

CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE IN EASTERN SUMBA, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Children's folklore is common in all cultures. During childhood, children engage in activities to build friendship, have fun, and above all to develop particular life qualities. Though children's folklore did not quite attract folklorist's interest in the early development of folklore studies, now, it has become an attracting arena of interests for many social scientists. This research attempts to give a descriptive analysis of the children's folklore, i.e. games, in eastern Sumba, Indonesia. The invasive presence of technology certainly affects the existence of "old-time" children's folklore. Children of the present are heavily exposed to "modern games" that overpower the vitality of the traditional games. Some people see this shift as something inevitable, and the only way to respond to this situation is by accepting this "game revolution." However, some old-time game supporters attempt to revitalize the old-time children folklore by holding events where children's traditional games are performed. The latter believe that maintaining children folklore is of importance because it is a matter of identity, and above all, children's modern games cannot replace the social values offered by the traditional ones. This present article, written based on the data from interviews and discussions on social media, aims to list some traditional games in eastern Sumba. Like any other children in other parts of the world, Sumbanese children are also friendly with modern games. Yet, some still perform the "old time" games. In addition, this article also gives some description of each game and the values the participants might learn from the children's folklore.

Key words: folklore, children's folklore, eastern Sumba

INTRODUCTION

In the history of folklore studies, folkloric expressions related to children have become a valid domain of research although adults' lore still becomes the more favorite areas of investigation. Like the adult, children have their own folk group in which they actively

create, preserve and pass down their “own folklore.” In general, children develop their own folklore by mimicking and “mocking” the lore of their adult.

What is “children’s folklore” then? Like the relativity of the various definitions of the term folklore itself, it is not easy to pinpoint the exact definition of children’s folklore. However, the term itself obviously refers us to the folklore or folk culture of children. In other words, children’s folklore has primarily something to do with children or young people. Therefore, studies on children folklore deal with those activities practiced by children. In this folklore, children themselves function as the bearer of their lore and transmit it to other children. In this context, children are perceived as the culture bearer of cultural knowledge and “active participants in the production and reproduction of culture” (Jirata, 2011: 270).

One can easily observe various kinds of games or practices especially performed by children in every culture. Games have been common phenomenon in all cultures in all times. As claimed by Sarita(2013: 121), playing games has been an universal characteristic worldwide. During the writer’s childhood in eastern Sumba, Indonesia, it was very common to see some male children/ young people and adult playing a wooden top game, which is in local language called *pajulu maka*. The competitive game took form in two ways. This first one was determining the winner by the length of the top spinning. Two or more contestants participated in the competition. They spun their top at the same time, and the one whose top spun the longest would win the competition. The second was by testing the strength of spin and the competitor’s accuracy in hitting his competitors’ tops. In the second kind of top play, one or more players spun their tops, and another one, “the attacker,” attempted to hit the opponents’ tops. The winner was the one able to break other’s tops. If the competitors’ tops did not break up, then the winner was the one whose top spun much longer. Another game easily recalled by the writer is rhyme. When getting together, children utter some rhymes. *Ina kulua la wuaka; kulua la wuaku kupappu tora, kupappu tora, kujulu wangu; kujulu wangu, la rukawindu; la rukawindu, la lumbu mbuamangu* (Mom, I go to the garden; I go to the garden, I pick up eggplant; I pick up eggplant I play with; I play with at the corner of my house; At the corner of my house, and under the hearth of my raised-floor house).

In the writer’s last visit to Sumba in December 2016, he interviewed 4 adult Sumbanese about the folklore of their childhood. They eagerly shared me some genres of children folklore, and even simulated some children’s games. Then, their enthusiasm

was soon followed by a concern that their young generation at this time seemed to leave the traditional games behind. However, they admitted that some children especially those living in some remote areas of Sumba still performed the kinds of folklore they once did.

At the present time, some young Sumbanese attempt to revive the old time children's folklore. They argue that traditional games and plays are still important since they provide rooms for children to socialize to each other and strengthen bonds. To bring back the children's folklore, they regularly hold events to introduce children's folklore to young people. This article attempts to, first, list the kinds of folklore practiced by the (eastern) Sumbanese children, second, explain their functions, and third, describe how the children's folklore is performed.

