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### Masculinity of Madurese Men in the Folk Tale *Ke' Lèsap*

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#### Abstract

##### Keywords:

Keyword ;  
masculinity,  
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Ke' Lèsap

his study aims to analyze the representation of Madurese masculinity in the folk tale *Ke' Lèsap*. The focus of the study lies in the values of courage, honor, the symbol of the celurit (traditional sickle), and social responsibility as key pillars of masculinity constructed in the story. This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive-analytical methods. The primary data consists of the *Ke' Lèsap* text, collected through document studies, while secondary data is obtained from literature on masculinity and Madurese culture. The analysis technique applies content analysis to identify masculine themes in the story's quotations, which are then interpreted using the theory of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and cultural representation theory (Hall, 1997). The results show that masculinity in *Ke' Lèsap* is embodied through the main character's courage and willingness to sacrifice for honor, the use of the celurit as a symbol of dignity, and the social role as a protector of community integrity. Masculinity in this tale emphasizes not only individual strength but also moral responsibility toward family and society. These values represent cultural heritage that continues to shape Madurese male identity.

#### Abstrak

##### Keywords:

Keyword ;  
maskulinitas  
Keyword ;  
Madura  
Keyword  
Ke' Lèsap

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis representasi maskulinitas Madura dalam cerita rakyat *Ke' Lèsap*. Fokus kajian ini terletak pada nilai-nilai keberanian, kehormatan, simbol celurit (arit tradisional), dan tanggung jawab sosial sebagai pilar utama maskulinitas yang dibangun dalam cerita tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif-analitis. Data primer berasal dari teks *Ke' Lèsap* yang dikumpulkan melalui studi dokumen, sedangkan data sekunder diperoleh dari literatur tentang maskulinitas dan budaya Madura. Teknik analisis yang digunakan adalah analisis isi untuk mengidentifikasi tema-tema maskulinitas dalam kutipan cerita, yang kemudian diinterpretasikan menggunakan teori maskulinitas hegemonik (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) dan teori representasi budaya (Hall, 1997). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa maskulinitas dalam *Ke' Lèsap* diwujudkan melalui keberanian tokoh utama dan kesediaannya berkorban demi kehormatan, penggunaan celurit sebagai simbol martabat, serta peran sosial sebagai pelindung integritas masyarakat. Maskulinitas dalam cerita ini tidak hanya menekankan kekuatan individu, tetapi juga tanggung jawab moral terhadap keluarga dan masyarakat. Nilai-nilai ini merepresentasikan warisan budaya yang terus membentuk identitas laki-laki Madura hingga saat ini.

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## INTRODUCTION

Masculinity is a concept that refers to the social construction of male roles, values, and identities within society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It is not an inherent biological trait, but rather a set of social norms and expectations that shape male behavior and self-image according to the cultural context in which it is situated (Jewkes et al., 2015). The theory of hegemonic masculinity positions the ideal form of masculinity as a dominant standard, regulating power relations both among men and between men and women in society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

In the context of Indonesian local culture, Madurese masculinity exhibits distinctive characteristics. Madurese men are generally associated with values such as bravery, honor, and a readiness to risk their lives for the sake of personal dignity (Rahmawati & Ismail, 2022). *Carok*, a traditional form of dueling in Madura, serves as one manifestation of these values. The *celurit*, a traditional Madurese weapon, functions not only as a tool for combat but also as a symbol of masculinity representing courage, honor, and a socially embedded readiness to defend the dignity of one's family and community (Rizki & Sugiarti et al., 2022).

Folklore, as a form of cultural expression, plays a significant role in the transmission of masculine values. It reflects the value systems, norms, and symbols embedded within a society and serves as a medium for moral and cultural education (Fleming et al., 2014). In Madura, one notable folklore narrative rich in masculine values is the story of *Ke' Lesap*. This tale portrays the protagonist as the ideal Madurese man one who upholds honor, demonstrates courage, and embraces social responsibility as a protector of both family and village.

Research on Madurese masculinity has been conducted from various perspectives, ranging from anthropological studies to cultural analyses. (Rahmawati et al., 2023) examined *carok* as a representation of masculinity in Madurese culture from a cultural anthropology standpoint. Safitri et al. (2021) analyzed hegemonic masculinity within Madurese culture, highlighting courage and honor as its core pillars. Meanwhile, Rizki and Sugihartati (2020) explored the *celurit* as a symbol of masculinity through the lens of cultural semiotics. At the international level, (Jewkes et al., 2015) discussed how hegemonic masculinity is represented and internalized through cultural symbols and social practices a framework relevant for understanding the symbolic and social significance of *celurit* and *carok* in Madurese culture.

