

EXPLORATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT, VIOLENCE, AND TRADITION IN "MATA BLATER" BY MAHWI AIR TAWAR

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Received: 19th July 2025
Revised: 27th August 2025
Accepted: 1st September 2025
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55981/salls.2024.12919>

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the cultural ecology of the short story anthology "Mata Blater". This collection was selected due to its representation of diverse Madurese customs, traditions, and values, which are infrequently explored by literary authors. The research employs a descriptive exploratory methodology and a cultural ecology approach, utilizing data in the form of literary text units pertaining to cultural ecology. The findings of this investigation demonstrate that this short story collection exhibits a strong correlation with culture and environment, such as *karapan sapi*, *blater*, *tandak*, *celurit*. *Karapan sapi* is a traditional bull racing event is not only a showcase of animal prowess but also serves as a celebration of community, culture, and agricultural identity. The preparation for the race involves elements of care for the bulls, emphasizing a relationship steeped in mutual respect and cultural significance. *Blater* comes from the Madurese language and can be literally translated as "brave" or "champion." However, its meaning and connotations are far more complex within the context of Madurese society. A *blater* is not merely a thug or a local strongman; they are a highly influential social figure with a dual role as an informal peacekeeper and, at times, a thug for personal gain.

The *blater* represents an informal justice system thriving in a community that holds traditional values dear and reflects the unique social dynamics, beliefs, and power hierarchy within Madurese society. *Tandak* refers to a female dancer who performs at celebratory events, especially weddings. The role of a *tandak* is crucial in folk entertainment and has unique characteristics that set her apart from other dancers. A *tandak* becomes a central figure and a symbol of prosperity at a celebration. A key feature of the Madurese *tandak* is her interaction with the guests. They dance to the accompaniment of traditional Madurese music, such as *saronen*, and invite guests to dance with them. Guests who dance with the *tandak* usually give them a tip (money) as a form of appreciation. *Celurit* is a traditional sickle used for harvesting illustrates the connection between labor, agricultural practices, and respect for the land. The narratives surrounding *celurit* highlight the skills passed down through generations and convey the importance of sustainable practices in rice farming. The anthology suggests that these cultural practices embody a collective awareness regarding the interplay of culture, nature, and human well-being. Collectively, these stories emphasize how Madurese people respect, utilize, and preserve their cultural and environmental heritage, underlining the intrinsic

value of these interactions for community identity and environmental stewardship. Research has shown that communities around the world employ traditional agricultural practices that enhance biodiversity and ecosystem health, as highlighted in studies on sustainable farming methods. Evidence from environmental psychology suggests that exposure to natural environments can improve mental health and well-being, with studies indicating a positive correlation between time spent in nature and reduced stress levels. Additionally, anthropological research

reveals that cultural rituals related to nature conservation can strengthen social ties and promote collective action for environmental protection. These findings underscore the significant role that culture, nature, and the environment play in contributing to human well-being.

Keywords: *blater*, *tandak*, sand mattress, Suramadu, *karapan*, *celurit*

Introduction

Mahwi Air Tawar, a Madurese author, has examined his social milieu and environment in his anthology entitled *Mata Blater (MB)*, published in 2010. Mahwi portrays diverse behaviors, traditions, and customs of the Madurese people that originate from ancestral heritage concerning nature, culture, and the environment. The MB comprises 12 short stories presented as metaphorical narratives of characters who depict the behavior of the Madurese ethnic group, highlighting the uniqueness of their attitudes and customs. The natural environment is perceived as a way of life that must be preserved through traditions and customs. Nature is revered as it is considered a source of sustenance. The Madurese consistently exert considerable effort amidst their arid landscape, necessitating a focus on developing, cultivating, and maintaining the natural environment for future progress. Mahwi also addresses aspects of Madura's local wisdom, which has encountered various challenges due to technological advancements and the inauguration of the Suramadu Bridge in 2009. The Madurese population resides on Madura Island, situated in East Java Province. Madura Island encompasses four districts: Bangkalan, Sampang, Pamekasan, and Sumenep. The island extends from west to east, measuring 160 kilometers in length and 40 kilometers in width. To the northeast, there are approximately 70 small islands, resulting in a total land area, including the main island and smaller islands, of 5,300 square kilometers (Rifai, 2007).

Madura Island possesses diverse cultural elements that are widely recognized by the populace, encompassing language, art, religion, technology, livelihoods, knowledge systems, social organizations, Madura cultural artifacts, and demographic developments (Rifai, 2007). Similar to other ethnic groups in the archipelago, the Madurese have established a system of values and phenomena conceptualized as Madura culture, which subsequently forms a distinctive regional characteristic (Faizin, 2015). MB has portrayed the naive, humorous, and violent behaviors of the characters, thereby sociologically reflecting the paradoxical attitudinal peculiarities of the Madura ethnic group. As an indigenous author from Madura, Mahwi comprehends the socio-cultural behaviors of his environment that warrant appreciation, including his perspectives and thoughts in his short stories from the lens of cultural ecologies. These encompass the conservation of sand mattresses on the coast, the role of *tandak* (*tandha'*) or *tayub* in the social milieu, the function of traditional *celurit* weapons in the domain of social life, the lifestyle of a *blater* in influencing the environment, religious practices of communal prayer for rain and life's well-being, and the maintenance of *karapan* cattle and *sono* cattle to support cultural preservation and environmental sustainability.

Mahwi was born in Sumenep, Madura Island, in 1983. His work is inextricably linked to his exploration and concern regarding the cultural conditions in his region, which are perceived to be neglected by his generation. This exploration manifests in the form of social conflicts during folk cultural performances, such as altercations and intimidation by *blater* towards the vulnerable, occasionally disrupting community activities. The narrative characters represent various aspects of Madurese life, including the absurd, intelligent, industrious, courageous, arrogant, naive, honest, easily offended, vengeful, and humorous. Mahwi boldly critiques the life of his people through his imagination and satirical style, resulting in those criticized finding amusement in their own portrayal. However, it is important to note that the characteristics of the Madurese ethnicity are not universally applicable, as prolonged association and cultural understanding reveal. In social contexts, instances of violence, such as those perpetrated by *blater* wielding *celurit* or *karapan* cow owners who euthanize their animals after losing competitions, are unique to certain groups and have become commonplace. Such behaviors are not exclusive to the Madurese and can be observed in other ethnic groups across the archipelago. Mahwi effectively elucidates the misinterpretation of Madurese ethnic behavior, addressing the persistent negative stigma attached to the Madurese, who are known for their adherence to Islam. Broadly, the Madurese ethnic group is recognized as a religious and Islamic community, known for their devout practice of Islam. It is common for each household to have a dedicated prayer room for congregational worship with family and community members.

