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The handle http://hdl.handle.net/1887/21539 holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

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Title: Islam and politics in Madura: ulama and other local leaders in search of influence

(1990-2010) Issue Date: 2013-08-28

Chapter 4 Blater, Forms of Violence, and the Abangan-like Culture: Overlooked Aspects of the Madurese

Introduction

There are other variants of local leadership in Madura, besides the kiai. This includes klebun (village heads) and blater. The blater are local strongmen, who are feared, held in awe, and with a high position in society. Like many kiai and certainly the klebun, the blater primarily live in rural areas, yet the shifting Madura in the post-Suharto era has provided them with more opportunities to expand their influence to urban areas. In terms of wealth, many of them have evolved from the unfortunate to the reasonably moneyed, or even to the prosperous. Like many other places in Indonesia, Madura has experienced the lack of control over violence by central and local authorities. Consequently, the inability of state institutions to enforce the law has allowed local strongmen to spread their influence and challenge influential actors: state officials and religious leaders. However, like the kiai, the blater are also known to be very adaptive and responsive to socio-political transformations. Indeed, they may form mutually beneficial relations with the state and religious leaders when the power of the state and the influence of religious leaders are too strong to oppose or when making such an alliance is seen as a helpful option.

This chapter deals with the nature and characteristics of the *blater*, forms of violence associated with the Madurese, and aspects of the *abangan*-like culture in which the *blater* are its most avid supporters. In doing so, I focus on the *blater*'s origin, resources, and

commodities in the larger Madurese society. Furthermore, I will also examine the role of blater in remo (the blater's special feast) and distinct violent cultural forms associated with wealth, status and honour that are embodied in kerapan sapi (bull racing), and carok (Madurese violent action). Finally, I will also discuss several aspects of local beliefs and the blater's religious views. Among the questions addressed are: What is the origin and what are the characteristics of the blater in society? How does remo contribute to the way of life of the blater and distinguish them from santri Muslims? What is the nature and characteristics of forms of violence in Madura? How have the religious beliefs of the blater adapted to santri Islam in daily life?

These ranges of cultural variety have provided the *blater* with opportunities to strengthen their role as true perpetrators of cultural violence in Madura. Johan Galtung defines cultural violence as:

[a]ny aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form. Examples of cultural violence are indicated, using a division of culture into religion and ideology, art and language, and empirical and formal science (Galtung, 1990: 291).

According to Blok, the view on violence is always bounded with time and place, and is largely depended on those involved in it, whether they are the offenders and victims, spectators and bystanders, or witnesses and authorities (Blok, 2001b: 106). Indeed, as Freek Colombijn argues, people are enculturated in the practice of violence through a process that is best described as 'social learning' (Colombijn, 2005: 266). In *blater* traditions such as *remo* (further described in this chapter), a *blater* can commit acts of violence (for example fighting using sharp weapons) if he is interrupted by another *blater* when he is dancing with a *tandhak* (dancer). This act of violence is legitimised by a set of rules for *remo* that all *blater* are expected to follow. Moreover, besides *remo*, they are also highly engaged in *kerapan sapi* and *sabung ayam* (cock fighting), other *blater-style* symbols of machismo and violence which are frequently exploited to amplify their influence.

Clearly, while the *kiai* are the main actors who use their position to enhance their social standing and political well-being

in state-society relations, the *blater* are local strongmen who can act as power brokers and have mutually beneficial relationships with authorities and religious leaders. Thus, they occupy a high position in society. While I have explained the roles of *kiai* in the previous chapter, this chapter presents depictions of another important actor in this study, the *blater*.

Origin and characteristics of the blater Origin and nature

Despite the emergence of the blater not being well documented, the blater world is not a new phenomenon. They are local strongmen who often gain their reputation through the fear they spread amongst the local population. It should be noted that these local strongmen differ from the strongmen of politics. The latter are defined as political leaders who rule by repression and exercise an authoritarian administration, while the former are defined as local gangsters who benefit from local insecurities to obtain an occupation, gain their reputation, and accumulate social and political influence when they become involved in politics. We cannot simply conclude that the lack of information means that no such phenomenon existed. In fact, as we shall see, the existence of the blater in Madura is prevalent. Nevertheless, the blater do not have a distinctive institution, such as the pesantren for the kiai, and blater-ship itself cannot be considered as an official occupation: hence, it is never recorded in official statistics. Consequently, counting the number of blater is impossible because we simply do not know how many of them there are. Moreover, there is no 'official' organisation with a central leadership for blater. They may form a small group, consisting of tens of blater, whose members are those who share, among other things, the same working area or the place of origin. However, it is in remo that the presence of blater in groups is obvious. By and large, they do not appear in a group on a daily basis.

Blater are particularly active in the western Madurese regencies of Bangkalan and Sampang. In the regencies of Pamekasan and Sumenep, they are less conspicuous due to the infrequency of remo held in the eastern regencies. While the blater mainly exist in Madura, they are actually part of the general Indonesian

phenomenon of strongmen—including the vanished *jagoan* in the nineteenth century Java and the *jawara* in Banten—who offer protection to those who need it or those who are thought to need it.⁵⁰ This includes petty traders in traditional markets as well as big entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, one should note that every strongmen group has its specific features, and different groups differ considerably from one another. Unlike the *jagoan*, who were portrayed as masters of the underworld, or the *jawara* who were mostly known as political brokers during the New Order as well as the post-Suharto era, the *blater* are true supporters of the *abangan-like* culture in Madura.

In Madura, many of the local traditions and customs, such as tellasan topa' (an extra celebration of Eid Al-Fitr on the eighth day of Shawwal month after voluntarily observing six days of fasting) and padusan (a communal bathing performed one day before the fasting month of Ramadan to purify one's heart and soul), have become linked with the common santri culture. However, there are also several local traditions that are closely-related to non-santri culture, such as kerapan sapi and sabung ayam. These two traditions are deeply embedded in the lives of many non-santri, which I identify as abangan-like people. Therefore, I would argue that Madura is not only a home for santri groups, but also for non-santri groups, like the blater.

According to Clifford Geertz's renowned trichotomy—the santri, the abangan, and the priyayi—in his book The Religion of Java (1960), santri are orthodox Muslims in Java. The santri religious tradition consists not only of a set of basic Islamic rituals, but also includes a whole complex of social, charitable, and political Islamic organisations. Meanwhile, abangan is a variant within the general Javanese religious system whose religious tradition is made up primarily of the ritual feast called the slametan, as well as an extensive and intricate complex of spiritual beliefs and a whole set of theories and practices of curing, sorcery and magic (Geertz, 1960: 5-6). Unlike Geertz, however, I do not describe blater practices as un-Islamic. There are several similarities between Javanese abangan

50 Onghokham suggests that *jagoan*'s historical roots lie in the pre-colonial period, during the time of royal wars and in a period of violence in Javanese history (Onghokham, 1984: 336).

and blater as far as cults, spirit beliefs and ritual practices are concerned, which lead me to identify them as abangan-like. In the pesantren tradition, santri are pupils of kiai. In this study, as I have explained in Chapter 2, santri refer primarily to the majority of Madurese Muslims as the proponents of a more orthodox Islam that is based on the global influences of Sunni Islam, while the blater, the abangan-like group, are primarily a minority of Madurese Muslims and proponents of a less orthodox Islam that is largely based on local perspectives.

Several authors seem to neglect the existence of other variants of Islam in Madura, besides the *santri*. They suggest that:

[t]he conceptual distinction between abangan and santri does not exist; the Central Javanese abangan religion, with its many magico-mystical influences from Hinduism and Buddhism, never developed to a large extent on Madura (Koentjaraningrat, 1972: 54),

With the exception of occasional eccentrics, religious uniformity among the Madurese makes it difficult for us to observe overt representatives of a strange [sic] tradition comparable to Javanese abanganism (Mansurnoor, 1990: 4),

Dalam masyarakat Madura tidak dikenal adanya pembagian golongan abangan dan putihan, sebagaimana di masyarakat Jawa (In the Madurese society, the division of abangan and putihan [a term also denoting santri] like in Java is not recognised) (Moesa, 1999: 53).

Unlike these three authors, I would maintain that the whole island cannot be completely characterised by *santri-style* orthodoxy.

Madurese Islam is, in fact, plural and at least two forms of Islam can be identified. The first is based on the global viewpoints of Sunni Islam and the other is based on local perspectives. The former adheres more to the largest denomination of Islam, *Ahl as-Sunnah* or Sunni Islam and the latter, while also adhering to Sunni Islam, is influenced more by local mystical belief systems. According to Mark Woodward (1989) and Martin van Bruinessen (1999), traditions similar to those of Indonesia's supposedly non-Islamic local culture can be found in other Muslim civilisations as well. Furthermore, it is important to note that, as in Java, each form of Islam in Madura itself shows heterogeneous characters.

Therefore, the categorisation of *blater* as an *abangan*-like group does not mean that they are the same group as the one identified by Geertz on Java. What I intend to do is to make a distinction between the two divergent groups: the *santri* and the *blater*.

In tracing the origin of the concept of blater, one cannot find the word blater in Madurese-Dutch dictionaries. In H.N. Kiliaan (1905) and P. Penninga and H. Hendriks (1936), one can find the word 'badjingan' (a word that is used to refer to blater by many Madurese today) that means landloper ('tramp' in English). In an older dictionary of Dutch-Madurese (1898), Kiliaan translates schurk (meaning ruffian or scoundrel in English) as bangsat or bhangsat (a word that is sometimes used to refer to blater today) and dhurjhana (meaning evil or wicked in English). In two Madurese-Indonesian dictionaries written by Asis Safioedin (1975 and 1977), I did not find the word blater or bajingan (thug, an alternative word for blater, see below). Only in the most recent dictionary of Madurese-Indonesian, one can find the word blater (Pawitra, 2009). According to this dictionary, blater means a figure who is regarded as a charismatic jagoan (jago) due to his strong influence in his place of origin. The term has a negative connotation.

Moreover, I have not been able to trace the emergence of *blater* in the colonial records. No newspapers of the colonial period appeared to provide accounts on *blater*. Today's East Javanese papers also hardly make any reference to *blater*. Even local Madurese newspapers, which came into existence mainly after the New Order, seldom talked about *blater*. It is fair to say that the media fear the repercussions of being critical of the *blater*. If a *blater* commits a crime, the media will refer to the perpetrator only by his name without explaining that he is a *blater*. However, it seems that the lack of appearance of the *blater* in local newspapers is largely as a result of journalists' perception that the word *blater* is less popular than other similar terms in Madura and East Java, such as *bajingan* or *preman* (hoodlum, this term has become more popular since the 1980s).

It appears that *blater* is a relatively new word, at least when we compare it to the older word of *jawara* that might have existed in the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, the *blater* or the *blater* ship are not new phenomena. In Kiliaan (1904), one can find the

words of *remo*(*h*) and *tjarok* (*carok*). This obviously indicates that these cultural forms already existed, at least in the first decade of the twentieth century. These traditions are in fact older and were already recorded in Dutch sources.⁵¹ In a general sense it is possible to suggest that the concept of *blater* came into being some time before the twentieth century. More importantly, since *remo* and *carok*, which play an important part in *blater* life, were already prevalent in the nineteenth century, it is possible that *blater* first appeared around the same time. A possible argument is that *blater* might have another name that was not recorded by the Dutch,⁵² or that the distinction between *bajingan* and *blater* did not exist yet (see the following paragraph for the distinction between *bajingan* and *blater*).

