Women's Empowerment in Madura Villages: Examining Female Resistance within the Patriarchal Power Structure and Political Dynasties

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Abstract

The position of village head (klebun) in Madura is predominantly held by men, suggesting patriarchal power and political dynasties. This study explores how women klebuns responded to the situation by empowering themselves and other women. The analysis uses qualitative descriptive methods and Foucault's theory of power and legitimacy. Data was collected from observations of 11 women klebuns and in-depth interviews with four of them. The findings reveal that female klebuns face a choice between being extensions of their male relatives or being leaders themselves. To challenge the patriarchal constructs, they strategically use political influence, establish relationships with officials, and seek support from legal aid institutions. These efforts were made to address the issue of village security centering around the Madurese people in order to regain public trust. The study unveils the complexity of women's empowerment in Madura's male-dominated political landscape. This encouraged female klebuns to strive and transform the social and political

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dynamics, advocating for gender equality and challenging existing power structures. This research offers insights into promoting women's political empowerment at the village level, and fostering gender equity in local governance, inspiring change in Madura and beyond.

Keywords: *Madurese villages; female klebuns; patriarchal power; political dynasties; women empowerment*

Introduction

Villages are not only administrative areas but also social and cultural entities. Villages serve as the breeding ground for traditional values and cultural expressions, which reflect the local society's social and cultural identity. A village head in Madura, known as *klebun*, functions as not only a government leader but also an upholder of significant social standing and value directly legitimated by their community. The *klebun* position is fiercely contested among social and kinship-based groups. In Java and Madura, village head elections have become battlegrounds among various social groups within the community. Consequently, the electoral competition for the village head position has evolved from personal contests between candidates to group-based ones. Being a village head provides a wide range of access to social, economic, and political spheres for the incumbent and their supporters. Economically, winning the village head's election means receiving various economic benefits. Quoting scholars like Elly Touwen-Bouwsma (1989), Dzulkarnain (2021) note the victorious *klebun* and their supporters gain various advantages, such as securing village administrative positions, obtaining access

to *percaton* land (endowment land) for cultivation, receiving subsidies, and participating in various government-sponsored credit programs. These 'payback' actions not only reciprocate the supporters' efforts but also bolster the incumbent's position and authority throughout their term. Over time, such economic interests, coupled with changes in state policies, have intensified the competition and the desire to maintain the status quo.

In the post-reformation era, political changes have redefined the role of the village head. As stated in Government Regulation Number 43 of 2014, village heads are now considered as part of the state bureaucracy with a salary-based system, no longer linked to *percaton* or land grant, at least officially. With this new system, the village head receives a regular monthly salary similar to that of civil servants. Economically, the guaranteed income through the salary system offers more stability compared to the *percaton* models. Winters (2011) argues that economic justifications in a power struggle will lead to the emergence of power oligarchies. Touwen-Bouwsma (1989) explains that, in the long-standing tradition in the election process for *klebun* in Madura's society, formally anyone can run for the position, but candidates are usually those with economic and influential power. The strategic position attracts family-based social groups to seek and maintain this position. Various strategies are employed to ensure the continuity of power. After the term of office ends, and the incumbent can no longer run for the next election (because they have served two terms), candidates from the family will be prepared to maintain the political power. In this way, dynastic politics is built.

In the post-reformation era, the phenomenon of female *klebun* candidates has emerged in Madura. The Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning Villages has provided space for women's participation in village institutions, including the village head position. With the formal opportunities for women in politics, they have now been considered potential candidates and successors. These women typically come from the incumbent's family, such as a wife or a daughter. The personal relationship with the incumbent has given these women access to the political arena that otherwise remains closed. The entry of women into the political arena in Madura marked a significant change in the patriarchal tradition, as *klebun* positions had always been exclusively held by men. Nonetheless, Rahmawati et al. (2021) noted that the presence of women *klebun* (*klebun babine*) leaves a question about whether their role is merely a continuation of family power or a genuine representation of women's independent presence and substance in the realm of power.