In addition, previous studies have predominantly focused on social practices such as *carok* and physical symbols like the *celurit*, with relatively limited attention given to

folklore as a cultural text rich in masculine values. Yet, folklore such as *Ke' Lesap* plays a significant role in constructing and reproducing Madurese masculinity through narrative structures, symbolic elements, and moral messages (Purnama Sari et al., 2019).

The primary issue in the study of Madurese masculinity lies in the scarcity of research that examines representations of masculinity through a textual approach to the folklore *Ke' Lesap* (Andalas & Qur'ani, 2019). Despite its rich cultural symbolism, this narrative has received little scholarly attention as a source for understanding masculine values in a more nuanced yet profound manner. Elements such as the *celurit*, the courage to face *carok*, and the moral messages embedded in *Ke' Lesap* reflect the masculine ideals upheld by Madurese society. Therefore, this study is crucial in addressing a gap in the literature and contributing to broader discourses in cultural and gender studies in Indonesia (Rohman, 2022).

In the story of *Ke' Lesap*, the masculinity of the main character is reflected not only through physical actions but also through moral and social attitudes. *Ke' Lesap's* courage in confronting threats, his willingness to risk his life for the sake of honor, and his role in protecting his family and community serve as key symbols of Madurese masculinity. The *celurit*, which *Ke' Lesap* always carries, is not merely a weapon of defense but a visual representation of the courage and honor deeply embedded in the identity of Madurese men (Liliani et al., 2022).

Folklore such as *Ke' Lesap* functions as a medium for transmitting cultural values. Through its narratives, characters, and embedded symbols, folklore serves as a vehicle for social and moral education for younger generations (Hall, 1997). The masculine values reflected in this story are not merely behavioral norms, but serve as guiding principles practiced in everyday social interactions. The *celurit*, the courage to face *carok*, and the moral messages within *Ke' Lesap* constitute cultural representations that shape the collective identity of Madurese men (Rifai et al., 2022).

On the other hand, a notable issue is that studies on masculinity within Madurese culture have predominantly focused on social practices such as *carok* and physical symbols like the *celurit*, while the narrative aspects found in folklore such as *Ke' Lesap* have received relatively little scholarly attention. Yet, this cultural text holds complex symbolic values and deserves to be examined as a means of understanding the construction of Madurese masculinity within broader cultural, historical, and social contexts (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; (Jewkes et al., 2015)

The urgency of this research lies in its effort to fill the gap in the literature concerning Madurese masculinity as represented in folklore, while also contributing to the

broader fields of gender studies, local cultural studies, and Madurese oral literature. This study is expected to serve as a valuable reference for future research in cultural anthropology and masculinity studies in Indonesia and the wider Southeast Asian region (Nilan, 2009).

The folklore *Ke' Lèsap* offers more than just a heroic narrative; it articulates the core values of Madurese masculinity that serve as behavioral guidelines for men within their social lives. The value of courage is portrayed through the protagonist's willingness to confront danger in order to uphold dignity. This bravery is not isolated, but closely intertwined with a readiness to sacrifice. *Ke' Lèsap* is depicted as choosing to risk his life for the honor of his family, as reflected in the quote: "*This celurit is not merely a bent piece of iron, but a symbol of my honor and courage.*" (Rizki & Sugihartati, 2020).

The concepts of courage and honor align with the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), which position men as dominant figures both in interpersonal power relations and within society at large. In Madurese culture, the willingness to confront conflict and engage in *carok* serves as a symbol of a man's moral supremacy. As emphasized in the study by (Jewkes et al., 2015) symbols of masculinity are often materialized through the possession of tools or weapons, as well as a readiness to face risks in order to defend the honor of one's group.

In addition to courage, social responsibility is also a central pillar of masculinity in *Ke' Lesap*. The character of *Ke' Lesap* not only protects himself and his family but also safeguards the dignity of his community. His actions align with the findings of Fleming et al. (2014), which suggest that traditional masculinity is often associated with protective roles and social obligations. *Ke' Lesap*'s efforts to uphold justice in his village exemplify the embodiment of social responsibility as an integral aspect of Madurese masculine identity.