Today's *blater* frequently assert when the term first appeared. In interviews with several *blater*, many of them claim that the word already existed when they were young. Some of them spent their childhood in the 1930s and 1940s and are convinced that the word *blater* was used at that time to identify strongmen in villages. Although such claims are unverified, it is still useful to indicate that

⁵¹ Regarding *carok*, Dutch sources mention: 'When a Madurese was made to be ashamed (*malo*), he pulled his knife and immediately avenged the insult or waited until an opportunity arose to avenge himself. Fights, murder, and homicide (*carok*) were the order of the day, if one can believe it. One assumed the adage 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth' (*De Java-Post* 1911, 9-22: 345), and 'Even 'small insults' were 'answered with a knife' (Wop 1866: 284) (both are quoted in De Jonge, 1995: 13) and 'Before the prohibition of carrying weapons in 1863, *carok* was also committed with spears, lances, swords, broadswords, and *kris*' (De Jonge 2002: 147). Regarding *remo*: 'The Madurese are also crazy about festivities. That is when they kick over the traces, followed again by a long period of saving. It is often said about the inhabitants of the western part of the island that they drink *tuak* or palm wine ('the population of West Madura is addicted to alcohol') and that festivities there often got out of hand. For a long time parties were only permitted there under police supervision' (Surink 1933: 196; Van Gennep 1895: 270), (quoted in De Jonge, 1995: 15-16).

⁵² It is possible everywhere to have many names for one particular thing. For instance, the word *gali* in Indonesia (*gabungan anak-anak liar* – literally, groups of wild boys) was not popular before the 1980s although individuals who acted like *gali* already existed in the 1960s and 1970s. The word became popular only during the *petrus* (*penembak(an) misterius* – the mysterious rifleman/shooting or the mysterious killer/killing) period and shortly afterwards (personal communication with Robert Cribb).

blater wish to highlight their presence by stressing their historical significance. Many Madurese actually identify blater as bajingan or preman: the first is a common but not exclusive term for a thug in Madura and East Java, while the latter is commonly used in Jakarta. Blater will almost certainly object to being categorised as bajingan since this term has negative connotations, while blater has an honorific meaning to them.

According to Rozaki (2004: xx. 9), blater are a social community who possess habits or customs that are different to those of kiai or santri. They engage in remo, sandur (Madurese dancing), sabung ayam (cock fighting), gambling and what he incorrectly defines as other forms of crime. Other characteristics of blater include their predilections for magic, invulnerability skills and martial arts. Moreover, Wivata defines a blater as someone whose behaviours tend to committing crimes, such as gambling. Like Rozaki, he incorrectly defines the blater's alcohol consumption and womanising as forms of crime (Wiyata, 2006: xix). Meanwhile, Moesa defines blater as people who do not want to be bound by religious norms and who like gambling, consuming alcohol, and carok. He also suggests that they tend to avoid conducting such practices in front of the kiai and state officials, and that they usually repent their sins when they become old (Moesa, 1999: 151). Both Rozaki's and Wiyata's identification of blater as having the tendency to indulge in what they define as criminal activities is not constructive. It seems that these views are based on the writers' general perception that the blater have a negative image in society. The views of these Madurese authors, that the standing of the blater in their own society is unequivocally negative, seem, however, exaggerated. We should also not forget that Moesa is known as a religious leader and politician who has direct institutional involvement in local politics in East Java, and so it is perhaps unsurprising that he has negative perceptions of the blater.

Blater, however, are not simply local gangsters as Rozaki, Wiyata, Moesa or Pawitra suggest. They cannot be explicitly associated with crimes or amoral conduct. Rather, blater are a group of people who are able to sustain their distinctive norms and values in society using their charisma and by intimidating potential enemies, which includes other blater from other

communities (usually but not exclusively from different regencies), common *preman* groups, or low-level village *kiai* who criticise their participation in *remo*, *kerapan sapi*, or *sabung ayam*; indeed, anyone who is considered an obstacle.

Resources

The *blater* seem to resemble the mafiosi in Sicily and, certainly, to make a link between Madura and Sicily is not a novel idea. Touwen-Bouwsma in *De Gids* (1983) compared violence in Madura to that in Sicily. In the Indonesian version (1989), she mentions:

'Orang berani' merupakan sumber ancaman yang paling besar dalam situasi di mana mereka harus mempertahankan martabat mereka. Apa yang berlaku untuk orang mafia di Sisilia di Itali, juga berlaku untuk 'orang berani' di Madura (Touwen-Bouwsma, 1989: 178).

'Brave men' are the biggest threat in situations where they have to defend their dignity. What applies to the mafiosi in Sicily, Italy also applies to the 'brave men' in Madura (Touwen-Bouwsma, 1989: 178).

She also states:

Perkumpulan remo, yang secara terbuka mendukung kekerasan, makin lama makin berkembang menjadi pusat kejahatan di bawah tanah yang terorganisir. Pengaruh 'orang berani' dalam bidang ekonomi dan politik menjadi kabur dan teror yang mereka lakukan menjadi lebih sulit untuk diatasi. Madura dengan cepat mengarah menjadi Sisilia Jawa (Touwen-Bouwsma, 1989: 179).

Remo groups, which openly support violence, increasingly develop into a centre of crime in an organised underworld. The influence of 'brave men' in the fields of economy and politics becomes blurred and the terror that they spread becomes more difficult to handle. Madura rapidly transforms to become the Sicily of Java (Touwen-Bouwsma, 1989: 179).

De Jonge (2002: 147) also mentions orang berani:

A person who succeeds in committing *carok* after being seriously insulted is acclaimed as an *orang berani*, a courageous person. *Carok* can be revenged if the relatives of the person wounded or killed do not agree with the 'verdict'. This failure to acquiesce could eventually lead to a vendetta (*carok berantai*) between the families involved. In case of *amok* there is usually no feeling of vengeance.

In the Madurese tradition, the 'orang berani' will be identified as blater. The blater have some things in common with the Sicilian mafiosi. Both groups came into being as rural phenomena. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that they differ in certain respects.

There are a number of literatures dealing with the Sicilian mafiosi. Eric Hobsbawm, for instance, downgrades the roles of the mafiosi as an important element in Sicilian society. He argues that mafiosi's organisations and ideology are, more often than not, undeveloped and that mafiosi are not able to become accustomed to modern social movements (Hobsbawm, 1965: 6). Moreover, he also stresses the characteristics of mafiosi; that 'they are never pure social movements, with specific aims and programmes'. They are also unorganised and do not have appropriate association above local level (Hobsbawm, 1965: 30).

The significance of the mafia has been highlighted, among others, by Blok. According to Blok, the central characteristic of the mafia is 'the private use of unlicensed violence as a means of control in the public arena' (Blok, 1988: xiv). Unlike Hobsbawm, who puts both bandits and mafia in the same form of primitive movements, Blok argues that there are clear lines between bandits and mafiosi in the use of force: while the former 'do most of their work through the direct use of force; the mafiosi only employ force when someone steps out of line', and while bandits 'do not belong to long, reliable and protective patron-client chains', mafiosi are far more advanced in their relationship with authorities. Therefore, the mafia is 'more similar to regular government and more dependent on regular government than is banditry' (Blok, 1988: xx). Moreover, Blok, also suggests that bandits often terrorize the poor and the weak and that interdependencies between lords, peasants, and bandits are far more complex than social banditry, and thus, Hobsbawm's 'social bandit' is closer to myths and legends than to reality (Blok, 1972: 496; 2001a: 17, 20, 22).

Furthermore, Gambetta reveals the significance of the mafia. He defines the mafia as an industry, an enterprise which offers private protection as its main product (Gambetta, 1993: 1). He argues that protection can become a genuine commodity and that it plays a crucial role in the economy of Sicily due to the fact that

there are always people who need protection at all levels of the economy. Furthermore, it rejects the idea that many people become victims of extortion when they deal with mafiosi; he suggests that actually there are people who are willing to buy protection from mafiosi (Gambetta, 1993: 2).

Relating to the concepts of mafiosi in Sicily, the *blater* in Madura are not bandits. In studying the Sicilian mafiosi, Blok and Gambetta make a clear distinction between mafiosi and bandits. In another context, a recent work by Margreet van Till also clearly signifies the difference between *jagoan* who had dual roles and Batavian robbers who were bandits (Van Till, 2011: 14-15). Nevertheless, exceptions do occur. Some of them may be involved in criminal activities although in principle the *blater* are not criminals.

Borrowing Blok and Gambetta's concepts together, the blater can also be described as entrepreneurs of protection, individuals who offer protection to various groups, ranging from commoners to political parties, in order to get political and economic benefits. Moreover, the relationship between the authorities and strongmen groups depends on mutual understanding, especially in economic sectors. In order to give the impression that without strict controls society would descend into chaos, the New Order administration made use of 'fine and elegant' methods to convey its message, including the use of local strongmen as agents to discredit opposition movements. By the late 1980s, this stategang relationship was often categorised as one of perdekkingan/ perbekkingan (the backing system). In practice, it was a privatisation or franchising of state power, which allowed the state to distance itself from excesses conducted on its behalf. Meanwhile, such arrangements for the gangs themselves were ultimately pragmatic. They paved the way for economic advantage and political advancement, and simultaneously reduced the risk of becoming a target of state pogroms (Wilson, 2011: 244).

Commodities

Although *blater* are known to possess characteristics of bravado and bullying, they are actually needed by commoners, village officials, religious leaders and local authorities for various

purposes. One of the most likely reasons behind the existence of blater before Indonesian independence was the absence of certainty⁵³ and law enforcement by the authorities. Henk Schulte Nordholt asserts that it was the inability of the Dutch to strengthen the colonial administration at the local level and the geographic isolation in the countryside that created favourable conditions in which jagoan could establish in Java. He also suggests that the extent of the *jagoan*'s intimidation and violence caused people to deal with the danger of the strongmen carefully (Schulte Nordholt, 1991: 89). Similar explanations can be applied to the existence of blater in Madura. Nevertheless, it does not seem to be the most sensible explanation. Madurese rulers had been reliable allies of the Dutch since the eighteenth century when they supplied armed forces to fight in the Third Succession War (1746-1755) (Lombard, 1996 (volume 3): 46), in the Surapati War (1767) (Kuntowijovo, 2002: 146), and for the Barisan. Barisan was a paramilitary organisation established in 1816⁵⁴ following a request from the Dutch to the ruler of Bangkalan. The king of Bangkalan provided the Dutch with 1,000 soldiers to be stationed in Java and Madura. In the following year, the ruler of Sumenep supplied 1,080 soldiers. In 1831, Barisan consisted of infantry, cavalry, artillery, and pioneer troops/pikemen with 95 officers and 2,881 soldiers or 2,976 in total (Kuntowijoyo, 2002: 146-148).

As a result of their allegiance, the VOC bestowed self-government on Madurese rulers. Consequently, they were able to extend their authority to the remotest parts of the island and to levy taxes and labour services. The authority given to the local rulers were soon abused. It was the peasants who became the obvious victims of these semi-independent rulers (De Jonge, 2002: 149). Despite the introduction of direct rule in Java, which resulted in a number of changing policies, the colonial government could not interfere with the administration at the local level. In Madura, where self-government was maintained until the end of the nineteenth century (Pamekasan principality was abolished

⁵³ Personal communication with Amrih Widodo.

