

Traditions of Remo in *Blater* Community of Madura

(Tradisi Remo dalam Komunitas *Blater* di Madura)

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Abstrak

Pada masyarakat Madura terdapat komunitas *blater* yang masih bertahan dengan segala profesi dan kegiatannya. Komunitas *blater* ini, mempunyai tradisi secara rutin mengadakan hajatan Remo untuk tujuan tertentu. Hal inilah yang menggugah peneliti untuk mengkaji lebih jauh karena pada era modern dan kontemporer ini tradisi hajatan Remo ini masih ada pada masyarakat Madura. Menurut Kuntowijoyo terdapat struktur masyarakat, yaitu abangan, kyai, dan priyayi. Di Madura terdapat kelompok yang bernama *blater*. *Blater* adalah seorang jagoan yang ditakuti sekaligus dihormati oleh masyarakat Madura Barat. *Blater* perlu mengikuti tradisi Remo untuk lebih diakui oleh masyarakat sekitar. Remo adalah sebuah pesta ajang berkumpulnya para orang jago atau *blater* di Bangkalan dan Sampang. Di dalam tradisi Remo para *blater* melakukan saweran atau *bhubuwan* kepada tuan rumah dengan besaran sekitar 500.000-2.000.000 rupiah per



orang sesuai dengan kemampuan dan kedudukan *blater* tersebut dalam kelompoknya. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode kualitatif. Teknik pengumpulan data wawancara mendalam pada informan kunci, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Sejumlah 10 (sepuluh) orang telah diwawancarai. Dari hasil penelitian, tradisi Remo ini sebagai bentuk eksistensi komunitas *blater*. Eksistensi ini diperlukan sebagai bentuk pengakuan diri *blater* sebagai modal sosial, kemudian memberi *bhubuan* adalah modal ekonomi, dan hajatan Remo adalah modal simbolik. Kami simpulkan bahwa dalam komunitas *blater* adalah penting untuk mempunyai kekuatan modal simbolik, modal sosial, modal budaya dan modal ekonomi.

Kata kunci: *blater*, komunitas, Remo Madura, tradisi

Abstract

Blater community is a sub-culture within the Madurese community, which until now still exists in carrying out Remo tradition. Members of *blater* have various professions and activities, and they are feared and respected by the people of West Madura. They maintain their influence through a gathering called Remo in the cities of Bangkalan and Sampang. During Remo, *blater* members conduct *saweran* or *bhubuwan* (giving some money) to the host. The amount varies from around 500.000 to 2.000.000 rupiahs per person according to the financial and social status of the member. This is a qualitative research. The data collection techniques were in-depth interview, observation, and documentation. We interviewed the members of *blater*, and analyzed the qualitative data. We conclude that every community needs activities to maintain its existence. In West Madura society, it comes in the form of Remo. This existence is required as a form of recognition from the society. The study also finds that it is important for the individual member to assure oneself of having power of symbolic, social, cultural, and economic capital.

Keywords: *blater*, komunitas, Madurese Remo, tradisi

INTRODUCTION

Geographically and socio-culturally, the island of Madura, which is surrounded by the sea and close to Java Island, has its own uniqueness. The geographical location of the limestone plateau affects the character of the Madurese society. It is likewise with the social culture in Madura. After the Suramadu bridge was built, the mobility and access to information of the Madurese community was much easier. On the other hand, however, the Madurese society, especially Bangkalan, has a culture that is difficult to change so that, to date, the negative stereotypes of the Madurese community remain attached. This easy access to information has caused cultural dynamics in Madura to become more diverse where there is a change in the culture in the society. Despite this change, however, traditional culture is still available and exists, one of which is the culture of Remo tradition.

In West Madura society—in the cities of Bangkalan and Sampang—there is a social class that is not the same as the structure of society in general. They call themselves *blater*, who have a tradition that they call Remo. The lifestyles of these individuals are also different from the general people in the community.

Remo tradition in *blater* community is the heritage of the ancestors of the Madurese. The Remo tradition that is more widely known in West Madura (Sampang and Bangkalan), is a meeting place for *blater* champions from the whole area of the island of Madura and even from the island of Java. The Remo tradition that has emerged and taken root in Madura Island is apparently developed in an urban society, in Bangkalan and Sampang. This tradition still continues even

though Madurese society has certain degree of heterogeneity. The *blater* gather in a community, interacting and getting to know each other, including both overseas and migrant Madurese. With the tradition of Remo, it is expected that it can foster a sense of fellowship among the *blater* champions as fellows who have both the same background and the same ancestors, and also the same goals. Therefore, with Remo, the *blater* champions assume that they can strengthen the friendship and fellowship.