A prevailing issue in academic discourse is that Madurese folktales such as *Ke' Lesap* are often treated merely as folkloric material, without critical examination of the constructions of masculinity embedded within them. Such narratives, however, contain symbolic complexity that can significantly enrich our understanding of how masculinity is constructed and transmitted within local cultural frameworks. This underscores the importance of conducting research that explores masculine values through a textual-cultural approach to folklore, thereby revealing the nuanced ways in which gender identities are shaped and perpetuated in traditional narratives.

Furthermore, in the modern era, Madurese masculinity is confronted with new challenges arising from social change, urbanization, and the influence of global values.

The traditional ideals of courage, honor, and social responsibility as embodied in *Ke' Lesap*—are susceptible to shifts in meaning under these evolving conditions. Consequently, this research is also crucial in documenting the construction of traditional Madurese masculinity before such values are diminished or transformed by the forces of modernity. As noted by (Jewkes et al., 2015), traditional masculinities in many cultures around the world are increasingly subjected to pressures brought about by structural transformations and the global diffusion of normative values.

Thus, this research holds a strategic position in addressing the gap in the literature concerning Madurese masculinity within the context of folklore. It is also expected to contribute meaningfully to the development of gender studies, oral literature, and local cultural studies as integral components of scholarly discourse in Indonesia.

## METOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using critical discourse analysis to examine the representation of Madurese masculinity in the folklore *Kè' Lèsap*. This approach is chosen as it allows for an in-depth understanding of how masculinity is constructed through language, symbols, and cultural narratives embedded within the folktale.

This study is a library research employing primary data in the form of the folktale *Kè' Lèsap*, obtained through written documentation and oral transcriptions from the Madurese community. Secondary data are gathered from scholarly journals, books on Madurese culture, and relevant articles concerning masculinity and gender studies. Data collection techniques include documentation and textual analysis. The researcher identifies specific elements within the narrative that depict male behavior, attitudes, and roles—particularly those embodied by the character of *Kè' Lèsap*, who is renowned for his bravery and supernatural powers. The focus of the analysis is directed toward how masculinity is represented through heroic actions, combat scenes, and the social dynamics between men and women as portrayed in the story. The data are analyzed using R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, which conceptualizes masculinity as a social structure that subordinates both alternative forms of masculinity and femininity. The analysis is conducted in three stages: (1) textual description, (2) interpretation of the socio-cultural context, and (3) explanation of power relations within the discourse.

Through this method, the study aims to reveal the social construction of Madurese masculinity and its ideological function in sustaining the patriarchal cultural structure through the medium of folktales.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study employs the theory of hegemonic masculinity as introduced by Connell (1995). Hegemonic masculinity refers to patterns of behavior, traits, and values that are regarded as ideal for men within a given culture and that dominate over other forms of masculinity. In the context of Madurese culture, masculinity is often associated with values of honor (both personal and familial), bravery, physical prowess, and a readiness to defend one's dignity through *carok* a traditional form of duel (Salam, 2002; Van Dijk, 2010).

In addition, Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of cultural representation is employed to analyze how masculinity is constructed and represented within literary texts as cultural products. This representation is manifested through language, actions, and symbols within the *Ke' Lèsap* narrative. Hegemonic masculinity, as a theoretical framework, refers to the dominant and culturally idealized form of masculinity. In the context of Madurese culture, hegemonic masculinity is characterized by several core attributes: bravery, defined as the willingness to confront danger in defense of honor; honor, regarded as a measure of personal and familial dignity; and the role of protector, which is expressed through readiness to engage in conflict, such as in *carok* (traditional dueling).

The folktale *Kè' Lèsap* represents the construction of Madurese masculinity through its main character, who is portrayed as a courageous, honorable figure, willing to risk his life in defense of personal and familial dignity. Masculinity in Madurese culture is not solely defined by physical attributes, but is also shaped by moral values and a man's social responsibilities. These cultural ideals are embodied in the character of *Kè' Lèsap*, whose actions and traits reflect the normative expectations of masculine identity within the Madurese sociocultural context. The findings and discussion of this study reveal that the narrative serves as a medium through which hegemonic masculinity is reinforced and transmitted, highlighting the intersection of heroism, honor, and communal duty as central to male identity.

### Masculinity Demonstrating Courage and Willingness to Sacrifice

In the *Ke' Lèsap* narrative, bravery stands as a central trait of masculinity. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

*"Kè' Lèsap is known as a valiant man who never retreats, not even a single step, when his dignity or the honor of his family is at stake. He would rather die at the tip of a celurit than live in disgrace".*



Based on the above textual excerpt, *Ke' Lèsap* is portrayed as an embodiment of Madurese honor culture a value system that prioritizes dignity over physical safety. The statement “would rather die at the tip of a *celurit*” reveals the extreme logic underpinning the practice of *carok*: life is deemed worth living only if one's reputation remains intact. Psychologically, this choice reflects what sociologists refer to as *commitment escalation*, wherein individuals continuously increase their risk exposure in order to maintain consistency with a collective identity.

