of folklore, children's games, is structurally similar to a verbal form, the folktale. If, then, there are nonverbal analogues (e.g., games) for verbal folklore forms (e.g., folktales), then folk lore as a discipline cannot possibly be limited to the study of just verbal art, oral literature, or folk literature, or whatever smiliar term is employed. Kenneth Pike has observed that "Verbal and non-verbal activity is a unified whole, and theory and methodology should be organized or created to treat it as such." (Glendale 1954 in Dundes 2007:161), It is time for folklorists to devote some of the energies given over to the study of verbal folklore to the study of folklore in its non-verbal forms. Compared to folk narrative and folksong, such forms as folk dance, games, and gestures have been grossly neglected. (Krappe 1930 in Dundes 2007:161).

Meanwhile Danandajaja said every nation in the world generally has folk games. This activity also includes folklore because it is obtained through oral inheritance. This is especially true of childhood folk games, because these games are spread almost purely through oral traditions and many of them are disseminated without the help of adults such as their parents or their school teachers. Every nation in the world generally has folk games. This activity also includes folklore because it is obtained through oral inheritance. This is especially true of childhood folk games, because these games are spread almost purely through oral traditions and many of them are disseminated without the help of adults such as their parents or their teachers (Danandjaja 2007:171). Research on folk games by various disciplines shows that a game has a set of rules of play, stages, structures, functions, and rituals.

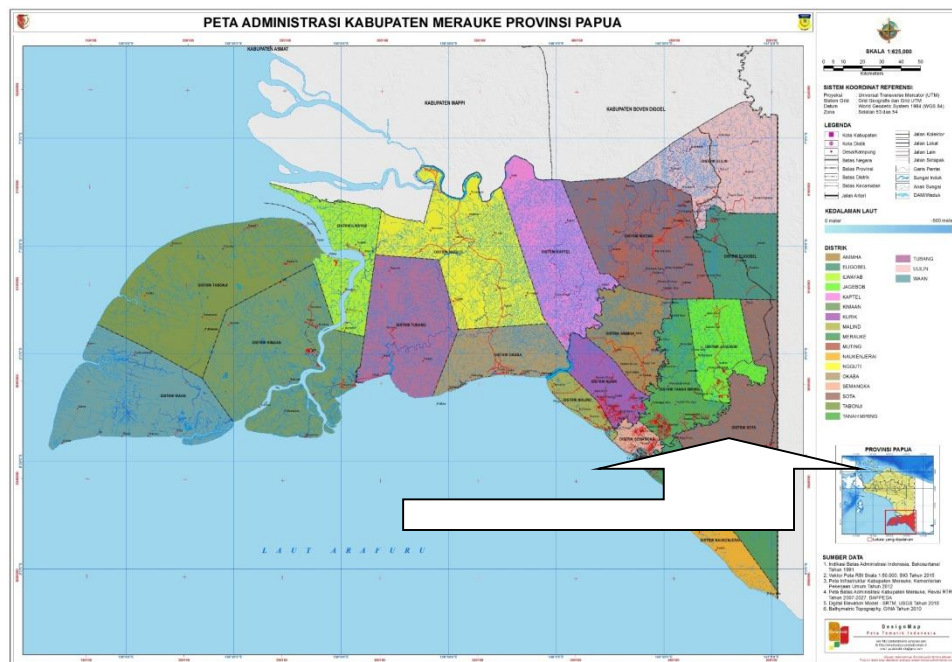
## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research applies qualitative methods to observe the daily life of Kanome people like fishing in swamps are everywhere in Sota district. I also did observations on the hunting and gathering activities and the establishment of *bivak* (temporary houses). I attained the data by interviewing the custom chief of Kanome, custom chief of Sota, village chief of Yanggandur village, and the *ondoofi*. The custom chief (*Kepala Adat*) of Kanome, who is also the Chairman of the Institute of Indigenous Papuans (*Lembaga Masyarakat Adat Papua*) in Merauke, is M. Ndiken. He understands the history of the Kanome in Sota, as well as the Kanome culture and the traditional games of Kanome children. The children of Kanome are not excluded from interviews and observations. However, shy Kanome children sometimes only gave short answers on the questions. The data is collected through observation and in-depth interviews.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

