

WITCH-HUNT AND CONSPIRACY

THE 'NINJA CASE' IN EAST JAVA

NICHOLAS HERRIMAN



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MONASH University
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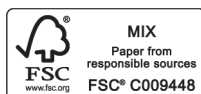
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nicholas Herriman is Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at La Trobe University. His podcasts on iTunes U, including the Audible Anthropologist and Witch-hunts and Persecution, have tens of thousands of listeners. He also regularly contributes opinion pieces to the mainstream media. Based on more than one year's fieldwork, he has written a number of significant and award-winning publications on East Java, including his PhD dissertation—the Australian Anthropological Society's "Best Thesis" in 2008. This book represents the culmination of researching witch-hunts for more than a decade.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The killings of sorcerers and subsequent ninja killings in 1998 Indonesia far eclipsed the number of victims in the Salem witch trials. In the district of Banyuwangi alone, around 100 sorcerers were killed and many more suffered. Yet the Indonesian events have attracted not a fraction of the academic attention devoted to Salem. Moreover, such scholarship as can be found often misleads. I thus have spent a sizeable chunk of my working life trying to understand the violence that occurred. I conducted research at the desk (1999) and in the field (2000–2002), then wrote a PhD thesis (2003–2008) on the topic. Beginning in 2006 and continuing up to the present, I have also published some findings. Revised versions of several of these publications are represented here. Sections from my articles ‘A din of whispers’ (Herriman 2009), ‘Governing the black arts’ (Herriman 2013b), and ‘Legislating against the supernatural’ (Herriman 2013a) appear in different parts of this book. Also Chapter Two is based on ‘The Great Rumor Mill’ (Herriman 2010); Chapter Six on my article ‘Fear and Uncertainty’ (Herriman 2006a); and Chapter Seven on proceedings of the 2008 Asian Studies Association of Australia (Herriman 2008). I have drawn together this previously published material with new writings to compile this book. I thank the various publishers for allowing me to publish these revised versions here.

Convention demands that this kind of book be attributed to a single author’s name. However, it is composed of the support, ideas and experiences I have absorbed from others, prominent among them my father, Michael Herriman. Recently retired, his field was philosophy of education, but his passion for music, film, science, sport, antiques—in brief, human culture—was a feature of my early years. I observed my father’s interest and curiosity as well as respect and tolerance for other ways and cultures. I have tried to emulate this ever since. So, as a child, playing ‘Cowboys and Indians’, I always wanted to be an ‘Indian’. In adolescence, he steered these naive

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impulses by giving me anthropological books and encouraging travel. Just recently, he was so impressed by the anthropological classic *Tristes Tropiques*, that he sent me a copy. I had not read this and it amused me that I, now a professional anthropologist, was still following his lead! So I have dedicated this book to him.

My own fieldwork experience had to wait until 2000–2002. I suppose I should feel guilty that I have not had the opportunity to reciprocate the generosity of Dr Habib and Haji Hatip, who guided me throughout this period. I sometimes daydream about doing it all again; *rawon* lunches; prayer breaks, drawn out conversations and silences. From it I experienced another way of looking at life.

Post-fieldwork I was lucky enough to find myself under the supervision of David Bouchier and Greg Acciaioli. All things must pass I suppose, but they had good reason to doubt this, as it would be 2008 before I would graduate. But finally an anthropologist Monika Winarnita inspired me to complete. She was doing her PhD fieldwork in my home town; I followed her back to her university, ANU, after which we created our own anthropological family, complete with my mother-in-law, Yunita Winarto, Professor of Anthropology at Universitas Indonesia.

My career began when I was fortunate enough to work at Monash Asia Institute with Director Marika Vicziany and its Centre for Southeast Asian Studies under Penny Graham. This provided the pathway to my current position, in a team of wonderful anthropologists at La Trobe University, led by the phenomenal Helen Lee.

Through this all, my mother Carole Herriman has supported me as collaborator, sounding board, and editor. Her only reward in this book's publication will be the knowledge that she will not have to revisit each of its sentences for the hundredth time, and perhaps to realise this book would not have eventuated without her. Many other among my family and friends have provided contentment in this journey, but I should especially mention those whom I forced to listen to or read parts of this manuscript: Alicia Herriman, Kiely O'Flaherty, Phillip Dobson, Ed Knox, and Tod Jones.

As for that which I cherish above all, my children Joey, Kiki, and Miya, I hope I can bring the excitement and curiosity to them that their 'Grandpa Mike' has brought to me.

Sorrento, July 2015

NOTES ON STYLE AND SPELLING

Pseudonyms have been used for places and names where the information might be incriminating. In my transcriptions of interviews words were lost, my informants or I used ungrammatical and awkward structures, the ‘train of thought’ changed halfway through a sentence, and so on. In order to minimise my role in interpreting or skewing data, I have translated interviews as faithfully to the error-ridden original as possible—although this often lacks rhetorical grace. I indent longer quotations, use double quotation marks for shorter quotations, and single quotation marks for quotations within quotations.

For modern Osing language, there are two spelling systems, following the Javanese. The more consistent, but less popular, renders the English terms ‘hamlet head’ and ‘no’ as *‘kamituwa’* and *‘using’*, for example. The more popular, but less consistent, renders the terms *‘kamituwo’*, *‘osing’*. The latter spelling system will be used here.

In spelling Indonesian personal names, I have attempted to accord with the most common usage, and so I have opted for ‘Soekarno’ and ‘Mas’oed’, for example, though when quoting others I follow the spelling they have used. For bibliographic purposes, the last appearing name of the author will be used in the alphabetic listing.

For convenience, the word ‘outbreak’ is used to describe the increased frequency of killings in 1998, though I do not wish to imply these events were in any way akin to a disease. To refer to those whom I interviewed or who helped me in my research I have used the word ‘informant’ instead of ‘participant’. This is to avoid confusion with ‘participant’ in the sense of someone who took part in a killing. Notwithstanding, I also hope to avoid the negative connotation of ‘informant’. By the word ‘sorcerer’, I refer to one who has learned black magic abilities. Accordingly, I use the verb ‘ensorcell’ to refer to the sorcerer’s use of black magic. This contrasts with the word ‘witch’, by which I refer to one who has inherent black magic abilities, and the verb ‘bewitch’, which I use to refer to the witch’s use of black magic.

GLOSSARY

<i>ABRI</i>	<i>Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia</i> , The Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia
<i>Adat</i>	customary practice (including ritual, art, and law)
<i>Aksi Sepihak</i>	unilateral action (refers to the Communist Party of Indonesia's program of redistributing agricultural land)
<i>Aparat</i>	state apparatus (often specifically used to refer to the state's repressive institutions such as the army and police)
<i>Babinsa</i>	village guidance army officer
<i>Balai Desa</i>	village hall, village office grounds
<i>Bupati</i>	district head
<i>Camat</i>	subdistrict head
<i>Desa</i>	village
<i>DPR</i>	<i>Dewan Permusyawaratan Rakyat</i> , People's Consultative Council
<i>Dusun</i>	hamlet
<i>Dukun</i>	practitioner of white magic; healer; seer
<i>Gestapu</i>	' <i>Gerakan September Tigapuluh</i> ', 'The September Thirtieth Movement' (an alleged coup against President Soeharto in 1965)
<i>Guru Ngaji</i>	local Islamic religious instructor who typically teaches neighbourhood children for a couple of hours every day
<i>Haji</i>	pilgrim
<i>Ilmu</i>	esoteric knowledge that provides one with supernatural power; magical power
<i>Kabupaten</i>	district
<i>Kecamatan</i>	subdistrict
<i>Kepala Desa</i>	village head
<i>Kepala Dusun</i>	hamlet head

GLOSSARY

<i>Keterbukaan</i>	openness. This term is sometimes used to describe the relaxing of media controls that occurred during <i>Reformasi</i> . Note that the same term is also used to represent a short-lived period of press openness instituted by the Soeharto regime in the late 1980s and early 1990s.
<i>Kiai</i>	an Islamic scholar or teacher whose pupils board with him
<i>Komnas HAM</i>	<i>Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia</i> , National Commission for Human Rights
<i>Kontras</i>	<i>Komisi untuk Orang Hilang dan Korban Tindak Kekerasan</i> , Commission for Missing People and Victims of Violence
<i>Krismon</i>	the 'monetary crisis' in Indonesia that accompanied the 1997 Asian Economic Crisis
<i>MPR</i>	<i>Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat</i> , People's Consultative Assembly. With around one thousand members, this has been the highest governing body in Indonesia and incorporates the <i>DPR</i> . The MPR is sometimes referred to as the 'Upper House'.
<i>Musholla</i>	a prayer room or small mosque
<i>Nadhlatul Ulama</i>	<i>Nadhatul Ulama</i>
<i>Nadhatul Ulama</i>	the largest traditionalist Muslim organisation in Indonesia
<i>Ngaji</i>	to attend or address a prayer meeting, to study the Koran and Hadith
<i>NU</i>	<i>Nadhatul Ulama</i>
<i>Oknum</i>	a mysterious agent
<i>Petrus</i>	<i>Penembakan Misterius</i> , the Mysterious Shootings (refers to extra-legal killings of <i>preman</i> around 1982–83)
<i>PKI</i>	<i>Partai Komunis Indonesia</i> , the Indonesian Communist Party
<i>PPP</i>	<i>Partai Persatuan Pembangunan</i> , the United Development Party (a centrist Islamic party formed during the Soeharto era)
<i>Preman</i>	a local hoodlum or petty-criminal; a thug
<i>Reformasi</i>	Indonesia's Reform Movement, a political and social reform movement (c.1996–1999) which began with demonstrations, culminating in the resignation of President Soeharto in 1998.
<i>Santri</i>	a comparatively orthodox or pious Muslim
<i>Tukang Santet</i>	sorcerer

FOREWORD

In 1998 around 100 people were killed for being sorcerers in Banyuwangi, far-east Java, Indonesia. The killers were local residents who were proud of their actions and received strong support from other community members. This book explains why.

The killings—variously dubbed the ‘Banyuwangi Incident’ (*Peristiwa Banyuwangi*), the ‘Banyuwangi Case’ (*Kasus Banyuwangi*), or the ‘Ninja Case’ (*Kasus Ninja*)—assumed national significance. They were even covered in the international media, which is how I came to hear of them. In my first year of doctoral research I perused reports of the killings, including press coverage, findings from various institutions and organisations, and academic reports. These all led me to believe that the killings were part of a larger political conspiracy.

Several scenarios were proposed: organised squads of ‘ninjas’ were killing religious scholars and teachers, or the grandchildren of members of the Communist Party were wreaking vengeance on those people who had killed their grandparents, or the military was attempting to destabilise the regions. Absorbing all of this, I presented a paper at a postgraduate conference, finding that ex-president ‘Soeharto and his allies encouraged and manipulated violence towards their own ends’ (Herriman 1999). My suspicion of a conspiracy seemed to be confirmed when I arrived in Indonesia, as all the Indonesian academics, reporters and lay-people I met seemed to know (at a distance) someone who could ‘prove’ there was a plot lying behind the killings. So when I finally arrived in East Java I expected that most of my research would be consumed with getting to the origins of the conspiracy. At my first stop, in Malang city, for a few minutes I even thought I was being followed by a member of the state security organisation. I *was* being followed, but it turned out to be by a member of the local parliament who subsequently became a friend.

This did not relieve my wariness that the forces behind the conspiracy would find out when I was getting too close to ‘the truth’.

FOREWORD

I found something quite different after spending some time in Banyuwangi. Residing in a village where killings had occurred, given the pseudonym Tegalaring here, I undertook ethnographic research on the origins of the violence. I observed and participated in the daily lives of the killers, the families of the victims, and other local people. I also had the opportunity to interview such people in villages all over Banyuwangi District. It soon became apparent that the entire framework I had brought was wrong. The killings were best understood as the product of local residents grouping together to kill one among them whom they believed to be a 'sorcerer', in a context of the state's being unable to stop this.

Although I expected to find a conspiracy, the local dynamics underpinning the violence I uncovered were in some ways more interesting. Local residents 'raided' the village offices in order to kill 'sorcerers' being protected inside, or to free killers of 'sorcerers'. Local officials supported killers of 'sorcerers' and local residents expropriated programs designed for state surveillance in order to torture 'sorcerers'.

Interviewing and interacting day-to-day with those closely and recently involved in this outbreak of killings enabled an understanding of actions against witches and 'sorcerers' quite apart from that which could be obtained on the basis of written records and other sources. For the participants at least, violence against 'sorcerers' in this context is a form of community justice. In 1998, this communal impulse escalated in response to district and national events.

Nevertheless, the finding that a conspiracy did not lie behind the killings has been the most widely criticised aspect of my research. In seminars, conversations, and in reviews of my work, some friends and colleagues have criticised me ('But did you really understand what was going on?'); others have made unflattering *ad hominem* comparisons ('I hope you realise how much you sound like [the Soeharto general] Wiranto'); and yet others have reached for humour ('Wow, you'll get a medal from the Armed Forces for this'). Mostly these criticisms have been in good faith and reflect not only the majority opinion that a conspiracy lies behind the killings but also an assumption that in Indonesia conspiracies generally lie beneath 'unusual' social, economic, political and, especially, violent phenomena.

Yet the challenges of sleepy afternoon seminars, informal chats in university corridors, email correspondence with colleagues, or teasing friends, were pleasantly distracting after conducting the field research. As I had become aware of the domestic and mundane nature of 'sorcery' and its recriminations, fieldwork became emotionally and morally challenging. The

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people I lived with suspected their neighbours, friends, and even family members of theft and, in extreme cases, of sorcery. I became conscious of, unwittingly involved and almost carried away in, this world of fear and suspicions when, for example, my own belongings went missing, or on the occasions when I was perceived to have slighted a 'sorcerer'. I lived among people who were involved in the killing of a local 'sorcerer' and met many such people in my almost daily trips to other villages. My early fieldwork was disturbed by nightmares based on the troubling stories they had told me. Leisurely interviewing a killer at night, sipping coffee his wife had politely offered me, seeing his face illuminated by the tiny light bulb in the roof and the glow of the clove cigarette he dragged on, my horrified imagination fancied the faces of men and women illuminated by the burning faggots of Europe's witch-hunts.

Becoming used to these stories and feelings, and more intimate with the people who accused and killed 'sorcerers', I found it harder to insulate myself against the encroaching moral problems. The people I spoke to were neither especially good nor bad, but were, as far as I could tell, normal. Yet they were also people who had thrust a sword "up a 'sorcerer's vagina", dragged a 'sorcerer' behind a truck, or set a 'sorcerer' on fire. Moreover, they were proud of what they had done, and had received widespread village support for their actions.

In this book I dispute the prevailing scholarly opinion that the outbreak of 'sorcerer' killings resulted from either a conspiracy or larger political or economic forces. I argue that larger political and economic forces were relevant only in as much as they shaped local interactions between friends, neighbours and family, and I emphasise the importance of domestic factors and local belief systems which have largely been overlooked.

PROLOGUE

It was ten people who killed him, but it was one village that supported them.

Everybody told this story differently, but they agreed on almost all of what follows. The story is set in Tegalaring village in far-east Java. It begins when Saman took a frond from a coconut tree on a plot belonging to his grandmother, Hadipa. Coconut fronds have some value. They can be used as decorations, for example, at a wedding. This is how the story went ...

Hadipa's son, Kustari, was not happy. Saman, Kustari's nephew, had stolen the frond from Hadipa, Kustari's own mother! Kustari made a veiled threat, "Whoever took this frond will soon suffer for what he did."

Saman went to his grandmother, Hadipa. He explained he had a right to take the coconut frond. He told her he was not afraid of Kustari. But he was. Kustari was a sorcerer.

Following this, Saman became sick. Then he died.

Everyone thought that Kustari had gone too far. It is normal for things to go missing. Aside from that, no one likes having a sorcerer around. If you offend one, even without meaning to, you might end up dead.

So it was not difficult for Bunali, a poor farm labourer, to muster support when he decided to avenge the death of his son, Saman. Initially, Bunali turned to Salimi for help. Salimi used to be a local tough. Bunali apparently offered Salimi a large sum to help him with the killing. (Salimi claimed he was never paid leading to disagreements for years afterwards.)

They enlisted the help of some others. And, as with all secrets in the village, everyone soon knew about it ... Bunali was planning to kill Kustari, his wife's brother.

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Even Kustari was aware that he had become a target. He carried a knife around with him for protection. He was advised to leave the village. But Kustari didn't want to leave. If he left, other people would take that as a sign that he had killed Saman.

It was organised more or less spontaneously. Ten men met on a Monday night in September, 1998. They gathered in the middle of the village at the intersection of the two roads which lead out of the village. They searched for Kustari, but could not find him, so they decided to delay until the next night.

The next night, a couple of men could not be present. But that was all right because another couple could. This time they would get him.

They were a mixed group. A few were farm labourers. Another was a teenager. One was there because Bunali and Salimi had offered him money. The rest were hoodlums. One was a thief who had returned from Bali. Two brothers who had reputations as tough drinkers were also there. And there was a motorcycle thief who was visiting home and decided to lend a hand. They all hated sorcerers. They all hated Kustari. They had a drink to stiffen their resolve, so that they could "forget themselves". One folded his sarong around his head so that only his eyes were showing, "like a ninja".

First, they went to a watch house at the corner of the village. Here they enlisted two boys from a neighbouring house to find Kustari. The two boys returned with the information that Kustari was sitting at the front of Sairi's house watching TV with his wife.

The killers headed off into the darkness and the drizzle. One threw a stone at each house on the way. It was a sign that they should turn off their lights. One by one the lights went off. The group crept through the cemetery and around the side of the house. For the last few metres of their approach they crawled along the ground.

One of the attackers grabbed Kustari and dragged him several metres towards the road. Others helped throw him to the ground. Another smashed at his eyes with a wooden pole. The masked one beat Kustari until his mask and clothes were spattered with blood. They left him for dead, and went their separate ways.

Word quickly spread that Kustari was dead. Some local men began voluntarily collecting money for the killers. The police arrived from the nearest police station about an hour later, around 9:30. It turned out Kustari was not, in fact, dead, but was seriously wounded. Twice on the way to hospital the car

PROLOGUE

broke down. Finally, Kustari died after he reached the hospital. And that night the wind blew like it had never blown before.

Why was Kustari killed? And why, in the period around September 1998, when Kustari was killed, were many more ‘sorcerers’ killed than usual? And how can we make sense of the killings of ‘ninjas’ that followed?

INTRODUCTION

Nestled between an outcrop of volcanic mountains and the Bali Straits lies Banyuwangi, the easternmost district of Java. Rural Banyuwangi supports what could be loosely called a peasant society. The main ethnic groups are the Osing (indigenous to the area), Madurese and Javanese (who have migrated). These groups tend to live separately: the Osing in rice growing areas, Madurese in fishing villages, and Javanese near plantations. However, little tension or acrimony exists between ethnicities. All share a belief in magic and sorcery. Local residents reconcile Islam, the predominant religion, with the existence of magic by reasoning that magic and sorcery occur only by God's leave. In every village I researched, the inhabitants I spoke to reported that several other local residents were sorcerers.

In 1998 after the killing of around a hundred such 'sorcerers' in Banyuwangi, with a number of killings in nearby East Javanese districts as well, people identified as 'ninjas' were targeted throughout East Java as the perpetrators of these killings. This book presents new information based on more than a year's research (2001–2002) and interviews, conducted while living amongst killers and families of victims of the outbreak.

By the time I conducted research, gone were the tufts of smoke from the warm embers of a 'sorcerer's' scorched house, the blood dribbling from a disfigured cranium, or the panting breath and beads of sweat from the accused man escaping his home village. But most of the actors or their relatives and witnesses were still *in situ*, and their memories and accounts were still fresh. As I write more than a decade later, it remains crucial to learn from this outbreak because it provides a rare glimpse into how those involved understood such an event, and because victimisation of sorcerers still occurs. Insights from this event also help us to understand Indonesia's Reform Movement, *Reformasi*, and give a local perspective on and context to the violence that accompanied it. Most importantly, this story rectifies misunderstandings of the 1998 outbreak itself—including the idea that the outbreak resulted from an elite conspiracy.

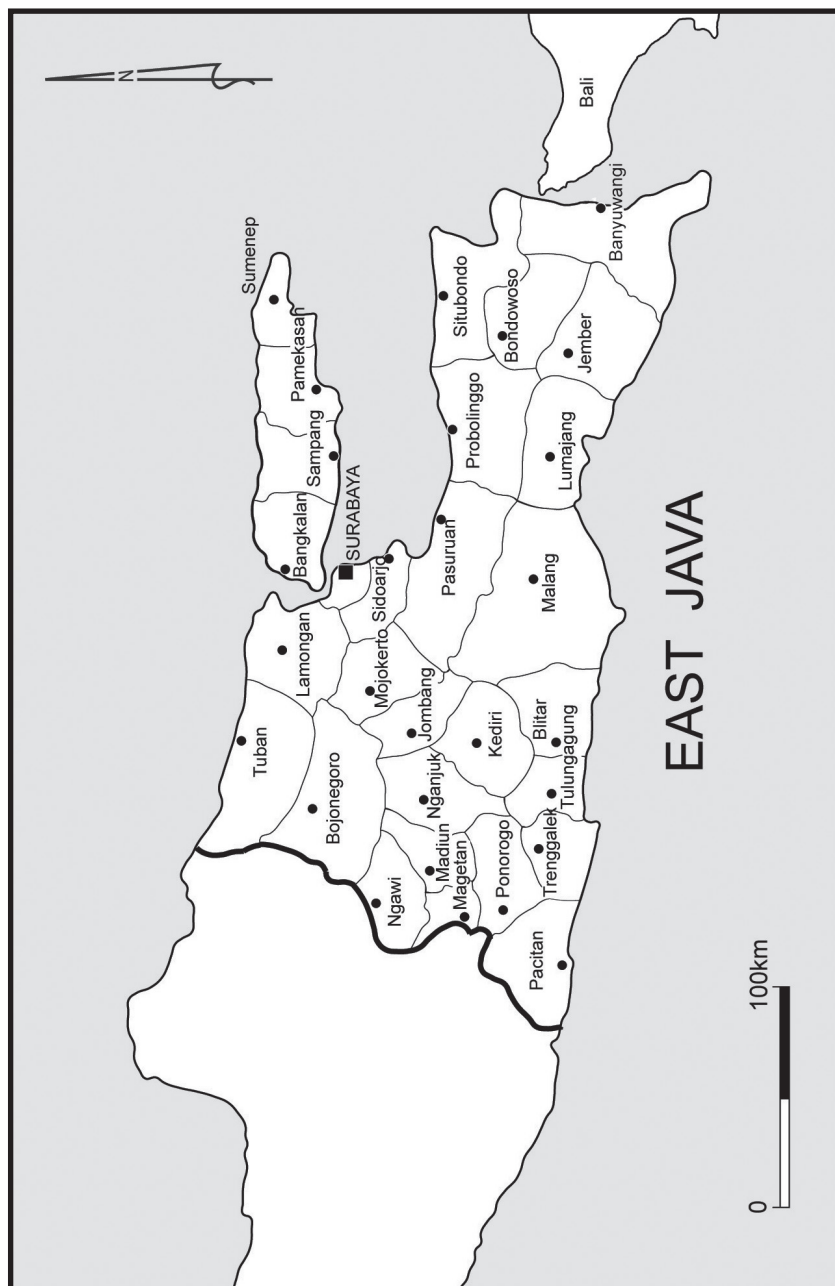


Figure 1: The Districts (*Kabupaten*) of East Java.
Banyuwangi is located in the far east.

Map by J. Byrne, 2012.

INTRODUCTION

Cases of accusations and actions against alleged witches as well as sorcerers have been recorded in different societies in Indonesia. Historical evidence of this includes “one of the oldest surviving legal texts of Southeast Asia” (Hoadley and Hooker 1981:1). The *Agama*—a Javanese text produced in the sixteenth century—proscribes sorcery (Hoadley and Hooker 1981:206–207). Additionally, a diary of a soldier in a late-eighteenth century Javanese court records a sorcery accusation (Kumar 1980:72). However, not much can be concluded on the basis of these sources.

Rules recorded from various places in Indonesia in the *adat* (customary) law document retaliatory actions to be undertaken against a sorcerer. Dutch scholarly accounts of the 1890s report that in:

the Barbar archipelago [sic., Babar Islands], the populace might club to death both a wizard and the full-grown members of his family. Such an act would have followed the discovery, through sorcery, that the wizard had brought about the sickness ... of some other person ... Among the Galela and Tobelorese ... Sorcerers were killed and their bodies were cast into the ocean (Burns 1999:153).

In the Netherlands New Guinea, it was reported that a female sorcerer:

will be subjected to a trial by ordeal. Usually she participates voluntarily. She will be taken to a particular spot and made to drink a quantity of the sap of some kind of lianes [woody climbing plant of tropical forests]. Then she is made to walk and dance. Most of those submitted to such a treatment will start vomiting after a while, which is proof of guilt. She will die eventually or be killed. Those who do not vomit or die are considered to be innocent ... (Slaats and Portier 1993:140).

Several authors have also noted sporadic killings of ‘sorcerers’ in Java and other islands in the 1980s and 1990s. In East Java, Wessing (1996:272n) recorded thirty newspaper “reports of suspected sorcerers being killed or injured” between August 1990 and February 1993. In Java and other islands Nitibaskara (2001:58–153) documented over twenty such cases in newspaper reports from the 1980s. These attacks seem to have occurred intermittently across geographically dispersed areas.

By contrast, at certain times killings occur with such frequency in a restricted geographical area that they could be described as ‘outbreaks’. The Banyuwangi outbreak of 1998 discussed in this book is apparently not unique. Between fifty-five and 150 alleged sorcerers were killed in West Java between January and June 1999 (Munir 2001:22; Ricklefs 2001:411;

Sidel 2006:142), with thirty-seven victims in Ciamis (Sidel 2006:246n.). Subsequently, in Malang in November 1999 – January 2000 a small outbreak resulted in nine fatalities (Herriman 2006b). Again in West Java, twenty villagers accused of being witch doctors were killed in attacks in Ciamis between July and October (BBC News 27 November 2000).

Sidel (2006:142) suggested that the outbreaks following Soeharto's resignation in 1998 are "a new form of large-scale collective violence". However, similar outbreaks of violence pre-date 1998. Victims include twenty-seven putative sorcerers and criminals in Jember in 1981 (Barker 1998:17n), people who allegedly used evil spirits in North Sumatra in 1987–1988 (Slaats and Portier 1993:141–2), and large numbers of 'sorcerers' in the mid-1960s and early-1980s in Banyuwangi, noted by Beatty (1999:77) and remembered by older people in that area. Such evidence suggests that in the years since Independence outbreaks of killings of 'sorcerers' have been a recurring phenomenon in Indonesian societies.

However, little detailed study of these outbreaks has been undertaken. Scholarship on the 1998 killings has focused variously on the victims, the perpetrators, and the larger objective of a conspiracy supposedly underpinning these.¹ Barker (1998:40) and O'Rourke (2002:172) note that the victims came from the traditionalist Muslim population. Barker (1998:41), Beatty (1999:259) and Hefner (2000:210) claim more specifically that those targeted were *guru ngaji* (religious preachers). Comparably, Barton (2002:257), Cribb (2000a:193; 2000b:191), Van Dijk (2001:161), O'Rourke (2002:168), and Thufail (2005) observe the victims included *kiai* (religious scholars and leaders).

According to Brown (1999:98) the perpetrators were "local *oknum* [mysterious agents]". It has also been claimed the perpetrators were brought in from other areas. Hefner (2000:210) wrote that they were "vigilantes" who were "trucked in to remote locales". For Campbell and Connor (2000:88) they were "armed groups"; while Cribb (2000a:193), Barker (1998:40–41), Thufail (2005:153), and Beatty (1999:259) stated that the perpetrators were known as ninjas.

Some scholars, such as Thufail (2005), have speculated on a larger political conspiracy lying behind the killings. For Cribb (2000a:195–196) it might have been the army preparing for a return to power. And Hefner (2000:190–193, 210) has written that it was an elite attempt to stop a political alliance between traditionalist Muslim and nationalist political forces.

1 For more detail see Herriman (2006b:361–64), from which the following section, as well as a section in Herriman (2007:68–69), has been adapted.

INTRODUCTION

All these ideas will be shown to be inaccurate. Yet, given the tenor of the reportage coming out of Indonesia and what many people in Indonesia might have been saying at the time, it is not surprising that these authors sincerely believed, as I had, that a conspiracy had occurred.

Campbell and Connor (2000) suggested that the 1997 economic crisis triggered the outbreak of killings, that alleged sorcerers were actually healers, that the significance of the shrouded oath (a ritual to determine the innocence of alleged sorcerers) had been lost, and that the killings involved “large armed groups on the street coming in the dead of night dragging neighbours away” (Campbell and Connor 2000:88). Finding fieldwork “not possible,” the authors used “media reports” for “the empirical material they provide” (Campbell and Connor 2000:63). However, as will be demonstrated, media reports regarding the killings provided little reliable empirical material. Campbell and Connor are fundamentally mistaken to suppose (2000:62) that the killings should not be seen as an expression of traditional life, but rather as “intrinsic to the processes of modernity that are experienced so sharply and so ambivalently in East Java.” Put simply, the evidence they advance to demonstrate this does not provide solid grounds for reaching such a conclusion.

In three publications Siegel (2006; 2001; 2002) similarly argued that the outbreak represented a break with the past. He maintained, without providing supporting evidence, that the killings were undertaken in the name of the “masses” (*massa*). I contradict this point in Chapter Six. Siegel also maintained that the killings were a response to a new kind of witchcraft. I could find little evidence to support this idea; indeed most evidence indicated a strong continuity in forms of witchcraft.

My fieldwork for this book involved participating in and contributing to relatively formal events (such as rituals and prayers) as well as informal ones (such as playing soccer and volleyball and participating in midnight feasts). But mostly I focused on mundane things such as giving lifts to people in my car, eating with other people at a roadside stall (*warung*), crowding around the television broadcasts of European soccer, chatting and smoking by the roadside, visiting healers (*dukun*) and meeting alleged ‘sorcerers’—all in the course of everyday life. From this I observed how people gossiped about alleged sorcerers, reacted in their presence, and felt about the killings.

In order to conduct interviews in Banyuwangi, where the bulk of the killings of 1998 occurred and where I, for that reason, based myself, I bought a car, and for more than a year, every evening I attempted to interview people in Banyuwangi’s subdistricts. In practice, many obstacles arose. I was

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sometimes ill, interviewees were sometimes not at home or were at home but did not know about a killing, a driver or a research assistant could not be organised, the weather was inclement, and so on. Nevertheless, I eventually undertook over 150 interviews.

The most accurate record of the outbreak is a list of violence against ‘sorcerers’ which I obtained from the district government. It shows a total of ninety-nine killings in 1998: one killing in February; three in July; seven in August; peaking with eighty in September; before dropping back to eight in October. Using this record, I sampled at least one killing in every sub-district in which a killing occurred. From this sample, I conducted interviews with families of victims, killers, onlookers and local officials.

I developed this body of interviewees primarily through snowballing. Having interviewed contacts suggested by one informant, I used these contacts to develop further contacts. The criterion for selection that I particularly sought was those who had been present during attacks, either by being directly involved or as bystanders (although in practice the distinction often seemed blurred). This meant conducting interviews with people jailed for killing ‘sorcerers’, both while in jail and after their release. I also interviewed family members of ‘sorcerers’ who had been killed and local community leaders such as Islamic scholars, village officials and informal leaders.

This information was complemented by newspaper reports in the two major East Javanese dailies of the period—*Jawa Pos* and *Surabaya Post*. I have also used two reports from the traditionalist Islamic party (NU) which I have translated as ‘Provisional Report’ (TPFNU 1998) and ‘Research Findings’ (Lakpesdam-NU 1998) respectively. Additionally, I have used a report from the Justice Party (PK) (Partai Keadilan 1999).

The aim of my research was to understand why people were killed. I thus focused on local informants’ understandings of events by spending my days interviewing them, rather than going to the courts, hospitals, and police stations scouring official records. Although it appears that some local communities managed to keep some killings secret, most were officially recorded and processed. Nevertheless, such records were often hard to obtain and some were inaccurate or non-existent.

This book comprises eight chapters. Following this introduction, I describe nine representative case studies in Chapter One. These demonstrate the local dynamics of the killings in 1998. Specifically, neighbours, friends, and family members suspected one among them of being a sorcerer and then killed that person.

INTRODUCTION

Chapter Two focuses on an incident that immediately followed the outbreak of killings. Rumours had spread throughout East Java that evil conspirators or ‘nijas’ had been behind the killings of ‘sorcerers’ and that these conspirators or nijas were bent on persecuting the traditionalist Muslim majority. Although there is no evidence to suggest that such conspirators existed, local residents established roadside guard posts and vigilantly waited for, discovered, attacked, and sometimes even killed ‘nijas’.

Then the following chapters are devoted to understanding these cases in the larger contexts of the historical period, magic beliefs, local ideas of justice, and the influence of national-level events. Hence, Chapter Three is an overview of Indonesia’s Reform Movement, the national historical context of the outbreak. I particularly focus on violent phenomena in Indonesia during this period. In Chapter Four I examine continuing beliefs in magic and sorcery. In Chapter Five I make the case that the killing of ‘sorcerers’ in Banyuwangi is understood within the social environment as a form of ‘community justice’—inasmuch as the majority of local residents enact their own form of ‘justice’. Chapter Six provides a general overview of the outbreak of killings in 1998 and an account of the enabling local and national dynamics. Crucially, local residents interpreted the Reform Movement as a weakening of state power, and arising from that an opportunity to kill ‘sorcerers’.

Having situated the killings in terms of these larger contexts, I then engage with competing explanations of the killings. In Chapter Seven I show that several putative explanatory theories for the killings have not come to grips with the situation in Banyuwangi and consequently have no solid basis in evidence. In Chapter Eight I reject notions of the killings of ‘sorcerers’ as a conspiracy, purveyed especially by East Java’s two main newspapers, *Surabaya Post* and *Jawa Pos*, and the fact-finding missions of various other organisations. Intriguingly, it must be acknowledged however that the idea of a conspiracy was compelling: most local residents I spoke to still believed in a conspiracy even though they may have undertaken a killing in their own village and might have been expected to know better.

On the associated website of this book are several appendices which provide further statistics regarding the 1998 killings. My focus of research was mostly qualitative and therefore these appendices are not precise. However, the data I gathered in the process of research serve as a starting point for further research into exactly how many were killed or attacked, the location and the date.

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The analysis in the chapters, as well as the statistics in the website appendices, lead me to the findings summarised in the Conclusion. Local areas experience regime change and other ‘national’ phenomena in ways particular to those areas. To understand the 1998 outbreak of violence in East Java, one must turn to local interpretations of human rights, the Reform Movement, and the state’s reactions to violence against sorcerers. Such an understanding runs counter to popular conspiracy theories and scholarly treatises regarding the outbreak of ‘sorcerer’ and ‘ninja’ killings in Indonesia.

CHAPTER I

SORCERER KILLINGS

It's a problem; if you kill them they say it's breaking the law, if you don't kill them they finish off other people.

Samsul, Banyuwangi

A sample of 'sorcerer' killings gives a sense of the chronological development of the outbreak peaking in August–September 1998. The killings detailed here include examples which occurred earlier in the year as well as those which followed demonstrations against arrests of those suspected of killing. The picture that emerges will ultimately help to substantiate the explanation advanced in this book; that the sense of a right to community justice provides local residents with the impetus to kill 'sorcerers', resulting in intermittent homicides. In 1998 homicides occurred more frequently due to a particular set of district and national circumstances.

July 11, 1998: Singojuruh Subdistrict

Kebonjati is a typical Osing rice-bowl village, with about 500 residents. As in other villages of Banyuwangi there are strong beliefs in sorcery and in the need to deal with sorcerers.

A 'sorcerer' had been killed in Kebonjati in the early 1960s but until the killing of Salimun on July 18, 1998, there had been no other killings. Subsequently, there were eight more killings in the same subdistrict, Singojuruh. These occurred in the second half of September, when the killings were at their peak.

In the middle of Kebonjati there is an Islamic boarding school (*pondok pesantren*). I met its *kiai*, Haji Habib, and asked him about Salimum, who was aged in his 60s when he died:

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Figure 2: The Subdistricts (*kecamatan*) of Banyuwangi District.
This maps shows the subdistricts of Banyuwangi District (not to scale).
Map by J. Byrne, 2012.

NH: Was he known as a sorcerer?

HM: Yes

NH: Since when?

HM: Earlier than a year before. Someone was sick, seriously ill. His name was Abir. Just one [person]...

NH: Who first accused him of being a sorcerer?

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HM: Everyone, all the community.

NH: Why was he known as a sorcerer?

HM: Because he was, in fact.

NH: Had he ever been seen naked on the road?

HM: Yes. Someone met him at twelve o'clock. Lots of people know about it...

NH: Was he really a sorcerer?

HM: Yes.

NH: How could you know?

HM: There was also a *dukun* who said so.

NH: A *dukun* from this village?

HM: No.

NH: You are, let's say, 'knowledgeable' in these [supernatural] matters. Can you see it [the sorcery]?

HM: It has its signature.

After Abir had been sick for some time his nephew approached Salimun on July 11. This is the nephew's story:

I went to his house to ask him to cure that sick person, but he didn't want to ... then straight away he stabbed me ... my father went over to Salimun's house ... There were a lot of people outside, but my father went in alone ... [Salimun was] his relative. "What's this? How come my son was stabbed?" He said, "Your son was asking for trouble, that's why I stabbed him." After that he [Salimun] was dragged out, and his head was clubbed. After that all my friends joined in, he was clubbed, we didn't need to knife him.

NH: Approximately how many people joined in?

About sixty people. He was dragged half a kilometre. He was pulled by hand to the Kamituwo's house and, at the same time, he was stoned. After that he still wasn't dead, and Salimun said "kill me", and we stamped on his neck. After stamping on him for a while—lots of people were stamping—he didn't die for another quarter of an hour.

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Haji Habib felt relieved that following the killing the village was “free of interference, no hassle from the police,” so no charges were laid.

July 18, 1998: Tegaldlimo Subdistrict

The other two killings in July occurred in Tegaldlimo, a subdistrict that borders the jungle to the south-east of Banyuwangi. It is an infertile area of predominantly unirrigated plots, limestone, and long, straight, dusty roads. The population is mainly Madurese and Javanese, with an Osing minority. Aside from the Muslim majority there is a sizeable Hindu population, with a large temple. All these groups coexist harmoniously. The killings occurred in Kendalrejo, which is one of seven villages in Tegaldlimo and is inhabited mostly by Javanese. Paiman and Jamirah (or Jami) were killed around midnight on Friday, July 17.

The evidence of their sorcery seems to have emanated from those closest to Paiman and Jami: their family and neighbours. Some informants, who were not sure that Bu Jami was indeed a sorcerer, reported:

Before her death, there were, among her family, a few who were against her, there was someone who was sick, but now even after Bu Jami was killed, they are still sick ... Was the sickness natural or deliberate [induced by a ‘sorcerer’]? Until now they are still sick.

According to the “neighbours’ suspicions” Jami visited this sickness upon Bu Mariah, her niece and neighbour. As to the victims of Paiman’s sorcery, “if there was a problem ... his sorcery didn’t go straight to humans, but was visited upon his neighbours’ animals” [who were affected]. “There weren’t any human [victims], but there were many cows and water buffalo”, so “the neighbours were fed up (*resah*) while he lived.”

Informants often spoke of seeing Jami naked at night. The Village Head explained, “Jamirah [was naked] every night. I once met her walking naked.” He continued:

Jamirah was well known. She had been singled out [*disorot*] by the community of the entire village as a sorcerer [*tukang sante*]. The residents reported it to the police, but the problem of sorcery [*sante*] cannot be explained physically, with proof. So the police couldn’t summon her. The community of the entire village couldn’t believe that she didn’t ensorcell people. In the end she was mobbed by the residents ... the residents put on a demonstration, a demo, a mob ... so Jami’s house had been investigated by the police looking for the tools of sorcery but there

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weren't any. The community was annoyed so they formed a mob, and she was killed by the mob.

Jami was hit with wooden sticks, bound with rope, dragged to the cemetery and buried, perhaps alive. It was related that she: "was the hardest to kill ... probably her magic [*ilmu*] was greater than Pak Paiman's." My assistant, not catching on, responded, "so she was physically strong?" He was corrected, "it was not her physical strength. There's a big difference between a man's and a woman's physical strength." The implied reason is that a woman could only be harder to kill if she had supernatural strength.

Other sources corroborate this perception. The NU, an Indonesian religious organisation representing the traditionalist Islamic outlook, will be mentioned frequently in this book. It sent a Fact Finding Team to Banyuwangi. The Team reported:

Cases of murder of a person who is accused of being a sorcerer can be seen in several cases. The case of Paiman, or Eplok, and Ny Djamariah residents of Kendal Rejo, Tegaldlimo Subdistrict, Banyuwangi [is one of these]. The community's certainty about the two mentioned victims was based on the account of residents of Kedungsari and Kedungwungu hamlets, which are located close to the victim's Kendalsari Village. [These residents] were convinced that both victims possessed sorcery. The community in both the mentioned hamlets often saw the two victims walking naked every Thursday night [a time for heightened supernatural powers]. Both of them, according to the testimonies, were heading to the Kutorejo general cemetery [cemeteries being ideal locations to enhance ones powers]. Based on the information from the Kendal Rejo Village Head, in 1992 both the victims had been banished from their homes by the residents of the neighbouring villages. Although in 1995 both returned again to Kendal Rejo village (Lakpesdam-NU 1998:15).

The Team felt this case was unique, and that in other killings the victims had been chosen for political reasons. However, my data indicate that the killings of Jami and Paiman were typical in as much as their neighbours, family, and friends suspected them of being sorcerers and killed them because of this suspicion.

Although the victims happened to be Muslims, the killers were both Muslims and Hindus. Following the killings, four people were arrested, but "the others, lots of them, ran away and were not identified because there

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were so many of them.” Four men were sentenced to six years for the killing of Paiman, and one of those was sentenced to an additional six years for the killing of Jami. The sentences were appealed unsuccessfully, and the first four had their sentences increased (Manan, et al. 2001:Appendix V). This was only the second of over a hundred cases that were heard, and these early sentences were comparatively severe; in later cases the jail terms were usually one to three years.

August 3, 1998: Kabat Subdistrict

The next recorded killing occurred on August 3 in Kabat. The victim Jaenuddin (or Zainuddin) of Kedayunan was the first sorcerer killed in that village since the 1950s. The other thirteen killings in Kabat occurred weeks later, between August 30 and September 20.

In its analysis of the Jaenuddin killing, the NU report referred to above states that the victim was truly believed to be a sorcerer:

... another case indicates that the butchery is a result of social conflict within the community, and can be seen in the butchery that occurred on a resident of Babakan hamlet, Kedayunan Village, named Zainuddin. According to the testimonies of the residents of Babakan, Zainuddin had ensorcelled members of his own family, Hajar (57), Buanan (48) and his wife, about eight years ago. In 1996 Zainuddin was banished from his home by the residents of Dusun Babakan. For a while he lived in Bali, but after Mohammad’s Birthday several months ago, Zainuddin returned again, and that raised the community’s ire.