Mahwi's environmental exploration in the context of modern industries, such as the tourism sector, which has recently attracted numerous international visitors to Madura Island following the operationalization of the Suramadu Bridge. The bridge not only facilitates physical connectivity for improved traffic flow but also serves as a conduit for various modern cultural and lifestyle influences entering Madura Island, necessitating careful consideration. The influx of modern culture subsequent to the Suramadu Bridge's construction is perceived to potentially foster negative behavioral patterns among the populace, as the local culture, which previously served as a filter for undesirable behaviors, has begun to diminish. The Suramadu Bridge should be viewed as an opportunity, rather than an impediment, to accelerate economic development on Madura Island. Mutmainnah & Azhar (2019) posit that three sectors are development priorities: industry, tourism, and services. The development of these diverse industrial sectors raises concerns regarding potential detriments to the Madurese population, such as nightlife or promiscuity, which are perceived to be incongruent with Madura's predominantly Islamic culture, given that the island's population is primarily Muslim.

Previous research on MB was conducted by Arifin (2017) and Faizin (2015). Arifin (2017) describes various types of cruelty in society. These atrocities have an impact on uncomfortable environmental conditions and people's disappointment with individual characters, barbarism, and later because of trivial social problems that then result in fights, even murder. The trigger for these atrocities is women's issues, retribution, and inheritance, which then have implications for the image of the cruel and ridiculous Madura tribe that is irrelevant to its religious teachings. *Carok* occurs during cultural activities such as cow caravans and folk art performances in villages or other crowded places due to misunderstandings, losing matches, eye contact, or physical friction. Faizi's research (2015) conveys the attitude of the Madurese people to relate to social life with a literary sociology approach. He highlighted two things, the first is the attitude of the Madurese people to respect four figures, namely fathers, mothers, teachers, and *rato*/government. These four figures must be maintained if they want to uphold parents and teachers as teachers. Second, being brave in doing and defending the truth even though it is high risk because doing good is a commendable attitude.

This article builds upon the foundations laid by Arifin and Faizin by integrating their findings into a broader analysis of contemporary Madurese society, offering a multi-dimensional perspective on the evolution of cultural practices and their ongoing influence on social behaviors. It delves into intersectionality, examining how specific triggers of violence, as emphasized by Arifin, intersect with modern societal changes such as economic pressures and migration, subsequently affecting the nature and prevalence of *Carok*. Moreover, the article highlights the resilience of Madurese cultural values in the face of these challenges, illustrating how respect for authority figures is both maintained and transformed amidst external influences, providing a more comprehensive view of cultural adaptation. Employing a new methodological approach, it not only analyzes individual behaviors but also explores the community's collective response to violence, thereby enriching the discourse surrounding Madurese culture by incorporating contemporary narratives and experiences. Additionally, the article addresses the implications of shifting cultural practices, discussing how the identity of the Madurese people is negotiated in a modern context, as they seek to reconcile traditional values with contemporary life challenges—an area not fully explored in previous studies. Overall, this work aims to deepen the understanding of Madurese societal dynamics by connecting past research findings to present-day realities, ultimately offering nuanced insights into the interplay between culture, violence, and identity.

The research of Arifin (2017) and Faizin (2015) has two things, namely: (1) sociologically it only describes the cruel behavior of *pecarok* and *blater* which then creates a bad attitude for the Madurese ethnic group, and (2) the dissemination of normative attitudes in Madurese life such as prioritizing respect for parents, teachers, and leaders so that there are still gaps for further research, including ecological issues. Cultural ecology can describe the human knowledge system as a social creature in understanding and interpreting its cultural and natural environment (Sugiharti, 2017). MB's short story is not only a problem of the dark side of human violence, but on the other hand, there is still human behavior that cares about the good for the benefit of creatures and the natural environment. The preservation of culture, nature, and traditions is an important means for the survival of creatures on the earth described by Mahwi through ways of respecting and maintaining ecology, so it is necessary to study how local culture can support and strengthen ecological conservation.

Cultural ecology etymologically comes from the words ecology and culture. Cultural ecology is a system of human knowledge as a social creature that can process and interpret the cultural and natural environment (Sugiharti, 2017). Cultural ecology will explain the reciprocity between humans and their environment because the development of human socio-cultural life will affect the good or bad of their environment. Putra and Sugiharti (Putra, 2019) stated that the problem of environmental and societal change is a concern of cultural ecology because there is a process of restructuring the environment as a place for human beings to live so they must be ready to adapt. The environment changes, and the people will also change. It is not an exaggeration if an ethnicity is worried about the changes in its environment so that humans must be ready to adapt to changes without leaving their culture.

Research related to cultural ecology is closely related to the concept of culture itself because cultural ecology is culture, humans, and the environment (Putra, 2019). The Law on the Promotion of Indonesian Republic Culture Number 5 of 2017 explains that culture is part of the creation, taste, *karsa*, and works of society that interact with other

cultures. This interaction at a certain time will cause environmental change due to the creative and innovative thinking of humans as cultural creatures; thus, that there is a link between the implications of a two-way relationship between humans and their place of residence. These changes, are not independent, but are systematically formed by the ecosystem, starting from humans themselves to facilities, infrastructure, and variables such as law, politics, and economics. For this reason, humans become formal objects of ecology so that they become the domain of study, namely about humans and their environment, so that humans cannot be separated from the environment. For this reason, cultural ecology includes various dynamics of human resources and their environment (Putra, 2019).