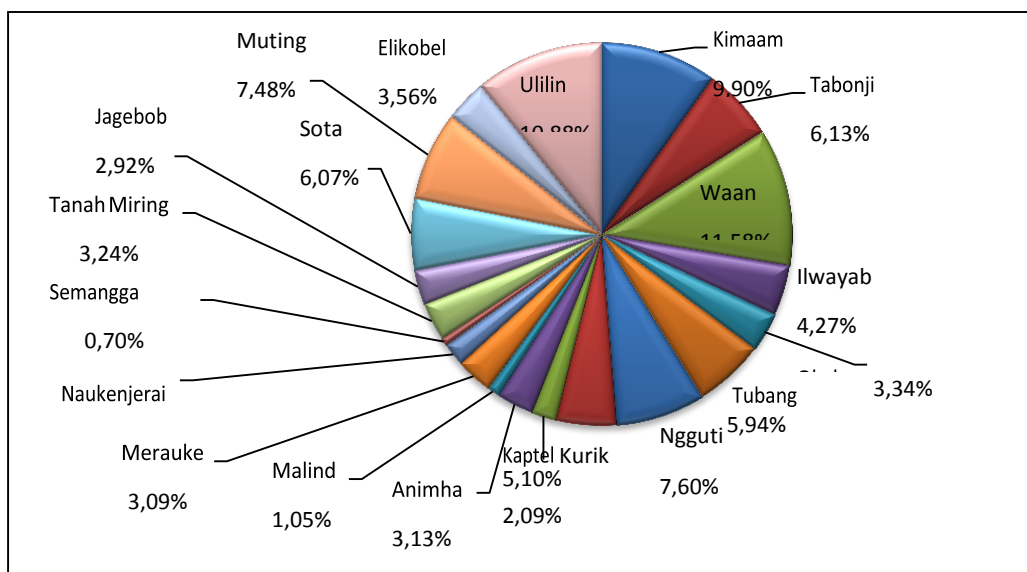
Merauke Regency is located between  $137^{\circ}$  –  $141^{\circ}$  east longitude and  $5^{\circ}$  –  $9^{\circ}$  south latitude. Merauke Regency which has area 46.791,63 km<sup>2</sup> and 5.089,71 km<sup>2</sup> of water areas. Merauke Regency is the greatest regency in Papua. In the north, Merauke Regency is bordered by Mappya Regency and Bouven Digoel Regency, in the east it bordered by Papua New Guinea. In the south and west is bordered Arafura Sea (BPS 2011:3).

Figure 1. Research sites (Google)



Percentage of Merauke Regency Area by District in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Percentage of Merauke Regency (BPS 2011:4)



Population of Merauke Regency projected from Population Census 2010 were 195.716 the area of Merauke Regency is 146.796,63 km<sup>2</sup>, hence its population density is reached 4,18 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. In 2010, the number of household which recorded 46.102 Ruta. The biggest population are found in Merauke regency with as many as 87,634 inhabitants. While the District Kaptel smallest district with a population of 1681 inhabitants. With a population of 103,078 souls of men and 92638 female soul, Merauke sex ratio at 111.27, which means the total male population is 11.27 percent more than the female population (BPS 2011:53).

The research focuses on communities that settle in Sota village and Yanggandur village, Sota district, Merauke, in October 2010 and February 2011. The district is selected as the study site because the majority of the population is Kanome. Yanggandur and Sota are also located next to Papua New Guinea (PNG), so people who live in Sota and Yanggandur (Indonesia) are still in contact with the people of Kanome who live in the neighboring country, PNG. The area of Sota is 2,842.21 km<sup>2</sup> or 6.07 percent with a population of 2,831 or 1.45 percent.

Description of Kanome Children's Traditional Games. The traditional games that are played by Kanome children today is *tai-tai* (in Kanome language in Sota village) or *kiri mbal-bal* (in Kanome language in Yanggandur village).

**(i) The description of both games are as follows:**

*Tai-tai* (in Kanome language in Sota village) uses small parts shaped like a wheel made of sago tree's stem with a diameter of 20 cm. Before playing, the players (*mbarai*) prepare the equipment such as wheels made of sago's stem (*Sago Metroxylon*) and timber as their playing equipment. Other tools needed are bows (*sorgin*) and arrows (*sofar*). Once the equipment is prepared, the players will shoot the wheels to hit the target. The player that hits more wheels with the arrows will be recognized as the winner of the game.

*Tai-tai* is played by boys aged 6 to 10. The number of players in the *tai-tai* is not limited, but depends on how much time the children have and how many of them have their bows and arrows to play with the group. *Tai-tai* is only played in June or July, when *kumbili* trees (*Colocasia sp.*) are harvested. The game starts as the harvest begins and ends as the harvest stops.

