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Islam, Representation, and Ethnic Stereotypes: Genealogy of the Construction of Madurese Identity in Javanese-Madura Relations in the Digital Space

Abdul Halim[1*], Mardiana Haris[2]
[1]IAI Hasan Jufri Bawean, Indonesia, [2]IAI DDI Maros Indonesia
Email: abdulhalim_inhafi@gmail.com [2], emiratsdien@gmail.com[2]

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Abstrak

Representasi orang Madura dalam hubungan Jawa–Madura sering dikaitkan dengan stereotip seperti keras, kasar, temperamental, dan kekerasan. Di ruang digital, representasi ini direproduksi melalui humor, meme, komentar, dan komunikasi sehari-hari. Dari perspektif Islam, hal ini menimbulkan pertanyaan penting karena Al-Qur'an menekankan keberagaman sebagai sarana ta'āruf (pengakuan timbal balik), melarang ejekan dan pelabelan merendahkan, serta menolak penilaian berdasarkan perbedaan etnis dan sosial. Studi ini meneliti silsilah representasi Madura dalam hubungan Jawa–Madura dan menganalisis bagaimana representasi tersebut direproduksi, dinegosiasikan, dan diperdebatkan dalam ruang digital dari perspektif Islam. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan netnografi kualitatif, buku ini menganalisis konten digital, komentar, humor, meme, dan percakapan publik mengenai identitas Madura melalui teori representasi Stuart Hall, konsep kekuatan simbolik Pierre Bourdieu, perspektif genealogis Michel Foucault, dan konsep Islam *ta'āruf, ḥusn al-ẓ ann, ukhuwwah*, serta larangan *sukhriyah, tanābuz bi al-alqāb*, dan *ghibah*. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa stereotip etnis dihasilkan melalui kategorisasi, penyederhanaan, pengulangan, pengenalan, dan naturalisasi. Humor berfungsi sebagai mekanisme mikro yang membuat representasi stereotip menjadi akrab secara sosial. Dari perspektif Islam, praktik semacam ini menjadi bermasalah ketika perbedaan etnis diubah menjadi penilaian negatif, ejekan, dan asumsi umum. Prinsip Al-Qur'an ta'āruf menyediakan epistemologi alternatif yang memahami keberagaman bukan sebagai dasar hierarki, melainkan sebagai kesempatan untuk saling pengakuan. Dengan demikian, studi ini berpendapat bahwa stereotip Madura harus dipahami tidak hanya sebagai masalah representasi budaya tetapi juga sebagai pertanyaan etika Islam dalam mewakili Yang Lain.

Keywords:

Islam; Madura; stereotypes; representation; digital space; *ta'āruf*; netnography.

Abstract

The representation of Madurese people in Javanese–Madura relations has often been associated with stereotypes such as being harsh, rude, temperamental, and violent. In digital spaces, these representations are reproduced through humor, memes, comments, and everyday communication. From an Islamic perspective, this raises important questions because the Qur'an emphasizes diversity as a means of ta'āruf (mutual recognition), prohibits ridicule and derogatory labeling, and rejects judgments based on ethnic and social distinctions. This study examines the genealogy of Madurese representations in Javanese–Madura relations and analyzes how they are reproduced, negotiated, and contested in digital spaces from an Islamic perspective. Using a qualitative netnographic approach, it analyzes digital content, comments, humor, memes, and public conversations concerning Madurese identity through Stuart Hall's theory of representation, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, Michel Foucault's genealogical perspective, and Islamic concepts of ta'āruf, ḥusn al-ẓann, ukhuwwah, and prohibitions of sukhriyah, tanābuz bi al-alqāb, and ghibah. Findings indicate that ethnic stereotypes are produced through categorization, simplification, repetition, familiarization, and naturalization. Humor functions as a micro-mechanism making stereotypical representations socially familiar. From an Islamic perspective, such practices become problematic when ethnic differences are transformed into negative judgments, ridicule, and generalized assumptions. The Qur'anic principle of ta'āruf provides an alternative epistemology that understands diversity not as a basis for hierarchy but as an opportunity for mutual recognition. Thus, the study argues that Madurese stereotypes should be understood not only as a cultural representation problem but also as a question of Islamic ethics of representing the Other.

