

Madura Bull Racing from an Islamic Perspective: A Study of Ethics, Animal Welfare, and Cultural Preservation

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This study examines Madura bull racing as ancestral cultural heritage with significant historical, social, and economic value. However, from an Islamic perspective, this practice has generated considerable debate within the community. Although the tradition has become an annual event supported by the government, previous practices have, in some respects, inadequately addressed animal welfare. It analyzes animal welfare ethics within the framework of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), specifically focusing on *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān*, and assesses cultural preservation from the Islamic perspective of *al-ʿādah muḥakkamah*. A descriptive qualitative method was used to analyze interview data from informants, including youth leaders, religious figures, former practitioners, and current practitioners. The findings indicate that the Madura bull racing tradition previously involved the use of balm, chillies, and sharp objects to hasten the animals, constituting animal cruelty, which is prohibited by Islam. Following criticism from various societal sectors, regulations now prohibit such objects, allowing only the use of whips. Regarding animal welfare, owners provide special care by feeding the bulls herbal remedies made from free-range chicken eggs, housing them in high-quality pens, and ensuring monthly veterinary health checks. However, interviews revealed that some individuals continued to secretly employ old methods, violating the rules. As currently regulated, bull racing aligns with Islamic principles, since acts of violence are no longer permitted; what remains is not a flaw in the tradition itself but the failure of a few participants to comply, indicating a need for firmer oversight and enforcement.

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Public Interest Statement

This study examines the Madura bull racing tradition from an Islamic perspective, focusing on animal welfare ethics and cultural preservation within an Islamic framework. This practice has undergone significant changes following criticism from community leaders; whereas previously the practice involved the use of balm, chillies, and sharp objects to injure the oxen and cause them pain so that they would reach the finish line more quickly, it has now changed, and the use of such items is prohibited; only the use of a whip is permitted. However, findings from interviews indicate that there are still individuals who secretly continue to use these items in violation of the rules. In terms of the rules themselves, the tradition of bull racing is consistent with the Islamic perspective; however, there is a need to take a firmer stance against those who secretly continue to use the old methods.

Introduction

Indonesia is known as a country with a rich and diverse culture. Every region across the archipelago has its own traditions and local wisdom that reflect the values, identity, and history of its communities (Wijaya, et al., 2023). This cultural diversity is an extraordinary treasure that enriches the nation's civilization, whilst also presenting a challenge to continually maintain and preserve it. Kurnia & Lestari (2023) also state that in this era of rapid globalization and modernization, many local traditions are at risk of extinction or being forgotten, particularly if they are unable to



adapt to social change. Madura, an island situated to the east of East Java, is a region with strong and distinctive cultural traditions, one of which is bull racing (*karapan sapi*). This tradition is an activity that has been passed down from generation to generation. More than just a competition or a form of public entertainment, this tradition is a symbol of the Madura people's identity and pride.

The history of bull racing is believed to date back to the 13th and 14th centuries, when it formed part of harvest rituals and served as an expression of the community's gratitude for the earth's bounty (Kosim, 2012). This evolved into a competitive event and spectacle showcasing the superior quality of the bull and the skill of the jockeys in controlling the animals in a race to determine the champion and with pride at stake. Although this has contributed significantly to strengthening the local economy and improving the community's welfare. In recent decades, the bull racing tradition has faced criticism and scrutiny, particularly regarding animal welfare. Various practices carried out during the races, such as the use of balm, chilli rubbed into the bull eyes, and sharp objects thrust into their thighs to make them reach the finish line more quickly, have been viewed by some as inhumane acts and a form of animal cruelty (Suprpto, et al., 2022).

This criticism has grown stronger as the people of Madura have become increasingly aware of the violence inflicted on animals during bull racing races. In Islamic jurisprudence, *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān*, or animal rights, is a concept that affirms that animals are creatures of Allah who have the right to be treated with kindness and compassion. Islam not only governs the relationship between humans and Allah and among fellow human beings but also governs the relationship between humans and other living creatures, including animals (Sholikhah, 2025). The Qur'an also states: "And there is not a single animal on earth, nor a bird that flies with its two wings, but they are communities like you. We have not omitted a single one in the Book; then to their Lord they will be gathered" (QS. Al-An'am: 38). Therefore, on this basis, everyone who keeps, utilizes, or interacts with animals has a responsibility to safeguard their welfare and protect them from all forms of suffering.

One relevant *fiqh* principle in this discussion is *al-'ādah muḥakkamah*, which means that customs can serve as a source of law, provided they do not conflict with Islamic law (al-Suyūṭī, 1990; Ibn Nujaym, 1999; Majallat al-Aḥkām al-'Adliyyah, Art. 36). Anggraini (2024) states that this principle allows for the preservation of local traditions that embody positive values and do not violate Islamic norms; thus, Madura bull racing can be maintained as part of local wisdom, provided that adjustments are made to ensure harmony with Islamic teachings. Beyond the ethical dimension, preserving bull racing culture is vital for safeguarding local identity and wisdom amid the rapidly advancing tide of globalization. Traditions that are not properly managed and preserved risk a decline in their value or may even be condemned by the wider community.

Sustainable cultural transformation must be able to preserve the original meaning of traditions whilst accommodating the demands of the times (Yaqin & Ahmadi, 2019). Following criticism from community leaders, the rules governing bull racing, which previously permitted the use of balm, chillies, and sharp objects, are now prohibited. However, the problem remains that there are still individuals who secretly engage in these practices. In this regard, the bull racing tradition needs to be developed so that it can be practised sustainably and remain a living cultural heritage within Madura society. Adjustments, particularly to the procedures involved, are a vital part of this transformation process. These changes do not mean eliminating the essence of the tradition, but rather improving aspects that are no longer appropriate so that the tradition remains relevant, ethical, and dignified. Clear regulations and oversight from the government, traditional leaders, and religious figures are required to ensure that the conduct of bull racing adheres to animal welfare standards and religious values in accordance with Islamic principles.

