Exsploring the Madurese political culture in the short story *Pelean Klebun* by Ahmad Suipardi

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Head of Village Madura Politic	This study aims to analyze the dynamic interplay between social structures and individual agents in Madurese political culture as depicted in Achmad Supardi's short story "Pelean Klebun" and the representation of Madurese culture in its political culture. The research used qualitative method with a sociological approach based on Anthony Giddens. The results of this study reveal the depiction of the duality of structuration in the relationship between structure and agents in recursive and decursive forms. The recursive structure reinforces traditional power hierarchies by positioning established elites (blater, kiai, Klébun) in political processes, while the decursive structure represents countervailing democratic principles that theoretically allow non-elites to participate in village head elections. The representation of Madurese political culture in this literary work is depicted through the social background of Madura and its various phenomena, including the defense of dignity in village head elections.

Introduction

There is significance of understanding the specific region sociopolitical culture as it can foster the citizen engagement and participation in political rhythm. According to Watts et al. (2003), understanding sociopolitical condition can enhances individuals' political awareness and consciousness on their surroundings sociopolitical condition which can fosters a sense of agency to effect change. Moreover, in the region with multi social identities and interpersonal relationships like Madura, understanding political culture become preeminent. In Madura, the political culture did not only influence by the politicians but also religious leaders such as "Kiai" (Abdullah & Kusaeri, 2024; Anshori & Samputra, 2024). According to Rohman (2023) in Madurese, Kiais have dual role where they act as mediator between political candidates and their constituencies, using their influence to shape electoral outcomes and local governance. The prominence of Kiai in Madurese political aspect shows the heterogeneity political power in Madurese which make it worthy to be further explored (Mahardhani et al., 2023; Faizah et al., 2022). Other than that, what make Madurese political culture be preeminent to be explored is the existence of kinship-based political structure (Hamida et al., 2024). This system is distinguished by strong familial ties, which frequently determine political loyalty, community leadership, and resource allocation (Thelen & Alber, 2021; Alber & Thelen, 2021). Joseph (2011) explained that the Madurese kinship system works on the same principles as "political familism", where family ties significantly impact political dynamics and collective activities. Its indicate the dynamics of politics in Madurese context. Hence, exploring this political culture is important.

One way to explore the specific region political culture is by examining the local story within the culture (Madhok, 2021; Mourik et al., 2021). in this case, local narratives might much be influenced by the

political condition in the region and behaviors condition of each area (Rabbani & Salam, 2017; Harmel et al., 2024). Local narratives such as short story not only the reflections of past events; but also the reflection of how the people's responses to contemporary societal challenges including the political dynamic, it also can depict the collective action in political spheres (Ljungkvist & Boers, 2016; Irwan et al., 2022; Sari, 2021; Uslan et al., 2024). Therefore, local narrative such as short story can be used to explore the condition of specific region political condition. In the context of Madurese, one local narrative or short story proposed by Ahmad Suipardi namely *Pelean Klebun* might be explored to further analyzed the culture of politic in Madura. It is because, this short story portrays the *Klebun* which refer to the local leader who might have role in the tradition and emerging political dynamics in Madurese. Furthermore, since the local leader is the leader in the village, which is the lowest political structure, analyzing the *Pelean Klebun* can mirror the true political practice in Madurese context. *Klebun's* also might demonstrates the difficulties of village leadership, which are intertwined with tradition and contemporary demands. Rahmawati et al. (2021) explain that *Klebun* functions within a patriarchal paradigm typified by limitations and obstacles, reflecting the greater political culture of Madura. Its emphasize the suitability of analyzing the *Pelean Klebun* to understand the political culture in Madurese.

In the current literature, several research have been conducted related to Madurese political context. For example, role as Kiai as the religious educators and political leader in Madurese (Abdullah & Kusaeri, 2024), correlation between Islam and politics in Madurese (Pribadi, 2013), political culture in Madurese marriage law (Sumarkan & Choiroh, 2022), and political economy conflict in Madurese (Hilmy, 2015). In term of the *Pelean Klebun* research context, only one research was provided in the literature namely research from Irsyadi (2018) who explore the Madurese Typology and Characteristics Amelioration. This research indicates the limit research related to political culture and *Pelean Klebun,* emphasizing the significant of conducting research that explore the political culture in Madurese context. Furthermore, the limit research in *pelean klebun* context indicate that no research was conducted to explore the Madurese political context embodied in *Pelean Klebun* short story. Therefore, based on the significance of exploring the Madurese political culture and the limit number of research in this aspect, the current research intend to fill this gap by examining the Madurese political culture through *Pelean Klebun* short story.