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INTRODUCTION

Javanese-Madura relations have long been colored by a tendency of systematic underestimation, in which Madurese people are positioned as inferior "others" in the face of Javanese cultural constructions that are considered more refined and civilized (Wiyata, 2002; Hefner, 2011). Hard, rude, temperamental, and identical stereotypes to carok are not just remnants of colonial views, but continue to be reproduced in daily interactions through humor and anecdotes (Ida, 2008). In the digital space, these stereotypes are massively amplified. Social media such as TikTok and Instagram facilitate the rapid spread of negative images, as well as naturalize them through entertainment content consumed by the younger generation (Nasrullah, 2017). As a result, ethnic prejudice seems natural, neutral, natural, and almost undeniable.

Existing literature has documented stereotypes against ethnic Madurese in various contexts: cross-cultural communication in the university environment (Savitri, 2020), ethnic humor as a mechanism for reproducing stereotypes (Ida, 2008), and analysis of digital discourse in social media comment columns (Lim, 2018). These studies generally use representational frameworks, social construction, or critical discourse analysis. However, there is a significant gap: the ethical-Islamic dimension of this representation practice is rarely the focus of analysis. In fact, the majority of Madurese and Javanese people are Muslims, and Islam has explicit principles of prohibition of demeaning (QS al-Hujurat/49:11), good prejudice, and ta'āruf (QS al-Hujurat/49:13). This gap needs to be filled so that the study of representation does not lose its ethical footing.

To bridge the gap, this research integrates critical theoretical frameworks and Islamic perspectives. Stuart Hall (1997) on representation is used to dissect the production of the meaning of "Madura" through the practice of signification; Pierre Bourdieu (1991) on symbolic power to analyze how dominant groups establish categories and judgments; and Michel Foucault's genealogy (1977) to trace how stereotypes become the "truth" of common sense through repetition and naturalization. This framework is complemented by Islamic concepts: ta'āruf as an alternative epistemology (M. A. Abdullah, 2006), ḥusn al-ẓ ann as an ethics of good prejudice, and ukhuwwah as a bond of brotherhood that transcends ethnic boundaries (Ramadan, 2004). This integration allows for representational analysis as well as ethical criticism of stereotyping practices.

This research aims to analyze the genealogy of Madurese representation in Javanese-Madurese relations and how these representations are reproduced, negotiated, and contested in the digital space, with an Islamic perspective as an ethical lens. The main argument is that Madurese ethnic stereotypes are not just a matter of cultural representation, but a matter of Islamic ethics in representing the "Other". When ethnic differences are transformed into negative judgments, ridicule, and generalist assumptions, the practice is contrary to the principle of ta'āruf which places diversity as an opportunity to know each other, not as a basis for hierarchy (QS al-Hujurat/49:13). This study offers a conceptual contribution in the form of integration of representational criticism with Islamic ethics to understand inter-ethnic relations in Indonesia more fairly and equally.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with the netnography method, which is a systematic, immersive, and multimodal study of online communities and cultures through observation, digital footprints, and elicitation (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2022). Netnography was chosen because it is able to capture the practice of ethnic stereotypical representations that take place in everyday digital interactions, including humor, memes, and comments (Kozinets, 2023). Different from virtual ethnography which only provides general philosophical guidance, netnography offers detailed operational and ethical procedures and is constantly updated to keep pace with the development of contemporary technocultural platforms and realities (Kozinets, 2025). This approach allows researchers to understand how the meaning of "Madura" is produced and negotiated in natural online conversations.