Children's folklore is most likely to be overlooked since it is regarded as something trivial and unimportant. The writer argues that paying attention to this particular folk group, carrying out research about their folklore, and writing about children's folklore will offer various values, such as entertainment, pedagogy, and social ties, both to the performers and audience. Learning this genre of folklore will give us insight "how children are creating their own world, interpreting, and explaining it" (Snel, 2009: 3). Traditional games or plays provide children arenas of social, physical, and psychological development. In her review of works on children's folklore of play, Ellsworth(2013: 49)concludes that studying children folklore is fruitful for it demonstrates "how play helps children develop a sense of personal and communal identity and mediate their standing in a complicated vertical and horizontal social order."

Some researchers have also proposed various functions of traditional games. In her research on traditional games in Iran, (Dehkordi, 2017: 134)concludes that traditional games bring positive impacts to children at school, such as, improvement of spiritual and mental health states, institutionalization of cultural values, and relief of physical and mental fatigue. (Aypay, 2016: 287)insists that through traditional games, children are exposed to variations of social skills and their own cultural values, while (Akbari, Bdoli, Shafizadeh, & Hasan Khalaji (2009: 126) highlight the role of traditional games in developing children's motor and physical skills. Based on their research on traditional Shona children's games and play songs, Nyota and Mapara(2008: 189) emphasize the importance of Shonachildren's folklore in educating children at learning some virtues like "good behavior, hard work, total commitment, competition and unity of

purpose...," the skills required in present industrialized world.(Amlor, 2016: 72)suggests the roles of indigenous games in nurturing children to develop "good behavior, tolerance, discipline, healthy spirit of co-existence, leadership qualities, hard work, and competitive spirit," while (Kovacevic & Opic, 2014: 109) underline the contribution of traditional games in improving the quality of relations among students in classroom.

In study of folklore, children folklore comprises several genres, and studies of this folklore are mostly based on collecting and analyzing genres of children folklore like **songs, rhymes, riddles, games, teases and pranks**. Every culture produces songs closely associated with children. The one most easily recognized song aimed to children is the functional and chanting song, lullaby. Parents use lullaby to soothe their restless child or helping the child to fall asleep.

Closely related to soothing song for children is nursery **rhyme and song**. Like repetition in folktale as a means to help memorization in the process of transmission, rhyming song functions the same. In addition, rhyming songs also give a sense of amusement when they are sung or chanted. The most-well known lullaby song is "Mary Had a Little Lamb:"

*Mary had a little Lamb,
She also had a bear;
I've often seen her little lam,
But I've never seen her bear*

Children's games are games played by children. These kinds of activities require physical and verbal practices, such as hide and seek, rope jumping, hand-clapping, cooking, and other role-playing games. Rhymes or songs often accompany children's games.

Children's folklore might take form in verbal and non-verbal **riddling**. Quoting Bauman, Roemer(1999)defines riddles as "a type of sollicitational routine." Further, Roomers describes that that "riddles are characterized by a speech act that elicits a response; that is, they are marked by an implied or stated question posed by the initiating participating." The second participant (s) answers the question." One example of riddles is as follow: *Question= What has four legs and can't walk? Answer= chair.*

Teases and pranks are other kinds of children's folklore. Jorgensen(1999) explains that "in the prank games, the perpetrators have fun at the expense of the hurt or embarrassed victims." Teases and pranks are games of victimization. This can be embarrassing or even humiliating for the victim. However, in the world of children, this kind of embarrassment or humiliation is a source of entertainment of the doer at the expense of the victim's feeling.

To collect children folklore, the most prominent techniques are reminiscences, interviews, diaries, surveys, questionnaires, observation and experiments (Fine, 1999: 121). Reminiscences refer to asking adults to recall the games they played when they were young. This is the most frequently used method for collecting children's folklore for at least two reasons. One is for pragmatic and theoretical reasons. It is much easier to obtain information from the peer of the researcher. A researcher does not to go to the field to have a direct observation and collection of the children folklore, but through correspondence; and this way of collecting folklore is most likely fulfilled if adult people involved. Dealing with adult informants also minimized ethical issues. Second, from theoretical perspective, is that collecting folklore from adult is more justified for the information derived from adult people is relatively believable and qualified. The second reason for preferring adult respondent is based on the argument that folklore is transmitted in social hierarchy in which it is the adult who possesses it. Therefore, the traditions of adults become the traditions of children.

