UNVEILING THE DUALISM BETWEEN CAROK CULTURE AND ISLAMIC VALUES: AN ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINISM PERSPECTIVE IN MADURESE SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT
This study aims to examine the dualism between carok culture and Islamic values in Madurese society through the perspective of environmental determinism proposed by Friedrich Ratzel. Carok, as a form of honor-based conflict resolution, continues to persist in the social life of Madurese, despite being in contradiction with Islam, which emphasizes peace and self-restraint. This research employs a qualitative method with an environmental determinism approach to analyze the relationship between environmental conditions, social characteristics, and the persistence of carok culture. This perspective is used to explain how the relatively harsh geographical conditions and limited natural resources in Madura contribute to shaping a society that highly values honor and firmness. The findings reveal that the dualism between carok culture and Islamic values is a result of a complex social construction. The community does not entirely perceive both as absolute contradictions, but rather situates them contextually. Carok is understood as a last resort in defending honor, while Islamic values remain the primary normative guideline in everyday life.

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INTRODUCTION

Carok is a tradition of violence originating from the Madurese people who live on Madura Island, carried out to restore honor that has been insulted or violated. The tradition of carok involves two opposing parties fighting with sharp weapons, especially the sickle-like weapon known as the *celurit*. Usually, carok is conducted between two individuals, although sometimes each side may consist of two to three people. All parties involved in carok must be male. Women are not allowed to participate in or engage in carok because this tradition is considered to be exclusively "intended" for men. If women engage in a fight resembling carok (even if it results in death), it is not regarded as carok but merely as an ordinary fight.

Like a game, the carok tradition recognizes winners and losers. A person is considered the "winner" in a carok duel if he successfully kills his opponent using his weapon. In the Madurese language, the winner is called *se mennang*. Meanwhile, the person who is killed is regarded as the losing party. In Madurese, the loser in a carok duel is referred to as *se kala* (Wiyata, 2002:1). Furthermore, the person who wins the carok is often given the title of a "*orang jago*" by society (Wiyata, 2002: 182).

In Madurese society, carok may occur when triggered by actions considered insulting to a man's honor. Several actions regarded as insults to male honor include disturbing another man's wife, adultery between a wife and another man, sexual harassment against female family members, as well as other actions perceived as degrading a man's dignity (such as slander). For the Madurese people, such acts give rise to *malo*, a feeling of humiliation caused by another person's insult to one's honor. To restore the violated honor, there is believed to be no other solution except carrying out carok (Wiyata, 2002: 172-173). Based on data collected by Wiyata from the Bangkalan Resort Police Office, between 1990 and 1994 there were 207 cases of carok in Bangkalan Regency. Of these cases, 60.4% were caused by disturbances involving another man's wife (Wiyata, 2002: 4).

In Madurese society, when a wife is disturbed, the husband has two options. The first option is to carry out carok (killing the man who disturbed his wife) in order to restore his honor. However, if the wife has already

entered into a relationship or had sexual relations with another man, the husband may choose the second option, namely killing both parties. Nevertheless, there is an exception to this second option: if the husband and wife are still related by kinship, divorce may be considered permissible instead (Wiyata, 2002: 175-176).

Before carrying out *carok*, the perpetrator sometimes visits a *kiai* to ask for mantras or amulets as protection, which are believed to be spiritually infused into the body. In the *carok* tradition, there are three mantras commonly used for self-protection: *nylateng*, *nyepet*, and *mesem*. The *nylateng* mantra is used to give courage to the perpetrator of *carok*. Meanwhile, the *nyepet* mantra is intended to make the perpetrator resistant or immune to sharp weapons. Lastly, the *mesem* mantra is used to soften or influence the opponent's heart. These mantras are usually infused into a drink, which is then consumed by the perpetrator within a specific period according to the instructions of the *kiai* (Wiyata, 2002: 192).

In practice, carok can be carried out in two ways: directly approaching the opponent and challenging him to a duel or through *nyelep*. *Nyelep* refers to attacking the opponent from behind or from the side while the target is off guard. This tactic is generally regarded as the least honorable method in carok. Meanwhile, *ngonggai* refers to visiting the opponent's house and openly challenging him to engage in carok (Wiyata, 2002: 187-188).