The NU’s account of the case is supported by my data. An informant told me that Jaenuddin had killed members of his own family—and one family member had even asked for water from Jaenuddin, by this means implying that Jaenuddin caused the illness. When I asked a community leader (*orang tua*), “Who first accused Jaenuddin of sorcery?”, he responded:

I don’t know, the main thing is that it was all the community in this hamlet ... usually a person has a weapon, has magic powers, they speak out of turn. What I mean is they threaten people after arguing ... His neighbours once saw him praying in the corner of his house ... and during *Petrus* [the state-sponsored extra-legal killing of alleged thugs in 1982–1983] he disappeared because he was scared.

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On September 3 Jaenuddin was attacked and killed. The killers comprised “all layers of the community”, a community leader stated, and “if you didn’t join in, it would be a problem. At the very least you had to get out of the house [to publicly show your support].”

In October, police forces comprising provincial, area and district personnel began a crackdown, resulting in arrests throughout Banyuwangi. On Friday, October 2, a person suspected to be one of the killers was arrested in Kedayunan. Local residents contested the arrest, and organised some trucks to take them to Banyuwangi’s central police headquarters, about ten kilometres away. When they arrived in Banyuwangi, it was time for Friday prayers (*Jumatan*) but, nevertheless, a demonstration ensued. The central mosque in Banyuwangi is directly opposite the police station. One of my main informants was at the mosque at the time. He recalled that amongst those at the mosque there was outrage that a demonstration should occur before Friday prayers. (It is said that every male who is able must go to a mosque for Friday prayers.) These people, including my informants, saw that the demonstrators were not participating in prayers, and would potentially disturb them. Furthermore, encouraged by the NU and by reports in the press, they were under the apprehension that the killings in other villages were not of sorcerers but of religious leaders, and were politically motivated. Accordingly, they saw the demonstrators as enemies of *guru ngaji*, *kiai*, and the *NU*, and they sided with the police.

My informant had supported a killing that occurred in his own village, so it could not be said he was opposed to ‘sorcerer’ killings. The *Surabaya Post* reported that in challenging the demonstration, “the apparatus was assisted by the citizens of the city who supported the catching of the perpetrators of murder. They participated in chasing and catching them.” The *Jawa Pos* (October 4 1998) indicated that the situation threatened to become a clash between those who supported the killings of ‘sorcerers’ and those who did not.

In the end, calm seems to have been restored. Five people were tried for the killing, while about sixty of the protesters received short jail terms for the demonstration with seven of them receiving jail terms of one-and-a-half to four-and-a-half-years (Manan, et al. 2001:Appendix V). These measures were apparently effective in deterring the local residents, as an informant related they were then too afraid to move against ‘sorcerers’ for the time being.

September 10, 1998: Srono Subdistrict

Basir and Haeriyah were a married couple who lived in Paiton village, Srono subdistrict. According to Haeriyah's cousin, the couple had learnt sorcery from an older sorcerer in a neighbouring village; Haeriyah possessed sorcery that could kill people, whereas Basir's could only kill animals such as water buffalo. I was told that Haeriyah had once approached a neighbour to buy a cattle-feeding trough, and when she was refused the neighbour became sick. Another story was that Haeriyah was often seen bathing naked at night—clear evidence of the possession of sorcery. Basir's brother related that Haeriyah alone, and not Basir, was the problem. However, Basir's nephew was not prepared to say whether his uncle was a sorcerer. Basir nevertheless was alleged to have been photographed at the police station. In addition, a policeman advised Basir's brother to instruct Basir to leave Paiton, though Basir was reluctant to follow this advice.

Imron, one of the people jailed for the killing, told me:

For years Haeriyah had been accused of sorcery. There were many people who were made sick, who confirmed that Haeriyah possessed sorcery. All the community said that. And in the end there was the butchery [*pembantaian*].

This 'butchery' was not the first measure that had been taken against the couple. Before 1998, they had been banished from Paiton, and then banished from another village, before finally returning to Paiton.

The eventual killing occurred at about 9 pm. Imron denied his involvement in the killing; rather, he attributed the killing to the 'masses' (*massa*):

the masses made their move. They weren't masses from anywhere, they were just masses from the east [of the village]. Starting from the east, but I did not know who was who.

The *Jawa Pos* (12 September 1998) recorded that the entrails of the wife or both were spilled out. Subsequently, three men were arrested, tried and sentenced to two-and-a-half years' imprisonment.

September 15, 1998: Rogojampi Subdistrict

There were some fifteen killings in Rogojampi Subdistrict between August 18 and September 29, 1998. Yasin of Krajan subvillage, Watukebo village, was killed on September 15. I interviewed a witness named Idris and Mahmud. Mahmud, one of Yasin's killers, previously had been a village

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head. I interviewed him both in jail and after release; he also provided a written account of the events.

Idris related that all Yasin's nine victims lived within about 400 meters of Yasin's house. Yasin "was envious of people who got rich through their work ... he used his sorcery against people so that they were sick". One victim, a neighbour, "was sick and was taken to a shaman". This shaman "provided the direction [in which Yasin's house was located]". Mahmud corroborated that Yasin "had been accused by his neighbours of being a sorcerer".

Yasin reportedly denied he was a sorcerer, so my research participants' opinions about his sorcery were derived from gossip and suspicion. For example, following a directive from the district head (detailed in Chapter Six), Yasin's sorcery was discussed at a village meeting. Mahmud admitted "I was not present" at the village meeting "but" he added, "I know [what happened]". Similarly, although he was not in attendance, he maintained that Yasin "was photographed by the police, and the police themselves knew that Yasin was a sorcerer". His conviction of Yasin's guilt seems thus based on gossip or supposition.

Eventually, Mahmud took part in killing Yasin on the night of September 14–15, 1998, when the killings throughout the district were at their height. Idris related how the killing came about:

many people, the people from here, the community ... threw rocks at his house and window. His door was banged on, and he came out. He tried to defend himself. [The killers] used knives, and [one] hit him using a torch ... he was hit with wood and rocks.

Subsequently, the *Surabaya Post* (October 12 1998 "*Pembantaian Mereka*") identified Yasin as a *kiai* (religious scholar). This article related that another twenty-eight "*kiai* and prayer teachers" had been killed. Another *kiai* was quoted saying "several *kiai* have become victims, including KH Yasin". Furthermore, Yasin was head of the village executive branch (*Ketua Tanfidyah*) in the traditionalist-Muslim organisation, the NU (Nadhatul Ulama). Yasin was thus construed to be a *kiai* or NU leader killed as an "operation target".

According to local participants, Yasin was not considered a *kiai* by them or other local residents. The community, rather than a formal institution, gradually bestows the title '*kiai*' on a man who attracts students, is considered sage and supernaturally powerful, and so on. Mahmud maintained "a witness—the wife [of Yasin] wrote that her husband was not a *kiai*, not a prayer teacher ... But the police and the judge said Yasin was a *kiai*".

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Mahmud corroborated that Yasin had only given a few informal speeches (*ceramah*). Idris confirmed that Yasin had been the head of the NU executive in the village—however, not much stock was placed in being a village-level NU leader.

Local residents killed this ‘sorcerer’ apparently because they ‘knew’ he was a sorcerer, and this ‘knowledge’ had been spread through gossip.

September 20, 1998: Glagah Subdistrict

Glagah Subdistrict stretches from the western border of Banyuwangi city, up the steep slopes of the Ijen plateau. There were eight recorded killings during 1998 in Glagah—all occurred between September 16–23. Three of these—the killings of Mahfud, Arifin, and Jumali—occurred on the night of September 20, in Segobang village, a wet, muddy, and impoverished place high on the slopes.

Prior to the killings of Mahfud and Arifin, a man named Madrawi had been killed during the Communist massacre of 1965–66. He was killed, a local resident recalled, by:

the community, lots of people ... In this village it has happened twice [the Communist massacre and 1998], twice the incidents were the same, it was a sorcerer who was killed.

Mahfud was one of only two cases I researched in which some informants questioned whether the victim was a ‘sorcerer’. A *Jawa Pos* (September 27 1998) article reported he was not thought to be a sorcerer. Another *Jawa Pos* article described him as (September 28 1998b) a *guru ngaji*. One of my informants concurred he was *guru ngaji*, saying he “had a *musholla* and about 50 boy and girl students, aged under 15”. This informant also denied that Mahfud was a sorcerer; he maintained that “around Mahfud there were bad feelings” [*di antaranya ada setimen*].

Yet even in this case there seems to have been ‘recognition’ by the surviving family of a sorcerer that the victim in some way deserved his punishment. Although at the outset of the *Jawa Pos* (October 13 1998c) article the reporter asserts, “There wasn’t even the faintest indication that this one person possessed sorcery”, the article goes on to quote the sister-in-law of one of Mahfud’s victims as saying, “indeed, several people continued to believe that Mahfud was a sorcerer.” Apparently “Mahfud liked a maiden [*perawan*] from this village [Segobang]. As it turned out, the mother of this maiden did not agree that her child should marry

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Mahfud. Then all of a sudden the mother fell sick. She was struck by breast cancer.”

One of those arrested for the killings related that before the killings one of his relatives had been bewitched by this ‘sorcerer’. The relative had a flaccid hand. As a result, the man who had been arrested told me “I asked Jumali but he didn’t confess. I tied his hand ... and put red ants on him, he was bitten ... eventually he confessed”.

Gufron, who was imprisoned for the killing of Arifin (in spite of denying that he played a leading role), told me: “I knew [about Arifin’s sorcery] from the community. As for myself, I’m not so conceited as to accuse a sorcerer ... The community knows if it is sorcery. The community evaluates.” When I asked him and another informant, “was he [Arifin] really a *tukang santet*?”, one responded “naturally, of course.” Gufron tacitly agreed. He stated, “if he’s like that, it’s directed towards his family.” My host father affirmed, “If [sorcerers] don’t kill [others, then] their own family is affected.” Gufron continued, “his own children were affected by the sorcerer,” and another informant added, “to the extent that his children kept their distance, they were afraid of getting close [to him].” So Arifin was suspected of having ensorcelled, or having the potential to ensorcell, members of his own family. In another interview, a village official corroborated:

It was his own family who spread the rumour. Many of his family were sick, it was felt that he, ummm ... His children had died. The child who died had stated that his father possessed bad things ... He had four children, but only one is still alive. The ones that were affected were the girls ... both of them have died, same with the in-laws. The family didn’t accuse the perpetrators of the killing [of Arifin].

While the ensorcelling of family members was important, informants focused particularly on a neighbour, Ayin, whose treatment by Arifin seemed to have aroused the community’s ire. Arifin had an electric cable connected to Ayin’s parents’ home, on the proviso that Arifin would pay a certain amount of Ayin’s parents’ electricity bill—a common arrangement between neighbours in contemporary rural Indonesia. Ayin’s family delayed turning on the electricity at night, and because of this, Arifin was said to have ensorcelled Ayin and made him crazy.

In response, Arifin was taken to the village office grounds (*balai desa*) by a village official. There a village guidance army officer (*babinsa*) seems to have hit him and forced him to confess that his ‘teacher’, Pak Haji Hosin, was

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also behind the sorcery practiced against Ayin. The officer ordered both of them to cure Ayin's illness. By that time a large crowd had gathered and were urging each other to kill the 'sorcerers', but Arifin and Haji Hosin escaped injury at that time.

The killing of Arifin seems to have been well organised. It was also particularly brutal. The local people of Segobang urged each other to 'join in'. Refusing to participate was regarded as unacceptable. Gufron said that those who were more active in their urging were thought to be 'provocateurs' (*propokator*). The killers were portrayed by the *Jawa Pos* (October 13 1998c) as an anonymous "mad mob of witch hunters." The same paper (September 27 1998) reported there was a cross marked on the corpse. However, the perpetrators did not attach much significance to it (ritual, mystical or otherwise) but rather thought that it occurred coincidentally during the violence, in the same way as one of his legs was reportedly almost cut off from the body. When I asked why a cross was cut, Gufron related:

he was destroyed, [it was] the emotion of killing what was considered an illness. Whatever you wanted to do, it was up to you ... because *tukang santet* are considered to be sicknesses in this village. The emotion resulted because we felt we were wiping out germs. If we'd let things continue as they were, even more people would have died.

This emotion probably explains why many other 'sorcerers' were mutilated (both while alive and after dying) by local residents during attacks.

On the same night, the same group of people moved on to kill another alleged sorcerer, Mahfud, and the same kind of violence was visited upon him; "his instrument [scrotum] was pulled until his two balls were ripped off." Haji Hosin had apparently left the village, purportedly in fear of the spreading killings. According to a Segobang resident and a *Jawa Pos* (September 27 1998) article, Jumali suspected he was to be targeted, so he attempted to escape to another village. Nevertheless, he was found and brought back to Segobang where he was killed.

The influence of a killing in Aliyan (in which the police apparently had released the killers of a 'sorcerer') on these three attacks was testified to by Gufron, who related:

First a killing occurred in Aliyan. The main point was we were free to kill sorcerers, provided they were really sorcerers. We were towards the end of the killings here. Without any deliberation, we were united straight away.

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Following the discussion with the village hierarchy the police arrested a number of suspects. As in other villages, there was no forensic or criminological investigation. A village official told me that sorcerers' family members were not embittered towards the killers. Gufron also related that, if anything, they were grateful to them.

September 22, 1998: Giri Subdistrict

Penataban village is officially classed as rural, but is really part of the larger urban area that incorporates Banyuwangi City. Three people were attacked in 1998: Padil, who died; Humaidi who survived and moved to Bali; Nasir who was taken to hospital and eventually died (apparently after release) as a result of wounds he received. The *Surabaya Post* Tuesday edition (September 22 1998) states that the attacks occurred earlier on Tuesday morning (if this is accurate it would suggest that the news was published very quickly).

Aside from this article, my sources were a local resident named Mukhlis and two men, Supriadi and Haris, whom I interviewed while they were jailed for the killing of Padil. Supriadi explained that he had received nine years: four for Padil, two-and-a-half for Nasir and two-and-a-half for the attack on Humaidi (the 'problem' according to Mukhlis was that Humaidi had survived and could bear witness against Supriadi). Haris stated both Padil and Nasir were scared of him because he knew "their deeds and actions". All three interviewees, Mukhlis, Supriadi and Haris, explained that the three victims were suspected of sorcery and all three perceived that the *aparats* had endorsed the killing.

As to whether Padil was a sorcerer, Mukhlis stated:

yeah many people [knew,] the community here all knew. After Padil died, they weren't sick again. Where there's smoke there's fire. The accusation was spot on. [If he] hadn't done it [sorcery] he would not have [been accused]. He had been known as a sorcerer since the 1960s. He stated that people in front of Padil's house had suffered from "strange illnesses".

If people requested water from him, they were cured. Padil had apparently ensorcelled his nephew, Ravi'i. As for Humaidi, Mukhlis simply stated that Humaidi had argued with an office colleague who subsequently suffered an enlarged stomach. The colleague apologised to Humaidi but subsequently died. Nasir, according to Haris, had been known as a sorcerer since 1955.

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All three victims were attacked on the same night. According to Mukhlis it had been arranged by word of mouth (*dari mulut-mulut*) first. The group of killers comprised about twenty-five people, six of them wearing ninja-style scarves, but in each case “those who were close to [the house of the victim] supported” the killing. Nasir was dragged along the road, as was Padil. Humaidi’s head was broken open by a huge tree pot. The men had also intended to kill another ‘sorcerer’, Sukardi, but he escaped.

There were subsequently about seven successful prosecutions (including Haris and Supriadi).

September 27, 1998: Wongsorejo Subdistrict

The killing of Syafi’i on September 27 was one of three killings in Wongsorejo, the northernmost subdistrict in Banyuwangi. Wongsorejo has a largely Madurese population, which ekes out a living through fishing and tending unirrigated plots.

I interviewed a group of local men in Sumberkencono, who explained that Syafi’i had moved there from another hamlet but, as one of the men recalled, evidence of his ‘sorcery’ had preceded him:

he moved to his new address because he wasn’t wanted by that precinct [*lingkungan setempat*]. It was felt that he possessed black magic [*ilmu hitam*]. One of the next-door-neighbours was sick, with a puffed-up [*kembung*] stomach. The community here still believes in seers [*paranormal*] or *dukun*, so it was the assurance from a *dukun* who thought he [Syafi’i] had it [black magic]. It was an accusation. As for the proof, that’s difficult [*pembuktiannya sulit*]. The sick person always mentioned the name of Haji Syafi’i ... Because there was that information [*informasi*] this precinct suspected him, and eventually didn’t accept him.

At the same time as Syafi’i was killed, another ‘sorcerer’, Maruha, was also attacked. He had been accused of being a sorcerer by “the surrounding community. Many people said it.” The neighbourhood head had also suggested to Maruha that “it’s better that you move ... The community won’t let you fit in.”

Another informant concurred with my finding on what precipitated the killing—that the perception that the police and army had failed to react to the killings was a causal factor behind the 1998 outbreak. His opinion was:

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The mass incidents earlier in the south [of Banyuwangi] turned out to be an influence ... The opportunity was seized [*ambil kesempatan*]. Think what would have happened if [those] in the south had been arrested.

In another interview a similar opinion was offered when I asked, “Why did the killing occur at that time? What triggered it?”:

the original trigger came from Banyuwangi to the south. It was influential, because the police didn’t handle it; even though there was killing, they only watched. [People said]: “there are killings there that the police aren’t managing.” So they spread to other areas.

I asked if it was petty criminals (*preman*) who led the attack, but was told it was:

normal members of the community, mob, it was purely from the mob ... There were forty men who joined in [*ikut*an]. They all ran away ... The perpetrators [of the killings against the] two people [Syafi’i and Maruha] were the same.

Syafi’i was found at a neighbour’s house and knifed to death. Maruha was knifed and left for dead, but survived. As one of the killers told me, “Maruha wouldn’t die. He had magical power. He was knifed, and his blood [splattered] on the tree.” Surviving was ‘proof’ that he was a ‘sorcerer’.

That Haji Syafi’i was a mosque official (*takmir masjid*) and a pilgrim (*haji*) should not be interpreted as significant. Kustari was also, along with dozens of others, a *takmir masjid* at one of the mosques in Gintangan, but the position of mosque official does not equate with significant Islamic standing. And even though being a *haji* ensures respect, it does not preclude one from accusations of sorcery and attacks. This is also the case with Mahfud, whose alleged *guru* was a *haji*.

For the killing of Syafi’i three men were sentenced in June 1999 to three years’ imprisonment, and four were sentenced to two years and six months for the attack on Maruha. The procedure was typical of the legal system’s handling of the killings. One of those charged received a comparatively short term. When I commented on this, the man in question laughed shyly, and his friend explained that he had bribed the prosecutor with two million rupiah, which is about ten months’ minimum wage. (Usually the prosecutor, not the judge, was bribed in these cases. This seems to be a common pattern of practice in Indonesia).

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Another of those incarcerated, Matari, was a petty criminal (*preman*), but was known to be innocent of the killing. Muadnan asserted that though Matari had been planning to kill Syafi'i, Muadnan "got to" Syafi'i first. Although Matari missed the opportunity to enhance his reputation, he apparently continued to boast that he had taken part. Consequently, for the police, who were apparently more concerned to maintain the appearance of a successful operation and less with who was actually guilty, Matari became an easy target. The pride associated with being involved in the killings is apparent in many other cases.

September, 1998: Songgon Subdistrict

Hasan (also known as Nipan and as Hasan Hanipin) of Sumberagung Subvillage, Sumberbulu Village, was killed in September. I have not been able to ascertain the exact date. Two other alleged sorcerers from Sumberbulu village were also killed—Umi and Paiman.

The origin of suspicions seems to be a dispute. A chicken belonging to Ramelan's family strayed onto Hasan's rice paddy and started fossicking. Hasan threw stones at the chicken. This action appears to have enraged members of Ramelan's family, who attacked Hasan at that time. After some time Ramelan died, and it appears that sorcery was suspected, but not by everybody.

One of the four hired killers who undertook the killing recalled that Sunaryo hired the assassin Briwo, who invited Misful and two others. They found Hasan in his rice paddy around midday:

While he was ploughing the rice paddy I came up to him and asked "Do you possess sorcery?" He got angry so I hit him. He fell to the paddy and my friends came and started hitting him. We weren't satisfied (*puas*) with that so we hanged him on a coconut tree.

The case of Hasan was exceptional. First, I found a surviving family member to be embittered by the killing. Most family members I met during research expressed resignation and acceptance, some even consented or engaged in the killing. Second, the local community was apparently divided as to whether the victim was a sorcerer. The *Jawa Pos* (October 11 1998) reported this and my research supports it. Hasan's son denied his father was a sorcerer. The subvillage head was not prepared to say either way. Another local resident (a neighbour or subvillage head) stated that "the information was buzzing in the community (*informasi sudah ramai sama masyarakat*). The

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community accused him of possessing sorcery”. Either way, certain close neighbours suspected him of sorcery and one even organised assassins to kill him.

This method of employing assassins was also exceptional. This was one of the few cases in which killers were hired from a distant village. In some other cases, local residents contributed to pay those who led the killing, or were arrested, but the killers were local people, and payment was not a precondition for their involvement, but rather a token of gratitude or an expression of solidarity.

These factors seem to explain why Hasan’s killing diverged from the pattern of neighbours, family, and friends killing one of their fellow villagers whom they suspected to be a sorcerer. Aside from the Hasan killing, in all the cases I studied during my research I found that in the 1998 killings the alleged victim was apparently considered by the majority of local residents to be a ‘sorcerer’.

Conclusion

The killings related in this chapter point to the local dynamics of the killings. In all cases neighbours, family, and / or friends played a role in identifying and killing the suspect. And in all cases, except that of Hasan, the killers received widespread support for their actions. Even in the exceptional case of Hasan it seems some sections of the community supported the action. The killings of ‘sorcerers’ in Banyuwangi stopped rather abruptly in early October, to be succeeded or, in the memories of informants at least, superseded, by the Ninja Fear.

CHAPTER 2

NINJA FEAR

“Brigands”... were being armed to ravage the countryside and to destroy the peasants’ property ... [T]he rumour spread ... and ... inflamed the rural population. So the peasants armed and awaited the invaders. But the “brigands,” the product of panic and excited imagination, failed to materialize.

George Rude, The Crowd in History

The killings of ‘sorcerers’ were mostly confined to the district of Banyuwangi. As explained in the previous chapter, local residents targeted one among them whom they considered to be a sorcerer. The press hardly mentioned these killings of ‘sorcerers’ as they were occurring. However, once the killings subsided, neighbourly gossip and newspaper reportage about the killings of sorcerers combined to create another bloody chapter to this story.

Rumours spread that masked ‘ninjas’ had been behind the violence and they had begun attacking innocent people in East Java. Indeed, this idea was also contained in press articles (mostly published in October and November). Believing the rumours, local residents throughout East Java set up road blocks, acted as guards and attacked and even killed people suspected to be ninjas. This rumour appears to have spread over a surprisingly wide area through face-to-face communications. However, the broadcasting and publishing media also contributed to the generation and spread of rumours.

Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy theories about the killings dominated the two major East Javanese Indonesian language dailies: the *Jawa Pos* and the *Surabaya Post*. They have the widest circulation in East Java and have little outside competition.²

2 Thufail (2005) has analysed ninja stories and conspiracies in English-language newspapers based in Jakarta and Singapore. These have almost no circulation in East

Catering to the East Javanese population, these two newspapers provide the most in-depth coverage of events in East Java.³

Conspiratorial ideas contained in the *Jawa Pos* and *Surabaya Post* coverage are mostly sourced to ‘commentators’ who are usually people prominent in public life. Commentators also included spokesmen and leaders from the NU, the National Commission for Missing People and Victims of Violence (Kontras), the National Commission for Human Rights (Komnas HAM), and other NGOs (non-government organisations), and fact-finding teams established by such organisations to research the killings of ‘sorcerers’. Many of the examples I provide are direct quotations or at least sourced from these commentators.

The Ninja Rumour

For a short time, the most gripping conspiracy theory was that the killings in Banyuwangi had been undertaken by ninjas, who were also targeting traditionalist Muslims and their leaders. During October 1998, after the killings of ‘sorcerers’ had subsided, this idea seems to have quickly spread throughout Banyuwangi, and then through East Java.

The rumour that brigades of black-clad assassins were roaming around the countryside provoked an alarmed response. Terrified of ‘ninjas’, local communities began posting guards in villages and cities all around East Java. ‘Ninjas’ were sighted, caught, and even killed. In the recollections of my informants, even though there were far fewer deaths in this period, as a source of general, widespread terror, these events eclipsed the killings of ‘sorcerers’ such that the ‘sorcerer’ killings are remembered as just part of the “ninja period” (*waktu ninja*).

Newspapers provide a sense of how the rumour about ninjas developed. In September, articles related that ninja-like perpetrators were responsible for the killings of ‘sorcerers’. In the *Surabaya Post*, perpetrators were “dressed as ninjas” (September 18 1998 ‘*Dituduh Jadi*’); “wore masks like ninjas” (September 27 1998 ‘*Isu Santet*’); and they “wore clothes *a la* ninja” in the *Jawa Pos* (October 10 1998 ‘*Bupati Banyuwangi Dituduh*’). By mid-to-late October, instead of being *like* ninjas, press reports related that the

Java, and thus limited currency with local people.

3 With an “estimated circulation of about 350,000”, the *Jawa Pos* was the “third-largest newspaper in Indonesia” in 1992 (Sen and Hill 2000:58), and was the flagship of “one of the country’s most successful press empires” (Sen and Hill 2000:66). The commercial fortunes of the *Surabaya Post* have been more variable, but it was the commercial rival to the *Jawa Pos* in East Java in the late 1990s.

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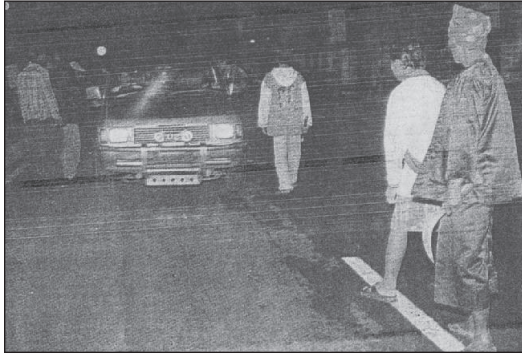


Figure 3: Local guards searching passing vehicles for 'ninjas' in Jember.
Note the knife (clurit) in the left hand of the man pictured in the foreground.
Note also his style of dress, which is associated with martial arts.
Surabaya Post, October 13, 1998.

perpetrators *were* ninjas. The *Jawa Pos* (October 15 1998 'NU Satukan') reported on "the massacre and terror by ninjas." By November's end, all the evidence of the 'ninjas' had been uncovered, according to the *Surabaya Post* (November 30 1998 'Tim NU Serahkan').

The ninja rumour merged with the conspiracy theory that the NU, the traditionalist Islamic organisation introduced in the previous chapter, was being targeted. NU commentators asserted in the *Jawa Pos* (October 8 1998 'Pembantaian "Dukun...") that 'ninjas' were targeting traditionalist Muslims and their *guru ngaji* and *kiai*. This theory developed quickly. Muslim leaders all over East Java reported receiving death threats (October 22 1998 'Ulama Magetan'); being followed while driving (for example, October 16 1998 'Teror Kiai'); or receiving threats by telephone. "Mysterious" or unidentified people approached Islamic boarding schools or asked about local *kiai* (October 17 1998 'Diduga Ninja').

The ninja were often conceived of as having miraculous or supernatural powers. The *Surabaya Post* reported cases of 'ninjas' who were sighted but disappeared into thin air (October 13 1998 'Ninja Teror'; October 15 1998 'Geropyok Ninja'; October 20 1998 'Ninja Tembakkan'; October 21 1998 'Polda Amankan'); put on masks and disappeared (October 14 1998 'Warga Berjaga'); disappeared after jumping into a drain (October 16 1998 'Gara-gara Isu'); and disappeared behind banana trees (October 13 1998 'Dikira Ninja'). Anxious local residents then destroyed the trees (October 16 1998 'Gara-gara Isu'; October 16 1998 'Teror Kiai'). And, in one case, after a

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‘ninja’ transformed himself into a cat, cats were killed (October 16 1998 ‘Gara-gara Isu’).⁴

Perhaps the most comprehensive story, which appeared in the *Surabaya Post* (October 17 1998 ‘Dari Isu’), could be summarised as follows:

Someone at a Muslim boarding school saw two ninjas running fast and carrying chains. Two pedicab drivers [*tukang becak*] also saw two ninjas jump on top of a shop at the back of the boarding school. Young children in the boarding school saw two figures [*sosok*] that seemed to be flying over the tiles. One of the boarding school caretakers [*pengasub pondok*] saw the ninjas teasing the students by jumping from one wall to another, and on top of trees. The ninjas then apparently stuck to a tree, and then disappeared. The students and local residents attacked the poinciana and banana trees. The police were called and, unable to find the ninjas, they fired warning shots.⁵ After the police left, the ninjas reappeared. The students managed to corner them before they stuck to a wall and disappeared again. Local citizens and students then attacked the wall. After touching the wall, two students fell into a kind of trance, as if electrocuted. (Figure 4.)

In spite of their powers of invisibility and invulnerability, in almost all cases the ‘ninjas’ did not physically attack religious leaders. The few religious leaders who claimed to have been attacked also claimed to have successfully defended themselves, which implied that they had greater (supernatural) powers than those attributed to the ‘ninjas’ (October 10 1998 ‘Jember Mencekam’; October 18 1998 ‘Guru Ngaji’). In all such cases, however, the ‘ninjas’ either left no trace or evidence of their ‘attacks’, or the evidence was discounted by the police.⁶

Local residents vigilantly guarded their villages and *kiai* throughout the night (October 3 1998 ‘Seorang Lagi’; October 11 1998 ‘Massa Bunuh’; October 16 1998 ‘Gara-gara Ninja’; and October 17 1998 ‘Diduga Ninja’). This increased surveillance was supported by state officials, including East Java’s military command and the NU leadership, according to the *Jawa Pos* (October 1 1998 ‘Pangdam Minta’), and the governor, according to the

4 George (2004:39) describes a case in Sulawesi in which two men with “spiritual powers” were said to be “able to fly to the peak of the mosque roof”.

5 Retsikas (2006:60) avoids judging whether the ninjas existed, but does note that “the state did not offer appropriate recognition, or give protection for that matter” (2006:65).

6 See the *Surabaya Post* (October 22 1998 ‘6 Orang’).

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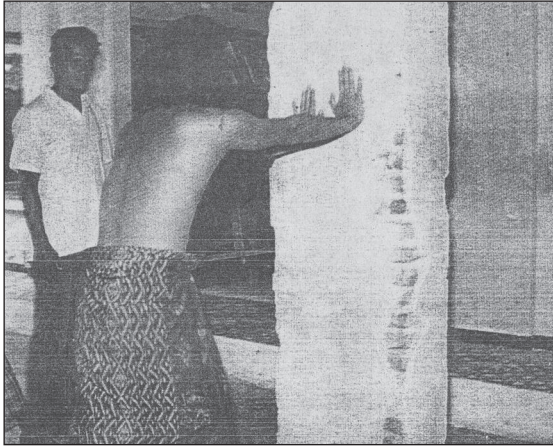


Figure 4: Evidence of Ninjas

This photograph appeared in the *Surabaya Post* on October 14, 1998, several days before the appearance of the article describing the incident on October 17. The accompanying caption explains that the photograph depicts the wall onto which two ninjas had allegedly stuck themselves. The student in the foreground re-enacts touching the wall that putatively gave students a shock. Brickwork showing through the plaster is possible evidence of an attack on the column.

Surabaya Post, October 14, 1998.

Surabaya Post (October 16 1998 ‘*Dandim: Segera*’). Spokespeople for traditionalist Islamic organisations urged the utmost commitment. The *Surabaya Post* (October 21 1998 ‘*Antisipasi Ninja*’) recorded that residents in Gresik consulted martial arts experts and *kiai* in order to obtain invulnerability (*ilmu kebal*) and inner strength (*tenaga dalam*) in order to face the ninja.

Many “forms” (“*sosok*”) were reputedly sighted during this period. I was told that a ninja had arrived in Tegalaring, accompanied by the screams of local girls. Local residents gave chase but it flew out over the rice paddies that surround the village before disappearing. This is consistent with ‘ninja’ sightings in other places (October 16 1998 ‘*Diamankan, Orang*’; October 17 1998 ‘*Isu Teror*’).

Although ‘ninjas’ could supposedly disappear, fly through the air and stick to walls, some were caught with apparent ease by local residents. The *Surabaya Post* (October 21 1998 ‘*Polda Amankan*’) reported that a mentally ill person suspected of being a ninja was caught and handed over to the police. In Sidoarjo, two “mysterious people” were handed over to the police, according to the *Surabaya Post* (October 22 1998 ‘*Lima Ninja*’). More than a week later, local residents seized two ‘ninjas’ in Semarang, but the police

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Figure 5: A *kiai* questions an unknown person who was caught in Kalipare and is suspected of being a ninja.

This photograph apparently portrays a man with a bloodied face being restrained while a *kiai* questions him. It also appears that a drink and a plate of food are placed before him on a table.

Surabaya Post, October 20, 1998

managed to take them into custody before they were attacked. These people were comparatively lucky.

At one point a 'ninja' was killed and then beheaded in Turen Subdistrict, Malang District (October 19 1998 '*Massa Makin*'). A large 'convoy' of motorcycles then paraded the head around several subdistricts of Malang. Fifty-four men from this convoy were subsequently arrested on October 19 (October 20 1998 '*54 Tersangka*') (Figure 6). It appears the victim was Zaenal Arifin, who came from the city of Malang and had a mental illness (*sakit ingatan*) (November 12 1998 '*BAP Pembantai*'; October 21 1998 '*Pembarwa Kelapa*'; October 23 1998 '*Algojo "Ninja"*'; and October 29 1998 '*Tim Kejari*'). By October 22, the Malang District Police had identified twenty-five people either killed or victimised under suspicion of being ninjas (October 22 1998 '*Daftar Korban*'). Newspapers recorded similar attacks and killings in other districts.

It appears some 'ninjas' killed by vigilant local residents were strangers. The *Jawa Pos* (October 13 1998 '*Dua Korban*') reported that two strangers in Balung Lor village were taken to the village hall (*balai desa*). While detained there, the rumour that the two were ninjas spread and intensified. Local residents, in any case, raided the village hall and beat the two to death.

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Figure 6: The people in the convoy which took a part of the body of an unknown person considered to be a 'ninja'.
Surabaya Post (October 20 1998).

Other strangers appear to have been travellers who were stopped at roadside guard posts and requested to provide personal identification. If they failed to provide official documents, they were subject to suspicion. The *Surabaya Post* (1998 '*Nasib Tiga*') also reported that beggars (*pengemis*) and itinerant workers were being taken for ninjas.

Many 'ninjas' were later identified by family members or by the authorities as being mentally ill (October 20 1998 "*Ninja*" *Gila*'; October 24 1998 '*Psikiater Polda*'; October 29 1998 "*Ninja*" *Diklarifikasi*'; October 29 1998 '*Dibanjiri Pasien*'; and October 30 1998 '*Sebanyak 36*'). In East Java, mentally ill drifters ('*wong gembel*') are an accepted, common sight, as they tend not to be institutionalised. While they might be teased or laughed at, their presence is seldom questioned. As the ninja rumour spread some local residents believed that the 'ninjas' had metamorphosed into madmen. Local guards believed they were attacking ninjas while to the police and victims' families the guards were killing mentally ill itinerants. Surprisingly, in the *Surabaya Post* (October 22 1998 '*Banser Gresik*'), an NU paramilitary (*Banser*) leader seems to imply that the victims were not ninja. He suggests that the police and government round up mentally ill people in order to "avoid the incorrect capture which results in pointless killing or assault".

Raids on many police stations occurred. The *Surabaya Post* (October 14 1998b) reported that the Glenmore Subdistrict Police station was also subject to demonstrations, as local residents wanted access to 'ninjas' who were

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Figure 7: A 'ninja' mask which was found on Raya Rungkut Industri Road, Wednesday (28.10) early in the morning, being examined by the Head of Rungkut Police ...

Surabaya Post, October 29, 1998

believed to be inside the station and protected by the police. The *Surabaya Post* (October 21 1998) also reported that Muslim clerics in Sidoarjo warned police not to release 'ninjas', and that if they were released, the Muslim clerics could not be held responsible if the district police station was burnt.

Rumours, as Paul Cohen (1997:151) notes, persist in the face of contradictory evidence. Confronted with evidence that many of the victims were mentally ill, another conspiracy theory developed: when the mentally ill people were caught, other mysterious agents would arrive and defend them, and it was these mysterious agents who planned to attack *kiai*. A further embellishment was that the madmen were 'dropped' by mysterious agents (October 20 1998 'Siapa yang...'). Or, in yet another version, the ninjas captured by people and handed over to the police were then swapped for mentally ill people. And, finally, in the *Surabaya Post* (December 9 1998 'Khatib Suriyah'), the NU argued that the rumour of ninjas was itself an attempt to terrorise the NU.

Although occurring on a much smaller scale, there are similarities between the ninja murders of 1998 and the massacre of Communists in 1965–1966 Indonesia, during which hundreds of thousands of purported

party members or sympathisers were killed (George 2004; Retsikas 2006). The Communist Party had been rumoured to have initiated a bloody coup. Among the alleged evils committed, members of the party's women's organisation had supposedly danced naked around the bodies of the generals killed on the night of September 30, 1965. These rumours were also partly attributable to anti-Communist newspapers, which published accounts of the 'depravity' (Langenberg 1990:47). George (2004) finds that rumour was "fundamental" in both cases.

Conspiracy Theories as Credible

The conspiracy theories might have gained additional plausibility because army, police, and political leaders espoused them. The East Java regional commander implied that those arrested for the killings of 'sorcerers' were acting on orders from a higher authority. He stated that it was necessary "to catch the head, not the tail" (October 24 1998 '*Pangdam: Yang*'), and that the conspirators were experimenting in East Java and intending to use these techniques elsewhere (October 27 1998 '*Isu Santet*'). Similar opinions were attributed to, among others, East Java's police chief (October 10 1998 '*Setelah Penjarahan*'), East Java's governor (October 22 1998 '*Saya Yakin*'), and a national minister (October 15 1998 '*Menko Polkam*'). Almost all the officials I met, including police, army, and government officials, agreed that there had been a conspiracy.

Spokesmen from the army, police, and executive, among others, seemed to blame other arms of government. For example, in a *Jawa Pos* article (October 8 1998 '*Pembantaian "Dukun..."*'), the governor of East Java:

maintained that he had not received a report regarding the two armed forces *oknum* who were involved in the butchery ... "Indeed [their involvement] is possible. But, I have yet to receive a concrete report. I know because I read about it in the newspaper. It was your newspaper that wrote about that issue".

This phenomenon of the support for conspiracy theories by armed forces and political leaders could be attributed to higher levels of fragmentation and vulnerability within the ruling-class or elite during the Reform Movement. Furthermore, the 'authorities' lost control of the dispersal of information—the governor even sought information from the newspaper which was seeking information from him. In any case, the authorities' acceptance of a conspiracy clearly influenced other people to believe in it.

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Another factor which made conspiracy theories credible was their very murkiness and flexibility. Although I will discuss such ideas as ‘Army Conspiracy’, ‘Communist Party’, and ‘Ninja Rumour’ separately, elements of each of these and other conspiratorial ideas melded together, morphed, and survived almost by virtue of their murkiness (Bubandt 2008:812). Inconsistency in the various theories did not count against their individual credibility. Mentally ill drifters, mysterious and magical assassins, clandestine paramilitary or army forces, undercover policemen, travellers without proper identification, as well as chickens and cats were all identified as ninjas.⁷

The clearest evidence of the vagueness and changing manifestation of the ninja rumours pertains to the killers of ‘sorcerers’ in Banyuwangi. Some local killers wore sarongs or T-shirts around their heads when killing ‘sorcerers’. Mahmud, for example, reported that some of those who killed Yasin of Watukebo had “worn sarongs” in such a way. They may have been influenced by the face and head coverings (a T-shirt or sarong tied around the head) that protestors sometimes wore in big demonstrations in the Reform Movement period. These local killers were also concealing their identity and may have been eager to exploit the sense of a mysterious, deadly, supernatural power that ‘ninja’ conveys.

No killer of ‘sorcerers’ had had any inclination to kill Muslim leaders. Mahmud, of Watukebo, Rogojampi, had killed Yasin, as described in Chapter One. Later he was involved in “guarding religious leaders” in Watukebo. I spoke to other killers who subsequently were involved in the roadblocks that had been established to protect against ninjas. Apparently, they were unaware that their wearing ‘ninja masks’ may have been a source of ninja rumours.

How could this misunderstanding have occurred? Perhaps the killers of ‘sorcerers’ could not identify themselves as evil and supernatural killers of *kiai*, even though, during interrogations, the police accused some of them of being ninjas. After being incarcerated for the murder of a ‘sorcerer’, one participant reflected that during “the ninja rumours the entire community (*masyarakat*) was on guard. [Yet] all the people in prison were thought to be ninjas.” Imron, who was jailed for the murder of the ‘sorcerers’ Basir and Hairyah, complained that after the two were killed:

7 The “lack of specificity”, as Spyer (2006:204) notes, with regard to who is responsible for various political and violent phenomena, “may in fact produce a sense of phantom danger, lurking both nowhere in particular and therefore potentially everywhere in general, provoking fear and, perhaps even, new violence.”

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then there was the ninja rumour ... I was on guard [against ninja] for thirty days, and yet I was detained as a ninja ... those police pigs said "Yeah you're all ninjas."

In summary, some of the same people who participated in guarding against 'ninjas' were eventually called ninjas themselves. As with the putative ninjas, the stories about them could 'morph' and were seemingly impervious to evidence.

As mentioned earlier, commentators from NGOs and political parties gave credibility to conspiracy theories through media coverage. The NU, in particular, was portrayed as vigilantly seeking to uncover the source of the alleged ninja conspiracy. It obtained privileged status as the most popular 'oppositional' organisation and as a legitimate news source. The *Surabaya Post* (December 3 1998 'Soal Investigasi') reported that "the NU will strive to get to the bottom of this case, whatever the political risk; this is a most serious issue."

NU claims regarding the extent of the conspiracy, and evidence of it, became increasingly extravagant. At the end of November, an NU spokesman announced in the *Surabaya Post* (November 30 1998 'Tim NU Serahkan') that the organisation had "located the training grounds for the ninjas, [personnel] who had been recruited by the ninjas, and so on." This evidence was never released. Although the press and the leaders of the East Java executive, police, and army requested the details, the NU leaders seemed to be unavailable to the *Surabaya Post* (December 2 1998 'Kapolda Minta'), and avoided the question when it was put by the paper (November 30 1998 'Tim NU Serahkan'; December 3 1998 'Ketua PW NU'; December 3 1998 'Choirul Anam'; December 4 1998 'Gus Dur Membenarkan'). NU leader, Gus Dur, reportedly stated in the *Surabaya Post* (December 4 1998 'Gus Dur Membenarkan'), "the data that has been exposed still hasn't covered all of the truth." Later, the *Surabaya Post* (December 7 1998 'Soal Investigasi NU') reported:

The proof collected by the NU's Investigation Team, among other things includes a recording of a confession of an armed forces mysterious agent (*oknum*) who admitted to training *provokator*, video clips of the occurrences, [and] the location where junior *provokator* were trained ...

