



# SHAMANS, VIOLENCE, AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF MEMORY: VIOLENCE SURROUNDING WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS IN BANYUWANGI, 1998–1999

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## Abstract

This article examines the wave of violence triggered by accusations of witchcraft (*dukun santet*) in Banyuwangi between 1998 and 1999, which resulted in more than 194 deaths. The killings emerged amid the political, economic, and social crises preceding the collapse of Indonesia's New Order regime. Accusations of *santet* were not merely expressions of popular belief but were actively produced and instrumentalized as tools of mass mobilization. Political stigmatization that associated alleged witches with communism, combined with the interests of both local and supra-local actors, significantly accelerated the scale and spread of violence. The study analyzes the relationship between witchcraft accusations and violent mobilization during a period of political transition by mapping key actors, networks, and patterns of action. It further examines how myths, rumors, and collective imaginaries functioned to legitimize killing. In addition, the article assesses the broader socio-cultural consequences of the killings, particularly their impact on civic identity, collective memory, and shifting configurations of power in the Reformasi era. Methodologically, the research combines empirical analysis and theoretical reflection, drawing on Charles Tilly's concept of violence and Claude Lévi-Strauss's theory of myth. Primary sources include court and police records, the East Java Regional Archives, reports from the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM), and contemporary mass media coverage. The findings show that political, economic, and cultural dynamics shaped violence and effects on Banyuwangi's social identity and collective memory.

**Keywords:** Banyuwangi, witchcraft accusations, collective violence, reconciliation

## Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji gelombang kekerasan yang dipicu oleh tuduhan ilmu sibir (*dukun santet*) di Banyuwangi pada 1998–1999 yang mengakibatkan lebih dari 194 kematian. Pembunuhan-pembunuhan tersebut terjadi di tengah krisis politik, ekonomi, dan sosial menjelang runtuhnya rezim Orde Baru di Indonesia. Tuduhan santet tidak semata-mata merupakan ekspresi kepercayaan popular, melainkan secara aktif diproduksi dan dimanfaatkan sebagai sarana mobilisasi massa. Stigmatisasi politik yang mengaitkan para terduga penyihir dengan komunisme, yang dikombinasikan dengan kepentingan aktor-aktor lokal dan supra-lokal, berperan besar dalam mempercepat dan memperluas eskalasi kekerasan. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengungkap hubungan antara tuduhan santet dan mobilisasi kekerasan masa transisi politik, memetakan aktor-aktor kunci, jaringan, dan pola-pola tindakan. Lebih lanjut, artikel ini menganalisis bagaimana mitos, rumor, serta imajinasi kolektif berfungsi untuk melegitimasi pembunuhan. Selain itu, studi ini menilai dampak sosial-budaya yang lebih luas dari pembunuhan tersebut, khususnya terhadap identitas kewargaan, ingatan kolektif, dan perubahan konfigurasi kekuasaan pada era Reformasi. Secara metodologis, penelitian ini menggabungkan analisis empiris dan refleksi teoretis, dengan merujuk pada konsep kekerasan kolektif Charles Tilly dan teori mitos Claude Lévi-Strauss. Sumber-sumber primer meliputi arsip pengadilan dan kepolisian, Arsip Daerah Jawa Timur, laporan Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia (Komnas HAM), serta pemberitaan media massa sezaman. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dinamika politik, ekonomi, dan sosial-budaya membentuk kekerasan tersebut serta berdampak pada identitas social dan memori kolektif masyarakat Banyuwangi.

**Kata kunci:** Banyuwangi, tuduhan santet, kekerasan kolektif, rekonsiliasi

## Background

The people of Banyuwangi have long woven myths and local beliefs in supernatural practices into the region's historical experience. As an agrarian area at the eastern tip of Java,

communities have traditionally used the term *santet* (witchcraft) to explain various forms of misfortune, including sudden illness or



unexplained death.<sup>1</sup> These beliefs are deeply embedded in everyday life, forming an integral part of the community's social and cultural cosmology.

By the late 1990s, Indonesia entered a period of profound crisis that dramatically reshaped everyday life. The collapse of the rupiah rapidly eroded purchasing power, basic necessities became increasingly unaffordable, and unemployment spread across the country.<sup>2</sup> As economic hardship deepened, social tensions escalated, giving rise to widespread unrest and growing public dissatisfaction with the New Order regime.<sup>3</sup> This convergence of economic and political instability formed the backdrop for social turmoil in various regions, including Banyuwangi.

In early 1998, rumors about the presence of *dukun santet* (individuals accused of practicing black magic) began to spread widely across Banyuwangi's villages.<sup>4</sup> These rumors were fueled by a series of mysterious deaths in several areas, which were then linked to practices of black magic. Amid the tense social atmosphere of the crisis period, such rumors spread rapidly through word-of-mouth communication.<sup>5</sup>

The situation further escalated with the emergence of stories about mysterious figures dressed in black, commonly referred to as "ninjas." These figures were described as hired assassins tasked with killing religious leaders and spreading witchcraft among the population (Siegel, 2009).

<sup>1</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mitos, Dukun, Dan Sibir (Terj)* (Kanisius (Karya asli diterbitkan 1964), 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Imam Ibnu Hajar, M. Yunus Abu Bakar, and Mochammad Nginwanun Likullil Mahamid, "Political Islam in the Old and New Orders: Actions and Reactions of Islamic Figures Versus the State (1945-1973)," *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 10, no. 1 (2024): 46–61, [https://doi.org/10.30983/islam\\_realitas.v10i1.8103](https://doi.org/10.30983/islam_realitas.v10i1.8103).

<sup>3</sup> Yuniarto P, *Krisis Moneter Dan Jatuhnya Orde Baru* Jakarta: Gramedia, 2025).

<sup>4</sup> Eggy Fajar Andalas and Hidayah Budi, "Remembering the 1998 Indonesian Sorcerers Massacre: Memory of Tragedy and Trauma in Intan Andaru's Perempuan Bersampur Merah (Woman in Red Scarf)" 13, no. 1 (2021): 1–13.

<sup>5</sup> Latif Kusairi, "Ontran-Ontran Demokrasi: Kekerasan Dengan Isu Dukun Santet Di Banyuwangi 1998-1999," *Universitas Gadjah Mada*, 2015.

The "ninja" narrative fueled mass panic, fostering deep suspicion among villagers toward their neighbors and increasing wariness of outsiders entering their communities.