⁵⁴ The name of Barisan might appear only after 1831, yet it does not mean that in 1816 the garrison was not established yet. It was rather a matter of naming (Kuntowijoyo, 2002).

in 1858, while the Sumenep and Bangkalan principalities were brought to an end in 1883 and 1885, respectively), feudal relations continued to exist, and at the village level, local leaders were able to impose their power on society; a situation that resembled that in Java. Although at the principality level the degree of power exercised by village leaders did not have any consequence, at village level, corruption was prevalent. Meanwhile, a lack of security increased due to the absence of faith in the abilities of village leaders. Consequently, private protection might be offered by individuals who had physical capabilities and were able to deal with insecurity. It is likely that the protection was offered to the village's rich dwellers who had to make sure that their resources were secured. In many cases, the protection was actually provided against the protectors' allies who also protected rich landowners in other villages. Meanwhile, commoners who did not have adequate resources to buy protection relied heavily on self-help.⁵⁵ Brest van Kampen, an assistant resident of Bangkalan between 1847 and 1851, reported a huge amount of violence during his tenure in the kingdom. In his report, which covered the period of 1847-1849, he stated that 'corpses of murdered persons' were a daily scene in the alun-alun (square) of Bangkalan. Furthermore, it was reported that, in those years, around three murders per day were committed and in 1871, in Sumenep, the official annual murder rate was 1 per 2,342 inhabitants (De Jonge, 2002: 150). According to Glenn Smith, disputes over valued resources often triggered the motives for these killings (Smith, 1997: 63).

Although Hobsbawm downgrades the significance of bandits and mafiosi by underlining their subordination to the ruler (Hobsbawm, 1959: 6), as a matter of fact, it does not completely hold true for the mafiosi and the *blater*. Today, the *blater* are no longer deprived commoners. Indeed, they are more prosperous than most villagers. They can be successful traders or wealthy farmers, professions that can lead to occupying a *klebun-ship*. Although they may become clients of higher patrons, they can also become patrons for lower clients, the villagers, and so they can employ villagers in their businesses, their shops or their farms. Nevertheless, running an 'ordinary' business is not an occupation

⁵⁵ For an explanation on self-help in Madura, see De Jonge 2002.

that turns them to *blater* ship. Like the mafiosi in Sicily, they offer protection. The violent aspects of the *blater* are, in fact, outcomes of the protection. Therefore, *blater* activities have two aspects: protection and violence.

Many blater become private security forces for entrepreneurs not only in Madura, but also in neighbouring cities in the East Java province. More often than not, they are seen by entrepreneurs as being more reliable than the police. Many blater who are unable to find a 'job' in the private security world opt for offering pseudoprotection at lower levels, such as in bus terminals, traditional markets, or seaports. Their clients are taksi (small van used as public transport, in Java it usually called angkot), ojek- (motorcycle taxi used as public transport) and bus drivers in bus terminals or retailers in markets. These people, whether regularly or irregularly, give jatah preman (japrem - illegal rents) to the ruling blater in their working area. Drivers usually pay japrem when they enter or leave bus terminals. Each bus terminal is usually monitored by a certain group of blater and thus if the drivers have to pick up passengers in more than one terminal, it means that they have to pay more than one japrem to more than one group. Retailers, meanwhile, usually have to give sewa (another word for japrem) in the middle of the day or later when they have collected money from their customers. Blater claim that japrem must be paid because their clients receive threats from irresponsible people. They like to claim that it is their duty to protect their clients and, as a consequence of the protection that they provide, the clients have to pay a certain amount of money. In reality, however, the clients are protected from the blater themselves. This pseudo-protection may be called protection racketeering.⁵⁶ Here, we can see that the distinction between the blater and the bajingan is quite hazy and that is how many people see it in reality.

There is usually a strong agreement between groups of *blater* who control certain areas not to interfere in each other's territory. Disputes after the 1967/1968 and 1973/1974 conflicts have <u>hardly occurred</u> (the conflicts will be discussed in the following 56 According to Vadim Volkov, protection racketeering is 'an institutionalized relationship whereby tribute is collected on behalf of a criminal group that, in exchange, claims to offer physical protection from other such groups' (Volkov, 2000: 491).

paragraphs). Clashes involving blater in Surabava, however, are known to have taken place. Nevertheless, the clashes usually involve groups of blater and other strongmen from other ethnic groups in Indonesia, not between Madurese blater. Although threats to the clients are rare, it seems that the blater will most surely take action if their clients are in danger. Unlike many common preman in lakarta, who only collect payment without necessarily protecting their clients, the blater will likely prevent their clients from falling victim to potential extorters, whether it be preman or other blater groups, without possibly being aware that the clients are under the protection of certain blater. To the majority of blater, protecting their clients means a way to preserve their dignity and honour in their vast blater network and a way to maintain their reputation. In return, their reputation as a reliable protector is useful when a blater is involved in the private security business at a higher level, protecting big entrepreneurs or ensuring the smooth running of political parties' campaigns (Khoirul, a blater who is a former head security in Perak, Surabaya is a perfect example of how blater offer 'real protection', instead of 'protection racketeering'. See the illustration in Chapter 7). Those who are retired from the private security world, mainly because of old age, usually start up new businesses in trade and commerce as a means of earning a living. In Madura, like the jawara in Banten, once someone is recognised as a prominent *blater*, he is likely to maintain this status even when retired from the private security world or no longer active in remo.

Blater can offer protection because of their fearsome reputation. In several interviews with people from various backgrounds, the blater are portrayed with both negative and positive images. For those who perceive them as having a negative image, the blater are no more than bajingan or preman. This view seems to be generated for two main reasons. Firstly, this view is formed because of a lack of personal interaction with the blater. Secondly, it is formed as a result of the activities of blater. As I have explained above, some blater may commit crimes or be involved in different vices. Consequently, the people who experience or witness such amoral conduct have negative perceptions of the blater. Those who have a more positive image of the blater regard them as influential individuals, especially those who show hospitality

and politeness towards the community where they live. However, those who hold positive views are mainly individuals who benefit from forming patron-client relationships with the *blater*. These people are employed in various *blater* businesses. The high degree of instability and insecurity, and the inability of security forces to enforce the laws that protect society, have created communities who apply patterns of violence to solve problems. At some point, the *blater* appear to be the right solution for solving problems or conflicts and for offering economic security, whether it is through violence or via compromises. These explanations indeed indicate the importance of local strongmen who offer protection when certainty and trust of the authorities and between commoners and, more importantly, confidence in law enforcement by the authorities, are absent.

Remo

What distinguishes *blater* from other strongmen in Indonesia is remo. Remo is an exclusive all-blater meeting that signifies the importance and existence of blater in Madurese society. Remo is a feast for blater, which also serves as a rotating savings and credit association. A guest has to give money (bhubuwan) to the host and, in return, when he becomes a host, he will receive money from the former host and other guests, who will eventually become hosts as well. In this sense, remo may have significant economic benefits for the host. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the host will become affluent from the gathering. In principle, when he becomes a guest for a remo being held by a fellow blater, he has to provide the host (who was himself a guest at an earlier occasion) with more cash than he received from him before (ngompang). If he gives the same amount of money or even less, the host may consider this as an insult. Consequently, he may be removed from the membership of remo. However, exceptions frequently do occur, as many hosts show no real objection if they receive the same amount of money, taking into consideration the possibility that some people may not have sufficient funds to attend a remo held by a fellow blater. Furthermore, money is not the main reason why a blater holds a remo. Remo is a means of establishing new fraternities or fortifying old brotherhoods (nyareh taretan or nyareh kancah).

Remo also entails performances such as a tayub.⁵⁷ Unlike tayub in Java, tayub in remo is not performed by female dancers. The dancers are men dressed as women. According to the blater, replacing female dancers with male performers is said to reduce unwanted trouble that may arise if the dancers are women. Nonetheless, as in Javanese tayub, the act of napel (giving money to the dancer(s) by putting it on the dancer's chest) is prevalent and, in fact, symbolises the level of affluence of the cash-giver. In general, the dancers are not really important for blater since the most essential aspect of remo is the opportunity to prove their existence to other blater. However, in the mass carok in Surabaya (see the following paragraph), it was the dancers who triggered the dispute between bands of blater from Bangkalan and those of Sampang.

Between 1973 and 1974 there were a series of conflicts between blater from Bangkalan and those of Sampang in Surabaya. These conflicts were known as Bhara Songai vs Temor Songai.⁵⁸ The clashes began in 1967 and 1968 when a participant of a remo from Bangkalan had a quarrel with one from Sampang. The dispute happened in a remo hosted by a certain Delan in Tambak Sari, Surabaya. The dispute developed into an open clash between the two groups of blater. This remo resulted in mass carok, although shortly afterwards the tension was mitigated by elderly (sesepuh) and religious leaders of both regencies. The second conflict appears to have taken place in 1973. It centred on a man called Mattingwar, a tandhak from a sandur group led by Mak Dol of Bangkalan, whose popularity attracted the attention of a sandur group led by Mak Selor of Sampang. Mattingwar turned down a proposal to join Mak Selor's group and subsequently Mak Selor became angry. In response to his refusal, Mattingwar was stabbed (dibacok) when he was walking in Perak, Surabaya. Mattingwar survived the assassination attempt, but the stabbing escalated into a broader and more terrible conflict between the Madurese from the east and west banks of the Kalimas River.

⁵⁷ In the blater world, such performances are called sandur or sandhor instead of tayub.

⁵⁸ Bhara Songai is a term to denote people from Bangkalan who reside in the west bank of Kalimas River in Surabaya, while Temor Songai is a term to indicate those from Sampang who inhabit the east bank of the same river.

While the first clash in 1967-1968 involved remo participants, this second clash saw sandur groups as the main actors. Like the first clash, however, the second one also turned into a wider conflict that involved many parties from the West and the East. A couple of days after the attempt to assassinate Mattingwar, Mak Selor was murdered in a remo in Krembangan, Surabaya. The conflict became even larger and generated tensions among the general population. Madurese people from Bangkalan, living in Surabaya were beaten by those from Sampang and vice versa, and the conflict made people feel unsafe in general. The peak of the conflict was a mass carok in Gundi Street in Surabaya that took several lives and left several injured. To solve the problem, an arbitration process took place in the Ampel Mosque in Surabaya, mediated by Kiai Nawawi Ampel; the governor of East Java, Mohammad Noer; the regents of Bangkalan and Sampang; and kiai and other public figures (Faishal, 2007: 75-82; Siahaan & Purnomo, 1997: 111-113). Similar conflicts do not appear to have occurred since the arbitration.

In remo, the position of klebun is of important since, in the first instance, they are always invited to dance with the dancers. This seems to have created jealousy among other participants. Since a remo was held in Kamal in 1977, many participants of remo have added the title klebun to their name so that they have opportunity to be invited to dance earlier. Consequently, those with the pseudo klebun title received such positive reactions, that almost all blater decided to put the title klebun in front of their name. Nevertheless, the addition of the title klebun cannot be freely done. Usually, the title of klebun is based on the place where the blater lives. For instance, the title klebun of Jembatan Merah means that the person lives in the area of Jembatan Merah. The title also has another consequence. It symbolises the territory that a pseudo klebun holds. Here we see the importance of the title of pseudo klebun. Since it relates to one's territory, only certain individuals are able to posses this title. The title can be obtained based on an agreement among other blater. If there is another blater using the same title, it means a challenge for the blater who held the title earlier. Interestingly, since it is a pseudo title, people can bid and buy the title for a high price (Faishal, 2007: 68-70). However, over time, this pseudo title has become ineffective in terms of its original intention—to be invited to dance earlier. This is due to the fact that almost all *blater* have the title now, so all participants in *remo* are invited in the same order as before they obtained the pseudo title.