Carok Visualization
Source: Kus Indarto

As explained earlier, the weapons used in carok are sharp weapons, most commonly the *celurit*. However, the *celurit* used in carok is different from the ordinary sickle used for cutting grass; it is a special type made specifically for carok. The *celurit* used in carok is usually forged from pure steel or railway tracks, while lower-quality versions are made from ordinary steel (Wiyata, 2002: 38). In terms of size and shape, carok weapons are divided into several types, including *are' takabuwan* (the most commonly used type), *tekos bu-ambu* (shaped like a rat's tail when still), *dang-osok* (long like a sword), *bulu ajam* (resembling a chicken feather), *lancor* (with a curved handle at the top), *monteng*, *sekken* (a small knife less than 15 cm long), *kembang turi*, *calo'* (a type of *celurit* with a curved blade), *ladding pangabisan* (a dagger), *koner*, *larkang*, *birang* or *biris* (types of machetes), and *tombak* (a spear) (Wiyata, 2002: 36-37).



Sharp weapon that usually used in carok
Source: Wiyata's book p. 251.

Although the tradition of carok has long been deeply rooted in Madurese society, it is equally remarkable that Islamic culture and values are also deeply embedded in the daily lives of the Madurese people. Islam is estimated to have first entered the island of Madura in

the fifteenth century through trade routes (De Jonge, 1989: 240). At that time, Islam was spread by Muslim traders originating from Gujarat (India), Malacca, and Sumatra (Palembang) (Schrieke, 1955–1957, II: 230–232). In later periods, the spread of Islam in Madura was also carried out by the followers of Sunan Ampel and Sunan

Giri, who are known as two of the Walisongo, the nine revered Islamic saints of Java. Sunan Ampel and Sunan Giri were important figures in the Islamization of Java and were based in Gresik and Surabaya (De Graaf and Pigeaud, 1974: 137–155 and 159–160). The claim that the spread of Islam in Madura was influenced by the followers of Sunan Ampel and Sunan Giri is strengthened by oral traditions telling of a man from Ampel, Surabaya, who settled in Pasundan Village near Sumenep (Abdurrachman, 1971: 16–17). The spread of Islam in Madura became more widespread when the rulers of the island converted to Islam in the mid-sixteenth century (De Jonge, 1989: 241).

In Madurese society, Islamic culture holds a very important and deeply rooted position. Islamic values are reflected not only in religious practices but also in social life, traditions, and the identity of the Madurese people. The existence of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), the high respect for kiai (Islamic scholars), the influence of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Islamic religious rituals, demonstrate that Islam has become an inseparable part of Madurese life.

The first aspect of Islamic culture that occupies a strong and important position in Madurese society is the high respect toward kiai. The term kiai itself has three meanings. First, it refers to a person who represents the highest spiritual authority and possesses a deep understanding of the power and greatness of Allah. Second, it refers to the leader or caretaker of an Islamic boarding school (pesantren). Third, it is a title for individuals who are highly involved in Islamic religious activities such as preaching and religious lectures (Turmudi, 2004: 29). In Madurese society, there is a well-known expression: "Buppa', Babbu', Guru, Rato", meaning "father, mother, teacher (kiai), and ruler." This expression implies that fathers and mothers are the most respected figures within the family sphere, while in the social sphere, kiai are regarded as highly respected role models. For the Madurese people, kiai are teachers who provide Islamic religious knowledge and guidance for living both in this world and in the afterlife (Rozaki, 2021: 25).

Over time, the relationship between kiai and society has evolved beyond a simple teacher-student spiritual bond into a relationship characterized by mutual dependence and
social exchange. A kiai may receive economic and financial support from the community, especially from former students (santri). The close relationship between kiai and society also creates social prestige and a sense of pride. For example, Madurese people often feel honored when receiving a visit from a kiai (Rozaki, 2021: 28).

The second aspect is the strong respect and admiration toward the Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Similar to their respect for kiai, Madurese people highly revere NU. When asked about their religion, many Madurese people simply answer "NU." This indicates that among the many Islamic organizations in Indonesia, such as Muhammadiyah and Sarekat Islam (SI), Madurese society is more familiar with NU than with other Islamic organizations (Hannan, 2018: 34).

