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Bargaining for the Good Fate: An Ethnography of the Social Mobility of Madurese Migrant Traders in Jakarta

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Abstrak

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman para pedagang migran yang memiliki jaringan warung kelontong kecil di Jakarta. Warung Madura mengacu pada warung kelontong kecil milik pedagang pendatang asal Pulau Madura yang kini menjamur di Jakarta. Melalui pendekatan etnografi, artikel ini memberikan gambaran rinci tentang perjalanan pedagang migran dalam mengembangkan bisnis Warung Madura. Kami melakukan penelitian lapangan selama empat bulan dan melakukan wawancara mendalam dengan 16 pemilik Warung Madura di Jakarta. Pengalaman para migran Madura mendirikan usaha di luar negeri menunjukkan aspirasi mereka terhadap mobilitas sosial vertikal. Terlepas dari tantangan dan kendala yang dihadapi, para pemilik Warung Madura dalam penelitian ini dapat dikatakan cukup berhasil dalam membangun usahanya. Naik turunnya perjalanan membangun jaringan Warung Madura dapat dianalisa secara sosiologis melalui kacamata modal sosial dan mobilitas sosial sebagai upaya strategisnya dalam menavigasi struktur sosial yang seringkali menjadi kendala dan peluang. Artikel ini menawarkan eksplorasi etnografi mendalam mengenai langkah-langkah strategis yang dilakukan pedagang migran Madura dalam membangun kemandirian sosial ekonomi melalui jaringan Warung Madura di tengah keterbatasan lingkungan barunya di Jakarta.

Kata Kunci: *Warung Madura, Modal Sosial, Pedagang Migran, Mobilitas Sosial, Etnografi*

Abstract

This article explores the experiences of migrant traders who own a network of small grocery stalls in Jakarta. *Warung Madura* refers to the small grocery stalls owned by migrant traders from Madura Island that are currently mushrooming in Jakarta. Through an ethnographic approach, this article provides a detailed description of the journey of migrant traders in developing the *Warung Madura* business. We conducted four months of field research and conducted in-depth interviews with 16 *Warung Madura* owners in Jakarta. The experiences of Madurese migrants in establishing their businesses in the overseas land demonstrate their aspirations for vertical social mobility. Despite the challenges and constraints faced, the owners of *Warung Madura* in this study can be said to be quite successful in building their businesses. The ups and downs of the journey of building the *Warung Madura* network can be analyzed sociologically through the lens of social capital and social mobility as their strategic efforts in navigating social structures that often function as constraints and opportunities. This article offers an in-depth ethnographic exploration of the strategic steps taken by Madurese migrant traders in building socio-economic independence through the *Warung Madura* network amidst the limitations of their new environment in Jakarta.

Keywords: *Warung Madura, Social Capital, Migrant Traders, Social Mobility, Ethnography*

INTRODUCTION

The tradition of migration among the Madurese people is deeply rooted in history, predating the independence of Indonesia (Wekke et al., 2019; Suyanto et al., 2020). Over the course of history, the Madurese have made significant contributions to various sectors, including agriculture, plantations, and trade, as they ventured into different regions in pursuit of better livelihoods.

Over the past two decades, the phenomenon of *Warung Madura* has not only gained attention, but has become an integral part of Jakarta's urban landscape. These small grocery stores, owned by Madura migrants, are strategically located in residential areas, and offer a wide range of daily necessities. The affordability of the products they offer has made these stalls popular with residents, contributing to their widespread presence throughout the city.

With their numbers reaching the thousands, *Warung Madura* establishments play a vital role in supporting the local economy. Beyond serving as retail outlets, these businesses are a tangible indicator of the successful adaptation and sustainable entrepreneurship of Madurese migrants in the capital (Garip, 2008). Their ability to establish and maintain such a substantial presence underscores the resilience and business acumen of the Madurese community, demonstrating how they have not only integrated into the urban fabric, but also actively contributed to Jakarta's economic vibrancy.