Blater who come to remo usually, but not exclusively, wear besa`an (traditional Madurese black-coloured shirts), typically with a red-and-white striped T-shirt (sakera) underneath. In addition, they wear gombor (traditional Madurese black-coloured trousers), odheng (traditional Madurese head accessories), and carry a sharp weapon. Another significant characteristic of remo is the consumption of alcohol, mostly beer, which likely serves to fuel the fights between blater. Younger blater tend to show their ability to drink significant amounts of alcohol in order to prove their machismo, while older blater are less determined to do so. Touwen-Bouwsma reveals that since blater are expected to carry sharp weapons, the chances of carok occurring are high (Touwen-Bouwsma, 1989: 169). Nevertheless, when Touwen-Bouwsma conducted fieldwork in Madura in the late 1970s, tensions from the Bhara Songai vs Temor Songai conflicts were still ubiquitous. Perhaps it explains why she argues that carok actions are likely to happen in remo. Nowadays, it seems that despite the heavy consumption of alcohol and the permission to carry sharp weapons in remo, the feast rarely ends in carok.

To many villagers, remo is considered an entertaining feast. To the host, rain is the archenemy. Here dukun or kiai-dukun play a significant part. The host usually makes a visit to a dukun or kiaidukun asking for guidance in determining the appropriate day (hari baik) to hold the party. He will also ask him to prevent it from raining on the festivities. It is said that, in the past, remo was held for 24 hours. It usually began at 7 am and ended the next morning. Nowadays, it usually starts at 9 or 10 pm and ends at 5 am. Although remo is exclusive to its members, villagers can watch remo from outside the arena. It is also an opportunity for spontaneous hawking. There are usually many spectators from other villages at a remo party. Indeed, if it is a big remo, sometimes the crowds come from other regencies. For villagers who do not often get an opportunity to enjoy entertainment, remo is seen as an amusing event. Like many other traditional events in Madura or Java, remo also attracts gambling. Both blater and commoners who come to remo frequently entertain themselves with gambling, whether it is

card games or dice. Unlike gambling at a klebun election (which will be further discussed in Chapter 6), the sums of money circulating are small. The purpose of the gambling for blater is actually to spend some time before remo begins and, most importantly, to demonstrate affluence to other blater and commoners. Meanwhile, for commoners the gambling is a rare opportunity to entertain themselves. While gambling is legally prohibited in Madura and in other places in Indonesia, during remo, gambling usually takes place without interference from the police. In fact, police officers or members of the armed forces are unofficially invited to 'ensure the smooth running' of remo. The security forces are clearly aware of the gambling. Nevertheless, the host usually provides them with a range of services, from providing them with various kinds of food to giving them money (memberi amplop). Consequently, the gambling goes on undisturbed (Wivata, 2006: 79-80). A villager highlights the importance of the remo feast:

I enjoy the remo party because it is a folk entertainment (hiburan rakyat). Indeed it is a blater's feast, yet commoners (orang awam) can also see remo from outside. If I have much money, I usually buy sate (traditional Indonesian food) and play a dice game (main dadu). My wife never tells me not to gamble. I do not know why. I have never seen a fight at a remo. Blater are usually polite. They do not want to have a fight if there appears to be no big problem. Moreover, there are many blater who become a klebun. If they have a fight, they will be embarrassed in front of their underlings [their people]. The police and Koramil (sub-district military office) [sic] are usually there as well and they will be shamed if they have a fight in front of the police (Interview with H, a petty trader, on 24 April 2011).

Blater may form a small group consisting of tens of blater. Such a group is usually headed by an influential blater. He collects a regular contribution (iuran) from each member of the group for various purposes, such as providing a donation if a fellow blater has a rite of passage ceremony for a family member. The leader also ensures that his group is invited to every remo. To be the head of a blater group is not an easy task. He must have certain characteristics. One of the most important characteristics is commanding respect from other members. To get respect, he must be feared by other blater. Reputation plays an important part

here. A number of *blater* tell me that, in the past, such a reputation could be gained by committing carok, actions that they claim were committed only for good reasons, never for meaningless motives. In recent times, especially during the New Order, having close ties with Golkar was seen as advantageous in terms of gaining a good reputation and a good position as well. An established link with kiai and entrepreneurs was also beneficial for their status. In the post-Suharto era, various parties replaced Golkar as the most sought after political party to be associated with. Initially, it was the PKB that became the largest political party on the island. In the last elections in 2009, there was no dominant party. However, despite their declining results in the last elections, the PKB remains the most influential political party due to its association with the NU. Another important condition for becoming a leader is wealth. The blater head must be affluent enough to protect and help his men if they cannot give money to the remo host. Indeed, he will lose face if his underlings cannot come to a remo due to a lack of money. Therefore, he will try his best to provide the less fortunate members with resources. In this case, wealth plays important part in determining a blater's reputation.

According to Touwen-Bouwsma, people are interested in getting involved in remo as a result of debit-credit opportunities (Touwen-Bouwsma, 1989: 165). This is somewhat doubtful. No blater wants to have debts with other blater because this may be very risky. On the one hand, if they cannot pay the debt, they will be very embarrassed; the inability to pay means a loss of honour. On the other hand, blater who lend money may feel insulted if the other party cannot pay the debt on time. Consequently, there is a chance, albeit small, that *carok* may occur as a result of unpaid debts. However, the leader will try his best to prevent this situation from arising. He will persuade both parties to resolve the problem with non-violent solutions. If he has money, he will pay the debt first and then the debtor has to pay to the leader. Clearly, for a blater, having debt-credit relations with other blater may involve violence if one party cannot pay the debt, and it certainly generates fear and an incentive to pay. With such complex conditions, many blater seem to prefer having such (financial) relations with commoners than with other blater.

In general, remo is essential for blater in terms of proving their existence. Although many Madurese will deny the accusation that they like to show off, in fact, Madurese are stereotyped by many outsiders as individuals who like to do so. The involvement of blater in remo—showing their money to the host and other blater; the ability to dance with the tandhak and to napel; and the ability to drink large amounts of beer—actually confirm this stereotype. While many kiai and people will condemn the gathering, blater ignore such complaints and continue to preserve their primary cultural identity in order to assert their existence in society.

Forms of violence associated with the Madurese Carok

There is perhaps no single thing more notorious and more associated with crime in Madura than carok. When I read a series of 1980s editions of an East Java newspaper, I was astonished at the frequency with which reports on carok appeared. What was more remarkable was the fact that police officers always stated that the numbers of carok actions were declining at that time (see for instance, Jawa Pos, 3 January 1983 and Jawa Pos, 11 April 1984). Despite these police officers' unsubstantiated reports, it seems very likely that the numbers of *carok* actions in earlier periods were high. It is also interesting to note that while Indonesian law identifies carok as a form of crime, one that can be categorised as murder or severe physical abuse (penganiayaan berat), many Madurese do not consider carok to be a criminal act, but rather a form of defending honour. There are a number of studies discussing carok. For instance, Smith (1997) and De Jonge (2002) provide us with clear descriptions of carok actions. De Jonge also links carok actions with running amok. Wiyata (2006: 176-177; 184) discusses carok in detail and argues that carok is never committed by women. De Jonge seems to follow Wiyata's opinion in this respect (De Jonge, 2002: 146). I will demonstrate, however, that my explaination, based on my findings, differs from theirs.

Carok is normally, but not exclusively, committed by men. There are at least three carok cases—in my findings—that involved women as the perpetrators. In the first case, it was reported that

two women, Hosni and Erru, residents of the sub-district of Bluto in Sumenep, committed carok because of a misunderstanding over garbage. As a result, Hosni was severely wounded and received medical treatment (Jawa Pos, 12 August 1992). Eight years earlier, in 1984, a certain T assassinated S in a bloody duel in the sub-district of Konang, Bangkalan. T killed S because she was convinced that the latter had had an affair with her husband, who was actually S's uncle. T used a sickle in the duel, while S carried a small knife (Jawa Pos, 4 May 1984). The last case occurred in the sub-district of Blega, Bangkalan in 2002. It was a mass carok that involved around twelve people, several of which were women. The frenzy was caused by a dispute over the inherited land of two related families. During the carok, several people were injured, including several women (Radar Madura, 8 September 2002). Carok, for Madurese, either committed by men or women, is considered to be the ultimate vindication of honour following an insult; or, in other words, carok is a last resort in terms of defending one's honour.

Not all *carok* cases are triggered by 'more serious' events, such as adultery. In fact, many cases show that *carok* is triggered by disputes over insignificant matters, such as the dispute over garbage (*Jawa Pos*, 12 August 1992) mentioned above, a misunderstanding over cow dung that led to an assassination (*Jawa Pos*, 21 November 1992), or an insult generated by flatulence (*Jawa Pos*, 1 September 1983). These three cases, along with many others, which may seem trivial to outsiders, are taken very seriously by many Madurese. These apparently insignificant causes all lead to an insult to one's honour, which for Madurese is essential, and the loss of honour must be avenged with a fight, often to the death.

Madurese use sickles and other sharp weapons to kill, or at least attempt to injure, their adversary in *carok* fighting. According to oral tradition, the act of *carok* was usually performed like a real duel, one side against the other. In the later period, attempts to kill or to injure adversaries when they are unprepared or unarmed are also considered to be *carok* as long as the main reason is to defend one's honour. At this point, *carok* has lost its meaning in terms of being seen as a daring action. In contrast, when one conducts a crime and injures or kills his victim, with the main reason is not defending one's honour, the act cannot be considered as a

carok action. At this point, we can say that carok is not simply a criminal action, as many outsiders see it; it is a tradition that has been entrenched in Madurese society.

Despite the decreasing trend for carok actions in daily life, the tradition is still widely perceived as a legitimate demonstration of honour. The saying 'ango' an poteya tolang etembang poteya mata', which means 'better dead than ashamed/dishonoured' appears to legitimate the phenomenon. This saying is known in almost every Madurese household, at least in Bangkalan. 59 Thus, contrary to De Jonge's argument (2002: 145) that carok in Madura has decreased in importance and prevalence; I would argue that carok is deeply institutionalised in Madurese society. It is true that crime rates have dropped drastically since Indonesian independence, due chiefly to stronger law enforcement (compared to that in the colonial era), yet since carok is approved by the social environment and the righters of wrongs dare to challenge the weak law enforcement, carok actions have apparently always been seen as the answer in matters of honour. It is also important to note that many Madurese who live outside the island, mostly in Tapal Kuda areas and on Borneo, still practice carok towards fellow Madurese or other people from other ethnic communities as a last resort in defending their honour. The saying is certainly still alive and well in the minds of the migrated Madurese:

We are called hotheads by Dayak people and Javanese; Malay and Buginese confirm the viewpoint. We never want to have disputes with

⁵⁹ I had a number of chats with housewives and young females, mostly students, in villages in Bangkalan. They stress the importance of fighting for honour as a true indication of real human beings (manusia sesungguhnya) and good Muslims. The housewives believe that there have to be differentiations between boys and girls in their home. For instance, boys play football, war simulation, marbles or with toy cars, while girls are limited to playing with their dolls or playing hopscotch or skipping rope. When asked about honour, they are convinced that it is a highly important aspect that must be respected and when honour is violated, either men or women have to defend it. They intensify the importance of fighting for honour by transmitting this saying to their children, boys and girls, and expect that their children will do the same when they have their own children. The reason for talking to these women is obvious. If women have a strong tendency to emphasise the significance of the saying, then it follows that men, as the main actors of forms of violence in Madura, are highly likely to believe in this maxim.

those people but we cannot just remain silent (tidak bisa tinggal diam) if we are bothered (diganggu). For us, it means someone is threatening our existence and our existence means our honour. If someone violates our honour, no matter where we live, we have to defend it. We would rather die than lose face (kehilangan muka). We are always Madurese, wherever we live. There is nothing else we can do [to overcome the shame] than committing carok (Interview with MZ, a refugee from Palangkaraya who now resides in Bangkalan, on 3 December 2009).