To examine this issue, the researchers first drew upon a study of the *fiqh* of *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān*, which encompasses several key principles: the fulfilment of animals' basic needs, such as food, drink, shelter, and proper care; the prohibition of torturing or harming animals without justifiable cause; and the prohibition of overburdening animals beyond their capacity (Modaqiq & Sediqi, 2024). Second, the researchers drew upon the principle of *al-'ādah muḥakkamah* (customs and practices may serve as a basis for law) (al-Suyūṭī, 1990; Majallat al-Aḥkām al-'Adliyyah, Art. 36), a *fiqh* principle that signifies that customs or practices may form the basis for the establishment of legal rulings. This concept stems from the understanding that Islam recognizes the existence of societal traditions and customs as part of the social reality that influences human life (Anggraini, 2024). Therefore, provided that a custom does not contradict the Qur'an, Sunnah, and principles of Sharia, it may be considered in legal matters.

This study focuses on two aspects. First, the forms of violent deviance found in the Madura bull racing tradition prior to public criticism and the introduction of regulations from an Islamic perspective; second, the changes that occurred following criticism and the introduction of regulations regarding the bull racing tradition from an Islamic perspective; and third, the shortcomings in the implementation of the bull racing tradition following these changes from an Islamic

perspective. These three areas of focus are interlinked in illustrating the dynamics of change in the practice of Madura bull racing. Through the interconnection of these three aspects, this study captures the changes that have taken place and assesses the effectiveness of social control and regulations in reducing deviant practices.

Literature Review

This review sets out the key concepts relevant to animal welfare and cultural preservation from an Islamic perspective in the context of Madura bull racing and develops the theoretical framework for the study. These concepts serve to analyze how traditional practices can continue to uphold cultural values while ensuring ethical responsibility towards living beings and adherence to broader humanitarian standards.

Animal Welfare Ethics

The concept of animal welfare ethics in Islam, as applied to the study of the Madura bull racing tradition, is based on a *fiqh* study of *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān* (animal rights). From an Islamic perspective, animals are regarded as creatures created by Allah who possess intrinsic value and certain rights that humans must respect. Humanity's role as Allah's vicegerent on earth entails responsibility not only towards fellow human beings but also towards all living creatures. The classical jurist 'Izz al-Dīn Ibn 'Abd al-Salām (d. 660/1262) formulated these entitlements in his chapter on *Jalb al-Maṣāliḥ wa-Dar' al-Mafāsīd*, holding that animals have the right to adequate sustenance even when old or ill, not to be overburdened beyond their capacity, and to be spared avoidable harm (Ibn 'Abd al-Salām, 1991). These entitlements are echoed in contemporary scholarship (Long, et al., 2023). Every form of human interaction with animals must be based on the principles of compassion (*rahmah*), justice, and moral responsibility (*'aql wa-mas'uliyah*).

One of the fundamental principles of *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān* is the obligation to meet the basic needs of animals. These needs include the provision of sufficient food and water, suitable living conditions, and care that safeguards animals' health and welfare (Shafiei, 2024). From an Islamic perspective, neglecting the basic needs of animals is an act that runs counter to the humanitarian values and religious teachings. Qamariah et al. (2023) argue that animal owners or carers have a moral responsibility to ensure that the animals in their care are treated with dignity so that they may live in good conditions and be spared unnecessary suffering.

The second principle is the prohibition against torturing or harming animals without justifiable cause. A hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) states: "Do not take living animals as targets for shooting." (Narrated by Muslim) (Rahman, 2017). This emphasizes the importance of treating animals with compassion and prohibits actions that cause suffering. Within the framework of Islamic ethics, animals are not merely objects to be used at will by humans, but living beings that must be treated with dignity (Sahira & Rosid, 2022). Any action that causes unnecessary pain, fear, or suffering is regarded as a violation of animal rights and is contrary to the principle of compassion, which forms the foundation of Islamic teachings.

The third principle prohibits overburdening animals beyond their capacity. Animals must not be forced to perform work or activities that may result in excessive fatigue, injury, or health problems (Qamariah, et al., 2023). This principle indicates that the use of animals for various human purposes must take into account the animals' physical condition and natural abilities. The benefits gained by humans must not be achieved through exploitation that sacrifices animal welfare. Striking a balance between human needs and the protection of animals is one of the key aspects of Islamic ethics (Rahmawati, 2023).

In the context of a study of Madura bull racing, these principles of *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān* can serve as a normative framework for assessing the extent to which the racing practice takes into account the welfare of the bull involved. The analysis focuses not only on the cultural values, traditions, and community identity inherent in bull racing but also on the treatment received by the animals throughout the rearing, training, and conduct of the race itself. By applying the perspective of animal welfare ethics in Islam, Madura bull racing can be examined more comprehensively, ensuring that the preservation of cultural traditions proceeds hand in hand with respect for the rights of animals as living beings possessing value and dignity within Islamic teachings.

