

FROM SUNRISE OF JAVA TO SANTET OF JAVA: RECENT URBAN SYMBOLISM OF BANYUWANGI, INDONESIA

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Abstract—Some of Indonesian people believe that misfortunes such as illness, death, crop failure, the death of livestock, and divorce is caused by individuals with certain magical power and knowledge—what then called “santet”. Together with Lombok and Banten, Banyuwangi is among the areas believed to be the warehouse of witchcraft. Those evil and cheaty trick attached to banyuwanginese talent born, something that supposedly rooted in the myth from the past. Islam as majority religion on contemporary Banyuwangi, condemn those sorcery and witchcraft practices, but rather than disappearing under the mass influence of Islam, Banyuwanginese people pick “santet” as their identities, as shown on their city’s tagline “Banyuwangi Kota Santet”.

Keywords—*santet, urban symbolism*

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of urban history in Indonesia has been transformed its paradigm from "all-events" nature, conversed into "socio-economic", then still pursuing the nature into the shape of history that focused on “mentality” aspects. [1] and [2] have periodized the development of Indonesian cities marked mostly by the colonial penetration and the independence of Indonesia. Those trends then changed dramatically into social aspect, as often encountered in recent Indonesian historiography. Historian began to abandoned big events and political discusses and pay more attention into local dynamics, such as the opus of [3], [4], [5], and [6]. Unlike both previous paradigms, mentality history not enough to be explored among Indonesian scholars. Yet, [7] should be prominent savant who broke the limit: highlight the meaning of guardhouse as part of urban society in Java during the colonial and postcolonial eras.

On the other hand, history of non-rural area encouraged a new perspective as the interdisciplinary amalgamation between history, memory, and urban planning. [8] entitled it as urban symbolism, an appropriate idiom to represent cultural aspects, despite morphologic, demographic, economic, socio-cultural, administrative, and planning dimension. Indonesian city identities, such as cemeteries [9], street name, and statue [9] store specific but full of contention and meaning. Hence, in the past, those sites encountered important role as representation or landmark of a city, on contrary, contemporary people treat them as an ordinary monument, vice versa.

The focus of this essay is on the symbolic spectrum of Banyuwangi, particularly on reconstructing identities aspect of the city. After the Reformasi 1998 (the relatively smooth transfer of Indonesia's political power and economic structure), the massive change occurred on reinventing identities, including on city's identities. Solo as one of popular city in Java, for example, has modified its city's tagline, from Solo Berseri (abbreviation of “bersih sehat rapi indah/clean healthy neat lovely”) in New Order era into Solo Kota Budaya (Solo the City of Culture), Solo the Spirit of Java, and Solo Future is Solo the Past [10].

Unlike Saleem, Massachusetts, which is nicknamed as "the city of witch", the labeling of Banyuwangi as the city of black magic related to myth on Blambangan Kingdom (biggest kingdom on ancient Banyuwangi). People believe that Blambangan corps were digdaya (invulnerable), and some of their indigenous inhabitants are talented with witchcraft expertise. If there were witch trials in Saleem at the end of 17th century, in 1998, Banyuwangi encouraged the massacre of over a hundred of dukun santet (black magic expert) or people accused to be the black magic practitioner. However, the tagline to acquaint and promote both city is nearly the same: city of witch and kota santet (city of witchcraft).

The initial part of this paper illustrates the terminology of santet and the way banyuwanginese judge it. Hereafter, the mass violence of people accused to be santet practitioner will be depicted concisely, including various data such as statistic, chronology and several theories about motives and actors. Those elucidations disemboque onto modifying and revision of the new meaning of “santet”.

Instead of smothering us with past burial, history allows us to look toward and start to choose more options to solve our actual problems. At this point, the slogan "Banyuwangi Kota Santet" is positioned as a field of meaning negotiation, which instead of being considered as a pejorative title, the new brand and meaning of “santet” used as a marketable identity, particularly on the industry of tourism issue.

II. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

A. Turbulence and Violence on Alleged Santet Practitioner

Although history does not repeat itself literally, due to the fact that all events are non-repeatable (einmalig) with precise condition and situation, such pattern occurs when a result occurs after a cause precedes it. The 1965 mass killings of hundreds of thousands of lives were the excesses of the political succession from the guided democracy's government under Sukarno to New Order era under the command of the later Indonesia's longtime dictator, General Suharto [11]. When Suharto stepped down, the political transition of May 1998 not only led the country into democracy but also dragged it onto social and economic disorder.

Two months later, a series of murders taking place in Banyuwangi and the surrounding areas. Rumors that have been revolved stated that some practitioners of black magic (*dukun santet*) planned an evil scenario to slaughter teacher (*guru ngaji*) or scholar (*kyai*) of Islamic discipline. As a consequence, a mob of anger attacker captured and beaten to death numerous individuals suspected as *dukun santet*—though Javanese people familiar with some kind of *dukun* (shaman or sorcerer), such as *dukun beranak* (traditional midwifery), and *dukun pijat* (massage and herbal healing expert) etc. (see also, [12]). A local newspaper reported that around 84 people killed caused by santet issue (Jawa Pos, Oktober 2, 1998), while another scholar estimated that more than 150 people of Banyuwangi were murdered during July until November 1998 ([13], [14]).