The research location was focused on social media platforms that actively produce discourse on Madura identity, especially Instagram and TikTok, taking into account the level of engagement and relevance of the content. The site selection criteria included the quality of interaction, security, ethical aspects, and suitability with the research question, not just the popularity of the account (Sádaba & Fernández, 2023). Data were collected through participatory observation, archiving of uploads,

comments, and visual materials containing stereotypes or identity negotiations. The time span of data collection was clearly limited to maintain consistency and traceability, as did sampling procedures in netnography that emphasized purposive sampling based on online "place" rather than just individuals.

Data analysis was carried out thematically with an abductive approach, combining theoretical categories from the Hall, Bourdieu, and Foucault frameworks with themes emerging from field data. The analysis process followed the procedural movements of netnography that included identification, immersion, interaction, and interpretation of digital footprints as well as symbolic practices in online communities (Kozinets, 2023). Data were analyzed to uncover the mechanisms of categorization, simplification, repetition, familiarization, and naturalization that make stereotypes seem natural. The analysis was also directed at how humor functions as a micro-mechanism that makes stereotypical representations become socially familiar.

The ethical aspects of the study are of particular concern because the data involve public and semi-public conversations that can contain sensitive SARA-themed content. Researchers follow an ethical framework of netnography that emphasizes contextual considerations of public-private boundaries, intrusivity, risk of harm, and informed consent, especially when researching closed or hard-to-reach online groups (Demant & Moretti, 2024). Participants' identities are anonymized, citations are anonymized, and data is stored securely. This procedure is important because studies of ethnic stereotypes have the potential to reinforce stigmatization if not managed ethically and reflectively.

RESULTS

Yes	Theme	Field Data	Meaning/Findings
1	Categorization and simplification of stereotypes	TikTok and Instagram content associate Madura with being harsh, rude, temperamental, vindictive, and carok; 51% of Gen-Z stereotypical sources come from social media	The digital space is a key socialization agent that reinforces stereotypical categories
2	Humor as a micro-mechanism	Accounts such as @FuadSasmitha and @Boger_Bocor93meledak_Bum convey a derogatory message through humor; the "Jamet" and "ndeso" styles are commented on in a way that reinforces stereotypes	Humor makes stereotypes seem light, familiar, and natural so that they are easy to normalize
3	Normalization and contestation	Comments referred to Madura as a "pest," "Mexican migrants," and associated the "M" plate with negative behavior; @exploremadura and GPM's accounts displayed a positive culture	The digital space is a reproductive arena as well as a resistance to stereotypes
4	Islamic Perspective	Derogatory comments such as "pest," "rioter," and "thug"; generalization of individuals into collective culture	This practice is contrary to the prohibition of sukhriyah, lamz, tanābuz bi al-alqāb, as well as the principles of ḥusn al-ẓ ann and ta'āruf
5	Social impact	67.9% of Madurese Gen-Z felt a	Digital stereotypes have an

Yes	Theme	Field Data	Meaning/Findings
		negative impact; only 3.7% rated positively; cultural dislocation and discomfort in the Madurese language appeared	impact on identity, social distancing, bias, and interethnic discrimination

Findings show that Madurese ethnic stereotypes in the digital space are produced through three main mechanisms: categorization, simplification, and repetition. Content on TikTok and Instagram consistently associates Madurese people with harshness, rudeness, temperamental, vindictiveness, and is synonymous with *carok* violence. This categorization is reinforced by the repetition of netizens' comments that reflexively associate conflict or criminality with ethnic Madurese, even when the content does not explicitly mention ethnic identity. Humor then serves as a micro-mechanism that makes stereotypes seem light and entertaining, so that degrading messages can be accepted as fairness. At the same time, the digital space is also an arena for contestation, as accounts and channels that display Madurese cultural richness emerge as a form of resistance to dominant representation.