Formal objects related to human interaction can be traced through universal cultural elements, as expressed by Koentjaraningra (2000), namely the system of religion, knowledge, kinship, livelihoods, equipment and technology, language, and art. These elements are different, but they are related to each other so that the changes that occur in a society will support each other. Changes in the environment, both physical and social, are inseparable from human creation or previous knowledge of the environment. This is revealed in the literature because of literature integration with the social and the natural environments of its time, which can be studied through cultural ecology.

Methods

This study employs an exploratory descriptive methodology to analyze and investigate cultural ecological phenomena in literary works (Putra, 2019). The approach focused on the cultural ecology depicted in the collection of short stories. The primary source for this research is a short story anthology book titled "Mata Blater" (MB) by Mahwi Air Tawar, published in 2011. The data utilized in this research comprise textual units in short stories that illustrate cultural ecology. A textual unit refers to specific segments of text within the short stories that convey important cultural ecological themes. For example, it could be a paragraph describing the local environment, a dialogue that reveals cultural beliefs about nature, or a sentence detailing a traditional ritual related to agriculture. Analyzing these textual units helps uncover the interplay between culture and ecology in Mahwi Air Tawar's "Mata Blater." In addition to data sourced from MB short stories, the researchers also utilize supplementary sources, including theoretical texts, other supportive analytical works, scientific journal articles, and relevant online publications.

Data collection was conducted through the following process: (1) reading 12 short stories contained in the MB anthology to identify story text units depicting cultural ecology; (2) subsequent to the reading, each short story containing units of content (words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs) describing cultural ecology was recorded in the respective analysis subchapter within the research findings section, ensuring comprehensive data usage for analysis rather than sampling; (3) identifying data from sections of each short story related to indicators of traditional and modern cultural values that signify the dynamics of changes in human life and its environment; and (4) describing all the data obtained from the compilation of short stories in the form of words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. In this study, the following indicators or categories were employed to analyze cultural ecological aspects:

- Cultural Practices: Analysis of rituals, traditions, and customs (e.g., *karapan sapi*, *tandak*) that showcase local knowledge and sustainable practices.
- Human-Nature Relationship: Examination of depictions of how characters interact with their natural environment, highlighting respect and stewardship versus exploitation.
- Values and Beliefs: Identification of traditional and modern values as they relate to environmental conservation, community well-being, and identity (e.g., use of *celurit* as a symbol of agricultural heritage).
- Adaptation and Change: Exploration of how cultural practices evolve in response to environmental changes, globalization, or modernization, reflecting on the balance between tradition and progress.
- Community and Identity: Investigation into the role of culture in forming community bonds and individual identities, particularly how these are tied to shared ecological understandings and practices.

These indicators facilitated a comprehensive cultural ecological analysis, revealing the intricate connections among human activities, cultural practices, and environmental awareness depicted in the short stories of the anthology.

Result

Passion of Art and Tradition For Ecology

Artistic and traditional activities can foster a sense of community cohesion and enhance the social dynamics of a society. Cultural arts performances serve not only as entertainment venues and platforms for folk communication but also as catalysts for character development and creative expression within the community. Mahwi has elucidated the life values inherent in art and tradition, such as those exemplified by the roles of *tandak*, *blater*, and shamans as ritual practitioners. These three elements are consistently present in folk art performances, including the *karapan* tradition, village purification rituals, celebrations, and

the *sonok* cow contest. The *karapan* tradition and cow contests are emblematic of Madurese culture and are believed to have ecological benefits, thus inextricably linking the Madurese ethnicity to these two traditions. The *karapan* and *sonok* cow events facilitate interaction with spectators from diverse ethnic backgrounds and nationalities, thereby broadening their environmental and national perspectives. *Karapan Sapi* (cow race) events are typically conducted in open-air settings, surrounded by verdant trees and grassy fields or on muddy terrain, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between natural functions and the preservation of cultural arts. The melodious sounds of traditional instruments, accompanied by gamelan music, the presence of spectators, and the natural ambiance of greenery and fresh air, contribute to the vitality of these artistic and traditional performances.

Karapan activities are consistently accompanied by artistic performances and mantra recitations, such as the ritual conducted by *Madrusin*, who recites mantras prior to the commencement of the *karapan* to ensure the event proceeds smoothly: "*Madrusin paced back and forth around the karapan (race) arena. His mouth is mumbling reciting mantras*" (Tawar, 2010). *Karapan* activities are enriched with artistic performances and mantra recitations, such as those conducted by *Madrusin*, who recites mantras to ensure the event unfolds smoothly: "*Madrusin paced back and forth around the karapan (race) arena. His mouth is mumbling reciting mantras*" (Tawar, 2010). This practice highlights the cultural significance of rituals within the *karapan*, showcasing a deep-rooted connection between cultural activities and ecological awareness. The recitation of mantras serves as a form of spiritual engagement, linking the community to their environment through expressions of respect and gratitude. This ritualistic aspect emphasizes the importance of harmony with nature, as participants seek blessings for a successful event and to honor the livestock involved. Such ritual performances signify an understanding that the success of agricultural and cultural practices is inherently tied to the well-being of the natural world. Additionally, the role of the female performer or *tandak* adds another layer of cultural significance. Her well-groomed appearance and traditional attire not only represent local heritage but also embody the community's identity. The *tandak* contributes to the vibrancy of the *karapan*, with her melodious voice and rhythmic movements creating an atmosphere that engages the audience, thereby reinforcing community bonds. This showcases how traditional art forms enhance cultural celebrations, providing entertainment while also promoting ecological values. Thus, the intertwining of mantra recitation and the *tandak* performance within *karapan* activities illustrates the cultural ecological framework where human practices, artistic expressions, and a respect for nature coexist, reflecting a collective identity and commitment to environmental stewardship.

In artistic and traditional events, a female performer or *tandak* is invariably present. She maintains a well-groomed appearance and is attired in traditional local clothes. Her melodious voice while singing or praising, coupled with her rhythmic movements during stage performances, contributes to the vibrancy of the event. These traditional art forms possess an exotic quality and allure for the audience. In this context, the art of *tandak*, which is the sole Madurese cultural practice with a feminist dimension (Arizal, 2020), is particularly appreciated by the community, especially men. *Tanda'/tayup*, a female traditional Madurese art performer, demonstrates proficiency in dancing and embanging (*ngejhung*) on stage. Within the context of *karapan sapi*, the presence of the *tandak* can enliven the atmosphere preceding the *karapan sapi* event. The sound of the *soronen* or *siren*, combined with the melodious voice of the *tandak*, serves to motivate the audience, thus rendering it an integral component of the artistic activities and traditions within the society.