In general, Bangkalan and Sampang populations in western Madura are considered less refined (halus) than those of Pamekasan and Sumenep in eastern Madura, and the residents of the eastern regencies usually assert the difference proudly. However, it would be a mistake to see *carok* as being exclusive to the people of the western regencies. Based on data collected by Wivata (2006: 237-238), there were 286 cases of murder and 591 cases of severe physical abuse between 1985 and 1994 in Bangkalan and Sampang. In the same period, there were 198 murders and 922 cases of severe physical abuse in Pamekasan and Sumenep. Carok is never recorded as a separated case in the police statistics. It can be classified either as murder or severe physical abuse. Although not all murders and severe physical abuse in the statistics can be categorized as carok, it clearly indicates that the use of violence in Madura, compared to that in the East Java province or in Indonesia as a whole, is high. The table below shows the violence rates in Madura, the East Java province and Indonesia.

Table 4.1

The 1994 percentage of criminal acts of violence against the population of each regency, Madura, the East Java province, and Indonesia

Region	Population	Murder and severe physical abuse	Percentage
Bangkalan	719.086	53	0.00007
Sampang	704,081	28	0.00004
Pamekasan	633,173	55	0.00008
Sumenep	920,173	49	0.00005
Madura	2,976,934	185	0.00006
East Java	32,370,441	955	0.00003
Indonesia	194,754,808	8,267	0.00004

Source: Wiyata, 2006: 6

Although it is clear that any Madurese can commit *carok*, their motives are predominantly driven by attempts to take their honour back. Madurese who commit *carok* believe that their honour, taken away by insults, will be regained if they take a revenge action. Meanwhile, for many *blater*, committing *carok* can serve as the ultimate means of strengthening their *blater*-ship. However, it does not mean that *carok* can be committed indiscriminately. There always has to be a reason to perform *carok*. The most important reason, as stated, is the need to defend honour when, for instance, a *blater*'s spouse has been pestered. Incidentally, how the spouse reacts to this attention, favourably or otherwise, is irrelevant. For many Madurese, not only for *blater*, harassment of a spouse is considered to be an extremely serious offence. For newcomers to *blater*-ship, *carok* can be seen as an important way to reinforce their reputation:

I did not wish to commit *carok* with Mat Kani. He is known as a *blater* in his village. My friends kept telling me that I had to commit *carok* against him in order to solve the problem [of indebtedness] between us, because he did not show good faith (*niat*) in paying his debt. I was still hesitant due to the fact that the amount of money he borrowed was not much. But when my friends persistently reminded me that he was a *jagoan*, and that by killing him I would be considered as a *jagoan* too, I began to think about it earnestly [...] now, even though he was not killed and he will almost certainly take revenge, I have more courage to show him that I am capable of challenging; more importantly, I now have many *blater* friends and I can participate in their cock fighting. I am a *blater* now (Interview with B, a *blater* in Bangkalan on 12 February 2011).

However, *carok* is not the most significant way to be regarded as an influential *blater*. It is actually the ability to become a broker and a fixer that is likely to improve one's status as a prominent *blater*. This indicates a changed perspective in Madurese society in which direct physical violence is not the only way to solve problems. Instead, there is more emphasis on the illicit practices that form a *blater*'s skills, such as intimidation, informal lobbying

⁶⁰ Wiyata (2006) describes four main motives behind *carok* cases in Bangkalan: the most notorious is adultery, followed by misunderstandings, land disputes, and unpaid debts. Adultery in this case does not exclusively involve sexual intercourse. Flirting with someone's wife or partner can be considered as a serious offence and will provoke *carok*.

with local officials, distribution of *amplop* (bribery), and the ability to manipulate villagers due to their inability to cope with recent developments.

Carok can also involve gangs of blater. Bangkalan and Sampang are notorious for *blater-ship*. The relationships between the blater of these two regencies have varied over time. In Surabaya, the Kalimas River is seen as a tacit border between the two groups. The west side of the river belongs to the band from Bangkalan. while the east side belongs to those from Sampang. Traditional markets, bus and angkot terminals, and train stations in Surabaya 'belong' to these groups. Despite the presence of jagoan from other ethnic communities, such as those of the Javanese, Bataknese and Moluccans, the existence of the Madurese groups is very tangible. Bataknese and Moluccans may well be clearly visible in those areas due to their distinct physical appearance compared to the Madurese or Javanese, and also because they mostly operate in the front line, bullving bus and angkot drivers or street vendors. However, it is the Javanese and the Madurese who are the criminal masterminds behind operations. The relationship between Madurese and lavanese jagoan is not always mutually beneficial. Nevertheless, it is the tensions between the jagoan of Bangkalan and Sampang which are most notorious. These tensions manifest themselves in wars of words, intimidation, invasions of territory and the kinds of mass carok that I have described above.

According to Touwen-Bouwsma, *carok* can occur not only during *remo*, but also during village head elections (Touwen-Bouwsma, 1989: 163). Nowadays, disputes over village head elections can be solved with more options than *carok*. One of these options is reporting the possible fraud in a *klebun* election to the local parliament.

In the Lajing village, in the Arosbaya sub-district of Bangkalan, three former *klebun* candidates went to the regency parliament in order to complain about alleged *klebun* electoral frauds in their village. The frauds were supposed to have ranged from vote rigging and bribery to illegal voters being brought in from outside the village. The three asked the parliament not to inaugurate the winning candidate. It is also reported that three individuals spent a lot of money on winning the election (*Radar*

Madura, 14 March 2005). The report to the parliament indicates a new way of problem solving, avoiding the need for committing *carok*.

Moreover, adultery does not always lead to *carok*. Other solutions are also possible. For instance, in recent times, a nonviolent solution to this insult has emerged. Two married couples, Khoirul Anwar (46) and Kamariyah (38), and Sugianto (40) and Jamilah (38), both living in Pamekasan, had a dispute over an illegal love affair. Sugianto cheated by having an affair with Kamariyah. As a result, Kamariyah became pregnant and gave birth to a child. Khoirul, a good friend of Sugianto, demanded that Sugianto give Jamilah to Khoirul. According to Khoirul, rather than assassinating Sugianto, who had four children, he believed it was better for him to ask for his wife to be given to him. The case was brought to the Pamekasan court. 61

In principal, as well as *remo*, *carok* can also act as a central means for *blater* to demonstrate their existence. However, *carok* is not a distinctive characteristic of the *blater*. In Madura, anyone, including women, can commit *carok* if they feel insulted. Therefore, the winner of a *carok* action is not automatically regarded as a *blater*.

Kerapan sapi

Kerapan sapi has significance not only for blater, but also for many non-santri in Madura. Many people are involved in one of the most celebrated cultural events on the island. Unlike remo, which is exclusive to the blater, kerapan sapi or kerapan, a word that is used more in Madura, is a festivity for everyone. From the lowest levels in kecamatan (sub-district), to the highest rank on the island, kerapan always attracts a great deal of attention. Besides kerapan, there is another type of cultural form, one which exploits cattle in Madurese tradition, namely aduan sapi (bull fighting). Although it once existed in Madura, at least until the first decade of the twentieth century, this tradition can now only be found among Madurese in East Java (De Jonge, 1990: 424).

Cattle are very significant to the Madurese. The importance of cattle for the Madurese is discussed by Smith (1989). Almost

⁶¹ http://regional.kompas.com/read/2010/10/22/0758309/Istriku.Kau. Hamili..Aku.Tukar.Istrimu, accessed on 22 October 2010.

every household in Madura raises at least one pair of cattle. Those who raise other people's cattle share the profit with the owner. Cattle usually have dual roles. They help the owner cultivate the land and the cow dung can be used as organic fertiliser in agriculture. Cattle for kerapan purposes are different from those with an agricultural purpose. These cattle are never used to cultivate the land. Today, the cost of having special cattle for kerapan is so high that only affluent people can afford it (Smith, 1989: 279-286). Cattle for small farmers are used in sawah (rice fields) or tegalan to plough or to harrow. These cattle are vital to such farmers, mainly because they are an important source of income when used in their fields or when sold. When Madurese keep kerapan cattle, they will allocate their resources, including time and money, for their cattle. Compared to small farmers, they dedicate their life more extensively to their most valuable assets. Their cattle are treated in the same way as a Westerner might treat their dog. 62 Cattle for kerapan are regarded extremely high by their owners. There is even a saying 'anak urusan ibunya, sapi urusan bapaknya', which means children are mother's affairs, cattle are father's affairs. Some informants are even of the opinion that kerapan cattle are more important to their owners than their wives; thus, disputes over cattle, or more importantly cattle for keraban, can lead to carok.

Legend reveals that the origin of *kerapan* can be traced back to the Majapahit age, during the twelfth or thirteenth centuries. There was a ruler in Madura, namely Pangeran Katandur, who introduced a new form of agriculture. He encouraged the use of cattle to improve the farming. The prince then proposed the idea of creating an event to follow the harvest. The use of *kaleles* (a tool that resembles a plough) as a piece of equipment on which the jockey (*tokang tongko*) stands reminds the people that they must not forget about the fact that farming is the origin of *kerapan*, and that *kerapan* was also meant to express gratitude for the harvest (Dewo & Maduratna, 1983: 15-25).

Another oral tradition suggests that kerapan originated on

⁶² Emma Power finds that the majority of her respondents in Sydney (dog owners), 21 out of 22, describe their dogs as family members (Power, 2008: 539). In other Western countries, such as Canada, dogs are also considered as family members (Ipsos-Reid, 2001, www.ctv.ca/generic/WebSpecials/pdf/Paws_and_Claws.pdf).

Sapudi Island in the regency of Sumenep. The island is well known as the island of cattle, due to the high numbers of cattle raised there. Nonetheless, kerapan sapi is not famous in Sapudi. One can find small children playing with their parents' cattle and pretending to be jockeys, imitating kerapan, but there is no real kerapan on the island. The word 'kerapan' was also believed to originate from the word 'gharabhan', which means 'menggarap' or to work the land (Interview with MS and TH, owners of kerapan cattle, on 14 November 2009). It signifies the importance of agriculture during the initial era of kerapan. Over time, the race gained popularity and from colonial reports we discover that Prince Notokoesoemo initiated the first official races in the 1870s. With the aim of improving livestock in Madura, the colonial administration in Sumenep organised and financed the race on a regular basis after 1895 (Munnik, 1929: 116-117, quoted in Smith, 1995: 166).

Despite the popularity of the race in east Madura, *kerapan* only came to the western part of the island at the beginning of the twentieth century (Leon, 1901: 463, quoted in Smith, 1995: 166). *Kerapan sapi* was also found in the Tapal Kuda area. In Situbondo and Jember, *kerapan* still existed in the 1960s (Sutjitro, 1992: 10). This indicates that the Madurese in Java kept their tradition going outside their own island, something that was made possible due to the considerable numbers of Madurese in the Eastern Salient (Tapal Kuda area).

The transformation of *kerapan* from a minor event to a major spectacle had many consequences. One of the most crucial changes is the level of competitiveness. Initially, it was a race for farmers; nowadays, it is a demonstration of wealth and honour by well-to-do individuals. Another central shift was the insertion of gambling into the arena. We should also notice that magic used by owners of bulls in order to win the race became an integral part of *kerapan*. Before I elucidate the three aspects of *kerapan*, I will first discuss the levels of *kerapan*. *Kerapan* is commonly divided into four levels (Sutjitro, 1992: 15-22). The sequence from low to high is *kerapan adat* or *kerapan nazar*, *kerapan pesanan*, *kerapan insidental* and *kerapan besar*. The following paragraphs on the four types of *kerapan* are based on the description by Sutjitro.