From an ethical and social perspective, field data shows that digital stereotypes are not just jokes, but practices that violate Islamic principles of the prohibition of ridicule, denunciation, giving bad titles, and the obligation to be prejudiced and know each other. Comments that refer to Madura as "pests," "rioters," or "thugs" are a form of negative generalization that places ethnic differences as the basis of hierarchy, not a means of *ta'āruf*. The impact is real: 67.9% of Gen-Z Madura respondents feel negatively impacted, only 3.7% rate it positively, and symptoms of cultural dislocation in the form of discomfort in the form of using the Madurese language and decreased pride of identity emerge. Thus, stereotypes in the digital space not only shape the way other groups view Madura, but also the way some Madurese people view themselves.

DISCUSSION

Genealogy of Madura Stereotypes From Categorization to Naturalization

Madurese ethnic stereotypes are not natural facts that are given from birth, but rather historical products that are formed through long power relations. Understanding stereotypes as a genealogical construct allows us to trace how certain categories emerged, survived, and changed over time. Field data show that harsh, harsh, and temperamental attributes do not appear suddenly, but rather through the accumulation of representations inherited from colonial discourse, reinforced by local conflict experiences, and now reproduced in digital space. Madurese stereotypical genealogy reveals that what appears to be a "general truth" about Madurese ethnicity is actually the result of a historical process full of power interests (Wiyata, 2002).

Ethnic categorization in digital discourse serves as a practice of symbolic power that establishes boundaries between "us" and "them." Bourdieu (1991) asserts that symbolic power works through the ability to name, classify, and establish what is considered normal. Analysis of TikTok and Instagram content shows that Madurese people are consistently placed in the categories of "problematic," "rude," and "uncivilized," while other groups are positioned as norms that do not need to be labeled. This categorization is not just a description, but rather a performative act that creates a social reality about who is considered appropriate and who is seen as a threat.

The simplification of Madurese ethnic identity into a single dimension is a reductionist mechanism that removes cultural complexity. Hall (1997) explains that representation always involves selection and removal; what is displayed is the result of choices that favor the dominant narrative. The data show that the rich traditions of Madura art, music, literature, and religious rituals hardly appear in viral content, while content about carok, violence, and "tacky" behavior gets much higher engagement. This simplification is not accidental, but a consequence of the logic of digital platforms that prioritize sensational content and confirm existing prejudices.

The repetition of negative representations in digital spaces creates a naturalizing effect that makes stereotypes appear as an undeniable reality. Foucault (1977) showed that truth is not found, but rather is

produced through the repetition of discourse in institutions and everyday practices. Field data reveal a pattern in which any content about conflict or criminality without even mentioning ethnicity is reflexively associated with Madura in the comment column, creating an automatic association between Madura and violence. This repetition makes stereotypes part of common sense, so that ethnic prejudice is no longer perceived as prejudice, but rather as an unquestionable "fact".

The naturalization of Madurese stereotypes works most effectively when it is conveyed through colloquial language that seems neutral and non-offensive. Bourdieu (1991) asserts that symbolic violence is most successful when the victim is unaware that they are being subjected to violence. Comments such as "yes it is so Madurese" or "it is normal" appear in digital conversations as statements that are considered normal, unconsciously as a form of degrading generalist labeling. Everyday language that appears to be neutral is actually the most effective vehicle for the reproduction of stereotypes, because it disguises the practice of power as fairness.

The digital space serves as a genealogical archive that records traces of stereotypes over time in a traceable form. Foucault (1977) emphasized the importance of reading discourse as a historical document that shows how power works through the production of knowledge. Viral content about Madura from various periods from early 2010s memes to 2020s TikTok content shows a continuation of themes: violence, rudeness, and cultural inferiority, even as their forms and mediums change. By reading digital space as an archive, we can see that Madurese stereotypes are not a new phenomenon, but rather a continuation of a long-standing genealogy of representation in Javanese-Madura relations.

