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Reinterpreting the *Carok* Tradition: Discourse on Identity and Power in Madurese Culture

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Abstract

The tradition *of carok* is often viewed as a form of violence inherent in Madurese society. However, this study shows that *carok* is not merely a brutal act, but rather a social discourse that represents the values of honor, identity, and power in Madurese cultural structures. This study aims to reinterpret the meaning *of carok* through a socio-anthropological approach using Michel Foucault's discourse theory. The method used is qualitative with an ethnographic approach, involving in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and group discussions in four districts in Madura: Bangkalan, Sampang, Pamekasan, and Sumenep. The results of the study show a shift in the meaning *of carok* from a symbol of violence to a representation of moral struggle and social identity. The discourse *of carok* is produced and reproduced through power relations between the community, religious leaders, and the media, which shape a new understanding of honor and conflict resolution. This study emphasizes the importance of reinterpreting local culture as an effort to deconstruct stereotypes of violence in Madurese society, while offering a model of conflict resolution based on human values and local wisdom.

Keywords: Carok; Reinterpretation; Discourse; Cultural Identity; Madurese Society

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Menafsir Ulang Tradisi Carok: Wacana Identitas dan Kuasa dalam Budaya Madura

Abstrak

Tradisi *carok* sering kali dipandang sebagai bentuk kekerasan yang melekat pada masyarakat Madura. Namun, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa *carok* tidak semata tindakan brutal, melainkan sebuah wacana sosial yang merepresentasikan nilai kehormatan, identitas, dan kuasa dalam struktur budaya Madura. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menafsir ulang makna *carok* melalui pendekatan sosio-antropologis dengan menggunakan teori wacana Michel Foucault. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan etnografi, melibatkan wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan diskusi kelompok di empat kabupaten di Madura: Bangkalan, Sampang, Pamekasan, dan Sumenep. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya pergeseran makna *carok* dari simbol kekerasan menjadi representasi perjuangan moral dan identitas sosial. Wacana *carok* diproduksi dan direproduksi melalui relasi kuasa antara masyarakat, tokoh agama, dan media, yang membentuk pemahaman baru tentang kehormatan dan penyelesaian konflik. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya reinterpretasi budaya lokal sebagai upaya dekonstruksi terhadap stereotipe kekerasan masyarakat Madura, sekaligus menawarkan model resolusi konflik berbasis nilai kemanusiaan dan kearifan lokal.

Kata kunci: Carok; Reinterpretasi; Wacana; Identitas Budaya; Masyarakat Madura

INTRODUCTION

The tradition of carok in Madurese society occupies a paradoxical position. It is widely recognised as a violent practice that reinforces stereotypes of Madurese people as “hard”, “angry”, and “vindictive”. Simultaneously, carok is deeply embedded within a complex socio-cultural framework involving honour, identity, power relations, and the construction of local discourse. Studies indicate that carok is frequently triggered when an individual or group perceives a threat or violation to their pride or dignity (Djatmiko et al., 2019). This duality, in which carok functions both as a symptom of criminality and as a symbolic language of honour, renders the tradition analytically significant. The present study aims to examine this complexity rather than resolve it in favour of either interpretation.

The term carok has been documented since at least the eighteenth century, coinciding with Madurese resistance to Dutch colonial injustice. Figures such as Sakera became icons of popular resistance, and the celurit (sickle) emerged as a lasting symbol of Madurese cultural identity (Hafida et al., 2024). Over time, the meaning of carok shifted from anti-colonial resistance to a means of resolving social conflicts rooted in honour and self-respect (Razy & Faruk, 2024). Thus, carok should be understood not only as physical violence but also as a symbolic expression of courage, social responsibility, and cultural solidarity. Despite this historical transformation, scholarly attention to these symbolic and discursive dimensions remains limited. Most existing studies continue to frame carok within legal or criminological perspectives, rather than as a dynamic and continuously negotiated social construct.

In contemporary contexts, narratives about carok are shaped by mass media and public discourse that emphasise violence and criminality. News coverage of carok incidents typically foregrounds their tragic and brutal aspects, often neglecting the underlying socio-cultural context. This imbalance has contributed to negative stereotypes portraying the Madurese as inherently prone to violence, impulsiveness, and “hot blood”. However, as anthropologist Wiyata argues, carok should not be viewed in isolation. It is a social act rooted in moral and symbolic values, often serving to preserve self-respect rather than merely reflecting a desire to kill (Wiyata, 2002). Such simplistic stereotypes obscure the cultural dimensions and social meanings embedded in the practice and, as this article contends, also obscure the fact that the meaning of carok is itself evolving.

The intensification of carok cases in the digital age has further shaped external perceptions of Madura. The viral mass-carok incident in Bangkalan in 2024 demonstrated how social media has become a new arena for discourse on violence and honour. Cynical commentary circulating on social platforms, suggesting that “*Madura has not moved on from its old civilisation*”, reveals strong cultural bias in external narratives about the island. Nevertheless, survey data indicate that most Madurese no longer view carok as a source of pride. Research by Marsuki found that 75% of respondents expressed discomfort with the practice, 60% said they would not participate, and approximately 77% preferred conflict resolution without carok (Marsuki, 2015). These findings highlight a gap between external

perceptions that equate carok with the totality of Madurese culture and internal realities in which a significant proportion of the Madurese population actively rejects the practice. The persistence of violent carok incidents alongside this internal rejection presents a central puzzle for this study: if most Madurese disown carok, why and how does it endure, and what does its endurance and gradual transformation reveal about the workings of discourse and power in Madurese society?