Women's leadership has become a debated discourse in Madurese society today. Women are now allowed to assume political power, a possibility that did not exist before. Laws, values, and norms provide the basis for the community to consider and implement the provisions. The discourse on women's leadership has mobilized women, community leaders, and voters to take action in nominating, supporting, and electing female candidates to become *klebun*. This discourse becomes part of history, showcasing how discourse contexts are formed and influence individual behaviors. According to Foucault (1980), power is a process that continuously evolves through

power relations. Power is not an object but a verb, constantly developing within existing relational spaces. Power is highly productive as it resides within each individual within the spaces of relations that continuously evolve. Each relation shapes behaviors differently, some of which may contribute positively to the *klebun*'s victory, while others may limit or even hinder the success. In the context of female *klebun*, their journey through the village head election process is through complex power relations. Family, constituents, organizers, and *remo* groups play pivotal roles in determining the success of a village head or *klebun* in Madura. The presence of these groups simultaneously reveals the power relations that a female *klebun* must navigate to achieve her victory. On a practical level, after being elected, a female *klebun* must confront a hegemonic environment that undermines her leadership abilities.

This research explores a significant development in Madurese villages—the emergence of women in leadership positions, particularly as village heads (*klebun*s). This phenomenon challenges the traditional patriarchal norms and raises questions about the extent of women's independent power within the deeply rooted patriarchal power structures and political dynasties. Through a qualitative descriptive approach and Foucault's theory of power and legitimacy, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strategies employed by female *klebun*s to challenge patriarchal constructions and promote gender equality. The question is how women in leadership positions navigate

their roles within the patriarchal power structure and political dynasties. The hypothesis is that, despite the challenges posed by these structures, female *klebun*s can exert agency and resist patriarchal norms through various means, such as forming alliances, mobilizing support, and advocating for women's participation in village administration. The primary purpose of this article is to shed light on the dynamics of women's empowerment in Madura villages. By documenting the experiences, challenges, and strategies of female *klebun*s, this research aims to contribute to the existing literature on gender and politics and provide valuable insights into how women negotiate patriarchal power structures, which contributes to the transformation of the social and political landscape in Madura.

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach within the field of sociology. Data was collected through observations, interviews, document analysis, and literature review. The research subjects were female village heads. Observations were carried out on all village heads in Madura, involving 11 participants (the *klebuns* of Bilaporah, Tagungguh, Karang Asem, Klampis Barat, Tunagara Timur, *Blater*an, Lantek Timur, Morombuh, Pocong, Jaddung, Bancang). Meanwhile, repeated interviews were conducted with four participants (the *klebuns* of Bilaporah, Tagungguh, Pocong, and Bancang). The interviews aimed to gain insights into the experiences, challenges, and efforts of female village heads in confronting patriarchal power structures and political dynasties in Madurese villages. An analysis of official documents,

such as government policies related to women's leadership in Madurese villages, was conducted to support the primary data from the interviews. A literature review was also performed to gain a broader understanding of theories related to women's empowerment and patriarchal power structures.

The collected data from interviews, document analysis, and literature review underwent several stages of transcription, data organization and categorization, as well as data verification. The data were analyzed using Foucault's theory of power and legitimacy. This approach should unravel how patriarchal power structures and political dynasties affect female village heads in Madurese villages. The data analysis involved a thorough interpretative process to uncover meanings and patterns emerging from the collected data. By employing a qualitative descriptive approach, collecting data through interviews and document analysis/literature review, and analyzing the data using Foucault's theory, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's empowerment in Madurese villages and the resistance they employ to confront patriarchal power structures and political dynasties.

Results

Power and Legitimacy

Legitimacy is a crucial aspect in any political system, whether in societies and communities that are democratic or tyrannical, traditional or modern, homogeneous or heterogeneous. Therefore, anyone in power or struggling for power constantly strives to claim legitimacy. There are various ways to claim and maintain legitimacy in

a society. Efriza (2016:173-176) categorizes them into five forms. The first is legitimacy based on beliefs or myths, which refer to the realm of uncertain, irrational, and less critically analyzed beliefs within a society, including political beliefs. Leadership legitimacy is grounded in one's connection with specific myths. The second is ideology-based legitimacy. As an ideology comprises a set of rational and systematic beliefs, legitimacy is claimed by influencing actions. The third is symbolic legitimacy, stemming from moral, emotional, traditional, and cultural beliefs and values. In this case, legitimacy is claimed through ritualistic, sacred, and iconic symbolic representations. The fourth is material-based legitimacy, claimed and maintained by promising prosperity to the community.