Finally, the NU released a report (Lakpesdam-NU 1998), but it received little attention. It contained no evidence to corroborate the NU claims and provided only a large amount of innuendo. Nevertheless, the NU's

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reputation of “defending the truth” (*membela yang benar*) probably lent it an authoritative voice in this affair.

Having been marginalised in the New Order period, the NU was one of many organisations jockeying to occupy new positions of power with new elections imminent. Indeed, the NU’s political arm, the PKB, obtained a large share of the vote in the 1999 election both in East Java and nationally. Going by press reports, it is possible that the NU itself was engaged in spreading, if not creating, the rumour. Bubandt (2008:808) refers to Gus Dur as “an ardent trafficker in conspiracy theory” who used such theories as a “political weapon”. This is not conclusive evidence that the organisation consciously engineered the ninja rumours; the most we could assert is that the NU organisation contributed to the credibility of rumours.

The operation of the press is also important in this regard. *Jawa Pos* and *Surabaya Post* articles are generated almost entirely from commentators. Reporters and editors seldom undertake their own research or verify commentators’ opinions. Nor, it seems, are they expected to do so. As I have shown, the commentators mostly espoused grandiose theories. Out of hundreds of articles on this topic, I found only a few which printed opinions which were non-conspiratorial.⁸

The rare opinions from editors and reporters were equivocal: on the one hand, they reported that the existence of ninjas was a rumour (without attempting to establish its veracity) and, on the other, some wrote as if it were fact. Headlines were even often more blatantly colourful than the content of the articles. A typically evocative *Surabaya Post* (October 22 1998 ‘*Lima Ninja*’) headline announced ‘Five Ninjas to be Charged for Criminal Offences’ (*Lima Ninja Akan Dipidanakan*). The text of the article records that police had identified five men as drifters and were intending to hand them over to the Social Affairs Department.⁹

However, the important issue is not what was written so much as how readers responded. This response would have been tempered by scepticism aptly expressed in an informant’s opinion that, “as for the *Jawa Pos*, they see

8 For instance, in the *Surabaya Post* (October 15 1998 ‘*Sutarmas Menyeslakan*’) the speaker of the East Javanese parliament questioned conspiracy theories, and in the *Jawa Pos* (October 18 1998 ‘*Gus Dur: Dalang*’) a member of Komnas HAM asserted that local people (not outsiders) admitted to being the killers of ‘sorcerers’. These were exceptions.

9 During World War One, rumours spread that Russian reinforcements had passed through England with “snow on their boots” and that the Germans had used a live priest as a church bell clapper in Belgium. Taylor (1966:57) attributes some of these rumours to fabrications by “ingenious journalists of better material,” but “most sprang from the general conviction that war was like that”.

something black and call it white. Not even half [of what they write] actually occurred.” Nevertheless, it seems it was one thing to profess such scepticism, but quite another to put it into practice.

‘Ninjas’ might have been credible for different reasons. In this period, members of the Indonesian army, among others, were reputed to have dressed as ninjas in some operations (Aditjondro 2000; Kammen 2001:167–168, 172). Moreover, ‘ninjas’ also fitted into pre-existing conceptions, since East Javanese people generally believe in supernatural agents such as genies and sorcerers. Movies and TV shows which portrayed ninjas as deadly assassins also contributed to the image.¹⁰

These factors might help explain a contradiction that I have identified. Local informants knew the killers of a local ‘sorcerer’ because these killers were other local residents, yet the same informants were sure a conspiracy lay behind killings in other villages. Many did not provide any reason, whether ostensibly valid or not, for the existence of a conspiracy. Others, like Mahmud, did. With other local residents, and without ‘outside’ interference, he undertook the killing of Yasin from Watukebo (as described in Chapter One). He and other killers were arrested after ridding the village of a ‘sorcerer’ who had, it was alleged, killed people. Furthermore, the police and judge said that the sorcerer Yasin was a *kiai*. For Mahmud this was evidence that “it was all engineered by the police”. Supriadi had been jailed for the attacks on Padil, Humaidi, and Nasir in Giri. Even though he knew that only local people had been involved in the attacks that he admitted to undertaking, Supriadi told me that “my punishment [*hukuman*] was a result of *apar*at/police engineering”.

Other informants provided hearsay evidence. For example, the head of a neighbouring village related that local residents there “thought that the military was involved in [the killings of sorcerers in] Tegalgarang,” my fieldwork location. In fact, the killers in Tegalgarang were all local people acting on their own initiative. I asked Supriadi: “Was the Armed Forces behind all this [the outbreak]?” He responded “I know from being in prison that there were *oknum* involved”.

Perhaps the most important role played in the development of the rumour was by ordinary people of East Java. They were the ones who, fearing the arrival of ninjas, manned the guard-posts along local roads and lanes, claimed to have sighted, or even been ‘terrorised’ (*diteror*) by these ninjas.

10 Bubandt (2008:806) records that in North Maluku there was widespread fear of *provokator* with magical abilities. Also, Dutch Malukan killing teams were rumoured to arrive at night and disappear “mysteriously ... before dawn” (2008:808).

Claims such as these would ordinarily lack credibility, but it was perhaps not a case of a different cultural logic, but rather of different criteria for the acceptability of such claims. The main criterion appeared to be loyalty to the cause of defending against the ninjas. To deny the reality of ninjas attacking *kiai* was to side with the ninjas.¹¹ On the other hand, to be threatened or attacked by a ninja was to be on the right side.

Rumour: Mass Media and Word-of-Mouth

Clearly the spread of these rumours can be explained in terms of the interaction between the press and local networks of communication—gossip and rumour. One fascinating feature of the rumours was that suspicion was directed against the government, elites, and the armed forces. This inversion of authority can partly be attributed to particularities of the Reform Movement discussed in the next chapter.

11 Pressure to affirm the reality of a perceived threat was apparent during the McCarthy era, when any “news article critical of McCarthy’s efforts could leave the author wide open to accusation” (Cardozo 1990:474).

REFORM, REGIME CHANGE, AND VIOLENCE

Reformasi

The 1998 killings of ‘sorcerers’ and ‘ninjas’ must be understood in the context of *Reformasi* in Indonesia. ‘*Reformasi*’, hitherto translated as ‘the Reform Movement’, refers to the period leading up to and after the fall of President Soeharto in May 1998. There is no scholarly consensus on exactly when *Reformasi* began or ended, but I will take it as referring to the period 1996–1999.

For almost three decades prior to *Reformasi*, Soeharto had been at the head of the ruling regime in Indonesia. He had fought against the Dutch in 1945–1949 and had risen through army ranks during the years of Indonesia’s first president, Soekarno. Yet he was relatively undistinguished among the military’s top brass. However, in 1967 he emerged as President of Indonesia. This followed the confusion caused by an apparent coup attempt in 1965 and the ensuing massacre of communists, with hundreds of thousands of victims.

The Soeharto regime—which gave itself the name ‘New Order’ (*Orde Baru*)—continued to grow in power. Together with his followers in the Army Soeharto had taken a leading role in the massacre of communists. Subsequently, his use of violent suppression was apparent in subduing separatists in the province of Aceh; in establishing and maintaining sovereignty in East Timor; in suppressing activists, such as radical Muslims, students and union leaders; and in crackdowns against demonstrators, such as in the 1984 Tanjung Priok massacre.

The regime also attempted to establish its legitimacy through tightly controlled elections. From the 1970s, elections were limited to three parties—the regime’s electoral vehicle, Golkar, which always won; an Islamic party, PPP; and a ‘nationalist’ party, PDI. In 1993 Megawati, the daughter of

Soeharto's predecessor Soekarno, was elected head of the PDI. She became a figurehead for dissatisfaction with the Soeharto regime, and increasingly threatened to turn the PDI into a genuine opposition party. Soeharto subsequently attempted to unseat her by installing a puppet as head of the PDI, but Megawati's supporters refused to relinquish control of the party and occupied the party headquarters in Jakarta. It is widely accepted that Soeharto instigated the violent raid which eventually ousted them and installed the puppet effectively as the leader of the PDI. The raiders themselves are believed to have been soldiers and thugs (*preman*). In Jakarta, several days of rioting followed the raid. For convenience we could stipulate that these 1996 events marked the beginning of *Reformasi*.

Pressure on the regime was also increased that year by other important circumstances. One was the scandal of the new national car project (*mobnas*). Headed by Soeharto's son, Tommy, this project was proposed to eventually develop Indonesian motor cars; however the first model was designed and constructed outside Indonesia, albeit with Indonesian labour. Internationally, Indonesia's standing was also negatively affected by the awarding of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize to two East Timorese activists, Bishop Belo and Jose Ramos Horta. The Nobel Committee (nobelprize.org 1996) noted that since Indonesia had occupied East Timor it had been "estimated that one-third of the population of East Timor lost their lives due to starvation, epidemics, war and terror".

However, if trouble was brewing for the Soeharto regime, this certainly was not reflected in the polls. Granted, the campaign period for the 1997 elections had been violent (Cribb 2002:524), more so than usual for Indonesian election campaigns. Nevertheless, Golkar was returned with the most commanding share of the vote it had ever received. What really provided momentum for *Reformasi* was the 1997 monetary crisis (*krismon* or *krisis moneter*).

Krismon was part of the region-wide Asian Economic Crisis, though it is widely accepted that Indonesia was hit hardest. The national currency lost value dramatically. When the crisis began in July 1997 the *rupiah* was valued at around 2,500 rp/\$US. By January 1998, it had fallen to 17,000 rp/\$US. Other economic measures such as GDP, inflation, and stock market prices also indicated that the economy was performing badly. As a result of the downturn "every modern enterprise in the nation was bankrupt, the savings of the idle were wiped out and labourers were thrown out of work by the million" (Ricklefs 2001:404). Prices of the 'nine essential goods' (rice, cooking oil, etc.) rose sharply.

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Thus, in October 1997 the regime turned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In return for a loan of about US\$10 billion, the IMF demanded macroeconomic reform. It also demanded “a substantial limitation of the privileges enjoyed by Suharto’s family and friends and a reduction in government expenditure in areas that were important sources of patronage” (Cribb 2002:525). Apparently in declining health, Soeharto seemed ambivalent about pursuing reform, particularly where it touched on his family businesses. The negotiations were “answered by the closure of 16 banks” which “touched off a run on domestic private banks” (Bird 1999:27). Adding to the disillusionment, Soeharto’s bullish annual budget speech in January 1998 seemed out of touch to the incredulous Indonesians. The IMF stepped up the pressure. More humiliation resulted when Soeharto was photographed signing a ‘letter of intent’ addressed to the IMF with the IMF chief standing behind him with arms locked. The body language was clear and demeaning. The reforms demanded would cripple the Soeharto regime’s way of doing business.

The problems were compounded by the agricultural sector. Reduced rainfall in 1998 associated with *El Niño* accounted for a 10 percent fall in national rice output with other produce also being negatively affected. The deteriorating economy created a legitimacy crisis. The Soeharto regime was perceived to have broken its own covenant with the people—restricted political rights in return for economic improvement. Opposition leaders such as the modernist Muslim, Amien Rais, the head of the NU, Gus Dur, and Megawati began to voice their criticism.

Demands for *Reformasi* increased. ‘*Reformasi*’ meant different things to different people, but as Cribb suggests, this “single slogan” became “code for the simple goal of removing Suharto from office”. Generalisations are difficult, but for students and some activists it meant an end to the Soeharto regime’s ‘corrupt’ practices (known as ‘*KKN*’ standing for ‘corruption, collusion and nepotism’), its oppressive policies, and its violent response to dissent. It also encapsulated demands for social justice, freer elections, and a stronger civil society.

In March 1998, Soeharto announced a new cabinet heavily weighted with his cronies. It appeared that the regime was backsliding on the promised reforms and as a result international pressure consolidated. At home, leaders—including Megawati, Gus Dur, and Amien Rais—were increasingly vocal in their opposition to the regime.

The pressure came not only from the elite. Students began demonstrating with increasing vigour, demanding *Reformasi*. These protests became larger

and more frequent and garnered support from different sectors of society. On May 12, demonstrators around Trisakti, the elite Jakarta university, were shot and killed by troops. This event proved to be a “turning point” (Ricklefs 2001:406). The violent army and police reaction to *Reformasi* protests provoked further civil unrest.

Anger and grief erupted into rioting on May 13–15. Rioters generally targeted Chinese Indonesians, and mass rapes were recorded (Winarnita 2012). Rioters also targeted Soeharto family businesses. Malls and other symbols of affluence were burnt. As a result an estimated “50 people died; 3,000 buildings were burnt and many thousands of vehicles were also destroyed. A further 700 people were reported to have been killed in other centres” (Cribb 2002:526).

Calls for Soeharto’s resignation emerged from his own ‘supporters’ and the army. Soeharto attempted to assuage demands by appointing a ‘reform’ cabinet, but fourteen of the newly-named ministers refused to serve. Student protests intensified in Jakarta and elsewhere—the most symbolic protest was the occupation of the Legislative Assembly Building (*Gedung MPR*) from May 18. On May 21 1998 Soeharto resigned and Habibie, a protégé, was installed as interim President. He held this position until October 20 1999.

Habibie inherited a state seemingly in crisis, if not close to failure. The new president lacked broad support and his control—especially over the Armed Forces—appeared tenuous. Meanwhile, the nation was collapsing in a paroxysm of ‘ethnic cleansing’ violence. Indeed the term ‘Balkanisation’—referring originally to the fragmentation of the Balkan Peninsula in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—was often invoked amid predictions of a ‘post-Indonesia’ future for the archipelago (Kingsbury and Aveling 2003). Hindsight shows the idea of an impending collapse to be exaggerated. Yet continued civil unrest, including the outbreak of sorcerer killings described in this book, characterised Habibie’s presidency.

The situation at the time appeared equivocal. Aside from the potential for violent disintegration, democratic reforms seemed imminent. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the special MPR (People’s Consultative Assembly) session, November 10–13. Outside, on the streets, the session became infamous for other reasons. Protesting students challenged “the body’s legitimacy and its right and commitment to reform” (Cameron 1999:5). Shooting (presumably instigated by the Armed Forces) began and fourteen were killed. Inside the MPR, the session conferred democratic reforms. It agreed to limit presidential terms, rescinded Presidential emergency powers,

and validated Habibie's schedule for an election to be held by June 1999 (Mietzner 2008).

The June 1999 ballot was touted as the first free and fair elections in half a century. And to a large extent they were. Megawati's newly formed party, the PDI-P (The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle), won most votes, yet Gus Dur of the PKB was elected president in the subsequent parliamentary session. It is hard to reproduce the *Zeitgeist* of the *Reformasi* period up to this point. Substantial change had taken place in spite or because of Habibie's presidency. Yet to some it might have seemed that if Habibie, widely considered a lackey of Soeharto, could produce so much change so quickly, surely the true 'reforming' figures, once elected, could go much further and fare much better?

Economic Change

Although *krismon* had been a trigger for *Reformasi*, it did not disappear with the fall of Soeharto. Ricklefs (2001:408) states that in 1998 "the economy remained a disaster". The currency remained weak against the dollar, large enterprises (including many banks) were bankrupt, and unemployment levels were high. Thus, the general impression among scholars is that Indonesians suffered terribly.

I would like to present a dissenting opinion. Although the popular image holds that *krismon* constituted a national economic disaster, data regarding *krismon* are contradictory.

Early on, newspapers reported "large numbers of children on the streets of Jakarta, falls in school enrolments and tremendous increases in poverty" (Cameron 1999:12). But a 1999 World Bank-commissioned study found that poverty had increased "marginally, from the pre-crisis figure of barely 10% to no more than 14%" (quoted in Breman and Wiradi 2002:2). Possibly, different areas of Indonesia, or even Java, may have experienced *krismon* differently (Breman and Wiradi 2002:3). So what do studies of different areas show?

Again the findings are mixed. Breman and Wiradi (2002) found that poverty increased substantially in two villages in West Java. Lont's research on a Yogyakarta neighbourhood found most people "managed quite well" (2005:200). He writes "the real victims of the crisis are a minority, and many of them would also have had problems even if there had not been a crisis" (Lont 2005:193). In yet other areas *krismon* seems to have been beneficial. Research undertaken amongst pregnant Central Javanese women

found that nutrition levels actually improved during *krismon* (Hartini 2004). *Krismon* also heralded a ‘boom’, particularly for industries tied to the dollar. Timmer (2010) reports a wild growth in the shrimp export industry from the Mahakam delta of East Kalimantan, fuelled by the low rupiah. Thus a wide variety of experience characterises the different areas.

It is not just a matter of different areas but also different classes, demographics and sectors. In terms of class, the Poppele, Sumarto and Pritchett study (cited in Breman and Wiradi 2002:2) found that *krismon*, “hit the better-off harder than the poor”. With regard to demographics, *krismon* had “sharper negative impact on the urban than the rural economy”. Similarly, another study found that *per capita* household expenditure had not dropped in rural areas as a result of *krismon*, though it had dropped in urban areas (Cameron 1999). Finally, *krismon* affected some sectors worse than others. Another World Bank-sponsored team (cited in Breman and Wiradi 2002:2), Jellinek and Rustanto, claimed that the crisis had in fact been an “economic boom ... petty producers made good, stepping in to substitute for high-cost commodities that had been driven out of the market.” Underlining this, a Sumarto, Wetterberg and Pritchett report found that “many of the areas hardest hit were the relatively well-off areas that had booming modern economy sectors pre-crisis” (cited in Cameron 1999:14). In summary, *krismon* had mixed effects for different classes, demographics and sectors, but the rural poor, especially those working in the informal sector, were not as badly affected.

My opinion is not shared in general histories of the period, which stress that the economy was decimated. This has some bearing on understanding the killings of sorcerers and ninjas. As will be discussed later, several scholars have argued that *krismon* relates directly to the killings, that the ‘fact’ that poor and desperate people were implicated in the killings helps explain the outbreak. I contend on the other hand that rural Banyuwangi was mostly insulated from the economic downturn. And even if there had been a significant rise in levels of poverty this would not particularly help to explain the killings in the villages. Either way—with general impoverishment throughout Indonesia or not, Banyuwangi insulated or not—*krismon* is implicated only to the extent that it is associated with *Reformasi* in general, including the social transformations occurring during this period.

Social Change

During this period demonstrations increased. A February 23 1998 demonstration by the middle-class women's group Voice of Caring Mothers raised concerns for poor women in Jakarta. This was largely peaceful and successful in terms of gaining a widespread and sympathetic media reception. It was followed by large demonstrations in April in Jakarta, Ujung Pandang, Bandung and Surabaya, the last boasting some 1,000 women (Porter 2001:63).

Student demonstrations also seem to have gained traction. In April students were demonstrating in and around campuses. By May, the students were marching on the streets. The May 4 decision to reduce the fuel subsidy, causing a large increase in petrol prices, was followed by days of rioting. Student demonstrators in the capital were inflamed by the May 12 shooting of the Trisakti students. On May 14 students marched on parliament. A few days later they occupied it. This occupation continued for several days until after the installation of Habibie as president, when the legislators managed to regain control of the parliament building. Student protests were reignited by the November MPR session. Demonstrators clashed with armed forces near the parliament building. As a result, "14 students and civilians were killed" (Cameron 1999:5). This incident is sometimes called the 'Atma Jaya' shootings as they occurred near the Atma Jaya University. Rioting again broke out in Jakarta with sixteen killed and 400 injured (Cribb 2002:527). By this time, demonstrations regularly featured in public life.

The incidence of rioting also gathered pace during these months. During the *Reformasi* period rioters turned over cars in the street; torched, trashed and looted buildings, homes and malls associated with ethnic Chinese; and raped ethnic Chinese women. Buddhist temples and Christian churches were also damaged. The central Javanese city of Solo, in particular, was the scene of turmoil. Elsewhere, Bird notes "several-day-long episodes" of rioting outside Java in "Lombok, Sumba, Flores, South Sulawesi, West Kalimantan, and on Sumatra from Medan to Bagansiapiapi" (Bird 1999:35).

Taken together, the demonstrations and rioting events form a crucial part of the backdrop for the killings of 'sorcerers' and 'ninjas' in 1998. Many local residents I spoke with referred to both the demonstrations and rioting using the same term: '*demo*'. Ultimately I do not think they distinguished between 'demonstration' (meaning a public display of group sentiments as an expression of civil rights) and 'riot' (meaning a violent, wild, or turbulent disturbance involving many people). They saw violent actions as *demo* as well

—whether against ‘sorcerers’ or against police in order to free from police stations people who had been arrested for killing ‘sorcerers’.

Aside from the increasing number of demonstrations, the revival of tradition (*adat*) represents another important aspect of social change in *Reformasi*. As Acciaioli (2002:220) notes, in “the 1990s, especially since the dawn of Reformasi in 1998, some actual reassertions of the autonomy, if not sovereignty, of *adat* institutions have indeed become part of an emergent local governance landscape among groups now more publicly identifying themselves as [*adat* communities].” This *adat* resurgence has led to a wide variety of phenomena. The blocking of development projects, mass violence, challenges to national park boundaries, the development of self-styled ethnic or ‘traditional’ elites, and the development of a national indigenous people’s lobby—AMAN—all, as Henley and Davidson (2007:1) put it, were expressed “in the name of *adat*”. Thus, increasingly and self-consciously, activists invoked the idea of “*adat*”.

The *adat* resurgence, strictly speaking, is of limited relevance to Banyuwangi. Only one of the hundreds of people I spoke with and interviewed in Banyuwangi identified the killings of sorcerers or ninjas as instances of *adat*. However, the killings could not be stopped because of the strength of communal solidarity in the face of weak and ineffectual state representation in the village. I contend that the killings represented an assertion of the strengthening of traditional bonds. To the extent that this contention holds, the killings in Banyuwangi could be linked with the *adat* revival.

Related to the reinvigoration of *adat* was the growth of what might be termed an ethnic and regional outlook. Existing separatist movements were emboldened in Irian Jaya, East Timor, and Aceh. In Irian Jaya pro-independence demonstrations occurred in various cities in July and October 1998. The army responded violently to several of these demonstrations. In East Timor demonstrators demanding a referendum on independence greeted EU ambassadors who visited in June 1998, and in July Bishop Belo stated that a referendum was the only solution (Ricklefs 2001:412). Then, on January 27 1999 Habibie astounded many commentators by conceding the possibility of a referendum on the issue of independence for East Timor. This set in train events that saw East Timor effectively independent by the end of 1999. Elsewhere, Aspinall (2005:2) notes that:

In 1998–99, following the collapse of the authoritarian Suharto regime, there was a burst of anti-government political activity in Aceh. A mass protest movement demanded a referendum on independence, the

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military was excoriated for human rights abuses and the GAM [Free Aceh Movement] insurgency mushroomed once more, eventually gaining control of up to 70% of Aceh's territory.

Thus, independence activities gained momentum in the three most restive provinces.

In other areas, organisations formed to promote ethnic or regional interests took a form which was often difficult to distinguish from criminal gangs. In subsequent years on Bali, for example, gangs of *preman* (hoodlums) allied with local politicians conducted 'sweeping' operations. These took the form of persecution of non-Balinese residents on the island, sometimes in the name of preserving Balinese-ness (*Ajeg Bali*).

Aside from the resurgence in *adat* and regional identity expressed in 1998, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, radicalism, or literalism became more noticeable. The Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) was apparently established in August 1998 (see Wilson 2006:279). Over the following years it "achieved notoriety" through "raids on bars and brothels" (Desker 2002). The Justice Party (later known as the Prosperous Justice Party) was formed in 1998. It received about 1 percent of the vote in the 1999 election but managed to build on this support in following years through maintaining its literalist rhetoric, if not practice. Laskar Jihad was an irregular army which went to Ambon, Maluku, to fight against Christians (Desker 2002). These groups were some of the earlier expressions of literalism, or fundamentalism, of political Islam's increasing clout.

Laskar Jihad and the Islamic Defenders Front were able to engage in violent activities while the state played an ambivalent role in relation to this violence. I will demonstrate later that the state also played an ambivalent role with regard to societal violence which resulted in the 'sorcerer' and 'ninja' killings.

Civil Society

Civil society grew and democracy consolidated through the *Reformasi* period. This was partly realised in political parties, parliament and elections. *Reformasi* witnessed an astounding growth in the number of parties. During Soeharto's regime only three parties had been permitted and these had been carefully managed. Megawati led the split from the PDI, forming a new and influential party, the PDI-P. Other soon-to-be-influential parties were also formed in the months following Soeharto's resignation, including: The Justice Party (PK, later known as the PKS: Prosperous Justice Party),

The National Awakening Party (PKB, to become the political arm of the NU organisation), National Mandate Party (PAN), and the Crescent Star Party (PBB). These parties were more active in the larger cities than in rural areas. Within a year of Soeharto's resignation, around 200 parties had been formed (Cameron 1999:6). The result of this was the existence of a genuinely competitive party system in time for the 1999 elections. Many new NGOs were also formed at this time.

Aside from the competitive growth of parties, the role of the parliament was recast during 1998–1999. Parliament became more powerful while the office of the President was slightly curtailed. During the Soeharto era, the President had unofficially dominated parliament. However, the November 1998 MPR session limited the lengths of term for both President and Vice-President to a maximum of two five-year terms, and repealed broad emergency powers latterly enjoyed by Soeharto. Formerly the two 'houses' of parliament, the 'lower' (DPR) and the 'upper' (MPR)—at the national level as well as in the regional parliaments (DPRD)—were a mouthpiece and rubber-stamp for the President's decisions; now parliaments were becoming independent, if not representative of their voters.

Other reforms were geared to make parliaments become more elected than appointed bodies. After the resignation of Soeharto, parliaments regained authority and began to act more independently. The November MPR special session agreed to reduce the number of parliamentary seats guaranteed to the Armed Forces from seventy-five to thirty-eight.

Given the new role for parties and parliament, the decision to hold elections was significant. Previously, the regime had engineered elections. Golkar, the Soeharto regime's electoral organisation, had dominated national and regional parliaments. Now increasing democracy was in the offing. Habibie announced national parliamentary elections which, the November MPR session confirmed, would be held in June 1999. Moreover, public servants would no longer be required to vote for Golkar. In April 1998 the DPR also enacted a law that district heads (*bupati*) would be elected by district (*kabupaten*) parliaments, not appointed by Jakarta (Cribb 2002:527). This action marked a formal change in political direction. Indeed, in the wake of the 'sorcerer' killings, the district head of Banyuwangi was to be replaced in a free election. With the result no longer a foregone conclusion, elections throughout Indonesia from the district to the national level were democratic, competitive, free, and fair.

Even before the November 1998 MPR session, parties had begun jostling for position. Not only the NU (which had just launched its parliamentary

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arm, the PKB), but also the Justice Party sent ‘fact-finding’ teams’ to investigate the killings in Banyuwangi. Both presented the phenomenon as an elite conspiracy against Islam. This could be said to have served to position the parties as defenders of the faith against the old elites. Members of the state, the Islamic parties, and newspaper reporters produced interpretations of the events that incorporated sensational and conspiratorial narrations. As discussed earlier, NU officials and many others asserted that black-clothed assailants were targeting Muslims. This misleading idea quickly gained traction. Indeed we could partly attribute the fear of ‘ninja’ assailants, as they became known, to the statements of these party-affiliated fact-finding teams. In the new political climate parties responded actively to the killings, in anticipation of the upcoming elections both in the capital and in the regions.

A plethora of parties competing in an open election for seats in an empowered parliament did not necessarily equate to what in the West would be considered a thriving civil society. Changes in parliament, parties and elections amounted to significant democratisation, but in subsequent years the larger parties acted more like patronage machines than organisations with competing platforms and goals. Perhaps this cynical hindsight tinges the memory of the Reform Movement. Yet it seems that even in the months following their establishment, PAN, PDI-P and PKB were hard to distinguish from the Soeharto era parties such as PDI, PPP and Golkar. Granted, PAN was the party for modernist Muslims, PDI-P for patriotic nationalists, PKB for traditionalist Muslims and so on, but aside from these forms of ‘identity politics’ (as they might be called), unique ideologies or policies seemed to be of secondary concern to the simple possibility of power and patronage that the elections promised.

Another aspect of the growth of civil society was press reform. No longer were a few self-censoring, tightly-controlled media outlets producing solemn reports of President Soeharto, or of rows of generals announcing plans and instructions or opening power plants. Formerly journalists were controlled by the Soeharto regime through a body known as ‘The Journalists’ Alliance’ (PWI). Now the PWI was no longer to be the sole journalists’ body. Ministers no longer enjoyed the right to simply revoke media permits (SIUPP) and applications for such permits were to be streamlined (Sen and Hill 2000:51–79). The net result was an explosion of newspapers and, later, radio and TV stations. Accompanying this was a new-found freedom of expression—criticism of the government was now tolerated and censorship was to be cut back.

The flipside of this freedom and diminished control was new control from below. For example, in early 2000 I interviewed the chief editor of the *Malang Pos*, a newspaper based in Malang, East Java, who described how students of an Islamic school had raided his offices after a story critical of the school was run. More infamous examples followed in later years; for example the Islamic Defenders Front's rioting in 2006 outside the headquarters of Indonesia's *Playboy* magazine. Thus, paradoxically, increased freedoms for demonstrations allowed for new forms of censorship to grow. But one should not overstate the effect of this new censorship, as generally the period was characterised by '*keterbukaan*', or 'openness'.

The press response to the killings of 'sorcerers' and 'ninjas' exemplified the initial florescence of the media. For several weeks, not a day went by without another theory about elite forces of one kind or another being behind the killings. This would have been unthinkable a year earlier. The ninja fear in particular has to be understood in terms of the new role the press was taking in *Reformasi* Indonesia.

Arguably the most significant aspect of the 'new' civil society was the army's return to barracks. This may have been more important than the freer and more numerous media outlets, the cleaner elections and stronger, more numerous and more representative and powerful political parties. Since the 1945–1949 revolutionary war and throughout the Soeharto regime, the Armed Forces had assumed that they had a role to play in the day-to-day running of the country. This role was openly questioned during 1998. In some cases—Trisakti and Atma Jaya universities most notably—it seemed that violent repression characterised the army's response. Over a decade later the Indonesian army's relative neutrality in politics is something we can too easily take for granted. At that time the prospects of reform lay, in no small part, with the Army to squander or promote as it chose. As 1998 progressed, the Armed Forces adopted a neutral stance and came to be less obviously involved in civilian affairs. After 1998, the return to barracks was increasingly formalised.

Although this reduction in the Armed Forces' role took several years to realise, even during 1998 local residents in Banyuwangi perceived that the Armed Forces were taking a step back. Even though military representation at the village level remained intact through this period and the same institutional presence of the local police officer and army officers was maintained, local residents perceived that the Armed Forces were unwilling or unable to prosecute the killers of 'sorcerers'. The emasculation of the army was formalised in April 1999 when the police separated from the Armed

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Forces. This perceived weakening, as I explain later, helps to account for a sense of 'opportunity' to kill, which spurred the killers on.

To tie together the political and social developments so far discussed, it could be said that state repression declined, allowing for more civic freedoms. The May Trisakti shootings and the November Atma Jaya killings were typical of the extent of violent repression that had characterised the Soeharto regime, but within months of taking office, Habibie released political prisoners. Prabowo, Soeharto's son-in-law and political enforcer, had to face a military honour council, which "decided to discharge Prabowo from active duty" (Barton 2002:254–255). The National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM), which had been established by Soeharto, was by June and July increasingly outspoken about kidnapping, rape and the Trisakti shootings. That the Commission also sent a fact-finding mission to Banyuwangi to investigate the killings of 'sorcerers' constitutes some evidence of its increasing and wide-ranging activities. Similarly the Commission for Missing People and Victims of Violence (Kontras) also sent a fact-finding team to Banyuwangi. As with the other fact-finding teams, I do not know how active, careful, or comprehensive these two teams actually were in their investigations. At the very least, the perceived need to be publicly visible in investigating the killings is indicative of a new public culture.

In addition to the curtailing of state repression and a flowering of political expression, another important development was that of decentralisation and regional autonomy. A partial breakdown of centralised control was an immediate effect of *Reformasi*. During the Soeharto era, the state had increasingly centralised control. One of the key decisions from the special MPR session in November held that whereas formerly regional representatives to the MPR were selected by the president, now they would be elected by provisional parliaments (Ziegenhain 2008:98). The following year, the famous Regional Autonomy (*Otonomi Daerah*) legislation of 1999 (22/1999) formally promulgated a new era of power at the district level. Districts would now retain a larger share of revenue from locally obtained natural resources. This opened up competition to receive patrimony from the state and to extract a share of the revenue from resource projects. Many analysts lamented that what had been decentralised by regional autonomy was merely corruption and nepotism (*KKN*). Indeed it did open up the way for the often-unscrupulous regional tyrants (*raja kecil*) to dominate local politics and economics.

A partial breakdown of relations within the state also characterised the period. For example, in parts of East Java, antipathy between the Police and

Army had led to shots being fired. Especially in 1999 it was unclear whether the Army was actually following orders in East Timor. Even state officials were asserting that a conspiracy lay behind the killings of ‘sorcerers’ and ‘ninjas’.

These changes have a direct bearing on the killings in Banyuwangi. The decentralisation of politics is no more evident than in the pressure exerted on the district head of Banyuwangi district to resign in the wake of the killings. He was incorrectly accused of having listed ‘sorcerers’ with the intention that they should be killed, and of spreading terror. Eventually he lost office. But behind the scenes, this attributing of responsibility for killings of ‘sorcerers’ in Banyuwangi was apparently part of a struggle over control of office, and hence of resources and patrimony.

Violence

Reformasi was associated with widespread violence, accounting for up to 19,000 deaths in the 1997–2002 period (Klinken 2007). Spread throughout the archipelago, taking various forms, and appearing to escalate, the cataclysm of violence looked at the time to be tearing the nation apart. In late 1998, around the same time that ‘sorcerers’ and ‘ninjas’ were being attacked in Banyuwangi, the violence began to spread both in terms of the locations in which it occurred and the forms it took.

To make sense of this, Van Klinken stipulates five types of violence in the period 1997–2002. Social violence included inter-village brawls, and the lynching of thieves. Localised communal riots comprised the Jakarta riots described above, “short and sharp anti-Chinese riots” in 1996–1997, and violence between Christians and Muslims in Jakarta and West Timor. ‘Terrorist’ acts included the Bali Bombings of 2002. Secessionist violence was apparent in East Timor, Aceh, and Papua. Large-scale communal violence incorporated ‘ethnic’ or ‘religious’ strife and accounted for over half of the 19,000 deaths. Within these five types, Van Klinken characterises the killings of sorcerers, the subject of this book, as social violence. However, he only mentions it in passing, as his focus is communal violence.

Sidel (2006) is another major contributor to the study of violence in this period. He (2006:xi) sees the *Reformasi* violence as part of a longer trajectory involving:

[anti-Chinese] *riots* in provincial towns and cities in 1995–1997, anti-witchcraft campaigns and interreligious *pogroms* in Central Sulawesi

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and Maluku in 1998–2001, and paramilitary mobilization and terrorist bombings under the sign of ‘jihad’ in 2000–2005.

Sidel sees violence emanating from social classes holding distinct religious outlooks, and this leads him to state that the killings in Banyuwangi occurred in an upland frontier zone between areas of traditionalist Muslim belief and pre-Islamic belief. But this is a misconception. The killings in Banyuwangi did not occur in the uplands in general—it would be as difficult to ascertain a ‘frontier’ in Banyuwangi as it would be in Surrey or Wisconsin—and no trend of religious difference characterised the killings. As I demonstrate in Chapter Seven, this and other scholarship concerning the 1998 outbreak has either overlooked significant points or misunderstood events.

Finally an Australian student scholar, Brown (2000:15), suggests:

throughout Indonesia the reformation process quickly produced a dichotomy between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in the political sphere ... This ‘good-bad’ dichotomy also entered the collective consciousness at the village level. Dukun santet [sorcerers]...became the ‘bad’ which needed to be purged from the social landscape.

In as much as sorcerers were ‘bad or evil’ this can be accepted. However, the hatred of sorcerers predates the *Reformasi* movement and during *Reformasi* in Banyuwangi other purported ‘bad’ elements (such as the Chinese, prostitutes, and gamblers) were not targeted for purging. In the neighbouring district of Jember in January 1998 there were demonstrations against ethnic Chinese shop owners over the prices they charged. These demonstrations spilled over into, but only as far as, the extreme west of Banyuwangi (Kalibaru Subdistrict). There is no evidence of anti-Chinese violence in Banyuwangi throughout the entire period of the outbreak.

Although scholars may not have properly situated the killings of ‘sorcerers’ and ‘nijas’ in relation to the larger phenomenon of *Reformasi* violence, this does not mean the attempt should be abandoned. Indeed, my informants in Banyuwangi referring to violence portrayed on television—presumably the rioting in Jakarta and Solo—said that perpetrators elsewhere had ‘got away with it’. These perceptions emboldened them to take action.

Conclusion

Wide-reaching economic, social and political changes form the context in which the killings of ‘sorcerers’ and ‘nijas’ occurred. In May, a major regime change was shaking the larger cities. Jakarta must have seemed on the brink

of anarchy: certainly Chinese residents I know feared for their property and life. The urban landscape appeared physically changed, with burnt-out buildings, demonstrators, and new newspapers with sensational headlines. The few accounts of this period that have referred to rural life, like that of Forrester (1998), record rural support for *Reformasi*, but do not provide much detail on the rural experience. Until the killings of ‘sorcerers’ at least, I doubt much was noticeably different in the villages of Banyuwangi. Killings of ‘sorcerers’ peaked in September with figures of 3–4 victims each night in Banyuwangi. Yet as historically killings both preceded and came after *Reformasi*, all one could say about 1998 with total certainty was that many more occurred than usual.

The subsequent ninja phenomenon did affect all villages in which I made enquiries and it was far more disruptive than ‘sorcerer’ killings. Groups of local residents established roadblocks in the streets and lanes of villages in East Java. Although they acted autonomously they were motivated by the same fear. This fear was of conspiratorial forces releasing ninjas to target average members of the community as well as religious (that is, Muslim) leaders, under the guise of killing sorcerers. In terms of the fear they spread, although not in terms of number of killings, the ninja killings overshadowed the killings of ‘sorcerers’.

So what did *Reformasi* mean in rural Banyuwangi? People interpreted the demonstrations which they viewed on television from Jakarta and other cities as indicating a breakdown of control by the authorities. As will be described in greater detail later, this lack of control was equated with *kesempatan*, an ‘opportunity’, to kill sorcerers.

CHAPTER 4

MAGIC AND SORCERY

while there was hardly a soul in the neighbourhood but affected to laugh at this man's assertions, uttering the formula, "There's nothing in 'em," with full assurance on the surface of the face, very few of them were unbelievers in their secret hearts.

Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge

Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined the national context of reform in which the 1998 killings of 'sorcerers' and 'ninjas' took place. In this chapter I describe magical beliefs and practices in Banyuwangi, beginning by providing an overview of the status of magical beliefs and practices in Indonesia in general, then moving to consider Banyuwangi specifically. Subsequently, I focus on practitioners of white and black magic. I also analyse how suspicions of sorcery might arise through interactions between neighbours, family, and friends. This, I argue, explains why the attackers of a 'sorcerer' are often among the alleged sorcerer's 'nearest and dearest'.

Magical Beliefs in Indonesia

Magical beliefs and practices can be found throughout Indonesia. In some parts these are explicitly associated with spirits. Originating in southwest Sulawesi, the Bugis ethnic group has spread to many parts of insular Southeast Asia (Lineton 1975). In a migrant community around Lake Lindu in central Sulawesi they have attained political, economic, and cultural dominance as traders. Ritual provides Bugis with the opportunity to not only get the spirits 'on side' but also show off their wealth and rank, and attract followers (Acciaioli 2004).

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The Wana, swidden cultivators of Sulawesi, struggle against centripetal forces they see as socially and psychologically disruptive. For example, the Wana see illness as occurring when a person's soul parts fly away, especially as a result of 'small feelings'. As Atkinson (1987:350) explains, "people experience 'small feelings' in response to insult, rejection, or neglect. A characteristic response to 'small feelings' is withdrawing from those who have caused one injury". Social disintegration is also caused by the dispersion of swidden cultivation, an extensive form of agriculture that often requires or enables people "to move days away from the last year's farm" (Atkinson 1987:349). In the Wana's healing rituals, the shaman negotiates "with hidden powers on behalf of their community" (Atkinson 1987:346). The shaman plays an essential role in the struggle to keep the people and their world cohesive.

Witchcraft beliefs are also common among the Korowai of West Irian. Cannibalistic witches strike at solitary victims, usually very close relatives, who unknowingly meet catastrophe:

Until recently, bereaved survivors sometimes acted on an accusation by ambushing and killing the alleged witch outright, or by seizing and binding him for transfer a day's travel away to third-party others of lesser propinquity, who would assemble to execute the witch and eat his body (Stasch 2001:38).

These killings are a source of unease, trauma, and horror (Stasch 2001:38). Stealth or furtiveness (such as theft, adultery, or practice of witchcraft) is considered immoral, whereas anti-witch measures are "deemed justified by the prior invisible violence of the witch" (Stasch 2001:39). Killing the witches asserts human control over them. Those who eat the witch then reciprocate to the witch's kinship group by putting on a sago-grub feast and providing them with brides. The violence of killing and eating the witch transforms the witch's violence into something positive in the community. The police, however, have responded in ways the Korowai see as "depthless": in one case for instance a witch killer and his accomplice were taken away and tortured by police (Stasch 2001:46).

In Hindu Bali, Rangda, the widow-witch, is a mythological figure. Her mask is kept in the village death temple and she is considered the Queen of Witches. Her alleged followers are ordinary witches (*leyak*), who have obtained their powers from Rangda. Typically, the witches do not self-identify but, following misfortune, they are divined through séance, in which they are usually found to be a neighbour or relative of the victim.

Healers are sometimes suspected of witchcraft because they have acquired esoteric knowledge; women are particularly suspect. If women outlive their husbands or children, or even grandchildren, they might be held responsible for their deaths (Stephen 2000). Moreover, women are thought to have a natural tendency to become witches because of their ritual pollution (*sebel*), especially as a result of menstruation (Ruddick, 1989). Witchcraft powers are also believed to be enhanced by tapping into dangerous sources of ritual power (*sakti*) (Hay 2005).

Among the Javanese, who populate large areas of Central and Eastern Java, belief in magic is also common. Doing research in 1950s Pare, Geertz (1960:86–87) found a variety of shamans (*dukun*). Geertz (110) also noted that sorcery in Java “tends to be practiced on neighbours, friends, relatives, and other acquaintances fairly close at hand ... Javanese do not accuse outsiders of sorcery.” Again, sorcerers typically do not “self-identify; that is, they do not publicly proclaim themselves as such” (Nitibaskara 1993:126; Wessing 1996:270).