The *celurit* worn at *Ke' Lèsap*'s waist functions as a “warning signal.” In game theory, it serves as a credible commitment: adversaries are aware that any insult will be met with full retaliation, thereby creating a paradox in which the presence of a weapon may actually prevent conflict through deterrence. However, when confrontation becomes inevitable, the same weapon transforms into a medium for restoring honor.

The statement “never retreats, not even a single step” underscores the masculine norm of bravery. To retreat is to allow a “shame spiral” that not only tarnishes one's personal image but also diminishes the family's status in the eyes of the community. In a remote village with dense social networks, status functions as social capital: the loss of credibility directly affects access to assistance, marriage arrangements, and even economic security.

The tragedy of *Ke' Lèsap* lies in a utilitarian dilemma. From a rational standpoint, surrender would preserve life; yet within the cultural framework, such an outcome is meaningless without honor. Thus, the decision to “die at the tip of a *celurit*” represents a form of rationality within an alternative value system.

For contemporary readers, this narrative invites reflection: how might mechanisms for defending dignity be transformed into non-violent forms? Efforts such as customary-based mediation, legal awareness programs, and the redefinition of the *celurit* as a symbol of artistic heritage rather than a weapon may serve as compromise pathways preserving cultural identity without perpetuating violence (Siti Aminah, 2024).

This excerpt highlights courage as a core element of hegemonic masculinity, as theorized by Connell (1995). The character of *Ke' Lèsap* demonstrates that Madurese male bravery is closely tied to the responsibility of upholding family honor. These findings align with the study by Safitri et al. (2021), which identifies courage as a key symbol of Madurese male identity.

*“Ke' Lèsap was a Madurese man who lived in a small village at the edge of the island. From a young age, he was known as a brave and valiant youth. He never backed down when his dignity or his family's honor was insulted. One day, a young man from a neighboring village challenged him over a dispute concerning inherited land. Ke' Lèsap drew his celurit and*

declared boldly, "This *celurit* is not merely iron it is my life and my honor." In the ensuing fight, *Ke' Lèsap* was gravely wounded, yet he succeeded in defending his family's land. Before taking his final breath, he left a message for his son: "Protect our honor, my son. Never allow the good name of our family to be trampled upon."

Based on the textual excerpt, the story of *Ke' Lèsap* portrays the struggle between familial honor and the value of life within the cultural framework of Madura. The protagonist, *Ke' Lèsap*, is positioned as an ideal village figure: valiant, courageous, and deeply loyal to ancestral land. In the agrarian context of Madura Island, land holds significance not only as an economic asset but also as a symbol of identity and the continuity of lineage. Thus, disputes over inherited land trigger existential conflicts far beyond mere disagreements over material possessions.

*Ke' Lèsap's* decision to draw his *celurit* affirms that the traditional weapon serves both as a status marker and as a commodification of honor. His statement, "This *celurit* is not merely iron it is my life and my honor," reflects the underlying ideology of *carok* an honor duel that, despite being condemned by modern legal systems, remains deeply rooted in certain segments of society. Thus, the fight is not merely an act of violence, but functions as a social mechanism to uphold familial dignity and defend rightful ownership.

The climax of the *Ke' Lèsap* story where he is gravely wounded yet emerges victorious presents a tragic irony. He succeeds in defending both his land and his reputation, but at the cost of his life. This tragedy highlights the immense "social cost" of preserving one's good name. Within the framework of modern ethics, such a sacrifice raises critical questions: should violence be legitimized as a means of resolving disputes? The narrative prompts readers to reflect on the need to recontextualize the concept of honor within the bounds of positive law and peaceful mediation.

*Ke' Lèsap's* final message to his son, "Protect our honor, my son," functions as an intergenerational transmission of values. This parting admonition affirms the continuity of social norms, while simultaneously placing a moral burden upon the next generation. The son is called upon to uphold the family's reputation without necessarily repeating the cycle of violence. Modern readers may interpret this message as a call to preserve integrity through alternative pathways such as dialogue, litigation, or more secure forms of compromise.