The fifth is procedural legitimacy, obtained through procedural systems such as elections and referendums (Malau, 2021).

In terms of female leadership, Shimelis K (2015) distinguishes between descriptive and substantive representation. Descriptive representation focuses on the quantitative presence of women, while substantive representation refers to the elevation of women's genuine interests and the interpretation of their presence in politics beyond gender bias. Female presence in political positions can be analyzed based on these two categories, whether it is descriptive, substantive, or both. Analyzing the constraints women face when participating in politics, Walby (1990:20) highlights that lags, inequality, and injustice experienced by women stem from the patriarchal system that operates in both individual and public spaces.

Individual patriarchy exists within households, while public patriarchy manifests in public spaces such as work and the state.

Practically, Watson (2014:51) explains that patriarchy in politics includes the treatment women experience while participating in politics. Patriarchal practices include underestimating women's representation, perceiving men as having more knowledge and analytical skills, and 'imposing' higher political costs. The widely accepted assumption is that men are the primary breadwinners, while women only need to contribute supplementary income or rely on their husbands' financial support. This makes it nearly impossible for women to meet the financial demands of political campaigns. Aside from that, time also poses constraints for women. Most of their time is spent on household tasks during the day, and they are expected to be at home by the evening. Meanwhile, political agendas and activities have no time restrictions and cater to men, who are not limited by household responsibilities or time expectations. This creates a constraint for women, as they must align their schedules to actively participate in politics. The fifth and final constraint is political dynasties. While political dynasties facilitate women's participation in politics, they often serve to replace or maintain the power of dynastic fathers, husbands, or sons. Women are treated as assets to their families, as they are perceived as capable of garnering votes and winning political contestations. Ultimately, patriarchal interests continue to dominate.

Patriarchy prevails in society because of the ongoing process of producing and reproducing patriarchal practices. Three institutions play a significant

role in sustaining patriarchy: cultural institutions through their curriculum in schools, religious institutions, and the media. Additionally, the basic institution that shapes patriarchal culture is the family (Millet, 1972:33), which preserves patriarchal ideology in traditional and modern societies alike. As the smallest unit of patriarchy, the family greatly contributes to reinforcing this ideology. Families encourage each member to think and behave according to the rules dictated by patriarchal society. Patriarchal ideology is instilled in family members, particularly in children, as they learn from their parents' behavior how to conduct themselves, develop characters, engage in hobbies, understand statuses, and adhere to other appropriate societal values. The behaviors taught to children are differentiated based on appropriate conduct constructed exclusively for men or women.

Perceptions of female village head in Madurese Patriarchy

The history of women's leadership in Madura is marked by various folk tales, including the legendary stories of Potre Koneng and Rato Ebhu. However, the prominence of women's leadership in Madura was overshadowed by patriarchal culture. Women have to start from scratch to strive for leadership positions, including within the village context. The development of women's leadership in villages re-emerged after the reform era, driven by the growing women's movement for gender justice. In Madura, the increasing political participation in various regions has prompted kinship groups to nominate women as village heads, known as *klebun*. Overall, kinship ties continue to strongly influence social, economic, and political activities, including the selection of candidates,

campaign financing, and support in village head elections. Consequently, a candidate's victory represents a victory for a specific kinship group.

In other words, women's leadership in Madura cannot be separated from the role of kinship. Most *klebun* are born out of dynastic interests. They serve the interests of kinship groups in maintaining dynastic power held by their male relatives. The mechanisms through which women obtain leadership positions include:

a. Village head elections: The mechanism of village head elections is regulated by Law No. 6 of 2014, which stipulates that village heads are elected through direct voting. Most women who become *klebun* are elected through this mechanism.

b. Interim replacements: This mechanism is regulated by the law governing the replacement of village heads whose term has not yet ended. Women who become *klebun* through this system are 'appointed' to replace their deceased husbands or male relatives until the end of the term.

c. Temporary officials: This refers to village heads appointed by the regent during the interim period until a new village head is elected. One female *klebun* in Bangkalan Regency was appointed as a temporary official to replace her husband, whose term had ended.