To guide the exploration, the current research will utilize specific theoretical framework in analysing and examining the Madurese political culture contained in *Pelean Klebun* short story. In this case, the theoretical framework used is the Anthony Giddens` structuration theory. This theoretical framework used because its ability to guide the understanding of social phenomena through its key concept namely the duality of structure, agency, and the iterative process of social practices. According to Chatterjee et al. (2019) the Anthony Giddens` structuration theory challenges the traditional dichotomy between the existed structure and agency, making that structure are both the medium and outcome of practice. Its will be valuable for the current research in understanding how the existence political constitution overlap and correlate with the agency or the society. It was emphasized by New (1994) who stated that human acts both constitute and are shaped by structures, highlighting a reciprocal interaction that Giddens calls as "the duality of structure". It's how the Giddens Structuration theory will be utilized in the current research. Through the theoretical framework, the current research intends to focus on two aspects; (a) analyze the influence of social structures on individual agency within the political culture of Madura as depicted in Pelean Klebun by Ahmad Suipardi, and (b) examine the representation of Madurese political culture in Pelean Klebun to provide a comprehensive understanding of its sociopolitical dimensions.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research method, which aims to describe and analyze individual and group phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research design follows a descriptive approach, intended to illustrate the political culture of Madura as depicted in the short story Pelean Klebun by Ahmad Suipardi. In attaining the study objective, structuration theory or sociological framework proposed by Anthony Giddens was utilized. Therefore, the text codification process was guided by key structuration concepts including duality of structure, recursive and decursive forms, and the relationship between structure and agency, allowing for systematic identification of relevant textual segments.

The data in this study consists of textual excerpts that represent elements of Madurese political culture within Pelean Klebun, analyzed through the lens of structuration theory. The textual excerpts were selected based on their representation of political relationships, power dynamics, and cultural practices specific to Madurese society. The analysis focused particularly on interactions between traditional power structures and individual agency within the narrative.

The data analysis follows these steps. First, the text codification—identifying and categorizing relevant textual segments. Second, the description—interpreting the meaning of each segment. Third, the logical

conclusion—synthesizing findings systematically. Fourth, the interpretation—analyzing the representation of Madurese political culture within the structuration framework (Miles et al., 2014). This methodological approach ensures a structured and in-depth examination of the political dynamics reflected in Pelean Klebun.

Results and Discussion

The Influence of Structure on Agency in Madurese Political Culture

The first objective of this research is to analyze the influence of social structure on individual agency in the context of Madura political culture which depicted in Pelean Klebun by Ahmad Suipardi. The influence of social structure on individual agency can be explained in the concept of duality of structure in Giddens` structuration theory. The duality concept explains that the structure such as norm, rules, and regulation have a constant interplay with the human agency such as individual action and decision (Whittington, 2010; Chatterjee et al., 2019). In this case, the structure enable agency to shape the individual capabilities and choices while agency can reshape the structure which lead to their evolution (Ng, 2021; Anam, 2025). Through this concept, Giddens` intend to emphasize that human activities are informed by and incorporated in existing structures; nevertheless, these structures can be transformed by social practices (Oppong, 2014; Tural, 2017). It is accordance with the concept of Reflection Monitoring of Action (RMA) explained in Pelean Klebun by Ahmad Suipardi which explain that agents continuously assess their actions within the existing structural framework.

The influence of structure on agency in this short story of Pelean Klebun is observed in two key aspects. First, the recursive dimension, where agents operate within an established structure while simultaneously maintaining it through their language and actions. This process reinforces social awareness and reproduces the social system, albeit with subtle variations over time (Seiler, 2002). Second, the discursive dimension, where individuals critically question the existing system and may instigate changes if their dialectical discourse is accepted by the broader society (Zienkowski, 2018). The recursive relationship between structure and agency in Pelean Klebun is exemplified in the hierarchical structure of Madurese society.

In the specific context of Madura, various types of local elites play significant social roles, including blater (local strongmen), kiai (religious leaders), Klebun (village heads), Aria or Sentana (nobility), bureaucrats, local politicians, intellectuals, oréng sogi (wealthy individuals), tauke (business owners), juragan (landlords), and bandol (informal power brokers) (Wiyata, 2002). Each of these elites holds substantial influence within the community, with some playing crucial roles in maintaining democracy at the local level. Their varying forms of capital—whether economic, social, or symbolic—contribute to their ability to consolidate power and mobilize the masses within specific social processes.