Magic and Elites in Indonesia

Elites often sympathise with a professed need to address the problems that sorcerers and witches cause. Slaats and Portier (1989:33) observe magical beliefs and practices are “by no means restricted to simple, illiterate villagers”. In North Maluku, for example, decentralisation, high levels of corruption and the perception of increased levels of sorcery among politicians are intimately related. This is evidenced in the 2003 death of an aspiring politician named Muhammad. Muhammad had headed a group which lobbied for the creation of a new district and was a contestant in the elections for a provincial parliament. Suffering from a distended stomach, he was diagnosed with hepatitis. He suspected that sorcery was responsible. This sorcery was attributed to Abdul, Muhammad’s close associate and co-founder of the lobbying group. Apparently, “Muhammad’s wife hinted that disagreement about both political and financial support” had prompted Abdul to “turn to sorcery” (Bubandt, 2006:429). During the same period, two other deaths of politicians were attributed to sorcery (Bubandt, 2006:420–421). ‘Sorcery’, along with ‘corruption’, figures centrally as a practice that ostensibly prevents the realisation of the ideal regional democracy (Bubandt, 2006:419). Although sorcery and corruption are thought to be bad, individuals feel forced to use them because others do—“sorcery catches people in a moral economy where protection and suspicion generate each other” (Bubandt, 2006: 426).

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Another example of elite use of magic is seen in scholars' use of shamans. In Indonesian universities, salaries are low, so candidates seek higher positions. Competition is fierce, especially for *basah* positions (which give you access to divertible funds) rather than for *kering* positions (which do not). Scholars use shamans to gain supporters; these supporters will then be protected if the position is obtained. For their part, potential supporters seek successful patrons and their loyalty will be rewarded. The shamans are also used to harm competitors. In this way magic is used to obtain important academic positions (Wessing, 1996).

Research indicates that judicial officers and legal experts also fear sorcery. One researcher reports a situation in which a judge and his staff suspected one of the staff of having bewitched others (Pompe, 1996:351). The view of legal expert and professor of law at the prestigious Airlangga University, Professor Weda, echoes opinions about sorcery that I collected in the field. He has written: "the existence of sorcery faces the reality that it is difficult to prove this action perceivably. It is said to exist, but it is not apparent, it is said not to exist, but it does" (Weda, 1998).

Several presidents have been associated with sorcery. For example, an Australian newspaper reported:

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono complained during the 2009 election campaign that nefarious mystical forces were being deployed against him and his staff. "Many are practising black magic. Indeed, I and my family can feel it," he was quoted as saying by *Antara*, the official Indonesian news agency. "It's extraordinary. Many kinds of methods are used. I have come to the conclusion that only prayers can defeat black magic attacks" (Allard, 2012).

How then do beliefs about magic operate in Banyuwangi?

Magic Beliefs in Banyuwangi

After a few days of residing in my fieldwork village 'Tegalaring', my introduction to magic beliefs was provided by Salimi. A middle-aged man, he had developed a reputation as a healer while in jail for having killed a local 'sorcerer', Kustari. I visited him at home to find out more about the powers he had reputedly developed. After we had chatted for a few hours, he started tinkering around in a little tool kit of healing gear, and then produced a safety pin that had been straightened. He stuck the blunt end in his mouth, muttering a mantra at the same time. At this point, I sensed that

something was about to befall me. I became extremely nervous and protested loudly, but to no avail. His wife, his son, and a friend quietened me and, the next thing I knew, five centimetres of safety pin were sticking in my arm, running underneath the surface of the skin, but seeming not to pierce any deeper. He then said another mantra and removed the safety pin, revealing a pinprick in my skin. He pointed out that this puncture was not bleeding. The experience was, aside perhaps from a gratuitous display of his ‘capabilities’, intended to provide me with a degree of invulnerability (*kebal*) from attack. It certainly provided me with a sincere, and fortunately unfounded, fear that I had contracted tetanus or some other disease.

By contrast, my informants believed in the effectiveness of such acts—an effectiveness that is derived from a power which, in one informant’s words, “cannot be perceived by the five senses.” Such power will be referred to here as ‘magic’.

All my informants in rural Banyuwangi believed in the existence of magic. Some were quite open and candid about their beliefs. Others expressed scepticism about magic, especially the sort that causes harm. They would dismiss magic beliefs as old-fashioned (*kepercayaan kuno*) or similar statements. This might partly have been due to a sense of embarrassment that they would be seen by me as backward. For some *santri* (orthodox) Muslims, especially modernists, magic has idolatrous implications (Cederroth 1994:155). Additionally, some informants denied any belief in harmful magic and suggested that by denying it, one made oneself immune. Yet it seemed to me that they denied belief because they were genuinely afraid of harmful magic. Regardless of what they initially said, all my *santri* informants frequently called on practitioners of magic like Salimi. I also found, as I came to know them better, that they inadvertently revealed a sincere fear of harmful magic.

The Understanding of Magic in Banyuwangi

How did my research informants think about magic and, in particular, about sorcery and sorcerers? Following from Caro Baroja (1965:243) this chapter is concerned with what is believed about sorcerers, not with what the putative sorcerers themselves believe. I sought to record and analyse local people’s beliefs in magic with a view to understanding and providing part of the cultural context for the killings of ‘sorcerers’.

A fascination with sorcery and magic seems to characterise life in rural Banyuwangi. Most knowledge about magic is transmitted orally and is

distinct from the ideas that could be gleaned from popular culture sources. Unlike Islamic beliefs—the legitimacy of which is ultimately based on the written documents the Q'ran and Hadith—it is difficult to isolate ideas that must be adhered to, or that could be called 'doctrine'. Rather, beliefs are heterogeneous. As Geertz (1960:17) noted, while there is agreement on the importance of the supernatural realm, everyone seems to have their own opinion regarding the details of this realm. So while there are inconsistencies in the magic beliefs described in this chapter, we should expect accounts of culture to be incoherent and inconsistent (Geertz 1973:17–18). Therefore, to paraphrase Evans-Pritchard (1937:540), if this account does not present a rigorous, comprehensive, consistent, or precise picture of magic, I hope that is because it accurately reflects local beliefs.

In my fieldwork, I observed that informants tend to understand magic in two ways: theoretical and practical. People talk about magic in a theoretical way when relating, for example, folk tales about the origins of magic. Such abstract discussion is without reference to 'actual' cases or specific instances of magic. By contrast, when people talk about magic in 'practice', they talk about 'concrete' or 'actual' cases of magic.

Sometimes theoretical and practical knowledge are consistent. For example, in theory it is believed that one needs maturity to acquire knowledge. In practice, most people who are said to practice magic are mature. In other cases theoretical and practical knowledge are inconsistent. When talking in 'theory', informants reported that most allegations of sorcery are deliberately false, that people who are accused of sorcery are the victims of slander, usually because someone is envious of them. However, when discussing sorcery in practice, in cases where, for example, the gossip was familiar with both the victim and the sorcerer, the allegation of sorcery is almost always deemed to be true. Individual killings were based primarily on 'practical' understandings of magic, such as that the villager Kustari was a sorcerer and that he had ensorcelled someone close to him. The distinction between theory and practice cannot always be easily maintained, but there will be a strong focus on practical understanding in this chapter.

Informants perceive a dualism between the supernatural and natural worlds. They believe that the magic that a sorcerer 'blows' onto his victim is a supernatural phenomenon, whereas the wind that blows against one's face is a natural or 'perceivable' phenomenon (*nyata*). What I refer to as 'supernatural' is a provisional translation of the concept '*ga'ib*' or '*halus*'. '*Ga'ib*' can refer to things that 'can't be seen or felt, like God' or the afterlife. Another term that is approximately synonymous is '*halus*' meaning, in this context, 'the

unseen' or 'that which is imperceptible or immaterial'. 'Ga'ib' and 'balus' refer to ghosts (*bantu*), genies (*jin*), spirits (*roh*), angels (*malaikat*), village spirits (*danyang desa*), and ancestral or cemetery spirits (*abli kubur*). In theory all these beings are thought to be able to affect the natural (*nyata*) world, although, in practice, I rarely came across cases where supernatural beings were thought to have acted of their own volition, such as those detailed by Geertz (1960:16–20).

As suggested above, magic is also believed to be a supernatural phenomenon. It is the human capacity to cause changes in the physical or 'real' (*nyata*) world for which there is no observable cause, and for which non-observable, supernatural (*ga'ib*) forces are used. Esoteric knowledge (*ilmu*) is required in order to control these forces; the capacity or power to perform magic is referred to as '*ilmu gaib*' (which is, literally, knowledge of the supernatural) or sometimes just '*ilmu*' (knowledge).

People refer to enchanting, ensorcelling, or casting a spell as '*jampe-jampe*'. Spells incorporate groups of words called '*mantra*', which are considered sacred or magically imbued and, when recited (*dibaca*), are thought to harness supernatural power. The words are said to come from the Koran or old Javanese texts. Generally, the lips move quickly and do not pronounce audible or recognisable sounds. Aside from this vocal element, spells often incorporate material objects. The most common means for curing people is to recite a spell over a scoop of ordinary water, which is then poured on the person to whom the spell is directed.

Magic is conceived as being of two basic kinds, 'black magic' (denoted by the terms '*ilmu hitam*', '*ilmu sibir*', '*ilmu santet*', '*ilmu setan*', '*ilmu cemeng*', as well as the English '*black magic*') and 'white magic' ('*ilmu putih*' and the English '*white magic*'). In the words of informants, "what is conveyed by 'black magic' are things that are related to evil, while 'white magic' is related to good things." In other words, "[black magic] causes illness, while white magic can be used to help." In spite of this, black magic and white magic are conceived of as the same power used to different ends, rather than two unique sets of knowledge. One might, like Slaats and Portier (1993:136–137), criticise the analytical distinction between black and white magic;¹² one might also point to informants' differing theoretical opinions about

12 For Slaats and Portier (1993:137), "the dichotomy between black and white magic does not seem to us a useful approach to understanding magic." They write that a differentiation between "white or good magic, which produces and protects," and "black or malign magic, which destroys", eventually breaks down (Slaats and Portier 1993:136).

more kinds of magic than just black and white. However, in practice, most informants understand magic as being either black or white based on whether it harms or helps.

Practitioners of White Magic are *Dukun* and *Kiai*

In villages in Banyuwangi, everybody is thought to be capable of producing a little white magic. Nonetheless, some people, such as Salimi, are thought to have acquired a higher ability. These people are regarded as specialists or practitioners of white magic and they are paid for their services. There are two types of white magic practitioners: *dukun* and *kiai*.

The following excerpt from my fieldnotes describes a meeting with a *dukun*:

I bumped into Pak Jumadi who took me to a *dukun* ... by the name of Mak Ita ... I asked her to advise me of the best place to work if/when I finished my PhD. She told me to write down the places I was thinking on a piece of paper. She watched as I wrote 'America, Japan, Australia' under each other. She then asked me to place my hand on another piece of paper ... She muttered an Islamic mantra beginning with "*bismillah hirohman hirohim*" and placed the paper over the lamp, her hands moving/being moved around. Eventually she showed me the result: 'Allah' written in Arabic, two circles representing eyes, and 'Amerika' and something like 'Jepang' written underneath. They were the places I should work. On my side of the lamp was an heirloom (*pusaka*), which was a ceremonial knife (*kris*). She asked me to feel the *kris* through the cloth remarking that it felt like a corpse, but that was not my impression. According to Mak Ita it is the heirloom "which speaks" ("*yang bicara*").

Aside from fortune telling, I recorded cases of *dukun* using magic to help locate a lost watch, assist with marital problems, recover stolen money, cure infertility, ensure a promotion, become village head, and heal a nagging foot pain.

The other white magic practitioner is the *kiai*. *Kiai* are respected primarily for their status as Muslim leaders or scholars, and only secondarily for their magical powers. Nevertheless, *kiai* provide a similar range of magical services as *dukun*. One *kiai* explained, "all *kiai* possess *ilmu* ... and indeed religious guidance. They all possess *ilmu* to help people ..." This *ilmu* is assumed to flow naturally from the *kiai*'s knowledge of Islam. In contrast to *dukun*, *kiai*

are clearly distinguishable from their neighbours, they are exclusively male, wear Islamic dress, and have followers who regard them with a degree of reverence. *Kiai* are also fewer in number; there were only three or four *kiai* in Tegalaring.

Anybody can acquire limited magic capabilities by being taught mantra and other techniques by family, neighbours, and friends. *Dukun* and *kiai* develop this knowledge to a higher level. It is thought that, as with playing football or a musical instrument, their talent at magic may be partially inherited from a parent, but the ability is mostly acquired. The advanced (*tinggi*) capabilities of *dukun* and *kiai* require application and study. This training incorporates ascetic practices—fasting, sleep-deprivation, wandering, meditating, and so on—sometimes under the guidance of a *guru* or *kiai*. A *kiai* explained to me that his *ilmu* “was obtained from those old *kiai*, and the source was the Koran”. It seems that for *kiai* the emphasis is on studying the holy books of Islam, while for *dukun*, it is on Javanese texts. As Wessing (1996:168) notes, possession of objects believed to be imbued with supernatural power such as amulets, daggers, and so on, is also thought to assist practitioners of magic.

Being ‘clever’ or ‘skilled’ (*pintar*) also helps in the acquisition of *ilmu*. Hence, a *dukun* is sometimes referred to as a ‘clever person’ (*orang pintar*, *wong pinter*, *wong ngerti*). Another euphemism used to refer to *dukun* is “old person” (*orang tua*, *wong tuo*, *wong tuwyek*). This makes sense from the perspective that the *dukun*’s *ilmu* is believed to take years to acquire. Most people, whether for lack of ability or application, have not acquired sufficient *ilmu* for their magical purposes. So they visit the white magic practitioner—*dukun* or *kiai*—to provide supernatural assistance. The other kind of magic practitioner specialises in black magic.

Practitioners of Black Magic are Sorcerers

Before I began fieldwork, all that my Indonesian friends could tell me about Banyuwangi District was that it was known as the ‘Warehouse of Sorcery’ (*Gudang Santet*). Sorcery lurks in every corner, and I would be lucky to escape with my life. Hence, I began fieldwork with some trepidation. I found that out of a population of 5,000 in Tegalaring, there were around ten people who were ‘known’ throughout the village to be sorcerers.¹³ In the local idiom, a variety of terms for sorcerers are used, including *tukang*

13 This contrasts with Geertz’s (1960:110) finding that “one finds no private individuals in Modjokuto with a wide reputation for instigating sorcery”.

santet, *tukang sibir*, *dukun santet* and *tukang nyuwuk*.¹⁴ Additionally, approximately fifteen other people were known as sorcerers but only in certain quarters (as apparently the word had not spread throughout the village). These people were thought to have used black magic against others, causing minor misfortune (usually), or illness and death. Alleged practitioners of black magic in Tegalaring and other villages throughout Banyuwangi are the object of fear and resentment, the target of 'demonstrations' and banishments, and the victims of killings.

People accused of sorcery do not admit to being sorcerers, and their sorcery allegedly occurs out of sight. Therefore, much of the information I acquired regarding sorcery came from the neighbourly gossip that is a constant feature of social life in Tegalaring, rather than from first-hand or eyewitness experience.

Means and Effects Sorcery

While all my informants could converse at length on the topic of sorcerers and sorcery, none could report having seen a sorcerer at work. The sorcerer's fiendish behaviour, it is believed, occurs out of view, usually at home and in the middle of the night. Douglas (1991:723) notes that witchcraft is often a variety of "insidious damage ... hidden away from observation" such that "a witch looks like anyone else". This applies to sorcery in Banyuwangi, where Siegel (2001:32) has found "No one reported seeing the accused practicing his craft, for instance, so far as we know."

Nevertheless, informants do have a theory on how sorcery is performed. In order to cast a spell, sorcerers recite mantras and 'blow' the spell which can cause misfortune. This misfortune is usually referred to with the euphemism 'abnormal' (*tidak wajar*, *heng wajar*). Otherwise, when people are affected by misfortune they are said to be 'disturbed' (*diganggu*).

The misfortune is usually illness, and just about any illness can be attributed to sorcery. In most cases though, the disturbance is a fatal condition known as 'enlarged stomach' (*perut besar*). Other terms to describe the same phenomenon are 'inflated sickness' (*sakit kembung*, *loro abuh*) or 'bloated stomach' (*perut busung*, *perut melembung*, *perut kembung*). While there were few stories of people witnessing 'sorcerers' casting spells, anecdotes frequently circulated about people suffering from such a condition. For example, an informant related, "Pak Muji was afflicted by sorcery, as was Sugiono. Many people were afflicted. They swelled up, their stomachs were enlarged."

14 For all these terms, 'sorcerer' is perhaps the best English translation.

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I only knew of two such victims in the vicinity of the village I lived in. One of them died before I had the opportunity to speak to him, but I met the other. Her stomach was larger and rounder than that of a pregnant woman, and much softer if depressed (see Figure 8). The doctor who accompanied me believed that this condition is ‘actually’ a distended stomach or ascites (fluid in the peritoneal cavity). He explained that ascites is most commonly caused by cirrhosis of the liver or a gastrointestinal or ovarian cancer. He and other local doctors I met saw the important causal factor contributing to this symptom to be viral hepatitis, a precursor to cirrhosis or cancer of the liver. According to the director of the health department (*Kepala Dinas Kesehatan*) in Banyuwangi, the medical records listed two pathologies that might be associated with a distended stomach. These are “aggressive neoplasm (tumour) of the liver and bile duct *intrahepatitis*” and “chronic hepatitis.” Given the number of stories circulating about ensorcelled people with distended stomachs, one would expect cancers of the liver, stomach, ovaries, and so on, to be a common phenomenon. Indeed, the doctor who visited Banyuwangi in the 1840s listed stomach complaints among the three main illnesses (Epp 1849:248). However, contemporary official documentation seems to indicate that the treatment of tumours or chronic hepatitis in hospitals is quite rare. In 2001, the major hospital in Banyuwangi treated only eleven tumours, and 121 hepatitis cases, out of a total of 20,575 visits for all illnesses (Rumah Sakit Blambangan 2002).¹⁵

Local people are aware of the medical explanations for distended stomachs, but evidently feel they are not entirely satisfactory. The cause of *perut besar* is perceived to be distinct from the pathologies of Western medicine. As one man told me:

If you go to a doctor, he’ll say it’s the liver, it’s the liver, [but] if it’s operated on you can’t find anything. After the operation there’s nothing. It’s unseen. But there is an illness. You can’t find it in the liver.

As another example, Lili told me her husband had been ensorcelled. She juxtaposed the two types of knowledge, relating that her husband “was taken to [the main hospital in Banyuwangi]. They said it was the liver. People here

15 These numbers might be an underestimate, for three reasons. First, the data collection may be inaccurate. Second, there may be other pathologies to account for these symptoms. The third and probably only significant reason is that sometimes care is provided by the family and *dukun* and *kiai*, so people with distended stomachs do not always visit hospitals. For these reasons there may be other people with a distended stomach who are not accounted for in these data.



Figure 8: Enlarged Stomach.

This woman believed she had been ensorcelled. Her protruding stomach is visible from this profile. The author is in the background.

Photo taken by L. Indrawati, 2003.

call it swelling.” There are other illnesses that, in the eyes of local people, fall within the taxonomy of medicine, but at the same time are thought to be the result of sorcery. A clear example of this was the *titanus* (tetanus) that a sorcerer in Tegalgarang allegedly caused in his victim. Belief in sorcery does not result from ignorance, but medical knowledge is integrated into beliefs in magic. Aside from an enlarged stomach, other symptoms I recorded that were attributed to sorcery included vomiting blood, ‘eye sickness’, constipation, sore throat, blindness, paralysis, boils, dehydration, mental illness (*stres*), skin allergies, and undiagnosed illnesses.

Besides illnesses, there are incidents that ‘Westerners’ might ascribe to bad luck, misfortune, or coincidence, which are sometimes ascribed to sorcery. Such cases I have recorded include divorce, a bursting tyre, and death of livestock. It seems that almost any state of illness or misfortune can be attributed to sorcery.

Why Sorcerers Use Their Sorcery

In Banyuwangi ‘sorcerers’ are believed to use black magic intentionally. But why, according to local people, do they do so? In ‘actual’ cases of sorcery that I recorded, one reason why sorcerers ensorcelled others was jealousy or envy. One informant related that a sorcerer would ensorcell people, “if he was jealous, just that. Rabi’i [a sorcerer], his work developed when he had hard feelings (*sakit hati*). If he was envious of a person, that person would be hit

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(*dihantam*).” In another case, a university professor’s maid complained to me that her daughter had been ensorcelled by a local sorcerer who was jealous of the daughter’s job in a café.

However, most commonly, ‘sorcerers’ reportedly ensorcelled others after being offended. In other words, victims of sorcery thought they had offended a sorcerer and, in revenge, the ‘sorcerer’ had caused them illness or misfortune. One woman with an enlarged stomach ascribed her malady to her jealous sister-in-law. She explained that her sister-in-law, who was a prostitute, requested that a lane be built over the woman’s land to provide easier access for her clients. The woman felt she had affronted her sister-in-law by refusing the request, and believed that her sister-in-law had sought redress through causing her illness. The authors of the NU report (Lakpesdam-NU 1998:7) recorded:

... in the view of his neighbours, Ruslan possessed sorcery. “If he did not possess sorcery, he couldn’t possibly have had the courage to openly make passes at other people’s wives, and he couldn’t possibly have forced the channelling of the irrigation flow from other people’s rice paddies,” said Hanafi. Every time he was challenged he stepped back, but the challenger would shortly fall sick and then die.

I also heard a story about a sorcerer who, after having his passes rejected by a woman, purportedly fed her *tempe* that had caused her stomach to swell. These accounts, drawn from actual cases of perceived sorcery, contrast with the widely-held theory that sorcerers attack people, even strangers, randomly.

While any illness or misfortune could be ascribed to sorcery, sorcery is only imputed when the afflicted person thinks that they have offended a sorcerer or, more rarely, that they have offended someone who has then employed a sorcerer. Most commonly, the offence has occurred during a dispute or altercation. The fear that one’s affliction results from sorcery is more pronounced if the supposedly offended person is already suspected of being a sorcerer. Talking about the effectiveness of an alleged sorcerer’s magic, an informant related, “sometimes there would be an enlarged stomach, so the community was scared of him ... sometimes there was a dispute, and now the person’s sick ... so people were scared.” If the supposedly offended person is not already known as a sorcerer, then this might be the beginning of sorcery suspicions. Sorcery in Banyuwangi thus fits into the general pattern of witchcraft or sorcery, namely: “suspicion usually rests on a person who has recently quarrelled with the supposed victim” (Mair 1969:51).

Source and Acquisition of Sorcery

Some informants were vague when questioned on the source of this magic. For example, one participant explained that “black magic characteristically injures or wounds people, but it can’t make people die, it is the Lord who makes people die.” The most common opinion accords with the revelation in the Koran chapter entitled *The Cow*, that people who use black magic “can harm none with what they learn except by Allah’s leave.” It also accords with the thinking that white magic and black magic are essentially the same power, but used to different moral ends. Black magic, like white magic, and everything else for that matter, exists only by the grace of God.

A maturity of age is required for the acquisition of *ilmu*, whether it be for white or black magic. So, with sorcerers, “the older they get, the more powerful their *ilmu*.” In practice, this principle precludes young people from being perceived as sorcerers. This is reflected in the age profile of the victims of the Banyuwangi killings in 1998. Most of these ‘sorcerers’ were aged forty and above. The age of the victims might also be explained by the observation that the longer someone is suspected of being a sorcerer, the more entrenched and widespread the view becomes. It might take several ‘incidents’ over a number of years to ‘confirm’ a person’s identity as a sorcerer. Additionally, as will be discussed in more detail later, killers explained to me that they were “waiting for the opportunity” (*menunggu kesempatan*) before they killed a suspected sorcerer. This period of waiting could have raised the age profile of the victims.

Ilmu is not the exclusive preserve of men. As regards white magic, although *kiai* are exclusively male, many *dukun* and alleged sorcerers are women. In the case of black magic, approximately 5 percent of the suspected sorcerers killed in 1998 were women. How can this asymmetry be explained? In theory, there is no barrier to women attaining *ilmu* that is as ‘advanced’ (*tinggi*) as that of men. However, in practice it seems that advanced *ilmu* is more commonly associated with men.

Prevention and Cure of Sorcery

My research regarding the prevention and cure of sorcery produced inconsistent results. Theoretical opinions differed as to whether prevention or cure is possible. In practice, informants suggested, and used, many different techniques in an attempt to prevent sorcery. These included:

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- placing *rajab* (Arabic-style script) at important locations around the house. As one participant explained, “*rajab* are positioned above the door or a corner of the house. *Rajab* can be used to ensorcell and also to repel ensorcelling”;
- planting a kilor tree in one’s yard. This is considered to protect one’s house; these trees are considered to be supernaturally imbued;
- using “drops of your mother’s urine”;
- using dirt. According to one participant, “if your mother has died you can use the dirt from the foot of her grave,” and according to my host-father one can also use the ground that one’s mother has stepped on;
- using talismans (*penangkal*);
- employing a scatological treatment. In Kaligung, a victim of sorcery was advised to eat his own faeces. It was also explained to me that if one is being ensorcelled one can store one’s faeces in the sorcerer’s house thereby causing the sorcery to return to the sorcerer (though I never heard of this actually being put into practice); and,
- using a pig’s mandible. It is believed that a pig’s lower jaw placed at certain locations around one’s house provides a distraction so that the spell does not reach its target. Interestingly, in this conception the spell is a sentient being.

These and other preventative steps are not widely believed to be effective, but are apparently clung to out of a dread of sorcery.

Is there a cure for sorcery? One informant stated “it can’t be treated, if ensorcelled that person will definitely die”. Unanimously, medicine is thought not to be effective (*mempan*), but although some people insisted that white magic practitioners are effective in providing a cure, others doubted this. Another informant explained, in the case of sorcery:

the person is sick but we take him to a doctor, but the doctor can’t say that it’s an illness. The illness is difficult to cure. For a cure, we have to find an old person (*orang tua*), not a doctor. If we have a normal illness, we go to a normal doctor, if we are affected by sorcery, it has to be an old person or a *dukun*.

Yet when I asked another participant, “if a person is made ill, can they be cured?” he responded, “they can’t, that’s that. A doctor can’t, a *kiai* can’t.”

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In spite of these inconsistent opinions, in practice, people will often go to a *dukun* or *kiai* to cure an illness or a misfortune allegedly caused by sorcery. In Banyuwangi, however, I rarely came across a case in which a *dukun* or *kiai* was perceived to have lifted the spell; they only temporarily ameliorated the worst symptoms. Several decades ago, Kiai Soleh was the most renowned *kiai* in Tegalgaring. Being a *kiai*, he was presumed to have magic powers. In spite of this, a sorcerer named Tajeri, according to the story, ensorcelled him. Because he could not cure himself, he died. One exception was a *dukun* I met who claimed to have cured herself after having been ensorcelled by a neighbour.

In practice and theory, 'abnormal' illness is generally believed to be curable only by the sorcerer who caused it. In the case of the 'sorcerer' Hadis, "it had to be Hadis who provides the cure, if you were affected by him; there was no [other] cure." Another participant similarly explained, "it has to be the person [the sorcerer] who cures it." The usual method is to 'request water' (*minta air*, *njaluk banyu*) from the sorcerer. Untung explained, "someone in my family had an abnormal sickness, [so] I asked for water from the [responsible] person." It is hoped that water will be enchanted with a spell that retracts the evil that the sorcerer has caused. In some instances, this appeared to be successful. A victim asked the 'sorcerer' Padil of Giri for water and then "got better". In another case, despite receiving water from a 'sorcerer', "after a month [the 'victim'] would get sick again." 'Victims' usually visit the 'sorcerer', but if they are too ill, the 'sorcerer' is requested or forced to visit them. Husuhaili related the story of Jaenuddin of Kabat's younger brother who, on his deathbed, requested "water from my older brother, maybe I'll get better." Asking for water from 'sorcerers' is also an indirect way of accusing them. Given that meeting the request is self-incriminating, it is not surprising that alleged sorcerers sometimes refuse. There is believed to be no failsafe way of preventing sorcery, and there is little possibility of a cure, although on both issues there is little consensus. Measures to prevent or cure sorcery are undertaken with uncertainty, and without much expectation of success. Unsurprisingly, the 'victims' of sorcery and their families generally feel the situation is hopeless.

Another belief makes sorcerers all the more dangerous in local residents' eyes. It is thought that sorcerers are compelled to use their magic. As one informant put it; "the problem with that *ilmu* is that if it isn't used, sometimes it comes back and attacks them [the 'sorcerers'] themselves." Another participant similarly explained, "if it [the sorcery] is not used, it can affect one's own body. The weapon kills its owner." This is mainly a theoretical

perception. I have only come across one putative case where sorcery consumed the sorcerer's body—"Haji Hojin could be like that. Because it wasn't used any more he was affected himself," an informant explained. I asked if he had died, and was told "no, he went blind ... Rajak [a victim of 'sorcery'] died like that, it's vicious that [magic]." Although such cases are apparently rare, local people are convinced that sorcerers are in part motivated by this concern. This 'need' to ensorcell further convinces local residents that it is perilous to harbour a sorcerer in their community.

It is believed that if there is a sorcerer in one's community, the sorcerer will certainly be active. Moreover, there is no foolproof way to protect against, or to cure oneself of, sorcery. Possibly, if local people believed in an effective supernatural or natural means to deal with the threat of sorcery, killing sorcerers would not be undertaken.

Evidence that Someone is a Sorcerer

How do local residents think they know who a sorcerer is? A few told me that the existence of victims constitutes proof. However, in the course of fieldwork, I rarely heard this kind of reasoning. When I asked informants for proof or evidence (*bukti*) of sorcery, the responses were almost unanimous—there is no proof of sorcery.

Informants comprehended the concepts of 'proof', perception, rationality, logic, and reason. And yet they felt that sorcery contradicted these concepts, that it did not make sense (*masuk akal*). So it could not be said that a belief in sorcery results from a lack of understanding of such concepts. For instance, in discussing the distinction between real and supernatural, an informant said "if you want to prove it, it's difficult, because it's irrational, it's *ilmu*." Furthermore, local residents held that it is "imperceptible", "irrational", or "illogical".

For people in rural Banyuwangi, 'proof' of guilt of sorcery is not required because of its 'supernatural' nature. While most informants maintained that there was no 'proof' of sorcery, they nevertheless believed that sorcery exists and they talked and acted as if the victim of a communal killing had been, in fact, a 'sorcerer'. Indeed, I frequently met people who were involved in killing a sorcerer, and yet conceded that there was a lack of proof of sorcery.

Rather than being a reason not to kill sorcerers, the lack of proof made it all the more necessary to kill them. One participant explained, "personally we agree with killing of a sorcerer because they are cruel...even [if their cruelty] can't be proven." The lack of proof of sorcery is taken as indicative of

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the elusiveness and danger of sorcerers. I think most informants continually stressed the lack of proof because they perceived that naming a sorcerer was a difficult but serious task. In the words of one killer: “the community doesn’t just go around accusing anyone [of sorcery]”. They were aware of the consequences of incorrectly identifying a sorcerer, but they were also equally wary of the risk of not identifying a real one.

As there is no proof of sorcery there is no proof that someone is not a sorcerer. It is almost impossible to exonerate or vindicate a person once they are accused of sorcery. I have not come across a single case in which a sorcery rumour has died out or in which an alleged sorcerer’s name has been cleared. Those accused of sorcery are, like alleged black magic practitioners in Sumatra:

helpless ... [E]xplicit denial usually serves only to increase suspicion of his guilt. No procedure exists whereby it could be proven that a person is or is not using a [malicious spirit] ... and by which the suspect could establish his innocence (Slaats and Portier 1989:31).

Once somebody has been identified as a sorcerer, then their actions are interpreted against them. Like accusations of insidious harm in other cultures, sorcery in Banyuwangi “must be vague, unspecific, difficult to prove or disprove. The crime must be difficult to deny, even impossible to refute” (Douglas 1991:726).

In the absence of proof, then, how do local residents become convinced that someone possesses sorcery skills? The answer to this question is straightforward for informants in Tegalaring—people become known as sorcerers because they practice sorcery. This circular explanation will probably not satisfy Western readers who may question the existence of sorcery. Nevertheless, in informants’ stories about ‘actual’ sorcerers, several themes emerge which may help to explain the identification of ‘sorcerers’.

One of these is that sorcerers might be distinguished when they identify themselves to be sorcerers. Local residents believe that sorcerers know themselves to be sorcerers, and they consciously perform their evil magic and, in most cases deny their actions. However, in some cases, actual ‘sorcerers’ self-identified. This purportedly occurs in different situations. Allegedly, ‘sorcerers’ self-identify when they threaten others, or offer their services for a fee, or confess. Informants frequently cited cases in which sorcerers confessed as they were being mobbed. However, the stories of threats, purveying, and confessions of sorcery do not prove that the purported sorcerers actually thought of themselves as practitioners of evil magic. After all, the ‘sorcerers’

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may not have believed they had the power of sorcery, but may have claimed it anyway. It is also possible that their words or actions were misunderstood or exaggerated, given the trepidation of fellow residents regarding sorcery. In any case, self-identification cases are exceptional. In general, 'sorcerers' are at pains to defend a good reputation—however futile this may eventually prove to be. In no case I studied did the alleged sorcerer admit to sorcery in the course of daily life.

There are other explanations as to why one person comes to be known as a sorcerer, while people living around this person do not. These explanations include the sorcerer's appearance, being caught while casting a spell, witnesses seeing the spell flying through the air, and the discovery of the tools of sorcery.

Regarding a sorcerer's appearance, some informants told me that you could tell a sorcerer just by looking at one.¹⁶ Some informants said that sorcerers were haughty or proud (*sombong*, *sombong acuh*), and looking for trouble (*golet perkara*). Others told me that sorcerers appeared shy (*dilihat malu*). I also was told that the face of a sorcerer does not shine (*tidak berseri*) or that a sorcerer's eyes are blood-shot. However, I rarely heard of 'sorcerers' who actually possessed any of these characteristics. I came across many people who did possess these characteristics but were never suspected of being a sorcerer. And most importantly I have no information from actual cases that these kinds of characteristics were ever used to identify someone as a sorcerer. For example, one participant told me about how he travelled to a sorcerer's new home to inform the startled neighbours that there was a sorcerer in their midst. The sorcerer's new neighbours had not identified the sorcerer; they needed to be told. Sorcerers, in other words, were physically indistinguishable.

Sorcerers might be identified, I was told, by being caught while casting a spell. For example, a village head related this story of a 'sorcerer' named Udin:

One day Aunt Inul woke up at night, too early [for dawn prayers], she woke up at 3am. Because she [couldn't read] clocks, she didn't have a clock, she thought it was approaching dawn. As she went to the prayer house she detected that at the back of Udin's house there was a man [Udin] stark naked, rolling on the ground, rolling around on the ground.

16 O'Rourke (2002:166) claims that 'sorcerers' "often occupy prominent positions in village society" in Banyuwangi, but I found no evidence to support this.

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Often in these stories, the episode occurred at night, the sorcerer was often naked, sometimes rolling or praying, sometimes at the corner of the house, and in a few circumstances the scene of the incident was the local cemetery. This all makes sense to local people, who believe that nocturnal, outdoor activity, while undressed, rolling around and praying, at the corner of a house or a graveyard, can facilitate the working of the sorcerer's fiendish incantations. Seeing a 'sorcerer' in these circumstances can be traumatic. Aunt Inul was apparently tremulous for hours after the incident reported above. Once or twice I heard stories about a person who saw a 'sorcerer' and then could not talk about it afterwards.

I never witnessed a 'sorcerer' in this kind of compromising position. Rather, I suppose that prejudice and exaggeration accounts for the origins of the stories—once someone is 'known' as a sorcerer, it is likely that a person's narrating, remembering, or even perceiving the 'sorcerer' is tainted by a prejudicial fear that might embellish the 'facts'. Nevertheless, such stories are exceptional and cannot account for the identification of most 'sorcerers'.

Other possible means of identifying 'sorcerers' are the tools they use for their sorcery. In a case of 'abnormal' misfortune, yellow rice (*nasi kuning*) was hidden behind the bride and groom at a wedding, and the next day they divorced. Putatively, the yellow rice was the means through which the sorcerer ensorcelled his victim, who was also his nephew. Most stories focus on the use of small, sharp, metallic objects, which have supposedly been transported to the patient's body. These include mosquito coil stands, needles, broken glass, and nails. I heard many stories in which such objects were removed by doctors during operations.

According to an article in the *Jawa Pos*, the mid-section of a woman called Cicin had an enlarged stomach and an x-ray "clearly shows ... razors, wire, and a hair pin". According to hospital staff, Cicin died as a result of very low blood pressure and a urinary infection. The *Radar Banyuwangi* calls it a "strange illness" (*penyakit aneh*). This implication that sorcery was involved seems not to have been lost on readers, and various contributors to a blog discussing the case (August 30 2009) discussed the issue of sorcery.

As in North Sumatra (Slaats and Portier 1989:31), in Banyuwangi there were commonly-related anecdotes in which a *dukun* told a patient with an 'abnormal' illness that objects were buried near the patient's house, and subsequently, when the patient dug in a certain spot, objects related to sorcery were found. Following an attack on a 'sorcerer', the attackers sometimes raid the 'sorcerer's' house and conduct a 'forensic' search for material evidence of sorcery; inevitably, such objects are uncovered. For instance, a 'sorcerer's'

“house was broken down, and it was proven, there was incense, a rice scoop, a [strap], mysteriously that is thought to be the means of sorcery, tools for ensorcelling.” However, one could find these effects in almost every house in rural Banyuwangi, and they are only uncovered and invoked as evidence after someone has already been identified as a sorcerer. They do not explain how a person comes to be identified in the first place.¹⁷

Local residents’ theories about how ‘sorcerers’ are identified are contradictory, dubious, or too exceptional to be used as explanations. Taking data collected from informants’ stories at face value, there is no easy formula for determining why one person is accused of sorcery but another is not. Instead, it seems that an understanding of how and why ‘sorcerers’ are identified must turn to criteria that local people themselves do not normally recognise. Another explanation regarding the identification of ‘sorcerers’ is required.

The Social Context of Sorcery Allegations and ‘Sorcerer’ Killings

It is most commonly family, neighbours, and friends who are the perpetrators and also the victims of ‘sorcery’. Furthermore, although sometimes these people attempted to protect a sorcerer’s reputation and life, in most cases those who initially accused and subsequently killed the sorcerer were drawn from the same group. Relations among neighbours, family, and friends are not only the basis of communal life in rural Banyuwangi; they are also the basis for accusations, identifications, and killings.

When these people in rural Banyuwangi talk about sorcery without referring to specific cases, they maintain that the effectiveness of a spell is not constrained by physical distance and, provided a person’s power (*ilmu*) is less than that of the sorcerer, anyone, anywhere could be ensorcelled. It is said, for instance, that a strand of hair or piece of clothing, even from a person the sorcerer did not know, would suffice for a sorcerer to cast a spell. However, contradicting the theoretical conception of a supernatural that is unimpeded by distance, there is a practical proximity to sorcery. In all the cases of alleged sorcery that I encountered, the victim was always known to the ‘sorcerer’. In fact, ‘sorcery’ and reactions to it almost always occur among neighbours, family, and friends.

17 To paraphrase a sceptical participant talking about the results of this kind of forensic examination, ‘if that is evidence of sorcery, then I am a sorcerer as well’. In practice, this participant’s scepticism was absent in almost all cases. In its place, there was rather a zealous attempt to demonstrate guilt.

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Neighbours make the most sorcery allegations. This is not surprising, as they often perceive themselves to be the 'victims' of sorcery. While talking about a 'sorcerer' in his jurisdiction, a neighbourhood head explained to me, "it was clear that that person possessed sorcery." I asked him "Who knew?" He responded that the people who know for sure were the neighbours. In the village where the 'sorcerer' Mahali was killed, an informant recounted, "His neighbours were sick, [they] fought [with him, and] then [they got] sick."

Neighbourly relations are thus central to sorcery accusations. However, it is not only neighbours who are thought to be victims and who on the basis of this are accusers of sorcery, but also family. In the case of one female 'sorcerer', her neighbours were also relatives. It was explained that her victims "were all neighbours ... Sare was her relative. Sare's nephew was still young ... his stomach was bloated." Given the infamy associated with sorcery, I expected the alleged sorcerer's family members to strenuously deny that the accused person was a sorcerer. As I had expected, some family members did state that the accused was not a sorcerer. But I was surprised that in many cases family members did not deny or affirm that the victim had been a sorcerer. For instance, Jamuri of Rogojampi's son told me that Jamuri had been suspected as a sorcerer for around a decade, but he did not know if the allegation was true. In this context, this is tantamount to an admission. More remarkably, members of other families were even more explicit, stating that the person in question had been a sorcerer. This phenomenon may not be limited to Banyuwangi, as Nitibaskara (1993:131) cites a report of a suspected sorcerer in West Java who was murdered by four members of his own family, including a grandchild.

There are also many cases of acquaintances being both victims and attackers of sorcerers. For example, Bu Nasrodin's husband, Yasin, was killed under suspicion of sorcery. She explained: "If there was even a small problem [between her husband and a friend], well, then, that friend would be sick. He [the friend] would be attacked and his stomach would swell." As a result she had advised other people, "don't befriend Yasin or you'll die tomorrow." This is backed up in theoretical opinions. An Islamic scholar (*kiai*) explained to me, "even if it's their own relative ... if you are in the wrong or hurt [a sorcerer's] feelings ... they don't care if you are their relative, or their close friend."

In most cases, it was a combination of neighbours, family, and friends who had suspicions and would later be involved in killing a sorcerer. A schoolteacher explained about those who had suspected that Kasim was a

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sorcerer: “It wasn’t just anybody, but those closest to him. Also some relatives said so, but that was also a secret.” When talking to a Tegalgarang sub-village head about a suspected sorcerer, I enquired, “who was it who suspected him?” He explained, “the community, neighbours, the surroundings (*lingkungan*), sometimes there was a family relationship.”

Apart from the description given in the preceding pages, no sociological profiling of ‘victims’ of sorcery, accusers of sorcerers, sorcerers themselves, or their relationships reveals any significant pattern. No pattern of age, religion, gender, occupation, ethnicity, wealth, or political affiliation distinguishes ‘sorcerers’ from those who condemn them. Claims, for example, that those accused of sorcery are large landowners being victimised by landless labourers, or are the children of killers of communists being slandered by descendants of slain communists, are unfounded. ‘Sorcerers’ are not being punished for being lazy or remiss in their neighbourly duties, or for forgetting to return a favour. Informants never mentioned these as factors. Instead, the indignation focused on the alleged actions of the sorcerer: the killing or harming, through means of sorcery, of other people or, more rarely, their cattle.

My research suggests the ‘sorcerer’ in rural Banyuwangi invariably comes from within the village and could be an uncle, neighbour, brother-in-law, or friend. This contrasts with the findings of several other scholars, who see sorcery in East Java as manifesting between social groups. Brown (2000:15) stipulates that “A code of ethics among Banyuwangi *dukun santet* [sorcerers] forbids them from using their magic against people in the same village”. In his research on sorcery in East Java, Wessing (1996:270) writes that “the Southeast Asian data show the sorcerer to be perceived as some sort of outsider, either a member of another ethnic group or a marginal member of one’s society.” And, although his findings were vigorously disputed in the Indonesian news magazine *Tempo* (January 14 2002), Kammen argued that during the outbreak of killings in Banyuwangi large landowners were accused of being sorcerers, and that the killings were a manifestation of social conflict between landless and landowners.