Despite these three mechanisms, the overall trend indicates that women's leadership positions as *klebun* remain closely tied to their kinship. Society perceives women as

merely symbolic representations rather than substantive figures occupying strategic political positions. This perception emerges because most women who become *klebun* have influential kinship ties in the village. Accordingly, the challenges they face predominantly arise from the prevailing cultural and societal norms, which include:

a. Patriarchal construction of leadership: Leadership is defined by society as the ability to maintain order in the village, which is why men are more easily accepted as leaders due to their perceived physical strength. When female candidates run for an election, the public questions their ability to, among others, catch thieves, mediate conflicts, and assist affected community members.

b. Strict division of labor: There is a philosophical belief that women are responsible for domestic tasks and should remain at home. This poses a challenge as *klebun's* job requires interactions with various stakeholders. Their husbands or male relatives would prohibit them from going out in public, especially among men.

c. Perception of women as mere symbols in their role as village heads.

The perception and societal beliefs regarding leadership in Madura are closely linked to the prevalent and multifaceted security issue. Madura has unique social dynamics and a rich cultural tapestry that influences the concept of leadership, including the concept of '*blater*' (strong figures or local strongmen), which reflects the link between leadership and the ability to establish security.

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Social leadership is frequently led by individuals from the *blater* group. These individuals possess not only physical strength but also knowledge of traditional martial arts, mystical powers, and magical abilities, which further enhance their charismatic influence over the community. It is important to note that while *blater* may have some religious knowledge, their focus is primarily on personal development and maintaining their authoritative position within the village.

Meanwhile, at the elite level, religious figures known as "*Kyai*" hold prominent roles, commanding great respect and influence within their communities. They are often seen as spiritual leaders, guiding their followers on matters of faith and morality. The interplay between the spiritual guidance of the *Kyais* and the social dominance of the *blaters* creates power dynamics that shape the leadership landscape in Madura.

Rozaki (2013) delves into the significance of *blater* in Madura's social structure, highlighting their role as strong figures who maintain order and protect the community. The respect and fear they command make them essential actors in mediating conflicts, settling disputes, and ensuring the safety and well-being of the villagers. Their charisma and legendary status play a crucial role in preserving social order and enforcing traditional norms within the community. However, as the landscape of Madura evolves with societal changes and the influx of modernity, the role of a *blater* in leadership and governance has started to diminish. The younger generation may be drawn to alternative forms of leadership, influenced by globalization, education,

and exposure to external ideas. This shifting paradigm could potentially impact the traditional authority of the *blaters* and their place in the community's power structure. Nonetheless, Madura's perception of leadership remains rooted in its historical, cultural, and religious context, with the presence of the *blaters* representing a unique facet of its social fabric. Religious figures like the *kyais* play pivotal roles in spiritual guidance, but the *blaters* assume the mantle of social leadership, acting as strong figures responsible for maintaining order and security.

Resistance of Women *Klebuns*

The political power of women *klebuns* can only be maintained by demonstrating leadership credibility to the community. To achieve this, they need to turn themselves into a valuable asset. First, independent female *klebun* have a high level of education and experience working in the public sphere. Education and experience provide them with the knowledge and bargaining power to negotiate and deal with leadership challenges. Higher education frees women from being mere puppets controlled by their male relatives. Through their education, they acquire skills that support their duties and responsibilities. Second, through their experiences, women *klebuns* build relationships with the village, sub-district, and district bureaucracies, which they can leverage to fulfill their tasks and responsibilities. Third, empowered and independent women *klebuns* possess strong willpower to become independent leaders. They have better political awareness, which motivates them to participate in politics.