The success of *Warung Madura* in Jakarta is a testament to the remarkable resilience and entrepreneurial development of its owners (Clark et al., 2018). Operating in an environment where large mini markets provide significant competition, these small grocery stalls not only survive but thrive, carving out a niche that meets the specific needs of local communities. This success story offers new hope to migrant traders, who often face significant challenges in establishing businesses in unfamiliar areas (Pieterse, 2003).

Warung Madura's ability to thrive despite the limitations faced by migrant entrepreneurs is an inspiring example of how social capital and perseverance can play a key role in overcoming economic challenges (Seferiadis et al., 2015). The tight-knit networks within the Madurese community, coupled with the determination of individual entrepreneurs, create a synergy that fosters success even in the face of intense competition. Unfortunately, despite the obvious importance of the *Warung Madura* in Jakarta's economic landscape, there has been a noticeable lack of focused research on this phenomenon (Wekke et al., 2019; Suyanto et al., 2020). The limited attention given to sociological research on ethnic-based economic models, particularly in the context of Madurese ethnicity, has left a significant gap in understanding the intricacies of the *Warung Madura* business network.

The lack of scholarly exploration of the various facets of the *Warung Madura* implies an urgent need for further research. An in-depth examination of this economic model could shed light on the social, cultural, and economic dynamics at play within the Madura community and their impact on the broader society. Understanding the nuances of the *Warung Madura* business network is critical not only for academic purposes, but also for policymakers and community stakeholders, as it could inform strategies that promote sustainable economic development and inclusivity in diverse urban environments.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. This approach focuses on the description and interpretation of culture, norms, values, and social practices that are part of the daily life of a community (Noer, 2012). Ethnography in this research involves intensive and direct field activities at the research site where the group or community is located. In this context, we lived in rented houses, in several research locations, namely in Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi (or often abbreviated as Jabodetabek), near Madurese grocery stall points, for approximately four months, from July to October 2023. We observed and interacted directly with the owners and keepers of Madurese stalls and conducted in-depth interviews with 16 informants of Madurese stall owners and

keepers. In conducting ethnographic research, we focus not only on what informants say, but also on what they do, and how cultural meanings are created and articulated in their daily lives.

The data we use in this research are primary data and secondary data. Primary data is drawn from the results of field observations at the research location, as well as the results of in-depth interviews with informants. Field observations were conducted for four months in a participatory manner, almost every day, at the location points of *Warung Madura*. In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, with 16 informants who are owners and keepers of *Warung Madura*. The recorded interviews were then transcribed into Indonesian. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from document sources in the form of books, journal articles and other archives related to Madurese grocery stalls in Jakarta.

The data analysis stage in the ethnographic approach begins with the transcription of qualitative data, including interviews, field observations, and field notes (Kadir, 2023). The data can be in the form of written text, audio recordings, or video recordings (Portes et al., 2005). Next, the researcher attempts to develop a narrative or story that explains the findings in the field. This process involves reorganizing the data in the form of a coherent story or description, creating a complete and more comprehensive picture of the lives of the people or groups under study. The analysis of cultural meanings becomes the next focus, with an attempt to understand the way individuals in the group give meaning to their experiences, values, and social practices. Personal reflection and interpretation are the next step, where the researcher creates a space to reflect and read between the lines, bringing the researcher's own understanding into the interpretation of the data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Warung Madura and Social Mobility of Madurese Migrant Traders in Jakarta

Madurese, as one of the ethnic groups in Indonesia, have a rich cultural heritage, one of which is their tendency to migrate outside their home region (Wekke et al., 2019). This phenomenon of migration is not only a tradition, but also a reflection of the values upheld in the life of the Madurese people (Salazar, 2010). The Madurese culture of migration is also reflected in the culinary diversity, with the spread of Madurese specialties to various parts of Indonesia (Sridhar et al., 2013; Utomo, 2019). Thus, the continuation of the Madurese tradition of migration not only strengthens their cultural identity, but also makes a positive contribution to building harmonious networks throughout the archipelago (Salazar, 2016).