Children might be observed and interviewed. Interviews and diaries are the technique of directly ask an individual child or a group of children to explain "their tradition." Interview can be done individually or in a group. However, obtaining direct information from children bear challenges since the researcher and the child informants need to build mutual, and in many cases interviewing children proves to be unsuccessful especially "when dealing with obscene or aggressive subject matters" (Fine, 1999: 124).

Observation refers to collecting children folklore by viewing children doing folklore in "natural context." By doing an observation, a researcher is really learning what children 'normally' do. Experiments, though not very common in folklore, are used especially to "understand the processes of [folklore] diffusion." (Fine, 1999: 136).

METHODOLOGY

The data of the research were collected by applying the reminiscence technique. The reminiscence technique is used by asking adults to recall the games they played in their childhood. This technique is useful for pragmatic and theoretical reasons. In practice, it is much easier to gain information from a peer of the writer, that is, from the adult. This technique can be carried out through correspondence. After all, dealing with adult informants prevent the emergence of ethical issues, which commonly come up when a research related to children informants. From theoretical perspective, folkloric information from adult is relatively believable and qualified. Further, preferring adult respondents is based on the argument that folklore is transmitted in hierarchy in which it is the adult who possesses it. Here, the traditions of adults necessarily become the traditions of children.

Being a part of Sumbanese ethnic group, speaking the local language, *Kambera*, used in the children's folklore, and spending his childhood in the area of research give advantages to the writer himself. He is still able to recall the kinds of folklore he played in his childhood. Four (4) informants were also interviewed by telephone call and email correspondence. For this data collection technique, adult informants were the best source of information for sharing the kinds of folklore they played during their childhood. In addition, the writer made use of social media, such as Facebook, to ask questions about children's folklore to his Facebook (Sumbanese) friends.

In his latest visit to the area, the writer met some potential informants. In this occasion, he explained the purpose of his research, and the informants did not mind to share what they knew about Sumbanese children's folklore. We shared telephone numbers to facilitate our interview in the future. Some informants can be contacted by email; thus email correspondence is another technique of collecting data from the adult informants. After collecting the data through phone interview, email correspondence, and Facebook messages, the researcher took the following steps of data analysis. First, categorizing the children's folklore. The writer sorted out and classified the genres of Sumbanese children's folklore into the already existing classifications of children's folklore such as game, riddle, song, or rhymes.

Second, giving description of each folkloric expression. The writer attempted to present for example, the soothing/lullaby song in the local language and translate it in English.

The same procedure also applies to riddles. For kinesthetic games, the researcher describes how the games are performed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis and interpretation of the data obtained are based on my memory as a part of the culture. As long as I remember, many children folkloric expressions became a part of my childhood life. In addition to the reminiscence technique, the interpretation of the data is also based on my interview with the informants joining the Focus Group Discussion. My analysis and interpretation of the children folklore of the Sumbanese people will be presented in these following arrangements. The first deals with the name and the description of the game itself, including the rule of the game. The second is the benefits offered and values represented in the children folklore.

The most common children folklore in many cultures is riddle. Quoting Bauman, Roemer(1999: 161) simply defines riddles as “a type of sollicitational routine,” characterized by a speech act that elicits a response; that is, they are marked by an implied or stated question posed by the initiating participant. The second participant answers the questions.” According to Jirata(2012: 284)riddles are the children’s opportunities to experiment in using language and solving problems. They provide learning situations through which children “exercise their intellects and acquire knowledge about realities in their local environment.”

The first example of children folklore in eastern Sumba is **riddle**, known in the local language as *Dikang* or *Padikangu*. It loosely means “pass.” When someone is given a riddle and this person is not able to give the correct answer, he will answer: *dikka-ngguka*, meaning, “I reach my limit/I pass.” *Padikangu* means, “making someone reach his limit.” This verbal-act performance is not designated in particular time, but the most occasion to play it is in the afternoon when children finish working on their household chores, or in the evening before mealtime. It is performed not only by children but also adults. While *dikangu* is not really played at home anymore since television serves as the main source of entertainment in many Sumbanese households, it is still performed when people are working in their field.

This folklore needs two parties. One (usually an individual) serves the function to ask question. The rest will try to solve the riddle. Each of the group members then take turns to ask questions. There is no “winner-loser” at the end of this chain game. *Dikang* is

usually filled with the expressions of joy if nobody gives the right answer, or the feeling of “powerlessness” by those who fail to answer correctly. The Sumbanese riddles might be the “stocked ones” or those who are invented by a particular “riddler.”