The naturalization of stereotypes has epistemic consequences: it closes out the possibility of understanding Madurese people as complex individuals. When ethnic categories have become an established "truth," any new information tends to be interpreted to confirm the category. Data show that when Madurese display good behavior or achievements, the response that emerges is often a reinforcement of positive stereotypes that remain essentialistic, such as "it turns out that there are also good Madurese people" (Maulana & Achmad, 2025). The naturalization of stereotypes not only harms Madurese people, but also undermines the public's ability to think critically about diversity and individuality.

The genealogy of Madurese stereotypes reveals that this issue is not a question of right or wrong representation, but a question of the distribution of power to represent. Hall (1997) emphasizes that representation is always related to access to the means of production of meaning. In the digital ecosystem, large accounts and platform algorithms tend to amplify content that conforms to dominant stereotypes, while alternative voices from the Madurese community itself are often marginalized. Therefore, efforts to counter stereotypes are not enough just to spread positive representations, but must touch on the power structures that determine which representations are considered worthy of being heard.

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Humor, Symbolic Violence, and Micro-Mechanisms of Normalization

Humor in digital discourse about Madura serves as a micro-mechanism that makes stereotypes socially acceptable. Bourdieu (1991) explains that symbolic violence works most effectively when it is conveyed through forms that do not seem coercive, including humor and entertainment. Field data show that accounts such as @FuadSasmitha and @Boger_Bocor93meledak_Bum use comedy formats to convey messages that implicitly denigrate the Madurese ethnicity, and this content receives high engagement. Humor is not just a complement to stereotypes, but rather the main instrument that makes degrading messages digestible without resistance.

Ethnic humor works through a mechanism of displacement, in which social tensions are channeled through laughter rather than being openly criticized. As examined in Madura's analysis of humor, jokes are often a release valve for aggression and prejudice that cannot be directly expressed (Herlianto, n.d.). Comments that refer to Madurese as "pests" or "Mexican migrants" are often wrapped up in the format of memes and jokes that make racist messages feel light and entertaining. Thus, humor serves a dual purpose: it conveys a demeaning message while protecting the conveyor from racist or discriminatory accusations.

Humor that demeans ethnic Madurese is often unrealized as a form of symbolic violence by the perpetrator himself. Bourdieu (1991) emphasizes that symbolic violence works through misrecognition, where both the victim and the perpetrator do not recognize the practice as violence. Many content

creators who make jokes about Madurese state that they are "just joking" and do not intend to be demeaning, even though the impact is real on the Madurese audience. This unawareness actually reinforces the effectiveness of symbolic violence, as it closes the space to criticize humor as a detrimental practice.

Humor about Madura serves as a marker of ethnic boundaries that reinforces the hierarchy between the civilized "we" and the rude "them." Hall (1997) asserts that representation always involves power relations that determine who is the center and who is the periphery. In much humorous content, the Javanese are positioned as the laughing spectators, while the Madurese are the objects of laughter; this relationship reflects and reinforces the subordinate position of the Madurese in interethnic relations. Ethnic humor is not a neutral practice, but rather a practice that reproduces and legitimizes ethnic hierarchies in society.

Normalized humor makes Madurese ethnic stereotypes part of the popular cultural repertoire that is inherited between generations. When ethnic humor becomes part of everyday language, it is no longer perceived as prejudice, but rather as a cultural heritage that needs to be preserved. Data shows that 51% of Gen-Z's sources of knowledge about Madurese stereotypes come from social media, and many of them consume ethnic humor content as routine entertainment without critical reflection (Purnamawati et al., 2024). This normalization of ethnic humor has the potential to extend the age of stereotypes far beyond the generation that first produced them.

Resistance to degrading ethnic humor faces challenges because criticism is often perceived as a form of "can't joke." In the digital ecosystem, those who criticize ethnic humor are often positioned as overly sensitive, so criticism of symbolic violence is marginalized. Field data show that comments that reject Madurese stereotypes often receive negative responses, such as "don't baper" or "this is just funny" (Maulana & Achmad, 2025). This mechanism suggests that ethnic humor is not only degrading, but also protects itself from criticism through the strategy of shifting responsibility to the victim.