Perhaps because ‘sorcery’ functions among neighbours, family and friends, Siegel (2001:29) suggests that the killings signal the “end of social reciprocity.” In fact, the in-group manifestation of ‘sorcery’ and reprisals for it are symptomatic of the strong communal bonds that exist in rural society in Banyuwangi. Even if those family, friends, and neighbours grieved for the victim, they almost always seemed to be on speaking terms with the killers, who were drawn from others in the village. These social pressures might

explain why I have no evidence of the victims' family members seeking redress from, or revenge against, the killers. The relationships constructed from kinship, propinquity and friendship are the organising principles of social life. At the same time, they are the basis for the identification and killing of 'sorcerers'.

It could be generalised that these ties are necessary but not sufficient for sorcery allegations to occur. So it is not the case that "Everyone is likely to accuse others of being sorcerers and to be accused in turn," as was the case amongst the Makah Northwest Coastal Indians (Gluckman 1963:310), or that everyone is "at one time or another exposed by oracles as having bewitched their neighbours", as amongst Zande commoners (Evans-Pritchard 1937:114). Only about half a percent, or about 25 people in a population of 5000, in Tegalaring, were suspected of being sorcerers. Why so few? A possible reason is that most often a person who already has a reputation as a 'sorcerer' is identified when an 'abnormal' illness is discovered. Different illnesses and misfortunes are thus attributed to the one person among a group of neighbours, family, and friends.

How a Sorcerer is Identified

Usually, the people who initially identify a sorcerer are those who believe themselves to be the victim of sorcery. When people become ill, it is easy for them to suspect that their malady has been caused by sorcery. People often 'know' they have been ensorcelled through feeling, which is '*rasa*' (Geertz 1960:238–240). In other cases, the 'victim' is allegedly haunted by images of the sorcerer. The woman who had been ensorcelled by her brother-in-law, Jaenuddin, was reputedly:

about to die and yet could strongly affirm that he [Jaenuddin] had done it, had got at her. [She said it] spontaneously, she was almost dead. It was the speech of angels on the threshold of consciousness, at the time residents had entered there [her house].

More frequently, the 'victim' purportedly divined the 'sorcerer' through a dream. Speaking about the victims of one 'sorcerer', an informant related, "sick people would dream, especially those who [subsequently] died would mention, call out, his [the sorcerer's] name." I was told, "usually the sick person continually mentions the name [of the sorcerer], in his dreams." Another participant told the story of Mudrai:

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In every house that Mudrai walked past there would be a reaction from the inhabitants of that house, including, among other things, sickness and, after several days, death. While [the victim] was sick [the victim] would have images of Pak Mudrai, so the family of this person would be convinced that he possessed sorcery, Pak Mudrai.

When I asked him what form the images took, he explained they “often took the form of a dream, mostly in the form of a dream.” In another case, a *kiai* said “I was attacked ... I was about to be ensorcelled but I protected myself. There was a dream.” In response to my incredulity, he explained, peremptorily, “it’s supernatural, that’s all”. In these cases the reported content of the dreams was simple and literal. In practice, however, a sorcerer is rarely identified solely through this sort of divination.

While victims’ feelings and dreams may be initially important in identifying a sorcerer, the verdict of a white magic practitioner—a *dukun* and less commonly a *kiai*—is far more significant. As one participant explained:

first it is the community, the precinct (*lingkungan*). There is a sick person, call him A. Sometimes he does not receive medical attention at first, but goes straight to a wise person, a *dukun*, first. In the end, the *dukun* suspects that it is B, his neighbour. There arises a conviction that B had made him sick ...

In another case, “someone died with enlarged stomach [and] an ‘old person’ was asked”. Finally, in Tegalaring a person who suspected he was the victim of sorcery visited “an ‘old man’: that *dukun* said that the illness was [due to being] ensorcelled by Udin.” Although some informants expressed scepticism regarding the reliability of *dukun* and *kiai*, in practice their divinations functioned as irrefutable evidence.

White magic practitioners frequently state that another person is the cause of an illness, thereby intimating that sorcery is at work. However, all the *dukun* I met stated they would never name a ‘sorcerer’ even if they knew the person, because it would cause too much trouble. Indeed, in most cases I came across, the *dukun* only stated a compass direction from which an illness emanated. This direction either equates with the approximate location of the house of the ‘sorcerer’ relative to the house of the victim, or the direction that the sorcerer’s house faces. In one case where the death was suspected to be ‘abnormal’, relatives visited a *dukun* for a supernatural form of post-mortem, even though the corpse had been buried (and was never exhumed). I was told, “after he was dead and gone, [they] asked a ‘wise person’. That *kiai* said

that the house of the person [who perpetrated the killing] faced northeast.” This is similar to cases of theft, in which *dukun* and *kiai* tend to provide a direction rather than giving a person’s name.

Given the residential layout in Osing villages, one’s family, friends, and neighbours are typically located in all directions around one’s house. Although a divination such as “this illness comes from the North” sounds ambiguous and indirect, whatever the white magic practitioners says will be interpreted in the light of prior community ‘knowledge’ regarding the ‘sorcerer’, so that it fits the identity and location of the suspected sorcerer. Even if the ‘sorcerer’s’ house is not to the north, perhaps the house of the sorcerer’s childhood was in the north. As gossip spreads, the content inevitably becomes more incriminating. The white magic practitioner’s divination of direction may be re-interpreted not just as the divination of a direction, but also as providing the name. I suspect that reports that a white magic practitioner supplied a name, as opposed to a direction, are a further manifestation of people applying a prior assumption concerning the identity of the supposed sorcerer to the information provided by the white magic practitioner.

To summarise: if, after a dispute, someone suffers a misfortune (particularly a ‘large stomach’), this might be considered ‘abnormal’, and a cause might be sought. As one participant put it, “Someone’s sick, someone dies, then there’s someone who’s suspicious” (*Ada orang sakit, ada yang meninggal, nanti ada yang sangka*). As arguments and illnesses occur all the time, in order to identify the ‘sorcerer’ who caused the illness or misfortune, the ‘victim’ and other sympathisers have a ‘feeling’ or seek the divination of a *dukun*. Most ‘victims’ seem to already have their suspicions at this stage, and it is most often a person who already has a reputation as a ‘sorcerer’ who is identified. Initially, the accusation of sorcery may be barely a whisper as the rumour begins to spread amongst a few neighbours, or a part of the family. Yet in ‘actual’ cases of sorcery, “all the community, the whole village” was aware. How is it that the whole village eventually comes to hear of it?

A Din of Whispers: Gossip as ‘Community Information’

Information about the goings on in Tegalaring—whether it be flooding in one corner of the village, a fight in another, that someone is a prostitute, that two people are having an affair, or that the foreigner declined a sorcerer’s invitation—is transmitted by word of mouth. There are few formal means of producing mass communication of local events.

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Amplified public broadcasts from the mosques are limited to calls to prayer, announcements of bereavements, and sermons at Friday prayers. No newspapers were sold in Tegalaring village while I was doing fieldwork, and there was no coverage of Tegalaring events in the newspapers that could be bought in the subdistrict town. The same lack of coverage applied to radio and television. Instead of these, gossip is the most important source of knowledge about local happening. As Beatty (1999:124) notes, "Osing settlements are unusually dense, even by Javanese standards," and most likely the propinquity of residences in rural Banyuwangi facilitates gossip. In any case, gossiping consumes a lot of time, and through this interaction local residents construct the reality of the world around them, including ideas about who the sorcerers are.

The conviction that someone is a sorcerer spreads not by "public oration", as Evans-Pritchard (1937:92) found amongst the Azande, but by rumour or gossip. When Udin the 'sorcerer' was caught "snooping" around someone's house, news of the incident "had spread and become an open secret ... from mouth to mouth it had spread throughout Tegalaring village," according to an informant. I suspect that people would become aware of Udin's sorcery because they participated in, or overheard, a conversation where the subject of his sorcery was raised. If I asked informants how they knew that a person was a sorcerer, the most common response was that they had "happened to hear" (*dengar-dengar*) that it was so. Most people persist in a belief that someone is a sorcerer on the basis of other people telling them about a dispute followed by an illness, or by having a feeling, or through being party to the divination of a *dukun*.

Informants tend to call information provided in this way 'community information' (*informasi masyarakat*). If your neighbours tell you that the village head is having an affair, they will literally say, "the village head has a mistress 'according to community information'" (*menurut informasi masyarakat*). This rather awkward and formal phrase is widely used. As one would expect, like other sources of news, *informasi masyarakat* is sometimes false, sometimes true, and frequently contains elements that are both. People who do not agree with the information might refer to it as "gossip" (*gosip*), "rumour" (*rumor*, "*isu*"), or slander (*fitnah*). In this case, the content is regarded as libel or falsehood, even though it has been produced by the same process as all 'knowledge' created within the community. At the same time, as Mayer (1982:63) notes, accusations of witchcraft (we also could add 'sorcery' here) are usually determined by

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an 'objective' standard; in Banyuwangi, 'community information' is that 'objective' standard.

It was common for informants to maintain (possibly disingenuously, I believe) that they were ignorant of the putative sorcerer's guilt, but at the same time state that "according to the community information" the person was a sorcerer, and to talk, and act, as if the guilt were proven. For instance, talking about Kustari, the sub-village head told me: "according to the people around here (*menurut lingkungan*) he was accused of being a sorcerer ... One doesn't know whether it's true or not." Another informant explained that local people knew that one amongst them was a sorcerer because the knowledge was "the information of the majority." Both informants clearly indicated to me that they believed that the objects of 'community information' were sorcerers. Another who admitted to being at the front of a group who killed a 'sorcerer' also said that the sorcerer who was killed:

was indeed a sorcerer. Because of information from the people (*rakyat*) from the community (*masyarakat*) of Tegalaring ... according to the information from the people (*rakyat*) it was he [Tajeri] who ensorcelled people, I myself don't know.

That this man could have willingly been involved in the killing indicates that 'community information' is perceived to be well-founded. For local people, to say that the "village head has a mistress according to community information" is to affirm its truth. Similarly, saying "according to the community, Kustari is a sorcerer" was sufficient to condemn him. Adding "according to community information" to a statement transforms the information from a personal opinion into a statement of fact, of general belief. Consensus, thus, plays an important part in the construction of 'truth' with regard to sorcerers.

In gossip, people congregate and contribute ideas about the sorcerer that become accepted by all involved. As Besnier (2009:16–17) observes, "gossiping is a joint effort involving many participants, and the authorship of particular gossip stories is fundamentally blurred". The more talk there is about a sorcerer, the more the idea is enhanced by embellishments and inaccuracies. As Herskovits (cited in Gluckman 1963:307) notes with regard to gossip, "fantasy supplements or even supplants fact". For example, Pak Haji (PH) and I were talking to an administrative hamlet head (HH) about three alleged sorcerers, and they said:

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HH: As for the [three] others they weren't wrong. It was information from the precinct, from the community. I'm not going to say they were sorcerers because there isn't proof, the community noticed that they possessed sorcery.

PH: It wasn't just the neighbourhood, it was all of Tegalaring.

HH: All of Tegalaring knew alright.

The administrative hamlet head in this exchange quickly and subtly shifted his opinion from saying there was no proof to saying the entire community 'knew'. It could be interpreted as pressure from Pak Haji, but it seemed to me that he was moving from an official position of 'no proof' to the consensus opinion that they were sorcerers.

Rumours that a *dukun* provided the name of a 'sorcerer' were also created by truth consensus. In the case of the 'sorcerer' Jair of Rogojampi some informants said that the *dukun* gave a direction, saying it was a neighbour to the south. This is perhaps indicative of the way that rumours of sorcery might spread both before and after the 'sorcerer's' death. As discussed above, people who were not present at the alleged divination by the *dukun* nevertheless spoke as if they had been. In other cases, patients were brought to Western doctors who purportedly said that a patient had nails or needles in different parts of the body. These kinds of occurrences *might* have happened, but the important thing is that one does not 'know' most of it first-hand. One 'knows' someone is a sorcerer based on hearsay, *menurut informasi masyarakat*.

Some informants seemed self-conscious about this role of consensus in determining guilt. One related:

those who are thought to possess sorcery, black magic—black magic is for killing people—and that fact is not from individuals but from an entire mass of people, the whole hamlet, Kemundung Hamlet.

Furthermore, the very fact that there is gossip about a person's sorcery is considered to be indicative of their guilt. Several informants stated "where there's smoke there's fire" (the same adage is used in Indonesian). Lastly, it is possible that people feel a semi-conscious compulsion to enthusiastically believe gossip. Gluckman (1963:315) notes:

if I suggest that gossip and scandal are socially virtuous and valuable, this does not mean that I always approve of them. Indeed, in practice I find that when I am gossiping about my friends as well as my enemies I am deeply conscious of performing a social duty; but that when I hear

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they gossip viciously about me, I am rightfully filled with righteous indignation.

Perhaps this explains why even informants who expressed theoretical scepticism about the role of rumour, in practice also took part in gossiping.

Gossip and suspicion appear to increase in quantity (how many people are engaged in gossip about the person, how often, how much) and quality (how damning what they are saying is) over time. In the initial stages, the notoriety of a 'sorcerer' might be limited to a small area, but after a period of time this reputation will spread, until the suspect "comes under the attention of the community, the village." "The more time we gossip about it," an informant who believed in sorcery noted, "the more powerful the rumour."

The time it takes for the rumour to spread might account for the difference in the notoriety of 'sorcerers'. In Tegalaring, there are fifteen 'sorcerers' who are known "in a small arena, one neighbourhood". In the case of Saida, who was the object of a 'demo' in 2001, according to her village and hamlet head, she was not "well known, not public." By contrast, there are about ten "big fish (*kelas kakap*)," like Kustari, who were "infamous throughout the village." As with Kustari, most of the victims of the killings in other villages in 1998 belonged to the 'big-fish' category. Underlining this difference one informant stated that another local sorcerer was only known "in a small area, one neighbourhood, whereas Kustari was known throughout the village".

In almost all cases of killings I covered, all informants from the village where a killing occurred identified the victim as a sorcerer. There were two exceptions. In the cases of Mahfud from Glagah and Hasan from Songgon, informants from the same village were unsure as to whether the victim was a sorcerer. Mahfud and Hasan appear to have been small scale 'sorcerers'. My informants who lived in different areas of these villages did not state that these two were sorcerers—they only noted that neighbours suspected them to be sorcerers. I presume that this difference in knowledge—Mahfud and Hasan's neighbours 'knew' that the two were sorcerers but other people who lived further away in the village did not—can be attributed to the time it takes for a rumour and ensuing suspicion to spread.

There is generally then an initial suspicion from within the realm of family, friends, and neighbours; the involvement of a *dukun* in diagnosing or prognosticating the cause of the illness; then a spreading of news about this 'discovery' 'according to community information'. In reality, however, the process of identification may only approximate such distinct, sequential stages.

Accusations of Sorcery

Identification of sorcerers occurs mostly through secretive gossip. Direct accusation is rare. One form of direct accusation is by yelling or screaming at 'sorcerers' during attacks and banishments. Accusing someone of sorcery is analogous to the slander of calling someone a paedophile in contemporary European cultures, and is subject to a more violent response. As described in Chapter One, a young man who accused Salimun of Singojuruh had his arm hacked by Salimun. In retribution for hacking his accuser's arm, and for his black magic, Salimun was immediately killed by a large group led by the accuser's father. Aside from yelling during an attack on a 'sorcerer' and the requesting of water, I have only a few records of direct accusation.

An indirect accusation is often made via a request for help. For instance, when a person suffering an 'abnormal' illness requested water from the 'sorcerer' Hadis in order to be cured, the person was also insinuating that Hadis had caused the illness. The person could pretend to believe that Hadis was not a 'sorcerer' but, rather, had sufficient white magic power to cure. This may explain why 'sorcerers' agree to attempt to cure—they do so on the proviso that they are viewed as only having white magic, or perhaps they hope to defuse a volatile situation. But what is clear is that when a 'sorcerer' acquiesces, other residents will then see this as a case of the sorcerer treating their victim.

In fact, in several cases in which 'sorcerers' have acquiesced this has served to condemn them. At the insistence of a large crowd in the Malang district an accused female 'sorcerer' agreed to visit a seriously ill 'victim'. The 'victim' died while she was at his house, and the crowd then killed her (Herriman 2006b:92).

The avoidance of direct accusation can be attributed to the intense pressure to maintain apparently normal, cordial relations with neighbours, family, and friends, in rural Banyuwangi.¹⁸ The pressure to act 'normally' was all the more imperative because people were frightened of the 'sorcerer'. In one case, there was a *guru ngaji* who was thought to be a sorcerer. It might seem incomprehensible that neighbours would send their children to an Islamic teacher if they believed he was willing and able to kill with black magic. However, it might have been thought that not sending one's child to be educated by him for a couple of hours every night might pose a greater

18 This accords with Evans-Pritchard's (1935:420) observation that, among the Azande, "notorious witches are in no way ostracised and are treated in exactly the same manner as everyone else".

danger to one's family. Treating sorcerers differently than other people in the village might attract their ire and their sorcery.

Although the imperative of superficially good relations in communal life is extended to 'sorcerers', in the cases I could verify alleged sorcerers were aware that they were the objects of suspicion of those around them. For example, P. Sanen of Wongsorejo went to his village head saying "the community suspects me, they say I'm a sorcerer, give me a shrouded oath". I do not claim to know how this awareness arises. A person close to the 'sorcerer' might overhear the gossip and pass it on. It is also possible that the way people act around 'sorcerers' is subtly different, and that they experience, for example, the feeling that someone gets when they enter a room where people have been gossiping about them.

Ways Suspected Sorcerers Can Protect Themselves

There are only two common procedures alleged sorcerers might undertake when they are aware of the rumours that are circulating about them. One is to undergo a ritual death known as the shrouded oath (*sumpah pocong*). This is well known, if seldom practiced, throughout Banyuwangi and in other parts of East Java. I only came across sporadic first-hand accounts of this ritual. The shrouded oath was explained to me by an informant as follows: With a large number of local witnesses it "is usually undertaken in a local mosque after the religious duties of Friday prayers, attended by community and religious leaders, and sometimes attended by district leaders as well." Like a corpse the alleged sorcerer is wrapped in a white shroud. The Koran is raised above the 'sorcerer's' head, as is the practice, for example, when administering the Indonesian presidential oath of office. The ritual is partly punitive—the 'sorcerers' swear to their innocence, stating that if they are lying they will suffer in some way, or explicitly stating that they are prepared to die. The idea is that if sorcerers lie, or continue to practice sorcery, contrary to their oath, they will die. This trial by ordeal is also prophetic—informants think it can establish the guilt or innocence of a sorcerer.

Although there are more recent instances in other villages, there have been only two instances of the shrouded oath in Tegalaring which occurred around 1960. The process of the shrouded oath was explained to me by Haja Sitiamanah, who lived next to the mosque. She said that five men—Sudir, Tajeri, Harip, Hadiri, and Palahi:

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Figure 9: Shrouded Oath

This photograph of a shrouded oath appeared in *Tempo* edition of January 13, 2002.

Photo by J. Head, October 1998.¹⁹

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- 19 In an email the photographer, Jonathan Head, explained the photograph “was actually taken in October 1998 at the height of the ‘*dukun santet*’ (black magician) fear sweeping E Java. This was a ‘*sumpah pocong*’ oath swearing ceremony at a mosque in a village close to Jember. 11 local inhabitants had been accused of being *dukun santet* [sorcerers], and faced being lynched ... A crowd of several hundred villagers waited, holding home-made anti-*dukun* [black magician] posters, guarded by a solitary policeman with a rusty rifle. They believed that if a *dukun santet* uttered the oath they would turn to dust. The accused clearly believed this too. They were terrified, but all got through it unscathed.”

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were accused of being sorcerers, so they had to be given a shrouded oath ... It was the people (*rakyat*), the community (*masarakat*) who insisted. A person from the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) together with the *mudin* [caller to prayer], Rosid, performed the shrouded oath. The whole village was present at the mosque from eight o'clock in the morning until it finished ... [The alleged sorcerers] were shaved, wrapped up like a person who's died. They were given cotton cloth ... First there were funerary prayers, and then there was a call to prayer at the mosque, a funeral service. They were considered dead. Then they swore, "I swear I will never ensorcell again. If I ever ensorcell again, let me die like this" ... with the Koran above their head. They were given the oath, but none died. People hoped they would die. At least if they didn't die, they wouldn't do it again. There used to be a belief in the shrouded oath, but the proof is none died naturally; the proof is they had to be hacked to death. From that time people didn't believe in it. The second time was 1960. There were TNI soldiers here. A regiment [of] twelve men. People reported to the TNI so that the sorcerers would be taken. Those suspected were taken to Kaligung. They were tortured until they confessed. From this confession they were given the shrouded oath. There were two extra people. Sudir, Tajeri, Harip, Hadiri, Palahi and Ma'ad and Madalai. The village head was Abdurahman, the *mudin*, Robini [these two were present]. Kiai Soleh didn't take part. Really, [the alleged sorcerers] should have been washed [as a corpse is], but they were told to wash themselves.

As Haja Siti Amanah remembered it, the 'sorcerers' promised, "never to ensorcell *again*." The oath is therefore incriminating, as it assumes that they had previously ensorcelled. There was no opportunity for the accused to clear their name, and this is not just the case with the content of the oath, but indeed the entire ritual: in the eyes of the people of Tegalgarang and surrounding villages, the fact that one has been required to undertake the shrouded oath is proof that one is a sorcerer.

The NU report on the killings in Banyuwangi indicates that the attendance of a *kiai* is necessary at a shrouded oath (Lakpesdam-NU 1998:9–10, 16). Indeed, a shrouded oath was cancelled in Kabat in 1998 because the *kiai* who was supposed to officiate did not arrive. Yet, in the above account the *kiai* was conspicuous by his absence. So it is possible that someone who is recognised as having some standing as a religious figure, be it a *kiai* or perhaps a *guru ngaji*, or even a *haji* or a *mudin*, might suffice.

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To avoid victimisation, a sorcerer might also seek exile. If the shrouded oath is not an attractive option, neither is exile. Exile is tantamount to 'running away' because, in the words of one informant, "if you have [black magic], you'll definitely run, right? If you don't possess [black] magic you won't run." Understandably, some 'sorcerers' who were probably aware of the suspicions regarding them chose not to run for fear that this would give the impression that they were guilty. This was the case with Kamal, a 'sorcerer' in Jember who was killed in 1998. I asked his wife why Kamal had never left the village, and she responded "This relative called Pak Salid suggested that we don't leave the house if we don't feel wrong." Similarly, Mahfud of Glagah was advised to leave the village. According to the *Jawa Pos* (October 13 1998c), he valiantly responded:

Don't worry yourself about it. I'll just stay here. I'm not going anywhere, because if I ended up leaving here, it would be the same as admitting that I was a sorcerer. People definitely think I am. Because of that I don't want to go anywhere. Even if I die. The main thing is that I'm not slandered by people.

Shortly afterwards, Mahfud was killed. Mahfud's reported courage demonstrates that if you are thought to be a sorcerer and "you don't leave, you'll be killed."

Even if 'sorcerers' do leave, local residents from their former village sometimes hunt them down and kill them. This was the case with Tafsir, who went into exile in a small hut outside Tegalaring, but was hunted down during the 1998 outbreak by residents of his former village Kautan.²⁰ Otherwise, former fellow villagers may inform residents in the new village about the 'sorcerer', and subsequently the 'sorcerer' may be killed by these residents. A 'sorcerer' was attacked in one participant's village because:

Pak M: That person was exiled from Lumabang village, in Rogojampi.

NH: Because he was thought to possess sorcery?

Agus: Yes, he was thrown out here.

So whether the 'sorcerer' leaves and finds that the people in the new village already 'know' or will be informed, or leaves and returns, or does not leave

20 This is the "gruesome murder" that Brown (2000:14) refers to at the outset of his article. Brown (2000:14) neglected to mention that residents of Kautan held Tapsir in contempt for being a 'sorcerer' and that it was a group of men from Kautan who undertook this "bizarre execution."

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at all, the problem is likely to be intractable. This situation is similar to that which occurs among the Lele of the Kasai in Africa, where ‘sorcerers’ “carried their infamous reputation with them wherever they settled” (Douglas 1991:728). The options for a ‘sorcerer’ are to run and be damned (and perhaps killed), or stay and be killed.

There is perhaps one other reason why ‘sorcerers’ do not just pack up and leave the village. Ties between family, neighbours and friends are so tight as to be all-but suffocating. The closeness of these ties in everyday relations has two relevant implications. First, disputes, suspicions of theft, and suspicions of sorcery easily arise in such a climate. Secondly, people are ‘socialised’ to rely and seek to rely on kith and kin. In other words the very closeness of ties can create sorcery suspicion while also making it very difficult for sorcerers to leave. Not only the ‘sorcerers’, but also those who are supposed to be ‘nearest and dearest’ to them and yet who suspect them, are stuck in what I would call a ‘morbid nexus’.

Where other societies may, for example, exchange gifts as compensation to symbolise the end of the matter, society in rural Banyuwangi possesses no non-violent methods to deal effectively with the suspicion of sorcery. Shrouded oath or exile are both incriminating. In Kabat, an alleged sorcerer, Haji Samsul Hadi, agreed to, or perhaps even requested, a shrouded oath. In Bomo, Mistari held a ritual meal (*slametan*) and requested a shrouded oath. Both men were subsequently killed. Not surprisingly, it is uncommon for ‘sorcerers’ to request these options.

‘Sorcerers’ probably understand that both options are incriminating. It seems they choose exile or the shrouded oath only when attack appears imminent, and it appears to be a last resort to buy them some more time. Hence, the majority of suspected sorcerers continue living as they formerly had, in a morbid social charade—pretending to be oblivious to the suspicions around them, while their family, neighbours, and friends pretend they do not suspect them at all.

The shrouded oath is generally regarded with scepticism. Local residents often do not acquiesce to the request by the alleged sorcerer for a shrouded oath. In the case of the ‘sorcerer’ Mistari, this may have been because they did not believe in the efficacy of the oath and thought that the ‘sorcerer’ also knew it would be ineffective. Lili wanted a shrouded oath to prove her father’s innocence of the allegation, but the neighbours, suspecting the father to be a sorcerer, were reluctant:

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Those neighbours didn't want to. They said "People who have powers of magic are willing to be given the shrouded oath." We wanted it, but they didn't.

Many informants questioned the efficacy of the shrouded oath, and some even stated that it is illegitimate. The village head in Bumo stated:

Even if a person does [sorcery] and has the guts to undergo a shrouded oath, it's called defending oneself ... if I possessed sorcery and you ordered me to undergo a shrouded oath, I wouldn't die.

There is a widespread idea that the shrouded oath was more effective in earlier times, just as the supernatural was more powerful in the past. For instance, informants recalled competitions in yesteryear between rival sorcerers and their pupils, where one could see arrows and other supernatural projectiles flying across the sky. In the same way, it is also believed that shrouded oaths used to be so effective that a sorcerer—or anyone, who undertook the trial and lied—would surely die soon after. For example, he might be hit by a car as soon as he walked out of the mosque. Because the shrouded oath is no longer as effective as before, informants like Haja Sitiamanah told me, there has been a loss of belief in it.

Reactions of Local People to the 'Sorcerer'

The two measures that 'sorcerers' can undertake to protect themselves—the shrouded oath and exile—are the same measures that local people may demand in order to deal with 'sorcerers'. Although local residents regard the shrouded oath with scepticism, it is still occasionally practiced in Banyuwangi. It is worth speculating on the reasons for this. Local residents who are terrified and aggrieved by the 'sorcerer' may take this measure in hope rather than in conviction. Their motivation may be unconsciously cynical: to provide a public proclamation of their suspicion in a formal, ritual context. Thus, its purpose may not be to give the accused a fair trial (as informants suggested), but rather to further insinuate that the accused is guilty.

The reasons why a community might exile a sorcerer are different. As noted above, in contradiction to the theoretical perception that a sorcerer's magic is omnipresent, in practice, exile is undertaken as an effective way to prevent the further ensorcelling of local people. This is thought to be an imperfect measure because sorcerers do not always agree to leave. One participant complained that a sorcerer "was told to leave by the village government, the village administration, but he didn't want to leave the village." Secondly,

even if sorcerers leave, they frequently return. I asked another participant, who was an official at the time, why the ‘sorcerer’ had not been exiled instead of being killed, and he responded:

Exiled to where? Exiled to A? That was the situation. Baseri had family and went to Bondowoso. They weren’t happy there and he returned here. So, the accusers were not just one person.

A third measure that is frequently undertaken is vandalising property. I came across one case in which local residents burnt down a hut located in a rice field belonging to a sorcerer—Mistari of Rogojampi. More frequently stones are thrown on a sorcerer’s roof. In these cases, the message is certainly one of disapproval, but also seems an attempt to scare the ‘sorcerer’ out of the house and village. Another common measure is to destroy the house (reported by interviewees in Bangsring), sometimes achieved by burning (reported by interviewees in Temuguru, Bengkak). I saw, for instance, a recently burnt house that had belonged to a sorcerer in Muncar. As with exile, the shrouded oath, and stoning a roof, this measure is not thought to be effective. In the eyes of local residents, the only truly effective means of dealing with sorcerers is to kill them.

Conclusion

Understanding how ‘sorcerers’ are identified is crucial to explaining the killings in 1998 because there are conflicting accounts regarding who was actually killed and why. Identification or accusation of sorcerers is not on the basis of some sociological relation between different groups or political affiliation. Rather, the process of identification is rooted in the ongoing beliefs, practices, and social dynamics within groups. The basis of sorcery allegations I researched was an altercation or disagreement between family members, neighbours, or friends. If one of the parties subsequently suffered illness or misfortune, this could be deemed abnormal, implying that it resulted from sorcery. The divination of a *dukun* might serve to confirm the imputation in these cases. Following this, the news is spread from kith and kin eventually to the entire village. As the gossip spreads, consensus grows, and the idea becomes entrenched, or reinforced, through its transmission. Other factors that point to the alleged sorcerer’s guilt, such as reported sightings of naked, nocturnal, outdoor activities, might also be attributed in gossip. These are some of the social mechanisms through which ‘sorcerers’ are identified and the background to the violent actions examined in this book.

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The violence against sorcerers has as its basis a widespread and apparently deeply ingrained fear of sorcery and sincere belief that certain people are sorcerers. It is difficult to say whether few or any of the victims regarded themselves as sorcerers. Regardless, fellow members of their community believe that the victims 'know' themselves to be sorcerers and are attempting to hide this fact. Aggrieved by the 'sorcery', and seeing no failsafe recourse to protect oneself, one's family, one's neighbours, one's community and even one's animals from this threat, community members decide that the only effective way to deal with sorcery is to kill its practitioners.

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... there is one thing, I suppose, that they don't dare to say: they don't dispute that a guilty person ought to be punished; what they probably do dispute is who the guilty person is, and what he does, and when he does it ...

Plato, The Last Days of Socrates

If suspicions of sorcery emanate from within local communities, why is this?

During my fieldwork I made several visits to Porong prison, near Surabaya, where many of those jailed for the 1998 killings of 'sorcerers' were incarcerated. I tried to interview one of the inmates, Haris, about the circumstances of the 1998 outbreak of killings, but he could not get beyond his desire to talk about his daughter. My research assistant noted his lip quivering the first day we interviewed him, and the next day as we continued the interview I saw tears rolling down his cheeks. He pulled out a photo of his daughter. He told me that the "king" (*raja*) of sorcery in his village had killed her—"she couldn't defecate for 8 months and eventually I took her to a doctor who couldn't cure her. It was Mr King [*Pak Raja*] who ensorcelled her. He was knifed ... by us!". This is the sort of background or reason that residents often give for having violently targeted a 'sorcerer'.

As outlined earlier, when an incident of perceived sorcery occurs, neighbours, family and friends sometimes form a group to punish the accused 'sorcerer'. This punishment can be a spontaneous reaction to an incident, but equally the retribution may be planned or the aggrieved feelings may slowly simmer over a long period. The violence is specifically targeted against the accused. Even if the spouse and children attempt to support or protect the 'sorcerer', they are usually left untouched. The punishment is summary and violent, and frequently the corpse is defiled. The authorities often tacitly sympathise and ignore the violence.

One approach to making sense of this would be to see such killings as a form of vigilantism or “lynching” (Sidel 2006:142). “People taking justice into their own hands”, one author contends, “is caused by a deep distrust of the system” (Liem Soei Liong 2002:211). In local residents’ eyes the authorities are inefficient, corrupt, and do not take sufficient action against ‘sorcerers’. But to say that the killers are lynch mobs or vigilantes who take the law into their own hands implies that the responsibility for justice lies solely in the state’s domain. Local residents do not see it that way. They have never, apparently, given up the ‘right’ and ‘responsibility’ to handle local justice issues.

So what kind of justice do the killings represent?

In legal terms, within Indonesian society, “more than one normative system is operative simultaneously”. Slaats and Portier (1993:137) call this situation a “legal plurality”. It is possible that one or several of these normative systems might have informed the killers and others in their community who endorsed a killing. In other words the killing of ‘sorcerers’ might relate to several informally recognised systems of morality or justice.

Adat

Are the killings a form of *adat*? In its original use ‘*adat*’ described those normative rules which were regarded as being distinct from religious law. Related closely to this original meaning, *adat* may refer to the customary practices which vary across Indonesia’s cultural groups. These include ritualistic, artistic, and legal elements. In a second, “more restricted sense,” the term *adat* denotes “normative rules governing social life” (Benda-Beckmann 1984:34n). A third meaning is “codified normative rules with sanctions”.

Adat is usually transmitted orally or by example, but legal elements of *adat* have been recorded in writing. This process began when Dutch colonial jurists recorded what they called ‘*adatrecht*’ (*adat* law) (Hoebel and Schiller 1948). The term ‘*adatrecht*’ itself was a Dutch invention (Benda-Beckmann 1984:34) and was intended to be used as the basis of a legal system to be applied to ‘native’ Indonesians. Hence, this third sense of *adat* is that of codified *adat* which has “consequences in law” (Thoolen 1987:32) or “legal consequence” (Vollenhoven 1981:6). For clarity, the third sense will be referred to in this discussion as ‘*adat* law’.

Although the Dutch colonisers presumed that they were recording *adat* law that accurately reflected local customs and mores, post-colonial scholars have questioned this presumption on a number of grounds.

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First they argue that the Dutch *adat* scholars ignored the presence of the Dutch authority in constructing the notion of villages (Bremen 1982). For example, there was a concept that the colonists lived “alongside, not among, the indigenous population” (Vollenhoven 1981, 145). ‘Native’ villages were falsely construed as autonomous, corporate republics, (*dorpsrepubliek*) closed off from outside influence, particularly that of the Dutch (Warren 1993b:3).

Second, the Dutch ossified a dynamic and adaptable system by producing records of formerly uncoded laws: “Once written ... the adat research violated a principle of adat law theory, that the adat lived in local tradition. Now, written, it lived in books” (Lev 1985, 86).

Third, Dutch colonisers created separate and distinct ethnic group boundaries (Murray Li 2000:158–9) in the process of inventing *adat* as a legal tradition (Sullivan 1992:220): the “discrete, bounded, distinctive cultural unit” now known as the Minangkabau was created by Dutch *adat* scholars (Murray Li 2000:159n).

A fourth criticism holds that the Dutch construed *adat* law in such a way as to reflect their colonial interests. Even though the Dutch conceived of *adat* as coming from ‘below’, from the people, recent scholarship focuses on recorded *adat* as a colonial construct, reflecting the imperatives of instilling a social order from ‘above’ (Sullivan 1992:220). As Bremen (1982:17) writes:

Under the cloak of village rehabilitation so-called old customs and traditions were revived and new local institutions were introduced ... What a large number of followers of the adat-law school assumed to be local common law meant in fact the enforcement of the law of the locally powerful.

The Dutch construction of *adat* served to subordinate ‘natives’ to a judicial system that was subordinate to that of the colonisers (Lev 1985). And dividing the colony into *adat* regions (*adatrechtsskring*) assisted the colonists in their attempts to control the land.

Fifth, the influence of Islam was in effect written out of Dutch accounts of *adat*, reflecting the attempt to counter the influence of Islam in the colony. For the purposes of analysis here, *adat* and Islamic law have been treated separately. Although in practice the two normative systems were interrelated, the Dutch attempted to separate the two, and to down-play the influence of Islam on *adat* (Lev 1985:66). For example, in controlling the Minangkabau:

[t]he colonial government relied upon the ‘adat chiefs’ the (*penghulus*) to counteract what it saw as Islamic fanaticism. The Dutch thereby

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artificially enhanced the distinction between customary law (*adat*) and Islam in Minangkabau society (Ricklefs 2001, 183–184).

In defence of *adat* scholarship, it would appear that some of the Dutch scholars, particularly Van Vollenhoven, had genuine respect for local custom. As flawed as their accounts may be, in the absence of other comprehensive records the Dutch colonial record still represents an important historical source regarding indigenous justice and law. Furthermore, regardless of whether the Dutch invented an *adat* tradition which was subsequently incorporated in the villages, in some areas, such as Bali, *adat* is “a powerful framework of meaning and social action” (Warren 1993b:5). As Thoolen (1987:33) notes, “Adat and adat law are still flourishing”.

On this basis it is tempting to pursue the argument that *adat* or *adat* law may also provide a framework for explaining the killing of sorcerers in Banyuwangi. There are several sources for what might be considered *adat* in Banyuwangi: Cavendish, Raffles, Stoppelaar, and Atmosoedirdjo.

The English explorer Thomas Cavendish stopped in Banyuwangi in 1588 while circumnavigating the world. He observed that corporal punishment existed for certain trade violations:

The common people may not bargaine, sell, or exchange any thing with any other nation without speciall licence from their king: and if any so doe, it is present death for him (spelling and punctuation as in original, Hakluyt 1904:340).

This extract may be relevant to the killing of sorcerers in contemporary Banyuwangi in that it records the application of capital punishment.

A further account of justice in Banyuwangi is provided in the 1830 monograph by Sir Stamford Raffles, a major figure in Southeast Asian history, who was governor of Java during the British interregnum (1811–1816) and authored *The History of Java*. In this work he discusses the Javanese judicial system, which he found to be “at once barbarous and revolting” (Raffles 1978:287).²¹ As evidence of the ‘abhorrent’ Javanese administration of justice, some detail regarding customary law in Banyuwangi is provided in a footnote (Raffles 1978:287–88), which reads:

21 He continues: “practices prevailed under the sanction of native law, which were abhorrent to the criminal jurisdiction of any enlightened nation, without being at all necessary to the due administration of justice” (Raffles 1978, 187).

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Among many others, the following enactments, which were in force in some of the Eastern districts when the English arrived, will serve to shew the barbarities of the law then existing, in its operation on the people, and its leniency towards the great.

“Any person murdering his superior shall be beheaded and his body quartered and given to the wild beasts, and his head stuck upon a *bambu*.

“Any person disobeying his superior and attempting to murder him, may be killed by the superior, without giving any intimation thereof to the chief town.

“Any person daring to destroy any public advertisement promulgated by government shall forfeit his right hand.

“A *Demáng*, or other chief of a *désa*, being acquainted with any conspiracy tending to the injury of the state, and not giving intimation thereof, shall be punished by losing one ear, his head shall be shaved, and he shall be banished.

“Any person daring to offer violence to a priest in the mosque or among the tombs shall forfeit one hand.

“If a woman kills a man she shall be fined 500 reals *batú*.

“If a superior kills an inferior he shall be fined 1,000 doits.

“If a person puts out the eyes of another he shall be fined 500 reals *batú*; if one eye only, 50 reals.”

There were different fines for maiming different parts of the body. For cutting out the tongue, 500 reals; for knocking out the teeth, 25; for breaking the thumb, 500; for breaking the finger, 100; and the like.

See Collection of Native Laws at Banyuwangi

The authenticity of these ‘Native Laws’ must be questioned.²² Islam did not begin to make inroads in Banyuwangi until the 1800s. Thus, Stoppelaar finds the ‘enactment’ regarding ‘violence to a priest in the mosque’ to be dubious. Moreover, Stoppelaar believes that *adat* emanates from the village, whereas these ‘enactments’ seem to have been “laid down from above” (*van*

22 Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate the “Collection of Native Laws at Banyuwangi” to which Raffles refers. Stoppelaar was similarly flummoxed regarding the origin of this material. Thanks to Annabel Teh Gallop of British Library for her assistance in searching for the source of the “Collection”.

bovenafopgelegd) (Stoppelaar 1927:108–9). While they prescribe capital punishment, both Cavendish's and Raffles' accounts seem to focus on a centralised legal authority rather than community-based decision making and neither deals with the issue of 'sorcery' (Stoppelaar 1927:108).

Turning to the records of '*adat*' law that Dutch scholars undertook in the early twentieth century, Van Vollenhoven (1981:145), writing in 1917, found that Java and Madura were "said to be without *adat* law or to have only a scanty remnant of it". While van Vollenhoven seems to have attempted to disprove this idea by providing some general comments on *adat* law in the area, these were far less comprehensive than scholarship regarding *adat* elsewhere in the archipelago.

Nevertheless, there are two *adat* law records from Banyuwangi. The first is *Adat Law of Balambangan* (*Balambangansch Adatrecht*) written by Stoppelaar, a Dutch judge who served in Banyuwangi in the early twentieth century. Another monograph was written by Atmosoedirdjo (1952), apparently a Javanese official in Kalibaru, in the far-west of Banyuwangi.

These two works tend to stress civil disputes and compensation as opposed to criminal actions and punishment. This is thought to reflect a scholarly understanding of the world-view of Javanese villagers. Dutch scholarly commentaries have stressed a spiritual-social bond that villagers have with each other and their village. For example, ter Haar writes that villagers conceive of the village as an equilibrium between the "cosmic and mundane worlds" (ter Haar 1948:49, 213). This equilibrium is disturbed by actions such as slander or adultery. The purpose of *adat* law is to restore the balance—the person who caused the offence must offer compensation to the injured person. In this way, the "natives'" belief in an equilibrium was supposedly connected to their eschewing criminal punishment in favour of civil resolution.

While Stoppelaar focuses primarily on civil resolution, he does incorporate a brief account of purely criminal matters, which he seems to distinguish from *adat*. However, criminal matters such as theft, adultery, rape, murder, and sorcery do not appear in Stoppelaar's rendering of Banyuwangi's *adat* law. Interestingly, the section does note the tendency for 'vengeance', 'mob violence', and capital punishment, among the people of Banyuwangi. Stoppelaar records:

A community, whether from one village or a hamlet or several villages or hamlets together may also act as a revenger for the acts which a member of the residents of the village may have experienced ... The

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intention to undertake [revenge] can result in reflection and preparation that is extremely careful, nevertheless it can also result in actions which are completely spontaneous as an act of punishment/law (*hukum*) by their own community (Stoppelaar 1927:110).

This description fits neatly with the killing of sorcerers, but Stoppelaar seems not to consider such vengeful acts to be *adat*. The records of Cavendish, Raffles, Stoppelaar, and Atmosoedirdjo also do not contain any indication that killing sorcerers is prescribed by *adat*.