Lengking soronen meliuk-liuk. Langgak-lenggok penandak kian menyemarakkan suasana karapan. Debu terus mengepul. Matlar dan dua penunggang sapi lainnya bersiap-siap. Seember air yang sudah dicampur lombok merah-hijau dan balsam disiapkan, dan paku pun digoreskan pada punggung masing-masing sapi. Rotan siap dipecutkan. Sesaat kemudian melesatlah sapi-sapi karapan. Sorak sorai terdengar bingar (Tawar, 2010).

The slender *soronen* is crooked. The hanging of the marker is increasingly enlivening the atmosphere of the *karapan sapi*. Dust continues to billow. Matlar and two other cow riders were in vain. A bucket of water is mixed with red-green lombok and balsam is prepared, and nails are scratched on the backs of each cow. The rattan is ready to be accelerated. A moment later, the *karapan* cows galloped. The cheers sounded frenzied (Tawar, 2010).

The art of *tandak* is prevalent in various performance events within the community. The art of *gtersbu* continues to develop rapidly in Sumenep Regency, which has consequently been designated as the land of *tandak* due to its 28 *tandak* or *tayub* art groups distributed across various sub-districts. In Soronggi district, it is recognized as the oldest *tayub* location, hosting a total of eight *tayub* art groups (Rahmawati, Farida Nurul, Susanti, Emy & Saptandari, 2021). The melodious sound of the *tandak* can elicit enthusiasm from the audience and the *karapan sapi* riders. This phenomenon is depicted by Mahwi in his short stories entitled "*Karabhen Sape*", "*Tandak*", "*Sapi Sonok*", and "*The Story of Penandak*" (Tawar, 2010). The resonance of gamelan music and the *langung* of the tank's body, augmented by the audience's acclamation, serve as motivation for the *karapan sapi* riders (*tukang tongko*). *Tandak*, music, and spectators have evolved into cultural forces that support the development of their environment when traditions are observed that necessitate produce such as chili, water, rattan, coconut coir, flowers, frankincense, or herbal preparations.

Mahwi constructs his perspective on ecology by incorporating arts and traditions that the presence of *blater* and *tandak* has historically supported to enhance their benefits for human life, nature, and the environment. The title of this short story collection, *Mata Blater*, is intrinsically linked to *Blater's* culture and existence as a social community associated with violence in their actions and whose offended sensibilities can create a threatening social atmosphere due to their anger. *Blater* is characterized as a local knight of Madura (Tawar, 2010); Arifin (2017b) asserted that *blater* is a term for thuggery that dominates certain areas and can be the source of acts of violence that are culturally embedded in Madura society. *Celurit* serves as the identity and symbol of Madurese masculinity; consequently, it is consistently carried, typically tucked around the waist, regardless of location. In Madurese social interactions, *celurit* may be employed to perpetrate violence or *carok* to preserve self-esteem due to losing a competition, misunderstanding, land dispute, or jealousy, as exemplified by the characters Gani and Madrusin, who are siblings in the short story "Bulan Selaksa Celurit" (Tawar, 2010) and engage in combat with a *celurit* weapon due to a misunderstanding. Therefore, *blater* with his *celurit* and *tandak* with his traditional artistic skills are ecologically and culturally inseparable from the environment and society, despite various negative stigmas.

The *blater* exhibits aggressive and intimidating behavior towards members of society, similar to the *tandak*, who is perceived as a person who engages in inappropriate relationships with married individuals and possesses limited education. The *tandak* becomes a target for *blaters* following artistic performances, with demands for a portion of their earnings under threat of violence. Similarly, male dancers who do not receive a *sampur* necklace from the *tandak* during stage performances may become agitated. The bestowal of *sampur* upon men while on stage is considered a prestigious act, as it is perceived as an honor bestowed by the *tandak*. Those who do not receive this recognition from the *tandak* during performances may take offense and disseminate malicious rumors. Such defamation can lead to embarrassment and emotional distress, potentially resulting in the *tandak's* reluctance to perform in the future. The stigma associated with the *tandak* is not solely attributed to women; rather, it is deliberately propagated by men who do not receive a share of the *tandak's* income or attention. "It is also not because of the voice that is not as melodious as before. But because he felt depressed by the news of the threat spread by Madrusin" (Tawar, 2010).

Tandak is a female performance artist who provides entertainment, particularly for male audiences. The melodious sounds and exotic movements elicit positive responses from men. However, negative stereotypes are also associated with these performers, such as being perceived as seducers of married men, unsophisticated, uneducated women, covert sex workers, individuals of low social status, or those with questionable morals, based on the actions of certain individuals (Rahmawati, Nurul, Farida, Emy Susanti, Emy, & Saptandari, 2021). In reality, *tandak* performers possess inherent strengths, including self-potential, independence, artistic intelligence, and the right to pursue their livelihood. They demonstrate courage by appearing in social gatherings with various objectives, such as cultural preservation and economic sustenance. The negative stigma surrounding *tandak* or *tayub* performances can be attributed to the predominantly Muslim population of Madura Island, which may lead to the marginalization of female *tandak* performers who showcase their artistry in nocturnal settings with male participants on stage (Effendy, 2020).

The presence of *tandak* in the realm of folk art performances is supported by the community due to its perceived ability to foster social cohesion. This can be reflected in the following quote from the short story *Tandak*.

"Sebagaimana kebiasaan masyarakat Madura, pada akhir musim kemarau, sehabis panen tembakau (dengan hasil memuaskan tentunya), para petani selalu mengadakan pesta desa. Salah satunya menggelar pertunjukan rakyat *tandak* yang memang sudah akrab dan menjadi dambaan setiap masyarakat."

"As is the custom of the Madurese people, at the end of the dry season, after a satisfying tobacco harvest, the farmers always hold a village feast. One such event is a *tandak* folk performance, which has become a familiar and longed-for event for every community member."

It is reinforced by the following quote.