Empowered and independent women *klebuns* establish relationships with law

enforcement officials, aiding them in addressing security issues, such as theft, which is a major concern in Madura's society. Additionally, female *klebun* broaden their connections with legal aid institutions as an alternative means of resolving issues, which are often resolved through violence traditionally. By employing these strategies, women *klebuns* can demonstrate better leadership performance compared to men *klebuns*. As a result, they gain recognition from the community and their male relatives. In the midst of patriarchal constructs that surround them, women *klebuns* continue to build their leadership to prove that women can fulfill their duties and responsibilities. The ability of women to carry out their tasks and responsibilities will foster trust in the community. Thus, the work of women *klebuns* becomes an act of resistance against the stereotyping of women as symbolic figures in village leadership. In practice, women *klebuns* employ the following leadership strategies:

a. Performing official village head duties defined by Law No. 6 of 2014

b. Carrying out village head tasks based on knowledge and beliefs held by the community

Women *klebuns* carry out village head duties prescribed by the law through:

a. Administering village governance: Improving the village governance system poses its own challenges for village heads since many village administrations do not function properly. This is because governance is centralized, relying solely on the village head.

b. Implementing village development: Some women *klebuns* in Madura have

spearheaded the use of Village Development Funds (ADD) for constructing village facilities such as community centers and health clinics, which were previously nonexistent in their villages.

c. Conducting village development guidance: This involves addressing and resolving social issues faced by the village community.

Regarding religious and social expectations, women *klebuns* consistently participate in community religious activities, proving that women can lead in religious affairs. Another duty is to assure the community regarding security, which is often questioned in relation to female leadership due to the high crime rates and recurring conflicts. Women *klebuns* address these challenges using various strategies. First, they build safety by reducing the crime rate. Second, they mediate and resolve conflicts arising in the community. In Madura, social conflicts often escalate into violent clashes. Women *klebuns* seek legal channels to resolve and prevent clashes in, for example, inheritance disputes. Third, they address legal issues faced by community members.

In addition, women *klebuns* solve domestic issues through negotiations. Women's relationships in Madura's society are strictly regulated, especially when men are involved. This poses a challenge for female *klebun*, who must navigate relationships with individuals from diverse races, ethnicities, and genders. Their ability and courage to negotiate with their husbands have changed the conduct of public affairs and engagement for women. Moreover, their ability to independently

determine village policies, separated from their husbands' domination, is progress toward the autonomy of women as village leaders in Madura.

The strategies employed by women *klebuns* and their visible presence in Madura's villages have constructed a new perception of women's leadership. In practice, this has strengthened the position of women in leadership, as evident from the re-election of women *klebuns* with excellent track records and immense support from their communities. This demonstrates that discourse can transform societal behavior based on disseminated knowledge.

Negotiations between Women *Klebuns* and Their Male Relatives

One indicator of women *klebuns* becoming empowered is in the success of negotiations with their husbands or other male relatives. The negotiation process is influenced by gender differences, with men often seeking to assert dominance over women (Hapsari, 2021), ensuring that they hold control over women in the interactions. Since men often assert their dominance to achieve their predetermined goals (Lewicki, Barry, & Saunders, 2007), women's success in negotiations depends on their ability to influence others to act according to their desires (Gangl et al., 2015). These abilities include referent, coercive, informational, expert, and reward power (Raven, 2008). Manipulation is also employed by creating a situation where obedience leads to praise

or other rewards and failure to comply with the husband's orders results in punishments, physical or psychological. This is used as a means of exercising power during negotiations (Raven, 2008).

Madura's culture, characterized by a matrilocal residence pattern, paradoxically enforces patriarchal power dynamics, placing men in more dominant positions over women (Hefni, 2012). This is further strengthened by the concept of *"bhupa'-babhu-ghuru-rato,"* a referential standard in Madurese society that enforces hierarchical obedience to central figures. According to this hierarchy, individuals deserving respect and compliance are ranked as follows: father, mother, teacher, and ruler/leader. Placing the father at the top and women in a secondary position reflects men's dominance in Madura. An example of failed negotiations

can be seen in the case of SF, the *klebun* of Pocong Village. In the negotiations with her husband, who was appointed as a civil servant in the Indonesian National Army (TNI), SF declined the proposal to run for *klebun* election . She cited reasons such as her lack of experience and the societal taboo associated with women holding positions of authority in Madura. The negotiation concluded when her husband threatened to resign from his position as a civil servant, which was crucial for their survival. Consequently, SF submitted to her husband and eventually assumed the role of *klebun*.