*Kiri mbal-bal* (in Kanome language in Yanggandur village) also uses wheels made of sago tree's stem with a diameter of approximately 20 cm. There should be 6 X 6 wheels. Players will prepare the equipment made from *sago metroxylon* and timber. The players should also prepare the arrows (*bitakin*) and bows (*yeria*). Once all the equipment is ready, the game will start. Boys under the age of 6 will shoot the wheels which are the target. The player with the most arrows that hit the wheels are the winner of the game. The number of players is not limited, depends on how much time the children have and whether they have the equipment to play with the group. The games start from the beginning to the end *kumbili* harvest, which is held in March in Yanggandur village. Photo 1 and photo 2 show a child playing *kiri mbal-bal*.

Photo1: Stage 1 and 2 of playing *kiri mbal-bal* (Doc. SM)



**(ii) Other games are Fishing, swimming, kertaper, and, selling play**

**Fishing.** Kanome children from childhood have been accustomed to being brought by their parents to fish in swamps or small times that are often found throughout their settlements. Fishing is also one of the Kanome children's games that are done together. These children will prepare a long bamboo with a string of kenur which is attached to one end of the bamboo. Rope kenur will be given a ride in the form of crumbs of food that is rather half hard for fish bait. Next, the fishing rod will be put into river or swamp and left for a while until the bait hits. After the bait hits the

fish, the hook is caught. Furthermore, children will cheerfully bring home the fish they have caught to be cooked at home or burned with friends in the game earlier.

Photo 2: Fishing



**Swimming.** The life of swamps and rivers that decorate the natural environment where the Kanome people live has accustomed children to very close to the water. Times in swamps and rivers are not only for fishing or bathing but also used to learn to swim since childhood. Swimming is a daily activity for Kanome children, especially when the weather is hot the day. The sight that we are very familiar with when the day is very hot by the sun, the river and times become noisy with children who throw themselves into the water.

Photo 3. Swimming (Doc. Uci SM)



***Kertaper game.*** Kertaper game is a game commonly performed by Kanome boys aged 6 to 12. This game can be played alone or together. This game equipment is made of a piece of wooden twig in the shape of the letter Y. Deliberately selected Y-shaped twigs so that the kertaper players can immediately play the game. At the ends of the letter Y will be associated with tire rubber in a bicycle or valve. The size of the paper cup is generally 10-25 cm long. Other kertaper game equipment is a bullet made from ground circles with a diameter of 1-2 cm. Kertaper players will take wet red soil and make dots. Furthermore, the ground circles will be dried in the sun by Merauke until it hardens. After hardening then the spheres can be used as paper cartridges. The way to play a kertaper game starts with holding the paper cup with your left hand with your hands at shoulder level. The right hand pulls the rubber as a sculptor that has been filled with bullets in the form of dry earth circles. A bullet is usually wild birds that are perched on a tree. If the bird is hit and falls it will be taken to be cooked and eaten together with the players

***Selling play.*** This play is usually played by Kanome girls aged 3 to 7. Girls play selling in their yard or in a field not far from where the children live. This play is played by two people to an unlimited number. Usually there will be sellers and buyers pretending like adult women who are shopping at the market. Merchandise sold is usually vegetables or fruits that grow or can be taken from the kitchen of their home. The medium of exchange as a complement to the sale and purchase game is the leaf or paper used as rupiah money as a payment instrument selling play.

## **DISCUSSION**

Based on the nature of the games, folk games can be divided into two major categories, namely a game and a play (Danandjaya 2002:171). The former is done mostly for pleasure or recreation, while the latter is done mostly to achieve something. However, all folk games almost always have five special characteristics, namely (1) are organized, (2) competitive, (3) must be played by at



least two participants (4) have the criteria that determines who wins and who loses, and (5) the rules of the game are accepted by all participants (Roberts, Atrh, and Bush, in Danandjaya 2002:171). Furthermore, folk games can also be further divided into: (1) games that require physical skills (2) games of strategy, and (3) speculative games (Roberts and Sutton Smith in Danandjaya 2002:171).

In some traditional tribes, folk games can be classified further into worldly games and sacred games (Danandjaja, 2002:171). Traditional games have a number of functions that can affect the children to shape their characters. These functions are: (a) recreation, (b) media study, and (c) comfort the souls of the players. In some societies, there are traditional games that are sacred or profane (Danandjaja 2002:172).