Beginning in February 1998, violent acts started to occur. Several individuals suspected of being shamans were brutally attacked and killed by mobs. These executions were often exceptionally cruel, carried out using sharp weapons or through the burning of victims' homes. The early incidents quickly triggered a wave of imitation, spreading across multiple districts of Banyuwangi.<sup>6</sup>

The violence peaked between June and September 1998, coinciding with the fall of President Soeharto in May of that year. A power vacuum at the local level, combined with the weakened capacity of security forces, created conditions in which mobs could act with relative impunity. Accusations of witchcraft became a collective justification for murder, as fear was transformed into open violence.<sup>7</sup>

The victims were not limited to those accused of practicing witchcraft; many innocent people were also targeted. Religious figures, Qur'an teachers, and elderly residents were among those killed merely on the basis of suspicion. According to the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM, 2012), at least 194 people were killed in Banyuwangi, while the total number of victims across East Java exceeded 300.<sup>8</sup>

At the time, local government reported 115 deaths, while NU's fact-finding team recorded 147 victims.<sup>9</sup> These discrepancies highlight the difficulty of uncovering accurate accounts amid widespread chaos and fear. Available evidence

<sup>6</sup> Budiawan, *Mematahkan Pewarisan Ingatan* (Jakarta: EISAM, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Charles Tilly, "The Politics Of collective Violence / Charles Tilly. p. Cm. – (Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics) Includes Bibliographical References and Index. ISBN 0-521-82428-1 – ISBN 0-521-53145-4 (Pb.)," n.d.

<sup>8</sup> F. Colombijn, "Mobilities and Mobilizations," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 2012 36(4), 643 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2012.01119.x>.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*



suggests that the actual number of victims was likely far higher than official government figures indicate.

Security forces were often late to respond and largely ineffective in halting the wave of violence. In some cases, they were even accused of allowing mobs to act without meaningful intervention.<sup>10</sup> This failure further fueled suspicions that supra-local operations or political interests either deliberately allowed or actively provoked the unrest.

From a cultural perspective, witchcraft accusations were not merely expressions of social tension but also functioned as myths that gave meaning to disorder. The symbol of *santet* provided a framework through which the community could interpret crises that defied rational explanation. Within this symbolic logic, the killing of alleged “shamans” was interpreted as a form of moral cleansing of the community.<sup>11</sup>

From a political perspective, witchcraft accusations were exploited as instruments of mass mobilization. Collective fear was directed toward specific individuals, making acts of vigilantism appear legitimate in the eyes of the masses. As Siegel (2009) notes, the label of “shaman” often served as a political weapon, used to eliminate rivals or assert legitimacy.

Charles Tilly’s analysis of collective violence helps explain these dynamics.<sup>12</sup> The mass violence in Banyuwangi reflected three key elements: a shared interest in eliminating the perceived fear of witchcraft; organization through existing social networks and religious leadership; and political opportunities created by the collapse of state control after Soeharto’s fall. Together, these conditions created a permissive environment in which mass violence could erupt rapidly.

<sup>10</sup> Komnas HAM, “Laporan Penyelidikan Kasus Pelanggaran HAM Berat Di Banyuwangi,” Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mitos, Dukun, Dan Sibir (Terj)*.

<sup>12</sup> Tilly, “The Politics Of collective Violence / Charles Tilly. p. Cm. – (Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics) Includes Bibliographical References and Index. ISBN 0-521-82428-1 – ISBN 0-521-53145-4 (Pb.)”

In the aftermath, the central government and institutions such as Komnas HAM launched investigations. Their findings concluded that the violence in Banyuwangi was systematic and widespread, thus falling under the category of gross human rights violations.<sup>13</sup> Yet, the main actors behind the mass mobilization remain unidentified to this day.

Two decades later, the 1998 Banyuwangi tragedy remains a deeply traumatic collective memory. For victims’ families, the stigma of being associated with alleged “witchcraft shamans” continues to persist, even though guilt was never proven. The tragedy left deep social scars and serves as a stark reminder of how vulnerable societies are when deeply rooted traditional beliefs are manipulated by political circumstances.<sup>14</sup>

Studies of violence based on accusations of witchcraft in Banyuwangi in 1998 generally lie at the intersection of cultural analysis, political studies, and theories of collective violence. Belief in witchcraft is commonly understood as part of cosmological framework of East Javanese agrarian society, serving as a social mechanism to explain uncertainty and suffering. At the same time, the violence cannot be separated from the economic and political crises preceding the collapse of the New Order, which significantly weakened state legitimacy and control.

James T. Siegel interprets the “ninja” narrative as a political myth that channeled collective fear, in which the label of “witchcraft practitioner” functioned as a tool to legitimize violence. In parallel, Charles Tilly’s theory of collective violence explains the Banyuwangi events as the result of shared interests, mobilization through social networks, and

<sup>13</sup> Komnas HAM, “Laporan Investigasi Pelanggaran HAM Berat Kasus Banyuwangi 1998,” Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Latif Kusairi, “Bukti Acara Pemeriksaan Kepolisian Sebagai Data Sejarah: Upaya Merekonstruksi Kekerasan Banyuwangi Tahun 1998-1999: Evidence of Police Investigation Events as Historical Data: Efforts to Reconstruct the Banyuwangi Violence in 1998-1999,” *Journal Of Islamic History* 1, no. 2 (2021): 101–19.



political opportunities created by the weakening of state authority.

Reports by Komnas HAM emphasize that the violence was systematic and widespread, thus constituting a serious human rights violation. However, these reports tend to focus more on victims and state responsibility than on the social and cultural processes that enabled the violence to be collectively accepted.

This paper highlights several research gaps in existing studies of the 1998 Banyuwangi tragedy. In particular, there remains a lack of integrative analysis linking beliefs in *santet* (witchcraft) with the political dynamics of violence. The role of *santet* myths as instruments of political mobilization, as well as the involvement of local actors in transforming rumors into organized violence, remains underexplored. Moreover, victim-centered perspectives and analyses of the long-term impacts of violence, especially the enduring social stigma faced by victims' families, are still limited. Addressing these gaps requires further research that systematically integrates cultural interpretation, political analysis, and collective memory dimensions.

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of collective violence arising from accusations of witchcraft in Banyuwangi in 1998. Data were collected through a comprehensive literature review, document and archival analysis, and, where possible, in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders. The data were conducted using thematic analysis to identify recurring narratives and patterns related to witchcraft beliefs, collective fear, mass mobilization, and power relations. This analysis is guided by theories of collective violence and political myth, which serve as the study's main analytical framework.

### **Reading the 1998 Banyuwangi Violence through Social and Political Conditions: A Theoretical Framework**

This study employs a historical-qualitative approach that emphasizes the analysis of

documents, testimonies, and scholarly literature. Primary sources include mass media reports, investigations conducted by Komnas HAM (the National Commission on Human Rights), and police examination records (*Bukti Acara Pemeriksaan*), which together serve as the empirical foundation for reconstructing the chronology of the 1998 Banyuwangi violence.<sup>15</sup> Secondary sources consist of previous studies, books, and academic articles discussing witchcraft (*santet*), collective violence, and Indonesia's political transition.