"Bila selendang terkalungkan kepada salah satu *penayub*, sungguh itu kebanggaan tersendiri, untuk mendapatkan itu, tak cukup *penayub* bermodak uang untuk diselipkan ke atas sanggul penari *tandak*. Tapi lebih dari itu, salah satu *penayub* harus memantrai penari *tandak* agar meunak dan mau mengalungkan selendang pada salah sdeorang *penayub*."

"When a sash is draped over one of the male dancers (*penayub*), it is a source of immense pride. To achieve this, it's not enough for the dancer to have money to tuck into the *tandak* dancer's bun. More than that, one of the male dancers must cast a spell (*mantra*) on the *tandak* dancer so that she is willing to come up and drape the sash over one of them." (Tawar, 2010).

Both quotes show that *tandak* acts as a social glue, bringing community members together to celebrate the village party after the tobacco harvest. The *tandak* serves as a form of folk entertainment. Also, the guests support the *tandak* by giving her tips as appreciation.

Threats, intimidation, and performance prohibitions have been limited to actions by certain individuals. Mahwani, a female *tandak* practitioner with 25 years of experience, has encountered harassment and defamation as depicted in the short story "Tandak" (Tawar, 2010). She was consistently invited to mirammi 'party' events following tobacco harvests. Farmers expressed gratitude for successful tobacco yields through artistic performances attended by diverse groups from various villages. Indirectly, the *tandak* is valued and receives financial support from tobacco farmers. Occasionally, the practitioners of *tandak* art, the blater individuals exhibiting thuggish behavior, and the community as enthusiasts of *tandak* art fail to create a balanced environment conducive to supporting *tandak* performances. Instead, the group of thugs is unable to fulfill their role as guardians, protectors, and supporters of the continuity of *tandak* art.

Blater instigated the disturbance due to a minor issue. The short story "Mata Blater" (Tawar, 2010) depicts Madrusin's cruelty as a blater who becomes easily offended when his desires are not fulfilled, resorting to threats with his cellulite, coercion, profanity, and mystical methods. Madrusin portrayed the behavior of *blater* as a village miscreant who creates discord and anxiety if the community does not heed his demands. The short story collection *Mata Blater* conveys a perspective on preserving the continuity of art and tradition. The narratives of the *karan* tradition and bovine competitions demonstrate that cattle serve multiple functions, including as artistic commodities to stimulate economic activity and enhance social prestige. The short story "Karabhen Sape" (Tawar, 2010) illustrates that *karapan sapi* embodies the value of communal solidarity in social life. The community actively participates in executing the race in an orderly manner from commencement to conclusion. The spectators, cow owners, cow controllers on *kaleles* or *tukang tongko*, cow bridle holders prior to release or *tukang tambeng*, *tukang gertak sapi* or *tukang gettak* responsible for signaling the cattle to commence, cattle guides or *tukang tonja*, a cohort tasked with providing vocal encouragement to spur bovine movement or *tukang gubra*, and including the role of the *tandak* as a *karapan sapi* motivator through vocal sonority (Istnaini, 2021).

Karapan sapi can serve as a measure of honor and prestige for the cow owner, thus making it challenging to disregard the emotional distress resulting from a loss in the race. The narrative of the character Lubanjir recounts his act of euthanizing his cows following a defeat in the race. Experiencing shame and a perceived loss of status, he terminated the lives of his two cows using his *celurit*, and subsequently expelled his son from the household.

"Pergi" bentak Lubanjir. Matlar terperanjat, sementara sepasang sapi karapannya terus menghentak-hentakan kaki ke tanah, seolah-olah tak rela ditinggalkan Matlar. Sebelum Matlar sempat beranjak, Lubanjir lebih dulu mengibaskan celuritnya pada leher sepasang sapi itu. Dan menyemburlah darah (Tawar, 2010).

"Go away" Lubanjir snapped. Matlar was stunned, while his pair of cows stomped their feet on the ground, as if they were unwilling to leave Matlar. Before Matlar could move, Lubanjir flicked his *celurit* at the cows' necks. And a gush of blood (Tawar, 2010).

The quotation shows how *karapan sapi* symbolizes honour and prestige in Madurese culture. Lubanjir's brutal act of killing his cows and expelling his son is not just about a loss in a race; it's a direct response to a perceived loss of social status and a profound sense of shame. The story critiques a cultural system where a person's worth is tied to the success of their animal, exposing the destructive side of a society driven by rigid ideas of honour and hierarchy. The act highlights how social pressure can lead to tragic and extreme actions.

In addition to experiencing a loss of pride, Lubanjir perceives that educating *karapan sapi* is challenging due to the required perseverance, patience, and substantial financial investment. From a young age, his cow have undergone a rigorous disciplinary and training process, involving a nutritious diet comprising chicken egg-based feed, herbal supplements, and selected green grass to develop into robust, healthy, and strong animals. *Karapan sapi* are conditioned for strength and speed in racing, while sonok cow are cultivated for graceful physiques, attractive coats, and harmonious gait during competitions. The short story "Sapi Sonok" (Tawar, 2010) depicts a pair of female cows prepared for a beauty contest, their bodies adorned with floral fragrances, yellow powder, beads, anklets, and brass necklaces that produce a tinkling sound as they are guided by a handler. The pair of cows move in synchronization with rhythmic music. During the contest, sonok cows are treated with gentleness and without violence, in contrast to *karapan sapi*, which are subjected to harsh treatment, including the application of hot oil to their bodies, lacerations on their backs, and the administration of hot chili water. *Karapan sapi* is an outdoor racing event open to the public. The races are held biannually, in August and September. The race track spans approximately 100 meters, with completion times ranging from 10 to 15 seconds. *Karapan sapi* are evaluated based on their speed to the finish line, while sonok cows are judged on their aesthetic qualities and the uniformity of their gait towards the finish line (Kemdikbud, 2018).