Structurally, the text employs a linear narrative with a clearly defined climax. The characterization is simple yet effective, emphasizing the stark contrast between protagonist and antagonist. The rural setting at the island's edge reinforces a sense of isolation, where customary institutions hold greater authority than state law. Through a



concise narrative, the story offers profound reflection on cultural identity, the stakes of honor, and the moral tension between courage and brutality.

The *Ke' Lèsap* story portrays Madurese masculinity as characterized by extraordinary bravery and a willingness to sacrifice oneself for the honor of one's family. This value is strongly reflected in *Ke' Lèsap's* actions, as he chooses to confront danger rather than allow his family's dignity to be disgraced. This is clearly illustrated in the following excerpt.

"This *celurit* is not merely iron; it is my life and my honor."

The *celurit* is not merely a tool of self-defense, but a symbol of bravery and male dignity within Madurese culture. It serves as a metaphor for the courage intrinsically tied to *Ke' Lèsap's* identity as a true man in the Madurese cultural context. This symbolism, embodied in the *celurit*, represents the values of bravery and honor within the construction of Madurese masculine identity.

*Ke' Lèsap's* courage is not portrayed as reckless action, but as one driven by a noble commitment to uphold the dignity of his family. This aligns with Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity, in which bravery and moral authority function as standards for ideal masculinity in society. This interpretation is also affirmed by Safitri et al. (2021), who argue that in Madurese culture, the ability to face challenges courageously is a key indicator of a man's masculinity.

In addition to bravery, *Ke' Lèsap's* willingness to sacrifice is evident in his decision to continue fighting despite the risk of severe injury and even death. His final message to his son is reflected in the following excerpt:

"Protect our honor, my son. Never allow the good name of our family to be trampled upon."

The legacy of masculine values must be preserved across generations. This illustrates how masculinity is not only manifested through actions but also transmitted as a guiding life principle. The values of courage and willingness to sacrifice form part of the social construction of masculinity that must be upheld by each generation, as noted by Nurdin and Lestari (2023).

This narrative also demonstrates that bravery in Madurese culture does not stand in isolation, but is closely intertwined with honor and the social responsibility of men as protectors of their families. This aligns with the findings of (Rahmawati et al., 2023), who assert that Madurese masculinity is deeply embedded in the social role of safeguarding family reputation through courage in the face of threats, even at the cost of one's life.

Accordingly, in the story of *Kè' Lèsap*, courage and the readiness to sacrifice are portrayed as the very essence of Madurese masculine identity. These values are represented not only through the protagonist's actions but also through cultural symbols such as the *celurit*, and are passed down from generation to generation as part of a noble cultural heritage.

### Honor as a Pillar of Masculinity

Madurese masculinity is also represented through the high regard for personal and familial honor. In the *Ke' Lèsap* narrative, honor is portrayed as a non-negotiable value, safeguarded with one's entire being. This is evident in *Ke' Lèsap*'s willingness to sacrifice himself for the sake of honor a value further reinforced by the study of (Rahmawati et al., 2023), which interprets *carok* as an expression of honor.

"In a small village at the edge of Madura, there lived a man named *Ke' Lèsap*. From a young age, he was known for his unwavering commitment to the honor of himself and his family. One day, a nobleman from a neighboring village attempted to seize *Ke' Lèsap*'s inherited land through deceit. Upon hearing of this, *Ke' Lèsap* said to his brothers: "Dignity and honor are worth more than land. But if this land is taken, it is as if our good name is being trampled upon. That night, *Ke' Lèsap* went to the nobleman's house to demand justice. The confrontation ended in *carok*, for to *Ke' Lèsap*, allowing his family's honor to be defiled was a disgrace worse than death. Before the *carok* began, he declared: "This *celurit* shall bear witness that I die not for land, but for honor."

Based on the excerpt above, the story of *Kè' Lèsap* illustrates that Madurese masculinity is inseparable from the concept of honor. For *Kè' Lèsap*, honor is not merely a matter of personal image, but a fundamental pillar that shapes a man's self-worth and the identity of his family. The value of honor serves as the primary foundation for every action, including his courage in confronting conflicts that threaten his family's good name, as reflected in the following statement:

"Dignity and honor are worth more than land. But if this land is taken, it is as if they are trampling upon our family's good name."

Based on the excerpt above, it is evident that for *Kè' Lèsap*, land is merely a material symbol, whereas honor holds a higher moral value. *Kè' Lèsap* does not fight solely for wealth, but rather to uphold the dignity and reputation of his family. This aligns with the findings of (Rahmawati et al., 2023)), who assert that in Madurese culture, honor serves as the primary principle guiding masculine actions. One of *Kè' Lèsap*'s notable statements prior to the *carok* (ritual duel) reflects this ethos:

"This *celurit* bears witness that I die not for land, but for honor."