The first killing of alleged *dukun santet* taken place on February 4 1998, when Seomarno Adi, a peasant from a remote village of Banyuwangi murdered after one of his family members accused his misfortune to Seomarno Adi (Memorandum, February 5, 1998). Suddenly, another murder followed on the same month, when Barri, a dweller from District of Selorejo was killed after his home was burned by hordes of attackers. On February 6, Asmaki, Sahroni, and Marjani hunted for the same reason, luckily, the two later name successfully on managed to escape. After the case of Marjani, the police officer of Banyuwangi consolidated the surveillance until the mass action that hunted people suspected to be *dukun santet* broke up [15].

The second wave of witchcraft killing begun in July 1998, several weeks after the Reformasi Movement of Mei 21, 1998. On July 7, 1998, in Jember there was a murder of 45-year-old Nuryatin, a resident of Sukamakmur Village, District of Ajung who was killed by mobs from neighboring village in the middle of the night and accompanied by the destruction of the house. Another murder also occurred in the Kaliwining, District of Rambipuji, Jember. Sanafi (60) was killed by a mob on the charge as *dukun santet* (Kompas, July 9, 1998).

In Banyuwangi the killing occurred on July 11, 1998, with the victim Suhaimi (65) a resident of Benelan, Subdistrict of Singojuruh. A week later Jamirah and Paiman were killed, both residents of Kendalrejo, District of Tegaldlimo. Since then the murder in the name of the witch hunter continues to happen and become the daily life of the people of Banyuwangi along until the end of 1998. Different backgrounds distinguish two waves of slaughter, if in the

former stage of violence the killing is done by family-motivated, the later actually done by people who feel uncomfortable against witch practice.

According to Muchlisin, member of Tim Pencari Fakta NU (TPF-NU, NU Fact-Finding Team), the pattern of July's murder is done by a group of people from both the village of the victim or from the outside, with the number of killers between 5- 25 people. Although this pattern is purely done by the masses, the masses have been provoked by people who came to be known as ninjas. At this point, the issue of witchcraft practitioner murders then overlapped with a masked figure popularly known as a ninja (a mercenary in Japan feudal age).

B. Map and number of spreading victims of witchcraft issue in Banyuwangi until 2 October 1998.

(Source: Jawa Pos, October 2, 1998)

Various theories are composed by the experts to unravel the tangles of this turmoil, especially concerning the intellectual actors such as old forces/part of new order element, international actor, and communism resurrection. TPF-NU conclude that; first: the murder of *dukun santet* alleged; second: the pattern that the murder involved the community with provocateurs to execute in it; and third; the provocateur instantly executed the person who suspected as *dukun santet* without involving the masses (TPF-NU, 1998).

Though it is impossible to argue against fact that this contemporary fact of slaughter of *dukun santet* alleged portrays Banyuwangi as a violent tourism object, particularly the center of bewitching skills, but Banyuwangi has long been labeled as warehouse of santet [16], despite the belief that these skills were learned from Tulung Agung. This reality turns out to create a unique tagline of the city: "Banyuwangi Kota Santet" (Banyuwangi, the City of Black Magic).

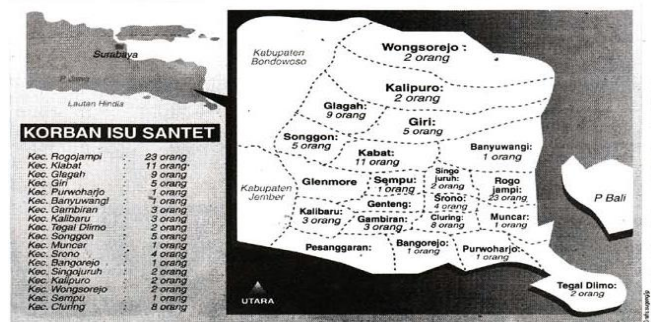


Fig. 1. Banyuwangi Map

C. Change the Stigma of Santet

On the case of witchcraft killings in 1998, Banyuwangi becomes one of the most frequently mentioned areas, particularly on mass media. During August and November 1998, various news about the accident of witchcraft hunting became national headlines. The title of the story was very tense, such as "Memburu Dukun Santet (Hunting the Sorcerer)" (D&R, Oct 3, 1998); "Jalur Darah di Banyuwangi (Blood Band in Banyuwangi)" (Tempo, January 9, 1998); while international mainstream media reported and entitled the story as "Fear of Sorcerers Spur Killing in Java"

(The New York Times, Oct 20, 1998). The titles above have created a fear for people outside of Banyuwangi, hence would also contribute stigma Banyuwangi as the center of black magic.