My own research indicated that *adat* never arose as a justification for the actions taken, either by the killers, or by the local residents who supported them. Even when specifically asked about it, very few interviewees associated the killings with *adat*. One apparent exception was a Madurese sub-village head, who explained that a killing was based on “law that had been created by the *adat* community itself, that it obeys itself.” In response, I asked him “could the killing be considered *adat* law?” He replied:

“No! It was the revenge of a village, because [those sorcerers] were considered to ruin the souls of other people. Because if [the community] reported [it to the authorities] there is no proof, according to law, it hasn’t become a legal category. But the fact is those [victims of ‘sorcery’] really died.

Similarly, when I asked another participant, “Is there *adat* law in this village?” he replied, a little confused, “What do you mean by ‘*adat* law?’”. I said, “[I] don’t know ... they say there is *adat* law in Indonesia,” but this was met with a dismissive, “not here.” When I asked other informants “is there *adat* law in this village?”, the response was unanimous: “there isn’t.”

Nevertheless, scholars have adopted the term ‘*adat*’ to refer to customs and laws of the indigenous cultures of Indonesia, even in cultures where the word exists in a different form, or does not exist at all. From this usage it follows that the fact that the Osing, Javanese, and Madurese people of Banyuwangi do not use the term ‘*adat*’ to describe a system of justice or something like it, is not by itself significant as to whether or not they have *adat*.

However, if an informal, unarticulated, relatively simple set of normative or moral principles are taken to be *adat*, then it is possible that the killings could be considered as *adat*. For instance, the current idea of reciprocating gifts provided at a wedding is precisely what van Vollenhoven pointed to as an example of ‘*adat*’. This principle certainly pertains in an unarticulated manner in Banyuwangi, that is, it is customarily performed but not under any

name at all. Similarly the killing of sorcerers, which is sanctioned in other parts of Indonesia, and in Banyuwangi, might also be conceived as *adat*. Nevertheless, this would be an *adat* that is very different from the formalised (if uncoded) principles which are outlined in the *adat* scholarship and by the *adat* scholars of Banyuwangi: Stoppelaar and Atmosoedirdjo.

Several authors have conceived of violent actions against sorcerers as being in opposition to *adat*. In North Sumatra, Slaats and Portier record that:

Traditional law (*adat* law) is ... unequipped to react officially to such cases or to take sanctions against a person thought to be a [consorter of malicious spirits]. There remains “only” the possibility of social sanction, which can, however, be radical (Slaats and Portier 1989, 31).

Warren also sees such ‘social sanctions’ as different from *adat*. She describes how sometimes during a death ceremony in Bali the corpse is violently thrashed about—to the extent that limbs have been ripped off—by members of the local village who are disgruntled by the deceased person’s lack of contribution to the local community. Mershon describes a death ceremony in Bali for “a woman loathed by many in her *banjar* [sub-village] for reputed dealings in black magic”. This was disrupted when members of the *banjar*:

carried the corpse to the graveyard on the day of the cremation, the corpse was dragged through a stream, covered in mud, and after being placed in the bull coffin for burning, attacked with an axe (Warren, email to author 2001).

Warren finds these “occasions for spontaneous expressions of collective disregard no less effective as social sanctions than the invocation of formal customary law” (Warren 1993a:46). In this way the actions are similar to *adat*, but different in that they are not codified, less formal and more spontaneous.

Colonial Justice

Compared to *adat*, the state’s justice system in Indonesia is of more recent provenance. From the outset, the colony was ‘dual’ or ‘plural’ in character whereby generally, European people were subject to Dutch laws and ‘natives’ were subject to customary law (Thoolen 1987:33). The Dutch East Indies can be contrasted with the unitary economic and legal structure of the British colonies in India and Burma (Furnivall 1944:460). Although the specifics changed during the course of the colony’s history, the principle remained

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unaltered. Whatever the motivation behind it, from the initial period of 'discretionary rule' (Lev 1985:59), until the end of the Dutch colony, the plural system prevailed.

In many places, legal matters pertaining to 'natives' were presided over by colonial judges who worked in Western-style local courts (*Landraad*) that were informed by what the Dutch construed to be *adat*. In some areas, these local courts acted as a court of appeal. *Adat*, or a codified interpretation of it, was adopted by colonists as a model for the justice system for natives. As indicated in the discussion on *adat* above, some systems of customary law prescribed the killing or trial by ordeal of 'sorcerers'. The justification of violent behaviour towards sorcerers in *adat* systems was as "a necessary reaction to acts of magic that were threatening to society, and in accordance with traditional moral and normative standards" (Slaats and Portier 1993:139).

Colonial (native) law, it seems, might allow for the killings of sorcerers. However, as Slaats and Portier have written, Dutch colonial judges were instructed to respect local law but also to treat their subjects as fathers would their family. Under these instructions, judges were granted a prerogative to use the 'repugnancy' clause to overrule local law in the cases where it would conflict with their pastoral duties. This clause implied the "non-applicability of *adat* law if its application would be contrary to generally accepted human values" (Slaats and Portier 1993:140–141). Although it was meant to be applied only in exceptional circumstances, the repugnancy clause came to be repeatedly applied. In places where the Penal Code was in force, Slaats and Portier (1993:139) write:

It was not the practitioner of magic who was on trial but those who violently turned against him, thereby infringing the law. They were charged with an offence under the Penal Code ... most judges, being Dutch, with Western moral values and trained in Western law, loathed what they considered the inhuman and irrational assaults on innocent victims.

In short, although recognising that *adat* law might have resulted in the killing of 'sorcerers' being condoned within the colony's legal system, this possibility was not realised because of the repugnancy clause.²³

23 Similarly, in the first half of the twentieth century in Northern Rhodesia, as part of the British colonial ordinances limiting the power of indigenous courts, these courts lost the power to try "cases relating to witchcraft, except with special permission" (Gluckman 1955:3).

Similar cases outside the jurisdiction of the Penal Code presented an interesting conundrum for the judges. In such places, judges were instructed not to follow autochthonous *adat* law which “would be contrary to the judges’ own moral convictions and not in line with the government policy to raise the existing legal order in the territory to a more modern and humane level.” (Slaats and Portier 1993:139)

Modern State Law

After Independence, the officially plural legal system of the colonial government was felt by many to be in opposition to nationalist aspirations. One of the biggest changes from colonial state law to the post-colonial or independent state law was therefore the attempt to provide a unitary system of justice. The general opinion is that, aside from this, the legal system in practice has not undergone significant changes (Lev 1985:69; Thoolen 1987:55–56). In other words, the current criminal code in Indonesia is largely based on Dutch law. Nevertheless, as Lindsey (1999:1) points out, “It would be wrong ... to assume that Indonesia has simply adopted the Dutch legal system”.

Contemporary criminal legislation in Indonesia deals with magic only indirectly. As Slaats and Portier explain:

if the relationship between magic and law in Indonesia were discussed in terms of the formal system of state law, the story would be rather short, because there are practically no regulations concerning magic. There are no direct references to magic and sorcery in either the colonial legislation, or in the present-day Indonesian codes of law, and there are only a few indirect ones (1993, 138).

Two pieces of legislation inherited from the colonial codes are directed against those who sell, teach, or offer powers or sell objects that they *purport* or *allege* to be magical. Article 545 of the Criminal Code makes fortune-telling and dream-divining illegal. Article 546 makes illegal the purveying of talismans and the intended provision of invulnerability.

Nevertheless, the issue of whether sorcery should, or how it might, be incorporated in law, frequently arises in newspapers and seminars. Participants in these discussions assume the ‘sorcerers’ evade criminal sanction while the killers of ‘sorcerers’ are “victims of the inability of (criminal) law to prevent or tackle occurrences which are caused by sorcery” (Anwar March 10 2003). For instance, after the outbreak of killings in Banyuwangi, the *Jawa Pos* (October 15 1998) recorded that:

CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY JUSTICE

A number of legal experts have suggested that firm provisions be made to take actions against perpetrators of sorcery (*santet*). Only, the reality on the ground is that efforts to haul sorcerers (*tukang santetnya*) into court are clearly difficult. This is because among the several pieces of legislation in the criminal code, none are appropriate for hauling the sorcerers (*pelaku tukang santet*) into court.

In order to address this problem, a provision against sorcery and witchcraft has been proposed and a draft included among hundreds of other provisions in a Draft Criminal Code produced under state auspices.

Since 1981, attempts to reform Indonesia's Criminal Code have resulted in various drafts, including those of 1993, 2005, and 2008 (Blackwood 2007:301). Yet, after more than three decades and various revisions the Draft Criminal Code has still not been adopted. Revisions are currently the responsibility of Indonesia's national elected legislative assembly, the National Representative Council (DPR), comprising over 500 members. These members are divided into eleven cross-party commissions, each delegated with different tasks. With a brief that incorporates judicial matters, Commission III (*Komisi III*) is currently responsible for preparing the Draft Criminal Code.

An early rendering of the sorcery provisions appeared in the Draft Criminal Code as drafted in 1993 (RUU KUHP 1993), Article 223:

Whosoever, in claiming magical powers (*kekuatan magis*), informs or encourages others to believe that they can cause death or suffering of another person, will be sentenced to a maximum of five years imprisonment or fined at most, category IV (Anwar March 10 2003; Sugiarti 1999:46–48).

Here, the specific crime is to 'encourage others to believe' something. In the 2005 draft, the relevant provision 293 contained different wording: "Any person declaring that he/she possesses mysterious powers (*kekuatan gaib*) ...". Here, the crime is to 'declare' something. In the 2008 draft legislation it is : "Whoever declares that he/she possess mysterious powers (*kekuatan gaib*) ..."

Again, the crime consists in 'declaring' something, rather than harming somebody. In each of these versions, if the accused could not be proven to have confessed, informed, or represented in the manner delineated in the legislation, it would be difficult to see how a prosecution could be successful. In other words, the laws require confession or declaration of supernatural power.

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In Indonesia this draft legislation was criticised for being “not strong enough or rather vague” and because it “*cannot cover all practices of sorcery*” (Sugiarti 1999:49, 50 [italics in original]). Hence, another approach to the problem of sorcery has been to propose legislation directly against sorcery. In order to improve the draft legislation, a legal scholar, Barda Nawawawi suggested that the wording should be changed to: “Whosoever offers or provides assistance to cause death, or mental or physical suffering of another whilst professing to possess sorcery, witchcraft, or other magical strengths ...” (Sugiarti 1999:49). Here, the words ‘provides assistance to cause the death’ in the revision would seem to imply that an act of magic has taken place. Nevertheless, the suggestion has not been adopted.

The most recent draft penal code still focuses on what the alleged witch or sorcerer ‘declares’ (*menyatakan*). It has been drafted according to the usual process, but as the document has not been formally released to the public, the specific details are not available. However, we know from formal announcements that, aside from making adultery and premarital cohabitation illegal, it also contains provisions outlawing the practice of magic. According to press reports, Article 293 now holds that “any person declaring possession of magical powers, informing or encouraging others to believe that by their actions they can cause mental or physical suffering of another person, or offering or providing such services to another person, will be sentenced to a maximum of five years imprisonment or fined at most, category IV (Rp.300,000,000 or A\$29,230).” On 6 March 2013 these provisions were circulated to parliamentarians for discussion and to propose any changes. The major parties have indicated their willingness to complete this process, but it is difficult to get a sense of whether the new criminal code will be legislated. At the time of the killings of ‘sorcerers’ in 1998, in any case, no legal provisions outlawing sorcery existed (and indeed, at the time of writing, none have been enacted).

Community Justice

Evidence suggests then that neither adat nor state law are relevant for understanding motivations for or justifications of these 1998 killings. The killing of a sorcerer is not considered to be a breach of the social code. Far from showing compunction, the killers were proud of their act. They appeared to think that aside from pointing to the fact that the victim was a ‘sorcerer’ the killings did not require any further justification. In order to understand the killings, analysis needs to turn to local justifications.

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Informants rarely attempted to explain why sorcerers should be killed. This is because the need to kill ‘sorcerers’ is so obvious to most informants that, to quote Douglas (2008:76), “its rightness needs no explaining”. Informants managed to convey this point in different ways. The community, said one:

does not like sorcery, because sorcery gives rise to effects which are not good for the community. Amongst other things, a sudden sickness occurs within people who have been affected by sorcery.

Another explained that a ‘sorcerer’ had been “hanged because [the community] was irritated.” There were utilitarian explanations, citing the need to take one life in order to save others: “What we have is the ‘bus system’, the ‘bus driver principle’. Rather than more of the victims being the passengers, it is better that just one person is finished off, killed.” Another analogy is in terms of a disease. An informant explained that his local community had taken action against an alleged sorcerer prior to the 1998 killings: “because sorcerers are considered to be a blight on this village. Emotions were running high because it is considered to be eradicating a germ (*membasmi kuman*). If we let it go, all the more people would die.”

However, most informants did not explore these philosophical avenues to justify or explain killings, and it would be misleading to get caught up in these idiomatic renderings of what remained an ‘obvious’ point—that sorcerers should be killed. This point is the primary motivation for killers.

The secondary incentive to kill is the social pressure to ‘join in’ (*milu-milu*). One killer likened the killing of a ‘sorcerer’ to a family outing to Surabaya. “If an entire family wants to go sightseeing in Surabaya, how would it feel if one of them didn’t join in, how would that feel?” he asked me. In another case, a local community leader insisted repeatedly that in the killing of a ‘sorcerer’, when “everyone hit him, you had to hit him. The main thing was you had to hit him. They were the rules of the agreement (*atarun kesepakatan*). The main thing was ‘you have to hit him hard.’”

This kind of solidarity does not seem to apply to defending the ‘sorcerer’. As noted, contrary to my expectation people accused of being a ‘sorcerer’ are rarely supported by neighbours, family, or friends. Oftentimes, the reason for this is that these are the very people who suspect the ‘sorcerer’. In all the cases I researched only a small minority of the local community was prepared to say that the accusation of sorcery was false. Many local residents did not protect the ‘sorcerer’ precisely because they actively supported the killing.

‘Sorcerers’ are attacked by local residents because it is believed that sorcerers murder surreptitiously. The attacks are pre-emptive or restrictive in

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as much as killing 'sorcerers' is thought to be the only way to stop them from murdering again. Attacks can also be interpreted as vengeance. Often those who lead the killing are related to 'victims' of the sorcerer (and because the victims are usually close to the sorcerer, the leaders are often related to the sorcerer as well). Given the brutality with which 'sorcerers' are attacked—being dragged behind cars, hanged in prominent places, bodies sometimes mutilated—there seems also to be the intention of deterrence.

The killings of 'sorcerers' are thus best understood as a form of community justice or law. Alleged wife-beaters, thieves, rapists and so on are often violently targeted or killed by local residents throughout Indonesia. However, perpetrators of the attacks rarely explicitly justify their actions, aside from pointing to the alleged wrongdoing. Such community justice is pervasive in Banyuwangi.

CHAPTER 6

FEAR AND UNCERTAINTY

If children were one's only hope of immortality, if that immortality could be snatched away ... by human malice, the malice of kith and kin—if that were true, how could one live except in constant hate and suspicion. Was this what lay below the surface? Hate, jealousy, fear?

Elenore Smith Bowen, Return to Laughter

Prior to 1998, at least three local 'sorcerers' had been killed in the village of Tegalgarang. One of these was Tajeri who, as older residents recalled, had been suspected of being a sorcerer in the Dutch colonial period. As described in Chapter Four, he had allegedly ensorcelled a local *kiai* and undergone two shrouded oaths in the 1950s and 1960s. About a year after the second of these, he was physically attacked. A crowd of local people set upon him as he returned from evening prayers. One of the attackers explained:

The people (*rakyat*) did it, the people were just doing their job ... There was excitement and the people came out because people were hitting him. So they just joined in hitting, all those people ... Many of the people, all the mob (*semua massa*) ... There were many excited people. While he was unconscious and lying in the gutter he had covered his private region so people couldn't hit him there ... Everybody went home, they said he was dead. When he regained consciousness, he escaped.

Having survived this first attack, Tajeri continued to live in Tegalgarang through the 1960s. My host-father recalled that the second attack on Tajeri occurred:

one day in the 1970s. [He] didn't die straight away, but was sick for a month, then died. [The killer] was from here, his name was Sis. [He killed Tajeri] alone. [Tajeri] didn't die, he was stomped on with shoes,

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but had internal injuries. He was sick for a long time, at least one month, then he died because ... There was no report [to the authorities] from people here, because they agreed. Tajeri was a big fish, a heavyweight (*kelas kakap, kelas tinggi*). When he died, all of Tegalaring was happy. They just kept their mouths shut; no one reported it, his family was also afraid to report it.

Tegalaring is not unique among the villages of Banyuwangi with respect to the killing of 'sorcerers'. Among the more than 150 interviews I conducted throughout Banyuwangi district, I recorded oral histories from elderly informants who recalled similar attacks dating back to the colonial period. On this basis it could be posited that since at least the 1950s throwing stones on roofs, banishments, shrouded oaths, and the occasional killings of 'sorcerers' have been occurring in an intermittent and geographically dispersed fashion.

In rare cases, the killing is undertaken by an individual, as evidenced by the case of Sis above. Occasionally men with exceedingly violent reputations are hired as killers. In such cases, these men are hired because local residents are afraid to undertake the killing by themselves. As my host father explained it to me it is like a football club hiring a professional footballer. Or, as another informant put it:

If we are unhappy, the community always has hopes for a brave person [to help] ... the community which is injured, [or] the family which is ensorcelled— automatically these people [will ask] each other "who has the courage?" [Someone will respond,] "alright I'll find someone" [courageous to undertake the killing].

Impediments to Killing

The 'sorcerers' killed in 1998 were still only a small minority of people believed to be sorcerers in Banyuwangi. In Tegalaring, for example, at the time of my fieldwork there were at least ten people who were identified by local residents as sorcerers. Furthermore, in almost every village I visited in Banyuwangi, there were still 'sorcerers' living locally. It thus appears that many more survived and continued to live in the district.

Since sorcerers were thought to be an inexorable threat and killing them was acceptable, why were not all the 'sorcerers' killed? The only clear disincentive was that the *aparat* might respond to a killing. The term '*aparat*'

refers to the state and particularly its repressive elements in relation to local communities. *Aparat* is probably best translated as 'the authorities'.

To local residents, the stance of the *aparat* in regards to sorcerer killings appeared ambiguous. Anwar (March 10 2003) suggests that killers of 'sorcerers' did not realise that their actions could attract a response from the *aparat*. Indeed, some informants perceived that the *aparat* sympathised with the killing of 'sorcerers'. Furthermore, as a result of perceiving a sympathetic response by the *aparat*, local residents often pressured village officials to take action against 'sorcerers'. On the other hand, most informants seemed to feel that retribution by the *aparat* would be possible.

Around the time of Independence, sorcerers were apparently killed in larger numbers than usual. In 1965–1966, hundreds of thousands of communists throughout Java, Bali, and other islands were massacred following the coup in Jakarta. During this period, it seems that a large number of 'sorcerers' in Banyuwangi were also killed, mostly by local people. During the so-called 'Mysterious Shootings' (*Petrus*) campaign of 1982–1983, troops supposedly targeted hoodlums (*preman*) throughout Java (Bourchier 1990), yet in Banyuwangi it seems that the troops also targeted a large number of 'sorcerers'.

The 1998 Outbreak

Hasan (otherwise known as 'Asan') was one of the hundred or so victims of the 1998 outbreak. Hasan's fellow residents of Karangrejo Hamlet had long suspected him of being a sorcerer. It was reported that he and his cousin had argued, and following this, his cousin complained that his livestock had died. (It is thought that sorcerers begin their 'art' by practising on livestock before moving on to humans.) Moreover, Hasan was supposedly involved in a dispute between a truck driver and his assistant (*kernet*). According to local residents, the truck driver thought that his assistant had stolen his money and so had paid Hasan to ensorcell the assistant, who subsequently fell sick.

In Karangrejo Hamlet, local residents' suspicions of sorcery were directed at half a dozen or more people, a typical number for a hamlet of this size. Nevertheless, "the entire village feared sorcerers," as one informant, a neighbourhood head (*kepala RW*), explained, so:

There was a community session at the village hall (*balai desa*). The people who were suspected by the community [of sorcery] were Arifin, Bunali,

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Asari, Gojali, Mujaki ... It was hoped that they would be put on the [government's] transmigration scheme so that they would be safe.²⁴

It seems that the meeting was a pretext for some, because subsequently local residents undertook to kill one of these 'sorcerers': Arifin. According to one of the killers who was jailed for the killing:

there was a meeting at the cemetery, but there wasn't enough zeal. The meeting failed because our friends weren't united (*kompak*). The meeting failed, then there was another meeting at the house of Asnawi [a local resident] ... There were more or less three hundred people. Then Asnawi marshalled the community to Arifin's house at seven o'clock. Arifin wasn't there, so the community headed on to Hasan's house ... Before the incident the community was ordered to turn off the lights [in their houses] ... It turned out that [Hasan was] hiding underneath a bed at Basuni's house, without Basuni's knowledge. So the community was angered. Hasan was dragged out of the house, thumped, struck, and knifed ... He was taken to the old sand mine. And there he was hanged. After that the community went home.

These events took place on September 16, 1998. A month later, the police arrested four people, two of whom were eventually sentenced to terms of three years, and the other two to terms of six years.

In many ways, the above account is typical. Killings are characterised by the same pattern of residents banding together, and with widespread support from other residents, killing another local resident whom they believe to be a sorcerer. In about five killings, hired killers from outside the village were used, but even here, the hired killers I met, who claimed to be involved in all five killings, maintained in all but one case that they were joined by local residents.

What accounts for the change from the 'usual' dispersed and randomly infrequent killings, to a large 'outbreak' around September 1998? All of the constraints and motivations to kill had been generally in balance in the 'usual' state of affairs, so for an outbreak of killings to occur, there must have been a change in this balance.

The critical factor, informants asserted, was "*kesempatan*", which roughly equates to "having the opportunity" or "being provided with the opportunity." As my host-father put it, a 'sorcerer' "was marked to be killed and then there

24 Transmigration is the internal migration program in which residents are sent from densely populated areas in inner Indonesia and are given some government assistance in establishing a livelihood in less densely populated areas in outer Indonesia.

was the opportunity". A policeman in Banyuwangi town, reflecting on the outbreak in general, stated that "the community used the opportunity" afforded by the "situation" (*suasana*).

Doubts about the capacity or inclination of the *aparatus* to stop the killings probably arose from three perceptions. First was that *Reformasi* might incorporate violent actions against 'sorcerers'. Second, in relation to the "Radiogram" described below, was that by recording lists of names of 'sorcerers' the government had legitimised their identification and thereby given tacit approval to killings. And third was a sense of lawlessness tied to perceptions that the police were overwhelmed by 'Human Rights' and demonstrations.

Reformasi

Reformasi was closely connected with the outbreak. Again, quoting my host-father, "if there is turbulence in the state, there is an opportunity for the concerns of the many, they look for an opportunity; this was, after all, the opportunity of *Reformasi*."

Reformasi was equated with a lack of state control. When I asked an informant, "Why was that sorcerer killed then? Why not before?", he responded: "*Reformasi*, before *Reformasi* we were waiting for the opportunity. It was like there was no law [during *Reformasi*]." In a similar vein, another informant described how a 'sorcerer' named Jakarya survived prior to *Reformasi*:

J: Jakarya was often traumatised; some people came to him in the rice field wanting to kill him.

NH: Why wasn't he killed?

J: It was before *Reformasi*, it was still secure (*aman*).

Some informants implicitly contrasted the lack of control with the preceding New Order period. One explained that "in '93 [a 'sorcerer'] was exiled, at that time the people wanted to kill [him but] were afraid [of the consequences]". These people perceived a diminution of *aparatus* control during *Reformasi*.

To many villagers *Reformasi* also implied a time for mass action. In Banyuwangi, gatherings of local residents with the aim of exiling 'sorcerers', or destroying their homes, sometimes leading to the killing of 'sorcerers', are often called '*demo*'. For example, while I was doing fieldwork there was one such demo in a nearby village, against a 'sorcerer' who had recently taken up residence there:

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Just like that there was a “demo”. There was contact between *preman* [hoodlums] drinking liquor. After that they organised a mass of people under one of the leaders ... The house [of the ‘sorcerer’] was completely ruined.

The term ‘demo’ is also used to describe local residents massing outside a police station to demand the release of their comrades arrested for killing ‘sorcerers’. As an informant related:

A person had been taken [by the police for the killing of a ‘sorcerer’], so there was solidarity, there was a demonstration ... They had a tough image so that the police would be scared.

Other actions which were considered to be *demo* included incidents televised from the larger cities during *Reformasi* in 1998, such as student marches advocating political reform and also the actions of other groups, which looted, destroyed and razed prominent malls and shops and committed violence against ethnic-Chinese. Those involved in these *Reformasi* demos had ‘got away with it’, so why could not demonstrators against sorcerers get away with it too? Two informants discussing the killings as a form of demonstration, reflected:

HA: There was a mass opportunity.

HH: They said that there was no law.

HA: It was almost the same as a demo, the activities of the mob.

As another put it, more directly, “[the killers of ‘sorcerers’ were] copying what was on TV.”

The important point here is that the killing of ‘sorcerers’ was understood as similar to, or perhaps not even differentiated from, demonstrations in the major cities. *Reformasi* was a time for demonstrating with impunity, and such demonstrations incorporated actions against sorcerers.

The connection with *Reformasi* can be understood further as a popular reaction against injustice. Perhaps the greatest injustice perceived by the people in rural Banyuwangi was not the repressiveness of the Soeharto regime, but the injustice of their neighbour who, for many years, had been practicing sorcery. What the *Reformasi* demonstrations in Jakarta really were about was not relevant. What was important was that local residents saw them in terms of a lack of state control, a time for demonstration, and a time to right past wrongs.

Radiograms

A more immediate catalyst for the killings was the sending of radiograms concerning the official collection of data on suspected sorcerers. In English, 'radiogram' refers to a cabinet containing a radio and record player or to a medical imaging technique. In Indonesia 'radiogram', like telegram, refers to a way of sending messages. However, where telegrams are transmitted through telephony and the message ultimately transferred to paper and delivered by courier, radiograms are sent to the recipient over a dedicated radio channel.

The term 'radiogram' also has a specific meaning in relation to 1998 Banyuwangi. Every day as executive head of Banyuwangi district, the district head (*bupati*), sent around a dozen instructions to the various subdistrict heads (*camat*) via radiogram. Instructions were read out at the district head's office and broadcast over a two-way radio to the various sub-district offices, where the information was simultaneously transcribed by hand. My understanding is that this process was common throughout Indonesia at this time. Nevertheless, radiograms sent by the district head were thought to have spurred the killings. As one informant explained, a local 'sorcerer' was finally killed in 1998 because of the "opportunity of the Bupati collecting data". How can we understand this?

On February 4, it appears that a 'sorcerer' named 'Marno' was killed in Genteng subdistrict. On February 6, 1998, the district head, Purnomo Sidik, sent a radiogram which ultimately led to his ousting. The text of the radiogram, according to one version, was:

...bearing in mind the incidents of houses being destroyed because of sorcery rumours, it is instructed that:

1. There be co-ordination amongst the executive, police, and military subdistrict heads to avoid, as early as possible, the occurrence of incidents.
2. If it is possible appeal to the village and neighbourhood heads, if a citizen has been accused by the community as a sorcerer, that in order to ensure his own safety he relocate himself to a safer place.
3. Report each occurrence to the [*Komando Pengendalian Ketertiban Wilayah*] Post.²⁵

25 This is a translation of a reproduction in the appendix of Manan et al. (2001):. Nomor: 300/70/439.013/1998. (Continued on next page.)

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Another reproduction of the radiogram depicts it as containing two instructions.²⁶ The first instruction was “Coordinate protection for people who are thought to be SORCERERS by the community.” The second was, “If the opportunity arises invite them to move or suggest they transmigrate and provide those who are willing with assistance.” Although the district office acknowledged that a radiogram was sent,²⁷ and permitted me to read it, I was not allowed to copy it.²⁸ However, from my recollection, the intent of the two versions given above corresponds closely to the original.

On September 16, the district head issued a second radiogram, the text of which was similar to the first, but the context differed markedly.²⁹ By

Dari: District head KDH TK II Banyuwangi

Untuk: Camat se Kabupaten Banyuwangi; Pembantu Regent se Kabupaten

Klasifikasi: Penting

AA Memperhatikan kasus terjadinya perusakan dengan isu santet dengan ini diinstruksikan agar:

1. Adakan koordinasi dengan Muspika untuk mencegah sedini mungkin terjadinya peristiwa.
2. Apabila mungkin Sdr menghimbau melalui Kades, RW, RT, apabila ada warga pernah dituduh masyarakat sebagai tukang santet, supaya mengamankan diri pindah ke tempat lain.
3. Laporkan ke setiap kejadian ke Pos Kodat Tibwil.

26 This version was recorded in an unpublished document entitled ‘Laporan *Sementara Kasus Santet Banyuwangi*’ by the NU (TPFNU 1998). Their account of the text is that the instructions were:

1. [koordinasikan perlindungan kepada orang-2 yang oleh masyarakat diduga sebagai DUKUN SANTET]
2. Jika memungkinkan dipersilahkan pindah, atau disarankan untuk Transmigrasi dan akan dibantu kepada mereka yang sedia Transmigrasi.

27 Documents obtainable from the office confirm this. For example, the document ‘Materi *Pertemuan Tentang Pembunuhan Terhadap Orang-Orang Yang Diduga Dukun Santet Di Kabupaten Dati II Banyuwangi*’ records that the district head “sent out a radiogram on February 6, 1998, number 300/070/439.013/1998, to subdistrict heads to raise the level of security”.

28 The official reticence was perhaps due to a feeling that the radiogram might be incriminating in view of the events described here.

29 The district head’s official version of events records the second radiogram (450/1126/439.023/1998 *perihal Perkembangan ... oleh Isu Tukang Sihir*) as containing the following information:

“tanggal 16 September 1998 berdasarkan Radiogram tanggal 16 September 1998 nomor 450/1126/439.023/1998, Bupati Kdh memerintahkan kepada para Camat untuk mendata mereka yang diduga sebagai tukang santet dengan tujuan:

- a. Upaya penyelamatan
- b. Tindakan Pengamanan
- c. Mengadakan upaya persuasif kepada mereka yang merasa dirinya dicurigai agar pindah ke luar Banyuwangi.”

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September, Banyuwangi was in the grip of killings, partly incited by the February radiogram. The text of the radiograms seems to have affirmed that people accused of sorcery are in danger, and should be removed from this danger. Although the text of the two radiograms stressed that alleged sorcerers be protected and encouraged to relocate, the radiograms in fact led to more killings.

The instructions were forwarded to village heads who responded by compiling data about 'sorcerers' and passing this on to the police. In Tegalaring it was the hamlet heads (*kepala dusun*) who made the lists of 'sorcerers'. The Tegalaring village head noted:

the policemen from Rogojampi came, "Who are the people suspected of sorcery?" I feel that is common knowledge, so I would have just listed them. I know who they are, young and old, only too well ... It was just noted by the hamlet heads. This information was noted by the police.

In fact in Tegalaring, only one hamlet head formally recorded the information. This is how he explained it:

R: There was a request that anyone who was suspected, caught in the community spotlight [*sorotan masyarakat*], to possess it ... it did not imply that A possessed sorcery, just that he was spotlighted by the community. [I reported it] verbally, at the [village] office. As I remember it was the police. People who were suspected of possessing sorcery, the police requested information about sorcerers ... Kaderi, Mursid, Abdul, Urip. I recalled four people. There was a letter from the police that those who were suspected of sorcery were requested to come to the police office to be photographed. The term for it was "being called up."

NH: That was after they were listed, right?

R: Yes. There was a police letter calling them up, and I delivered it to those who were involved. He was emotional, he was mad at me, he said that I had listed him there, listed his name, Urip ... He said whatever happened he did not want to agree to being called up, so I said, "It's up to you, I have come and delivered this only because it's my job."

Listing also apparently took place in other villages. A village guidance army officer recalled:

Before the killings, people who were thought to possess sorcery were all called to the subdistrict police stations. People who were photographed,

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they felt surprised that the community knew [they possessed sorcery]. The subdistrict army station (*koramil*) didn't know about it ... After they were photographed, they were given advice.

Thus, in hamlets or villages where the lists were constructed, listed 'sorcerers' received a letter which required their presence at the subdistrict police station. This was apparently to be the first bureaucratic step in assisting them to relocate. I could find no evidence of subsequent steps in the relocation process—such as the preparation of necessary documentation—being undertaken.

Another official response was to convene meetings. For example, in Watukebo:

There was a meeting at the village hall about a month before the killing [of a local 'sorcerer']. From the police, the problem of sorcery, the listing of sorcerers. All the village officials, the neighbourhood heads, and also from the police. The [police gave a lecture, advice].

In specific cases where a 'sorcerer' was processed, local people perceived the letter, visit to the police station, and other official interventions as official recognition of the guilt of the 'sorcerer'. Many interviewees stressed that the 'fact' the 'sorcerer' had been taken to the police office, the subdistrict army base (*koramil*) or the village hall corroborated the 'fact' that the person was a sorcerer. In addition, many informants stated that the sorcerers admitted to their sorcery and were photographed at these locations. When talking about an alleged sorcerer with an informant I asked, "Was there ever any acknowledgment from the person that he possessed sorcery?" An informant explained:

I don't know about any confession. That man had been photographed by the army and the police. All the people who possessed [sorcery] were photographed.

I asked two killers from a neighbouring village why their victim had only been killed in 1998, and not earlier. They replied:

S: Yeah there was the opportunity. There was the listing by the district head.

J: Before the killing occurred there was the listing, they were photographed by the district head.

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There was a perception therefore that the 'sorcerers' had been photographed, and "those who had been photographed there, were the ones who really should be killed." I could locate no police records of photographs of suspected sorcerers, even though the police in my subdistrict and district stations gave me access to all the records that I had requested pertaining to the killings. Moreover, no informants witnessed the photographs and confessions, so their stories were hearsay.

But whether or not a 'sorcerer' was actually photographed, being listed and processed by the *aparat* reinforced local residents' belief that the 'sorcerer' was guilty. Two informants involved in the killing of Hasan of Rogojampi had the impression that either the Armed Forces or the district head had sent out the order: "There was information [*penyuluhan*] in the community that sorcerers should be exiled, transmigrated [*di'tran'kan*] or otherwise as the community saw fit".

In summary, the two radiograms were interpreted as officially permitting attacks on 'sorcerers'. As a killer of Arifin of Segobang stated: "The main thing was the district head gave the order to eliminate sorcerers."

Assessing that although the district head was intending to save the 'sorcerers', but that the radiograms could have the opposite effect, some local officials prudently chose to ignore the instructions. For instance, although one hamlet head in Tegalgarang was compliant, as mentioned earlier, the other four hamlet heads overlooked the radiograms. The head of a neighbouring village recalled that:

The village secretary was asked for data about people who possess sorcery. "Don't send it" I said. I'm a religious man who's not bold enough [to say who possesses] sorcery ... That would be a sin, there's no other [reason].

However, such thoughts or actions seemed to escape notice and did little to discourage their fellow local residents. To my knowledge, such radiograms were only sent in Banyuwangi. Hence, in this district the official attempt to protect 'sorcerers' seems to have been a unique and particularly important factor. The local interpretation of the radiograms may explain why there were more killings in Banyuwangi than in other East Javanese districts in 1998, and why the outbreak of killings in East Java began, as seems to be the case, in Banyuwangi.

Perhaps because the radiograms helped incite the killings, conspiracy theorists and critics of the district head have asserted that the intention was to promote killings by blacklisting and persecuting innocent people.

Local informants, by contrast, perceived it to be a long overdue attempt by the *aparat* to get tough on sorcerers. My sense is that neither is the case. In a press interview (October 15 1998a) and in an interview with me, the former district head insisted that his intention had been to save the alleged sorcerers. He would have gained no personal interest or benefit from the outbreak of killings, the lawlessness of which would have undermined his authority. In issuing the radiograms, he was not moved by altruistic concerns for 'sorcerers' (indeed, I cannot recall anyone I met during fieldwork who was). As a retired military man (like most Soeharto-era district heads), I suspect he did not like the prospect of anything that was not sanctioned (*hal-bal yang tidak diinginkan*) occurring within his jurisdiction. Regardless, it is clear that he lost his office as a result of the killings.

HAM

'HAM' was another factor contributing to a sense of lawlessness. In Indonesia the English concept of 'basic human rights' usually translates as HAM. 'HAM' is an acronym for *Hak* (entitlement or right), *Asasi* (fundamental or basic), and *Manusia* (human). In East Java HAM was interpreted to effectively allow people to kill, with apparent impunity, local individuals identified as sorcerers. If we had to translate, we could interpret HAM in this context to mean something like 'factors that inhibit the police and army from apprehending people'.

My informants perceived that during the outbreak the police and army were either unwilling or unable to respond. Indeed, though they had prior information, the police had apparently not responded to earlier killings. According to local residents the reason for this was HAM. The word 'HAM' obtained a different meaning for my informants than for the elites in Jakarta. Though hard to define, the closest approximation I could arrive at was that the term, as used in Banyuwangi, meant forces which hold the state (*aparatus* or *pemerintah* or, rarely, *negara*) accountable to the people, but which also inhibit officials from reacting to unlawful or violent events. For example, in 1998, fearing that they would be held accountable if they clamped down on the protesters, the police did not react to violent demonstrations against Chinese people. In other words, the police were restrained by their interpretation of HAM. If a policeman did not beat up a detainee who was being held on charges, it might have been because he feared the power of HAM. From this perspective, during *Reformasi* the state feared that preventing local residents from carrying out their actions would be conceived of as a HAM violation. Hence, as a local resident

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explained, the state could not do its job properly because 'after there was HAM, the state was confounded (*bingung*)'.

In Tegalaring, most residents supported the killing of a local 'sorcerer' named Kartiman. Many recalled that, perceiving the prevailing understanding of HAM, local residents took action against this individual. And in Aliyan, when local residents killed a 'sorcerer' named Jair the police arrested suspects but later acquiesced to a mob of local residents who demanded their release. According to local residents the police gave in to the mob because they were afraid of HAM. In both cases the killers had presumed that HAM would effectively stop the police from reacting. Eventually, however, in each case the police eventually arrested and charged several people for these crimes.

A similar situation pertained in the killing of Ashari. Rocks were thrown on Ashari's roof. In some cases, such actions foreboded further violence. Perhaps because of this, Ashari sought refuge in an Islamic boarding school (*pondok pesantren*). As Lili, his daughter, related, 'We could only look for a place [for him], and that was the boarding school of Kiai Mahfud.' However, some local residents threatened Lili; if she did not get her father away from the boarding school they would destroy her house. Her father agreed to leave the boarding school for the Cluring local army base (*Koramil Cluring*). Lili visited the Rogojampi Police Station (*Mapolsek Rogojampi*), but they could only suggest that her father be taken into protective custody. Meanwhile, her father and the *kiai* had returned to the *pondok pesantren* where local residents were waiting. Two trucks went to the boarding school and some local men promised to 'save' Ashari. The head of the boarding school apparently assented.

The local men in the trucks took Ashari back to Karangbendo village. There, as narrated to me by a community leader, local residents:

demo-ed the family [of Ashari], 'he has to be killed, I don't care if I'm put in jail' that [was the opinion of] the community, men and women from two neighbourhoods. It was spontaneous. The Dalmas [District Police Response Team] anticipated it. The Dalmas gave a direction not to be anarchic, not to demonstrate ... The community attacked the Dalmas, the Dalmas was chased ... In the end the Dalmas ran off; the Dalmas disappeared, rather than oppose [the community] in vain, because [the Dalmas] was afraid of HAM.

At this point, some of the men took Ashari to a local bridge where they killed him. Afterwards local men undertook to find another 'sorcerer',

Salam, who had run away. They eventually found him and killed him also. In local perceptions the police had retreated because of their understanding of HAM, which people then interpreted as supporting their 'right' to kill Ashari.

A similar interpretation of HAM can be observed in relation to events in another East Javanese district. In Malang, seven attacks against alleged sorcerers led to nine fatalities and one serious injury in the period November 1999 – January 2000. In one of these attacks, Martawi, his wife Ginah and their son Bukori were killed by local residents of Harjokuncaran village. The police arrested three local residents for the killing. In response other local residents destroyed the local police station. A few months after the events I spoke to Samsul, the Crime Reporter of the *Malang Pos*, the district's newspaper. He related to me that in his opinion the police were too afraid to use real steel bullets against these demonstrators, even though they had the right to.

State Response, Imitation, and Competition

In addition to interpretations of the district head's radiograms, *Reformasi*, and HAM, another contributor to a sense of lawlessness was the perception that the *aparat* had been overcome or won over by supporters of the killers. At the time of the outbreak there was a strong but vaguely defined notion that the *aparat* was unable and / or unwilling to stop the killing of sorcerers, or was possibly even supporting these actions. This notion of lawlessness strengthened the sense of '*kesempatan*' or opportunity. This was constantly repeated by informants, although sometimes with slight variations, as for example: "at that time there wasn't any law" ("*waktu itu sudah ndak ada hukum*") or "at that time they said there wasn't any punishment" ("*waktu itu katanya orang ndak hukuman*"). "*Hukum*" or "*hukuman*" in this context refers to the "law" as it is dispensed by police, army and courts—the *aparat*.

This perception appears to have become more widespread after the killings began. The increase can be traced to the events following the killing of Jair, in Aliyan village on August 18. On September 8 the police arrested four suspects but in response to the arrests the residents of Aliyan protested, and the suspects were released. The territorial police head told the *Jawa Pos* (September 12 1998) that he allowed the suspects to be released because they were not directly involved in the killing. However, local residents' perception was that those responsible for the killings had been released as a result of

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pressure from the protesters. One informant subsequently regretted the outbreak of the killings because he had mistakenly thought the killers could act with impunity when it eventuated they could not. He lamented “As they were released, the killings spread. [The killings] were copied because the killers were released. That was the mistake.” There were several other cases in which the *aparat* was perceived to have succumbed to local pressures. Nevertheless, informants often mentioned “Aliyan” as though it provided the impetus for killings that occurred in their villages. A subdistrict military head reported that the killings “developed from Sukodono [subvillage in Aliyan].”

By allowing the release of the initial suspects, the police defused the demonstration. However, their concession to the demonstrators served to incite further violence against ‘sorcerers’ because, through gossip, the message received by others was that killers of ‘sorcerers’ might ‘get away with it’, or at least might not be seriously pursued by the authorities. On the other hand, it was definitely not interpreted as a ‘green light’; that potential killers might proceed with total impunity. In later cases the killers of alleged sorcerers took precautions such as covering their faces and turning off the lights in their village.

Another further contributor to the perception that the *aparat* had been overcome was the slow reaction of the police. It appeared that ‘sorcerers’ were being killed but no one was getting arrested. Mahmud, one of those who killed Lahat of Songgon, stated that local residents only killed this ‘sorcerer’ when they “saw that others weren’t arrested so we joined in [the outbreak of killings]”. Lili regretted the outbreak because her father had been killed: “If the apparatus had provided protection [to people suspected as sorcerers], there wouldn’t have been an incident...”. The perceived absence of official reaction was taken to be further evidence that the *aparat* might condone the killings or might be powerless to stop them.