Based on the excerpt above, the *celurit* emerges as a symbol of moral commitment to honor. It functions not merely as a weapon, but as an emblem of loyalty to the masculine values of Madurese culture, in which safeguarding the family's honor is considered a primary responsibility of men. This perspective aligns with Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity, which asserts that ideal masculinity in society is often measured by the ability to uphold moral dominance and preserve honor.

Moreover, Kè' Lèsap's actions demonstrate that honor in Madurese culture is not merely a personal matter, but also a collective one. A man's honor reflects the honor of his entire family and community. Consequently, when his family's honor is threatened, Kè' Lèsap feels morally obligated to defend it, even at the cost of his life. Safitri et al. (2021) note that in Madura, men are regarded as the front line in safeguarding the family's dignity, and failure to uphold this honor is considered a grave disgrace that brings lasting shame across generations.

Kè' Lèsap also embodies the value of inherited honor. The teachings on the importance of preserving dignity are passed down through generations, shaping a robust system of masculinity within Madurese culture (Nuridin & Lestari, 2023). This reinforces the notion that Madurese masculinity is deeply rooted in the values of honor, courage, and devotion to both family and community.

### **The *Celurit* as a Symbol of Masculinity**

The *celurit* as a symbol of masculinity can be illustrated in the following text.

"In a village at the edge of Madura Island, Kè' Lesap was known as a man who upheld honor above all. Each day, a *celurit* hung at his waist not merely as a tool, but as a symbol of dignity and readiness to defend his family's pride. One day, a dispute over a land boundary with a neighbor reached its peak. When challenged, Kè' Lesap declared: "*This celurit is not just a curved blade of iron, but the embodiment of my honor and courage.*" When the *carok* (ritual duel) ensued, Kè' Lesap unsheathed his *celurit*, marking the beginning of a battle fought in defense of dignity. Until his final breath, he held the *celurit* tightly, uttering: "*This bears witness that I died protecting my honor.*"

Referring to the text above, Kè' Lesap emerges as a personification of Madura's honor culture, in which reputation is not merely a matter of personal image, but a form of social capital that determines a family's standing within the communal network. The *celurit*, which is always tucked at his waist, functions as a dual symbol: an everyday agricultural tool and, at the same time, a marker of readiness to defend dignity. Through his statement, "*This celurit is not just a curved blade of iron, but the embodiment of my honor and courage,*" Kè' Lesap affirms that the weapon's value lies in its symbolic meaning rather than its utilitarian function.

The land boundary dispute escalated the arena of conflict from an agrarian issue to a matter of personal and familial pride. In rural communities with limited access to formal legal systems, customary law including *carok* is often perceived as a swifter and more “just” means of restoring social equilibrium. When Kè’ Lesap unsheathed his *celurit*, he entered a rite of passage: transitioning from the role of a farmer to that of an honor-bound warrior. This act constituted a public commitment; to retreat would signify an admission of disgrace capable of diminishing the family’s social standing across generations.

The final scene, in which the *celurit* remains firmly gripped at the moment of death, encapsulates the concept of a “heroic exit”: death is deliberately embraced as the ultimate proof that honor has been preserved. From a modern rationalist perspective, such a decision may appear tragic. However, within the local value system, the preservation of dignity outweighs the value of continued life. It ensures that the family name remains respected and reduces the likelihood of future humiliation.

The story of Kè’ Lèsap simultaneously challenges contemporary readers to consider pathways of transformation: how traditions centered on the defense of honor might be converted into non-violent mechanisms such as customary-based mediation or the recontextualization of the *celurit* as a cultural artifact so that identity may be preserved without the cost of human lives.

Thus, the story of Kè’ Lèsap invites us to reconsider the boundary between courage and violence, and between tradition and social transformation. It reveals that when symbols of identity are regarded as sacred, even a seemingly minor conflict can escalate into a life-or-death duel a poignant reminder of the critical need for peaceful mediation that does not erase cultural roots.