Sociologically, all elites in Madura maintain grassroots support, yet the limited political space restricts democratic dynamics at the local level (Bazzi et al., 2019). The strong centralization of state power suppresses local political movements, leading to a "strong state, weak society" condition, where grassroots political activism remains underdeveloped. Consequently, Madurese local elites continue to operate within the constraints of this rigid political structure.

Madurese society is widely recognized for its distinct, unique, and sometimes stereotyped and stigmatized cultural traits. The term "distinct" refers to the uniqueness of the Madurese ethnic identity, which sets it apart from other ethnic communities (Alwi, 2001; Takdir et al., 2024). This cultural distinctiveness is particularly evident in the strong hierarchical obedience to four central figures in Madurese life: Buppa', Babbu, Guru, Ban Rato (Father, Mother, Teacher, and Government Leader). These figures command absolute loyalty, particularly in religious and social practices (Wiyata, 2002). For the Madurese ethnic group, this hierarchical loyalty is a necessity, deeply ingrained as a binding normative rule in daily life (Susylawati et al., 2024). Any intentional violation of this norm is met with strict social and cultural sanctions, a principle that also extends to the political dynamics of Madurese society.

In the village political structure, the term Klebun refers to the village head, similar to the Lurah or Kepala Desa in Javanese society. However, in Madura, where religious values strongly influence the community, the Klebun serves as a formal administrative leader rather than a comprehensive social authority. The role of the Klebun is primarily limited to governmental administrative functions, in contrast to Javanese village heads, who often engage in broader social and communal affairs. Meanwhile, social and religious matters are predominantly managed by informal religious leaders, commonly known as ulama' or kiai. This division of roles underscores the unique sociopolitical structure of Madurese society, where formal and informal leadership functions are clearly delineated, shaping the region's distinctive political culture.

The concept of structural duality is exemplified through various characters in Pelean Klebun, particularly in the experiences of the protagonist, Hairul, and other supporting characters. Hairul's uncle,

Misdi, attempts to dissuade him from running for village head, arguing that his education provides him with better opportunities elsewhere:

> "Your journey is still long, Rul," said Teh Misdi. "You can finish your studies and secure a good job in Surabaya or Jakarta. I am certain of that."

Misdi believes that Hairul, as a soon-to-be university graduate, has the potential to attain a more prestigious and stable career than becoming a village head. He reassures Hairul that he does not need to engage in the village head election to secure his future.

Similarly, another relative, Ridho, emphasizes the hereditary nature of village leadership:

> "That family has led this village since before I was even born. The villagers see them as the backbone of this place. It is not right to disrupt what has already been established," said Uncle Ridho.

Ridho's statement highlights the entrenched tradition of political leadership within specific families. The established elite lineage is perceived as the legitimate ruling entity, and any challenge from outside this lineage is regarded as a disruption to the existing order.

This perception is further reinforced by the broader community:

> "They, sitting in the prayer hall, on the porch, even in the courtyard, all voiced the same demand: withdraw from the village head election."

The collective insistence from Hairul's family and community reveals the strong social pressure exerted to maintain the status quo.

Additionally, Bok Na, a senior family member, appeals to Hairul's personal well-being:

> "Cong," Bok Na's voice broke the silence of the night, "We all love you. We want you to marry, start a family, and live peacefully. We do not want anything bad to happen to you."

Bok Na's concern reflects the underlying fears surrounding the election process, particularly the financial and emotional toll it would take on Hairul. Village head elections in Madura are often fraught with conflicts that can escalate into violence, making them a dangerous pursuit.

These narratives illustrate how Madurese political culture maintains a rigid framework in which only individuals from established political families—*blater* (local strongmen), *kiai* (religious leaders), *Aria* or *Sentana* (nobility), *oréng sogi* (wealthy individuals), and *juragan* (landlords or business owners)—are deemed suitable for leadership positions. Those outside these elite circles are discouraged from contesting elections, as their candidacy is perceived as futile and potentially destabilizing. This phenomenon exemplifies recursive structural maintenance through agency, wherein individuals uphold existing power structures through their responses to established norms.

While the recursive aspect of structural duality ensures continuity, the discursive dimension provides space for questioning and potential transformation. This occurs when individuals challenge the prevailing system and advocate for change. Hairul's perspective embodies this challenge:

> "I just want to contribute to the village's development with my skills. I already have programs in mind, and I will ensure that aid reaches those who truly need it, unlike before," I said.