The third aspect is religious ritual traditions. Religious rituals in Madurese society share similarities with traditional Javanese practices, such as nyekar (grave pilgrimage), tahlilan (The tradition of gathering together to recite dhikr, thayyibah phrases, and other prayers), slametan (a joint prayer service followed by the distribution of free food to people as an expression of gratitude to Allah), commemorations of the 100th day after death, the 1000th day after death, and other ceremonies. One interesting characteristic of these rituals is the central role of the kiai. Almost no religious ritual in Madura is conducted without the presence of a kiai. Without a kiai, such religious ceremonies are generally not carried out (Syarif and Hannan, 2020: 231).

The fourth aspect is the pesantren. A pesantren is an Islamic educational institution where students (santri) study the Qur'an and other religious teachings under the guidance of a kiai. In Madurese culture, pesantren are commonly referred to as pondhuk. Generally, a pesantren consists of at least three main elements: the kiai, the santri, and the mosque or langgar (small prayer house). In this context, the kiai serves as the leader of the pesantren and determines its policies, while the santri are the students who study there. The mosque or langgar functions as the central place for activities such as congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, religious studies, and other communal activities (Syarif and Hannan, 2020: 232).

The coexistence of the carok tradition and Islamic values, despite their seemingly contradictory principles, presents a distinctive cultural phenomenon in Madurese society. On the one hand, carok has long been regarded as a customary practice for defending honor and dignity, while on the other hand, Islamic teachings emphasize the sanctity of life, forgiveness, and peaceful conflict resolution. The persistence of these two deeply rooted yet conflicting value systems raises an important question: why do they continue to coexist within the same society? To address this question, this study employs Friedrich Ratzel's theory of environmental determinism to examine how Madura's geographical and environmental conditions have historically shaped the development of both cultural practices and religious values. Through this perspective, the study seeks to explain the cultural dualism that characterizes contemporary Madurese society.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore and explain the coexistence of carok culture and Islamic values in Madurese society. A qualitative method was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, including values, beliefs, behaviors, perceptions, and lived experiences within a particular community. The research adopted a correlational design to examine the relationship between environmental conditions and the persistence of these seemingly contradictory cultural and religious value systems. To analyze this relationship, the study employed Friedrich Ratzel's theory of environmental determinism. According to Ratzel, the natural environment plays a crucial role in shaping human culture, economic activities, social characteristics, and even political development. In *Anthropogeographie*, Ratzel illustrates this argument by comparing the distinct characteristics of the Germanic, Greek, and Latin peoples, which he attributes to differences in their geographical environments (Ratzel, 1899: 18). He further reinforces this perspective by referring to David Hume's observations on regional variations within China, arguing that climatic differences between eastern and western China produced different social characteristics despite the populations belonging to the same nation (Ratzel, 1899: 28). Guided by this perspective, the present study examines how the geographical and environmental conditions of Madura have contributed to the emergence and persistence of both carok culture and Islamic values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Environmental Conditions in Madura

Madura Island covers an area of 5,304 km², is 190 km long, and 40 km wide. The soil in Madura is dry, arid, and infertile. The soil in Madura is dominated by limestone deposits. The topsoil consists of limestone, while the second layer consists of limestone deposits.

Additionally, there are layers along the northern coast and four alluvial river deposits: one in the west, two in the east, one in the south, and one in the east (Kuntowijoyo 1988, 23–24). Geologically, Madura Island is an extension of the limestone mountains located north and south of the Solo Valley, resulting in numerous limestone hills. The limestone hills in Madura are lower, rougher, and rounder than the limestone hills found in Java. The highest limestone hill on Madura Island is Mount Tembuku, which stands 471 meters above sea level (De Jonge 1989, 5–6).