The function of traditional games according to R.E.B. Herron and Sutton-Smith is to prepare for the children's future to participate in the community as adults (Herron and Sutton-Smith in Danandjaja, 2002:181). Kanome traditional games called *tai-tai* and *kiri mbla-bal* can be categorized as games because it has all the special characteristics required in a game, namely: (1) is organized, (2) competitive, (3) must be played by at least two participants (4) has the criteria that determines who wins and who loses, and (5) has a regulation accepted by the participants.

Furthermore, both games can also be categorized as a sacred traditional game because it is only done at a certain period, i.e., June and July or March and April when the people harvest kumbili trees. It is a way to express the people's gratitude for the successful *kumbili* harvest that year.

The function of traditional games such as *tai-tai*, *kiri mbla-bal*, fishing, and swimming are to prepare children for the children's future to participate in the community as adults (Herron and Sutton-Smith in Danandjaja, 2002:181) and to hone the children's physical skills. Other functions of the Kanome traditional games (Murni, 2008) are (a) to recreate (b) as a means of media learning, (c) to develop creativity and intelligence, (d) to socialise honesty and sportsmanship; (e) to make a *guyub* / mutual cooperation; (f) to sharpen the children's skills, (g) to give meaning to the social environmental-natural interaction.

Explanation of the functions mentioned above are as follows:

#### **a. Recreation**

*Tai-tai*, *kiri mbla-bal*, fishing, swimming are a recreation for children. The children rejoice playing the games with his friends while spending their spare time. Children have free time to play after school.

#### **b. Media learning**

Kanome children unconsciously make traditional games as a medium of learning. Children learn how to play the games, learn to make game equipment, learn to use strategy, and learn to control their emotions by accepting defeat or victory.

#### **c. Developing their creativity and intelligence**

Traditional games like *tai-tai*, *kiri mbla-bal*, fishing can enhance creativity. Traditional games generally use game equipment made from materials made from natural resources available around such as wood, rattan, sago stem, and so on.

**d. Honesty and Sportsmanship**

Honesty and sportsmanship can be observed when *tai-tai* and *kiri mbal-bal* starts. The player who reach the target is recognized as the winner by others players.

**e. Guyub / mutual cooperation**

The children will carry the spirit of solidarity while making the games' equipment. The players will make the equipment together at one time and create the playground together. After that, they will start the game together using the equipment they have made together.

**f. Giving meanings to social - environmental-natural interaction**

Children learn to give meanings to their interactions with other players, with their environment, and with nature. The games' equipment are made from materials taken from natural resources such as wood, sago stem, rattan, etc., giving knowledge to Kanome children to use nature to meet their recreational needs.

**g. To Prepare the children's future to participate in the community as adults**, which is the function of traditional games according to R.E.B Herron and Sutton-Smith (Herron and Sutton-Smith in Danandjaja, 2002:181). Children's games are basically adult games, which is simplified so they can be played by younger participants. Therefore, children learn adult customs by playing games (Strutt 1801 in Smith 1989:35).

Learning honesty, sportsmanship, and dexterity will prepare children for the adult life where they will participate in decision-making. According to Yuzo (2006:26) Kanome traditional games such as *tai-tai*, *kiri mbal-bal*, fishing dan swimming may also be classified as games that prepare children to become adept at hunting in the forests of Papua, especially in Sota District. Schwartzman (1976:291) calls the play as faux (imitation) to prepare the children for adult lives, and therefore is functional for the enculturation and socialization of the children.

Along with the growth of industrial societies, children are freed from this kind of early apprenticeships. Instead, sometimes they join urban groups or idle people. Universal schooling is one answer to this problem; organized leisure is another (Goodman 1980 in Smith 1989:35).

(h) Traditional games such as *tai-tai* and *kiri mbal-bal* are played by boys aged 6-10 is a way to express the communities' joy because of the success of *kumbili* harvest. For Kanome people, *kumbili* harvest should be celebrated as it is the staple food of Kanome people. It is a taboo to sell *kumbili*, so we never find a trader selling raw *kumbili*.

**CONCLUSION**

The traditional games *tai-tai*, *kiri mbal-bal*, fishing and swimming are games that prepare boys to use arrows and bows skillfully, and to throw spears or catch prey in the forest. The boys will become men who will be the head of their families and be responsible for the families' livelihood. Kanome traditional games are played only at during *kumbili* (*Colocasia* sp.) harvest, which is the staple food of Kanome people. The people harvest *kumbili* with excitement. The villages conduct the events to play *tai-tai* games for a month. After the harvest ends, the game is no longer played.

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