Humor that demeans Madurese ethnicity has cumulative effects that cannot be reduced to mere "jokes." Every ethnic joke, no matter how small, contributes to the formation of a social climate that normalizes prejudice and discrimination. Data shows that 67.9% of Madurese Gen-Z respondents feel negatively impacted by social media impressions that contain negative labels, suggesting that ethnic humor has real psychological and social consequences (Purnamawati et al., 2024). To dismiss ethnic humor as "mere joke" is to ignore its role in nurturing broader interethnic inequalities.

Countering derogatory ethnic humor requires a strategy that not only prohibits, but also builds critical humor literacy. Because humor has become part of popular culture, repressive approaches tend to be ineffective and can even spark resistance. Field data show that accounts that present Madurese culture in a positive and creative way such @exploremadura are more effective in changing perceptions than those that are preachy. The most productive strategy is to build awareness that humor can remain funny without necessarily being demeaning, and that laughter built on the suffering of others is not free laughter.

Reproduction, Negotiation, and Resistance in the Digital Space

The digital space about Madura is not a single arena, but rather a contested terrain where meanings about ethnicity are contested. Hall (1997) asserts that representation is never final; it is always open to negotiation and challenge by alternative representational practices. Field data show the existence of two major currents: dominant currents that reproduce negative stereotypes, and resistance currents that display the cultural richness and achievements of the Madurese people. These contestations show that the meaning of "Madura" is never stable, but rather is constantly reproduced in a discourse battle involving various actors with different interests.

The most effective strategy of resistance in countering Madurese stereotypes is to display the complexity and diversity of ethnic identities. If stereotypes work through simplification, then resistance must work through the appearance of complexity that cannot be reduced to a single category. The @exploremadura account and the Madura Island Gate (GPM) consistently display Madura's rich and diverse religious traditions, art, language, and rituals, attracting the attention of a wider audience (Maulana & Achmad, 2025). Resistance through the appearance of cultural complexity challenges stereotypes at an epistemic level, by suggesting that Madura identity is much richer than that represented in the dominant discourse.

Short films and narrative content have proven to be more effective in changing perceptions than content. Ethnic perception change does not occur through the presentation of facts, but rather through affective experiences that allow audiences to connect emotionally with the subject. Short films produced by the Mata Pena channel have succeeded in changing the perception of the younger generation and reducing negative stigma against Madurese people, as they feature human stories that are not trapped in stereotypical categories (Hall, 1997). This shows that cultural strategies are not just anti-stereotype campaigns that have greater potential to change the way people perceive other ethnicities.

Digital resistance to Madurese stereotypes faces a structural challenge in the form of platform algorithms that tend to reinforce confirmative content. Social media algorithms are designed to maximize engagement, and content that confirms pre-existing prejudices tends to have higher engagement. Data show that content about Madurese carok and violence gets much higher engagement than content about Madura art and culture, creating an imbalance of visibility (Purnamawati et al., 2024). Without intervention against algorithmic logic, digital resistance will always be at a disadvantage, as it must fight not only prejudice, but also platform architecture that reinforces such prejudices.

Negotiations of meaning about Madurese identity also occur within the Madurese community itself, not only between Madurese and non-Madurese. Ethnic identity is not monolithic; it contains internal, generational, class, and cultural orientation differences that influence how stereotypes are responded to. Field data show differences in responses between older generations who tend to accept stereotypes as "reality" and younger generations who are more actively challenging them through creative content and alternative narratives (Purnamawati et al., 2024). This suggests that resistance to stereotypes is not only external, but also an internal process of communities in redefining their own identities.