Man and Nature's Unique Connection

Coastal communities in Sumenep district adhere to a traditional practice of utilizing sand mattresses for sleeping, despite the availability of modern foam or kapok alternatives. This choice of bedding material is rooted in generational customs and specific beliefs, extending even to childbirth practices. This phenomenon exemplifies the profound connection between the inhabitants of East Legung Village, Batang Batang, Sumenep District, East Java, and their natural environment and cultural beliefs. Nature is regarded as a familial entity deserving of respect, fostering a symbiotic relationship between the natural world and human inhabitants. The utilization of white sand mattresses is perceived to provide both security and comfort during sleep, as recounted by Nyi Marfuah in the short story "Kasur Putih" (Tawar, 2010). Nyi Marfuah, a resident of Legung Village, engages in the sale of white sand to local households for bedding purposes. The sand distributed by Nyi Marfuah has garnered long-standing trust within the community due to its perceived comfort and suitability for bedding, as well as its purported ability to ward off diseases and malevolent spirits. Furthermore, there exists a belief that newly married couples should sleep on white sand mattresses to mitigate future marital discord, jealousy, hatred, and malice, as these negative attributes are believed to be absorbed and neutralized by the sand.

Pasir putih itu selalu menjadi dambaan setiap pengantin baru. Kata orang, "Malam pertama, pengantin baru harus tidur di atas kasur pasir, agar pertengkaran tak selalu terjadi dalam rumah tangga". Sedari dulu orang-orang memercayai hal itu. Kata mereka, "biar sifat-sifat benci, dengki dan cemburu tertanggalkan, menyatu dengan tanah" (Tawar, 2010).

The white sand has always been the dream of every newlywed. They say, "The first night, newlyweds must sleep on a sand mattress, so that quarrels do not always occur in the household". People have always believed that. They said, "Let the traits of hatred, spite and jealousy be stripped away, merging with the ground" (Tawar, 2010).

The white sand mattress serves as a representation of a human life that continues to value the teachings of its ancestors, who consistently respected and integrated with nature and their environment. With various beliefs that persist in contemporary society, white sand is utilized as a dependable sleeping surface by coastal inhabitants. Sleeping on white sand can provide warmth to the body during cold weather. Sand mattresses have become an integral part of the local wisdom unique to Sumenep, Indonesia comprises numerous ethnic groups, each possessing distinct cultural characteristics resulting from diverse backgrounds (Wahida Inayatullaili, Wahida dan Pinasti, n.d.). The practice of sleeping on a white sand mattress has been associated with perceived health benefits, protection from spirits, and the elimination of negative traits for its users. Pasir Putih remains the aspiration of every newly married couple. It is said, "The first night, newlyweds must sleep on a sand mattress to prevent frequent quarrels in the household". This belief has been widely accepted. It is stated, "Let the traits of hatred, spite and jealousy be stripped away, merging with the ground" (Tawar, 2010).

Jika kalian bertandang ke Desa Legung, maka akan kalian jumpai sebarang tanah luas dengan lapisan pasir putih. Tentu, bila suatu ketika kalian ingin rebahan atau tiar sepanjang siang atau malam, percayalah, tubuhmu tidak akan merasa gatal-gatal, dan pasir-pasir tidak lekat di kulit (Tawar, 2010).

If you travel to Legung Village, you will find a vast stretch of land with a layer of white sand. Of course, if at any time you want to lie down or lie down all day or night, believe me, your body will not feel itchy, and the sand will not stick to your skin (Tawar, 2010).

Following sleep on a sand mattress, initial bodily discomfort subsides as muscles relax, leading to a state of comfort and cessation of complaints. The residents of Legung Village report experiencing sound and comfortable sleep when reclining on sand, and they maintain a belief in its prophylactic properties against various ailments, stating, "It is said that if someone sleeps on the white sand mattress, he will avoid all kinds of diseases" (Tawar, 2010). However, local beliefs are gradually shifting, resulting in the decreased utilization of white sand as a sleeping surface. This change is attributed to beach pollution, which has transformed white sand into a potential source of cutaneous irritation for users.

The coastal region of Legung Village experienced environmental degradation, with malodorous waste and fish remains dispersed along the white sand beaches, compromising the aesthetic appeal of the shoreline. Furthermore, Nyai Marfuah, who previously engaged in the distribution of white sand to neighboring villages, has been rendered silent due to the deterioration of the coastal environment she had managed from her youth to her advanced years. This

degradation has significantly impacted her household economy, as the sand was utilized for mattress production. For Nyai Marfuah, the white sand held sacred significance, as believed by her ancestors; however, the current generation appears to disregard its ecological and economic importance. The coastal sand dunes have been leveled to accommodate road construction, with some of the sand being appropriated by governmental authorities for urban road development. Nyai Marfuah had attempted to prevent this based on a premonition from her late husband, urging the government to refrain from extracting the white sand for road construction purposes. Following the implementation of the paved road, Nyai Marfuah's health declined, ultimately resulting in her demise in the modest dwelling she had inhabited since childhood. Consequently, local residents no longer derive comfort from sand-filled mattresses.

Ketika pemerintah meratakan gunung pasir untuk dijadikan jalan beraspal, Nyai Marfuah tak berani lagi mengambil pasir di sana. Di samping memang rata, juga kotor, tiap hari sampah bererak di sekitar tempat itu (Tawar, 2010).

When the government leveled the sand mountain for a paved road, Nyai Marfuah no longer dared to take sand there. Besides being flat, it was also dirty, with trash scattered around the place every day (Tawar, 2010).

Nyai Marfuah is revered by children due to her proficiency in narrating stories about the benefits of white sand for human health. She is also respected by the community for her expertise in selecting white sand for mattresses. When choosing sand and arranging sand mattresses in residences, Nyi Marfuah consistently recited mantras to ensure the comfort of the user and to avert potential calamities. However, over time, the white sand that was once considered sacred by the community has lost its significance due to prolonged pollution. Nyai Marfuah's efforts to preserve the beach from her youth to her advanced years are commemorated by her community. When the government leveled the sand dunes for road construction, Nyai Marfuah ceased collecting sand from that location. In addition to being flattened, the area had become contaminated, with refuse accumulating daily (Tawar, 2010). Various forms of waste and development have disregarded environmental concerns. These circumstances have resulted in diminished social cohesion among beach residents, as they rarely congregate and engage in casual conversation on the white sand beach. Nyi Marfuah once recounted that during her childhood, she and her peers would engage in games of hide-and-seek on the expansive white sand dunes along the beach, fostering camaraderie among them. Such childhood activities are no longer feasible due to environmental degradation. The white sand is no longer believed by local inhabitants to possess health benefits, curative properties for ailments, or the ability to counteract misfortune and supernatural forces. Consequently, Nyi Marfuah's passing had implications for both the environment and the community, and the sand mattress lost its perceived significance, unlike during her era when it was collectively believed to alleviate all diseases and dispel supernatural influences.