A review of the literature on carok shows that research on this tradition clusters into several broad categories according to approach and focus. The first category comprises anthropological and cultural studies that examine carok as a phenomenon intrinsically linked to the Madurese people's value system, honour, and identity. Wiyata (2002) identifies five constitutive elements of carok, the act of killing between men, expressions of self-esteem, feelings of shame (*malo*), social support, and the pride accorded to the victor. De Jonge attributes the persistence of carok partly to governmental neglect of historical context and the erosion of public trust in state institutions (Jonge and Nooteboom 2006). Rifai contends that carok forms part of a value system that regulates social relations and safeguards self-esteem (Rifai et al., 2022). Rozaki adds a political dimension to this cultural reading, showing how blater, local strongmen whose authority rests partly on a capacity for violence, function alongside kiai as "twin regimes" that reproduce discourse, culture, and political power in rural Madura. This observation is directly relevant to understanding why carok-related authority persists even where formal state institutions are present (Rozaki, 2009).

The second category encompasses research adopting a legal approach, spanning positive criminal law, Islamic criminal law, legal pluralism, and restorative justice. Suyanto identifies triggers such as accusations against wives, acts of revenge, village-head elections, inheritance disputes, and perceived impoliteness, while also noting obstacles to law enforcement, including witnesses' reluctance to testify, loss of evidence, and perpetrators being shielded by their families (Suyanto and Bakhtiar, 2024). Hartanto argues that carok satisfies the criminal elements set out in the Indonesian Criminal Code (Articles 338, 340, and 351) as well as in Emergency Law No. 12 of 1951 (Hartanto et al., 2024). Firmansyah reports that the primary triggers of carok are disturbances involving wives or family (55%), debt (10%), inheritance (7%), and misunderstanding (23%) (Frimansyah & Waluyo, 2023). From the perspective of Islamic criminal law, Syaputra classifies carok as qatl al-'amd (intentional killing), subject to the sanction of qisas or diat, with the possibility of an exception where the act is committed in self-defence (Syaputra & Ishaq, 2024). Arafah extends this legal reading by directly comparing positive law and Islamic law, concluding that under both systems, carok today carries broadly equivalent criminal meaning and punishment. This convergence, as suggested in this article, itself testifies to the erosion of carok's older legitimating discourse (Arafah et al., 2025).

Additional research categories include sociological and conflict-resolution approaches, historical analyses, and media or psychological perspectives. Takdir demonstrates that a forgiveness model facilitated by the kiai effectively manages anger and mitigates revenge through stages such as restoring security, supporting the victim's family, strengthening social ties, *tabayyun* (clarification), dialogue, and religious reconciliation (Takdir et al., 2021). Ismail highlights the central role of kiai in mediation, particularly through pesantren involvement in conflict-resolution processes (Ismail and Wardi, 2019). Historical studies by Hafida trace carok to eighteenth-century resistance against Dutch colonialism and the symbolism of Sakera (Hafida et al., 2024). Shobiroh argues that carok was, in part, cultivated as a colonial strategy to undermine Sakera's image, and proposes that "Settong Dara" (shared blood/kinship) can serve as a unifying principle capable of reducing negative stigma (Baiti et al., 2023). Psychological research by Asiyah identifies *malo* (shame) and *todus* (embarrassment) as core psychological triggers, with honour operating as the central value at stake (Asiyah & Muttaqin, 2021).

Studies on carok also underscore the significance of legal pluralism and restorative justice. Arafah notes that Article 2 of Indonesia's new Criminal Code (Law No. 1/2023) recognises customary law, yet argues that policy reformulation is still needed to accommodate criminal mediation and the involvement of customary leaders (Arafah et al., 2025). Budimansyah observes that Madurese legal practice diverges from state law by prioritising deliberation with the kiai as mediator and treating criminal law as the ultimum remedium Click or tap here to enter text.. In summary, research on carok has progressed from anthropological-cultural studies toward a multidisciplinary field encompassing law, sociology, psychology, and media studies, with restorative justice and legal pluralism emerging as prominent frameworks for locally responsive solutions.

This body of scholarship, while rich, exhibits a consistent pattern, carok is typically approached either as a cultural artefact to be described or as a legal problem to be classified and sanctioned. What

remains comparatively underexamined is how the very meaning of carok is produced and contested. In other words, carok is an object of discourse whose legitimacy is neither fixed nor self-evident but is continually negotiated by families, religious authorities, the state, the media, and Madurese people themselves. This is the specific gap this article addresses. Where legal scholarship asks whether carok satisfies the elements of a crime, and cultural-anthropological scholarship asks what values carok expresses, this study asks a prior and different question, through what discursive mechanisms does carok come to be seen, at different moments and by different actors, as either honourable or criminal? Furthermore, what does the ongoing shift between these two framings reveal about power in Madurese society?

This situation raises three central questions that structure the analysis that follows. First, why and how does the tradition of carok, widely condemned as violent, persist even as many Madurese themselves reject or disown it? Second, what meanings does carok hold for cultural identity, social power, and honour within contemporary Madurese society? Third, does the dominant perspective that frames carok solely as violence foreclose a more nuanced understanding of the practice as part of local social and cultural discourse? These questions underscore the need for research that examines carok not merely as a manifestation of crime or violence but as a social discourse: a system of meanings, power relations, and cultural identity continuously produced and reproduced within Madurese society. Without such reinterpretation, carok risks remaining narrowly understood, which hinders a more contextual and humane account of Madura's socio-cultural dynamics.

In response, this study adopts the position that carok should be reanalysed not as "traditional violence" but as a sociocultural discourse embodying honour, identity, and power. This approach allows carok to be viewed not only as a physical act but also as a symbolic practice that reveals social structure, cultural norms, and power relations within Madurese society. Operationally, the study employs a socio-anthropological lens focused on the production of discourse. It examines how carok is understood, discussed, interpreted, and represented by both practitioners and the wider community, and how power relations among individuals, families, traditional leaders, religious figures, and the media shape these meanings. This interpretive model facilitates mapping the reinterpretation of carok amid contemporary changes such as education, globalisation, media influence, and migration.