The contestation of meaning in the digital space results in hybrid forms of representation that are neither completely stereotypical nor fully resistant. In practice, much Madura content falls between two poles: they use humor and stereotypes as strategies to attract attention, but also insert messages that challenge those stereotypes. Some Madura content creators use a "jamet" style that is often associated with negative stereotypes, but do so in an ironic and self-aware way, thus creating a critical distance from the stereotypes themselves (Maulana & Achmad, 2025). This hybrid representation suggests that resistance is not always in the form of total rejection, but can also be a strategic use of stereotypes for subversive purposes.

The contestation of the meaning of Madura in the digital space cannot be separated from the broader socio-political context. Ethnic representation is always associated with greater power relations, including access to economic, political, and cultural resources. Field data show that Madurese stereotypes often appear in the context of migration, where Madurese people are positioned as immigrants who threaten the social and economic stability of local communities (Herlianto, n.d.). Therefore, countering Madurese stereotypes cannot be done only at the level of representation, but must also touch on the structural inequalities that are at the root of these prejudices.

Resistance to Madurese stereotypes in the digital space requires cross-ethnic solidarity that is not trapped in an essentialistic logic of identity. If resistance is only carried out by the Madurese community itself, it risks being seen as a group interest and not as a broader struggle for justice. Field data show that non-Madurese accounts that display solidarity and support for Madurese culture have a significant impact on changing the perception of their audiences (Hall, 1997). This cross-ethnic solidarity is important because Madurese stereotypes are not only a problem for Madurese people, but a problem for all who believe in justice and equality in interethnic relations.

Islamic Ethics and Other Representations, Ta'aruf as an Alternative Epistemology

The practice of stereotyping ethnic Madurese in the digital space is contrary to Islamic ethical principles regarding the representation of the Other. The Qur'an explicitly prohibits sukhriyah (mocking), lamz (reproaching), and tanābuz bi al-alqāb (giving bad titles), and commands ḥusn al-ẓ ann (good prejudice) and ta'āruf (knowing each other) (QS al-Hujurat/49:11-13). Field data show that comments that refer to Madura as "pests," "rioters," or "thugs" are a form of tanābuz bi al-alqāb that directly establishes a derogatory identity in a group (NU Online, 2024). Thus, ethnic stereotypes are not only a socio-political problem, but also a theological issue that demands ethical accountability before the teachings of Islam.

The principle of ta'āruf offers an alternative epistemology that views ethnic diversity as a means of knowing each other, not as a basis for hierarchy. QS al-Hujurat/49:13 affirms that Allah created people of nations and tribes so that they could know each other (ta'āruf), which implies that differences are a divine design to enrich the human experience. Field data show that where the principle of ta'āruf is applied, such as in content featuring Madura-Javanese cross-cultural dialogue, there is an increase in understanding and a reduction in prejudice (Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020). Ta'āruf is not only an abstract value, but an epistemic framework that can be translated into a more equitable and equitable cross-cultural communication practice.

The generalization of individual behavior into the collective character of ethnic Madurese is contrary to the principles of Islamic justice. Islam teaches that each individual is responsible for his own actions, and that no one should bear the burden of the sins of others (QS al-An'am/6:164). Field data show that the crimes of a Madurese "person" are often directly associated with the Madurese "culture" as a whole, creating an unfair collective stigma (Quraish Shihab, 2002). This generalization not only violates the principles of Islamic justice, but also undermines the possibility of healthy social relations based on respect for individuality.

Ḥusn al-ẓ ann (good prejudice) as an Islamic ethic requires Muslims to refrain from negative prejudice against other ethnic groups. QS al-Hujurat/49:12 expressly prohibits ẓann (prejudice) and ghibah (gossip), as both undermine the social order and violate the rights of others. Field data shows that many negative comments about Madura are based on assumptions and generalizations without evidence, rather than on direct experience or adequate knowledge (NU Online, 2024). Ḥusn al-ẓ ann demands that Muslims develop a critical attitude towards their own prejudices, especially when those prejudices have been normalized by public discourse.