The initial stage of this research involves heuristics, namely the systematic collection of primary and secondary sources. Komnas HAM's investigation report (2000) recorded that more than one hundred people were killed due to accusations of being shamans practicing *santet*. At the same time, various media outlets reported these events in sensational manner, accelerating the spread of the issue. Community testimonies further indicate that rumors about *dukun santet* circulated widely from village to village, creating mass panic.<sup>16</sup>

The next stage, source criticism, reveals differences between official narratives and the accounts of victims and their families. Government reports often framed the events as a spontaneous "community reaction to witchcraft," whereas victims emphasized the failure of security forces to protect citizens. Media narratives were also layered: while some reports stressed the perceived threat of *dukun santet*, others depicted the brutality of the mob violence.<sup>17</sup>

In the interpretation stage, Charles Tilly's (2003) theory of collective violence is employed to understand the dynamics of mass mobilization. The Banyuwangi violence did not arise spontaneously but was triggered by the political crisis and the weakening of state legitimacy. In

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Rogers Brubaker, David D Laitin, and Rogers Brubaker, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24, no. 1998 (2026): 423–52, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/223488>.

<sup>17</sup> Komnas HAM, "Laporan Penyelidikan Kasus Pelanggaran HAM Berat Di Banyuwangi."



this context, collective fear sought a tangible target, and *santet* functioned as a powerful symbolic enemy that could be easily mobilized to justify violence.

Here, James T. Siegel's insights are particularly relevant. In *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta*, Siegel (2009) asserts that the New Order regime constructed narratives of "imaginary criminality," abstract threats believed to exist within society.<sup>18</sup> These narratives seeped into the identity of ordinary citizens, leaving them living under the shadow of fear toward an "unseen enemy." Violence against individuals accused of being *dukun santet* in Banyuwangi reflects a similar pattern, in which baseless accusations came to legitimize the execution of fellow villagers.

Furthermore, in *Naming the Witch*, Siegel (2006) highlights that accusations of witchcraft often emerge during times of socio-political uncertainty. Processes of modernization and political crisis generate a need to "name the unexplainable." In Banyuwangi's case, *santet* served as an instant explanation for misfortune, illness, or crisis within the community. At the same time, such accusations became a channel for releasing accumulated social tensions that the state failed to resolve.

Siegel (2009) also underscores the blurring of moral boundaries in episodes of collective violence. Through narratives of criminality, the state effectively reclassified victims: they were no longer seen as citizens entitled to protection but as "criminals" deemed deserving of punishment. This framing was reflected in official reports that described victims as "dangerous shamans," despite the absence of any legal evidence to substantiate these accusations.

The final stage of analysis is historiography, or the construction of an academic narrative. The 1998 Banyuwangi violence was not merely a local tragedy but part of the broader national transition crisis. *Santet* functioned as a collective myth that allowed communities to unite against an imagined

enemy, while the state was either absent or complicit in letting the violence unfold.

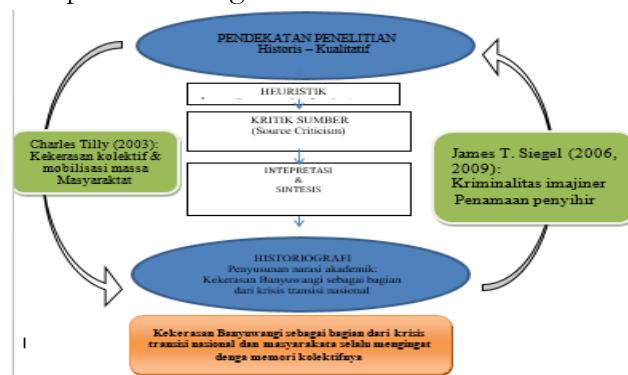


Chart 1.  
A Theoretical Analysis of Violence in Banyuwangi

Using Tilly's theory and Siegel's analytical framework, the events can be understood as a manifestation of collective violence triggered by a crisis of legitimacy, reinforced by myth, and legitimized by narratives of imaginary criminality.

### Economic Crisis, Shamans, and the Emergence of Violence

The 1997 monetary crisis marked the beginning of a major shock for the people of Banyuwangi. The rupiah plummeted, the prices of basic necessities soared, and thousands lost their jobs. Banyuwangi in Figures 1997 recorded that the local economy relied heavily on agriculture and small-scale trade, making the effects of the crisis quickly translate into social unrest.<sup>19</sup>

In these difficult situations, community suffering was not interpreted solely through the lens of rational economics. Clifford Geertz<sup>20</sup> has shown how Javanese society integrates the supernatural world into everyday life. Similarly, Nicholas Herriman<sup>21</sup> emphasized that beliefs in witchcraft (*santet*) often emerged as channels for anxiety when grievances cannot easily be resolved through formal legal or political frameworks.

<sup>19</sup> K van Dijk, *A Country in Despair: Indonesia between 1997 and 2000* (KITLV Press, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> R. E. Elson, "Clifford Geertz, 1926-2006: Meaning, Method and Indonesian Economic History," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 43, no. 2 (2007): 251-64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00074910701408081>.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Herriman, *The Entangled State: Sorcery, State Control, and Violence in Indonesia* (Yale University Southeast Asia Studies New Haven, CT, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> J T Siegel, *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta: Counter-Revolution Today* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).



Thus, economic hardship intertwined readily with local beliefs in mystical powers.

Tensions became more complex when the issue of santet merged with political rumors. Liddle (1992) explains how the New Order regime frequently deployed the stigma of “communist” to eliminate political opponents, while Roosa 22 demonstrated that such accusations functioned as moral justifications for violence. In Banyuwangi, accusations of being a “dukun santet” were often accompanied by suspicions of affiliation with the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) sympathizer.

Within this context, James Siegel<sup>23</sup> saw the practice of “naming the witch” as a mechanism for channeling collective fear. Meanwhile, Charles Tilly (2004) argued that collective violence tends to erupt when political structures open space for mass mobilization. The symbol of “santet” thus became an effective tool to mobilize public anger and vent frustrations born of economic and political pressure.

By early 1998, clear signs of escalation had been officially recorded. The Purwoharno Police Sector Archive (No. Pol B/09/II/1998, February 9, 1998) and the Rogojampi Police Sector Archive (February 10, 1998) reported incidents related to accusations of santet. Meanwhile, the Glenmore Subdistrict Archive (February 10, 1998), issued in response to a radiogram from the Banyuwangi Regent, shows that the local government had formally raised its level of alert. These records indicate that public anxiety was becoming institutionalized, shifting from circulating rumor to a recognized security issue.<sup>24</sup>

In the same year, national media outlets also documented the unrest in Banyuwangi. Kompas (February 12, 1998) wrote that Banyuwangi was in a state of tension, while Jawa Pos (January 16, 1998) reported that a local journalist had fallen victim to the growing chaos. These media records

<sup>22</sup> John Roosa, *Dalih Pembunuhan Massal: Gerakan 30 September Dan Kudeta Suharto*, *Journal GEEJ*, vol. 7, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> James T Siegel, “SUHARTO , WITCHES” 71, no. 71 (2001): 27–78.

<sup>24</sup> Arsip Kepolisian Sektor Purwoharno, “No. Pol B/09/II/1998 (9 Februari 1998),” n.d.

confirmed that the issue of santet had shifted beyond informal rumor to a tangible social threat.