Similarly, SM, the head of Bilaporah Village, refused to replace her deceased husband, who had been in office for only two years. A meeting was held with community leaders to find a replacement through a process called *"pengisian anggota*

badan permusyawaratan desa" (PAW), which resulted in the appointment of a relative of the former *klebun*. Eventually, SM was compelled to accept the position of *klebun* since her son had not yet reached the required age criteria to take on the role. Once again, the negotiation between a woman candidate and men, as well as the community, ended in favor of the latter. The situation left SM with seemingly no other option but to accept, although she claimed not to fully understand the administrative and financial responsibilities inherent in the role of the village head. Even after assuming the position, both SF and SM lacked the power to negotiate and exercise independent leadership. In fact, SF could only meet others with her husband's permission, highlighting her lack of bargaining power in front of her husband. She merely complied with her husband's decisions and acted according to his desires.

In contrast, the negotiations between MS, the *klebun* of Bancang Village, and her husband resulted in outcomes that accommodated her interests. Acts of rebellion through negotiations were achieved once they were in positions of power as village heads. During her negotiation with her husband, MS utilized her bargaining position, stating that Bancang Village was under her leadership while her husband's jurisdiction was another village. Her husband accepted this, and he refrained from interfering in the governance of Bancang Village, except when requested for assistance by MS. During the formulation of her work programs, MS faced criticism

for proposing the establishment of community health posts (*polindes*). Nonetheless, she managed to defend her idea.

Similarly, HB, the *klebun* of Tagungguh Village, who was originally a midwife, faced strong rejection of her proposal to establish integrated health services posts (*posyandu*) from her husband and other male village officials. Nevertheless, after a tough debate, HB emerged victorious with her proposal. This success in negotiations led to their empowerment as a *klebun*. Moreover, MS's courageous actions became an inspiration for many other *klebuns*, including her husband, who emulated some of her programs.

These examples illustrate the gendered nature of negotiations in the empowerment journey of women *klebuns* in Madura. Successful negotiations empower them, enabling them to exercise leadership with independence and authority. On the other hand, failed negotiations make them surrender their arguments and conform to traditional gender roles. The ability to navigate and transform negotiations plays a crucial role in determining the level of self-empowerment. By being assertive in negotiations, women *klebuns* can redefine the traditional power dynamics in Madura and challenge the patriarchal norms that have long constrained women's agency and leadership roles. The transformation of gendered negotiations among women *klebuns* demonstrates their capacity to shift societal paradigms, shaping a more equitable and inclusive future for Madura's communities.

Empowered Women *Klebuns* and their Impact on the Society

Aware of the difficulties faced by women in their pursuit of village leadership positions in the patriarchal landscape of Madura, women *klebuns* exhibit unwavering determination and employ a multifaceted approach to build a female-friendly environment within their communities. Foremost, they recognize that effective leadership thrives on collaborative partnerships with like-minded individuals who share a common vision, mission, and approach. To build solidarity and teamwork, women *klebuns* establish and nurture alliances in women's communities, which benefit the recruitment of female government employees.

However, navigating the patriarchal culture means challenging the notion that men are innately predisposed to leadership and the belief that physical strength defines one's suitability for governance. Matters pertaining to the community's welfare have also been assumed as men's jobs, including security maintenance, conflict resolution, and involvement in cases with law enforcement. Nonetheless, women *klebuns* challenge this perception, advocating the idea that women possess the capability and resilience to undertake governmental responsibilities with equal efficacy.