Hairul's statement reflects his desire to leverage his education for the betterment of his community. He envisions an administrative system based on merit rather than hereditary privilege. This sentiment is further reinforced when he questions the passive role assigned to him:

> "I cannot bear it. Am I supposed to simply accept being the only university graduate in this village without doing anything for the people?"

Hairul challenges the notion that political leadership should be reserved for elite families. He asserts that the village head should be chosen based on competence and performance rather than lineage. His resistance represents an attempt to shift the structural paradigm by introducing a discourse that prioritizes qualifications over familial ties.

Furthermore, Hairul's resistance to challenging and questioning the prevailing political system acts as a significant catalyst for potential change in Madura's political landscape, demonstrating how individual agency can foster a deeper political consciousness among the community. By challenging existing norms and authority figures, Hairul not only expresses his personal agency, but also challenges others to consider their responsibilities within the sociopolitical system. Such acts have the potential to empower individuals while also driving collective efforts to redefine power dynamics and advocate for more inclusive governance within Madura's social fabric. In this regard, Hairul's rebellion represents a watershed moment to increase political consciousness and activism in a community long dominated by patriarchal norms.

Despite his aspirations, Hairul's challenge to the status quo is met with strong opposition, demonstrating how deeply entrenched traditional structures resist change. His position highlights the tension between agency and structure in Madurese political culture, where elite dominance persists due to both systemic reinforcement and community complicity.

The dialectical struggle between Hairul's transformative aspirations and the entrenched resistance he encounters reveals the paradoxical nature of social change within traditional power structures, where the very act of challenging the system simultaneously exposes its vulnerabilities and reinforces its defensive mechanisms. This dynamic illustrates Giddens' concept of the "dialectic of control," wherein attempts to exercise agency inevitably generate counter-reactions from existing power holders who seek to maintain their dominance through various forms of coercion and legitimation. Hairul's educational credentials and democratic ideals, while representing potential agents of change, are effectively neutralized by the cultural apparatus that defines political legitimacy through traditional markers of authority rather than modern qualifications. The story thus demonstrates how structural transformation requires not merely individual resistance, but a fundamental shift in the collective consciousness that determines what constitutes legitimate leadership. In this context, Hairul's struggle becomes emblematic of the broader challenge faced by emerging democracies in post-traditional societies, where formal democratic institutions must compete with informal power networks rooted in historical privilege, kinship ties, and cultural symbolism. The narrative suggests that meaningful political change demands a delicate negotiation between respecting cultural values and challenging oppressive structures, requiring change agents to operate within existing cultural frameworks while gradually expanding the boundaries of acceptable discourse and legitimate authority.

Representation of Madurese Political Culture

Authors may integrate the results and discussion into a single section for seamless interpretation depending on the journal's preference. Subheadings can be used to divide themes or topics for better clarity and organization.

The objective of this research focus on examining the representation of Madurese political culture in pelean Klebun. The short story of Pelean Klebun provides a nuanced portrayal of Madurese political dynamics, revealing a deeply ingrained sociopolitical structure that governs village leadership. The narrative underscores the high-stakes nature of electoral contests in Madura, where power struggles often escalate into violence. This is evident in Hairul's dialogue with his older brother, Ramli:

"Why should it matter if I register for the village head election? It's not like I am guaranteed to win," I said, frustrated by the fear. "That's exactly the point! Winning is uncertain, but death is almost guaranteed!" Ramli exclaimed.

Ramli's response encapsulates the perilous reality of political contests in Madura, where elections are not merely administrative transitions but intense power struggles that can result in bloodshed. Tofa, another family member, reinforces this concern:

"Enough! You are intelligent, so don't act ignorant! You know very well that their family will not tolerate any challengers. That means you will die if you continue with this plan. If you die, we all die, because we will not stand idly by. Do you understand?!" Tofa shouted.

This passage highlights the collective familial responsibility in Madurese political culture. Elections are perceived not just as individual endeavors but as matters that implicate entire family networks. Political conflicts can trigger widespread retaliation, often leading to violent feuds.

The extent of political entrenchment is further demonstrated when Hairul encounters the father of the incumbent candidate:

"Jek gik atanyah pole mun lok terro pegek le'errah." (Don't ask again if you don't want your throat slit.)

This explicit threat underscores the rigid exclusivity of Madurese political leadership. Any challenge to the existing hierarchy is met with severe consequences, reinforcing the notion that village head positions must remain within elite circles.