Sumbanese riddles are communicated in local language. Therefore, they become the strategic way to maintain the indigenous language of the Sumbanese people. Mzimela (2016: 134) asserts that riddles are suitable for developing mother tongue since this game involves the use of language having questions and answers.

Here are some examples of *dikang*:

Question:

Kilimbantuwinggir, mbidahupadua (It is surrounded by a pile-up stone fence, yet its center is clean and flat).

Answer:

Lamba (Sumbanese drum). *Lamba* is a musical instrument in Sumba. Combined with gong beatings, it is used to accompany dances or to mark that communal public event is taking place, especially mourning of someone’s death. It has a round form, made from buffalo leather. Wooden pegs are planted around the leather. In the above riddle, the pile-up stones represent those wooden pegs, and the clean and flat center represent the flat surface of the buffalo leather

Question:

Ana mbiakamiting, tiwalung wiki (there is a small black container. It hangs itself)

Answer:

Pani (a bat). *Mbiaka* (small black container) is a common container among Sumbanese families to store food. Since it is usually hung in the kitchen, its previous brown color turns to be black one due to be exposed to smoke from the heart of the house (where cooking with firewood takes place). The turned-black container represent bat.

Question:

I Umbu Ndilu, jaka nahei la pingngi ai, nahei weli la kapuka-na (Mr.Ndilu, when he climbs a tree, he starts from the top).

Answer:

Pakiya na tawuru (wearing one's ring). This riddle seems to exploit the way of wearing a ring. One obviously has to wear ring from the tip (i.e. top) of their finger.

Question:

Tanggu tulih na inna-na, tanggu mbaca na anana (the mother's job is to write, while the child's is to read)

Answer:

Manu dangu da ana-na (a mother chicken and its chick). This riddle is based on observation on how a mother chicken and its chick behave in foraging for food. A mother chicken usually scratches the ground to search for seeds, bug, or worms while its chicks are just waiting for the fruits. Mother's scratching is parallel to writing (imagine the movement of a mother chicken's feet in scratching the dirt), while her chicks' act of eating to reading (imagine how the chicks peck their food behaving as if they are nodding (reading)).

The second children folklore is **child rhyming**. When children are playing cooking game, they usually sing a chained and rhyming song. The most well-known song that I still recall is one which rhymes: *Ina, kulua la wuaka; kulua la wuaka pa pappu tora; ku pappu tora, kujullu wanngu; kujullu wanggu la lumbu mbuamang; la lumbu mbuamangu, la ruhawindu* (Mother, I go to the garden; I go to the garden to pick up eggplants; to pick up eggplants I can play with; I can play with at the base of the house; at the base around the corner of (my) house.

This traditional rhyming is fun since the lyrics are tailed by the similar phrases. It also requires the quick thinking of the players to connect the lyrics in the most sensible way. Sumbanese riddles and rhyming require verbal wits, of which I call as "verbal agilities." It might function to build an intimacy among the players. If recounted when working, it might aim to ease the physical burden of the job or help them to handle the scorching sun. Child rhyming seems to help children to improve their speaking ability and logical thinking.

After presenting two examples of children's verbal folklore, what follow are children folkloric games which are more physical in nature. Here, the third folklore is **coconut shell game** (*pajulu maka*) or **cooking game**. This cooking game is named a coconut shell game because a coconut shell is usually used as a cooking instrument. Performed mostly by girls, this game is usually played in the base of Sumbanese house (a traditional house in Sumba is raised with wooden posts, and has raised wooden floor (*kaheli*) usually made of bamboos. Under the raised floor, there is a space which is cool at midday, and the space becomes the best playground for children). In this game, girls cook and serve the food by making use of the empty coconut shells or any other containers available around the house. Dirt is used to replace rice and leaves cut into pieces to replace vegetables. The boys usually just sit down and wait for their food. What is interesting and funny in eating the food and vegetables are the sounds that the children make when enjoying their meal. Recalling this game, I can compare the eating sounds like the clicking of dolphins. Children usually giggle when they mimic the act of eating.

In my opinion, coconut shell game seems to be a gender construction since it is only girls who take the role of cooking and serving the food. Boy seems to stay away from cooking although some time they contribute in picking up firewood and setting a fire for cooking. Most of the time boy do something else, like running around, playing hide and seek. When "the food is ready," they join the girls to eat. Boys are served first, and then come for the girls.