Cultural Preservation

In the preservation of culture, the application of the *fiqh* principle of *al-'ādah muḥakkamah* (customs and traditions may serve as a basis for law) is one of the key principles in Islamic law, which takes into account the traditions and customs of society when establishing legal rulings (Anggraini, 2024). This principle stems from the understanding that Islam emerged and developed amidst a diverse social reality; consequently, not every aspect of life is regulated in detail in the Qur'an and Sunnah (Desmuliati, et al., 2025). Therefore, customs practiced and accepted by the community may serve as a basis for legal consideration, provided they do not conflict with the principles of Sharia. Aristan, et al.,

(2024) argue that the recognition of *adat* demonstrates that Islamic law is adaptive in nature and capable of engaging in dialogue with various local cultures without losing its fundamental values. The custom of *hareuta sibareukat*, the Acehese practice of joint marital property, illustrates this dialogue. The ulema of the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate adjusted the custom to balance a wife's ownership of property with the household's need for maintenance, and on that basis admitted it into Islamic law (Sabil, et al., 2025). Recognition through *al-'adah muhakkamah* thus proceeds through examination and adjustment of the custom. The Madura bull racing stands on the same footing, earning acceptance as a valid custom through the same process of adjustment.

In *fiqh* scholarship, the application of *al-'adah muhakkamah* is based on several key principles. First, the principle of the repetition and continuity of custom: a custom must be practised continuously and persist over a relatively long period of time so that it becomes an integral part of community life. Second, the principle of general acceptance: the custom must be recognized and practised by the majority of community members, not merely by a specific small group. Third, the principle of non-contradiction with the texts of Islamic law, which emphasizes that a custom can only be accepted if it does not contradict the Qur'an, the Sunnah, or established provisions of Islamic law. Fourth, the principle of public interest, namely that a custom must bring benefit and not cause harm or detriment to society (Desmulati, et al., 2025).

The existence of these principles indicates that customary practices in Islam are not accepted unconditionally; rather, they undergo a process of selection based on Sharia values. Customary practices that meet these criteria can serve as important tools for understanding and resolving social issues not explicitly regulated in the primary sources of Islamic law (Hamzah, 2017). Thus, *al-'adah muhakkamah* serves as a bridge between the norms of Sharia and the ever-evolving realities of society. Through this principle, Islamic law can remain relevant to the social context without neglecting the primary objectives of Sharia, namely, promoting public welfare and preventing harm.

Within the context of the Madura bull racing tradition, the principles of *al-'adah muhakkamah* can be used as a framework for analyzing the cultural legitimacy of this practice from an Islamic perspective. Bull racing can be regarded as a custom that fulfils the criteria of continuity, community acceptance, and possesses strong socio-cultural value. However, the acceptance of this custom must still be tested against the principles of public interest, justice, and its conformity with the provisions of Islamic law (Tarmizi, 2020). If, in practice, there are elements that conflict with Islamic values, such as actions causing suffering to animals or other harm, then these aspects need to be evaluated and rectified. Thus, the principle of *al-'adah muhakkamah* serves not only to recognize traditions but also as a critical instrument in ensuring that the traditions preserved remain in harmony with the objectives and values of Islamic law.

Material and Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the data obtained in the research in depth (Creswell & Poth, 2024). This method was chosen because the study focuses on a descriptive analysis of the results of face-to-face interviews with informants. The research data were obtained from primary sources via interviews; consequently, the research findings are heavily dependent on the perceptions and experiences of the informants. Consequently, the findings of this study are based on the informants' perceptions.

The informants in this study comprised (1) FT, a youth leader living in Aeng Sareh Village, Sampang Sub-district, Sampang Regency; (2) AJ, a religious leader living in Paterongan Village, Galis Sub-district, Bangkalan Regency; (3) JS, a religious leader living in Ketapang Daya Village, Ketapang Sub-district, Sampang Regency; (4) BR, a former Madura bull racing practitioner living in Jatra Timur Village, Banyuates Sub-district, Sampang Regency; and (5) MKR, a Madura bull racing practitioner who remains active to this day, residing in Ketapang Daya Village, Ketapang Sub-district, Sampang Regency. These informants were selected because they are widely recognized as observers, critics, religious figures, and practitioners of Madura bull racing who possess experience and knowledge of the development of this tradition during the period of 2010–2025.

The data collection process took place over seven days, from November 23 to 29, 2025, using several techniques. First, interviews were conducted by visiting the homes of each informant to gather information on the practice of the Madura bull racing tradition. The interview with Informant 1 took place on Sunday, November 23, 2025, from 13:00 to 13:30. The interview with Informant 2 took place on Tuesday, November 25, 2025, from 07:00 to 07:45. The interview with Informant 3 took place on Wednesday, November 26, 2025, from 19:30 to 20:00. The interview with Informant 4 took place on Saturday, November 29, 2025, from 15:45 to 16:20. The interview with Informant 5 took place on Saturday, November 29, 2025, from 19:00 to 20:00. In addition to the interviews, data collection also involved recording key information obtained during the interview process. Subsequently, the collected data were categorized and sorted according to the research requirements to facilitate the analysis process.

Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach, involving an in-depth examination of the interview findings to identify the relationship between the traditional practice of Madura bull racing and concepts within Islam. The analysis process was carried out in several stages. First, all interview findings were transcribed into written form. Second, the researcher carried out data reduction by removing information irrelevant to the focus of the research. Third, the reduced data were analyzed thematically by grouping the informants' statements into several themes, namely, (1) deviations in the practice of the Madura bull racing prior to the changes; (2) animal welfare ethics and cultural preservation in the Madura bull racing tradition from an Islamic perspective; and (3) shortcomings in the practice of the Madura bull racing tradition following the changes. Based on the results of this thematic analysis, the researcher formulated an interpretation to explain the relationship between the research findings and the research objectives in a descriptive manner.