Local understandings of the radiograms, *Reformasi*, HAM, and the *aparat* response to the killings thus contributed to a perception that the *aparat* was unwilling or unable to act against the killers. This equated to a specific sense of lawlessness, and provided an opportunity to kill sorcerers and to demonstrate against the arrests of their suspected murderers.

Several other contributing factors may have spurred on the killings. One of these was a widespread perception of an existing outbreak. One informant recalled a sense of killings “flaring up” at the time. Another informant remembered that “Banyuwangi was seething (*ramai-ramai*)” and that his grandparent’s killer and “family and his friends used this opportunity.” This

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sense of outbreak in itself thus contributed to a sense of 'opportunity' to kill 'sorcerers'.

Another factor seems to have been imitation. In the 'usual' state of affairs, killings are sporadic and dispersed; there is no evidence that a killing in one village influences neighbouring villages to take similar steps. However, once the outbreak began, informants explained that they had copied killings of 'sorcerers' perpetrated by fellow villagers and those carried out in neighbouring villages. It thus could be said that the killings started to 'spread': one killing served to inspire another killing. A useful comparison might be the protest and violence associated with the nineteenth-century English Luddite movement: one village's actions appear to have influenced another, spreading in all directions from village to village. The people of Tegalgarang emulated killings that occurred in other villages, particularly proximate villages. Local residents copied or imitated the actions that had been taken in other villages that they heard about through word of mouth and, to a lesser extent, through reading accounts in newspapers.

A final causal factor was a sense of competition or rivalry both within and between villages. Within villages, some informants sought to bolster their status by their involvement in a killing. I came across a case in which a man had boasted of his involvement in a killing and was subsequently arrested and jailed although by all other accounts he had not been involved in the killing. Some informants maintained they would have been thought to be 'chicken' (*wedhi*) or 'transvestites' (*banci*) had they not killed a sorcerer. One informant related that "initially there were killings everywhere, then this village was teased by citizens of [other] villages, they said that the people here were chickens (*wandu*).” However, such accounts of rivalry are probably exaggerated and I only recall hearing such stories from *preman*.

Generally, the influence of imitation and competition was also limited by (mis)conceptions about what had occurred in other villages. Often the inhabitants of one village were (mis)informed about the victims and perpetrators of killings, even in neighbouring villages. Many people felt that it was not sorcerers, but innocent victims who had been killed elsewhere. In fact, the theory developed that ninjas had been killing *kiais*. Hence, imitation and competition probably operated only in cases where would-be killers knew both the killers and victims in the other location. It seems the other causal factors related to *Reformasi* and radiograms were far more significant.

After the Outbreak

What brought this outbreak of violence to a stop? Quite simply the answer seems to have been a police crackdown accompanied by press coverage. The *Jawa Pos* (October 5 1998b) records that the crackdown incorporated local and provincial police forces, with ostensible army support. The crackdown began on October 1 and the killings subsided within a week—the latest killing in the outbreak I have recorded was Srianan of Kalibaru, the westernmost district of Banyuwangi, on October 7. This show of force by the *aparat* thus appears to have halted the outbreak. This provides further evidence that it was a perception of the *aparat's* unwillingness or inability to respond that spurred the outbreak of killings in the first place.

The police did not undertake arrests in all villages where killings occurred. In those villages where they did arrest suspects, on average only three or four perpetrators in each village were arrested, although many others had been involved. It seems that the police were more concerned to show they had the situation under control than to catch all the culprits. As one informant put it “Whoever was easy to arrest was arrested. Why wasn’t everybody arrested?” Another explained that in the killings in his village, “hundreds were involved but only seven were arrested”. Others complained that the police were only looking for bribes. The trials were perfunctory, with up to eight defendants being tried together in a case. Acquittal rates in the Indonesian criminal justice system are low compared to Western nations, and these trials after the outbreak were no exception. According to the court records all but three of over 250 defendants were found guilty and given an average sentence of just over three years. Nevertheless, of those arrested and tried my information indicates many had indeed been involved in the killings.

For most of my informants, the jailing of these men was the greatest injustice of the whole affair—they had merely been protecting the ‘community’. Moreover, it was unfair to single out only a few, when so many had been involved. However, for a tiny minority of local residents, namely the victims of the attacks and killings and the few who sympathised with them, the arrests and trials were a case of too little state intervention too late.

Supporters of the killers had hoped that local sorcerers could be ‘dealt with’ without recrimination from the *aparat*. With *Reformasi*, the radiograms, HAM, and the delayed police response, it seemed their wish had been granted. However, arrests did eventually occur, and state law was reasserted. Local residents maintained that had they known that arrests would follow,

they would not have supported or undertaken the killing. One of my informants who had been jailed for the killing of Arifin of Kabat commented that “up to two or three hundred [people]” were involved in the killing, “because at first [the killings of ‘sorcerers’] were allowed by the police; if they had been arrested, no one would have had the courage.” Arrests and incarcerations eventually did follow. For most informants the killings of 1998 were a *‘tragedi’* because of the arrest and jailing of fathers and husbands for perpetrating the killings, but not because suspected ‘sorcerers’ were killed.

Some even maintained they had been misled. “The *aparatus* didn’t do anything [initially, in response to other, earlier killings],” Supriadi, one of those jailed for the attacks on Padil, Nasir, and Humaidi of Giri insisted. Then he added, “like an idiot [I went along with it], the community said that if it was a mass killing there wasn’t any law [so I] joined in the killing.” Another informant in the northernmost subdistrict of Banyuwangi complained that people “used the opportunity; if only there had been arrests in the south,” there would not have been a problem. Hence, although most informants generally agreed with the killing of the ‘sorcerer’ in their own village, they eventually bemoaned the sense of lawlessness which provided impetus to the outbreak.

There is another reason why the apparent lawlessness was considered with regret. This was a rumour spread in the press and by word of mouth that in other areas it was not only sorcerers who were killed during the outbreak. As sorcery is primarily a local phenomenon, it is rare for ‘sorcerers’ to be known outside the immediate environs of the village. Informants ‘knew’ that the people killed in their village and maybe in neighbouring villages were sorcerers. But there was a perception that outside familiar locales ‘ninjas’ were killing Muslim clerics. Because of all the ‘innocent’ victims in other areas, informants thought that in general the outbreak was a bad thing. So for this reason the sense of lawlessness was also lamented. Nevertheless, the lawlessness was perceived as an opportunity as far as it pertained to the killing of a local ‘sorcerer’ whom villagers knew.

In 1965–1966 a similar sense of opportunity seems to have operated with regard to the massacre of communists and those believed to be or who could be labelled communists. For instance, two alleged sorcerers in Tegalgarang were killed by local residents because, in the words of an informant who was a local *preman*, “the opportunity of the communist massacre was seized ... you have to understand that was an opportunity, it was the massacre of the communist movement.” Furthermore, one of the killers of a local communist recalled, “at that time there was no law.” As in 1998, informants

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recalled a sense of lawlessness and attendant ‘opportunity’ in 1965–1966. This resonates with Beatty’s (1999:77) observation that in Banyuwangi:

during the independence struggle [1945–1949] and the period of lawlessness of the early years of the republic [1949 – early 1950s] and again during the upheavals of the 1960s, ‘anti-social elements’—whether political agitators, criminals, or alleged sorcerers—were disposed of in a general ‘cleansing’.

It thus seems that regime change is associated with instability and the sense of opportunity to kill.

Summary

Violence against ‘sorcerers’ is part of normal life in Banyuwangi. The increase in the frequency of such violence in 1998 resulted from a perception of increased lawlessness and opportunity among local residents who were emboldened by their understandings of several supra-local factors, particularly *Reformasi*, the radiograms, and HAM.

The Indonesian criminal code does not recognise the existence of sorcerers, but local residents ‘know they exist’ and perceive them to be a real danger. For students in Jakarta, *Reformasi* might have been a political reform movement, while for local residents in Banyuwangi *Reformasi* meant a slackening of state control, a time for mass action and a time to right the wrongs that had supposedly been committed by the ‘sorcerers’. For the state, the radiograms were an attempt to protect alleged sorcerers, while for local residents they were evidence that the *aparatus* was finally getting tough on sorcerers. If the police had initially released some of those suspected of the killings of the ‘sorcerers’ because they were not directly involved, the release signified to local residents that the *aparatus* had been overwhelmed by the demonstrators and had capitulated. Furthermore, the ‘sluggishness’ of the police in their response to the killings implied to local residents that the *aparatus* would not, or could not, respond to the killings at all.

For the elites in Jakarta, the killings represented a violation of human rights, for local residents HAM allowed the killings. Indeed, in the wake of the killings, a delegation from the National Commission for Human Rights (Komnas HAM) visited Banyuwangi and found evidence of human rights abuses according to a report in another regional newspaper, the *Surabaya Post*. The *Jawa Pos* quotes one of the delegation as saying: “the National Human Rights Commission absolutely deplores the case of mass butchery in

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Banyuwangi and surrounding areas, because, in this case, HAM violations have been uncovered.”

Lili recalled that Munir, the fearless head of the commission, interviewed her. (Subsequently, on an international flight, Garuda flight attendants working for Munir’s enemies from another case poisoned him and he died.) The delegation apparently construed the killing of Ashari, like the other killings in Banyuwangi, as a human rights abuse.

Local residents fear sorcerers but are uncertain about the state’s response to violence against a ‘sorcerer’. During the 1998 outbreak in Banyuwangi potential killers were cautiously optimistic that they might kill ‘sorcerers’ without retribution from the *aparat*. However, any uncertainty they had regarding the inclination or capacity of the *aparat* to punish killers of ‘sorcerers’ was removed when, finally, there was some concurrence in understanding between the supra-local state forces and local residents. The crackdown at the beginning of October signified for all those involved that the state or *aparat* would no longer tolerate killings of ‘sorcerers’. The sense of ‘opportunity’ was lost, and the outbreak came to a halt. Subsequently, violence against ‘sorcerers’ returned to its ‘usual’ sporadic incidence.

CHAPTER 7

EXPLAINING THE KILLINGS

... we shall want finally to describe that research as a strenuous and devoted attempt to force nature into the conceptual boxes supplied by professional education

Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions

I have made the case that the killings examined in this book have to be understood in relation to local relationships and local perceptions of district and nation-wide events. But could there have been other factors at play? Siegel has argued that the killings were undertaken in the name of the masses in response to a new kind of witchcraft. Other scholars have suggested further reasons for the killings: religious tension; an economic crisis; contention regarding the payment of *dukun*; the loss of belief in the efficacy of the ‘shrouded oath’ ritual; and that at least some victims were mistakenly identified as sorcerers while actually being *kiai*, *guru ngaji*, victims of slander, land-controlling peasants, and / or *dukun*.

Killings Undertaken in the Name of the Masses

Siegel (2001; 2002) takes a post-structuralist approach. In articles and his monograph *Naming the Witch* (2006) he ‘deconstructed’ the meanings of ‘masses’ and ‘witchcraft’ and found that the killings were undertaken in the name of the “*massa*” (masses). This sense of *massa* was constructed during the Soeharto regime and was “a term increasingly used in opposition to ‘the people,’ or *rakyat*, though the actual persons who fall under the term are the same” (Siegel 2001:46). Although Siegel’s reasoning is based on the premise that the term ‘*massa*’ was used in opposition to ‘*rakyat*,’ at no point is an example of such usage provided. In the absence of evidence, we might consider that its usage in the press is what is being referred to. However, reading of contemporaneous newspaper articles reveals that in addition

to the frequent use of *massa*, different terms were used to describe the perpetrators of the killings, such as “hundreds of citizens” (“*ratusan warga*”), and “the public” (“*orang banyak*”). Another possibility is that Siegel referred to local residents’ representations or understandings of the attacks. From my records of interviews it is apparent that while ‘*massa*’ is used frequently, other common terms by which people characterised or referred to the killers included ‘the public’ (*orang banyak*), ‘citizens’ (*warga*), ‘the community’ (*masyarakat*), ‘a collective effort’ (*gabungan bersama*), ‘the village’ (*satu desa*), and ‘*rakyat*’. One example of *rakyat* can be seen in the following usage, when a neighbourhood head described the actions of local residents in forming a large group to kill a sorcerer as the “*rakyat* all busy and excited” (*rakyat beramai-ramai*). In another case a local resident explained “there was a demonstration [against a ‘sorcerer’] by the *rakyat*, with the public [*orang banyak*], with the *rakyat*.” Siegel’s argument being based on the idea that ‘*massa*’ must contrast with ‘*rakyat*’ is damaged, if not contradicted, by the local understanding as held in the area that I did my research that killers of sorcerers belong to the ‘*rakyat*’.

New Form of Witchcraft

It was also proposed by Siegel (2001:30) that a new form of witchcraft was at work: “The sorcerer is not productive but destructive ... But the sorcery that followed the leaving of office of President Suharto surpassed it.” Siegel claimed that this new form of witchcraft left the killers of 1998 with an unbearable feeling of death within them. He wrote, “Why murder? Why is it that, overcome by terror, one kills? I myself am sometimes terrorized” (Siegel 2001:73). He further stated that this feeling is the “human condition”; apparently universal.

While I often sensed that people feared a local ‘sorcerer’, through all my interviews I did not obtain data that equated this fear with the ‘terror’ that is the ‘human condition’. Informants seemed to evince a sense of relief following the removal of the ‘sorcerer’; the only fear that may have arisen after a killing was that of being charged and incarcerated. Siegel’s argument is based on impressionistic data that were not borne out in the ethnographic approach that I employed in my research. The evidence I gathered from the field indicates that there was no new type of sorcerer; that the sorcerers’ alleged practices were the same as before; and that the same patterns of killings operated as they had in previous decades. This outbreak was not driven by a “panic”, whether over a new form of sorcery, witchcraft, or something else.

Religious Tension (Sidel)

Sidel (2006) is a major contributor to the study of violence in this period and has devoted several pages to the 1998 outbreak. While he does not endorse conspiracy theories, there is a misconception in his account. Sidel explained the Banyuwangi outbreak in terms of topography—namely that the killings occurred in mountainous areas, termed “upland frontier zones” (Sidel 2006:148), which are located between areas where traditionalist Muslim beliefs predominate and areas where pre-Islamic beliefs predominate (Sidel 2006:146–153). He characterised the frontiers as “areas of religious tension” (Sidel 2006:146) and explained the killings in terms of this tension.

Most of the killings occurred where the terrain flattens out on the rice plains, and in locations which were closer to the beaches than to any uplands. Even if we accept Sidel’s statement that there is great religious diversity, characterising Banyuwangi as an “area of religious tension” seems difficult to sustain. I saw no evidence of this tension between religions—for instance, even though a small Hindu village was located next to my fieldwork village. Indeed, in one of the few villages where Hindus and Muslims lived side-by-side, I heard of Muslim and Hindu neighbours attending some of each other’s rituals. Within Islam, there has been perennial tensions between different varieties, but this had no significant bearing on the killing of ‘sorcerers’. There was, for example, no killing in the village of Bayu itself, famous in the studies of Beatty (1999) as a place of tension between animistic and puritanical strains of Islam.

Linking the idea of diversity to the killings poses a further problem. Religious tension does not help explain the means of identification of ‘sorcerers’ or the patterns of killings. In most villages where killings occurred, local residents predominantly adhered to a traditionalist form of Islam. In only a single case that I researched was religious diversity clearly apparent. This was in the village of Tegaldlimo, located about as far from the mountains as one can be in Banyuwangi. On this limestone plain in the south, Paiman and Jamirah were killed in July 1998. Both Hindus and Muslims reside in this village, and both Hindus and Muslims united in the killing of Paiman and Jamirah; this may not have been known to Sidel. The identification of sorcerers and the patterns of killing were the same as in other areas where little religious diversity existed. Relating topography, diversity of religious outlooks, and resultant tension with the killings is untenable.

Economic Crisis, Payment to *Dukun*, Lack of Belief in the 'Shrouded Oath'?

Brown (2000:15) and Campbell and Connor (2000) contend the economic downturn associated with *krismon* was an important factor behind the killings. Campbell and Connor (2000:65–6) assert that *krismon* devastated Banyuwangi:

Indonesia was by far the worst affected by the 'Asian Economic Crisis'. Research carried out by the World Bank showed that all areas of Java ranked among the most affected ... [T]here was a scarcity of food due to the drought which had preceded the crisis. These statistics were *particularly* relevant to Banyuwangi ... a predominantly agricultural area, heavily reliant on irrigation ... [T]hose forced to return because of the collapse of construction projects in Surabaya and the rest of Indonesia, and decreased opportunities for agricultural work because of the failure of crops, left a large pool of those either unemployed or underemployed facing hyperinflation.

They also assert that Banyuwangi and nearby areas bore "the brunt of the economic and political crises of the 1990s" (Campbell and Connor 2000:64). Their opinion is echoed by Brown (2000:15), who writes, "The monetary crisis threw many below the poverty line and created despair," and also by Kammen (Tempo 2002). However, it seems the authors have applied what they take to be the general situation of the Indonesian or Javanese economy, and applied it specifically to Banyuwangi, without recourse to local evidence.

My informants' experiences of the period and the available statistical data contradict the idea of a crisis. One informant, Tarhit, who was jailed for the killing of Sapuan of Kabat, maintained that he was "encumbered" (*keberatan*). However, in response to detailed questioning on their experience of *krismon*, most informants explained that things were 'just normal' (*biasa saja*). One person explained that "there was no *krismon* here, everything went along as usual, *krismon* was a *krismon* for the bigwigs; it was a *krismon* of the wealthy" (*krismon orang kaya*). Another stated that things were "just as usual here, we didn't experience an economic [downturn]. It was usual. The farmers farmed, and the traders traded." As a final example, I asked one of the killers in Tegalgarang, "did you experience difficulty during *krismon*?", to which he responded, "No, because I'm a labourer." This is telling, because according to Campbell and Connor, as well as Kammen, as an underemployed agricultural worker, he is one of those who would have

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been most severely affected. If there was a crisis in Banyuwangi of the sort suggested by Campbell and Connor, my informants experienced it as life as usual—many seem to have been unaware of the putative crisis.

Leaving aside how most of my informants understood the *krismon*, the existence of a crisis in Banyuwangi is not strongly supported by available statistics either. There was a significant drop in production, but the statistics do not reflect a “failure of crops” (see Table 1).

Table 1: Rainfall and Crop Production in Banyuwangi 1995–2001

Year	Rainfall (mm)	Rice Production (ton)	Corn Production	Sweet Potato Production
1995	869	692,043	45,730	59,344
1996	1,035	720,783	81,092	64,502
1997	738	637,043	41,423	52,476
1998	1,407	674,138	44,050	59,816
1999	1,807	662,355	41,925	61,790
2000	1,719	683,902	47,946	67,410
2001	1,345	682,131	39,691	72,225

(Kabupaten Banyuwangi 1998; Kabupaten Banyuwangi 1999; Kabupaten Banyuwangi 2002)

Other sectors of the economy of rural Banyuwangi might have been comparatively impervious to the worst effects of the economic downturn because labour exported from Banyuwangi seems more concentrated in Bali with its tourist economy, than in Surabaya. Findings by the Interim Consultative Group on Indonesia (2002:2) suggest “Bali’s tourist industry proved largely resilient, buoyed by an off-setting depreciation of the Rupiah after 1997,” and although there was a drop in 1998 (to the levels of 1995 and 1996), Bali’s resilience and the capacity of workers from Banyuwangi to send or bring money home may have insulated Banyuwangi from *krismon*.

Siegel (2001:78) compliments Campbell and Connor for their “valuable remarks about the impact of the economic crisis on East Java at the time of the killings,” but the applicability of their remarks to Banyuwangi does not appear to be borne out. I would maintain *krismon* had minimal direct effect on villages around Banyuwangi. Villages were poor before *krismon*, poor during, and poor after.

For the sake of argument, we might accept the premise that there was a significant economic downturn in Banyuwangi, but the causal connection between poverty and violence is generally tenuous. The Peasant’s Revolt of

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1391 in England occurred in a time of relative prosperity. The specific cases of a demonstration against ethnic-Chinese shopkeepers and a rice mill in Banyuwangi call into question the applicability of this link between poverty and violence.

In the context of rising food prices and widespread action against Chinese shop-owners, a demonstration against food prices began in Jember on January 12, 1998, and took the form of a convoy of hundreds of motorcycles which ended in Kalibaru, in the extreme west of Banyuwangi, on the border with Jember. The next day Chinese shop-keepers in Kalibaru complied with police advice to sell their produce at cheaper prices in order to avert further demonstrations, although shop-owners in surrounding towns did not follow suit (van Klinken 1998). The relevance of these actions to the contemporary Banyuwangi economy, or the killings, is limited for three reasons.

Firstly, geographically, Kalibaru is equidistant from Banyuwangi and Jember city. The action seems to have originated in Jember (as several other incidents had in that period) and ended in Kalibaru, without spreading onwards into Banyuwangi. If Banyuwangi was suffering acutely from *krismon*, and if there was a link between poverty and violence, then one would assume that the anti-Chinese actions in 1998 would have easily spread. Secondly, the relevance of Chinese-owned shops to the economy of the rural poor is limited because the patronage of these shops is usually limited to wealthier villagers and town-folk. Most villagers patronise vendors in the town markets who are 'indigenous' (*pribumi*), not Chinese. So most villagers are more directly affected by market prices rather than the prices in Chinese-owned shops. Thirdly, these kinds of demonstration were not only a result of *krismon*. They had been occurring sporadically throughout Java even during the years that the economy was performing at its strongest levels in recent memory.

On January 26, 1998 an attack on a rice mill took place in Pakisjati, Kabat. There had been a long simmering antagonism by rice farmers towards owners of local rice mills (*slep*) who had purchased the expensive right to mill rice. The farmers are legally prohibited from having their rice milled by anyone except the millers who own these licences. This issue predated *krismon* and was still simmering while I was doing fieldwork, when there was a large demonstration by owners of illegal mobile rice mills (*grandung*).

If there was a connection between poverty and violence, and Banyuwangi had experienced greater poverty than elsewhere, as has been suggested, we would expect that the demonstrations against Chinese shopkeepers or rice millers would have easily spread through Banyuwangi. However, the

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demonstrations remained confined, whereas the problem of ‘sorcery’, however tenuously connected to the formal economy, grew. So, even if it could be established that there was a meaningful economic downturn in Banyuwangi, significant evidence would be required to demonstrate that this was directly correlated with outbreaks of violence.

E. P. Thompson (1971:76) once noted that in explaining riots historians feel “it is sufficient to mention a bad harvest or a down-turn in trade, and all requirements of historical explanation are satisfied”. The argument that an economic downturn caused the outbreak of killings, in other words, seems to be based on a kind of “understanding of social action” that Sidel labels “simplistic and reductionist” (2001:49), or a simple *post hoc* fallacy. Indonesia’s *krismon* may have indirectly been a causal factor in as much as it contributed to *Reformasi* and local interpretations of *Reformasi* were, as has been demonstrated, a causal factor behind the killings. However, it is very doubtful that *krismon* stands in a direct causal relationship to the outbreak in Banyuwangi.

Campbell and Connor (2000:67) maintain “There is a further contentious issue regarding *dukun*, which may be a reflection of anxiety resulting from economic change: the matter of payment.” This premise helps them draw the conclusion that “the attacks [of 1998] can be understood as an expression of the tensions and contradictions of globalisation and social transformation” (Campbell and Connor 2000:88).³⁰ However, in my research in Banyuwangi, I found nothing that could accord with ‘contention’ or even ‘anxiety’ over such payments. To my knowledge, the way *dukun* are paid, the relatively small amount they are paid, and attitudes towards payment, have not changed in recent memory.

As noted earlier in the book, there is a widespread perception among people in rural Banyuwangi that the shrouded oath was more effective in times past. Some researchers have argued that the shrouded oath could no longer be used by local communities to handle ‘sorcerers’, and consequently people resorted to killing suspected sorcerers. The NU report (Lakpesdam-NU 1998:18) on the killings found:

a new belief has developed lately in the communities of Jember and Banyuwangi, that the shrouded oath cannot dissipate the sorcery (*ilmu santet*) that is possessed by a person. The community became convinced

30 Mahoney (2003) has a different take, contending that “Before 1998, being a *dukun* was a part-time occupation. Now many work full-time and being a *dukun* has become more established as a profession.”

of this matter when they saw so much proof that not one person who was thought to possess sorcery and undertook a shrouded oath died as a result of the oath that they undertook. So the community does not believe in the mechanism of the shrouded oath as a method of proof or punishment of a person who is accused of being a sorcerer (*dukun santet*). In fact, in Jember and Banyuwangi a rumour is spreading that the shrouded oath in fact raises the level of sorcery (*santet*) that is possessed by the person who is given the shrouded oath.

The other NU report also found that the killings occurred because “it was as if the community was stopped from continuing to believe in the culture of the shrouded oath as a final alternative for conflict” (TPFNU 1998:1). The Justice Party’s Fact Finding Team (Partai Keadilan 1999) also reports that “lately a new belief has developed in Jember and Banyuwangi community that the shrouded oath cannot make an individual’s sorcery disappear.” Campbell and Connor cite this fact and reassert that the shrouded oath “ritual suddenly lost its salience” (2000:79–80). Granted, there is widespread scepticism about the shrouded oath currently; however, no evidence, provided either by these researchers or others, indicates that formerly people possessed more belief. All I could ascertain while I was doing fieldwork was that people felt that the supernatural world, shrouded oaths included, had been more powerful in times past. Aside from this, if the shrouded oath really had entirely lost its significance, why have people continued to practise it?

Alleged Sorcerers as *Kiai* or *Guru Ngaji*

Another theory has been that *guru ngaji* or *kiai* (religious leaders) were purposefully targeted in 1998 as part of a conspiracy. Beatty (1999:259) asserts that in the 1998 killings, “many of the victims were Muslim preachers and NU personnel” and that these killings sprang from local suspicions of *kiai* and *guru ngaji*. His evidence is “a presumed link between Islamic expertise and sorcery” (Beatty 1999:259). In a discussion of the Islam of ordinary pious Muslims (what he calls ‘practical Islam’), Beatty (1999:77, 123) observes that piety or expertise in Arabic scripture is associated with ‘sorcery’:

magic is felt to be within the orbit of practical Islam (however it may offend against dogma) as it depends on Arabic spells ... It is symptomatic of this conception of scripture as powerful and manipulable but inscrutable that, in Banyuwangi, there is a popular association (rarely,

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of course, attested in fact) between magical powers, even sorcery, and expertise in Arabic. Two *modins* [callers to prayer] of the past generation in Bayu were reputed to be sorcerers and were blamed for causing numerous deaths. Modin S was eventually killed by a mob; modin P fled and turned into a were-tiger who haunts Alas Purwo the eastern forest. Several descendants of these ‘sorcerers’ were forbidden to learn Koranic recitation by their parents as it would open them to accusations of sorcery.

I found no evidence of any such association in my fieldwork.

Granted, the *mantra* of most spells comes from Arabic, so being able to *ngaji* (pronounce and memorise the Koran and Hadith) is essential to performing magic. For instance, when talking about a sorcerer Soad explained:

S: He could read from the Koran, and so he could study sorcery.

N: When he was young he couldn’t?

S: Yeah he couldn’t because he was still young.

However, ‘sorcerers’ who are devoted to, or skilled in, reading the Koran are thought to be a hypocritical aberration, rather than the norm. For instance, two informants discussed a ‘sorcerer’ who was thought to be outwardly pious, saying:

HH: Did he enjoy worship?

H: Yes.

HH: Could he read the Koran?

H: No.

HH: Did he pretend to enjoy reciting the Koran?

H: It was a mask, so that his nasty side was hidden. His speech was fine, but inside ... he was two-faced, he had a white tongue, but a red heart.

Another informant related about a ‘sorcerer’ that he “prayed routinely, and was observant of his religious duties—that was to cover his secret.” Observance and prayer here are conceived as a smokescreen for ‘sorcery’.

Local residents do not make an ‘association’ between the ability to *ngaji* and sorcery. Amongst the population of rural Banyuwangi much value is placed on learning how to read the Koran; every day young men and women

study how to '*ngaji*'. In fact many people can '*ngaji*', and many are also highly skilled, but they are not identified as 'sorcerers'. Generally, 'sorcerers' are considered capable at *ngaji*, as much as anyone else in the community, the killers of 'sorcerers' included, so there is no pattern with regard to piety and the identification of 'sorcerers'.

From all the data regarding killings I have found no pattern of 'association' with 'expertise' or piety among the victims. In fact, in some cases it was quite the opposite. Tapsir, for instance, "never went to the mosque." Of the alleged sorcerers in Bumo, the village head stated: "as for here, there weren't any who observed the obligatory prayers amongst those who were killed." Another 'sorcerer' "didn't know religion, never attended religious boarding school."

Alleged Sorcerers as Victims of Slander

Another theory is that many 'sorcerers' were victims of scurrilous slander or false accusation (*fitnah*) based on envy or jealousy (*iri*), or vengeance (*dendam*). This has also been proposed, for example, in a *Tempo* investigative piece which reported:

Of the more than 140 cases throughout 1997–1998 and based on an investigation that TEMPO could access (Glagah, Kabat, Tegaldlimo, Rogojampi, and Srono districts), generally, the motives were based on resentment, envy, and slander (Tempo 2002).

Such an idea can be obtained from what informants might say. For example, many informants reported ideas like, "if I don't like someone, I tell other people that he is a sorcerer, it's as simple as that." However, villages are full of rivalries and hatred, and if we used this as a criterion, then almost everybody could have been accused of being a sorcerer. In fact, only a few individuals in any village have such a terrible imputation against their reputation. Although a false accusation seems possible, I have never established a case where a sorcery accusation was a deliberate attempt to falsely undermine an enemy. For example, in order to tarnish the reputation of two of his enemies, a man in Tegalgarang took the unprecedented step of publishing a pamphlet accusing them of corruption and philandering. As much as he seemed to hate them, he did not call them sorcerers. In practice, every accusation I have come across seemed to result from a sincere belief that the accused is a sorcerer. That is to say, even though the accused may also be the object of rivalry or hatred, for an accusation to take hold there needs to be a perception

of an 'abnormal' illness, about which rumours circulate. Given an illness following a dispute, an accusation can easily take hold. I have never come across an accusation in the absence of an 'abnormal' illness, even if there was resentment, envy, and slander.

Sorcerers as Land-Controlling Peasants

At a conference in Indonesia Kammen presented a paper which attracted national interest, although the paper was never published and is not available for citation. In this paper he argued that large landowners were accused of being sorcerers or witches and that the killings were a manifestation of social conflict between the landless and landowners. In the paper, he argued:

1. *Kiai* are large landowners in Banyuwangi;
2. The concentration of land owned by *kiai* has resulted in a large landless population;
3. Prior to the 1998 killings, *kiai* changed their tenancy arrangements with landless labourers;
4. Landless labourers were unhappy with this new arrangement and reacted against it;
5. Instead of targeting *kiai*, the landless labourers targeted land-controlling peasants; so, in conclusion,
6. Land-controlling peasants were the victims of the killings.

Kammen's argument seems to have been conjectural and provisional, as he apparently presented little or no evidence from Banyuwangi to support his premises. *Tempo* (January 14, 2002), undertook an investigation of his conclusion and reported that this investigation:

yielded a conclusion opposite to Kammen's. There was hardly any fact, statement, or supporting data to support his opinion ... In general, the victims' profile was far from your idea of a landowner as described by the professor from the United States ... TEMPO's investigation proves that, only one victim could be considered rich [but he] didn't have an extensive farmland because he was never interested in the farm business. He was lynched by the mob who accused him of being a *santet* practitioner.

My research data, as demonstrated in this book, support these findings, and also contradict the premises as reported in Kammen's argument.

Alleged Sorcerers as *Dukun*

There is a theory that is generally invoked, although not specifically in relation to the 1998 killings, which is that some or all of the people who are alleged to be sorcerers are, in fact, *dukun*. Campbell and Connor (2000:66) assert:

Those who are consulted for more unspecified matters, such as unusual illness or personal problems, are known simply as *dukun*. It is these practitioners who are open to accusations of sorcery, and who are liable to be labelled as *dukun santet*.

Two reasons are advanced in support of this conclusion: ambiguities in the practice of *dukun* and linguistic ambiguities.

Considering ambiguities in practice first, some researchers have proposed that the ambiguous nature of the practice of curing means that most *dukun* are subject to suspicions of being a sorcerer. For instance, it has been argued, “Widespread ambivalence toward *dukun* arises because of the personal nature of their clients’ problems, and the ambiguous nature of the power they control” (Campbell and Connor 2000:67).³¹ Likewise, Nitibaskara asserts that there is an “essential ambiguity surrounding the role and intentions of the *dukun*” (1993:126). These opinions are related to Geertz’s (1960:96) finding:

there is an inherent ambiguity of the *dukun*’s power, trafficking as he does both with God and with devils, able to sicken people as well as to cure them, and engaging both in devout supplications to a high God and in dubious contracts with less elevated spirits—*ndukuni* (to *dukun* someone) means both to cure a person of a disease and to ensorcell a person into having one.

He also writes, “Most *dukuns* will deny that they practice sorcery, but evidently it is not hard to find one who will do it if the price is right” (Geertz 1960:106). The spells *dukun* allegedly use are often thought to call upon supernatural powers other than God, and in some cases involve occult-type things like cards buried at a graveyard. Because of this, piously inclined local residents like my host-father considered *dukun* to be sailing a little close to a heretical or idolatrous wind (*kiai* do not, to my knowledge, suffer from this suspicion of being heretical in their magic power). An indication of this attitude towards *dukun* is reflected in a preference to avoid the term *dukun*

31 Lovric (1986:87) discusses a healer in Bali who also dabbled in sorcery.

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in favour of other euphemisms such as '*paranormal*,' 'old person,' or 'clever person.' In spite of feeling that the powers of *dukun* may be of a dubious provenance, informants did not deem their practice to be any more serious an issue of religious piety than, for example, people visiting cafes and nightclubs (*tempat hiburan*) in the city, or whoring in the country, common as these activities are. Other community members gossiped maliciously about these activities, and yet were not overly aggrieved when the people they knew participated in them. The 'heresy' of the *dukun* does not stop local residents, even the more 'pious', from using his or her services. Furthermore, in no way is this heresy conflated or confused with sorcery, which is always despised, not for its heretical nature, but rather for the fact it causes ill-fortune and death to others. To put it another way, 'sorcerers' are not killed for being heretical but for using magic that harms others.

The case for ambivalence in attitudes toward the practice of *dukun* could be strengthened by the observation that as black and white magic are both under God's power; the difference between the two is only in the intention of the magician. However, for participants in my research, identifying a sorcerer was a serious and difficult issue, while distinguishing a sorcerer from a *dukun* presented no particular or special problem. They were as confident about being able to distinguish a sorcerer from a *dukun* as about being able to distinguish a sorcerer from anyone else.

A final case for ambivalence was sometimes proffered by those who defended a 'sorcerer', mainly sympathetic family members. Sometimes, as described earlier, a person with an 'abnormal' illness approaches the 'sorcerer' for water and the 'sorcerer' provides it. The alleged 'sorcerer' and their sympathisers, maintain that it is merely 'assistance', and providing water does not imply anything. For the accusers, the act of requesting and the subsequent providing of water is perceived as implying that the person who has been requested is a sorcerer.

One informant told me that 'sorcerers' often disguise themselves as *dukun* of various kinds. This would support Nitibaskara's assertion that 'sorcerers' "will be happy to speak of themselves generically as *dukun* with special healing powers" (1993, 126). One such 'sorcerer' was Sudir, who could also help with matchmaking and curing people. Another 'sorcerer' from Kabat was said to have been enlisted to help his local amateur soccer team by deflecting the opposition's shots away from the goal. Further, Yasin from Watukebo (who was also said to be a *kiai* in the *Surabaya Post* (October 12 1998d) although my local informants disagreed with this appellation) was also successful at helping people supernaturally. However, these cases were

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exceptional. In any case, informants perceived the sorcerers to be engaged in two separate activities: white magic and black magic. None of the people known as *dukun* whom I knew or heard about were thought to be dabbling in sorcery. Moreover, all these *dukun* survived through 1998, when alleged sorcerers were being killed everywhere. They held no fears for their safety, and had no need to, because no one around them suspected them of being sorcerers.

The second argument for the confusion between *dukun* and sorcerers is linguistic ambiguity. Nitibaskara has observed that with regard to sorcery practice in Java, “it is not possible, at least in the indigenous terminology to distinguish between benign and malicious practitioners” (Nitibaskara 1993:123). Nitibaskara’s observation seems to be supported by some opinions I collected in the field. Up to this point, I have translated ‘*santet*,’ according to the usage that I have observed in the field, as ‘black magic’ or ‘sorcery.’ Nevertheless, some informants maintained that the ‘real’ meaning of the term ‘*santet*’ referred only to white magic. These people told me that ‘*santet*’ originally referred to love magic, a form of magic that makes people intimate, and ‘hence’ that is the ‘real’ meaning. The informants bemoaned that people currently use the term ‘*santet*’ incorrectly to refer to evil magic. For example, when an informant was talking to me about Jair, a ‘sorcerer’ from Aliyan, he said: “Jair was famous for his *ilmu sibir*. Don’t say ‘*santet*,’ because ‘*santet*’ for people here means love magic, love matters between male and female.” On this basis it might be suggested that people should change their speech habits.

Because of this, one might conclude that somebody who is known as, for example, a *tukang santet* might practice a form of love magic and thus should be considered a white magic practitioner. Conceivably, somebody referring to this person by the phrase ‘*tukang santet*,’ meaning white magic practitioner, might be incorrectly thought to be referring to a sorcerer because ‘*tukang santet*’ can also mean black magic practitioner. In other words, because ‘*santet*’ can refer to both black magic and white magic, ‘*tukang santet*’ could mean healer or sorcerer.

Nitibaskara’s observation has, I believe, three weaknesses. First, even if ‘*santet*’ did at some time refer to love magic, in its most frequent current use it refers to evil magic. When informants talked about language—that is, meta-linguistic topics like how the Osing dialect is ‘inferior’, how children should be made to speak Indonesian, or in this case, how the term ‘*santet*’ should be used—some felt that ‘*santet*’ should refer to love magic. It might be observed then that in conversations about language there was

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some ambiguity or equivocality regarding the word '*santet*.' However, in our normal conversations about other topics (that is, whether Yudi slept with his wife last night, whether Mahfud is stingy, or how Kustari killed someone through 'sorcery'), these same informants used the term *santet* exclusively to refer to black magic. In everyday usage, '*santet*' refers only to black magic, so the theory of some informants that '*santet*' refers to love magic was contradicted not only by others' everyday speech practice, but also often by their own. Second, many informants disagreed with the theory that '*santet*' should be used only to refer to love magic. One commented "'*santet*' and 'sorcery' mean the same thing: disturbing people". Third, the very fact that informants prescribed that people *should* use the word to refer to love magic, indicates that in practice they often, or I would argue, almost always, *do not*. Most people used '*santet*' almost exclusively to refer to black magic, and that is what my informants complained about. If people did not use '*santet*' to refer to black magic, why would informants complain about it? These three objections demonstrate that '*santet*' can be used to distinguish practitioners of black magic in everyday speech.

Nevertheless, for the sake of the argument, it can be granted that there is equivocality in the word '*santet*,' and the ramifications of this should be considered.

Another term that could be construed as equivocating between practitioners of black and white magic is '*dukun*.' The term '*dukun*' is also ambiguous (Wessing 1996:268, 270–1). In some contexts it refers to practitioners of both black and white magic; in other contexts, just to practitioners of white magic. For instance, the word '*dukun*' appears in the phrases '*dukun sibir*' and '*dukun santet*,' which are two of the most common terms for 'sorcerer'. Yet some informants stressed that *dukun* (shaman) help people, and hence the use of the word '*dukun*' in the phrase '*dukun santet*' or '*dukun sibir*' to refer to 'sorcerers' is inappropriate, as it should be used only to refer to practitioners of white magic. One informant insisted I should say "'*tukang santet*' not '*dukun*'; *dukun* help people." Nevertheless, this informant unselfconsciously used the term '*dukun santet*' after reprimanding me. And indeed this is the most common usage; in spite of what informants felt was 'proper' usage.

While there is little equivocation in the terms '*dukun*' or '*santet*' in ordinary usage, there are other terms about which there is more equivocation. '*Ilmu gaib*' can refer to all magic, but, depending on the context, can refer only to black magic as opposed to white magic. There was a time, to take a comparative example from English, when the term 'man' in English could

refer to all humankind (males and females), but could also refer just to males as distinguished from females.

As regards the killing of 'sorcerers', the question is whether the equivocality in the terms '*dukun*,' '*santet*,' or '*ilmu gaib*' could somehow result in an 'innocent' white magic practitioner being 'wrongly' identified. Even if we grant there can be ambiguity or equivocality in some of the terms for 'sorcery', there are other available terms, which unequivocally refer only to black magic or sorcery, and could provide instant clarification.

Aside from the availability of other terms for clarification, the other important factor is context. Context usually demarcates whether in saying 'man' one is referring to all humankind or just males. Similarly context usually indicates which '*santet*' or '*dukun*' or '*ilmu gaib*' is being referred to, particularly if life or death matters arise. Considering the amount of time spent gossiping about 'sorcerers', it is inconceivable that there could be discussions in which there is continued confusion; where, for example, one person is using '*santet*' to refer to a white magic practitioner, while the interlocutor is using the same term to refer to a black magic practitioner. This is particularly the case given that the black magic practitioner people gossip about is usually their neighbour or uncle or workmate.

In summary, there are two arguments that support the conclusion that practitioners of white magic are sometimes mistaken for practitioners of black magic. The first argument centres on putative ambiguities in the practice of *dukun*. The second focuses on linguistic ambiguities. It maintains that there is a linguistic confusion between the terms that refer to black and white magic and concludes that, as a result, white magic practitioners are sometimes incorrectly being identified as black magic practitioners. But the little linguistic equivocality existing around the terms '*dukun*' and '*santet*' is based on a theoretical idea of what language should be, rather than a reflection of how language is actually, practically used. Furthermore, even if there was such ambiguity, the existence of other terms and the particular context of the discussion would clarify the issue. Alleged 'sorcerers' have been killed in Banyuwangi both during periods of outbreak and in times of sporadic, geographically dispersed killings, because their neighbours, family and friends have become convinced over a period of months or years that the 'sorcerers' are using black magic to harm others.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

[T]he frequent instances which might be alleged of holy martyrs whose wounds had been instantly healed, whose strength had been renewed, and whose lost members had miraculously been restored, were extremely convenient for the purpose of removing every difficulty, and of silencing every objection.

Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

Conspiracy theories regarding the outbreak of killings examined in this book were not limited to word-of-mouth gossip in villages on one hand and newspaper reports on the other. In urban areas I visited in Java, all the high-ranking people I met proposed conspiracy theories. In one Banyuwangi subdistrict town, for example, I met the NU subdistrict leader. He had witnessed the killing of Yasin in Kabat and told me that he had reported it to the police, but there had not been any investigation; “That’s why I say that sorcery has a political connection”. (He was mistaken—in fact a man had been arrested and jailed for Yasin’s killing.) Conspiracy theories spread internationally. Many scholars outside of Indonesia adapted elements of conspiracy theories in their depictions of the outbreak. It seems likely that outside of the region itself, without subsequent critical evaluation, the 1998 killings of sorcerers in Banyuwangi would have gone down in the historical record as a conspiracy.