Madurese migrants often look to Jakarta as their main destination, as the city offers broader and more dynamic economic opportunities. As the capital of Indonesia, Jakarta is the center of business and economic activities, attracting many companies and businesses (Rochadi, 2021). This creates more and diverse job opportunities, which is a major attraction for Madurese migrants seeking to improve their socio-economic conditions (Deshingkar, 2006). This process not only enriches the experience of Madurese migrants in the economic context, but also creates new dynamics in the social structure of the city, where migrants participate in building wider social and economic networks (Losoncz, 2020). By migrating to Jakarta, Madurese migrants hope to improve their standard of living through better economic opportunities and contribute to the economic development of Jakarta as the center of growth and progress in Indonesia (Rochadi, 2021).

These Madurese communities often form solid networks working in various sectors such as street vendors, motorcycle taxi drivers, and various other types of small businesses (Landa, 2018). The involvement of Madurese in this informal economic sector not only creates a vital source of income for their families, but also contributes to meeting the growing economic needs of the city (Salazar, 2010). The existence of Madurese communities in Jakarta's informal economic sectors also illustrates the dynamics of migration and cultural adaptation, where Madurese migrants successfully adapt to a different urban environment.

Since the last two decades, the existence of small grocery stalls owned by Madurese migrant traders in Jakarta has become an interesting phenomenon that reflects their significant role in the urban economy. These grocery stalls become centers of micro-economic activity, providing employment for local residents, and indirectly helping to drive the city's economy (Jannah et al., 2021). Through these trade trips, Madurese migrant traders bring their cultural nuances and local wisdom into Jakarta's daily life (Devika et al., 2020; Mas'udah, 2020).

Madurese stalls that increasingly dominate the grocery business sector in Jakarta not only function as a place of business, but also become an important means in the journey of social mobility for Madurese. Owning and managing grocery stalls provides significant economic opportunities for Madurese, enabling them to achieve economic prosperity and improve their standard of living (Kutor et al., 2021). The grocery stalls they manage not only act as a place for buying and selling, but also serve as a base for building close-knit social and economic networks. In the process, solid economic communities are formed, where traders support each other and share experiences (Mohanty et al., 2016). *Warung Madura* is

not only a place of business, but also a symbol of Madurese adaptability, entrepreneurship, and hard work in a fast-paced and dynamic urban environment (Wahab et al., 2020).

The concept of social mobility includes the dynamics of changes in the social status, economic position, and educational level of a person or group in the trajectory of society (Kartikawangi, 2017). Social mobility can take many forms, one of which is vertical mobility, which involves the movement of individuals or groups from one social layer to another (Panggabean & Smith, 2011). In this context, individuals or groups may experience an increase or decrease in social status, depending on factors such as job performance, education, or economic factors. Social mobility analysis enables a deeper understanding of how individuals or groups move within society, illustrating the complex interactions between economic, educational, and social environmental factors in shaping a person's or group's journey of social mobility within society.

The social mobility that occurs among migrant Madurese shopkeepers in Jakarta includes complex dimensions of social mobility (Mu & Yeung, 2018). First, there is the aspect of vertical social mobility, which shows the movement of individuals or groups from one social layer to a higher or lower social layer. In this context, Madurese migrant traders who own *Warung Madura* can experience an increase in social status through the success of their business (Wekke et al., 2019). In addition, this social mobility can also be seen in the form of intragenerational social mobility, where individuals experience a change in social or economic status within their lifetime. Madurese migrant traders may start from a lower economic position and, over time, manage to improve their social and economic status through effort and dedication in running a *Warung Madura*.

Social Capital of *Warung Madura* in Jakarta: Norms, Trust, and Social Networks

The rapid development of *Warung Madura* in Jakarta is not only influenced by economic factors alone but is also closely related to the amount of social capital owned by Madurese grocery stall owners. Social capital includes interpersonal networks, social norms and trust that develop in a society (Adedeji, 2021). Strong interpersonal networks help them to gain support, both from fellow Madurese migrant traders and loyal customers (Mu & Yeung, 2018). The trust instilled in these social relationships also creates a positive reputation for *Warung Madura*, attracting more customers and building business sustainability (Prayitno et al., 2014).