Informants for this study were selected using purposive sampling, based on their knowledge, experience, and involvement in the Madura bull racing tradition. In addition, snowball sampling was used to a limited extent when initial informants recommended other sources relevant to the focus of the research. Interviews were conducted in Madura and Indonesian, depending on the informants' preference. Data in the Madura language were transcribed and translated into Indonesian, while quotations presented in English were translated while maintaining equivalence of meaning. The credibility of the data was ensured by verifying that all research findings were based on the accounts of informants possessing experience and knowledge relevant to the research focus. The researcher also carefully reviewed the interview results to ensure that the interpretations presented remained consistent with the informants' intended meanings.

Results

Deviations from the Bull Racing Tradition Before the Changes

The forms of abuse that have occurred within the bull racing tradition have largely gone unnoticed by the people of Madura, as this practice has long been regarded as part of a sacred and proud cultural heritage, meaning that they have never recognized its negative aspects. The community focused more on the values of togetherness, sportsmanship, and competitive spirit inherent in the tradition, without realizing that certain actions could be categorized as violence and abuse. Pride in this tradition often blinds the community to the reality behind the preparation and conduct of the race, where both animals and humans must endure excessive physical strain, with objects that can injure and cause pain to the animals, all in the name of maintaining social prestige and group honor. Forms of violent abuse within the bull racing tradition, as revealed in the interviews outlined in the table below:

Table 1. Deviations from previous bull racing traditions

No	Interview Quote	Code	Category
1	"When I first saw a bull racing in 2010 in Sampang Regency, I noticed that the rear of the bull was covered in blood after the race. The wounds were linear, as if caused by a sharp object." "In 2011, I also witnessed a bull race held in Bangkalan Regency, where the practice of injuring the bull was still taking place. It was truly heartbreaking to see that a tradition which is always held in such high regard, in practice, fails to reflect humanitarian values."	(Informant 1: Youth Leader)	Violent deviance
2	"I have been warning people since 2009 that there are many irregularities in the practice of bull racing. So, when I preach in various places across Madura, I always point out that the way the bull racing tradition is carried out often involves violence, and that it is therefore forbidden in Islam to cause excessive harm to bull. The participants use nails and chillies as tools to reach the finish line more quickly. Naturally, such practices are extremely cruel to the animals and are not permitted in Islam."	(Informant 2: Religious Leader)	Violent deviance
3	"I am at a loss regarding this matter; many aspects of the bull racing event deviate from the principles of animal welfare, yet at the same time, we, as religious leaders, are faced with the wider Madura community, who believe that bull racing is a sacred tradition. In this regard, we are endeavouring to find the courage to preach so that	(Informant 3: Religious Leader)	Violent deviance

the practices within this tradition may be amended in accordance with Islamic principles.”			
4	“As a former practitioner from 2003 to 2011, I can confirm that many abuses were committed against the animals by those involved in bull racing. Back when I was involved in bull racing, I used to drive nails into the bull hindquarters to make them run faster, and I would rub balm and chilli into their eyes to make them run even more frantically, so that they would reach the finish line quickly. However, I realized that these actions were wrong. Since 2012, I have not engaged in such practices anymore.”	(Informant 4: Former Practitioner)	Violent deviance
5	“I have been involved in bull racing since 2016 and continue to be so today. I have heard that in the past, there were indeed many instances of cruelty towards the bull during the races. However, following the Governor’s directive in 2012, which remains in force today, such practices have been abolished. The use of sharp objects, balms, chillies and other such substances is no longer permitted; only whips may be used.”	(Informant 5: Practising Professional)	Violent deviance

The data in the table above show that, in the tradition of bull racing, prior to the introduction of changes and stricter regulations, there were various forms of misconduct relating to acts of cruelty towards animals. Based on interviews with informants comprising youth leaders, religious figures, former practitioners, and active practitioners, it was found that practices causing harm to bulls were once part of the bull racing event, with the aim of increasing the bull running speed during the race.

Informant 1 revealed that during bull racing held in Sampang Regency in 2010 and Bangkalan Regency in 2011, instances of bulls being injured were still observed, characterized by linear wounds and blood streaming from the rear of the bull bodies after the races. This situation was deemed to be contrary to humanitarian values, even though bull racing is a tradition of which the people of Madura are proud.

A similar view was expressed by Informant 2, a religious figure. According to him, since 2009, he has been warning the public that the practice of bull racing involves various abuses, such as the use of nails and chillies to spur the bull on to run faster towards the finish line. These practices are regarded as a form of animal cruelty and are contrary to Islamic teachings, as they cause the bull undue suffering.

Informant 3 explained that irregularities in bull racing are primarily related to animal welfare. On the one hand, bull racing is regarded as a tradition of sacred significance to the people of Madura; on the other hand, however, there are practices that cause harm to the animals. Consequently, religious leaders are endeavoring to raise awareness among the community so that the conduct of bull racing is aligned with Islamic values that place greater emphasis on animal welfare.

A more detailed account was provided by Informant 4, a former bull racing practitioner. He confirmed that during the period 2003–2011, many participants used various methods to enhance bull performance, such as driving nails into the bull hindquarters, applying balm, and rubbing chilli into the bull eyes to make them more aggressive and run faster. However, the informant acknowledged that these actions were wrong and stated that he had stopped these practices since 2012.

Meanwhile, Informant 5, as an active practitioner, explained that the violent practices that had taken place in the past had changed following instructions from the local government, in particular, the policy issued by the Governor of East Java in 2012. According to him, the use of sharp objects, chillies, balm, or certain substances is no longer permitted during bull racing. Currently, the only implement still permitted for spurring the bull is a whip, in accordance with the applicable regulations.