Tradition contributes a sense of comfort and belonging. It brings families together and enables people to reconnect. When a tradition is not being accomplished, the group will become extinct. Therefore, observing tradition is used by researchers to comprehend the existence of a group. The tradition that has developed among the *blater* group is a combination of the fulfillment of personal interests that are required by utilizing the potential in the surrounding environment.

Madurese society has different characteristics from other ethnicities in Indonesia, especially from the socio-cultural perspective. In the social life of the society, aside from *rato*, *priyayi*, and *kiai-rato* is the leader, *priyayi* are the nobles, and *kiai* are the Islamic leaders—the role of *blater* as the village social elite has a large influence in the Madurese society. The term *blater* is very popular, especially in western Madura (De Graaf and Pigeaud 2001). In this area, *blater* thrive and, hitherto, their existence has influenced the social and cultural life of Madurese society (Rozaki 2004),

Blater people are those who have expertise in *kanuragan* (supernatural powers), which is sometimes also accompanied by invulnerability to weapons and magical abilities that add to other charismatic powers. They also have religious knowledge, but it is limited to their own development. What stands out is their “social” role as a figure of a strong person/champion in his village.

The Remo performers are men, members of a *blater* community. Although there is a role for women in Remo traditions, it is limited to preparing food, and for making sure that the event is running smooth. This phenomenon illustrates the differences in gender roles in this community. “Masculine cultures, value work, strength, competition, and assertiveness” (Tubbs and Moss 2008). Masculine culture gives added value to work, strength, competition and assertiveness. The role of males are more dominant, even in the Madura tribe in general.

This Remo tradition is usually carried out from the evening until morning. The process of communication within the Remo tradition usually occurs by face-to-face interaction in the meeting of *blater* members. Remo has now become a tradition in west Madura.

This Remo tradition seems to have become a cultural identity of *blater* communities in Madura. Without Remo tradition, it would be as if this *blater* community has not been recognized by the surrounding society. Each of these *blater* individuals cannot behave as he pleases because he is assessed by the society and the *blater* leader in his group. For every individual, identity is something that must be owned as a sign of differentiation between one individual and another, “[...] identities are relational and contingent [...] They depend upon what they are defined against, and this may change over time or be understood differently in different places” (Giles and Middleton 1999).

According to Stuart Hall, the concept of cultural identity is hiding the personal identity of an individual behind the collective identity around it (Hall 2003). In accordance with this concept, an individual is forced to have the same identity as the identity around him. Individuals who have different identities from a group will be deemed unfit to be a part of that group. This concept causes the imbalance of cultural identity between one group and another.

In western Madurese society, there is a *blater* community that still survives with all its professions and activities. This *blater* community routinely holds a Remo tradition for various purposes. This intrigues the researchers to study further because, in the midst of this modern and contemporary era, this Remo tradition still exists.

In understanding *blater*, we need to clarify two concepts. There is often a confusion between *blater* and *bhejing*. People often assume that these two words have the same meaning. However, in fact, *blater* and *bhejing* are completely different. This can be observed from their ability and communication patterns. Another difference between *blater* and *bhejing* (scoundrel) lies in the social levels and classes that distinguish the two. The image of a *bhejing* is more closely related to the criminal world and has a rough and tough behavior. On the other hand, although a *blater* is also correlated with violence and the criminal world, the manner is gentler, calmer, and more civilized. In representing themselves, *blaters* are a gang of scoundrels whom the social class or level has been elevated. Therefore we would like to study the function of Remo for the *blater* community.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative methodology with an ethnographic focus. The study was conducted through watching Remo tradition practices in the Madurese population, particularly in West Madura, namely in the Bangkalan and Sampang regions. These regions were chosen because the *Blater* community mostly exists in these regions. The researcher then identified important informants using data gathered from the *Blater* community, which served as the study objective.

The data was collected by means of indepth interview, observation, and participant observation. The first author participated in many occasions of Remo traditions, so that she could observe the behavior of the informants.

The key informants were the members of *blater* community, such as dancers (*lengge*) and the Remo performers. One of the informants is a member since 1972. Another one of the informant is a leader of the *blater* community in Bangkalan. He became the leader of this community since 1982. Currently he is in his 60s, but he still performs the sandur dance as a *lengge* in every Remo tradition in Bangkalan. He said that he wanted to preserve the local culture of Madura.