By mid-1998, waves of violence spread across Banyuwangi. A recurring pattern was clear: an individual would be accused of being a dukun santet, mobs would descend upon the victim’s house (often at night), and the accused would be brutally executed. Jawa Pos (October 1, 1998) reported “Six People Massacred in a Day,” while Kompas (October 4, 1998) referred to the event as the “Drama of the Dukun Santet Massacre.” Sukidin (2010) estimated that the death toll exceeded 200 people.

Victims generally came from among the elderly individuals, those believed to possess mystical knowledge, or persons with different social positions.<sup>25</sup> Ironically, some residents even defended the perpetrators. Jawa Pos (September 16, 1998) reported that hundreds of residents stormed the district police headquarters, demanding the release of those responsible for the killings. Frederick (2002) described this phenomenon as the “invisible hand” in the pattern of Indonesian violence.<sup>26</sup>

In response to the escalating violence, the local government attempted a series of measures to ease the situation. The East Java Regional Archives (ADJT No. 4125, September 30, 1998) recorded a Regent’s decree establishing a “Counseling Team for Handling Santet Cases.”<sup>27</sup> Another archive (ADJT No. 4106) showed that the Brawijaya Regional Military Command took over the case, formally reframing the issue of santet as a serious threat to security.

The crisis also reverberated through local political and religious institutions. ADJT Archive No. 4128 contains an official statement from Banyuwangi’s branch of the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), while records of the

<sup>25</sup> J. Thomas Lindblad and Peter Post, “Indonesian Economic Decolonization in Regional and International Perspective,” *Indonesian Economic Decolonization in Regional and International Perspective*, 2009, 1–212, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004253780>.

<sup>26</sup> Jawa Pos, “16 Januari 1998.,” n.d.

<sup>27</sup> Arsip Daerah Jawa Timur (ADJT), “No. 4106 (1998),” n.d.



“Ulama 101” meeting with local government officials show the active involvement of religious and political elites. Media coverage further underscores the fragility of state authority at this moment. *Jawa Pos* (October 1, 1998) wrote that the Regional Commander had asked for assistance from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, a move that signaled the weakening grip of state security forces to manage the crisis independently.

By October 1998, law enforcement measures shifted toward formal judicial processes. Banyuwangi Police records (No. B/320/X/1998) documented investigations into Salimi and several others, followed by the issuance of detention warrants on October 23, 1998. Court proceedings are recorded in the Banyuwangi District Court Archive No. 416/Pid.B/1998/PN.BWI, which detailed the case of Rochman et al. under indictment No. PDM-361/EPO/BWNGI/12.98.28

Subsequent trials involved numerous defendants. The Banyuwangi District Court Archive No. P-29 recorded the indictment of Mabi bin Sabbi, while Archive No. P-42 documented the cases of Sapi'i, Salimi, and Bunali. Appeals in several cases reached the Surabaya High Court (Decision No. 121/Pid/1999/PT.SBY), showing that the state attempted to prosecute perpetrators, though the outcomes remain contested.<sup>29</sup>

Outside the judicial track, NU's Fact-Finding Team (Tim Pencari Fakta, TPF-NU) produced an independent report that offered an alternative reading of the violence. *Kompas* (October 15, 1998) published an editorial titled “The Banyuwangi Case: A Conspiracy to Divide NU,” while *D&R* (October 10, 1998) ran a feature asking, “Mastermind Behind the Dukun Santet Massacres?” These controversies highlight how santet became an arena of political discourse.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Arsip Pengadilan Negeri Banyuwangi, “No. 416/Pid.B/1998/PN.BWI (1998).,” n.d.

<sup>29</sup> Arsip Kejaksaan Negeri Banyuwangi, “P-29 Dan P-42 (1998).,” n.d.

<sup>30</sup> *D&R*, “10 Oktober 1998.,” n.d.

The social consequences of the violence were profound. Many families lost not only relatives but also livelihoods and social dignity. A letter from the Bustanul Makmur Islamic Boarding School, signed by KH. Thoha Muntoha, explicitly underlined the atmosphere of anxiety within pesantren circles. Banyuwangi in Figures 2010 and the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) 2010–2015 both acknowledged social trauma as a significant obstacle to local development.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the Banyuwangi violence of 1997-1999 cannot be understood merely as a local conflict sparked by internal rural tensions. Rather, it was the product of a complex intersection between Indonesia's monetary crisis, political tensions during the post-New Order transition, Javanese cultural symbolism surrounding shamans and witchcraft, and the intervention of supra-local actors who used the issue of santet as an instrument of power. The wave of killings against those accused of being shamans was not an isolated episode but was deeply interwoven with the grand narrative of regime collapse and national uncertainty.

The traces of this tragedy are preserved across multiple layers of documentation: state bureaucratic archives recording local security reports, police archives listing victims and suspects, national media coverage that often simplified the case as a “mystical phenomenon,” and court rulings that prosecuted perpetrators without fully exposing the intellectual masterminds behind the violence.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, later academic research has demonstrated that this violence was not merely an expression of local belief systems, but part of broader socio-political

<sup>31</sup> Surat Pondok Pesantren Bustanul Makmur, “KH. Thoha Muntoha, Banyuwangi (1998),” n.d.

<sup>32</sup> Media Zainul Bahri, “EXPRESSING POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS Religion-Science Relations in Indonesian Muslim Thinkers 1970-2014” 56, no. 1 (2018): 155–86, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2018.561.155-186>.



dynamics in which communities became victims of democratic transition instability.<sup>33</sup>

The collective memory of Banyuwangi society also underwent a profound transformation. Before the tragedy, Banyuwangi was often portrayed as a “mystical region” shaped by its distinctive Osing culture and strong spiritual traditions. In the aftermath of the violence, however, this label shifted toward that of a “conflict-prone region,” firmly embedded in national perception.<sup>34</sup> Public memory of Banyuwangi was no longer associated only with ritual practices and local traditions, but increasingly with the social wounds left by mass killings.<sup>35</sup> This transformation of image stemmed not only from local memory, but also from media constructions, state narratives, and academic discourse that collectively reproduced the tragedy as part of Indonesia’s late New Order history.

The emergence of accusations of *santet* (sorcery) in Banyuwangi between 1997 and 1999 cannot be separated from the broader context of economic crisis and political transition during the Reformasi era, which opened space for the mobilization of collective violence. These accusations functioned as a social mechanism for channeling fear, anger, and uncertainty that remained unaddressed by formal institutions. The network of actors involved operated across multiple levels—from local crowds and informal village elites to ambiguous security apparatuses, and supra-local actors such as national media, political elites, and religious organizations. Together, they deploy a repertoire of actions that

<sup>33</sup> African Studies, “Review Reviewed Work ( s ): State of Authority: The State in Society in Indonesia by Gerry van Klinken and Joshua Barker Review by : Michael Buehler Source : South East Asia Research , Vol . 18 , No . 2 , SPECIAL ISSUE : TRANSFORMATIONS OF SOUTH EAST ASI” 18, no. 2 (2025).