Accordingly, the study pursues three objectives. First, it aims to describe local narratives about carok, including how the community views, explains, and interprets the practice. Second, it analyses the reinterpretation of carok as an expression of cultural identity, self-esteem, and power relations, with attention to how the community reframes it as a specific cultural act rather than mere violence. Third, it presents the socio-cultural implications of this reinterpretation, particularly how a more contextual understanding can facilitate local, value-based conflict resolution grounded in human dignity and local wisdom, rather than relying solely on legal and criminalisation approaches.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative, socio-anthropological methodology to investigate how Madurese communities reinterpret the tradition of *carok*. This approach is warranted because the research questions address lived experiences, cultural symbols, and complex social discourses that cannot be adequately explored through quantitative methods (Arnold-Saritepe et al., 2026). Creswell (1998) notes that qualitative inquiry is intended to reveal deep, participant-centered meanings of social phenomena. This methodology facilitates the examination of how individuals attribute evolving meanings to *carok* in everyday life.

The research design is ethnographic, aligning with the characterization of *carok* as a cultural practice embedded with concepts of honour, social identity, and symbolic interaction. Ethnography enables the detailed description necessary to uncover the narratives and representations associated with lived experiences of *carok*. The study is informed by Spradley (2017) focus on participant observation, ethnographic interviewing, and emic sensitivity, which emphasizes understanding cultural meanings from the perspective of local participants.

Fieldwork was conducted in all four districts of Madura Island, Bangkalan, Sampang, Pamekasan, and Sumenep. This purposive selection reflects the unique social patterns, differing frequencies of *carok* incidents, and distinct cultural characteristics present in each district. Treating *carok* as a homogeneous phenomenon would obscure the influence of local histories, social conditions, and power structures on its meaning. The fieldwork spanned one year and was implemented in stages, with field assistants broadening the scope of observation.

Primary data collection comprised participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Observations focused on daily interactions, discourse related to *carok*, and the negotiation of honour in routine contexts. In-depth interviews were conducted with individuals directly involved in *carok*, their families, and a range of community figures, including *kiai*, *blater*, village officials, religious leaders, and members of the general public. The interviewing strategy followed the principles established by Taylor et al. (2015), emphasizing personal experience and subjective meaning.

Focus group discussions served to clarify and preliminarily verify findings from observations and individual interviews. These group settings enabled the collection of communal perspectives regarding the evaluation, interpretation, or rejection of carok. Furthermore, the discussions facilitated the identification of discursive dynamics at the community level and allowed for the assessment of narrative consistency among informants. Secondary data were gathered through a comprehensive review of academic sources, including books, journal articles, and prior studies on Madurese culture, honour-based violence, the anthropology of power, and *carok*. This literature informed the analysis of field data and situated the findings within broader scholarly discourse.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994), which comprises data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction phase, material directly relevant to the study's central focus narratives and meanings of *carok* was selected. The condensed data were organized into patterns, themes, and categories to elucidate the interconnections among narratives of honour, social identity, and power relations. The final stage entailed iterative verification and the development of provisional conclusions until the most substantiated findings were established.

To ensure validity, the study employed triangulation of both data sources and methods by comparing observational, interview, and focus group discussion materials and assessing their consistency with academic literature. This strategy is consistent with Denzin (2017) recommendation to utilize multiple sources to enhance the credibility of qualitative research findings. By integrating ethnographic fieldwork, discourse analysis, comprehensive data collection methods, and triangulation, the study seeks to demonstrate how Madurese communities construct, maintain, and reinterpret the meaning of *carok* within a changing contemporary context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding Social Knowledge of the Carok Tradition in Madura

This analysis employs three complementary theoretical resources: Michel Foucault's theory of discourse and power/knowledge, which provides the primary analytical lens, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic violence, which elucidate the persistence of honour-based dispositions; and Johan Galtung's theory of cultural violence, which situates carok within a broader framework of direct, structural, and cultural violence. Considered collectively, these frameworks enable carok to be conceptualised as a discourse, an embodied disposition, and a culturally legitimised form of violence, representing three interconnected aspects of the same phenomenon.

Foucault's discourse analysis (Foucault 1980; Foucault 1970)conceptualises discourse not as a neutral description of reality but as a practice that constitutes its object. Discourse determines what can be said, who is authorised to speak, and which interpretations are accepted as true within specific historical and institutional contexts. Central to this framework is the concept of power/knowledge (pouvoir-savoir): power and knowledge are mutually constitutive, with each regime of knowledge sustained by relations of power, and each exercise of power generating its own forms of knowledge. In the context of carok, narratives that frame the practice as honourable, criminal, or backward are not merely descriptive; they function as interventions within a field of power where families, kiai, blater, state institutions, and the media compete to define the meaning of the practice. Foucault (1970) related notion of the "order of discourse" further indicates that certain statements about carok such as those made by respected kiai or codified in state law possess greater authority than others. This uneven distribution of discursive authority helps explain the persistence of older honour-based framings, even after they have lost broad social legitimacy.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus complements the Foucauldian framework by elucidating how discursively produced values become internalised as durable, largely unconscious dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977). Habitus refers to systems of enduring, transposable dispositions that generate practices and perceptions without the need for explicit rules or conscious calculation. In the Madurese context, boys socialised from childhood to protect family pride and reject humiliation are not merely learning a cultural rule; they are acquiring a habitus in which readiness for violence in defence of honour appears natural, self-evident, and even involuntary. Mottier's subsequent concept of symbolic violence

violence enacted through cognitive and communicative channels that misrecognise domination as legitimate or natural further explains why *carok* may be experienced by its practitioners not as aggression but as an inescapable moral obligation (Mottier, 2002).

Similar dynamics have been documented in honour-based violence against women in migrant communities in Europe, where Grzyb demonstrates that Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence and masculine domination clarifies the persistence of honour killings, even as the structural conditions underpinning patriarchal authority (Grzyb, 2016). A comparable tension between diminishing structural legitimacy and persistent habitus can be observed in the Madurese case, although the primary contestation in carok typically involves male-to-male conflict over dignity rather than the regulation of women's conduct. Johan Galtung's theory of cultural violence introduces a third, complementary dimension. Galtung differentiates between direct violence (an event, such as a killing), structural violence (a process, such as institutional neglect or inequality), and cultural violence (an invariant, such as a shared belief that legitimises the other two forms) (Galtung, 1990).

