
Kocca Lanjheng as a Sign of Honor: Symbolic Communication of Blater's Social Identity in Madura Society

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Kocca Lanjheng as a symbol of honor and social identity within Madurese society, particularly in relation to the social figure of Blater in Bangkalan. Using a qualitative ethnographic–semiotic approach, the research explores how Kocca Lanjheng is interpreted, practiced, and negotiated through everyday social interactions. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that Kocca Lanjheng functions as a contemporary cultural symbol embodying values of honor, firmness, courage, and social legitimacy. Although relatively recent, its acceptance is rooted in long-standing Madurese principles of dignity and collective recognition. The study concludes that Kocca Lanjheng operates as a dynamic symbolic system bridging tradition and modernity, reinforcing collective identity and shaping social relations in Madurese society.

Keywords– Kocca Lanjheng, Blater, Cultural Symbol, Social Identity, Madura



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1. Introduction

Social life in Madurese society is known for having a strong value system with honor as the primary orientation in building and maintaining social relations. Honor is not understood rawly as an individual moral quality, but rather as a collective value that determines a person's position, reputation, and legitimacy within the social structure of the community. This value operates as an ethical guideline as well as a social mechanism that regulates behavior, interaction, and how individuals are perceived by their community.

In the culture of the Nusantara, visual symbols often function as identity markers and media for social communication. Clothing attributes, specifically head coverings, frequently contain symbolic meanings that transcend their practical functions. In Madurese society, for instance, one prominent visual symbol is the Kocca Lanjheng, a high-shaped head covering that is visually very easy to recognize and has a strong association with honor, authority, and social status. The term kocca means head covering or what is commonly called a peci, while lanjheng means long or tall; thus, literally, Kocca Lanjheng can be interpreted as a towering peci or songkok. There is another name for Kocca Lanjheng, which is Kocca Tegghi, meaning tall peci, which is synonymous with the term Kocca Lanjheng itself. Although this term has not been widely studied academically, in social practice within Madurese society, this symbol has long been known and interpreted as a representation of honor and cultural identity.

The existence of Kocca Lanjheng cannot be separated from the social figure of the Blater, an informal leader who gains social legitimacy through courage, firmness, formal power, the ability to maintain social harmony and order, and even the possession of ilmu kanuragan. Ilmu kanuragan is a traditional martial art knowledge that relies on physical and spiritual strength to achieve extraordinary abilities—such as invulnerability or the ability to withstand attacks—to increase strength beyond normal human limits. The Blater does not hold formal power but is culturally recognized as a respected local elite. In this context, Kocca Lanjheng functions as a nonverbal symbol that

strengthens the social legitimacy of the blater, conveying messages of authority, recognition, and honor without the need for verbal communication. This symbol works as a social language that is collectively understood by the Madurese people.

The research gap lies in the lack of studies linking the Kocca Lanjheng symbol with the process of social identity formation and the social legitimacy of the blater within the context of contemporary Madurese society. Furthermore, the dynamics of the meaning of Kocca Lanjheng amidst social change and modernization have not been widely discussed. In fact, in recent years, this symbol has been used increasingly often and has experienced a shift in function, not only as a traditional attribute but also as an expression of identity and a presentation of honor in a broader social space.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze how the Madurese community, particularly in Bangkalan Regency, interprets Kocca Lanjheng as a symbol of social honor, and how this symbol plays a role in strengthening the social legitimacy of the blater. This research positions Kocca Lanjheng as a form of symbolic communication that represents the values of honor, social structure, and cultural identity dynamics in Madurese society. Thus, this research is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the study of cultural communication and social identity, while enriching the understanding of the transformation of local cultural symbols in the midst of social change.

2. Method

This research utilizes the constructivism-interpretivism paradigm, which views social reality as a result of the construction of meaning through interaction. An ethnographic approach is employed to understand the symbolic meaning of Kocca Lanjheng from the perspective of cultural actors (emic). Data collection techniques include participant observation, in-depth interviews with blater figures, community leaders, and experts in the fields of culture and sociology, as well as the documentation of cultural artifacts.

Data analysis is conducted using an ethnographic approach. The data are analyzed in a descriptive-interpretative manner to understand the symbolic meaning of Kocca Lanjheng based on the experiences, perspectives, and social practices of the Madurese people. The analysis stages involve the preparation of ethnographic descriptions regarding the use of the symbol, the categorization of emerging themes of meaning from observation and interview results, and the interpretation of cultural significance within a broader social context. The validity of the data is maintained through source and method triangulation, member checking, and researcher reflection on the research process and findings.