<sup>34</sup> Mhd. Fajri Husnul Qolbi1, Aidinil Zetra, Asrinaldi, “The Social Movement of the West Sumatra Islamic Shari’ a Enforcement Committee ( KPSI ) in the Strengthening of Islamic Values in West Sumatra,” *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 8, no. 1 (2022), [https://doi.org/DOI: https://doi.org/10.30983/islam\\_realitas.v8i1.5389](https://doi.org/DOI: https://doi.org/10.30983/islam_realitas.v8i1.5389).

<sup>35</sup> Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–91.

included rumor circulation, stigmatization (linking *santet* to PKI), vigilante violence, and partial security and legal interventions. Myths and rumors about *santet* were constructed and circulated through everyday conversations, media reporting, and Javanese cultural symbols, and were then mobilized to legitimize violence by framing the victims as moral and security threats.

As a result, this violence transformed Banyuwangi’s civic identity and collective memory—from an image of spiritual-mystical locality into a conflict zone—and reconfigured power relations in the Reformasi era. Enduring social trauma, fragmented trust, and unfinished state narratives have left deep wounds, while simultaneously revealing the vulnerability of democratization to the manipulation of collective fear.

### Myths That Kill: Santet and Collective Violence in Banyuwangi

Myths, rumors, and the collective imagination surrounding *santet* do not arise spontaneously; rather, they are socially constructed through the interaction of local belief systems, social inequality, and conditions of crisis.<sup>36</sup> In many rural contexts in Indonesia, *santet* is understood as an explanatory framework for forms of suffering that cannot be rationally accounted for—sudden illness, unnatural death, or economic failure. These myths are reinforced by local cosmologies that view the world as a space of interaction between humans and supernatural forces.

Rumors function as the primary medium through which knowledge about *santet* circulates. They spread through everyday conversations, gossip, and orally transmitted stories, often without verification.<sup>37</sup> Under situations of heightened social tension, such as agrarian conflict, economic jealousy, or distrust toward state institutions, these rumors are transformed

<sup>36</sup> Muttafaqur Rohmah, “Student and Culture: Story of Banyuwangi” 6, no. 2 (2019).

<sup>37</sup> Ahmad Nashih Luthf, *Kekerasan Kemanusiaan Dan Perampasan Tanah Pasca- 1965 Di Banyuwangi , Jawa Timur Kekerasan Kemanusiaan Dan Perampasan Tanah Pasca-*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.4000/archipel.624>.



into “social truths” that are difficult to contest.<sup>38</sup> Certain individuals are then labeled as *santet* practitioners, not on the basis of empirical evidence, but through symbolic associations: reclusive behavior, ambiguous social status, or long-standing reputations within the community.<sup>39</sup>

The collective imagination serves to bind myths and rumors into a moral narrative. *Santet* is positioned as a hidden crime that threatens social order, so that violence against alleged perpetrators is perceived not as criminal behavior, but as an act of communal self-defense.<sup>40</sup> Within this moral framework, violence becomes “reasonable” and even morally legitimate. Thus, myths and rumors do not merely explain reality; they are actively deployed to legitimize acts of violence, channeling collective fear and frustration toward identifiable and punishable targets.<sup>41</sup>

In 1998, Banyuwangi—long known for its natural beauty and rich mystical traditions—was suddenly turned into a stage of tragedy.<sup>42</sup> At that time, Indonesia was shaken by the monetary crisis: prices soared uncontrollably, thousands lost their jobs, and a pervasive sense of uncertainty enveloped the entire nation. Within this atmosphere of collective anxiety, an old issue resurfaced: the figure of *dukun santet*, individuals accused of practicing black magic.

In its early phase, the circulation of rumors remained relatively limited, consisting primarily of

<sup>38</sup> Hanif Risa Mustafa, “Pergolakan Agraria 1965-1966 Di Banyuwangi The Agrarian Agitation of 1965-1966 in Banyuwangi” 1, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>39</sup> Heru S P Saputra et al., “Makara Human Behavior Studies in Asia Ancestor’s Legacy: Response of Using People to Sacred Values and Social Function of Seblang Ritual Wasiat Leluhur: Respons Orang Using Terhadap Sakralitas Dan Fungsi Sosial Ritual Seblang” 18, no. 1 (2014): 53–65, <https://doi.org/10.7454/mssh.v18i1.3461>.

<sup>40</sup> Arif Subekti and Hervina Nurullita, “Singing the Memories: Songs about the 1965 Anti-Communist Violence in Banyuwangi Arif” 116, no. October 2023 (2023).

<sup>41</sup> Ahmad Nashih Luthfi Tiara Nur Khanifa, Syarli Syanurisma, Ahmad Nashih Luthfi, “Reforma, Menuju Dan, Agraria Sosial, Perhutanan Banyuwangi, D I Timur, Jawa Telaah, Sebuah Dan, Spasial,” *JURNAL WIDYA BHUMI* 1, no. 2 (2024): 101–24.

<sup>42</sup> Abdul Manan, Veven Sp Wardhana, and Imam Suma Atmadja, *Geger Santet Banyuwangi* (Surabaya: Institut Studi Arus Informasi, 2001).

localized allegations that certain community members were engaged in witchcraft. Beliefs surrounding *santet* had long been embedded in the sociocultural fabric of Banyuwangi, functioning as a social explanatory mechanism for sudden illness, misfortune, and failure. However, by mid-1998, these rumors underwent a process of escalation, transforming into widespread collective anger at the community level.

This process culminated on January 15, 1998, when the use of force by state security apparatuses to disperse demonstrators triggered riots in the Purworejo District. Rather than restoring order, the incident intensified public grievances and contributed to the expansion of *santet*-related accusations among community members.<sup>43</sup>

At night, crowds began to gather. Torches lit up, voices roared. The homes of those accused were surrounded, doors were broken down, and the inhabitants were dragged out. Many had no chance to defend themselves. Within minutes, accusations turned into executions. Most victims were elderly people believed to possess mystical powers. Tragically, some residents even supported the killings, as if the death of one person could resolve shared anxieties.

Security forces, whose duty was to protect civilians, were not always present to intervene. In several cases, their inaction allowed mobs to unleash their rage, reinforcing the belief that such actions were “justified.” As a result, violence then spread rapidly from one village to another, ultimately claiming hundreds of lives.