Overall, we interviewed 10 (ten) informants. Their initial names were DW, SM, AD, TRM, KM, SHD, SY, FR, SHd, and Rsd, from January to July of 2019. The data were analyzed using categorization, and data triangulation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Tradition of Remo in West Madura

The Remo tradition in the *blater* community has existed a long time ago as the heritage of the Madurese ancestors. The Remo tradition that is more commonly known in West Madura (Sampang and Bangkalan) is a meeting place for *blater* champions from the whole island of Madura and even from the island of Java. With this Remo, it is expected to be a medium to foster a sense of fellowship among the *blater* champions as someone who has the same background, the same ancestors, and also the same goals. Therefore, with Remo, the *blater* champions assume that they can strengthen the friendship and fellowship both within their own community and with other communities.

Various interactions carried out in a *blater* community have become very meaningful as a measure of closeness between one member and another, either in one *blater* community or with other *blater* communities. Interactions such as announcement by the head of *blater* regarding the schedule for each Remo tradition to its members, and inviting them to attend the events. When some members did not have the money to participate, this community could provide loans. The interactions also involved mutual help when there was a wedding of a family, recital for mourning the death of a family, even helping the members when there were misfortunes.

What should be noted is how the interaction and communication is carried out inside or outside someone's *blater* community. For examples interaction between fellow Remo members in one *blater*, to ask for help with financial constraints from the head of *blater*. Another example, there can also be interactions between members of different *blaters* regarding job opportunities, protecting each other's territorial, or even information regarding a house for sale.

Remo becomes a tool to measure the existence of a *blater* champion. Remo tradition is the most important element in a *blater* community. This is in accordance with the explanation from Mr. T in the interview (29 June 2019, 16:00 WIB), "There are three purposes of Remo. The first is, indeed, to maintain the cohesiveness among fellow *blaters*, the second is to expand the relationship or friendship among all *blater* members, and the third is to continue the Madurese tradition so that it does not become extinct."

Remo as a Means to *Blaters'* Self-Esteem

In Remo tradition, every group member basically has their own motivation in deciding to join this event, although self-esteem is the main factor. In the life of the Madurese, self-esteem is a very important thing and has a very high value. A member of a *blater* community has a very high self esteem when he join a Remo tradition. This is in accordance with the Madurese philosophy saying that "ango' pote tolang atembhang pote mata," it means it is better to die rather than living in shame. In this case, someone who joins a Remo tradition is considered to be able to represent himself as an individual who has high self-esteem, or, simply put in other words, someone who joins Remo can increase his self-esteem quickly. It is also clear that there is a close relationship between self-esteem and Remo tradition. According to Mr. T's explanation in the interview (28 June 2019, 16:15 WIB),

"Monterrodaddhiya blatêryakodhunoro'acarabhubhuwan, maksoddha to'oto'otaba sêbiasa êkoca' rêmoh, lamba' rêmoh rêyakabiasaanna sesepuhorêngmadhurasêêghuna'aghi kaangghuy kompolla orêng blatêr ban kenenganna kaangghuy ajheralakosêpantes,monnoro'rêmohrêyahagadirinaorêng cepetongghelê'."

("If you want to be a member of a *blater*, you have to go to the *bhubuwan* event, which refers to *to'otok* or is also commonly called Remo. In the past, Remo was a custom of Madurese elders that is used to connect the relationship between family relatives, but now it is used as a gathering for *blater* members and a means of getting along for learning to behave well. If someone takes part in Remo, his self-esteem can rise quickly).

In the statement above, we can examine the characteristics of Madurese who hold their tradition very strongly. This seems to be a great concern of every *blater* members. They think that maintaining the tradition will provide a unique identity from Madurese in general. However, this is not the only reason why they work hand-in-hand together to maintain the existence of Remo. Furthermore, they assume that there are many benefits they can be obtained. Some of the benefits are to establishing friendship among *blater* members, creating networking relationships,

maintaining security in their area, and are respected by the surrounding community. Taking part in Remo traditions gives not only material benefits but more importantly the connections that can be solidly established, both within the group and with other groups of *blaters*.

Remo Tradition of *Blater*

Tradition is the proof of the existence of a social group. When the traditions carried out by certain social groups are gradually fading, it means that the group begins to become extinct. Therefore, many observers use the tradition of a particular group as a measure of the existence of the groups. The tradition that has developed among the *blater* group is a combination of the fulfillment of the personal interests that are required by utilizing the potential in the surrounding environment. According to Mr. T in the interview at the 28 June 2019, 16:00 WIB, “Rêmo hrêyasa êstonamaterrostradisinaorêngmadhuralamba’ lê’, daddhikitamaterrosapasê laêwarisisesepuhnêné moyang orêngmadhurarêyalê” (“Doing Remo tradition is actually continueing the tradition of the Madurese a long time ago, so we continue the legacy of the ancestors of the Madurese”).