3. Result and Discussion

Kocca Lanjheng as Collective Identity

The research findings indicate that Kocca Lanjheng functions as a visual marker of social identity. In various social activities, the presence of Kocca Lanjheng immediately triggers specific associations regarding the status, authority, and social position of the wearer. This symbol operates as a collective identity that represents not only the individual but also the group values embedded within them. These findings confirm that the identity of a blater is constructed not only through personal traits or social actions but also through visual symbols communicated nonverbally.

These findings align with research by Abdur Rohman (2022), which asserts that blater identity is formed through the social recognition of an ideal construction of masculinity. While Rohman emphasizes the performativity of masculine characters such as bravery and gallantry, this study shows that the construction of that identity is also reinforced through symbolic representation, specifically the use of Kocca Lanjheng. Thus, this research expands the study of blater identity by adding the dimension of cultural symbols as a medium for expressing honor.

In field observations, Kocca Lanjheng is frequently worn during specific moments, such as informal community gatherings like sandur or aremoh. Literally, sandur or aremoh refers to a gathering or assembly organized by an individual or a family for the purpose of congregating with close friends, relatives, and the local

community. The use of this symbol is not arbitrary; rather, it is understood as a form of self-representation that reflects dignity and honor. The height or shape of the kocca is often interpreted as an expression of pride and self-confidence, despite the absence of standardized rules regarding its size or model. Kocca Lanjheng serves as a symbolic language that facilitates the community in recognizing identity, reinforcing the view that visual symbols play a strategic role in shaping and maintaining collective identity within Madurese culture.

Kocca Lanjheng as a Symbol of Honor and Social Legitimacy for the Blater

Kocca Lanjheng is closely linked to the legitimacy of a blater as an informal local elite. This symbol does not merely provide recognition but also affirms the moral responsibility of the blater as a figure who protects the community and maintains social order. The community perceives that the use of Kocca Lanjheng requires the wearer to maintain behaviors and attitudes aligned with the values of honor. A blater typically wears the Kocca Lanjheng during sandur or aremoh events. Usually, a blater hosts a sandur or aremoh to maintain ties with relatives, family, and the local community, as well as to hold celebrations, religious commemorations, or other social activities that serve as opportunities for people to gather.

This finding is consistent with the research of Khoiri et al. (2024), which demonstrates that blater possess strong social authority outside formal legal structures through moral legitimacy and social influence. However, while Khoiri et al. emphasize power relations and the position of the blater within the socio-political structure, this study highlights how that legitimacy is reinforced through cultural symbols. Consequently, Kocca Lanjheng is understood as a visual representation of the social authority previously described structurally in earlier research.

The results of this study also relate to the findings of Rozaki (2009), who explains that blater legitimacy is formed through historical processes and long-term social relations. Unlike Rozaki, who emphasizes the historical and political power dimensions of the blater, this study focuses on contemporary symbolic

expressions used by the blater to assert their honor and social identity in everyday life.

The Dynamics of Meaning of Kocca Lanjheng in Contemporary Social Contexts

The meaning of Kocca Lanjheng undergoes dynamics alongside social changes in Madurese society. This symbol is not only used in traditional contexts but is also present in broader social spaces as an expression of identity and cultural pride. Nevertheless, the value of honor remains the core of the symbol's interpretation. For instance, according to an explanation from one informant, Kocca Lanjheng is now increasingly used for stylistic purposes. Mr. Ipung, a former blater, stated that the actual symbol of honor is the odheng. Similar to the Kocca Lanjheng, the odheng is a traditional head covering made of cloth, serving as a complement to Madurese attire that symbolizes identity, social status, or spiritual readiness.

Research by Listiana et al. (2024) asserts that values of honor and social duty (estô) are still maintained by the blater in modern Madurese society. This study strengthens those findings by showing that these values are not only practiced normatively but are also communicated through material symbols such as Kocca Lanjheng. Thus, this symbol functions as a concrete medium that bridges traditional values and contemporary social practices.

4. Conclusion

Kocca Lanjheng operates as a dynamic symbolic system that represents honor, identity, and the social legitimacy of the Blater in Madura. This symbol bridges the gap between tradition and modernity, strengthens collective identity, and shapes social relations through non-verbal communication. These findings reaffirm the ability of local culture to adapt without losing its core essential values.

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