Amidst their persistent efforts to shatter gender-based stereotypes, the presence of female village officials emerges as a powerful force that alters societal perceptions of women's competence within the domain of governance. Their performance in handling governmental tasks within the community becomes

a source of inspiration, eroding the prevailing biases that once confined women to domestic affairs. As a result, their visibility in public spheres transforms societal norms, paving the way for a more inclusive and gender-equal future. They not only transform their own lives but also become trailblazers, creating opportunities for other women to participate actively in leadership roles. This transformation goes beyond individual achievements; it is a societal endeavor that fosters an environment of inclusivity, diversity, and equal representation in the governance and decision-making processes of Madura's villages.

Secondly, female *klebun* establish networks with governmental institutions. Raising awareness about the functions of leadership is a priority for female *klebun*. This is done with the long-term goal of shaping the community's definition of an ideal leader's role and function. Efforts to redefine the meaning of village leadership beyond physical power involve various approaches. The *klebun* of Tagungguh, for instance, explains that during the initial period of his village head tenure, conflicts between residents due to land inheritance issues, resulting in *carok* (violent fight or killing) incidents, were frequent. Within the community, *carok* incidents were traditionally addressed by village heads, who were considered skilled fighters.

Carok refers to the act of killing in Madura's society, performed to protect one's honor from perceived insults. The main causes of *carok* are acts of disrespect towards others' wives or disputes over land and natural resources. *Carok* is executed using only a machete. The requirements for engaging in *carok* include *kadigdajan* (bravery), *tampeng sereng*

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(a specific stance), and *banda* (supernatural protection). In case of such incidents, women *klebuns* adopt a legal-based approach to conflict resolution. They collaborate with the judiciary and police to engage the community regarding land-related issues.

Over time, this model of conflict resolution has demonstrated its efficacy in transforming the approach to handling conflicts in Madura. By gradually shifting away from violence towards the legal realm, the association of leadership with physical power is challenged and redefined. The transformational impact of these efforts is profound, as it underscores the centrality of knowledge, administrative capabilities, and diplomacy in leadership. Through these strategies, women *klebuns* endeavor to establish a female-friendly environment that challenges patriarchal norms

and fosters an environment of inclusivity and empowerment for women. By bridging the gender gap and advocating for equitable representation, they set an inspiring precedent, not only within the context of Madura but also in the broader landscape of gender politics. The ripple effects of their endeavors extend far beyond their individual villages. As they continue to break barriers and pave the way for a more egalitarian society, they change Madura's social and political fabric permanently.

Klebun's Reconstructed Societal Perspective

Competent women holding positions as *klebun* not only transform discourses within society related to women's leadership but also reshape other discourses rooted in Madura's traditions. Many of these traditions, such as the infamous

"carol," can be harmful not only for women in terms of their rights and other aspects but also for society at large.

Traditions are not easily eradicated, so women *klebun* become extraordinary when they can alter the discourses related to these traditions. Another example of discourse embedded in tradition is the assumption of domestic tasks for women, implying that women should not participate in public affairs. In Madura's context, this patriarchal view is a source of conflicts, particularly issues related to self-worth, which are often associated with women.

Before marriage, women in Madura are seen as the property of their fathers, and after marriage, they are considered the property of their husbands. In this perspective, women are perceived as belongings with no ownership over themselves. Married women are not allowed to meet or communicate with other men, perpetuating the notion that women must remain confined to their domestic roles and only interact with their husbands, who are defined as the 'owners' of their lives. However, every human being inherently has their own agency, with the right to make decisions and choices and engage in activities freely.

As long as women are defined as property, they are denied the opportunity to choose their own path in life. Before marriage, their fathers determine when they will marry, what level of education they can attain, and even who they will marry. After marriage, their husbands dictate every aspect of their lives. Women *klebun* challenge these traditions. Through their communication and interactions, it becomes acceptable for women to deal

with men when necessary. It is no longer considered unusual for women to meet with men and appear in public spaces.

Showing the importance of coordination between women and men benchmarks a new discourse. Society gains a new understanding of the significance of such coordination and that women need interactions with men for their survival, including everyday matters like shopping or paying bills. This new discourse is built upon the empowerment of women *klebun* and challenges the idea that women are considered property. The new discourse normalizes women meeting and communicating with men so they can appear in public spaces and even participate in elections and become a *klebun*.