"Pasir-pasir itu sangat banyak manfaatnya. Selain bisa melemaskan otot-otot yang kaku, pasir itu juga dapat menghilangkan segala macam penyakit dan berfungsi sebagai penangkal bala sihir. Makanya, di setiap kamar tidur pasti ada pasir. Itu yang disebut kasur pasir" (Tawar, 2010).

"The sand has many benefits. Apart from being able to relax stiff muscles, the sand can also eliminate all kinds of diseases and serve as an antidote to witchcraft. That's why there must be sand in every bedroom. It is called a sand mattress" (Tawar, 2010).

The actions undertaken by Nyai Marfuah demonstrate a judicious approach to environmental stewardship, as she perceives nature as an integral component of her existence. She consistently opposes the disposal of waste on the beach and the conversion of white sand beaches into public thoroughfares, although her efforts prove unsuccessful. In addition to her role as a guardian of the beach and purveyor of white sand, Nyai Marfuah functions as a practitioner of traditional spiritual practices, including the exorcism of malevolent entities and the manipulation of meteorological phenomena, resulting in frequent requests for her services. During nuptial celebrations, she is called upon to perform ritualistic practices on the sand mattress in the bridal chamber to provide protection against supernatural disturbances.

Shaman as an Ecological Sustainability Spirit

MB's short story collection is inextricably linked to the role of shamans, who are considered to possess advantages in supernatural or otherworldly realms. A shaman as an individual who treats and assists the sick, and administers jampi (spells, charms, etc.) (The Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). Shamans are regarded by the community as a solution to human problems, resulting in their residences being frequented by individuals from various social strata for specific requests. In this short story collection, the shaman is solicited for assistance by owners of *karapan sapi* and

sonok cow to ensure their animals' victory in races, to induce rainfall, to enhance the appeal of performers, to increase physical strength, to facilitate finding a mate, or to address illnesses. Shamans are integral to the realm of traditional arts, as they are perceived to be capable of bestowing supernatural powers and influencing the preservation of culture, tradition, and religion. The recitation of mantras, accompanied by flowers, incense, coconut husks, and yellow rice, is believed by the community to imbue vitality into the continuity and smooth execution of artistic and traditional events. Kek Lesap's function as a shaman and enchanter is to petition the divine for rain during prolonged drought; Nyi Marfuah, in her capacity as a shaman, can cast spells on white sand mattresses in people's dwellings; Dulakkap, as a shaman, possesses a spell to enhance the beauty of *sonok* cow; Madrusin, in his role as a shaman, wields a spell to aid fishermen in procuring abundant catches.

The necessity for shamans to fulfill ritual requirements in order to succeed in competitions or contests organized by cow owners, grant requests for precipitation, provide comfort through sand mattresses for brides, dispel malevolent spirits, and facilitate the capture of fish by fishermen. The materials utilized in these rituals include incense, flowers, coconut fibers, yellow rice, and market-acquired comestibles. These materials are derived from crops cultivated by humans in their gardens, fields, and rice paddies. Kek Lesap's function as a shaman and practitioner is to petition the divine for rainfall during prolonged periods of drought; Nyi Marfuah, in her capacity as a shaman, possesses the ability to enchant white sand mattresses in residential dwellings; Dulakkap, as a shaman, employs incantations to enhance the aesthetic appeal of *sonok* cattle; Madrusin, in his role as a shaman, utilizes spells to assist fishermen in procuring substantial catches. Nature, humans, and flora engage in intrinsic communication, subsequently establishing a sustainable synergy that results in harmonious equilibrium, which consequently contributes to the preservation of nature from degradation. This implies that the role of shamans in ritual and cultural practices is not solely directed towards soliciting spiritual assistance for human success, but that shamans possess the capacity to encourage individuals to cultivate plants for the fulfillment of their spiritual needs. Consequently, shamans are inextricably linked to flowers and incense, as exemplified by Dulakkap's use of these elements to augment the beauty and allure of the *sonok* cow named Rattin, owned by Santap in the short story "Sapi Sonok" (Tawar, 2010).

Dulakkap beranjak mendekati Rattin, lalu mengusap-usap tubuh Rattin dengan air kembang dan asap dupa. Beras kuning dari mulut Dulakkap adalah bagian dari syarat yang tak boleh dilupakan agar wajah Rattin tetap elok, tak kisut kantuk, agar lulur bedak tak luntur sebelum kontes digelar (Tawar, 2010).

Dulakkap moved closer to Rattin and rubbed her body with flower water and incense smoke. The yellow rice from Dulakkap's mouth is part of the conditions that must not be forgotten so that Rattin's face remains beautiful, not drowsy so that the powdery scrub does not fade before the contest is held (Tawar, 2010).

The *sonok* cow shaman named Dulakkap, through his purported supernatural abilities and incantations, is believed to transform *sonok* cows with undesirable physical characteristics into aesthetically pleasing specimens suitable for competition. "The sound of *soronen* or flute continues to accompany the atmosphere of offerings to the ancestors to obtain eternal victory, help your children" (Tawar, 2010). Due to his alleged mystical powers, Dulakkap becomes a focal point for villagers seeking to perform rituals to enhance the appearance of their cows, with the ultimate objective of achieving success in contests. The Dulakkap shaman's livelihood is sustained by his perceived expertise, as visitors to his residence consistently provide offerings such as sacks of corn, *pindang* fish, coconuts, or toys for his children. This practice reflects an intrinsic bond and respect for shamans within the community, manifested through the sharing of agricultural produce. These offerings symbolize village prosperity and serve as a motivating factor for crop cultivation to meet the needs of both humans and livestock. The impetus for crop cultivation extends beyond fulfilling familial requirements, encompassing the altruistic act of sharing with others.