Cultural violence operates through religion, ideology, language, art, and science to make direct and structural violence appear justified or, at minimum, not objectionable (Galtung, 1990). Within this framework, carok functions as a form of cultural violence: it represents the symbolic and normative layer embedded in proverbs, family narratives, and the legend of Sakera that renders killing in defence of honour intelligible and, in certain contexts, even admirable rather than criminal. This theoretical perspective also clarifies why legal reform alone (addressing direct violence through criminalisation) or economic development alone (addressing structural violence) is insufficient to eliminate carok. According to Galtung's framework, the cultural violence layer that legitimises the practice must also be dismantled or reinterpreted to reduce the underlying propensity for honour-based killing.

An additional comparative theoretical perspective is provided by Cohen's "culture of honour" thesis, developed through experimental ethnography in the southern United States (Cohen et al., 1996). This research demonstrates that in social contexts historically characterised by weak state enforcement of property and personal security, communities develop honour codes in which insults to reputation necessitate a personal, often violent, response, and failure to respond results in social punishment through loss of status. This thesis closely aligns with the Madurese context: De Jonge & Nooteboom (2006) observe that carok is associated with weak historical trust in state institutions, while (Suyanto & Bakhtiar, 2024) document families protecting perpetrators from prosecution. Both findings suggest a similar logic in which the community, rather than the state, serves as the primary guarantor of personal security and reputation. This comparison is instructive because it demonstrates that carok is not a uniquely Madurese phenomenon but rather a local manifestation of a broader sociological pattern in which honour cultures arise where formal institutions are perceived as unable or unwilling to protect individual and family standing.

Synthesising these theoretical frameworks, carok can be conceptualised as operating at three interrelated levels: a discursive level, where competing narratives seek to define carok as honourable or criminal (Foucault); a dispositional level, where honour-based readiness for violence is embodied as habitus and perpetuated through socialisation (Bourdieu); and a cultural-legitimation level, where shared symbols and narratives render honour-based violence natural or justified (Galtung). This tripartite model does not imply that the three levels operate independently; rather, they are mutually reinforcing, such that discursive framing sustains dispositional embodiment, which is in turn naturalised through cultural legitimation. The discursive level, following Foucault, circulates through everyday speech acts proverbs, oral histories, and the retelling of the Sakera legend that continually reproduce carok as a legitimate response to insult. The dispositional level, drawing on Bourdieu's habitus, explains why this discourse is not merely believed but felt: readiness to defend honour through violence becomes an embodied, pre-reflective disposition transmitted across generations through socialisation within family and community, such that carok appears to its practitioners as an obligation rather than a choice. The cultural-legitimation level, informed by Galtung, accounts for why this disposition rarely encounters internal resistance: cultural violence renders the underlying belief system invisible as violence, recasting it instead as tradition, dignity, or piety. Read together, these three levels indicate that intervention addressing only one dimension criminal law targeting direct violence, or economic development targeting structural inequality leaves the cultural and dispositional roots of carok intact.

As Figure 1 illustrates, this Foucauldian model traces a circular, self-reinforcing relationship between power and knowledge. Power exercised by kiai, blater, family authority, the state, and the media produces the discourse of carok, determining what can be said about the practice, by whom, and with what legitimacy. This discourse, in turn, legitimises a particular regime of knowledge in which honour

and masculinity are taken as truth, while that same knowledge normalises subject effects, positioning men as bearers of honour for whom violence becomes duty rather than choice. These subject effects materialise into concrete social practices: carok itself, celurit duels, and the everyday authority exercised by blater. Crucially, the diagram also shows that this cycle is not closed. At least four counter-discourses can be identified as gradually reconfiguring the meaning of carok: formal education, which introduces alternative frameworks of citizenship and conflict resolution that compete with honour-based reasoning; pesantren-based religious ethics, which reinterpret Islamic teachings on retribution, forgiveness, and the sanctity of life in ways that challenge the framing of carok as religiously sanctioned; state law, which through criminalisation and prosecution works to redefine carok from an honourable act into a criminal offence, even where community-level habitus continues to resist this redefinition; and the emergence of youth and women's voices, as younger Madurese increasingly reject carok as a legitimate response to conflict while women articulate its consequences in terms of loss and grief rather than honour. Together, this counter-discourse reinterprets the same discursive field, gradually contesting the power knowledge configuration that has historically sustained carok, suggesting that cultural change in Madura is likely to be incremental rather than abrupt.

Figure 1. The Discursive Formation of Carok
(A Foucauldian Power-Knowledge Model)

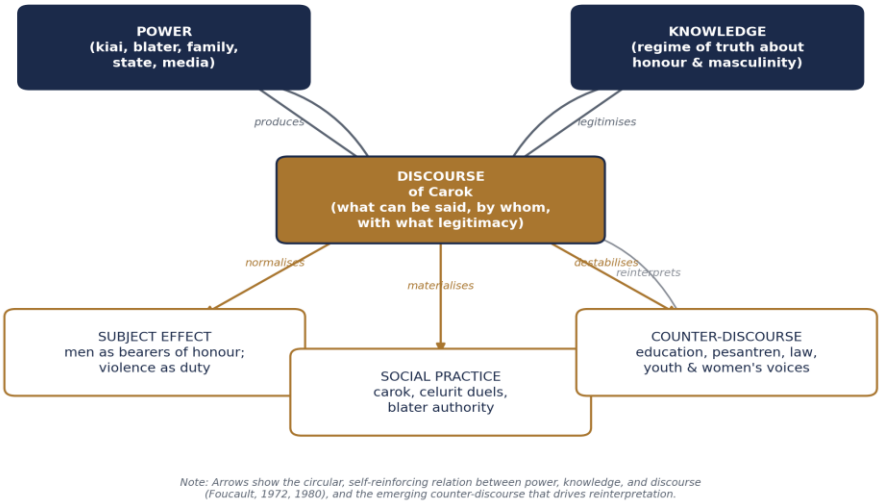


Figure 1. The discursive formation of carok: a Foucauldian power–knowledge model, showing how power and knowledge jointly produce the discourse of carok, its subject effects and social practices, and the counter-discourse now contesting it.