Based on all this data, it can be concluded that the predominant form of misconduct in the conduct of bull racing before the changes were introduced was violence against animals. Such acts of cruelty included the use of nails or sharp objects to injure the bull, the application of chilli and balm to specific parts of the body, and other actions designed to cause pain with the aim of increasing the bull running speed. These practices subsequently drew criticism from various quarters, particularly religious leaders, youth leaders, and the general public, thereby prompting the introduction of policies regulating the conduct of bull racing to ensure greater consideration of animal welfare.

Animal Welfare in the Madura Bull Racing Tradition Following Changes

Animal welfare in the Madura bull racing tradition has seen significant improvements following various efforts to refine and adapt the way the tradition is practiced. These changes have emerged in response to criticism from various quarters regarding practices that were previously deemed to cause animal suffering. Religious leaders, community leaders, youth leaders, and bull racing practitioners have sought to reform the tradition so that this cultural practice, which forms part of the Madura identity, can continue to be preserved without neglecting animal welfare. These changes are marked by a ban on the use of various tools and materials that have the potential to injure the bull.

The changes that have taken place in the bull racing tradition reflect a shift in values from practices that previously involved elements of violence towards those that pay greater attention to animal welfare. Although ongoing monitoring and evaluation are still required, these changes represent an important step towards maintaining a balance between the preservation of cultural traditions and the protection of animals. This is illustrated by the following data:

Table 2. Animal welfare in the bull racing tradition following the changes

No	Interview Quote	Code	Category
1	"Compared to a few years ago, the condition of the bull is much better now. I have noticed that practices involving the use of nails or sharp objects during competitions have ceased. It seems the organisers also carry out checks before the bull are brought into the arena, so greater attention is being paid to animal welfare."	(Informant 1: Youth Leader)	Animal welfare
2	"As religious leaders, we welcome the changes that have taken place in bull racing. Many practices that cause animal suffering have now been abandoned. This shows that the community is beginning to understand that Islam teaches compassion towards all living creatures, including animals."	(Informant 2: Religious Leader)	Animal welfare
3	"We used to receive frequent complaints about practices that caused harm to bulls. However, the rules are now clearer, and the public is beginning to accept that traditions can still be observed without causing harm to animals. This is a positive development."	(Informant 3: Religious Leader)	Animal welfare
4	"I used to be a bull racing organizer back when the use of nails and chillies was still considered normal. Things are different now. Nowadays, the focus is more on caring for the bull, providing them with good feed, giving them a monthly dose of traditional herbal medicine made from free-range eggs, regular training, and health checks. The old methods are no longer used."	(Informant 4: Former Practitioner)	Animal welfare
5	"As an active practitioner, I follow the current regulations. The bulls are well looked after because their health is crucial to their performance during the race. The use of sharp objects, chillies, or any other substances that could harm the bull is now prohibited and is directly monitored by the organizing committee. Now, race bull are given special treatment: they are given herbal remedies, nutritious food, and clean pens; their health is checked once a month and even weekly in the run-up to a race and they are given an egg-based herbal remedy every night."	(Informant 5: Practising Professional)	Animal welfare

The data in [Table 2](#) show that there have been significant changes in animal welfare within the Madura bull racing tradition. Based on interviews with youth leaders, religious figures, former practitioners, and active practitioners, it was found that various practices that previously had the potential to cause suffering to the bull have largely been abandoned and replaced with husbandry practices that pay greater attention to animal health and welfare.

Informant 1 explained that the condition of the bull is now much better than it was a few years ago. According to him, the practice of using nails or sharp objects, which were previously often used to increase the bull speed, is no

longer observed. Furthermore, the checks carried out by the organizing committee before the bull enters the race arena demonstrate that efforts are being made to ensure that the bull remains in good condition and is fit to compete.

A similar view was expressed by Informant 2, a religious figure. He considered the changes in the way bull racing is organized to be a positive development, as practices that cause animal suffering have largely been abandoned. In his view, these changes reflect a growing public awareness of Islamic teachings, which emphasize the importance of compassion and the kind treatment of all living creatures, including animals.

Furthermore, Informant 3 revealed that in the past, there were many complaints regarding practices that caused harm to the bull during bull racing. However, following changes to the regulations, the community has come to accept that the bull racing tradition can still be preserved without resorting to practices that harm the animals. The clarity of the applicable regulations has also contributed to ensuring that bull racing events are organized with greater regard for animal welfare.

More specific changes were described by Informant 4, a former bull racing practitioner. He acknowledged that, in the past, the use of nails and chillies was a common practice to enhance bull performance. However, nowadays, bull owners focus more on proper care, such as providing high-quality feed, administering herbal remedies and free-range eggs on a regular basis, ensuring regular training, and carrying out periodic health checks. According to him, the old methods, which had the potential to harm the bull, are no longer used.

A similar view was expressed by Informant 5, an active practitioner, who explained that the health of the bull is the key factor determining success in the race; therefore, they are cared for to the highest standard. Bulls are given special treatment, including nutritious feed, traditional herbal remedies, free-range chicken eggs, clean and comfortable pens, and regular health check-ups. In the run-up to the race, the bulls' health is checked even more thoroughly to ensure that they are in peak condition. Furthermore, the use of sharp objects, chillies, or any other materials that could injure the bull is strictly prohibited and is directly monitored by the organizing committee.

In this regard, animal welfare within the Madura bull racing tradition has seen a significant improvement following these changes. These changes are characterized by the elimination of practices involving cruelty to bull, stricter supervision by the organizing committee, increased compliance with applicable regulations, and the development of husbandry practices focused on the health, comfort, and welfare of the bull. These results indicate that the bull racing tradition has now undergone a transformation towards a practice that pays greater attention to the principles of animal welfare without compromising the cultural values inherent in the tradition.