Madura Island has a two-season climate: the west monsoon or rainy season, which lasts from October to April, and the east monsoon or dry season, which occurs from April to October. Only the inland areas receive continuous rainfall for six months. On the lower hillsides, the rainy season lasts no longer than three or four months. Meanwhile, in the areas along the northern and southern coasts, rain falls only in the early months of the year. During the rainy season, it rains an average of 16 days a month. Therefore, the monthly rainfall does not exceed 200 mm. During the transitional season, rainfall never exceeds 100 mm. Temperatures on Madura Island remain consistently high. The average temperature during the rainy season is 28 degrees Celsius. Meanwhile, during the dry season, the average temperature can reach 35 degrees Celsius (De Jonge 1989, 8).



Madura Island
Source: LintasPikiran.com

2. The Influence of Madura Island's Environment on the Emergence of the Carok Culture

As Ratzel pointed out, environmental conditions have a significant influence on the character and culture of the communities that inhabit them. Ratzel's statement also applies to the people of Madura Island. The island's conditions with its less-fertile, dry, arid limestone

soil and a hot climate with low rainfall result in low soil productivity and limited available resources. In the past, these conditions led to competition among individuals and groups to compete for limited resources. In traditional agrarian societies, disputes over land, land ownership, or social status often have a significant impact on a person's

survival. The deterministic perspective holds that harsh environmental conditions create economic and social pressures that can give rise to a culture that places greater emphasis on the ability to defend one's rights and honor.

In Madurese society, the concept of honor holds a very important place. Honor is understood not only as an individual's self-respect but also as a matter of the dignity of the family and the broader social group. Therefore, actions considered to undermine a person's honor are often perceived as a serious threat requiring a firm response. From the perspective of environmental determinism, the value of honor can be understood as a social mechanism that develops within societies living under conditions of competition and resource scarcity. Honor serves as social capital that must be preserved because it is tied to one's standing within the community.

The carok culture subsequently emerged as one manifestation of this value system. Carok is generally understood as a duel or fight carried out to defend or restore honor that is perceived to have been tarnished. From a deterministic perspective, this practice can be viewed as the result of cultural development influenced by the environmental conditions and social structure of Madurese society. A harsh environment is believed to shape a bold and resolute character, while resource constraints emphasize the importance of reputation and honor as means of maintaining social status. Consequently, when honor is compromised, a cultural justification for resistance emerges-one that may even lead to violence.

3. The Coexistence of the Carok Culture and Islamic Values in Madura Island Society

Madura is often described as a region with a very strong Islamic identity. Islamic boarding schools or pesantren, Nahdlatul Ulama, and religious leaders (kiai) play a significant role in the Madurese social life. There is even a phrase called Buppa', Babbu', Guru, Rato which translates to father, mother, teacher (kiai), and ruler. This phrase reflects the community's deep respect for religious authority. Normatively, Islamic teachings emphasize peace, self-control, deliberation, and the prohibition against taking another

person's life without a reason justified by sharia. Therefore, theologically speaking, carok is actually difficult to justify.

However, in social practice, people do not always act strictly in accordance with religious norms. They are also influenced by local cultural values that developed long before the arrival of Islam. In the context of Madura, the concept of honor is a particularly strong cultural value. Honor pertains not only to the individual but also to the extended family and lineage. When honor is perceived as tarnished, the resulting social pressure is often greater than the legal or religious consequences.

As a result, a process of negotiation takes place between Islamic values and local values of honor. Islam serves as the primary guide in daily life, while carok emerges as an extraordinary mechanism when an individual feels that their entire dignity has been shattered and there is no other way to restore it. In other words, the community does not view carok as a rejection of Islam, but rather as a response to a situation perceived as involving the most fundamental aspect of self-respect.

CONCLUSIONS

The emergence of the carok tradition cannot be understood just as an act of violence, but also as a cultural product shaped by Madura's environmental conditions. From the perspective of environmental determinism, the island's dry climate, infertile land, and limited natural resources contributed to the development of a social system that highly values honor, dignity, and the defense of one's social status. The coexistence of the carok culture and Islamic values reflects a process of cultural negotiation, not a total rejection of religion. Although Islamic teachings emphasize peace and prohibit violence especially intentional murder, the concept of honor, which is deeply rooted in the culture, continues to influence social behavior. As a result, many Madurese people view carok as an extraordinary response to serious violations of dignity, while Islam remains the primary moral and religious foundation in daily life.

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