Kè’ Lèsap’s narrative illustrates that the *celurit* is not merely a physical weapon, but a symbol of Madurese masculinity. It represents the embodiment of values such as bravery, honor, and the moral responsibility expected of men within Madurese culture. As Kè’ Lèsap himself declared:

*“This celurit is not just a curved blade of iron, but the embodiment of my honor and courage.”*

The excerpt above affirms that the *celurit* functions as an extension of masculine values. It is not merely a tool for defense or aggression, but a moral signifier that reflects a man’s willingness to risk his life for the sake of dignity. This aligns with the theory of hegemonic masculinity proposed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), which asserts that dominant forms of masculinity within a given culture are often embodied in symbols that reinforce the moral and social identity of men.

In a cultural context, the *celurit* as a symbol of masculinity supports the representation of socially constructed values of bravery and honor. As Hall (1997) argues, cultural symbols such as the *celurit* shape and reinforce identity through representation. In the case of Kè' Lèsap, the *celurit* functions both visually and practically to demonstrate that he fulfills cultural expectations of masculinity: courageous, loyal to familial dignity, and willing to sacrifice himself if necessary.

These findings are consistent with international research on masculine symbols. According to (Jewkes et al., 2015)) in *Global Health Action*, weapon symbols in many cultures serve to reinforce images of masculinity, bravery, and protection of one's group. In Madurese culture, the *celurit* holds a similar role as a symbol of readiness to confront any threat to the honor of the family or community. Another illustrative quote:

"This bears witness that I died defending my honor."

The excerpt above indicates that the *celurit* is not merely a weapon of combat, but a moral witness to masculine sacrifice. It signifies the honor that is defended until the very end of life. Research by (Fleming et al., 2014) in *Men and Masculinities* notes that symbols of masculinity are often associated with weapons or tools that represent strength, protection, and male honor within traditional communities.

Accordingly, in the figure of Kè' Lèsap, the *celurit* serves as a central symbol of Madurese masculinity. It integrates physical meaning (as a weapon), moral meaning (as a representation of dignity), and social meaning (as a marker of protective responsibility). The *celurit* becomes a cultural language that affirms bravery and honor as the core of inherited masculinity.

## **Masculinity and Social Responsibility**

The story of Kè' Lèsap portrays a form of masculinity that is closely tied to the social role of protector of the family and community. Kè' Lèsap emerges as the ideal male figure in Madurese culture one who is expected to safeguard the group's honor and social stability. This value aligns with the findings of Nurdin and Lestari (2023), who observed that Madurese folklore often depicts male characters as guardians of social honor. For instance, in the following excerpt:

"Kè' Lèsap was a Madurese man deeply respected in his village. He was known not only for his courage, but also for his unwavering loyalty in preserving the honor and harmony of his community. One day, when an outsider merchant deceived the villagers and caused public unrest, Kè' Lèsap declared: *"As long as I live, do not allow anyone to tarnish our honor."* With a *celurit* at his waist, Kè' Lèsap confronted the merchant and demanded justice on behalf of the villagers. He firmly stated: *"The dignity of this village is my responsibility."*

His actions restored a sense of security and respect among the people. Until the end of his life, Kè' Lèsap was remembered as the protector of his village's honor".

Based on the excerpt above, Kè' Lèsap emerges in this narrative as a liminal figure who mediates between individual interests, communal well-being, and the customary norms of Madurese society. When an outsider merchant deceived the villagers, an economic issue quickly transformed into a crisis of collective dignity. The statement, "*As long as I live, do not allow anyone to tarnish our honor,*" affirms Kè' Lèsap's moral mandate: he assumes the role of a guardian of shared values. Within the framework of legal anthropology, this action exemplifies the mechanism of a "guardian of honor," wherein a respected figure takes on the coercive role typically reserved for the state, especially in contexts where the state is absent or its effectiveness is questioned.

The *celurit* at his waist functions as a performative symbol. It is not merely a weapon, but a sign of readiness to uphold justice grounded in customary law. This symbol conveys a deterrent message: any threat to the community will be met with an appropriate response. At the psychological level, the visible presence of a weapon reduces normative ambiguity both villagers and outsiders come to understand the boundaries of acceptable behavior.

Kè' Lèsap's courage also serves to sustain *social trust*. By demanding justice on behalf of the deceived villagers, he restores the community's sense of security and dignity. This communal trust is productive; it stimulates solidarity and prevents social disintegration that might arise from a sense of betrayal. At the same time, Kè' Lèsap's intervention establishes a precedent: while honor is a collective responsibility, its realization often depends on a charismatic and respected figure.