The 1998 killings in Banyuwangi reveal a pattern of violence rooted in accusations of witchcraft (*dukun santet*) that led to vigilantism. Among victims was Sulaiman, killed on 28 August 1998 in Dusun Pendarungan after being assaulted by a mob and drowned; Djamuri, murdered on 3 September 1998 in Patoman after being beaten,

<sup>43</sup> Pujo Semedi et al., “Andrew Beatty, A Shadow Falls; In the Heart of Java,” *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 166, no. 2–3 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90003621>.



slashed, and hanged following rumors that involved both local residents and outsiders;<sup>44</sup> Kustari, killed on 7 September 1998 in Kedungbaru through a collective beating following a community meeting; Irsad, murdered on 27 September 1998 in Kembiritan by a mysterious group that carried out a direct execution without local mob involvement;<sup>45</sup> Saperik, killed on 28 September 1998 in Benculuk by a mob from multiple villages using extreme physical violence; and Jumani, murdered on 1 October 1998 in Bulusan through a planned ambush disguised as a neighborhood watch patrol. Mateha survived two attempted killings, on 18 and 30 September 1998, both carried out through organized attacks.<sup>46</sup>

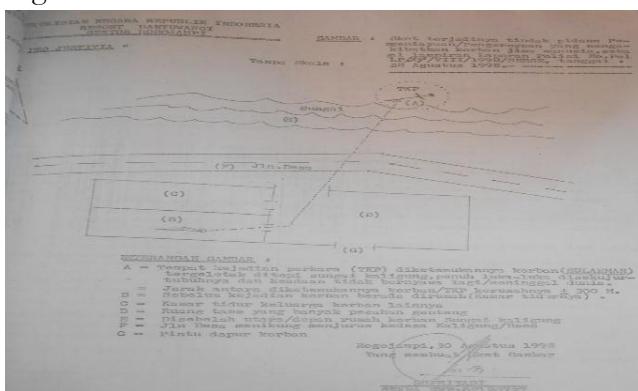


Figure 1. The murder pattern of Sulaiman

Many scholars argue that the tragedy cannot be explained solely by belief in *santet*. As Charles Tilly has noted, in times of political instability, crowds can be mobilized for specific purposes. Indeed, the violence in Banyuwangi coincided with the collapse of the New Order regime, a moment when Indonesian politics was on the brink of massive transformation.

Within this context, *santet* functioned as a kind of political language. It was not merely a

<sup>44</sup> Arsip Pengadilan Negeri Banyuwangi, "No P-42 Dalam Surat Dakwaan Kasus Pembunuhan Djamuri Dengan Terdakwa Sapi,i.No.Reg.Perk.PDM-473/EPO/BWNGI/02.09," n.d.

<sup>45</sup> Arsip Pengadilan Negeri Banyuwangi, "No P-42 Dalam Surat Tuntutan Kejaksaan Negeri Banyuwangi No. REG. Perk: PDM-482/EPO/BWI/02/1999., Dengan Terdakwa Salimi Dan Bunali Dalam Pembunuhan Kustari," n.d.

<sup>46</sup> Arsip Tim Pencari Fakta-Nahdlatul Ulama (TPF-NU), "Daftar Nama Korban No 96," n.d.

myth, but a tool to express anxiety, channel anger, and negotiate power. In other words, *santet* became a scapegoat amid crisis. Its legacy continues to shape Banyuwangi's public image. The region is remembered not only as the land of using culture or a tourist destination at the eastern tip of Java, but also as a place with a dark association as the "city of *santet*." Despite ongoing efforts by local authorities to rebrand Banyuwangi as the "Sunrise of Java," the shadows of the 1998 tragedy continue to linger.

This history underscores how rumors, myths, and collective fear can turn lethal when combined with economic collapse, political turmoil, and weak state control. The events of Banyuwangi in 1998 stand as a bitter lesson of how a supernatural narrative could lead to the loss of hundreds of real human lives.

Violence linked to accusations of *dukun santet* in Banyuwangi between 1998 and 1999 resulted in a high number of fatalities, although official figures varied.<sup>47</sup> The NU Fact-Finding Team (TPF NU) recorded approximately 100 deaths, while the Military's Fact-Finding Team (TPF ABRI) reported at least 95 people killed. Most victims died within their immediate social environments, particularly in their own homes or at neighborhood security posts after being captured and subjected to mob punishment. Others were murdered on village roads, in rice fields, or in plantations. In several cases, victims' bodies were disposed of in rivers or abandoned in remote locations, intensifying fear and psychological terror among local communities. This spatial pattern of violence indicates that the killings were widely dispersed across village social spaces, underscoring the prevalence of vigilantism and the limited capacity of the state to control collective violence during Indonesia's political transition.

<sup>47</sup> Charles A. Coppel, *Violent Conflicts in Indonesia* (New York: Routledge: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006., n.d.).



## Civic Identity, Collective Memory, and Reconciliation after the Violence of Banyuwangi

The mass violence associated with witchcraft (*santet*) in Banyuwangi between 1998 and 1999 resulted not only in the loss of hundreds of deaths but also in profound social trauma. Hundreds were killed due to accusations of being *dukun santet*, and since then Banyuwangi has been stigmatized as the “City of *Santet*”.<sup>48</sup> This stigma shaped a painful collective memory, not only for the victims’ families but also for the wider community that had to bear a persistent negative stereotype.<sup>49</sup>

Drawing on Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire*—collective memory can be understood as a site where past events are continuously linked to present identities. In the Banyuwangi case, the 1998 violence became such a site of memory, reinforcing trauma into the region’s civic identity.<sup>50</sup> For outsiders, Banyuwangi became associated with fear, while for local people the tragedy reinforced a sense of withdrawal. This trauma did not stand alone, but resonated with earlier episodes of violence in Banyuwangi’s history, from the *Puputan Bayu* (1771–1772) and the 1965 tragedy of anti-communist killings to the *santet*-related violence of 1998.<sup>51</sup>

Processes of memory reconciliation after the violence did not happen quickly. In the early 2000s, the local government introduced the slogan *jenggirat tangi* (rising up) as a moral call for society to recover from trauma.<sup>52</sup> Overtime, this

slogan was popularized through music, campaigns, and public policy.



Figure 2. Tagline Banyuwangi, *Jenggirat Tangi*

Local authorities actively sought to renegotiate Banyuwangi’s negative stigma into a more affirmative civic identity. For instance, during the leadership of Regent Abdullah Azwar Anas (2010-2020),<sup>53</sup> Banyuwangi was promoted with positive taglines such as “Sunrise of Java.” At the same time, the word *santet* was reinterpreted into cultural and creative-economic symbols.<sup>54</sup> This transformation reflects Paul Connerton’s (1989) view that social memory is shaped not only by what societies remember explicitly, but also by the rituals, symbols, and daily practices through which new meanings are affirmed.

Artists, academics, and civil society actors played an important role in reshaping trauma into a productive identity. *Santet* was no longer seen solely as black magic; it was reclassified into four types: black, red, yellow, and white, each associated with distinct social functions.<sup>55</sup> Cultural products and creative economy ventures embraced *santet* symbols, such as *Kopi Jaran Goyang* or T-shirts bearing the slogan *Tak Santet Riko* (I

<sup>48</sup> Latif Kusairi, “Ontran-Ontran Demokrasi: Kekerasan Dengan Isu Dukun Santet Di Banyuwangi 1998-1999.”