In the context of *Warung Madura*, the magnitude of social capital can be understood through the distinctive Madurese cultural values and norms, which become the main foundation in running their business. Values such as hard work, honesty, and the spirit of

cooperation form the basis of daily interactions, creating a strong foundation for business sustainability. In addition, the strong Madurese ethnic social network also plays an important role in strengthening social capital (Prayitno et al., 2014). In overseas dynamics, trust between fellow Madurese also plays a key role. By harnessing this social capital, *Warung Madura* becomes not only a place of business, but also a center of social and economic interaction that enriches life in the middle of a busy metropolis (Seferiadis et al., 2015).

The Madurese cultural values and norms that are the source of *Warung Madura's* social capital mainly stem from its rich traditions, such as expressions, proverbs, and customs that have been passed down from generation to generation. These traditions not only create uniqueness in the operation of *Warung Madura*, but also become a way for the owners to establish close relationships with customers. Madurese phrases and proverbs are often effective communication tools, creating a warm and familiar atmosphere among customers (Wahab et al., 2020). In line with Madurese cultural values, Islamic religious teachings also play an important role in shaping *Warung Madura's* social capital (Garip, 2008). The business ethics applied by *warung* owners often reflect moral values in Islam, such as honesty, responsibility, and fairness (Berry, 2005; Fatmawati, 2020).

In the operationalization of *Warung Madura*, religious figures, especially *kiai*, play a central role in various decision-making processes that affect business development and expansion. The involvement of *kiai* in strategic decisions, such as when to open a new stall, stems not only from their religious authority, but also from policies that are in line with Islamic values. The decision to open a new *warung* is not only viewed in terms of economic potential, but also from the perspective of business sustainability in line with religious teachings. *Kiai* contributes to shaping an ethical business culture, creating an environment that is sustainable and oriented towards Islamic moral values (Lücking, 2017).

In addition to values and norms, social capital in the form of social networks is a key element in the development of *Warung Madura* in Jakarta. This social network includes the close relationship between stall owners with the Madurese migrant trader community and loyal customers (Papastergiadis, 2000). In the business context, this social network helps in the exchange of information regarding market opportunities, consumer trends and effective business strategies. The existence of social networks not only expands *Warung Madura's* market share, but also forms a competitive business community (Mas'udah, 2020).

Almost all owners and keepers of *Warung Madura* in Jakarta come from Madura Island and are native Madurese, reinforcing the ethnic dimension and cultural sustainability in *warung* operations. Their presence in Jakarta often involves family, friends, or neighbors

who have close kinship ties. This kinship not only creates a familiar and trusting working atmosphere within the *warung*, but also builds a highly effective social network (Weinreich, 2009). The presence of family members or close friends as stall keepers not only helps in managing day-to-day operations but is also a vital form of emotional and financial support. In an often-challenging urban environment, the presence of relatives or friends as part of the *warung* team provides a sense of community and security, strengthening the spirit of gotong-royong and mutual assistance.

The recruitment process of Madurese shopkeepers in Jakarta often utilizes kinship relations as the main foundation. In the Madurese migrant trader community, information related to labor needs in various stalls is often spread through a network of kinship relationships (Garip, 2008). Family, friends, or even neighbors often become intermediaries who communicate job vacancies in certain stalls to individuals who are looking for work. Ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious similarities are important elements that influence the recruitment process of shopkeepers. Moreover, this common factor also ensures that prospective stall keepers have a deep understanding of the culture and values espoused by the stall owner, creating harmony in daily operations.