The Weaknesses of the Madura Bull Racing Tradition Following the Changes

Table 3. Weaknesses of the bull racing tradition following the changes

No	Interview Quote	Code	Category
1	"In fact, the rules governing the bull racing tradition are already in line with the community's wishes, namely that violence and the mistreatment of animals should no longer be practised. However, there are still individuals who break the rules by using balm and chillies without the supervisors' knowledge."	(Informant 1: Youth Leader)	Weaknesses
2	"The changes and rules introduced to the bull racing tradition are in line with Islamic principles, he said. Traditionally, there is nothing about this event that warrants criticism; however, it must be emphasised that those who breach the rules must face severe penalties."	(Informant 2: Religious Leader)	Weaknesses
3	"Traditionally, this bull racing is in accordance with Islamic principles and is accepted among the Muslim community. However, those who break the rules and continue to practise certain outdated customs must be punished to the full extent of the law."	(Informant 3: Religious Leader)	Weaknesses
4	"The current bull racing tradition is, in terms of its rules, in accordance with Islam. I have observed that almost 97% of those involved in bull racing adhere to these rules. At most, there are one	(Informant 4: Former Practitioner)	Weaknesses

or two individuals who secretly use chilli and balm, which is the old method.”

5	“As a participant in bull racing, I have never, to this day, resorted to old-fashioned methods or used violence against the bull. However, there are still occasional instances where one of the opposing competitors rubs chilli and balm into the bull mouth. Strangely, this goes unnoticed by the on-site supervisory team provided by the organizers. Unfortunately, such incidents only come to light after the bull racing has finished.”	(Informant 5: Practising Professional)	Weaknesses
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Based on the results of interviews with the five informants, it can be seen that changes to the Madura bull racing tradition have succeeded in significantly reducing practices that conflict with animal welfare and Islamic values. All informants stated that the current rules are essentially in line with the regulations set by the organizers and Islamic principles. Nevertheless, there are still shortcomings in their implementation, namely that a small number of individuals continue to secretly use old methods, such as rubbing chilli and balm onto the oxen before the race.

These findings suggest that the main weakness of the bull racing tradition following these changes no longer lies in the rules themselves but rather in the failure of a small proportion of participants to comply with them. Informant 1 emphasized that breaches still occur without the supervisory team’s knowledge: A similar view was expressed by Informant 5, who explained that such practices are often only discovered after the race has finished, making it difficult to take immediate action.

Furthermore, Informants 2 and 3 considered that the changes that had been implemented were in line with Islamic principles, but that their effectiveness needed to be strengthened through the imposition of strict sanctions on offenders. This view was reinforced by Informant 4, who estimated that almost all offenders had complied with the rules, whilst violations were committed only by one or two individuals who were still secretly maintaining the old practices.

The interview findings reveal a consensus among all informants that the weakness of the Madura bull racing tradition following the changes does not lie in the substance of the rules, but rather in the lack of oversight regarding violations committed by a small number of individuals. Therefore, the effectiveness of the rules’ implementation still needs to be improved, particularly in terms of oversight and the enforcement of sanctions, so that all participants comply with the agreed provisions.

Discussion

This discussion analyzes the deviations and animal welfare within the bull racing tradition from the Islamic perspective of fiqh studies on *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān* (animal rights) and the study of *al-‘ādah muḥakkamah* (customs that can serve as a basis for law), as well as outline the shortcomings of the bull racing tradition following these changes.

First, animal welfare and well-being before and after changes in the practice of Madura bull racing, as examined from the perspective of animal welfare ethics (fiqh *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān*). In this context, the practice of bull racing can be understood as a sacred tradition of the Madura people, which not only possesses a cultural dimension but also undergoes dynamics of socio-religious values in line with the community’s growing religious awareness and the strengthening of regulations concerning animal protection. Foltz (2005, p. 57) notes that, on the one hand, traditions serve as a cultural identity and a space for social competition; on the other hand, they also become an arena for the contestation of values between cultural preservation and Islamic ethical principles regarding animal welfare.

In theory, *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān* regards animals as living beings with fundamental rights that must be fulfilled by humans as stewards of the earth (Long, et al., 2023). Within this framework, there are three main principles that form the ethical foundation: 1) the obligation to fulfil animals’ basic needs, which include food, drink, suitable living quarters, and adequate healthcare; 2) the prohibition against harming or torturing animals without a reason justified by Islamic law, which is rooted in the principle of *rahmah* (compassion) in Islam; and 3) the prohibition against overburdening animals beyond their capacity, namely, by not forcing them to engage in activities that may cause excessive fatigue, injury, or physical harm. These three principles serve as a normative framework for assessing the appropriateness of practices involving the use of animals, including within the context of the bull racing tradition.

Prior to the changes, the practice of bull racing, as regulated, involved various forms of violation of these principles. In terms of meeting the animals’ basic needs, the care given to bull racing involved a primarily instrumental and

functional approach, whereby the animals were treated as tools of competition to achieve victory, rather than as subjects entitled to comprehensive welfare. Long-term care, therefore, received little attention.

Regarding the prohibition on causing harm to animals, it has been found that nails, chillies, balm, and other substances are deliberately administered to bulls to inflict pain, with the aim of increasing their aggressiveness and running speed. From the perspective of *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān*, such actions cannot be justified as they contravene the principles of Islam, which demand the compassionate treatment of living creatures. Acts that deliberately cause pain, particularly without an emergency or religious necessity, are categorized as ethical violations because they disregard the animal's right to be free from suffering (Masri, 2009, p. 63).