<sup>49</sup> I Kadek Yudiana, “Reconstruction of the Identity Of Female-Female Dancer in 1975-2022” 7, no. 2 (2023): 676–89, <https://doi.org/10.36526/js.v3i2.3006>.

<sup>50</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire (The Place of Memory),” no. 26 (1989): 7–25.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Hasnan Singodimayan, “16 January, 2015.”

<sup>52</sup> Latif Kusairi, “Witchcraft and Sumpah Pocong: Transformation and Resolution of Cases with the Issue of Shamans in Banyuwangi,” *SHAHIH: Journal of Islamicate Multidisciplinary* 7, no. 1 (2022): 55–66, <https://doi.org/10.22515/shahih.v7i1.5198>.

<sup>53</sup> Agus Mursidi, Hervina Nurullita, and Nafiatur Rizki, “Leadership Of The Regent Abdullah Azwar Anas In Developing And Advancing The District Of Banyuwangi Era 2010-2015” 2, no. 3 (2021): 92–97.

<sup>54</sup> Arif Subekti and Latif Kusairi, “From Sunrise of Java to Santet of Java: Recent Urban Symbolism Of Banyuwangi, Indonesia” 320, no. Icskse 2018 (2019): 144–47, <https://doi.org/10.2991/icskse-18.2019.28>.

<sup>55</sup> Heru S P Saputra, *Memuja Mantra; Sabuk Mangir Dan Jaran Goyang Masyarakat Suka Using Banyuwangi* (LKIS Pelangi aksara, 2007).



will not hex you), transforming horror into local pride.<sup>56</sup>

At the cultural and intellectual level, reconciliation is further evidenced by the growing legitimization of *santet* within academic discourse.<sup>57</sup> Scholarly studies on *santet* in Banyuwangi, previously scarce and marginal, have increasingly attracted attention from researchers at both national and international levels.<sup>58</sup> This trend reflects a paradigmatic shift from silence and stigmatization toward critical engagement and scholarly inquiry, positioning *santet* as a legitimate subject of cultural, social, and historical analysis rather than merely an object of fear or taboo. This shift signals the broader argument that collective memory is continually renegotiated to meet evolving social identity needs.<sup>59</sup>

A peak in symbolic reconciliation occurred on January 11, 2023, when President Joko Widodo expressed the state's regret for twelve gross human rights violations. This acknowledgment marked a significant step in Indonesia's ongoing journey toward transitional justice and was based on the findings of the Non-Judicial Settlement Team for Past Gross Human Rights Violations (PPHAM). Among the twelve cases recognized were the killings of those accused of being *dukun santet* (sorcerers) during the 1998-1999 violence.

This recognition was crucial as a form of moral responsibility for the state, even though it fell short of delivering full justice to the victims' families. The formal legal basis for this acknowledgment was later established through Presidential Decree No. 4/2023 and Presidential Instruction No. 2/2023. This state's apology thus

<sup>56</sup> Nicholas Herriman, *A Din of Whispers: Community, State Control, and Violence in Indonesia* (University of Western Australia, 2007).

<sup>57</sup> Bima Katangga, "Azwar Anas and Innovation in Local Government: A Phronesis Leadership Study," no. 2018 (n.d.): 1-17.

<sup>58</sup> Herriman, *A Din of Whispers: Community, State Control, and Violence in Indonesia*.

<sup>59</sup> Tiara Nur Khanifa, Syarli Syanurisma, Ahmad Nashih Luthfi, "Reforma, Menuju Dan, Agraria Sosial, Perhutanan Banyuwangi, D I Timur, Jawa Telaah, Sebuah Dan, Spasial."

represents an act of political courage in an effort to restore the dignity of communities affected by these events. It takes courage to reveal past mistakes in order to build a better national identity for the future.<sup>60</sup>

State acknowledgment also opened the way for more substantive reconciliation, as legitimizing victims' suffering made it to enter official historical narratives. This development aligns with Jan Assmann's (2011) concept of cultural memory, which emphasizes that collective memory can only serve as a source of reconciliation when it is recognized and institutionalized within political and cultural frameworks.

The reconciliation of memory in Banyuwangi illustrates a long and complex journey from trauma to identity transformation. The violence of 1998-1999 left deep scars, yet through symbolic negotiation, cultural policies, local creativity, and state recognition, traumatic memory began to shift into what may be understood as productive memory.<sup>61</sup>

Today, Banyuwangi is no longer known only as the "City of *Santet*," but also as *Jenggirat Tangi*, a symbol of communal resilience and renewal. This transformation demonstrates that collective memory is not a static burden but a dynamic arena, one that can be redirected toward reconciliation, renewed identity, and a more dignified future.<sup>62</sup> <sup>63</sup>

## Conclusion

The 1998-1999 Banyuwangi violence proves that the *santet* issue was not merely a matter of traditional belief, but a socio-political construction

<sup>60</sup> Zeffry, "Studi Memori, Politik Memori, Dan Rekonstruksi Nation Building," no. September (2023).

<sup>61</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, "On Collective Memory, Ed. Lewis A. Coser (University of Chicago Press, 1992); Irwin-Zarecka Dalam Anne Whitehead, *Memory: The New Critical Idiom* (Routledge, 2009)," n.d.

<sup>62</sup> Latif Kusairi, "Bukti Acara Pemeriksaan Kepolisian Sebagai Data Sejarah: Upaya Merekonstruksi Kekerasan Banyuwangi Tahun 1998-1999," *Journal of Islamic History* 1(2) (2021): 101-19.

<sup>63</sup> Barry Schwartz, "Rethinking the Concept of Collective Memory," *American Journal of Sociology* 105(1) (1999): 1-32, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1086/210278>.



born of intersecting economic crises, political transition, and the manipulation of cultural symbols. Witchcraft accusations became a channel for social tension and an instrument of mass mobilization, closely intertwined with the interests of both local and supra-local actors.<sup>64</sup>

The consequences of this violence went far beyond physical violence. It left deep social trauma, the collective stigma of “City of Santet,” and fractured social relations within the community. This tragedy became embedded in collective memory as a historical wound, shaping both traumatic civic identity and reinforcing negative stereotypes from outsiders.<sup>65</sup><sup>66</sup>

Yet, this dark memory has not remained static. The post-violence reconciliation process shows how society and local government actively worked to renegotiate stigma into a renewed identity. Through the symbolic narrative of *jenggirat tangi*, tourism rebranding such as “Sunrise of Java,” and the transformation of *santet* into cultural and creative products, Banyuwangi sought to rise from the shadow of tragedy.<sup>67</sup>

The state’s acknowledgment of the Banyuwangi case as a gross human rights violation on January 11, 2023 underscored that memory reconciliation also requires political legitimacy. The government’s expression of regret became a gateway to recognition for victims and their families, and a basis for building a more just collective memory.