The fourth folkloric genre is called **kanaka game**. This game requires five pebbles/small-sized stones and a "stone of a fruit" like the seed of jackfruits. The 5 pebbles are put on the ground and the player tosses the fruit stone, counts one and quickly scoops one pebble and catches the fruit stone before it hits the ground; counts two for two pebbles, and so forth. If a player fails, her opponent takes the turn.

When a player succeeds to scoop "one until five pebbles at once" without missing to catch the stone fruit, she secretly holds the pebbles at her back, selects a number of stones as she wishes, and asks her opponent to guess the number of pebbles she keeps in her hand. She wins if her opponent gives a wrong guess. This game teaches patience and physical agility.

The fifth is **breaking-finger or finger wrestling game** (*pata lima*). This is certainly a game to test muscle strength and played by boys. Two boys compete by sticking their elbows straight on a platform, and hooking their fingers. The winner is the one able to wrestle

his opponent arm. As long I remember, girls never play this game. They only watch the boys competing in this game or other boys screaming to support their favorite player. Similar to this game is *piti atu* (literally means taking away one's strength). Instead of hooking their fingers, two competitors wrestle with their wrist. From the emic term, *piti atu*, it seems that this strength competition is an act of absorbing your opponent's strength so as to beat him.

The sixth is the **spinning top game** (*pajulu maka*). Top spinning game is still played until today. Top is made of hard wood so it will not break easily when hit by others' tops. A rope is coiled around the top. When the tip of the rope is pulled with a full force, the top will spin. The Spinning top game is played both by boys and male adults. Like finger and wrist wrestling games, this is also a game to express one's skillful ability either to launch and handle an attack.

The top spinning game is usually played in an open flat area. The goal of this game is to hit someone's spinning top from particular distance. The winner is the one whose top is able to break his competitor's. If a top is not broken when hit, the winner is determined by the one whose top is spinning longer. This game is also dangerous when hitting someone. The top can injure human target.

The above wrestling and the top spinning games are exclusive for men. It is an arena where man shows and brags about their strength and agility. I believe that these games can be outlets of aggressive impulses. Wrestling and top spinning competition are usually tense at the moment of the games. Not only players, but also bystanders scream and dance to intimidate their opponents. However, the games usually conclude with a sense of community. People indeed compete but at the end, they take it as a moment of communal celebration.

This article discusses several children's folklore, especially games, of the Sumbanese children. In addition to offering entertainment, the games also prepare children to anticipate their future life. In his PhD thesis on folk games and life skills development of the children in Ghana, Gyadu(2014) asserts that through games, children learn about rules or regulation, how to work as individuals or members of a team. For children, plays, i.e. games, are important for physical and mental developments. The same thing applies to Sumbanese children's folklore discussed above.

The games fall into the category of folklore for they meet at least six of the folklore qualities suggested by Jakovljevic(2009: 58-59). First, the authors or creators of the above-

mentioned games are anonymous; second, the form of spreading them and communicating is oral; third, the games are collective in nature; fourth, they are some variations in performance, and fifth, they allow re-creativity, and sixth, they continue to be a living tradition among the Sumbanese children.

CONCLUSION

This article presents six (6) examples of children's folklore performed in the eastern part of Sumba. The *dikang/padikang* (riddle) requires verbal skills. Those asking question in Sumbanese riddle is expected to be creative and witty both in formulating riddles and answering to riddles. The players should have the ability to observe what happens or the objects around him/her, and then transform those "real life situations" into a riddle. I believe that this game also helps someone to maintain ties with other children through game situations. The second verbal game is rhyming which requires children to create a chain of phrases. For me, this game provides rooms for children to improve their speaking ability. As long as I remember, most of the Sumbanese children's games involve physical activities. Coconut shell (cooking) game, *kanaka* game, finger-wresting game, and top spinning games require physical strength and agility. These games are competitive in nature but at the end, they are a means of entertainment and creating solidarity among the players.

Indonesia is a country blessed with rich folkloric expressions. Like other children in other parts of the world, our young generation at present time is more familiar with modern games offered by the Internet and ready-made game tools. I argue that our children also need to be introduced to our old-times children folklore, since traditional games, like the modern ones, teach creativity and solidarity, and provides rooms for physical activities. I invite those who are interested in children folklore to re-invent, collect, and publish children folklore of many traditional communities in this country. It is also important to create an event where children's folklore, especially children's games, is introduced to the present generation.

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