Kerapan adat is based on a vow sworn when a wish comes

true (in Madura, a vow is sworn mostly but not exclusively by men). This vow is fulfilled by organising a *kerapan*. Only a small number of bulls participate in this *kerapan*. It usually consists of four to eight pairs of bulls and there are no official winners at the end. The show is usually held on dry land or in a rice field and there is no competitive rivalry between the participants. Unlike the other two categories of *kerapan*, this race is not significant for bull owners. However, it is extremely important for the host. Due to the large amount of money spent on arranging a *kerapan*, his position in society may considerably improve.

The second festivity is *kerapan pesanan*. Like *kerapan adat*, this *kerapan* is not considered to be an official race. The aim is mainly to welcome visitors in Madura. Unlike *kerapan adat*, however, the entertainment value of this event, which includes dance and other performances, means it is more rousing. Eight pairs of bulls take part in *kerapan pesanan* and more often than not they are chosen by local authorities.

Kerapan insidental is categorised as a formal race due to its competitive nature. Nonetheless, although it is considered formal, this race can be performed at any time and thus it does not have a regular schedule. Unlike the first two kerapan, this race provides the winners with prizes. This category of kerapan is usually hosted by police offices. Consequently, the names of the prizes offered are the Kapolres Cup (sponsored by the chief of police in Polres/ district police command) and the Kapolda Cup (sponsored by the chief of police in Polda/provincial police command). Twenty-four bulls participate in the Kapolda Cup; this number comprises six pairs of bulls from each. Due to its competitive aspects, this is a prestigious race for the owners of the bulls and thus gambling and magic become integral parts of the kerapan. This kerapan was also held for tourism purposes or to celebrate national days, such as Bhayangkara Day (The Police Day), Sumpah Pemuda Day (The Youth Pledge Day) or PWI Day (The Journalist Day).

Lastly, *kerapan besar*, as its name suggests (*besar* means big or great or grand), is a grand *kerapan*. It is one of the biggest cultural events in Madura. Spectators generally come from cities in East Java, mainly but not exclusively from the Tapal Kuda area. This *kerapan* competes for a presidential trophy. This event is regularly held in

August, based on an arrangement by a special committee. The bulls have to take part in a selection process in order to enter the race, with bulls chosen from each administrative level, including the sub-district (*kecamatan*), district (*kewedanaan*), regency (*kabupaten*) and the residency (*keresidenan*). The residency race is known as the grand *kerapan* and acts as the final of this formal *kerapan*.

Let us now discuss the three aspects of competitive *kerapan* in which many *blater* take part. Firstly, one of the reasons why there are many honourable individuals involved in *kerapan* is that they wish to demonstrate their higher position in society compared to commoners. For bull owners, their victory in formal races means an acknowledgement of their power and affluence. During the New Order, it was not uncommon for state officials, including *klebun*, *bupati* (regent), Kapolsek (the chief of police in Polsek/sub-district police command) and Kapolres (the chief of police in Polres/district police command) to have racing bulls. Like other owners, they also competed in official *kerapan*. Nowadays, given the disapproval of *kiai* and academics, state officials do not openly participate in *kerapan*. According to an informant, however, they take part in *kerapan* furtively, under other people's names. An owner stresses the importance of honour in *kerapan*:

I never want to be an official. My resources are much more than low-level officials. I have two wives and five *taksi*. I also have three shops in Sampang and one in Tanah Merah. I have also been to Mecca [for pilgrimage] three times. But there will be one thing missing in my life if I do not win in a *kerapan* race. I have been involved in *kerapan* for eleven years. Frequently I win the race, although on a few occasions I lose. For me, victory in *kerapan* is as essential as my business, because if I win in *kerapan*, my business becomes smooth. People will respect me and they see me as a *kerapan* champion (*jago kerapan*). I get more friends and I am highly respected by them (Interview with MN, a *kerapan* cattle owner, on 20 November 2009).

Besides gambling at *kerapan*, some *blater* are also owners of racing bulls. While the number of *blater* who become owners of racing bull is not really that great compared to those taking part in the gambling, many of them are renowned *blater*. These *blater* are ardent participants in *kerapan* for two main reasons: honour and capital. Although *blater* do not participate in *kerapan* as frequently

as they participate in remo, winning in a kerapan race also functions as a way to obtain honour. A kerapan victory will be witnessed by more people than participating in remo. Taking part in keraban also indicates the level of prosperity of blater. Raising kerapan cattle costs a great deal of money. Besides having a regular diet (which is not easy to maintain, especially during the dry season), cattle are provided with eggs, a traditional concoction of jamu (herbal medicine), tonic, and beer. Nowadays, bull owners also bring their cattle to the veterinary surgeon. There is at least one man who is responsible for the daily care of the kerapan cattle, including washing and massaging the cattle. During the game, there are more individuals involved in handling the cattle, such as a tokang tongko or jockey who runs the bull. There are also tokang tambeng (people who keep the bull steady behind the line before the race begins), tokang gettak (people who spur the bull behind the line so that the bull will run fast), tokang tonja (people who pull and guide the bull) and tokang gubra (people who yell at and give support to the bull during the race). These individuals are employed by the owner of the bull and he has to spend a lot of money on them. Therefore, only wealthy people can afford the costs of raising and racing a bull in kerapan.

Secondly, kerapan sapi is not a kerapan if it is held without gambling. Although there is no clear correlation between kerapan and gambling, like remo, kerapan is a perfect event for gambling. While only a small amount of money is gambled during remo, and the purpose of these games is purely entertainment, gambling in kerapan is, for many people, a seriously business. Large amounts of money are in play and gambling is a crucial aspect of the race. While the average spectator will only gamble a limited amount of money, big players will put a huge amount of money on the race, sums that leave the average gambler shocked. Unlike in remo, gambling in kerapan not only involves blater, but also includes Chinese entrepreneurs and other regular gamblers. Even though their presence is not always tangible in the arena, their money comes to the kerapan via bookmakers. The presence of the blater at kerapan is primarily for gambling. To be more specific, gambling during kerapan takes the form of betting. People bet on which bull will be the winner. Since there is a large amount of money circulating, bettors are likely to try to influence the results of the race. This can take various forms, ranging from intimidating the owner of the bull or, perhaps more likely, the jockey before the race, and asking a *dukun* to use his magic to make certain bulls lose, to buying or intimidating the referees. This also means that the possibility of losing parties committing *carok* during *kerapan* is higher than in *remo*.

Finally, the last aspect of the new shifts in *kerapan* is the use of magic. Although I have mentioned that one of the purposes of using black magic in *kerapan* is to make certain bulls lose, in point of fact, the most obvious aim of using magic is to make a bull win. Bull owners attempt to win races by consulting with *dukun* or even *kiai-dukun*, visiting sacred graves, and conducting ritual activities that range from fasting for several days to bathing in sacred waters or with holy water.

The three aspects outlined above are obvious examples of the characteristics of *blater*, which demonstrate their need to show off their wealth, to gamble and their familiarity with certain aspects of magic used to make them invulnerable. Certainly, the public gambling at *kerapan sapi* is essential for the acknowledgement of *blater* in society. In fact, *kerapan* incorporates two of the most vital characteristics of *blater*: bragging and violence. While the former is represented in the way in which a *blater*'s participation in *kerapan* is directed to show his wealth and in the way in which *blater* take part in costly betting, the latter can be seen in the way in which the *kerapan* is a form of animal torture and an event that is likely to stir up *carok*.

Nature and characteristics of the abangan-like culture Some aspects of local belief in Madura

The belief system of the common Madurese villagers centres on, among other things, supernatural powers. While *kiai*, as the core of the *santri* culture, sustain close connections with Islam, villagers at the grassroots level recognise the supernatural powers of spirits that mediate between them and God. From this point of view, common Madurese believe that several events occur because of God's will, while others occur according to a set of unknown powers or according to the laws of nature. Therefore, in order to

put everything in order, the supernatural powers of spirits have to be gratified regularly. We know that in Java collective ritualistic festivities, such as bersih desa (spirit shrine ritual) are held to keep the Javanese safe, fortunate, and free from trouble. It also holds true for the Madurese who hold rokat festivities, such as rokat bandaran or rokat tase (both fishermen's celebration) and rokat desa (annual ritual to bless a village) to ask for protection from the spirits of their ancestors, to avoid calamities, and to receive blessings so that they will benefit from their farm if they are farmers or the sea if they are fishermen. According to De Jonge, in Parindu, slametan are mainly held to signify rite of passage ceremonies such as births, deaths and weddings, and to bless certain important events, such as putting a boat into the water and building a house. During certain months considered appropriate for holding wedding ceremonies, slametan are held very frequently. Occasionally, there are two or three slametan held at the same time in a single night. While the preparation can take a couple of days, slametan hardly take more than an hour (De Jonge, 1989: 270).63

Mansurnoor, who conducted ethnographic research in Pamekasan, points out that *se areksa*, the immanent supernatural powers, are a key element in the everyday relations between villagers and the supernatural world (Mansurnoor, 1990 p. 3-4). This holds true for many Madurese in daily life. They pray five times every day and adhere to other pillars of Islam (*Rukun Islam*) and believe in the six articles outlined in *Rukun Iman*.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, supernatural powers play key roles in the Madurese belief system as well. *Dukun*

⁶³ In another place, in Banyuwangi, the purpose of *slametan* is generally to create a state of well-being, security, and freedom from hindrances of both a practical and spiritual kind—a state which is called *slamet*. Like in Madura, specific reasons for holding *slametan* range from the celebration of rites of passage, housewarmings, and harvests, to safeguard a new motorbike, and—among the commonest of reasons—to redeem a vow (Beatty, 2003-30-31).

⁶⁴ Rukun Islam or the Five Pillars of Islam are five acts in Islam considered obligatory by Sunni Muslims. They are: 1. The shahada (creed,) 2. Salat (daily prayers), 3. Sawm (fasting in Ramadan month), 4. Zakat (almsgiving), and 5. Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) if it is affordable. Rukun Iman or the Six Articles of Faith is a set of articles of faith in the Islamic creed consisting of: 1. Belief in God, 2. Belief in the Prophets, 3. Belief in the Angels, 4. Belief in Divine Book, 5. Belief in the Day of Judgment, and 6. Belief in Qadr (fate).

(shamans, healers, or fortune-tellers) are the primary mediators between the real world and the unseen world. It is true that kiai are also regarded as the ultimate mediators between the two worlds, yet, several kiai reject the idea of this identification because this has associations with *shirk* (the sin of polytheism) practices. They are afraid that the deification of anyone or anything other than God will lead to *shirk* practices, which are a serious sin. Therefore, for instance, several kiai will refuse to see someone who wants to ask for a jimat (amulet) or for their business to be blessed. Other kiai, however, believe that they are the intermediaries between the two worlds and, in fact, they attempt to maintain this status by remaining aloof and keeping away from villagers, so that villagers are convinced that they are different from common people. For instance, they uphold their sacred position by preserving a prevalent belief in society that people will receive a kiai's barakah (blessing) and karamah (dignity) if they visit them and ask for guidance. These kiai are usually called kiai dukun. Meanwhile, other kiai-and they are actually the majority—are a mixture of the two kinds of kiai. Dukun, on the other hand, frequently incorporate Islamic elements, such as recitation of Quranic verses (often blended with Madurese and Javanese words, considered un-Islamic) and declaring that their practices are approved by Allah and the Prophet. As in many Muslim societies, incorporating Islamic practices is a compulsory practice among Madurese dukun. Even though many Madurese still visit dukun today, they do not wish to be labelled as un-Islamic individuals and therefore they always believe that they are visiting dukun Islami (Islamic dukun), not un-Islamic dukun, which is not regarded as an un-Islamic practice.