The inheritance of Kè' Lèsap's reputation as a "guardian of honor" becomes a form of cultural capital for future generations. He exemplifies that authority does not solely arise from physical strength, but from consistent defense of communal norms. However, this story also opens a space for critical reflection: can mechanisms of honor protection evolve from the threat of violence to institutionalized forms of mediation? The success of such a transition will determine whether the *celurit* continues to be perceived as a weapon or is reimagined as a symbol of peaceful cultural heritage.

The story of Kè' Lèsap represents Madurese masculinity not only as defined by physical bravery or the possession of a *celurit*, but also by the willingness to bear social responsibility. In Madurese culture, ideal masculinity is reflected in the extent to which a man can act as a protector and guardian of dignity not only for himself, but also for his family and community. As Kè' Lèsap once declared:



“The dignity of this village is my responsibility”

The text above demonstrates that masculinity in Madurese culture is closely tied to collective responsibility. The figure of Kè' Lèsap is concerned not only with his personal honor but also with bearing the dignity of the entire village. This aligns with the concept of hegemonic masculinity proposed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), which posits that dominant masculinity requires men to serve as protectors and moral leaders within their communities.

Kè' Lèsap's action in demanding justice for the villagers is a manifestation of social responsibility that is deeply integrated with his masculine identity. According to the research of (Jewkes et al., 2015) in *Global Health Action*, masculinity in many traditional cultures is associated with the role of safeguarding the group's honor and confronting external threats to the community. In this regard, Kè' Lèsap fulfills these expectations by directly intervening to resolve the conflict, thereby preserving the dignity of his village.

This story also affirms that Madurese masculinity is constructed upon the value of devotion. As Hall (1997) posits, symbols and actions within a culture serve as mediums for representing social values. The presence of Kè' Lèsap as the village protector, with a *celurit* at his waist, reinforces the symbolic role of men as guardians of collective honor. In this context, the *celurit* is not merely a defensive tool, but a marker of moral commitment to the community.

Research by (Fleming et al., 2014) in *Men and Masculinities* similarly emphasizes that social responsibility is often embedded in the construction of masculinity within patriarchal societies. Men who fail to fulfill these responsibilities are frequently perceived as having lost their honor and masculine status.

Thus, in the story of Kè' Lèsap, masculinity is defined not only through individual courage but also through devotion and social responsibility toward the group. Kè' Lèsap stands as the ideal representation of Madurese manhood one who upholds the dignity of his community through concrete action.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the discussion on Madurese masculinity in the story of Kè' Lèsap reveal that masculinity within Madurese culture is constructed upon noble values deeply embedded in the social identity of men. Courage and a readiness to sacrifice are central aspects that shape the ideal image of a Madurese man. In this narrative, Kè' Lèsap is

portrayed as someone willing to sacrifice his life to uphold the dignity and honor of his family.

Kè' Lèsap's attitude demonstrates that courage is not merely physical bravery, but also moral courage—the resolve to uphold truth and defend honor in the face of various threats. This aligns with the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which views masculinity as a social construct grounded in values of bravery and moral dominance.

Honor in the story of Kè' Lèsap stands as the central pillar of masculinity. Dignity is positioned above material wealth, making Kè' Lèsap's struggle not merely a matter of material conflict, but a fight to preserve the honor of his family and community. This concept of honor is not solely individual, but also collective, reflecting the social responsibility of a Madurese man. As depicted in the story, honor in Madurese culture is a moral legacy to be preserved across generations and serves as a fundamental measure of a man's worth.

The *celurit* appears as a powerful symbol of masculinity in Kè' Lèsap. It is not merely a tool of defense or combat, but a symbol of bravery, honor, and moral commitment. The *celurit* signifies a man's readiness to fight in defense of his family's dignity. This aligns with the theory of cultural representation, in which cultural symbols such as the *celurit* shape identity and reinforce social values through inherited narratives.

In addition to courage and honor, masculinity in *Kè' Lèsap* is closely tied to social responsibility. The figure of Kè' Lèsap portrays the role of Madurese men as protectors of the community. The ideal masculinity in this story is manifested through concrete actions: safeguarding society, maintaining order, and confronting external threats that may undermine the group's collective dignity. This affirms a masculine social role that is not solely self-focused but is oriented toward the welfare and honor of the collective.

This research remains limited to the textual analysis of *Kè' Lèsap* as a representation of Madurese masculinity. Future researchers are recommended to explore representations of Madurese masculinity in other forms of media, such as regional films, performing arts, or oral traditions (folktales within the oral storytelling tradition). Comparative studies between Madurese masculinity and masculinities in other local Indonesian cultures are also encouraged, in order to identify both similarities and differences.

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