The cultural dynamics presented in the story align with sociological observations of Madurese society. According to Mukminin (2021), individuals in Madura must adhere to the principle of "*ngangghuy mata buta kopeng tengel*" (using blind eyes or deaf ears). This means that one's words and actions must always consider the social context and the potential it repercussions. In this context, The Klebun as the village leader, embodies this principle as he navigates the pressures of maintaining order and adhering to cultural norms. His choices often reflect an attempt to balance the expectations of the community with the necessity of addressing underlying issues that could disrupt social harmony. In this case, disregarding these

unwritten rules can lead to *epamalo* (perceived humiliation), which in Madurese culture often necessitates retribution, encapsulated in the saying "*tambana malo mate*" (the cure for shame is death).

Furthermore, the communal nature of Madurese society is reflected in the concept of "*tarètan dhibi'*" (one's own siblings) and "*satarètanan*" (all are brothers). Within the context of the story, these notions imply a mutual recognition of connectivity, implying that both blood relationships and chosen kinship are essential for individuation and identity in Madurese society. This story is a microcosm of the larger socio-cultural fabric, with family relationships and communal bonds playing a central role. Other than that, "*orèng dhâddhi tarètan, tarètan dhâddhi orèng*" (a stranger can become family, and family can become a stranger) illustrates the strong kinship ties that define social relations. The characters in the story navigate intricate social hierarchies where relationships are formed by shared experiences, mutual aid, and the collective concept (familial connection). This view is consistent with sociological considerations about cultural identity and community membership, implying a cultural predisposition that defines the Madurese way of life as intrinsically communal and linked. In this cultural context, the principle of reciprocity is highly valued—one should never harm others if they do not wish to be harmed in return. This ethical foundation reinforces the importance of harmonious relationships and mutual respect within the community.

The intricate web of cultural values and social structures depicted in Pelean Klebun ultimately reveals how Madurese political culture operates as a self-perpetuating system that resists external disruption through deeply embedded mechanisms of social control. The story demonstrates that political participation in Madura is not merely about democratic processes or individual ambitions, but rather about navigating a complex matrix of traditional hierarchies, familial obligations, and cultural taboos that collectively maintain the status quo. Hairul's struggle represents the broader tension between modernity and tradition, where educational attainment and democratic ideals clash with entrenched power structures and cultural imperatives. The narrative suggests that meaningful political change in Madurese society requires not just individual courage, but a fundamental transformation of the cultural paradigms that govern social relationships and power distribution. Through its portrayal of violence, intimidation, and collective responsibility, the story illustrates how traditional political culture can simultaneously serve as both a source of community cohesion and a barrier to democratic progress, ultimately questioning whether genuine political reform is possible within such deeply rooted cultural frameworks.

Conclusion

The duality of structuration in the short story *Palean Klebun* demonstrates that the relationship between structure and agency is reciprocal within the dynamics of sociopolitical processes, manifesting in both recursive and discursive forms. In its recursive form, the influence of structure on agency appears wherein the existing structure is enacted and accepted by the agency, depending on its linguistic and social framework while maintaining the prevailing social system, resulting in practical consciousness that leads to the reproduction of the social system with various modifications. Meanwhile, the discursive form emerges when individuals question the established system and propose alternatives, leading to structural changes if the agency's dialectics are acknowledged. Within the context of Madurese political culture, agency adheres to the entrenched structure of local political elites dominated by figures such as *blater, kiai, Aria, or Sentana* (nobility), *oréng sogi*, and *juragan*, consequently making individuals outside these elite groups struggle to exert influence and often perceived as disruptors of the existing system. This dynamic is exemplified by the character Hairul, an aspiring graduate who seeks to transform his village using academic knowledge despite not belonging to the established local political elite, representing the discursive aspect of structuration. The representation of Madurese political culture is vividly illustrated through the depiction of the prevailing social backdrop where any verbal or behavioral disruptions are perceived as *epamalo* (an act of humiliation), compelling individuals to take decisive action when they feel threatened or dishonored, as the Madurese believe that shaming others is taboo and encapsulated in the principle that *tambana malo mate* (the cure for shame is death). Within the dynamics of village head elections, this cultural assumption becomes highly subjective among different groups and intensifies the potential for conflict, as varying family interpretations of this principle contribute to tensions during electoral contests in Madura.

Declarations

| **Ethics Approval** | : | Information on Ethics Approval and informed consent statements are required for all articles published in BAHASTRA since 2025. |
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