Thus, the Banyuwangi tragedy of 1998-1999 should be understood as a multidimensional event: rooted in local cosmology, exacerbated by national crisis, and legitimized through political narratives. The reconstruction of memory

surrounding this event highlights the dynamic nature of collective memory—capable of shifting from trauma into strength. From the “City of Santet” to ‘*Jenggirat Tangi*,” Banyuwangi has sought to rebuild a dignified image while turning historical wounds into a collective lesson for the nation.

From a broader analytical perspective, the processes of economic and cultural reconciliation in Banyuwangi can be understood as a form of social transformation operating simultaneously across multiple layers of social life. Reconciliation here is not merely responsive to a history of stigma and symbolic violence that once strongly adhered to the region, but is also projective in nature, oriented toward the formation of a new future horizon for collective identity and regional development. In this sense, reconciliation functions not only as a mechanism of post-trauma social healing, but also as an arena for the production of meaning, saturated with negotiation, ideological contestation, and power relations among various actors.

At the symbolic level, *santet* undergoes a profound process of resignification. This symbol, long understood in the national public imagination as a representation of irrationality, threat, and latent violence, is gradually reappropriated by local communities as part of a more complex cultural narrative. This process does not aim to normatively justify mystical practices, but rather to reposition them as cultural-historical facts that emerged from specific social contexts. In this way, society is not forced to forget or erase traumatic memories, but is instead invited to manage them reflectively.<sup>68</sup> *Santet*, which once functioned as a source of fear and stigma, is thus transformed into a medium for critical reflection on histories of violence, social relations, and mechanisms of social control.

<sup>64</sup> Tilly, “The Politics Of collective Violence / Charles Tilly. p. Cm. – (Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics) Includes Bibliographical References and Index. ISBN 0-521-82428-1 – ISBN 0-521-53145-4 (Pb.)”

<sup>65</sup> Schwartz, “Rethinking the Concept of Collective Memory.”

<sup>66</sup> Latif Kusairi, “Ontran-Ontran Demokrasi: Kekerasan Dengan Isu Dukun Santet Di Banyuwangi 1998-1999.”

<sup>67</sup> Subekti and Kusairi, “From Sunrise of Java to Santet of Java: Recent Urban Symbolism Of Banyuwangi, Indonesia.”

<sup>68</sup> Mukhamat Saini, “Transnasionalisme Islam Indonesia; Studi Gerakan Keagamaan Fundamentalis Komunitas Wanita Bercadar Di Kecamatan Pace Kabupaten Nganjuk,” *Tafsīqūh: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Kajian Keislaman* 6, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.52431/tafaqquh.v6i1.128>.



This symbolic transformation has direct implications for the economic dimension. The reappropriation of meaning enables symbols that were once defensive and marginalizing to be converted into cultural and economic capital. Actors in the creative industries—artists, cultural practitioners, and Osing cultural groups—stand at the forefront of this process. Through performing arts, cultural festivals, tourism narratives, and other creative productions, they not only gain economic benefits but also reclaim agency over their collective identity. The culture-based economy that has developed in Banyuwangi thus does not rest on the erasure of history, but on a critical engagement with an ambivalent symbolic heritage.

In this context, economic reconciliation cannot be separated from identity politics. The success in shifting Banyuwangi's image from a “land of *santet*” to a dynamic cultural destination is the result of a long discursive struggle. Local communities seek to define themselves, while the state and the market have interests in simplifying narratives for the purposes of branding and promotion. The tension between the complexity of local history and the demand for easily consumable representations constitutes one of the central dynamics of this reconciliation process.

The local government plays a strategic role in institutionalizing this transformation. Through cultural and tourism policies, the state acts as a facilitator, providing resources, legitimacy, and symbolic infrastructure for the production of new meanings. Within the framework of place branding, the management of symbols once considered taboo becomes a differentiating strength for Banyuwangi compared to other regions. Ideally, the state does not function as an eraser of collective memory, but as a curator of narratives that seeks to balance economic growth with respect for the complexity of local history.

This reconciliation also carries significant implications for academia and knowledge production. The decline of social stigma surrounding *santet* opens new space for critical research that was previously difficult to conduct.

*Santet* can now be positioned as a legitimate object of study for understanding collective trauma, social memory, symbolic transformation, and post-conflict cultural dynamics. In this sense, reconciliation generates epistemic gains that are no less important than economic ones. It expands the horizon of knowledge and enables bolder interdisciplinary approaches to interpreting post-violence social experiences.

Nevertheless, the distribution of benefits from this reconciliation process is neither automatic nor fully egalitarian. Economic gains, social legitimacy, and representational power are highly dependent on the power relations among actors. There is a risk that symbols that have been “restored” may once again be exploited within new economic and institutional frameworks, in which local communities risk losing control over meaning production and becoming mere objects of cultural consumption. Therefore, critical vigilance toward mechanisms of commodification and institutionalization is a necessary condition for sustaining a just and equitable reconciliation.

Overall, the improvement of collective memory in Banyuwangi regarding its former stigma as a “storehouse of *santet* practitioners” demonstrates that economic and cultural reconciliation has functioned as a medium of social resurgence. Through this process, ideological contestation encourages society to rise from symbolic and material marginalization while simultaneously redefining its position within the broader public imagination. Reconciliation in Banyuwangi is thus not an endpoint, but an ongoing, continuously negotiated process in which the past is not forgotten, but critically reworked to build a more meaningful and just future.

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## Declarations

### Author Contribution Statement

The first author was responsible for the entire research process, including study conceptualization, research design, literature review, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, manuscript drafting, critical review, revision, and final approval of the submitted version. The second and third authors contributed as academic supervisors by providing guidance, intellectual input, and critical discussions throughout the research process, from the initial conceptualization to the final revision of the manuscript, and approved the final version for publication. All authors have reviewed, revised, and verified the final text and take full responsibility for the content of this publication.

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All data used in this study are publicly available. This research utilizes primary data obtained from archival institutions, courts, the public prosecutor's office, and the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM), all of which are accessible to the public. In addition, secondary data were collected from publicly accessible academic journals, academic repositories, and openly available news materials. All sources are appropriately cited in the manuscript.

### Declaration of Interests Statement

Disclose any potential conflicts of interest, financial or non-financial, that could be perceived to influence the study design, data interpretation, or manuscript preparation. Conflicts may include funding from interested parties, honoraria, consulting relationships, stock ownership, organizational affiliations, patents, or relevant personal/professional relationships. If no conflicts exist, explicitly state that the authors declare no competing interests.

### AI Use Statement

[1] During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used **Grammarly** (latest version available at the time of use) and **DeepL Translator** (latest version available at the time of use) exclusively for language-related assistance, including grammar correction, clarity improvement, and readability enhancement. The final manuscript was thoroughly reviewed, revised, and validated by the authors, who take full responsibility for its content.

[2] ChatGPT (OpenAI) was employed as a language-support tool during the initial drafting and structural development of the manuscript. All AI-assisted outputs were critically assessed, edited, and verified by the authors. Full responsibility for the content,

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[3] No generative AI or AI-assisted tools were used in the writing, editing, or preparation of this manuscript

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