In terms of social class in the society, the *blater* community is a group of people that has a different social class from the *kiai*, *priyayi*, or the merchants in Madura. Those who take part of Remo traditions have high social and economic capital in Madurese society, especially in West Madura.

Capital of the Remo Tradition

The reason that Bourdieu uses the term capital taken from economic terms, among others, is the way the capital can be inherited and can provide benefits in accordance with the opportunities owned by the owner. For him, it is impossible to understand the social world without knowing the role of capital in all its forms, and not just in one form that is recognized by economic theory. There are four kinds of capital presented by Bourdieu: economic, cultural (knowledge, writing skills, etc.), social (relationships that are useful for determining or producing social position), and symbolic (academic degrees, surnames, *ulama* (religious leaders), offices in elite areas, etc.). These capitals, besides habitus, are then used by individuals to fight in the realm of social struggle. In addition, capital can also be used by individuals as a goal in the struggle in the social environment.

Economic capital in the form of assets, such as property, money and the like social capital refers to a beneficial reciprocal relationship, while cultural capital comes in the form of information assets in the form of knowledge and skills that can be possessed through socialization and education and the fourth is symbolic capital (e.g. prestige, honor, the right to be heard) which Bourdieu sees as a crucial source of power. When holders of symbolic capital use their power against other people who have nothing, and then control their actions, then they practice symbolic violence.

Cultural capital can be manifested in three forms: embodiment, objectification, and institutionalization. In the embodiment, cultural capital is in the form of the disposition of the body and mind that is valued in a particular arena. Cultural capital cannot be transferred to other people like economic capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). In the objectified condition, cultural capital manifests in cultural objects. As a material object, objectified cultural capital can be owned with economic capital and can also be inherited easily.

Social capital is defined as social institutions that involve networks, norms and social trusts that encourage social collaboration (coordination and cooperatives) for the common good. Bourdieu argues that social capital refers to the benefits and opportunities that a person gets in the society

through his membership in certain social entities (associations, *arisan* groups, or congregations of Islamic study groups). Every domain has its own logic, principles, interests, and values, which, in this case, are called capital. It can also be said that each domain has its own capital. In each domain, they have interests that are not only economic, but also symbolic capital. Each domain has historically developed capital according to the conditions of each community.

Social capital can manifest in the form of praxis or institutionalization, both of which are produced and reproduced through exchanges (communication, goods, affection, and marriage). In the form of praxis, social capital is in accordance with the relationships that are relatively unattached, such as friendships, whereas, in the institutionalized form, social capital manifests in the membership of a relatively bound group, such as family, tribe, school, party, or organization (Bourdieu 1986). Social capital is social networking that enables collaboration with other parties while economic capital, in the narrow sense, is the capital that can be directly converted into money and can be objectified in the form of property rights. Economic capital is an independent type of capital. If other capital is more tied to a particular domain, economic capital is more freely transferred between domains, and is also the easiest to inherit to others.

Remo as a Cultural Capital

Remo as a cultural tradition in Bangkalan and Sampang Regency is a tradition that is preserved by the people of western Madura. Remo is only implemented by men who are able and willing to follow along. Madura has a very strong patrilineal culture, so this Remo sandur can still exist today. This Remo tradition is a cultural capital for *blater* because this activity is not only aimed at seeking economic benefits but also there are performance activities carried out by *lengge* dancers and gamelan accompaniment called sandur. *Lengge* is dancing with the *blater* members. The aim was to show the existence of self and the strength of the capital and social status of the *blater* members who were present at that time.

Remo can have double functions, as a place for economic transactions while strengthening social status and as a means to build social networks among *blaters*. Consequently, a *blater* will feel incomplete if he has not become a Remo member yet. The requirement to become a Remo member is to be economically capable and responsible, because Remo participants must contribute some money (*mowang*). The Remo host can collect the money overnight. An informant reveals that, a longtime member of Remo may collect from 750,000,000 to 1 billion rupiahs, while, if he is a new member, the money may reach 200,000,000 to 500,000,000 rupiahs. This amount is greatly influenced by the amount of money donated in Remo elsewhere. The greater the *mowang*, the more money can be earned/collected. In returning the money (*mowang*), the *blater* puts forward a sense of responsibility and the money must be more than from the money given to him.