Discourse and Social Knowledge Surrounding the Carok Tradition in Madura

Carok operates as a dynamic discursive phenomenon and a mechanism for the transmission of social knowledge, sustained through cultural interaction, family narratives, value systems, and power relations. Informed by Foucault's discourse theory, this tradition extends beyond individual acts by establishing a regime of truth that shapes conceptions of honour, self-worth, and moral legitimacy within particular social contexts. Field observations demonstrate that the discourse of carok is deeply embedded in Madurese knowledge and is continually negotiated and reinterpreted in response to broader social transformations.

In many instances, carok is regarded as a necessary response, often perceived as more honourable than seeking resolution through formal legal channels. Participants in carok are predominantly men, who wield the *celurit*, the traditional Madurese sickle, in duels that symbolically restore lost dignity (Ratnasari et al., 2021). For many, violence is viewed as the sole viable means of reclaiming tarnished honour. The reported sense of relief following the act indicates that this ritualised violence functions as a symbolic mechanism for asserting power and reinforcing the masculine identity that carok represents (Haris, 2017). According to Bourdieu (1977) concept of habitus, this relief is significant, it suggests that the act is experienced not as a transgression requiring justification, but as

the fulfilment of an embodied disposition an action perceived as correct because it restores a disrupted bodily and social order.

Carok serves as a culturally sanctioned mechanism for erasing shame and restoring the honour of families or individuals. Rather than being an impulsive reaction, it is embedded within a value system instilled from childhood through cultural socialisation, folklore, and collective experience. Qualitative field data reveal that some respondents learned about carok through ancestral narratives and guidance related to masculinity and self-esteem. For example, a respondent identified as LD from Pamekasan Regency observed that the values underlying carok are typically inherited from previous generations, with boys often instructed to protect family pride and avoid humiliation. Similarly, a respondent from Sampang Regency, identified as TI, emphasised that carok is not an isolated phenomenon but is rooted in an inherited worldview and value system transmitted across generations. In Foucauldian terms, these accounts position the family as a central node in the discursive apparatus of carok, suggesting that domestic pedagogy, rather than any single violent event, is where the “truth” of honour is first established.

Across generations, families have socialised these values by teaching children from an early age about the paramount importance of honour and male pride. The legitimation of carok as an expression of masculinity has been further reinforced by media portrayals. News outlets frequently depict carok as a traditional practice of violence embedded within honour narratives, thereby reinforcing a cultural framework that positions carok both as an element of local identity and as a persistent discursive structure of violence. This dual media function, which both sensationalises carok and reinforces its cultural intelligibility, exemplifies Foucault (1980) argument that power is not solely repressive. Media discourse that condemns carok can nevertheless sustain the honour-based interpretive frame by continually presenting it as the primary explanatory context for Madurese violence.

The legendary figure of Pak Sakera, prominent in Madurese oral tradition, has significantly influenced the construction of masculine ideals through carok-related symbols and narratives. Sakera, remembered as a plantation foreman during the Dutch colonial period, is consistently depicted carrying a *celurit*, whether at work or in prayer. This enduring representation has established him as a symbol of courage and a defender of ordinary people against colonial oppression (Baiti et al., 2023). Rozaki’s analysis of the historical emergence of blater authority in western Madura elucidates why Sakera remains influential, he serves as a legitimating ancestor-figure for the blater, a still-active social category whose contemporary authority is partly based on the same repertoire of courage, invulnerability, and willingness to use the celurit for which Sakera is remembered (Rozaki, 2009).

From a Foucauldian perspective, local knowledge of this nature functions not only as a means of understanding but also as an instrument of social control. The discursive structure that frames carok as an honourable act generates social pressure, particularly on men, to respond to violations of honour with culturally sanctioned violence. In this context, knowledge is not a neutral cognitive asset, it operates as a strategy of power, constructed and maintained through discourse. Cultural violence, as exemplified by carok, is embedded within honour narratives that have become thoroughly normalised in everyday discourse. This aligns with Galtung's identification of cultural violence as a mechanism that renders direct violence natural rather than requiring justification (Galtung, 1990). The analysis supports the argument that the Madurese local knowledge system has shaped a perception in which violence is viewed as a legitimate response to honour violations. Bourdieu (1977) concept of habitus aptly describes this process: these values have solidified into enduring patterns of thought and behaviour, shaped by social experience and transmitted through institutions such as the family, local community, and religious life. This habitus cultivates a collective disposition that renders carok natural and culturally acceptable—actions that appear self-evident but are, in reality, products of ongoing social construction, continuously reproduced rather than simply inherited.

Although carok retains symbolic significance as an emblem of masculinity, honour, and pride, perspectives on the tradition are visibly evolving. Several respondents indicated that carok is not a tradition worth preserving. For instance, a respondent from Sumenep Regency, identified as AR, reported that in Sumenep, carok is generally regarded neither as a tradition nor as a heroic act, but rather as a source of shame for Madurese society. Such incidents reinforce longstanding stereotypes that associate the Madurese with violence. Negative labels such as quick-tempered, stubborn, vengeful, and prone to violence have become entrenched in public discourse about Madura, often described as products of both external and internal social construction, encapsulated in the concept of ethnic stereotype. A comparative study in Pamekasan similarly documents stigma held by neighbouring

javanese communities, who perceive the Madurese as ‘rude’ and inclined to resolve conflict through carok, even as long-term Madurese residents themselves emphasise strong internal solidarity (Azizah et al., 2023).

As the image of carok, framed as a symbol of masculinity and pride, becomes more widely disseminated, Madura is increasingly distanced from a cultural identity associated with civility. Stereotypes equating Madura with violence not only inflict cultural harm but also subject Madurese citizens to social discrimination at the national level. In this context, the meaning of carok is being renegotiated through interactions with formal education, media, and religious norms. This process affirms that discourse is inherently dynamic, remaining in a continual state of contestation and re-articulation. As a result, the meaning of carok, once regarded as a straightforward act of honour, has undergone processes of disarticulation in response to modern values, state law, and religious ideals. This re-actualisation demonstrates that the discourse of carok is continually negotiated by both traditional social actors and younger generations, who increasingly question the cultural legitimacy of such violence.