In what follows, I evaluate these theories in light of my own research. As I did little fieldwork outside Banyuwangi, I cannot comment on evidence of a conspiracy in other districts. However, most of the conspiracy theories discussed here refer in whole or in part to Banyuwangi, so the findings of my fieldwork may also be relevant to other districts.

Killings Organised

A number of scholars have argued that the 1998 killings were centrally planned and organised. For Beatty (1999:259), the killings were a form of “Organized terror”, while for Barker (1998:40), the killings were initially local but were then undertaken by “highly organized squads of men”. Thufail (2005:156) writes, “the fact that the killings occurred in various places and that most of the victims were NU *kyai* suggests that these actions were coordinated.” Cribb (2000a:194) concurs: “the apparent similarity of the assassinations, moreover, hinted at a centrally coordinated campaign, as did the evident professionalism of the assassins.” Barton (2002:257) also reports: “Anecdotal accounts [of the killings] spoke of small, well-organized bands of individuals who appeared to be trained militiamen, and of carefully coordinated attacks.”

These ideas can easily be gleaned from the press reports of the period. The *Jawa Pos* (October 1 1998a), for example, recorded that the perpetrators of the killings were “pure masses” (“*massa murni*”), but paid killers soon undertook the killings. A source from the Banyuwangi NU asserted in a *Surabaya Post* (October 14 1998a) article and in a subsequent *Jawa Pos* (October 15 1998d) article that the killings incorporated three stages, with *preman* from outside the village, and *oknum* involved in later stages.

The press advanced other ideas evocative of coordination or organisation, including that the killings of ‘sorcerers’: showed “signs of having been engineered” according to a member of Komnas HAM in the *Jawa Pos* (October 13 1998b); were “undertaken by trained groups under a command,” maintained by an ex-government minister in the *Surabaya Post* (October 12 1998b); were most probably “controlled by people outside Banyuwangi,” the head of the PPP Fact-Finding Team quoted in the *Surabaya Post* (October 15 1998f); were the work of an “intellectual actor (*aktor intelektual*)” who was behind the killings, according to the *Surabaya Post* (November 12 1998) quoting the head of the East Java NU; and were the work of a puppet master according to prominent politician, Amien Rais, as part of an assertion “the Armed Forces must immediately catch the puppet master” in the *Jawa Pos* (October 13 1998b). Gus Dur maintained to the *Jawa Pos* (October 18 1998) reporters that he could identify who the puppet masters were, although he became vague when asked to do so. Furthermore, the *Surabaya Post* (November 21 1998) records that the East Java Military General stated that he would “continue to search for who is the real brains behind the incident (*otak kejadian*) ... [T]o reveal who the puppet master is in this

case is extremely difficult". It was also put that the killings were the result of an elite struggle. The *Surabaya Post* (November 30 1998) recorded that the NU's report on the killings "confirmed the involvement of the political elite in Jakarta in the tragedy;" while in an interview with the *Surabaya Post* (December 3 1998), the head of the East Java NU agreed that the killings were part of a national elite struggle.

Various evidence was put forward for the centrally planned and coordinated nature of the attacks, as discussed below.

Blackouts

The contention that electrical blackouts always preceded killings of 'sorcerers' was presented as proof of conspiracy. For example, the Justice Party's Fact Finding Team wrote:

we conclude [...] attacks and terror were undertaken in a well-planned and organized manner, which involved many parties and organized [*rapi*], because the terrorising was always preceded with a blackout in the entire village.

Similar accounts can be found in the *Jawa Pos* (October 2 1998) report of a victim who was:

butchered by the masses around 1am. At that time, the electricity stopped ... masses who were thought to originate outside the hamlet broke the front glass and window frames of the victim's house.

Cribb (2000a:194) also reports that the assassins frequently "cut electricity to their victims' houses before attacking."

According to my informants and other evidence local people, not external agents, were responsible for any 'blackouts' that occurred. 'Blackouts' were reported, but only in some killings. In most cases, I found no evidence of complete electrical failure or shut down. Rather, certain lights were turned off or broken, while other electrical appliances in the same area, if not the same house, still worked. This was often because local residents turned off the lights in rooms fronting their houses and on their verandas (*teras*). In some cases, local killers switched off the lights or broke the light bulbs themselves. One informant, Muklis, related that, "the killers were the ones who turned them [the lights] off." In the killing of Achmad in Glagah "local people struck the lights". In some cases, local residents did this in response to an order from the local killers. An informant related that in the killing

of Ashari, “the lights were broken, it wasn’t from the centre.” I asked him “Why were there lights turned off here?” He responded “Because there was an order, which means that they were part of the same group as the killers.” In yet other cases, it was a spontaneous gesture of sympathy and support for the killers. In fact, informants often mentioned that lights were turned off as evidence that local residents were united [*kompak*]. For instance, my research assistant asked an ex-village head about the killing in his village “Was it united here?” and the village-head responded, “Yes, it was united, there were many people, the entire village, the lights were turned off.”

I can confirm one case in which all the electricity to a village was shut off. This occurred in Sebogang, where, as already explained, Arifin, Mahfud and Jumali were attacked. Gufron explained that:

the lights were turned off throughout the village. There were commandoes [*ada komando*] not from PLN [the national electricity board] but from several of the commandoes they were all turned off. At the national electricity meter box [for the village]. [These commandoes] were from this village OK.

Whether it was only certain lights, or the entire village blacked out, far from indicating outside orders or conspirators, the turning off of lights demonstrates the extent of communal, local involvement in the killing.

Killers Dressed in Black

Belief that the killings were organised or coordinated was sometimes based on reports of the killers wearing black apparel. The NU’s fact-finding team reported finding “that as many as 253 people were killed by assassins clad in black ninja outfits.” A reporter named Retnowati (October 4 1998) wrote “the killers are usually dressed in black and are well-organised with dozens of them often turning up in trucks”. Hefner (2000:210) concurs that in Banyuwangi “the executions were carried out by black-clad vigilantes, trucked in to remote locales to capture, murder, and dismember their victims.” Cribb (2000a:193) writes that “the killings were attributed by all to shadowy gangs of black-clad masked men who quickly came to be called ‘ninja’”. And Thufail (2005:153) notes that “killings by masked ‘ninja’ figures” spread throughout East Java. The implication seems to be that conspirators had provided these uniforms to professional assassins.

I found little to corroborate the use of black clothes or uniforms. SiaR (December 12 1998), an internet news list devoted to Indonesia, reported

that a Reuters journalist had met someone on a bus who had a relative who had received an order for black clothes. After reporting this, she was allegedly “terrorized” by unknown persons. This chain of hearsay evidence is too remote (the author knew a journalist, who knew someone, who knew someone) to deserve serious attention. Nevertheless, I investigated this possibility, and it led to the one piece of ‘evidence’ that could indicate a conspiracy. An informant, a tailor in a nearby village, had reported that just after a killing in his village:

there was a person who ordered black clothes to be tailored. It was a person from here. The District Army Base Commander. He ordered black clothes, two outfits. It was after the killing [here]. He was from the apparatus. [He ordered] trousers and a shirt. If I’m not mistaken [it was a week after the killing].

I could not corroborate this statement. Even if this testimony were accepted, its significance must be questioned. After all, the outfit was made after most of the killings had occurred. And two outfits would have hardly been sufficient to dress the large numbers of people who were putatively involved in the conspiracy. It is possible they were intended to supplement supplies, but insufficient supplies would indicate that the killings were not properly planned. More discreet ways of secretly organising and perpetrating a killing could be found than asking a local tailor to outfit one in what seemed like an assassin’s apparel. Further, it is not at all certain that the uniforms were ordered for this purpose. The uniforms of Indonesian Democratic Party’s paramilitary (*PDI-P Satgas*) and the clothing worn by Madurese ‘toughs’ (*Sakera*), for example, are also black. The killers’ alleged use of black clothes is also contradicted by my findings. While some killers I spoke to recalled wearing cloth that covered their faces in a ninja-like fashion during the killings, none recounted wearing black apparel.

Lists of Victims

As I noted earlier, it was widely believed that a list of targets for killing had been intentionally created and distributed (see, for instance, Barker 1998:40–41). The *Jawa Pos* (September 28 1998b) reported, for example, that seven people, including an ex-NU village office-holder, had been listed as targets for the killings. Barker (1998:40–41) writes that squads of killers “reportedly select their victims from lists of *dukun santet* prepared by local

government officials.” There are two likely explanations for why such a rumour may have gained currency.

In discussing the first explanation, I need to emphasise a tendency among local residents to speak about sorcerers in a way that would give the impression that such a list existed. When discussing this issue with my research assistant, he put it that “in Tegalaring there were class A, B, and C sorcerers”. This seemed to me to imply that the ‘sorcerers’ had been listed or characterised in such a way (which is reminiscent of the actual or rumoured categorisation of the PKI during the 1965–1966 massacre). When I questioned him about this he explained that some sorcerers were thought to be more powerful (*ampuh*) than others. This was simply a manner of speaking that is common in Banyuwangi, and it does not indicate the existence of a list. As another example, a local official told me about the remaining ‘sorcerers’ in his hamlet: “according to the voice of the masses, the people, according to those data there still are four people who are accused of being sorcerers.” However, by ‘those data’ (*datanya*), he was not referring to an independent list, but rather to what local people were saying about these people—what I have referred to earlier as ‘*informasi masyarakat*’. ‘Knowledge’ of sorcerers transmitted through gossip is often referred to as ‘*informasi*’ or ‘*data*’; perhaps giving the impression that it is derived from a written list.

There is a second explanation for the spreading of the rumour that lists of ‘sorcerers’ had been circulated. As already discussed, in February 1998 the district head of Banyuwangi issued a directive urging that alleged sorcerers be provided with the opportunity to move, in order to escape harm. This involved local officials identifying local residents who were in danger. These events may be the origin of the idea of ‘lists’.

These two reasons may explain why the idea of lists being distributed took hold. However, I have found no evidence that lists were either distributed or unintentionally leaked. Nor is there any evidence that the killers selected victims on the basis of lists. All the evidence I have gathered indicates that the killers were local people who selected their victims on the basis of the victims’ alleged sorcery in their village.

Fundraising and Common Operational Characteristics

Fundraising was also taken as evidence of a conspiracy. For instance, according to the *Surabaya Post* (October 31 1998) the area military chief was quoted as saying that there were five fundraisers (*penyandang dana*) and ten organisers out of more than two-hundred arrested for the killings. However, people

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I knew who were accused of being fundraisers and organisers were merely local residents who collected money to provide some alcohol, cigarettes or cash as expression of local support for, and gratitude to, the killers. Such activities were all undertaken at a local level, and were not coordinated by conspirators outside the villages.

Reports of the killings implied other, common operational characteristics, aside from blackouts, black apparel, lists, and fundraisers. Cribb (2000a:194) records that the assassins frequently:

cut electricity to their victims' houses before attacking, and they seemed to be equipped with maps indicating escape routes. Some were seen carrying communications equipment and were heard to be talking with accents that were not local.

Barker (1998:40) adds that the squads of sorcerer killers used "walky-talkies, hand-signals and maps". In the *Surabaya Post* (October 15 1998f), the head of the PPP Fact-Finding Team is reported as saying:

there are provocateurs who are known to use walky-talkies (radio communication), and their speech is in Indonesian rather than Madurese which is the everyday language in Banyuwangi society.

However, I found no evidence of the use of maps, communications equipment, or non-local accents or languages.

Outsiders

Many press articles claimed that outsiders were involved in the killings, but this was misleading. In only a few cases were there assertions by my informants that outsiders had been involved. The daughter of a victim of one of the killings related in an interview with the *Jawa Pos* (October 12 1998c) that her father had been taken by "people in plain-clothes with whom no one was familiar." Upon reading this report, one might have the impression that mysterious people or outsiders were behind the killing. However, after a period of time establishing trust with this woman, she revealed to me that local residents, including neighbours, were the people who killed her father. Although she revealed the identity of the killers to me, in order to maintain good community relations she was also anxious not to publicly identify them.

In another case, a contact in a village bureaucracy had arranged to accompany my host-father and me to meet a hamlet head who had been

jailed for a killing. After we had driven for about an hour to the village, the contact pulled out at the last minute, so my host-father and I approached the interviewee cold. This man told us he had never been imprisoned and that the killers of the 'sorcerer' were outsiders. In spite of these assertions, his neighbours, a colleague, and also formal documents which I obtained, identified him as one of those involved in the killing, and who had been subsequently jailed.

Finally, the head of Kaligung Village, who seemed very suspicious of me, insisted that it was 'outsiders' who killed Sairi. However, other informants, including the local man Mistari, who had been jailed for Sairi's killing, maintained that only local residents were involved. The circumstances of such assertions regarding the involvement of outsiders call into question such claims.

In these three cases, informants who indicated that 'outsiders' were involved probably did this in order to avoid legal or other repercussions. Their testimony was contradicted by the weight of other data I had collected. Given this it is also probable that the original idea that no one knew the killers, or that the killers were outsiders, can be traced to a wish by certain people to protect themselves or others from possible 'fall out'. In some other cases where informants identified 'outsiders', these 'external' perpetrators all had close ties with the village, though they lived outside it. Regarding the killing of Hasan in Karangrejo, for example, a local neighbourhood head (*kepala RW*) noted that that people from other villages had assisted local residents as "a united group, from all over the place" (*gabungan bersama, dari sini sana*). In Tegalgaring, moreover, a person involved in the killing of Kustari was classed as an 'outsider'. Although he lived in the next village, he had grown up in Tegalgaring, and was the brother of another local man involved in the killing. The head of another village told me that "outside community [members]" (*"masyarakat luar"*) were involved in the killing of a local sorcerer. When questioned who these people were, the village head said that they were from neighbouring villages. He explained that the killing was "what you call a team effort" (*"istilahnya itu kelompok gabungan"*). Clearly, this sense of 'outsider' as being part of a 'team effort' of local residents does not support the conspiratorial idea alluded to in the press reportage. In the majority of cases informants willingly identified the main perpetrators by name. They could do this because the perpetrators were other local people.

Provocateurs!

Press reports regarding the killings made repeated reference to the involvement of provocateurs. The *Surabaya Post* (October 15 1998c) reported the existence of “agitators representing a professional force which activates the masses with sensitive issues.”

While educated Indonesians, including journalists, use the term ‘*provokator*’, with a meaning similar to the English (and originally of course French) word, in my research I came across a second meaning of the term which is roughly similar to ‘leader’. A local army officer, for instance, told me “Salimi was a *provokator*.” Salimi was amongst those who planned the killing of Kustari. He was also a member of the group which unsuccessfully sought Kustari on the first night, but he was not present on the subsequent night when his friends found and killed Kustari. At most, Salimi might be considered a ringleader, or something comparable. He did not and does not have any political connection outside the village; he was not acting on orders from the army. In fact, he does not have any of the attributes which one might associate with the term ‘provocateur’ in English.

As another example, Supriadi, who was jailed for the killing of Padil of Giri, explained, “there weren’t any *provokator*. There were *provokator*, but I was one of these *provokator*. There was a person, several people who heated the situation up.” By ‘*provokator*,’ he simply meant one of these local people who encouraged others to join in the killing. An informant explained that after the killing of Ashari, “many people ran away [from the village]. As far as I know these people who were watching at the time of demonstrating against him [Ashari] were perhaps too vocal, [and were afraid] of being accused as a *provokator*.”

I came across numerous other cases where *provokator* were said to have been involved in the killings, but this term ‘*provokator*’ was used to refer to local people who led the killings. To reiterate, these *provokator* were always other local residents. If the term is used to refer to those local people who led, or were more active or supportive of the killings, then I met many *provokator*. As for shadowy, mysterious agents who provoke local people to undertake killings, no evidence has been forthcoming, and the data I collected directly contradict such involvement.

Oknum and Gantung

The term '*oknum*' means something like 'instigator' or 'secret agent'. The Fact-Finding Team from the Justice Party (Partai Keadilan 1999) reported:

at one place when instigators ('*oknum*') were apprehended by villagers, the police came within five minutes, even though "police usually come within, at the fastest, 30 minutes."

An Australian student's report (Brown 1999:98, 112) recorded that political oknum (*oknum politik*) involved in the killings were:

local military oknum ... these political oknum were only local oknum, that is people who were afraid that their position within the local political structure was threatened by the Reformasi era.

However, I could find no evidence of the involvement of *oknum*.

It has been supposed that a conspiratorial organisation called '*Gantung*' was behind the killings. The *Surabaya Post* (October 5 1998a) reported:

The terrorist action is usually undertaken by ninja-like troops between 18:00–20:00, at the times when residents have not yet begun guarding. This terror takes the form of leaflets from a group which calls [itself] "*Gantung*" ("the anti-sorcery movement"), which threatens *kiai* who protect sorcerers.

No evidence of this leaflet existing has emerged. None of the killers I spoke to identified themselves as belonging to *Gantung*; none of them was involved in printing, distributing, or even mentioned seeing such leaflets.

Traditionalist Muslims, *Guru Ngaji*, and *Kiai* were Targeted

The most common conspiratorial idea, put forward by Barker for example (1998:40), was that the victims of the killings were identified on religious grounds: that they were traditionalist Muslims, generally '*guru ngaji*', or '*kiai*'. I also found this idea in numerous press reports. The *Jawa Pos* (October 12 1998a) recorded that at a rally Gus Dur "touched upon the case of the mass butchering of 'sorcerers' in Banyuwangi because members of the NU were its victims." Aside from 'ordinary' traditionalist Muslims, it was believed that religious leaders, including *guru ngaji* and *kiai*, were targeted. Beatty (1999:259) notes that "Many of the victims were Muslim preachers and NU personnel." Bird (1999:35) records "the pattern of killings by death squads broadened to include a number of obscure Muslim

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preachers almost all from the NU or its new political manifestation, the PKB party”.

The notion that traditionalist Muslims were the victims, although accurate, could be considered to have little significance. There is no doubt that most of the victims were members or aligned with the NU. However, most of the killers were also NU members or supporters. This is not surprising, as most people in rural Banyuwangi consider themselves aligned with the NU. As one informant explained, in his village “those who accused [‘sorcerers’], and those who were accused [of sorcery] were the same,” that is, both groups were followers of the NU. Another put it even more concisely, “NU people killed NU people, so they [the killers and the victims] all were NU people.” Hence, the observation that the majority of victims were members or supporters of the NU is true, but as pertains to a conspiracy against the NU, it has no explanatory value.

As for the idea that *guru ngaji* were targeted, Mahfud of Glagah was said to be *guru ngaji* but it seems close neighbours still suspected he was a sorcerer. I also discovered that another victim, Jamuri of Rogojampi, was said to be a *guru ngaji*. And again, in addition to being a *guru ngaji* he was also thought to be a sorcerer. H Samsul Hadi of Kabat was said to be a *guru ngaji*, a *takmir masjid*, and an NU office bearer. I did not have the opportunity to research this particular case in detail. However, I do not think this evidence establishes the theory that *guru ngaji* were targeted.

Considering the idea that *kiai* were targeted, all the data I have gathered indicate that the victims of the killings in 1998 Banyuwangi were thought by their attackers to be sorcerers, and none was a *kiai*. In meetings I had with local or provincial NU leaders, none could provide me with specific or verifiable evidence of *kiai* being targeted in Banyuwangi. There was one victim of the 1998 killings in Watukebo village—M Said—who was said to be a *kiai*. However, local people I interviewed disagreed with M Said being called a *kiai*. Aside from this, I could find no evidence of *kiai* having been targeted in Banyuwangi.

The *Jawa Pos* (October 14 1998c) notes that outside of Banyuwangi, in the district of Demak, a *kiai* named KH Rochmadi of Donorejo village was killed. The report continues that it is rumoured that the father of the ‘brains’ behind the operation was a victim of KH Rochmadi’s sorcery, and as a result the community ignited. If this report can be believed, it would seem to be that Rochmadi was thought to be a sorcerer as well as a *kiai*.

Aside from traditionalist Muslims generally, *guru ngaji*, and *kiai*, the *Jawa Pos* (September 28 1998b) also mentions a “*takmir masjid*” having

been killed in Pakel village. However, local people do not place any stock in the fact that someone is a *takmir masjid*, because they do not associate this position with particular religious prominence or piety. There are four mosques in my fieldwork location, each with over a dozen *takmir masjid*. If we counted no *kiai*, one *guru ngaji*, and a couple of *takmir masjid*, and even if we allowed for a few more victims in these categories, this evidence would be outweighed by the fact that the vast majority of the hundred or so victims in 1998 Banyuwangi were not thought by local villagers to be *kiai*, or *guru ngaji*, or pious figures.

The idea that victims in Banyuwangi were members of the NU, *kiai*, or *guru ngaji* was vigorously promoted by NU leaders in press reports and in their reports on the killings. Some of the killers of ‘sorcerers’ took issue with this. An informant explained:

In those villages [the victims were killed] because [they] were considered sorcerers. By bringing out the political aspect they [the NU leadership] were just trying to get a response.

Another informant laughingly complained:

In the mass media it was explained that he [a local victim of the killings] was a *guru ngaji*, but he wasn’t, he took care of ducks ... All [the killers and the victim] were NU supporters. The NU [leaders] got it wrong, it was exaggerated and in the end its own supporters [*anak*] were adversely affected. If Gus Dur had not said anything like that, it would have been over.

These informants felt the NU had thus put pressure on the “apparatus” to respond to the killings and arrest the local perpetrators, whereas the police and army might otherwise have been inclined to overlook the killings, as had often previously happened.

An Army Conspiracy?

The idea that an army conspiracy lay behind the killings was widely held. Beatty (1999:259) notes that “Many see the hand of the army in the killings.” A similar idea was propounded in the SiaR internet news source (November 10 1998). Specifically, Special Forces (KOPASSUS) deserters were speculated to be responsible. A SiaR (November 4 1998) article reported that two ninjas caught by “Banyuwangi citizens” were deserters from the elite corps. Apparently, these deserters had stated that Special Forces were

operating in and around Banyuwangi, and “drop outs” from Akabri (The ABRI Academy) were also involved. I do have evidence of several cases in which local soldiers acted against ‘sorcerers’, but this was on their own initiative, in sympathy with other local residents. In one case, superiors (incorrectly) thought that local soldiers were conspirators and detained and questioned them.

Another factor that supposedly pointed to army involvement was the slow response of the authorities, usually identified as the police, to the killings of ‘sorcerers’. The *Surabaya Post* (October 13 1998a) quotes a criminologist who “questioned the actions of the police apparatus: ‘Where have they gone? The impression is that they are letting it go and they are continually late.’”

We could debate whether the army’s response was slow, and if so, whether that is evidence of anything. There were several killings of ‘sorcerers’ in Banyuwangi prior to September 1998. Such a frequency of killings was by no means uncommon in East Java, and generally, as in this case, the army did not respond. By early October, when the total number of killings for the year had reached almost one hundred, the army responded, providing troops to support the police crackdown, in which there were widespread arrests of suspected ‘sorcerer’ killers.

The army involvement was apparently passive, as I have no records of arrests being undertaken by anyone other than police officers. Given the number of killings by the end of September, the army’s response could be defined as ‘slow’. However, I do not think this slowness can be taken as evidence of a conspiracy; rather, it reflects the difficulties in anticipating and stopping killings of ‘sorcerers’.

The Communist Party (PKI) Re-born?

Another conspiracy theory was that descendants of members of the Indonesian Communist Party were targeting traditionalist Muslims who were culpable for the 1965–1966 massacre of communists and suspected communists. Such opinions were ascribed to Islamic groups loyal to President BJ Habibie and to the NU leader in East Java, Hasyim Muzadi (Retnowati October 4 1998). In my fieldwork I came across only one person who voiced the communist conspiracy theory—a district military commander (*Danramil*). He hinted at several conspiracies, one of which incorporated the communists. As I recorded in my field notes, he told me:

he had fasted and meditated, and a name had come to him, then he fasted and meditated again and the place came to him. He went there and there was indeed someone by that name, and that they had just left for Jakarta. That person was classed as a communist (Golongan C). So the killings were most certainly a communist conspiracy.

Aside from this, there were a few random pieces of information that could be taken to support this proposition. Salimi, one of the ringleaders in the killings of Kustari, had been a member of a PKI-aligned dance group (SRIMUDA). However, revenge could not be said to have been the motive for the killing of Kustari because Kustari certainly was not associated with the perpetrators of the 1965–1966 killings of communists. Neither had anyone in Salimi's family been killed or persecuted during those massacres. The only other evidence I could find regarding the role of the PKI would, in fact, indicate the equally implausible conclusion that the PKI was being targeted in 1998: Hasan, who was killed in Karangrejo, was a member of Pemuda Rakyat, the communist party youth group.

While speculating on conspiracy ideas discussed here, foreign reporters and academics seemed sceptical about a communist conspiracy. The PKI was, to all intents and purposes, annihilated after the massacre of the mid-1960s. The 'communist bogey-man' had been invoked many times throughout the history of Soeharto's New Order government, but only as a means of suppressing dissent (BBC News Online 1998). Also, NU leader Gus Dur rejected this conspiracy outright (while insisting that members of Habibie's cabinet were behind the conspiracy) (October 18 1998).

An Anti-Alliance Conspiracy?

Another theory in circulation was that the killings were an attempt to stop an alliance between East Java's most prominent parties, the traditionalist-Muslim PKB and the nationalist PDI-P (Farid 2006:272). As Cribb (2000a:196) suggests, "The targets of the attacks were the rural Islamic teachers who were key supporters" of the traditionalist-Muslim PKB. He finds it is "most plausible" that the killings were intended to warn "grassroots supporters" of the NU organisation's political party, the PKB, against backing the nationalist leader Megawati.

Similarly, Hefner records that "in order to reduce the chances" of a potential alliance between NU leader Gus Dur and nationalist leader Megawati, "Many observers suspected that the goal of the violence was ... to worsen ties" between their respective constituencies—the comparatively

pious NU Muslims and the Muslims with animist beliefs (*abangan*). He continues that the killings were formulated as a “clear attempt to pit NU Muslims” against Muslims with animist beliefs. Hefner compares the killings in Banyuwangi with an incident in another East Javanese district, Situbondo. In this incident, he alleges, provocateurs in black ninja uniforms incited crowds to attack Christian churches and schools and ethnic Chinese property. He proposes that the 1998 killings in Banyuwangi were part of the same “pattern of mysterious killings of Muslims and nominal Muslims” (2000:190–193, 210).

A further justification given for this view is that the killings occurred around the time of the convening of a congress of Megawati’s PDI-P in Bali. Since many of the conference delegates came from Java, and all road and rail traffic passes through Banyuwangi, ‘forces’ opposed to the alliance could be seen to have targeted Banyuwangi for killings. By disrupting the traffic, these forces hoped to disrupt the conference, and undermine the possibility of an alliance.

This theory had some word-of-mouth currency. An influential friend in Banyuwangi told me about three soldiers who had been sent to disrupt the PDI-P congress in Bali. They failed and decided to come to Banyuwangi (which is nearby) and create havoc there. After succeeding in this task they were sent to Aceh and were killed, but not by GAM (the implication is that the Army was trying to cover its tracks by killing its own soldiers).

There was little such speculation in the East Javanese press. A *Jawa Pos* article (October 18 1998) has Gus Dur dismissing the idea, insisting that the conspiracy was directed solely against his organisation’s political party, the PKB. In any case, there are two problems with this particular conspiracy theory. First it relies on the proposition that traditionalist Muslims were targeted by the killings, which I have demonstrated to be of little significance. Second, the PDI-P conference began on October 8, and the last killings I have on record occurred on October 4 and then on October 7. It seems likely that, instead of coming to an end, the killings would have peaked in the days leading up to the conference.

Ninjas ...

Were ninjas the killers of ‘sorcerers’? Beatty (1999:259) contends:

From August to October 1998 more than one hundred ‘witches and warlocks’ throughout the [Banyuwangi] district were targeted by squads of masked, sword-bearing ‘ninjas’.

It has also been thought that these ninjas were targeting *kiai*. Cribb (2000a:182) regards the ninjas as belonging to death squads and claims “black-clothed killers, dubbed *ninja* from their resemblance in appearance to the clandestine warriors of Japan, launched campaigns of kidnapping and assassination against traditional Islamic leaders.”

The origins of this idea seem to lie in the fact that some of the killers wore masks. When I asked one informant “Were there ninjas who joined in the killing?” He responded:

Their clothes were ninjas; their clothes covered their heads. There were about six people who wore *ninja* clothes. The others did not have those clothes. After they killed they drank coffee, they were still wearing the clothes, and then they took them off.

When I posed a similar question to a person from a neighbouring village, he also responded, “Well if I said ‘*ninja*’ they weren’t real *ninja* but, well, people who covered their head.” And finally, an informant who was involved in killings close to the city explained, “Everyone was like *ninja*” and demonstrated by pulling his T-shirt over his face so that only his eyes were showing.

If the press reports are an accurate reflection of the frequency of these kinds of *ninja* sightings and attacks against *ninja*, it seems that the fear that slowly built up from the beginning of October, with sightings and establishment of guards, peaked during the third week of October and abated thereafter.

As explained earlier, many of those who were killed as ninjas were not in black uniforms or masks and seem to have been people stopped by guards at roadblocks; people who either failed to produce proper identification or were mentally-ill drifters. Subsequently, informants in my research also expressed scepticism about the existence of ninjas.

The Plausibility of Conspiracies

The widespread acceptance of conspiracies seems linked to historical memory or opinion that in the past the government secretly used extra-legal violence. During the Soeharto era there were cases of covert army action, such as the *Petrus* killings of the early 1980s, and there was the use of army-financed local militias (allegedly dressed in black like ninjas) in East Timor. It is often presumed that conspiracies exist, that naïve people cannot see the conspiracies, but that educated or informed people are aware of them. With

the assumption that appearances are usually deceiving, much of the media coverage of Indonesian politics and other societal phenomena concerns itself with discussing conspiracies. ‘Politics’ in Indonesia is conceived, to some extent, as conspiratorial and this understanding is also characteristic of the scholarly approach to violent and / or political phenomena in Indonesia. Conspiracies are regularly ‘uncovered’. Commentators in the press as well as scholars suggest grand conspiracies of different kinds.

Looking at violence in Indonesia during the 1996–1997 period Wessel asks “What was behind the violence?” Her finding is that where violence occurred, “people from outside played an important role as the perpetrator of the event.” While Wessel allows that “such reports certainly need further research,” until that research can take place she assumes the existence of a conspiracy (Wessel 2001:67–68). As noted at the outset of this book, I was initially influenced by accounts of the killings in Banyuwangi drawn from newspaper and NGO reports, which were basically rumour and speculation. I presented findings at a postgraduate conference which found that a conspiracy of some kind lay behind the killings (Herriman 1999). At the time, I shared an assumption that there must be something ‘lying behind’ the killings and kept searching for this evidence.

As there is no strong evidence of a conspiracy, it might be countered that, given the secretive nature of these conspiracies, if there were a conspiracy there might not be any verifiable evidence. Sidel (2001:58), for example, sees the “paucity of credible, documented evidence of instigation and orchestration” of conspiracy theories as “understandable.” This kind of reasoning may also have operated in 1998 East Java, wherein a ‘lack’ of evidence of the existence or actions of ninjas, such as their ability to disappear without a trace, was taken as proof of their existence. This implies that if there was a conspiracy there would be no evidence, and given there is no evidence, we should conclude that there was a conspiracy. By the same reasoning we could pose that the CIA, the Elders of Zion, and the Russian Mafia were involved in the killings. If we accept this rationale for belief, we can believe in every single logically possible proposition for which there is no evidence.

Conclusion

The idea that careful, secretive planning lies behind the 1998 outbreak of killings of supposed ‘sorcerers’ in Banyuwangi suffers from serious shortcomings. I have spoken directly with killers, families of victims, witnesses, and other local residents. The evidence I have gathered indicates

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that the killings were undertaken by local people, often neighbours, and sometimes family and friends of the victim. 'Sorcerers' were killed because they were perceived to be killing or seriously injuring people through sorcery. It is only at a local, even neighbourhood level, that some killings could be said to have been organised. Nevertheless, the idea that a conspiracy lay behind the killings proved to be compelling. As already described, convinced that armed ninjas were attacking East Java's Muslim populations, local residents took to the alleys and streets establishing road blocks, apprehending and even killing suspected ninjas.

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... the men and women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs; and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community. On occasion this popular consensus was endorsed by some measure of licence afforded by the authorities. More commonly, the consensus was so strong that it overrode motives of fear or deference.

E.P. Thompson 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century'

In 2001, some years after the outbreak of killings of 'sorcerers' and 'ninjas', I visited Muncar, a fishing town near Tegalgarung. Enda's house had been destroyed several nights earlier because he was suspected of being a sorcerer. Muncar's population is predominantly Madurese, and Enda himself had migrated from Madura in the 1970s. His case was unusual in that he openly received visitors suspected by nearby residents of obtaining black magic services for a fee. Precipitating the attack, however, was the case of Abu, who had married Enda's daughter. The couple had fought. Abu's son came to Enda's house and made trouble. After that Enda's daughter went to Abu's house and smashed windows. So about two weeks to a month before the attack, Abu went to Enda's house and challenged him—"if you are capable then ensorcell me". Following that, Abu fell ill with an enlarged stomach. After Abu died, the community attacked Enda's house, but since Enda and his wife had managed to escape earlier that night, the attackers had to satisfy themselves with destroying their house. The leaders of the attack—referred to as '*komando*' or '*propokator*'—were local *preman*. Subsequently, several attackers were arrested, but in response other local residents demonstrated against their arrest at the police station.

Askuri, one of those who told me about Enda, explained that he himself had led an attack against another local sorcerer, Abas, in 1987. Askuri

implied that a sorcerer friend of Abas had been killed in 1965 during the killing of sorcerers that accompanied the communist massacre, but Abas had survived. As a community leader, Askuri had taken it upon himself to advise Abas to leave the area for his own safety. This Abas did, but afterwards he returned. So Askuri led a group of local residents to kill him. He related that he had the blessing of local authorities and so was not arrested subsequent to carrying out that killing.

Attacks against sorcerers such as the two described here occurred intermittently in Banyuwangi both before and after 1998. They were usually domestic or local in nature; neighbours, family, friends, or other local residents suspected that one among them was a sorcerer, and took retributive action against that person. The attacks were usually supported by a large number of local residents. Arrests seldom occurred, because the authorities were largely sympathetic to such attacks. If there were subsequent arrests, local residents sometimes demonstrated at state offices such as police stations, in order to free those detained. The killings could thus be seen as a form of community justice or law which stands in contrast to the state's legal system. Generally, killers are unsure as to whether the state will respond to an attack on a 'sorcerer'.

The sorcerer killings and ninja phenomena of 1998 assumed national and even international significance. Within Indonesia, commentators drawn from political organisations and parties, NGOs, ministers, and other high-ranking civil society figures assumed that an elite conspiracy, with national political implications, was behind the outbreak. The international media also picked up on these stories and conflated the two phenomena—sorcerer killings in Banyuwangi with the ninja fear. Subsequently, academics also published reports of the two combined outbreaks of killings which also ascribed the cause of the events to a conspiracy or to ninjas.

Sorcery accusations have to be understood primarily in terms of the dynamics of small groups. Small groups are as much an 'economic' or 'emotional' unit as a 'social' unit. Amongst these groups, grumbles and gripes might arise about anything (sexual jealousy/envy, teasing, etc.), but in many cases gripes and grumbles about reciprocal economics underlay accusations. In summary, dissatisfactions arise out of reciprocal relations of family, neighbours, and friends. Mostly, these dissatisfactions can be expressed through gossiping and, rarely, open conflict. But local residents believe that certain people seek secret redress through sorcery; these residents suspect their neighbour, family member or friend to be a 'sorcerer' responsible for

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misfortunes that befall them. Sometimes they group together to attack or kill that 'sorcerer'. Conversely, if you are suspected of being a 'sorcerer' you might be killed by your neighbour, family or friend. Paradoxically, social cohesion is organised around family, neighbours, and friends, yet grievances push some of these people apart. Informants related that social cohesion is so important in the villages that following the killing of a 'sorcerer' relationships had to be maintained.

Thus, persecution, which took the form of a witch-hunt in 1998, has to be understood in terms of macro-historical and also micro-sociological forces. During the *Reformasi* unrest, people had a 'sense of opportunity' and 'took advantage' of the crisis to attack those among them whom they had long suspected of sorcery. By contrast, in the subsequent Ninja phenomenon, attackers killed people they did not know, and about whom they knew nothing. During this outbreak complete strangers were killed. Thus, one outbreak of killings was based on intimate relations, the other was not.

To understand the ninja killings, we also need to turn to the newspapers' representations of conspirators and ninjas. These are reminiscent of what Cohen (1980:9–10) describes as a "moral panic," underlying which is a class struggle. Cohen is concerned with the labelling of groups of people (particularly from lower classes) as deviants or folk devils. Through its agents—the media, the police, and the courts—the ruling class directs suspicion towards the lower classes.

The 1960s England that Cohen described was a comparatively organised, industrialised, and stable society. Radio, newspaper, and television had become major forms of daily communication. The social groups that controlled the broadcast stations and printing presses had pervasive influence over the communication of ideas, and were thus, according to the argument, capable of creating 'folk devils' and a moral panic.

The role that NGOs played in East Java indicates that the development of the rumour did not follow a simple model of the ruling class controlling or influencing a lower class. Moreover, in many East Javanese villages, newspapers were not sold, but they were brought in. The contents were likely to be spread, not only by passing on the paper but, more significantly, by talking. The main difference in East Java was the role of face-to-face communications in covering local, regional, and national events. Awareness of many events, both within and outside a village, was not mediated by the press. *Kabar angin* or 'news spread by the wind' drove the local rumour mills, and information about conspiracy theories and ninja sightings was also transmitted in this fashion. The rumours could spread in a decentralised

manner, through networks of connections (one person meeting and chatting with another).

Regardless of where the rumours emanated from, in the generation of the conspiracy and ninja theories in 1998 it seems that the two forms of communication interacted—the press fed into local gossip, and vice versa. Not only were the conspiracy theories received pre-processed from the media, but they were also generated and interpreted at a local level, and then fed back into the media. This local involvement helps explain the rumours that the state or elite forces were behind the ninjas who were said to be attacking local residents. While in 1960s England, the mass media were “the major promoters of moral panics” against the lower classes (Cohen 1980:xxii), in 1998 East Java suspicion was directed ‘upwards’. This great rumour mill was generated by conjunction of the ‘wind’ of local gossip and the turning of the printing press.

Both outbreaks of killings—of alleged sorcerers and ninjas—were tied with larger-scale dynamics of *Reformasi*. These include the decrease in centralised control which led to local officials acting increasingly autonomously. And where local officials attempted to follow directives from above to stop killings, they were forestalled by demonstrations. Increasing press freedom allowed for conspiracy theories to flourish. All this occurred in a time of apparent uncertainty and rumour, and an explosion of violence.

Understanding the events of 1998, related in this book, is important. If we are to work against the victimisation of witches and sorcerers we must first understand the particular origins and nature of the beliefs that lead to this victimisation. We must try to understand how these beliefs inform actions within the different social environments we are examining. And we must, in the process, avoid confidently imposing analyses—however sophisticated—based on data or information gleaned from metropolitan sources which may in fact reflect, in part, our own common metropolitan interests, preoccupations and patterns of thinking.

The Banyuwangi killings of 1998 continue to inform the literature on witch and sorcerer victimisation in Indonesia and worldwide. But the outbreak did not result from changing cultural understandings of ‘sorcerers’ or ‘the people’, from changes and tensions associated with modernity, or from one of the many conspiracy theories. Archival and long-term field research demonstrates the primarily local origins of this violence towards ‘sorcerers’ and ‘ninjas’. *Reformasi* was understood very differently by politicised students in Jakarta, other urban people who experienced economic grievances, and

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the rural people in Banyuwangi, who were suddenly freer, in their own minds at least, to act on their own interpretations of right and wrong.

There are, of course, limitations in the scope of research I conducted. Although there are indications of dozens of killings in other districts in East Java and Madura in 1998, I have only been concerned with killings in Banyuwangi. Nevertheless, I did spend a short time researching killings in Jember, and similar patterns to Banyuwangi emerged from this data. Newspaper reports about these other districts also reflected this higher than usual frequency of killing. My focus was on killings, not on stoning of rooves, banishments, shrouded oaths and other kinds of anti-sorcerer actions.

There were also limitations in my access to data. My access to archives was hampered by red tape. Obtaining a completely accurate number of victims of killings proved impossible. My research on the ninja phenomenon is based to a significant extent on hearsay and newspaper reports, which were unreliable but clearly played an important role in 'fanning the fires'. No doubt the findings on the ninja phenomenon would be improved by interviewing perpetrators and living victims of this violence. These limitations clearly indicate where further research is vital.

Anthropological research has indicated that in many societies it is usually an 'insider'—someone who is in your family or clan or village, your neighbour, or your 'friend'—who is suspected as a witch or sorcerer (Herriman 2009). In some societies, actions against such a person can be formalised in trials or rituals (Evans-Pritchard 1937). But in many cases, with the suspicion about the sorcerer having simmered for some time, the retributive actions can be 'approved' by the community-at-large based on implicit principles of justice, and then erupt into murder in a more-or-less spontaneous fashion. Moreover, at times these actions can become so frequent that the terms 'outbreak' or 'witch-craze' or a similar term could be applied. To the extent that this is the case, similarities with the 1998 outbreak in Banyuwangi might be drawn. In other words, in other parts of the world similar domestic or local relationships may also serve to explain outbreaks of victimisation against witches and sorcerers.

The 1998 outbreak in Banyuwangi shocked journalists and academics both nationally and internationally. The 'grizzly' murders appeared like a throwback to the witch crazes of Europe—an anachronism in the modern world. Struggling to understand it, they turned to conspiracy theories to explain what they perceived to be an anomaly. Seen from the perspective of villagers in Banyuwangi, killing the local 'sorcerer' meant something different. 1998 provided the opportunity to rid themselves and the village

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of a chronic and ubiquitous danger that came from within. They had feared their family member, neighbour or friend for so long. He haunted their dreams. Though smiling at him and chatting when he came by, they whispered about him after he passed. He had killed and would have killed again had they not acted first.

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WITCH-HUNT AND CONSPIRACY

THE 'NINJA CASE' IN EAST JAVA

NICHOLAS HERRIMAN

This book brings unique insight and prize-winning analysis to an extraordinary story – that of a witch-hunt and 'ninja' craze that swept a region of Java, Indonesia, in 1998. When neighbours, family members and friends believed that one among them was a sorcerer, this suspicion would sometimes culminate in the death of the suspect. In 1998, these sporadic killings turned into an outbreak of violence. Muslim organisations attributed the escalation of these killings to political conspirators, alleging that squads of 'ninjas' were responsible. A paramilitary group (Banser NU) began preparing and training for an onslaught of further violence, while anxious residents throughout East Java established road-side guards. Dozens of suspected ninjas were caught and some were tortured and killed.

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