The concept of ukhuwwah (brotherhood) in Islam offers a theological basis for transcending ethnic boundaries in building social solidarity. Islam teaches that all Muslims are brothers (QS al-Hujurat/49:10), and this brotherhood transcends ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences. Field data show that where cross-ethnic solidarity is practiced as in the content of the Madura-Javanese collaboration, there is a reduction in stereotypes and an increase in mutual understanding (Quraish Shihab, 2002). Ukhuwwah is not only a theological idealism, but a social practice that can be actualized in a digital space to counter stereotypes and build stronger social cohesion.

Islam teaches that justice ('adl) should be upheld even against those we do not like. QS al-Ma'idah/5:8 commands Muslims to be just, even towards the hatred, and forbids hatred leading to injustice. Field data show that negative stereotypes against Madurese often lead people to judge the behavior of individual Madurese more harshly than similar behavior from other ethnic groups (Quraish Shihab, 2002). This is a form of injustice that is contrary to the principle of 'adl, and therefore Muslims have a theological obligation to oppose ethnic stereotypes in all their forms.

Islamic ethics about the representation of the Other demands accountability not only in this world, but also in the hereafter. Islam teaches that every deed, including words and writings, will be accountable before Allah (QS al-Zalzalah/99:7-8). Field data shows that many social media users easily write degrading comments without considering the ethical and theological consequences of their actions (NU Online, 2024). This awareness of accountability in the hereafter should be a driver for Muslims to be more careful in representing the Other, especially in the digital space whose footprints are eternal.

The integration of Islamic ethics with representational criticism offers a holistic framework to understand and counter Madurese ethnic stereotypes. Representational criticism without Islamic ethics risks becoming mere secular analysis that loses its transcendental dimension, while Islamic ethics without representational criticism risks becoming abstract moralism that does not touch the structural roots of the problem. Field data show that approaches that combine the two, such as in content that displays Madurese culture in the spirit of ta'āruf, are more effective in changing perceptions than approaches that are only secular or lecture-only (Maulana & Achmad, 2025). Thus, this study offers a conceptual contribution in the form of the integration of representational criticism and Islamic ethics as a framework for understanding and overcoming ethnic stereotypes in interethnic relations in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Madurese ethnic stereotypes in Javanese-Madurese relations are not

natural facts, but genealogical products formed through categorization, simplification, repetition, and naturalization in digital space. Humor serves as a micro-mechanism of symbolic violence that makes degrading representations seem natural, familiar, and even entertaining. The digital space also becomes an arena for contestation: on the one hand it reinforces prejudice, on the other hand it gives birth to resistance through the appearance of cultural complexity and alternative narratives. However, from an Islamic perspective, this stereotyping practice faces serious ethical problems because it violates the prohibitions of *sukhriyah*, *lamz*, *tanābuz bi al-alqāb*, and ignores *ḥusn al-ẓ ann* and *ta'āruf*. Thus, the problem of Madurese stereotypes is not just a question of cultural representation, but a theological problem of how Muslims represent the Other.

The theoretical implications of this study demand the integration of representational criticism with Islamic ethics, not just secular analysis that loses its transcendental dimension. In practical terms, digital literacy rooted in *ta'āruf* and *ḥusn al-ẓ ann* is needed, not just superficial anti-stereotype campaigns. Digital platforms should be encouraged to engineer algorithms that do not reinforce ethnic prejudice, while religious leaders and educators need to transform *ukhuwwah* into a social practice that transcends ethnic boundaries. The sharp suggestion: first, Madurese and non-Madurese communities should build cross-ethnic solidarity that is not trapped by essentialism; second, the researcher then needs to examine how *ta'āruf* can be operationalized in the design of digital interactions; Third, the state and platform must be responsible for an ecosystem of equitable discourse. Without structural and ethical changes, Madurese stereotypes will continue to be reproduced, and condescending laughter will remain a wound inherited between generations.

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