Survey data further support this shift, 65 per cent of respondents under the age of thirty reject carok as a conflict-resolution strategy, regardless of the motive. A respondent from Sumenep, identified as H, articulated this perspective, stating that viewing carok as the sole means of upholding honour is no longer relevant to contemporary society. Rather than defending pride, carok is now seen as exacerbating problems and prolonging conflict. This respondent advocated for a transformation in the narrative surrounding courage, suggesting a move away from glorifying carok as a defence of pride and honour and toward conflict resolution through legal and mediated channels. Nevertheless, carok as a representation of Madurese masculinity remains deeply embedded, persisting as a nearly indelible aspect of identity even as its legitimacy is increasingly questioned. This coexistence of rejection and persistence, in Foucauldian terms, characterises a discourse in transition, the old regime of truth has lost its monopoly but has not yet been fully displaced.

New Production: Reinterpretation of Carok

A critical examination of the alternative discursive productions that challenge the prevailing value system surrounding carok requires close engagement with the complexities of Madurese culture and the social dynamics that sustain it. The figure of Sakera, for instance, remains deeply embedded in Madurese collective memory as a guardian of family pride. Although this romanticised narrative continues to exert influence, it now requires critical reassessment in light of contemporary conditions. Drawing on Foucault, such discourses do more than represent carok as violence; they actively shape societal understanding of the practice and influence individual responses to comparable situations. Power, in other words, is already operative within the discourse of carok, not merely applied to it after the fact.

The concept of power is thus central to understanding how meanings of carok are produced and reinterpreted. Power functions not only as a repressive force but also as a productive one, generating knowledge, identities, and social practices within Madurese society. In the context of carok, power operates through mechanisms of normalisation, discipline, and control, all of which shape community perceptions of and responses to the tradition. The social power sustaining carok is generated in part by blater and angas (strongman) communities, as well as by groups with limited exposure to critical discourse about the practice. Rozaki (2009) analysis of blater as a "violence machine" that nonetheless commands hegemonic local influence over customary practices such as remoh, cock-fighting, and pencak silat helps explain the durability of this productive power: blater authority is not simply coercive but is woven into a broader field of prestige, patronage, and cultural performance that many Madurese continue to value even as they reject carok specifically. This constellation of factors fosters a dominant narrative that simplifies carok, reducing it to a mere manifestation of violence and anarchy as its ultimate cultural meaning.

In reality, carok is a multidimensional phenomenon woven from symbolism, socio-cultural value, and mechanisms of self-defence, all of which require holistic deconstruction and reinterpretation rather than simple condemnation or simple celebration. The normalisation of carok is evident in situations where the Madurese community is framed by external discourses that depict them as inherently tough and brave. In this discursive environment, carok remains the narrative most readily invoked by outsiders when characterising the Madurese. Such externally produced normalisation shapes perceptions among those outside Madura, leading them to regard carok as an identity trait intrinsically linked to the community as a whole an externally imposed essentialism that Madurese respondents in this study explicitly resist.

Despite this entrenched normalisation, the meaning of carok has begun to shift. Previously upheld as a mechanism for defending honour and as a symbol of masculinity, carok is now increasingly viewed as a criminal act rather than a legitimate solution to conflict. According to a source in Sumenep, carok is currently regarded as contravening both legal standards and fundamental human values, reflecting growing awareness within the community of its destructive potential including, beyond the death of the perpetrator, the lasting psychological and social harm borne by the family left behind, particularly children and spouses. This shift is not confined to isolated testimony but is corroborated by broader generational patterns identified in this study, wherein a majority of younger respondents no longer regard carok as an appropriate or admissible response to conflict. As Table 1 summarises, this discursive transformation unfolds across several interrelated dimensions: the prevailing view of carok itself has moved from a legitimate and honourable defence of dignity toward a criminal act with no legitimate standing, while the surrounding social narrative has likewise been reshaped by the combined influence of education, media, and religious institutions, which increasingly frame the practice as incompatible with law and with a shared social identity rather than as an expression of courage and self-defence.

Table 1. Discursive transformation of carok: from honour-based legitimacy to criminalised violence.

Aspect	Old Interpretation	New Form of Production	New Reinterpretation
View of Carok	Carok as a legitimate and honourable defence of honour.	The view has changed; carok is increasingly seen as an illegal form of violence contrary to the law.	Carok is considered a criminal act, no longer a legitimate solution, and one to be avoided.
Social Narrative	Carok as a symbol of courage and self-respect; a respectable social identity.	The power and influence of media, education, and pesantren begin to reshape perceptions.	Carok is no longer part of social identity but an action understood to harm many parties.
Power and Influence	Rooted in the system of values and social norms that govern behaviour.	New knowledge produced through education, pesantren, and media reshapes perceptions of carok.	External influences (education, pesantren) change values and norms, producing a more legalistic view.
Function of Carok	Seen as a legitimate and culturally accepted means of conflict resolution.	Increasingly seen as an act of violence to be avoided, influencing how society views it.	Carok as an act incompatible with human values, causing lasting psychological trauma.
External Influences	The Madurese community views carok as a symbol of local honour.	Normalisation of carok discourse influenced by outside perceptions of Madurese culture.	Views from both outside and within Madura contribute to a renewal of social, legal, and humanitarian values.
Change in Perspective	Carok as a source of pride in social identity.	A shift from traditional views toward values that prioritise peace and justice.	Carok is seen as a violent practice that contradicts modern social norms and law.