Moreover, despite the presence of many medical doctors in sub-districts and midwives in villages, villagers still visit *dukun* if a family member is ill. Some believe that it is still expensive to visit medical doctors or midwives although the government have provided the less well-off with medical insurance, such as Jamkesmas.⁶⁵ Some, however, believe that *dukun* are the best

⁶⁵ Jamkesmas or Jaminan Kesehatan Masyarakat (Public Health Insurance) is a governmental programme of health insurance to help Indonesians (mainly the poor) to get better access to health care institutions. This programme commenced in 2004 and has provided millions of Indonesians with health costs in many health institutions across the Archipelago. Yet, many people claim

option since they are believed to be the best mediators between the two worlds where many of the illnesses appear to be present. For example, illness is believed to occur when visitors violate the territory of unseen owners, i.e. cultivating paddy fields without asking permission from the owner (the unseen) or fishing in forbidden sacred places. Some *dukun* have a specialisation, such as in the world of *akik* (*aqeeq/hakeek*) ring. ⁶⁶

I am a big fan of the *akik* ring because it is a Prophet's *sunnah* (a practice taught by the Prophet). Many *kiai* also wear an *akik* ring. An *akik* ring has many advantages, most importantly it gives self-confidence to whoever wears it [and they will also be] free from calamities if it is filled (*diisi*) [with magical mantra]. My rings also bring luck. Ever since I have had these rings, my business has been smooth (*lancar*), although once I got a heavy blow during the financial crisis [the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis], but it did not last for a long time. I have many rings and I wear them for different purposes. He (pointing at the *dukun*) always knows what is best for me to wear on any occasion (Interview with a well-off trader in the house of a *dukun*'s whose specialisation is filling (*mengisi*) rings with mantra (magic formula), on 20 December 2009).

The reason I emphasise this is that the perceived power of mystical beliefs and practices are embedded in supernatural practitioners, whether it be *dukun* or *kiai*, and they have great power associated with them. This great power is said to have bridged worlds and to heal spiritual diseases, such as spirit possession (*kesurupan*), and to predict the future using divination practices or the interpretation of dreams. It has been a trend for a long time in Madura to incorporate Islam into indigenous practices and all the parties involved—*kiai*, *dukun* and common people—are all supporters of the tradition.

that they never receive such insurance or, if they do, many Puskesmas (Pusat Kesehatan Masyarakat - Public Health Centre) will neglect them due to the health practitioners` preference for people who pay with other methods, mainly with cash.

66 An *akik* ring is a type of jewellery made of agate, worn mostly but not exclusively by men. In Islamic tradition, wearing an *akik* ring is believed to be important. This view is based on the belief that the Prophet wore an *akik* ring on his right hand and therefore it is considered as *sunnah* by a number of *ulama*.

Religious aspects of the blater

Like Javanese abangan, the blater religious tradition is composed primarily of syncretist religious activities, such as slametan, khaul (annual celebrations on the anniversaries of the death of religious leaders), and ziarah (pilgrimages to graves), as well as predilections for magic, invulnerability skills and martial arts. Despite their claim that they are Muslims, many blater may not practice Islamic values suggested by kiai since they may not perform salat (prayer) or fast during Ramadan. They also enjoy drinking alcohol and gambling, contrary to what the kiai preach. In several interviews conducted with a number of kiai, it became clear that they are aware of these blater tendencies. However, all of the kiai indicated that they do not want to interfere in these matters. These kiai gave the impression that they are ambiguous when it comes to the blater. On the one hand, they hold the blater in awe, and on the other hand, they disapprove of their activities.⁶⁷ During the colonial era, religious leaders, such as kiai or guru ngaji (religious teachers) often assumed political leadership. They were widely believed to possess mystical attributes and magical abilities, which gave them charismatic power and a high social standing in society (Pribadi, 2011: 176). Nowadays, petty blater will comply, to a degree, with what the kiai suggest, for instance, when the kiai instruct blater to ensure the smoothness of village head elections.

⁶⁷ In interviews with two kiai, one kiai, Kiai Nuruddin states that 'we never touch on (mengusik) them [the blater] as long as they do not touch on us either. Even though they are blater, they still mengaji (learn to read the Quran, sometimes with Arabic lessons) and respect kiai and santri. Whether they do not pray, it does not matter, as long as it [that they do not pray] is not in front of the kiai. What is important is that we have to respect their braveness. We have to remember that there are two kinds of [public] figures, the *ulama* and the *blater*. The two must not clash (bentrok) in Madura. What is negative about the blater is that sometimes they give kiai money from the thefts they commit, but we have to think that stealing is a sin' (Interview with Kiai Nuruddin on 1 December 2009). Meanwhile, Kiai Mashduqie Fadly reveals that, 'in my opinion, blater are a group whose professions are unpleasant for the people (tidak menyamankan masyarakat), but from another side [they] bring many benefits [...] in my opinion, from one side the blater can be utilised as security forces. If one who is facing a threat of being robbed (ditodong - by a preman, for instance) mentions a certain kiai or blater name, he will be safe [from the robbery]' (Interview with Kiai Mashduqie Fadly on 1 December 2009).

Blater like to claim that they are Muslims; yet, unlike most Madurese, they are not santri who practice the common santri culture. They possess a mystical syncretist belief about Islam that. to a large degree, is different from that practiced by kiai and santri. In fact, they tend to promote their own culture, especially remo. Nevertheless, following a series of interviews with a kiai and a number of blater, it became clear that many blater study in a pesantren or at least informally in a village languar during their childhood (Interviews with Kiai Mashdugie Fadly on 1 December 2009; R, a blater on 13 January 2011; K, a blater on 21 February 2011; and MG, a blater on 24 February 2011). They may be santri in the sense of having been pupils at pesantren during their childhood. For several reasons, mainly wealth, influence, and fame, at some time in their life these young santri leave the pesantren and transform into blater. Therefore, it is not uncommon that blater have the ability to read the Ouran, although like many other Madurese, they do not understand the meaning of the words. When asked what their religion is, like most Madurese, they will almost certainly answer that Islam is their religion.

They attend religious activities, such as *khaul*, *slametan* and *ziarah* not only for religious purposes, but also for social, political, and economical purposes. Prominent *blater* do not wish to be in the shadow of the *kiai*. For political purposes, for example during the New Order, they could cooperate with the *kiai* who were supporters of Golkar because both groups had been co-opted by the ruling party. In the post-Suharto period, they cooperate with *kiai* because they share similar goals, i.e. obtaining power. Indeed, *blater* will only cooperate with like-minded *kiai*. If they have no common goals and are unable to make alliances with *kiai*, they will look to forging relationships with officials, including *bupati* (regent) and *camat* (head of sub-district).

The *khaul* held for prominent *kiai*, such as that of *Kiai* Kholil, the *Kiai* of Batuampar and the *Kiai* of Guluk-Guluk, are believed to bring blessings for those who attend the events. These *khaul* even tempt prominent *blater*, who perhaps dislike certain *kiai* because of their ambiguous feelings toward the *blater*, to appear at the celebration to seek blessings and to acquire the charisma of the deceased *kiai*. In a way, the attendance of the *blater* at such events

functions as a free 'advertisement' and it is good for their standing to show up. Moreover, the idea of assuming charismatic power does not only appear within the religious elites but also among strongmen leaders. Prominent blater who have petty blater as their underlings, build leader-follower relations that mirror those of guru-murid (teachers-disciples) in religious circles of the pesantren or tarekat world. Such relationships serve to enhance the power of the leader. Besides khaul, another means of obtaining charisma is via ziarah to the holy graves of kiai or royal families or other holy places, such as gunung keramat (sacred mountains), huge old trees or big stones. The charisma of the leaders ensures the loyalty and obedience of their followers (Pribadi, 2011: 177-78). Although some blater pay less attention to the general population in their village, prominent blater certainly need to maintain good relations with their neighbours in order to maintain their influence in society. These *blater* are consciously aware of the fact that *kiai* preserve their position in society by doing the same thing. In this sense, they mirror the tactics of kiai in how they form relations with villagers. By appearing at slametan held by their neighbours, blater are better able to assert their position than if they did not attend these occasions. Like kiai, blater do not usually give gifts to the host; yet, unlike kiai who sometimes receive a number of special gifts (such as a sarong) from the host, blater rarely experience this.

Aside from the aforementioned reasons, all these visits are pragmatically implemented for social, political, and economical motives. The local or regional (in this case the East Java province) state officials are usually invited to the grand *khaul* of a legendary *kiai*. Their attendance also indicates how such *khaul* are politically-economically commoditised. The presence of local or regional officials helps enhance the level of such *khaul*. For instance, although for a long time the *khaul* of *Kiai* Kholil had already attracted a great number of visitors, the appointment of Fuad Amin Imron, a great-grandson of *Kiai* Kholil, as the regent of Bangkalan for the periods of 2003-2008 and 2008-2013, increased the significance of the occasion more than ever because Fuad frequently asserts the importance of his ancestor. The patron-client relationships that the *blater* form with state officials, in which the former are the client and the latter are the patron, constitute a good sign of 'obedience'

to the officials. For the *blater*, aside from maintaining their good relationship with the bureaucrats, it is not uncommon for them to obtain governmental or partisan 'projects', such as controlling the security of a sacred burial ground (*pasarean*),⁶⁸ as a result of their attendance at a *khaul* or other such event.⁶⁹ Such practices mirror the traditions in other places in Indonesia, especially in Jakarta.⁷⁰

Ziarah to holy graves provide blater with opportunities similar to those obtained from attending khaul. During Muslim holidays, such as Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, famous pasarean attract many pilgrims from all over Madura and Java. Like the event of khaul, ziarah also attract both state officials and blater. Royal Pasarean Ratu Ebu in Bangkalan or Royal Pasarean Asta Tinggi in Sumenep, like the graves of renowned kiai, are known to attract tens of thousands of pilgrims every month. Officials and blater meet, apparently coincidentally, on these occasions. However, since blater have a network of informants, they can easily find out when the officials will visit the cemeteries. Not surprisingly, the officials—whether or

- 68 In Chapter 6 I describe the story of a *blater* who was promised the job of controlling the security of a *pasarean* by Fuad's people because he was seen to be loyal and that sometimes Fuad's people saw him in the *Kiai* Kholil *pasarean* (Interview with MK, a *blater* on 23 April 2011).
- 69 William R. Liddle reveals how political parties in Sumatra wanting to be successful at the local level have to adapt to local socio-economic and cultural configurations (Liddle, 1972: 126-178). In Banten, through Tubagus Chasan Sochib, the general chairman of PPPSBBI (a *jawara* organisation), *jawara* acted as a bridge between the military, bureaucracy and Golkar, and many governmental projects came into their possession, since they maintained closed patron-client relationships with the officials (Pribadi, 2008: 59).
- 70 In Jakarta and also other provincial capitals, many governmental or partisan projects are obtained on informal occasions, such as during golf games. According to Anton Lucas, many senior members of Indonesia's bureaucratic elite are devoted golfers, or aspire to be. This is not because they are devoted to the game, but it is while playing golf that deals are done (Lucas, 1997: 237).
- 71 For instance, in the 1983 Eid Al-Fitr celebration, Royal Pasarean Ratu Ebu in Bangkalan attracted thousands of visitors, most of whom were young people. While during regular periods many people who visit the *pasarean* come mostly for religious purposes, during Eid, those who visited the burial ground (not only from Bangkalan but also from Surabaya, Gresik, Lamongan and other regencies surrounding Bangkalan), were said to do so for recreational purposes *(Jawa Pos, 18 July 1983)*.

not they are aware that *blater* will come—actually expect that they will meet their clients there at a certain time and location. In other words, the *blater* are expected to know when state officials will visit. The meetings that take place during *pasarean* are not necessarily intended to discuss significant matters between the two sides. Instead, they function primarily as a form of *silaturahmi* (good relationship). It should be noted, however, *silaturahmi* between patron and client also indicates a high degree of obedience from the *blater* to officials.