Dukun Nyai Marfuah is recognized as a seller of white sand for mattresses. Coastal residents believe that her merchandise provides superior comfort for sleeping compared to sand mattresses sold by other vendors. She is perceived as a preserver of the white sand beach from anthropogenic degradation. The sand sold by Nyi Marfuah is purportedly imbued with incantations, ensuring that purchasers sleep securely and without disturbance from supernatural entities. Her assistance is frequently sought during wedding ceremonies to prevent spiritual possession of the bride and groom and to avert precipitation during the celebration. Nyai Marfuah's connection with nature, established from birth, has ostensibly resulted in a symbiotic relationship with the environment. Consequently, she is attributed with the ability and conviction to select high-quality sand for sleeping purposes.

Rituals are performed to request precipitation during prolonged periods of drought that affect villages, resulting in parched land devoid of living vegetation, including grasses. These conditions have detrimental effects on both human and animal populations. This adverse environmental situation prompted the local inhabitants to promptly conduct the *ojung* ritual, 'a traditional ceremony to request rainfall,' as depicted in the short story entitled "Ojung" (Tawar, 2010). The purpose of this ritual is to alleviate water scarcity, ensure food availability, promote plant fertility, and restore the verdant appearance of the villages. The rain-requesting ritual is conducted by the shaman Lek Lesap,

who is regarded by the community as an expert in this ceremonial practice and has long been recognized for his expertise. He is the sole shaman in possession of an amulet in the form of a rattan stick. The amulet is maintained through the recitation of Salawat every Friday night before maghrib, the application of incense, and the moistening with flower water (Tawar, 2010). Ke Lesap performs a ritual involving sleep deprivation for one night, during which he removes all his clothing in a room, with the intention of ensuring the success of the rain-requesting ceremony the following day. He states, "For the sake of rain, for the sake of harvest, for the sake of people trapped in the shell of fate. I must perform the *ojung* ritual" (Tawar, 2010).

In addition to their belief in the efficacy of shamanic practices, individuals also attribute significance to certain animals, such as lizards and crows. The presence of crows on a residential rooftop is interpreted as an omen of impending misfortune or calamity for the dwelling's occupants. The vocalization of lizards within a domicile induces anxiety among its inhabitants, as it is perceived as a harbinger of adversity, particularly if family members are traveling, as depicted in the short story "Durama" (Tawar, 2010). Crows are regarded as portents of calamity, consequently eliciting fear and deterring their extermination.

Seekor cicak merayap dari balik jam dinding, berdecak lalu menyelinap di balik baju yang tergantung di tiang. Terdengar koak-kaek burung gagak dari atas bubungan surau. Sesekali suara burung itu terdengar lebih panjang. Saat itu pula Dulakkap terkejut dan mulai curiga. Cicak itu membuat perasaan Satnawi tak nyaman" (Tawar, 2010).

A lizard crawled from behind the wall clock, clucked and then slithered under the shirt hanging on the pole. A crow cawed from the ridge of the surau. Every now and then the bird's voice sounded longer. Dulakkap was surprised and became suspicious. The cicak made Satnawi feel uncomfortable" (Tawar, 2010).

Natural environments, sites, or animals that are considered sacred by indigenous populations offer a potential avenue for environmental conservation through cultural respect. The efforts to imbue certain objects and animals with spiritual significance serve as a means of internal fortification and a manifestation of human existence in close proximity to nature. Consequently, there exists a positive influence on the environment as a natural resource that warrants preservation, provided that the supporting community, including shamanic practitioners, continues to regard nature as a locus of their belief system and a reference point for their actions (Sukmawan, 2015). Locations or fauna that retain sacred status within local communities will continue to be revered, conserved, and maintained, thus offering hope for their sustainability. These entities are less likely to face extinction due to human activities, as there is a perceived intimate connection between the tangible world and the supernatural realm, which is believed to be mutually beneficial.

Conclusion

This collection of short stories by young Madurese authors serves as a vital documentation of Madurese ethnic civilization, emphasizing the interconnectedness of culture and environmental preservation. Through its portrayal of harmony with nature, it advocates for a way of life that honours cultural values, including environmental stewardship and the preservation of artistic traditions. These narratives foster positive behaviours such as communal solidarity and mutual respect, showcasing local cultural elements—traditional attire, cow racing, shamans, and village events—that reinforce local wisdom and sustainability. The characters embody moral principles of responsibility and care for the environment, making them exemplary figures in the narrative.

Importantly, this collection contributes significantly to ecocritical literary studies by illustrating how fiction integrates cultural identity with ecological consciousness. The nuanced language employed in these stories facilitates a deeper understanding of the interplay between human life, culture, and nature, enriching the field of ecocriticism with its focus on indigenous wisdom and environmental ethics. However, while the collection highlights significant cultural elements, it is essential to question whether all facets of Madurese culture are adequately represented. The diversity within the Madurese community—spanning different social classes, rural vs. urban experiences, and varying degrees of adherence to tradition—may not be fully captured, leaving certain voices, particularly those of marginalized groups or contemporary perspectives, underrepresented. This selective portrayal risks perpetuating a monolithic view of a complex culture that is continuously evolving.

Moreover, the focus on traditional practices might inadvertently promote nostalgia, overlooking the challenges faced by modern Madurese society, such as economic pressures, migration, and the influence of globalization. This could lead to a romanticized vision of cultural preservation that lacks critical engagement with contemporary realities. Despite these limitations, short stories possess significant potential as instruments of social change, serving as powerful mediums to challenge stereotypes, provoke thought, and incite discussion surrounding

pressing social and environmental issues. By exploring contemporary challenges faced by the Madurese—such as climate change and cultural assimilation—these narratives can foster a deeper understanding among readers and encourage a collective response.

Furthermore, short stories can bridge the gap between generations, allowing younger Madurese to engage with their heritage while also addressing the nuances of modern life. This blend of tradition and contemporary relevance can motivate individuals to actively participate in cultural preservation and environmental stewardship, reinforcing the notion that these efforts are crucial for the future. In conclusion, while this collection is a valuable exploration of Madurese culture and ecological consciousness, enhancing its inclusivity and focus on social change can further amplify its impact, inviting readers to engage with both the rich heritage and the dynamic realities of Madurese civilization.

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