With increasing legal awareness and higher levels of education, carok is now more frequently regarded as a criminal act. This reclassification carries significant consequences: a practice once celebrated is now stigmatised, generating psychological trauma especially for victims' families. This transformation reflects an evolving legal culture that originates not only from state institutions but also from within Madurese society itself, with education and pesantren emerging as key agents of change.Knowledge regarding carok is, in this sense, inherently value-laden. The introduction of formal schooling, pesantren education, and media exposure has produced a new discourse that gradually

displaces the traditional narrative. The moral seriousness instilled through religious and social education promotes the understanding that violence is not an ethical solution, redirecting the community from glorifying physical bravery toward prioritising the values of justice and peace (Kleindienst, 2024). Modernisation and globalisation have also been critical factors in this transformation, universal norms, including human-rights discourse, compel communities to reinterpret inherited traditions, thereby eroding the symbolic legitimacy of carok. This shift represents a transition from a particularistic ethics of honour toward a more inclusive moral universalism, engaging Madura not only with internal values but also with global norms that reject personal violence as a method of conflict resolution.

Nonetheless, resistance to this transformation remains. (Suyanto and Bakhtiar, 2024) demonstrate that certain segments of society continue to regard carok as a legitimate form of self-defence. Religious interpretations of carok also vary, with more fundamentalist readings generally adopting a more permissive attitude toward violence than moderate ones (Ratnasari et al., 2021); this divergence is characterised as an epistemological struggle over the interpretation of religious texts and local tradition. These differences indicate that the reinterpretation of carok is not a linear process but one characterised by contestation and competition precisely the picture that a Foucauldian analysis would predict, since a dominant discourse rarely collapses all at once but is instead worn down unevenly, sustained longest wherever institutional or economic interests continue to benefit from it (as with certain blater networks).

Collectively, these developments indicate that carok has shifted in meaning from an honourable act to a harmful one, reflecting the dynamics of power and knowledge in Madurese society as traditional values are renegotiated in relation to legal, religious, and global norms. This change does not imply the disappearance of tradition but a complex process of deconstruction and recontextualization. Carok today is best understood not only as a symbol of violence but also as a case study in how Madurese society negotiates identity, honour, and justice amid changing conditions. In this study, the reinterpretation of carok is evident along two primary dimensions. The first is symbolic, carok has shifted from representing honour to signifying violence that is no longer socially acceptable. The second is practical: alternative forms of conflict resolution legal channels, social mediation, and religious approaches have emerged to replace violent practice. This double reinterpretation demonstrates that the Madurese community has not merely changed its perspective on carok but has also developed new social practices aligned with the values of justice and peace.

The reinterpretation of carok thus centres on the fundamental concept of honour itself. Historically, honour was perceived as something to be defended, if necessary through bloodshed. The current reinterpretation instead establishes that honour can be maintained through adherence to the law, respect for human dignity, and peaceful conflict resolution. It is therefore not only the act of carok that has been reinterpreted, but the entire value framework supporting it a shift from honour-based violence to what this article terms honour-based peace. This transformation lies at the heart of the socio-cultural dynamics of Madurese society as it engages with modernity and globalisation, as visualised in Figure 2.

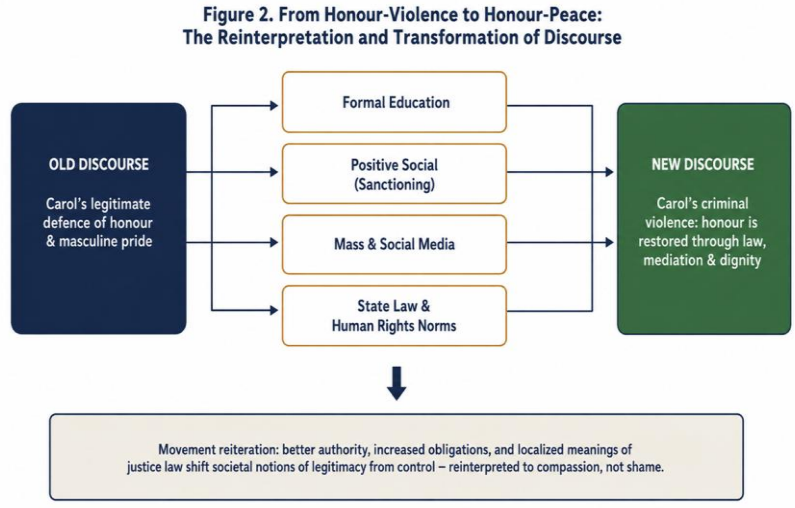


Figure 2. From honour-violence to honour-peace: the reinterpretation of carok as a discursive transformation driven by education, pesantren ethics, media, and state law, against continuing sources of resistance.

Locally Based Conflict Resolution

The practice of carok in Madurese society is deeply rooted in historical, social, and cultural contexts in which honour and self-respect are central to social relations. (Wiyata, 2002) contends that carok is not simply a criminal act but a complex expression of the community's value system and norms, making violence a last resort for restoring family dignity. In this context, carok can be classified as a form of cultural violence as defined by Galtung (1990): violence legitimised by symbols, traditions, and cultural norms, and thus perceived as reasonable and justified. Recent social developments underscore the urgent need to replace this traditional legitimacy with more humane conflict-resolution mechanisms, particularly those grounded in local practices that align with the social character of the Madurese community. These efforts matter not only for reducing violence but also for constructing a new Madurese identity that upholds honour through peaceful means.

Locally based conflict resolution must first recognise the symbolic dimension of carok. For the Madurese, wounded pride extends beyond the individual, affecting the dignity of the extended family. Tarnished honour requires immediate restoration, and when formal state mechanisms are perceived as insufficient, carok becomes a viable alternative (Arafah et al., 2025). Therefore, resolution strategies rooted in the local context must provide socially acceptable alternatives to restore honour without resorting to violence. The participation of local actors is therefore crucial for effective conflict resolution in Madura. Kiai (Islamic scholars), village heads, and community members hold significant moral legitimacy and are trusted as impartial mediators; in many cases, their mere presence can defuse tensions, as their symbolic authority often surpasses that of state officials.