Other occasions that attract many important pilgrims are elections, be they general elections (pemilu), gubernatorial and regency/municipal head elections (pilkada) or village head elections/ klebun elections. Prior to the elections, many candidates running for various positions will visit holy graves of kiai or royal families. This is believed to bring luck and confidence to the candidates. The juru kunci (the custodians of graveyards) of Pasarean Ratu Ebu, Makam Agung and Makam Tengah, all located in Bangkalan, claim that famous national figures generally visit their pasarean prior to general elections. Although such claims are unreliable—these kinds of stories can be heard frequently in many gravevards and although some famous national figures may indeed come, the numbers are in fact never revealed—many Madurese pass this story on to other visitors. For them, this justifies visiting such graves: if important people can have their wishes granted, then there is also a chance for other visitors to receive blessings. However, when asked whether blater come to these last resting places, juru kunci strongly deny it. They claim that bad people (orang jahat) never come to holy places because their wishes will not come true and, more importantly, instead of receiving blessings, they will have bad luck if they dare enter the cemeteries with unholy wishes:

Blater never come here. They do not dare to ask [for anything] because their bad intentions are already known when they enter the grave. Their bad intentions are unveiled by the holy people who are buried here, not by me. Those who come here are important people (orang besar). If they come here, they usually become someone important (jadi orang - here means they occupy important positions). If not governor, at least regent or member of parliament. But bad people will not have their wishes granted (dikabulkan) (Interview with the juru kunci of Makam Agung, 24 February 2011).

It is important to note, however, that it is an open secret that blater regularly visit the holy graves of kiai or royal families, the reasons for which I have already explained. The denials of the juru kunci are actually part of an unobserved contestation between the blater and the santri. In fact, the blater have been promoting a counter-culture, which is apparent in the objections of supporters of the santri culture, in particular the juru kunci of these holy graves. Juru kunci⁷² is an inherited position in Madura. The holders of this position are the auxiliary staff of religious leaders. In order to keep their places sacred, religious leaders need to keep them clear of unwanted people. Blater who do not practice santri culture are regarded by some kiai as their latent enemies. While on some occasions the two sides can cooperate in a loose relationship, it is exactly in the religious domain that the two have conflicting opinions.

While it seems trivial, attending nearby slametan can also have a political-economic impact. Blater who run in klebun elections need to broadly socialise their campaign, extending to neighbouring villages. By attending slametan, their presence can win the support of the public. Villagers need to know the candidates of their klebun and attending slametan indicates that the candidates are good Muslims despite their predilections for 'immoral' activities. Neighbouring villagers are also significant in gaining votes in the elections, not least because the manipulation of votes in klebun elections is rather common in Madura. They can become pemilih siluman (illegal voters) in the elections, providing the candidates with significant advantages. Moreover, in the post-Suharto period money politics (bribery) in elections was rampant. It was not uncommon for blater to indirectly support the candidates' campaign by bribing voters at the very last moment. This phenomenon is known in many places as serangan fajar (literally meaning a dawn attack). Furthermore, attending slametan can serve as a means of approaching kiai langgar who have a number of followers, in the hope that these low-level village *kiai* will at least not oppose the candidate's campaign.

In order to learn ilmu (it can be both magic and martial arts)

⁷² Based on colonial records, *juru kunci* had a distinctive position among those who had to provide service to royal families. They were awarded tax-exempted land (*pakuncen*) as rewards for their service (De Jonge, 1989: 71).

and possibly ilmu kebal (invulnerability), blater have to visit certain kiai believed to be masters of esoteric sciences. As Wiyata argues, they also come to kiai to receive a blessing and an amulet when they want to commit carok (Wiyata, 2006: 50). Nevertheless, it seems that it is only low-level kiai in villages who give approval (restu) to those who wish to commit carok. A number of high-ranking kiai who I have spoken to reject the idea of carok, or at least do not overtly support the violent action. Mansumoor also reveals that a high-ranking kiai in Bettet showed his disapproval of carok. In 1984, an individual wanting to take revenge, a certain young man Muja, had a quarrel with another young man, Barlekeh, as the result of an insignificant matter. Muja went to see a kiai who had been his teacher. Muja complained about the humiliation and insisted that the *kiai* should provide him with formula to retain his confidence. The kiai agreed to bless Muja but issued an ultimate warning of excommunication from his realm against Muja if he should decide to commit carok against Barlekeh. For some time, the kiai's threat against Muja succeeded in preventing the imminent carok. Not so long after the quarrel between Muja and Barlekeh, the kiai died. When the kiai went for treatment in Surabava, Muja and his core kinsmen attacked those of Barlekeh, killing two and seriously injuring one (Mansurnoor, 1990: 360). Here we see that an influential kiai remains an effective deterrent for some villagers, but when he is absent, the kiai's disapproval has little effect.

All the above examples seem to indicate that the *blater* are pragmatic individuals. However, their supposed pragmatic attitudes would not last very long if they were not sustained by a strong sense of their identity. As I have mentioned earlier, *blater* have been pushing their counter-culture vis-à-vis the *santri* culture, which is very influential in Madurese society, even at the lowest level. Nevertheless, the *blater* do not openly attack the *santri* culture since its main supporters, the *kiai*, are highly regarded by many segments of society, including the *blater* themselves. Even though they leave the *pesantren* after they graduate, *blater* still consider the *kiai* as their teachers. In Banten, for example, to oppose a *kiai* was a serious breach of etiquette, with both social and spiritual consequences. On a spiritual level, a rebellious pupil runs the risk of *kawalat* (being cursed and struck down by calamity) (Tihami,

1992: 99-100; Wilson, 2003: 246). This situation also holds true in Madura.

Moreover, while in Banten jawara, persuaded by kiai, mounted resistance to the Dutch in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Pribadi, 2008) and in Batavia the nationalists and gangsters formed an awkward coalition before the Second World War (Cribb, 1991: 190), local strongmen in Madura appeared not to challenge the Dutch hegemony. This was not solely due to the characteristics of blater, but because there were no important rebellions in Madura during the Dutch colonial era. Madurese in general seem to be individualistic, and therefore uniting themselves in a revolt against the Dutch was unlikely. Nevertheless, the coalition between blater and religious leaders appeared to develop well, in part because they shared an opposition to local aristocracies, and in part because they had resources to share with each other: the blater saw the kiai as individuals who were highly regarded by the people due to their knowledge of Islamic, while the kiai saw the blater as people who possessed abilities in martial arts and had extensive networks in the underworld. In the contemporary period, however, the relationships are far more complex.

Conclusion

Blater have demonstrated a variety of roles, from entrepreneurs of protection and perpetrators of cultural violence, to their leading roles as power brokers. As with many other strongmen groups in the Indonesian archipelago, the origin of the blater is not fully understood. It seems that it is a relatively new phenomenon (perhaps older than a hundred years) and the emergence of the blater in Madura may show parallel patterns with other groups of strongmen in the Archipelago, like the jagoan and the jawara. Moreover, the existence of the words 'remo' and 'carok', which can be found in Dutch dictionaries and other Dutch sources, indicates that the concept of blater might have emerged during the colonial period or even earlier. Like other strongmen in Java, they are strongmen who have acted as cultural and political brokers and intermediaries.

Meanwhile, remo is the distinctive blater characteristic that counteracts the dynamics of piety that kiai and santri promote. In

fact, seen together with kerapan sapi and sabung ayam, which play an important part in blater life, these cultural forms are so distinctive that it seems that no other strongmen in Java are counteracting the santri culture as much as blater do, at least when we look at the special feast of remo, which other strongmen such as jawara do not have. Blater have their own sets of religious beliefs that, to a large degree, differ from those of kiai and santri individuals. It shows us that Madura is also home to less orthodox Muslims and a place where abangan-like spiritual beliefs as a variant of Islam are appreciated by some segments of society.

Blater, together with much of the general Madurese population, acknowledge the supernatural powers of spirits that mediate between them and God, the highest power. What I want to emphasise is that the power of mystical beliefs and practices are perceived to be embedded in supernatural practitioners, such as dukun or kiai who act as kiai dukun. These practitioners are considered to have great power and to be able to interact with the unseen world.

Even though in terms of religious ideas and practices blater are a minority, in daily life they have adapted well to the mainstream Islam of the Madurese. They have never really experienced pressure as a minority among the majority santri adherents. There are, in fact, many Madurese, who, apart from their adherence to the santri culture (the prayers, the fast, and the almsgiving), visit dukun or kiai dukun on a regular basis and perform collective ritualistic festivities, such as the rokat traditions. While kiai and other main supporters of the santri culture, such as the pupils and others in the pesantren network, openly promote their religious orientations, blater and other less orthodox Muslims do not explicitly demonstrate their religious views. In fact, they do not seem to directly oppose the kiai's religious authority. What they actually promote are their distinctive institutionalised characteristics, remo and violent traditions, such as kerapan sapi and sabung ayam. With these cultural forms, the blater and the supporters of the abangan-like culture clearly signify the difference between the common santri culture and their own counter-culture.

Madura in Pictures

All pictures in the following pages were taken by me between July 2009 and January 2010 and between October 2010 and July 2011, except pictures 17 and 18 which were taken by Dr. N.J.G. Kaptein during his trip in East Java. I thank him for allowing me to use his pictures in this dissertation.



Figure 1: The mosque in the Pasarean Kiai Kholil under construction, last quarter of 2009



Figure 2: The mosque in the Pasarean Kiai Kholil after completion of the construction project, first quarter of 2011



Figure 3: Muslims pray in front of *Kiai* Kholil's grave in the underconstruction *pasarean*, last quarter of 2009



Figure 4: Muslims pray in front of *Kiai* Kholil's grave after completion of the *pasarean* construction project, first quarter of 2011



Figure 5: Venerating Kiai Kholil



Figure 6: Crossing the Madura Strait by ferry



Figure 7: Crossing the Madura Strait via the Suramadu Bridge



Figure 8: Typical tegalan soil in Sampang



Figure 9: Masjid Agung Sumenep, the grand mosque of Sumenep



Figure 10: Kalianget seaport in the Sumenep regency that connects Madura mainland with tens of smaller islands in the Sumenep regency



Figure 11: Kamal seaport in the Bangkalan regency that connects Madura and Java



Figure 12: One of the main roads in Sumenep



Figure 13: One of the main roads in Bangkalan



Figure 14: A klebun election in the Bangkalan regency



Figure 15: A crowd of people (in the background) who are possibly betting on the winning candidate in a *klebun* election



Figure 16: Food stalls in a klebun election



Figure 17: The election day of the 2008 East Java pilkada in Bondowoso



Figure 18: Pictures of candidates in the 2008 East Java *pilkada* in a polling booth in Bondowoso



Figure 19: The entrance of Pasarean Makam Agung Bangkalan



Figure 20: Pasarean Makam Agung Bangkalan



Figure 21: The entrance of Pasarean Ratu Ebu Bangkalan



Figure 22: Pasarean Ratu Ebu Bangkalan



Figure 23: Pasarean Makam Tengah Bangkalan



Figure 24: The grave of Pangeran Tengah in Pasarean Makam Tengah Bangkalan



Figure 25: A mosque and a pondok where santri lodge in a pesantren