Meanwhile, a decade after the turmoil, people of Banyuwangi interpreting and responding “santet” with the various meanings. Hasnan Singodimayan, one of the living artist of post-independence Indonesia state that “santet” also refer to such magical skills to growing pengasih (a commiseration) from others to the practitioners (2003). Santet, is an abbreviation of “*mesisan kanthet*” (continue to stick), it mean a supernatural power and knowledge to matchmake between men and women in order to create intimate or loving relationship between them. Ipso facto, santet is also an abbreviation of “*mesisan benthet*” (continue to broke or divorce), this means, the couple who previously intimate became tenuous and parted [17].

On the other hand, [18], an anthropologist, view that santet is a form of recitation and magical spell which is attributed with the skill and the way of interpreting it into the sub-tribe of Using and distinguished within four colour types, namely yellow, red, white and black santet. First, the spell of santet type which serves as a commiseration, then known by the term “yellow magic” if it contain positive purpose; second, red magic if the former contains a negative purpose. Local inhabitants, especially Using people, give an example of first type such as, *gandrung mangu-mangu, prabu kenya, puter giling, damarwulan, semar mesem, sabuk mangir, kembang jati* and *teh putu-teh abang*. Such an example of the second type, namely red magic, is jaran goyang. Third, the spell that is positive, the magical spell or mantra used to cure the disease, later known as white magic. This kind of santet are usually used by a religious leader or kiai to heal his or her patients, hence the method is more practicing by reciting the verses of the Holy Qur’an. Fourth, a spell of a destructive and potentially life-splitting type of magic, then known as black magic; such as *bantal guling, gombal kobong, and polong dara*.

In order to overtake the negative stigma of santet, the former resident of Banyuwangi, Ratna Ani Lestari (2005—2010) encourage and strive a series of cultural events to clear up the stigma and re-interpreting the santet not as homicide craftsmanship, but as a local and indigenous culture of Banyuwangi. This step has then been continued by Dewan Kesenian Blambangan (Blambangan Arts Council) and accompanied by mass culture applicable across multiple lines, the new interpretation of santet and a new brand of Banyuwangi: Banyuwangi the City of Santet. In mid-April 2013, we have enjoyed a coffee called “Jaran Goyang” and saw a parade of Persewangi (Persatuan Sepakbola Banyuwangi, local Banyuwangi’s Football Club) supporters wearing T-shirts bearing the words “Lare Osing, Tak Santet Riko (the son of Osing, i will spell you)”. On the other occasion, we found a tagline “Banyuwangi, the Santet of Java” on one of the most Banyuwangi’s popular outlets, “Osing Deles”. Those observations led us to conclude that the meaning of Santet’s has changed alongside the development of tourism of Banyuwangi.

D. Urban Symbolism and Memory of Santet

Though not all of Banyuwanginese are practitioners or learners of santet, b the negative stigma of post-alleged sorcery on 1998 covers all of the dwellers. The stereotype as an immune person labeled to Banyuwanginese since ancient era, combined with the predicate as an expert of hurting people with santet, experienced by Banyuwanginese inhabitants who spread on other cities throughout Indonesia. Masrikatin (71), an inhabitant and witness the incident at Districts of Srono and Gambiran, not long after the Banyuwangi incident, went to Nganjuk with his grandson to visit her family. After getting off the bus, ojek driver came to offer transportation services. Since Masrikatin mentioned that her origin is Banyuwangi, the motorcycle taxi driver did not continue his offer and step aside.

Those labeling and embedding attempt—relating all of Banyuwanginese as master of santet—are part of the discursive symbolism of city. [8] stated that the discursive symbol—distinguished from iconic, material, and behavioral types of symbol bearers of cities—reflect urban images and narratives. All signifiers of Banyuwangi which mentioned above could be seen as important symbolic carriers, such as text on football supporter’s t-shirt, the website of DKB, or such brand of local coffee, etc. They are used to present the city’s identity and are seen as a strategic manner of illuminating cities for various goals, be it information provision for locals or the attempt to bolster the Banyuwangi’s tourism sites. Through this, the tagline “Banyuwangi the City of Santet” contribute significantly to the Banyuwangi’s image.

In order to support the (re-)discovery of this new identity, artists and academics have re-enacted the meaning and function of santet, beyond its negative meaning. At this point, those people tackle off the selection of memory; i.e. remember certain things that reinforce their opinions, and vice versa forget about certain things that weaken it. Grouping local Banyuwangi’s witchcraft into four types of colors is a new discovery that attempts to undermine the old and eternal stigma of the supernatural power of the people of Banyuwangi [12].

III. CONCLUSION

The study of urban history in Indonesia has been transformed its paradigm from “all-events” nature, conversed into “socio-economic”, then still pursuing the nature into the shape of history that focused on “mentality” aspects. On the case of witchcraft killings in 1998, Banyuwangi becomes one of the most frequently mentioned areas, particularly on mass media. Those labeling and embedding attempt—relating all of Banyuwanginese as master of santet—are part of the discursive symbolism of city. In order to support the (re-)discovery of this new identity, artists and academics have re-enacted the meaning and function of santet, beyond its negative meaning. At this point, those people tackle off the selection of memory; i.e. remember certain things that reinforce their opinions, and vice versa forget about certain things that weaken it

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