The social network of *Warung Madura* in Jakarta is not only limited to internal relationships within the Madurese migrant trader community, but also involves close connections with suppliers, agents, or distributors of merchandise. In this context, Madurese grocery stall owners are able to obtain merchandise at more affordable prices and longer payment terms due to solid relationships with agents or distributors. The success of *Warung Madura* depends not only on the quality of the product or service, but also on the stall owner's ability to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with his business partners. In other words, the positive relationship between stall owners and agents is not only a smart economic strategy, but also reflects expertise in building sustainable partnerships, becoming a key factor in maintaining the competitiveness of *Warung Madura* amidst the dynamic business environment of Jakarta.

The good relationship between Madura grocery stall owners and suppliers, agents or distributors cannot be separated from the social capital in the form of trust, which is the main foundation of the existence of *Warung Madura* in Jakarta. This trust not only facilitates business transactions, but also creates the basis for strong and sustainable relationships. This trust also creates a solid social network among stall owners and related parties, such as agents or distributors, forming a mutually supportive business ecosystem. By utilizing this social capital, *Warung Madura* is able to build a solid foundation, face business challenges,

and continue to grow as one of the business entities that plays an important role in the local economy (Garip, 2008).

In the recruitment process of *warung* keepers, *Warung Madura* in Jakarta practices a unique approach where no formal selection process or tests are conducted. More than skill or experience, what is more important in decision-making is the extent to which the *warung* owner knows and trusts the prospective *warung* keeper. This approach is based on social capital in the form of trust, where personal relationships and shared cultural values are key factors (Pieterse, 2003). Recruitment decisions based on this trust not only speed up the process of filling positions, but also help *Warung Madura* reduce unnecessary economic costs associated with formal selection processes.

Uncovering the Socio-Economic Independence of *Warung Madura* Network in Jakarta

The socio-economic independence of the *Warung Madura* network in Jakarta is becoming increasingly prominent along with their ability to survive amidst the various challenges that arise in the effort to build a business in the overseas land. Despite being faced with a competitive and dynamic environment, *Warung Madura* owners have managed to develop resilient business strategies, such as the utilization of social media and inter-stall cooperation to increase their visibility and competitiveness (Jannah et al., 2021). Furthermore, they also demonstrate financial independence by managing their finances wisely and investing in employee training to improve service quality (Clark et al., 2018).

Socio-economic self-reliance is the ability of individuals, families, or communities to fulfill their needs without relying too heavily on external assistance. It involves both economic and social aspects of daily life. From an economic perspective, self-reliance includes the ability to generate and manage one's own financial resources. This includes job search, financial management, and efforts to establish businesses or economic projects. Meanwhile, the social aspect of self-reliance involves the ability to fulfill social and cultural needs. This involves active participation in community activities, fostering social networks, and understanding norms and values in society (Fonchingong & Fonjong, 2002). Ensuring that this access is equitable and sustainable can help build the foundation for an independent life (Fonchingong & Fonjong, 2002).

Despite being migrants, the owners of *Warung Madura* in Jakarta are able to optimally utilize the resources and social capital they have. This can be seen in their ability to build a strong network of relationships with local merchants, loyal customers, and the surrounding community (Nel & Binns, 2000; Kartikawangi, 2017). Consequently, their ability to leverage resources and social capital becomes not only the key to business success but also a

demonstration that collaboration and integration within the local community can be a primary driver in facing challenges as newcomers in a new environment (Nonini, 2015).

The socio-economic self-reliance of *Warung Madura* is also reflected in the owners' decision to manage the business without relying on bank credit as capital (Augendra et al., 2019). This step demonstrates independence in financial management and reduces dependence on external sources. The owners of *Warung Madura* prefer to use their own funds, acquired through personal savings or the proceeds from previous businesses. This decision not only mitigates risks associated with interest rates and loan installments but also gives them greater control over the direction and policies of the business (Booth, 2001; Rini et al., 2023).