In organizing Remo, the informant said that it would cost a lot of money to rent a *sandur* and provide food for all invitees. When Remo members have to attend the event, they do anything to get a certain amount of money to give (*mowang*), even if they have to borrow money in order to take part in the celebration. Therefore, participants of Remo must have strong capability in financial terms because they have to spend a lot of money for donations and saweran, so that some members may end up having debts.

Remo is usually held throughout the year except for the month of Ramadan and the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. According informant G, the number of Remo members who are officially recorded is around 400 to 500 people, the domicile of whom is spread from Bangkalan,

Sampang, and even Surabaya. The schedule has already been set by a note taker (caller) the name of whom is Mr. A.

Social Capital for *Blaters*

There are people who call themselves *blater* members. *Blater* is only a term in West Madura in the area of Bangkalan and Sampang, while, in East Madura such as Pamekasan and Sumenep, they are called *bhejing* (scoundrel). Wiyata (2002, stated that a champion will automatically become a member of *blater*. On the other hand, a member of *blater* may not be a champion. The status as a *blater* member is not an encryption status. Hence, a *blater* member does not have to be from a certain circle. Normally, his status makes him always treated as a respected informal figure, who is even feared by everyone in his neighborhood.

Champions are those who have expertise in *kanuragan* (supernatural powers), which is sometimes also accompanied by invulnerability to weapons and magical power that add to his charismatic power. He also has religious knowledge. What stands out is his “social” role as a figure of a strong person in his village. In this study, *blater* is interpreted as social and symbolic capital; thus, during Remo tradition, *blater* members may have different purposes.

First, the goal is to establish a fellowship (*nyaretretan*). Second, the purpose is to guard the area. Third, the aim is to gain networking while asking to protect the area of the society where he lives. Finally, the fourth goal is to form a friendly relationship. The researchers will interpret the symbolic capital in Remo from the variety of goals of *blater* members. Of the various types of capital available, symbolic capital is the central interest to gain recognition, authority and honor in every domain. Therefore, symbolic capital possesses the power to interpretations, or official knowledge of the social world (Fashri 2014).

***Bhubuwan*, “Economic Capital” in Remo tradition**

The tradition of Remo tradition in West Madura involves economic capital because, in every Remo tradition, the members must amass a certain amount of money to be given to the host. The amount of money given is even more than the previously given money. The amount of all money given is noted by the note taker and the caller and counted in advance in front of the Remo member concerned. Each person does not give the same amount of money, which, according to the researchers’ observations, ranges from 500,000 to 5,000,000 rupiahs in one event. Therefore, a *blater* who joins the Remo must be able to take responsibility for his participation, both financially and physically.

If the *blater* cannot attend the Remo tradition, then he has to ask another person, called *pede*. The *pede* must represent him to give the money. According to our informants, the host needs to amass around 100-150 million rupiahs for a Remo tradition. Despite spending a lot of money and even having a loss, *blater* members still continue joining Remo traditions because it functions to maintain power, status and prestige. Remo tradition has become a tool for maintaining the masculinity of the men, by showing off to other men who have become members of the *blater* community.

“In every man there is a child” is a very well-known proverb. Every man needs recreation. For the western Madurese, Remo tradition is a form of recreation that does not involve women, but can certainly boost their confidence and pride.

It becomes interesting that most of the members—currently all of the members—of this community are men. There are occasions when the *blater* members gather and carrying out certain activities together, such as regular social gathering, helping each other when someone has a misfortune etc. These activities are for strengthening their brotherhood, and for having fun together. Such activities are as reported in other communities, such as reported by Grazian (2007) among college male students.

CONCLUSION

From the observations and interviews, Remo tradition is a means for *blater* members to show their prestige in the society by showing off their wealth—which gives a very high self-esteem for the Madurese. In addition, Remo tradition aims to find connections with prominent people among the *blater* members. Meanwhile, in terms of the social capital, the Remo tradition has a long-term effect, not a quick financial return. The social effect, however, means more for the *blater* members, and the society where they live.

Any men from any profession may join a *blater* community, as long as he can be responsible for following the Remo tradition. *Blater* members at the Remo tradition in West Madura will always try to keep their groups in existence. *Blater* members hope to be able to support their families through trading, entrepreneurship, or other activities from the benefits obtained from the Remo tradition.

Hence, we conclude that a society needs activities to assure the existence of each individual in the community. The forms may vary. In the West Madura society, it is in the form of the Remo tradition. This existence is required as a form of recognition from the society that a man has the power of symbolic capital, social capital, cultural capital and economic capital.

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