Furthermore, this practice violates the principle prohibiting the overburdening of animals beyond their capacity. Bulls are forced to achieve high running performance through the use of pain as a stimulus, which biologically has the potential to cause physiological stress, extreme fatigue, and even the risk of injury to specific parts of the body. This situation reflects the exploitation of animals' capabilities without regard for the balance between the aims of the competition and the animals' natural capacities. Within the framework of *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān*, this demonstrates a discrepancy, as the use of animals must not compromise their physical integrity and fundamental welfare (Safitri, et al., 2022).

The practice of bull racing can be categorized as still falling within the zone of normative deviation when viewed from the perspective of fiqh *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān*, as it does not yet fully comply with the three fundamental principles of animal protection. This situation highlights a tension between traditional values, the demands of competition, and Islamic ethical norms, which emphasize balance, compassion, and the protection of living creatures as part of humanity's moral responsibility as stewards of the earth.

Following these changes, there has been a significant shift in the practices of caring for and treating bulls, indicating the internalization of *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān* values within the community's social practices. These changes are not merely technical in nature, such as the replacement of training methods, but also reflect a normative transformation in attitudes towards animals. In this context, as argued by Mukhtar & Todd (2023), animals are not merely positioned as tools of competition, but also as living beings who have the right to be treated humanely in accordance with the principles of Islamic Sharia.

From the perspective of meeting basic needs, bull owners are now showing increased attention to nutrition, health, and cleanliness of the rearing environment. Practices such as providing nutritious feed, traditional herbal remedies, and supplements such as free-range eggs demonstrate a systematic effort to maintain the animals' physiological condition at an optimal level. Furthermore, the implementation of regular health checks, both before and in the run-up to races, reflects a preventive approach to safeguarding animal welfare. This can be understood as a practical application of the principle of *ri'āyah al-ḥayawān* (animal care), which emphasizes that animal owners have a moral and religious responsibility to ensure that the animals' basic needs are met properly and sustainably (Masri, 2009, p. 63).

From the perspective of the prohibition against causing harm to animals, the findings of this study indicate the phasing out of practices that previously caused physical suffering, such as the use of sharp objects, chillies, and irritant substances. This phasing out is not only the result of formal regulations but also reflects a shift in the collective consciousness of society regarding the importance of the principle of *rahmah* in interactions with animals. From an Islamic perspective, this indicates a shift from a coercive and painful approach to a more ethical one, in which improvements in animal performance are no longer achieved through suffering but through care and training that do not violate the animals' basic rights (Foltz, 2005, p. 57).

Meanwhile, regarding the prohibition of excessive strain, current practices in training bulls demonstrate an adjustment to the animals' biological capacities. Performance is enhanced through structured, gradual training that considers the bull's physical condition, thereby avoiding extreme fatigue or a significant risk of injury to the bull. This approach reflects the implementation of the principle of balance (*tawāzun*) between the objectives of competition and the protection of animal welfare, as emphasized in *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān*.

In this context, it is evident that there has been a significant normative transformation in the practice of Madura bull racing, namely from rules that previously tended to deviate from the principles of *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān* towards practices more in line with Islamic ethics regarding animal welfare. Local traditions are not static but rather adapt to developments in religious, social, and regulatory values within society. Within a broader framework, this transformation reflects an effort to harmonize cultural preservation with the fulfilment of humanity's stewardship of the earth, in which the protection of animal rights forms an integral part of the ethics of religious and social life.

Second, Madura bull racing in the context of cultural preservation from the perspective of *al-‘ādab muḥakkamah* (customs that may serve as a basis (source) of law). Madura bull racing can be understood as a form of *‘urf ṣaḥīḥ* (valid custom) that holds an important position within the socio-cultural structure of Madura society (Amaliya & Tondok, 2025). This principle provides legitimacy for the existence of local traditions provided they fulfil four main principles: the repetition and continuity of the custom, general acceptance by the community, conformity with Islamic law, and public interest. Consequently, Madura bull racing cannot be separated from these normative parameters when assessing whether this tradition holds merely cultural value or also possesses validity from the perspective of Islamic law.

In terms of repetition and continuity (*istiqrār al-‘urf*), bull racing has been shown to meet these criteria, as it has been practised for generations over a long period of time and has become an integral part of the social cycle of Madura society. This tradition is not incidental but is institutionalized within social life; indeed, it has become an annual cultural event in various regions. This fact demonstrates that bull racing has strong historical roots and can therefore, in theory, be categorized as an established custom from a fiqh perspective.

In terms of general acceptance (*al-qabūl al-‘umm*), bull racing enjoys widespread social legitimacy within Madura society. This tradition is not only accepted but also practiced and supported by various social groups, ranging from bull breeders and community leaders to the local government, as part of the community’s cultural identity. This collective support demonstrates that bull racing serves a social function that goes beyond mere competition; it acts as a symbol of honor, social solidarity, and a representation of the Madura people’s cultural identity. Thus, bull racing fulfils the element of *‘urf* that is widely recognized.

From the perspective of compliance with Sharia (*‘adam mukhālafah al-syar’*), the practice of bull racing prior to the changes involved cruelty to animals. These harmful elements have since been removed from the rules, which have been brought into line with Islamic principles. From the perspective of *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān* (animal rights), the actions involved in the current bull racing tradition can be justified, as the practice no longer conflicts with the principle of *rahmah* (compassion) and the prohibition against harming animals without a Sharia-based justification. Therefore, although bull racing fulfils aspects of custom and social acceptance, some of its current practices are fully in line with the provisions of Islamic law.