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A study by Takdir et al. (2021) in Pamekasan demonstrates the use of forgiveness therapy as a faith-based method of conflict resolution, encouraging disputing parties to forgive one another by drawing on Islamic teachings regarding ukhuwah and the prohibition against shedding the blood of fellow Muslims. This practice indicates that locally rooted conflict resolution in Madura is not only customary but also spiritual, underpinned by a robust theological foundation.

Figure 3. Regional Variation in Locally Based Conflict Resolution across Madura

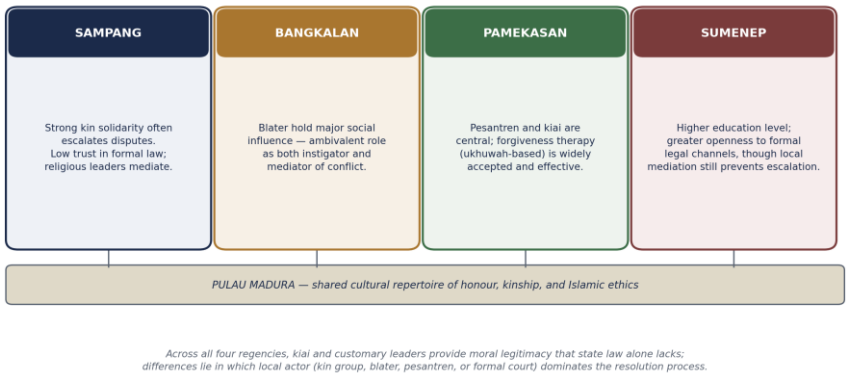


Figure 3. Regional variation in locally based conflict resolution across Madura, showing how the balance among kin authority, blater influence, pesantren mediation, and formal law differs by regency.

Local conflict resolution in Madura is not uniform, it varies across districts, as summarised in Figure 3. In Sampang, strong family solidarity often escalates conflict, necessitating the involvement of religious leaders to resolve disputes; limited trust in formal legal systems leads the community to rely more heavily on local mechanisms. In Bangkalan, blater play a significant role, wielding considerable social influence and frequently participating in mediation, though their position is ambivalent, since they may act as both instigators and resolvers of conflict. Law enforcement officials in Bangkalan often encounter difficulty where local norms continue to validate carok as a legitimate means of dispute resolution (Suyanto & Bakhtiar, 2024).

In Pamekasan, pesantren are central to conflict mediation, typically under the guidance of a kiai, and outcomes are more readily accepted owing to their religious legitimacy; the adoption of forgiveness therapy in Pamekasan demonstrates how pesantren have successfully internalised the value of peace in conflict resolution. In Sumenep, modernisation and increased educational attainment have made the community more receptive to formal legal channels, although local mediation remains prevalent, particularly to prevent minor conflicts from escalating. While the four districts differ in practice, all confirm the importance of locally based resolution as a key mechanism for managing conflict in Madura.

Despite its effectiveness, locally based conflict resolution faces several challenges. First, formal legitimacy remains weak: peace agreements do not always carry legal force, making enforcement difficult where they are violated. Second, the potential for gender and class injustice persists, as weaker parties may be pressured into accepting unfavourable compromises. Third, the dominance of certain figures, such as Blater, can render mediation biased and open to exploitation for consolidating personal power. For these reasons, it is important to develop a penal-mediation model that integrates local values with the formal legal system—one that grants local mediation formal legitimacy and embeds it within national legal policy. Reconstructing Madurese legal culture on the foundation of Pancasila values is likewise essential for strengthening national criminal policy. Such recommendations point toward the future direction of conflict resolution in Madura: the integration of local wisdom with universal legal principles, consistent with the broader restorative-justice and legal-pluralism agenda identified by Arafah et al. (2025) and (Haris et al., 2024).

Locally based conflict resolution in Madura demonstrates how the community actively negotiates its traditions alongside modernity, formal law, and religious values. Practices such as customary mediation, the involvement of kiai, social reconciliation, and district-level variation together illustrate that the Madurese community is an active agent in constructing peace mechanisms, not merely a passive recipient of external reform. These practices reflect the broader reinterpretation of carok traced throughout this article: a transition from a symbol of violence to one of peace. By reinforcing locally grounded conflict resolution, the Madurese community contributes significantly to the comparative study of conflict resolution, legal pluralism, and cultural transformation in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This article argues that carok is best understood not as a fixed cultural essence, but rather as a discursive formation whose meaning is continually produced, contested, and reinterpreted through relations of power and knowledge. Drawing on Foucault's theories of discourse and power/knowledge, Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic violence, and Galtung's theory of cultural violence, this research demonstrates that carok persists where family socialization, blater authority, and local religious leadership continue to reproduce an honor-based habitus, and where structural conditions—historically weak trust in formal law, limited economic opportunities, and entrenched local hierarchies—change more slowly than public attitudes. At the same time, the data clearly indicate that this discourse is shifting: formal education, pesantren-based religious ethics, media critique, and state law have collectively produced a counter-discourse in which carok is reframed as criminal violence rather than honorable self-defense, and honor itself is increasingly understood as something that can be maintained through peaceful and dignity-respecting means. Its theoretical contribution lies in demonstrating that persistence and shift are not contradictory, but rather conform to the predictions of Foucauldian-Bourdieusian analysis of any contested dominant discourse change is uneven, contested, and unevenly distributed across social groups, regions, and institutions, rather than sudden or sweeping. Practically, this research suggests that policy interventions should not rely solely on criminal law, but should work simultaneously at the discursive level (supporting educational and media narratives that reframe honor in nonviolent terms), the dispositional level (reshaping early socialization around masculinity and self-esteem), and the structural level (strengthening formal justice mechanisms and integrating customary mediation into restorative justice frameworks). District-level variations in Sampang, Bangkalan, Pamekasan, and Sumenep further suggest that interventions should be tailored to local authority

configurations rather than applied uniformly. While acknowledging its limitationsqualitative design, discourse analytics, and a limited informant base the reinterpretation explored in this article, from carok as honor-based violence to carok as a case study in honor-based peace, offers a more humane and sociologically adequate basis than criminalization alone for understanding and ultimately transforming one of Madura's most contested cultural traditions.

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