The competence of women *klebun* in their positions has also reshaped discourses of "*carok*". MS, a female *klebun* from Bancang village, during an interview on February 25, 2021, shared an incident involving a friend who visited her village and inquired, *"Oleh o wedok melu carokan?"* (Is it permissible for women to participate in carok?). She confidently replied, *"Ora lah, kuwi kan primitif"* (Of course not, that is primitive).

MS's response clearly illustrates her efforts to challenge the discourse that "*carok*" is primitive. She further clarified when her friend asked if "*carok*" was no longer practiced in Bancang village. She asserted, "*Nang kene wes raono carok to?*" (Is carok no longer practiced here?). She answered, *"Kui primitif ora ono carokan nek ora penting penting"* (That's primitive, there is no *carok* unless it's a matter of utmost importance). In brief, women *klebun* eroded the discourse of "*carok*" as a method for conflict resolution by

introducing a peaceful resolution, which involves compromise, negotiation, and other non-violent approaches.

From the examples above, it can be said that empowered by their education, experience, and political awareness, female *klebun* navigate the challenges that come with their leadership roles with courage and determination. Through their experiences, they build strong relationships with the village, sub-district, and district bureaucracies, leveraging these connections to fulfill their tasks and responsibilities. Their ability to negotiate with diverse stakeholders, including law enforcement officials and legal aid institutions, helps address security issues and conflicts in a non-violent manner. By employing these strategies, female *klebun* demonstrate better leadership performance compared to male *klebun*, earning recognition and support from their communities.

Within Madura's patriarchal constructs, female *klebun*'s ability to address both domestic and public challenges is an act of resistance. By performing official village head duties and adhering to legal requirements, female *klebun* strengthen their leadership in their villages. They address social issues faced by the community, contribute to village development, and ensure proper administration of village governance. In matters of religion and community security, female *klebun* actively participate in religious activities and employ various security strategies to create a safe and harmonious environment.

Conclusion

The historical patterns of village leadership in Bangkalan were traditionally entrenched in patriarchal norms, with male leaders predominantly occupying positions of authority based on kinship ties. However, post-reform, changes in leadership selection emerged, including discourse around women's participation in village leadership. The presence of women in Bangkalan's village leadership can be attributed to elite interests, and female village heads typically had kinship ties to previous elites holding the position. While regulations allowed for merit-based candidacy, in practice, familial and economic factors remained dominant determinants in leadership selection and victory. Mechanisms for female leaders' appointments included temporary appointments as an interim *klebun* or direct elections, with the latter being the most common route.

The discourse surrounding women's leadership in the context of village leadership in Bangkalan has transformed drastically. Women's perceptions of leadership in this setting are generally characterized by two dimensions. First, the role of the village head extends the influence of male relatives, ensuring that leadership remains within the family circle. Second, leadership is seen as a chance to prove women's capabilities in leadership to a community that remains doubtful of their capacity to lead.

The dominance of kinship ties influences women in village leadership. While some women accept and work within this system, others actively resist by implementing their own leadership strategies.

The variance in their leadership approaches is significantly shaped by factors such as education and social relationships. The categories of women's leadership that emerge within the context of Bangkalan are as follows.

a. Puppet-like Leaders: This group comprises women who, due to various constraints, choose not to resist the hegemony. They often lack the confidence, experience, education, and support necessary to perform their duties as village chiefs independently. Instead, they delegate their responsibilities to family members or trusted village officials, primarily handling administrative functions. This practice is culturally accepted and viewed as a local wisdom in Bangkalan.

b. Empowered Leaders: This category includes women who actively counter the prevailing discourse and power structures. They employ strategies such as building relationships with the community, government institutions, and other village stakeholders; demonstrating a commitment to independent leadership by actively participating in their duties; negotiating with their husbands for the freedom to engage with stakeholders; adhering to professional work practices; and engaging in open communication with the community to gather input and maintain their positions.

The presence of women as village leaders in Bangkalan has shifted the discourse within the local community, challenging the traditional belief that leadership is exclusively masculine. Women

klebun successfully gained the trust and confidence of the community, resulting in the re-election of several women *klebun* in subsequent periods.

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