The aspect of the common good (*jalb al-maṣlaḥah wa daf’ al-mafṣadah*) in the Madura bull racing demonstrates that this tradition makes a significant contribution to various dimensions of community life, be it social, economic, or cultural. Socially, the Madura bull racing serves as a means of strengthening the collective identity and social cohesion of the Madura community through shared participation in the practice of a tradition that has been deeply rooted for generations (Juhari, 2016). From an economic perspective, this activity generates a chain of economic impacts involving bull farmers, trainers, traders, feed suppliers, and event organizers, thereby contributing to increased income for the local community and a tradition-based economic cycle. Meanwhile, from a cultural perspective, bull racing serves as a symbol of identity and cultural heritage that embodies the values of honor and pride held by the Madura community (Setiawan & Debby, 2023). Weighing benefit against harm also sets a limit on how far a custom may be carried. Examining the practice of repeated Hajj in Indonesia, Husen and Mukhlisin (2024) show that an act permitted in principle turns discouraged once its harms, such as long waiting lists and risks to elderly pilgrims, outweigh its benefit, so that *maṣlaḥah* governs the degree to which it is upheld. The Madura bull racing follows the same measure: its social, economic, and cultural benefits sustain the tradition, while the harms of any surviving cruelty mark the point at which the practice requires correction.

Thus, Madura bull racing, viewed through the lens of *al-‘ādab muḥakkamah*, is understood not only as a cultural heritage but also as a dynamic socio-legal phenomenon. Its existence demonstrates that Islamic law possesses the adaptive capacity to engage with local traditions through a mechanism of normative selection, thereby ensuring that cultural preservation can be maintained without neglecting the principles of Sharia, particularly in matters of justice, the public interest, and the protection of living beings.

Third, the weakness observed in the Madura bull racing tradition following the changes lies in the suboptimal supervision during the event. Although various forms of cruelty towards the bull have been banned and the majority of participants have complied with the applicable rules, interview findings indicate that there remains a small number of individuals who secretly employ old methods, such as rubbing chilli or balm on the bull mouths. This finding suggests that the main problem no longer lies in the substance of the rules governing on-the-ground practices, but rather in the effectiveness of their implementation and supervision.

From a policy implementation perspective, a regulation will not function effectively unless it is accompanied by adequate monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. Monitoring is a vital component in ensuring that all provisions

are complied with by all parties involved. Consequently, weak monitoring can create opportunities for violations, even if the regulations have been well-drafted (Prastiti, 2022). This demonstrates that the concept of animal welfare emphasizes that the protection of animals depends not only on the formulation of regulations, but also on the consistent application of those regulations in practice. The implementation of animal welfare standards requires an effective monitoring system so that actions causing animal suffering can be prevented and addressed immediately. Formal recognition of a custom leaves the question of enforcement open. In resolving customary law disputes in Aceh, Mansur, et al. (2025) found that enforcement succeeds where state agencies and customary leaders act together. For bull racing, oversight therefore belongs jointly to the race organizers and to religious and traditional leaders, whose judgement the community already trusts and whose authority reaches the covert conduct that formal inspection tends to miss.

From an Islamic perspective, the enforcement of rules forms part of the efforts to safeguard the public interest and prevent harm (*dar'u al-mafasid*) (Musolli, 2018). Therefore, stricter supervision and the imposition of firm sanctions on offenders are crucial steps to ensure that the practice of bull racing tradition remains in line with the principles of compassion towards animals and the values of justice in Islam. Consequently, the success of reforming the bull racing tradition depends not only on the introduction of new regulations, but also on the organizers' commitment to consistently monitoring compliance with the rules.

Conclusion

This study shows that the Madura bull racing tradition has now been adapted to better align with the principles of *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān* and *al-ʿādab muḥakkamah* in the Islamic jurisprudence. From the perspective of *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān*, the current practice of bull racing has, in terms of procedural rules, demonstrated the fulfilment of animals' basic rights, such as the provision of nutritious food, healthcare, and the maintenance of suitable pens. Furthermore, the practice places greater emphasis on proper care and training, ensuring that the welfare of the bull is prioritized at every stage of both the preparation and conduct of the race.

The principle prohibiting the infliction of pain on animals and overburdening them beyond their capacity has also been incorporated into the current rules governing bull racing. This study indicates that the use of items that could harm animals, such as chillies, balms, or sharp objects, is, for the most part, no longer permitted under the rules governing bull racing. Instead, improvements in bull performance can be achieved through care, regular training, and periodic health checks. This indicates a shift in practice from actions that have the potential to harm animals to a more ethical approach in line with the principle of compassion (*rahmah*) in Islam. Meanwhile, from the perspective of *al-ʿādab muḥakkamah*, bull racing is currently still recognized as a living and evolving custom within Madurese society, although its practices have been adapted to align with Islamic law. The elimination of elements of violence against animals and the emphasis on care indicate that this tradition now fulfils the principle of public interest and no longer conflicts with Islamic values.

Nevertheless, based on the aspects analyzed, the traditional practices of Madurese bull racing are, in principle, consistent with the principles of *ḥuqūq al-ḥayawān* and *al-ʿādab muḥakkamah*, and can therefore be regarded as in harmony with Islamic teachings. However, the results of the interviews in this study also revealed that there are still a small number of individuals who secretly use substances such as balm and chilli to enhance the bull's performance during the races. This finding indicates that the implementation of regulations on the ground is not yet fully optimal and that there are still weaknesses in terms of supervision and enforcement. Therefore, stricter supervision is required from the organizing committee, local government, and all stakeholders, accompanied by the imposition of firm sanctions for any violations. These measures are essential to ensure that the practice of bull racing is carried out strictly in accordance with the established regulations, so that the values of animal welfare and the principles of Islamic Sharia can be consistently upheld in its implementation.

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