Although the government has offered credit schemes for micro, small, and medium enterprises (UMKM), including those in the informal sector, the owners of *Warung Madura* intentionally choose not to apply for credit and opt to use their personal funds. This decision reveals the cautious and thoughtful approach of *Warung Madura* owners toward the financial aspects of their business (Henley & Boomgaard, 2009). While UMKM credit schemes can provide easier access to capital, they may perceive it as a financial burden that could reduce flexibility and freedom in business management. By choosing to use personal funds, *Warung Madura* owners can maintain decision independence and minimize third-party involvement in their daily operations (Nel & Binns, 2000).

The decision of *Warung Madura* owners not to apply for bank credit and to use their personal funds is also influenced by their religious beliefs, which prohibit borrowing from banks with interest due to its association with usury (Henley & Boomgaard, 2009). Usury, known as "*riba*" in Arabic, refers to the practice of giving or receiving additional or excess in financial transactions involving loaned money (Fatmawati, 2020). In Islam, *riba* is viewed as a form of economic exploitation and is forbidden because it can create inequality and injustice in society. The giving or receiving of additional amounts in financial transactions is considered a violation of the principles of justice and mutual benefit in the Islamic economic system (Fatmawati, 2020).

Religious aspects play a central role in shaping their views on financial and business principles. Incorporating religious values into economic decision-making demonstrates consistency between spiritual beliefs and daily business practices. The owners of *Warung Madura* value integrity and adherence to their religious teachings, which encompass financial aspects (Lücking, 2017). A profound understanding of the concept of usury and the Islamic prohibition against engaging in such practices illustrates the earnestness of *Warung*

Madura owners in building their business in accordance with their deeply held principles (Panjaitan-Drioadisuryo & Cloud, 1999; Augendra et al., 2019). This decision, in harmony with local values and religion, creates a sustainable business environment where *Warung Madura* is not just a center of economic activity but also an entity that promotes sustainability, integrity, and positive participation in Jakarta's society (Devika et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

The success of *Warung Madura* owners in Jakarta, particularly in terms of business growth and vertical social mobility, can be closely linked to the robust social networks within the Madurese community, especially those from Sumenep who reside in Jakarta. These tight-knit social ties serve as a foundational element, providing vital support mechanisms that play a critical role in the expansion and sustainability of their businesses. From sharing business insights and market trends to providing financial and logistical support, the interconnected web of relationships within the community empowers *Warung Madura* owners to navigate the challenges of urban entrepreneurship.

The success of Madurese entrepreneurs in Jakarta is deeply intertwined with the concept of social capital, which manifests through robust interpersonal networks, strong mutual trust among community members, and adherence to distinctive cultural norms rooted in Madurese traditions. These interconnected dynamics have proven to be a significant driver of their achievements, offering a unique competitive advantage that sets the Madurese community apart from other ethnic groups in Indonesia.

The socio-economic independence achieved by Madurese stall owners in Jakarta is a testament to the collaborative efforts within the Madurese community, emphasizing that their success is not solely attributed to individual endeavors. Instead, it is fortified by the social capital that has evolved into a vital foundation for the informal economic activities of Madurese migrant traders in the capital city. The spirit of cooperation and mutual support among Madurese citizens plays a pivotal role in creating a conducive environment for the sustained growth of their businesses.

The Madurese grocery store network, built upon the foundation of social capital, stands as a noteworthy model that can be leveraged as a reference to enhance the socio-economic independence of ethnic economy-based Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia. This model suggests that by fostering strong interpersonal networks, cultivating mutual trust, and incorporating cultural norms into business practices, MSMEs can not only survive but thrive. The Madurese example highlights the

importance of community cohesion and collaboration in achieving sustained success. As such, there is an opportunity for policymakers and business development agencies to draw lessons from the Madurese grocery store network and implement supportive measures for MSMEs across diverse ethnic groups.

Recommendations for policymakers include creating platforms that encourage collaboration among entrepreneurs within specific ethnic communities, providing targeted support for MSMEs rooted in unique cultural practices, and fostering an inclusive environment that celebrates and capitalizes on the diversity of social and cultural resources. By doing so, the development of ethnic-based MSMEs can contribute significantly to sustainable economic growth at the community level, fostering a more inclusive and resilient economic landscape in Indonesia.

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