

Evidence of Police Investigation Procedures as Historical Data: Efforts to Reconstruct Violence Banyuwangi, 1998-1999

Latif Kusairi^{1,2}✉, Dhanang Respati Puguh¹, Yety Rochwulaningsih¹,
Eka Yudha Wibowo³, Adrian Perkasa⁴

¹ Universitas Diponegoro, ✉ latifkusairi2018@gmail.com

² UIN Raden Mas Said

³ Universitas Negeri Semarang

⁴ Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV),

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Abstract: It is Reconstructing the history of mass violence frequently encounters significant methodological challenges due to the scarcity of reliable primary sources, the reluctance of perpetrators and witnesses to disclose past events, and the limited availability of official archives. These challenges are particularly evident in studies of the anti-witchcraft violence that occurred in Banyuwangi, Indonesia, during the late 1990s. This study examines the potential of police investigation records and court archives as alternative primary historical sources for reconstructing episodes of violence when conventional archival materials and oral testimonies are incomplete or inaccessible. Employing the historical method, the research integrates archival research, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography through the analysis of police investigation reports, court proceedings, judicial decisions, and supporting documentary evidence. The findings demonstrate that judicial archives preserve detailed chronological accounts, witness testimonies, suspect interrogations, and material evidence, enabling historians to reconstruct violent events with greater accuracy and to verify information obtained from oral histories. Furthermore, these records reveal dimensions of violence that are frequently absent from public memory and institutional archives. The study contributes to historical methodology by proposing judicial archives as an underutilized yet credible category of primary historical sources for investigating political and communal violence. It also expands the methodological toolkit available to historians by demonstrating how legal documents can complement conventional archival collections and oral history. The findings have broader implications for historical research on violence, transitional justice, and collective memory, particularly in contexts where official state archives remain inaccessible or historical actors are unwilling to provide testimony.

Abstrak: Menulis sejarah kekerasan seringkali menemui kendala dalam pencarian data. Hal ini disebabkan adanya kekhawatiran dan bungkamnya para pelaku untuk mengungkapkan kronologi tentang peristiwa sejarah. Proses pencarian data arsip kadang kala juga tidak banyak ditemukan di lembaga arsip. Di sisi lain, para sejarawan belum begitu familiar terhadap data yang didapat dari pihak berwajib. Rekonstruksi sejarah kekerasan dengan isu dukun santet di Banyuwangi pun juga demikian. Penelusuran data banyak ditemukan kendala seperti pelaku sejarah yang tidak mau menceritakan peristiwa yang terjadi. Peran arsip dari kepolisian dan pengadilan sangat penting, karena dalam berita acara pemeriksaan dan berita pengadilan sudah tertulis. Sejarawan perlu untuk melihat arsip dari pengadilan sebagai salah satu alternatif manakala sejarawan kesulitan dalam mencari data. Pada poin inilah sejarawan harus bisa menjemput arsip tidak hanya terpaku pada lembaga arsip saja, tetapi bisa mencari arsip melalui lembaga seperti pengadilan untuk melihat kronologi dari kekerasan yang terjadi dan sudah diadili di lembaga peradilan. Sejarawan bisa bertindak lebih jauh untuk analisis data dan bisa melihat hasil wawancara yang sudah dilakukan oleh lembaga peradilan. Kajian ini akan membahas tentang peran sejarawan dalam melakukan pencarian data yang berasal dari pengadilan sebagai sumber primer.



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INTRODUCTION

On 23 April 1999, the area surrounding the Banyuwangi District Court on Jalan Adi Sucipto No. 26 was crowded from early morning by hundreds of residents from villages across Banyuwangi. Unlike the political demonstrations that had filled the city before the fall of President Suharto in May 1998, these people gathered to witness the trial of individuals accused of involvement in the anti-witchcraft (*dukun santet*) killings that had terrorized Banyuwangi throughout 1998 (Herriman, 2013). For many local residents, the proceedings represented not merely a criminal trial but a public effort to uncover the truth behind one of the most traumatic episodes in the region's contemporary history. Families of victims, relatives of the accused, journalists, students, religious leaders, and ordinary citizens attended the hearings, transforming the courtroom into a highly visible arena where justice, memory, and public expectations converged.

The Banyuwangi District Court subsequently became the focal point of national attention as it handled a succession of murder cases related to the anti-witchcraft violence between late 1998 and mid-1999. Courtrooms were consistently filled beyond capacity, while journalists, researchers, and human rights observers closely followed the proceedings. These trials emerged as one of Indonesia's earliest legal responses to large-scale communal violence during the Reformasi transition. Beyond determining criminal responsibility, the hearings reflected the state's attempt to restore the rule of law after months of vigilantism by examining witness testimonies, police investigation reports, forensic evidence, and legal arguments presented by both prosecutors and defense attorneys (Siegel, 2001; Hanpalam et al., 2026). Such episodes were not unprecedented in Java, where earlier studies have traced how individual violence developed into collective violence in periods of weakened order, as in coastal Semarang from the colonial period to the revolution (Hartatik et al., 2021).

The sensitivity of the cases required extraordinary administrative and security measures. Judges, prosecutors, court staff, and clerks faced an unprecedented workload because of the number of defendants, the extensive documentation, and intense public scrutiny. Local police and military personnel were deployed inside and outside the courthouse to regulate access, prevent overcrowding, and anticipate possible demonstrations or acts of retaliation involving supporters of either the victims or the accused (Manan et al., 2001). These precautions reflected widespread concern that the judicial pro-

cess itself could reignite communal tensions if not carefully managed.

Among the most closely watched proceedings was the murder trial of Djamuri, a farmer and Qur'anic teacher from Patoman Hamlet, Watukebo Village. Although the hearing formally began at 10:00 a.m., large numbers of villagers had arrived several hours earlier. During the trial, presided over by Chief Judge Made, the court heard witness testimony and reviewed the Police Investigation Report (Kusairi, 2015). One of the most significant testimonies came from Usnan, Djamuri's son, who explained that his father had previously been accused of practicing witchcraft but had publicly taken a Qur'anic oath six months before his death, declaring that he possessed no such knowledge. Following this oath, community suspicion had largely subsided, and earlier attempts to expel Djamuri from the village were abandoned because many residents accepted the oath as sufficient proof of his innocence (Kusairi, 2015).

The Djamuri case illustrates the complex interaction between local belief systems and formal legal institutions during the anti-witchcraft violence. While judicial authorities sought to establish criminal responsibility through legal evidence and witness testimony, the social dynamics surrounding the killings were deeply influenced by rumours, collective fear, and customary mechanisms such as Qur'anic oaths. The courtroom therefore became a space where competing narratives were contested: victims' families demanded justice, whereas many defendants claimed they had acted under intense communal pressure and misinformation. Religious organizations, academics, journalists, and human rights activists likewise debated whether the violence stemmed primarily from belief in witchcraft, political manipulation during the democratic transition, institutional weakness after the collapse of the New Order, or a combination of these factors (Siegel & Beatty, 2000).

For historians, the Banyuwangi court proceedings constitute invaluable primary sources for reconstructing the violence of 1998–1999. Court records preserve witness testimonies, police investigation reports, legal arguments, forensic evidence, and judicial reasoning that document not only how the killings unfolded but also how state institutions attempted to restore constitutional order in the aftermath of collective violence (Hajar et al., 2024). Although the verdicts could not fully heal the trauma and social divisions left by the anti-witchcraft murders, the trials represented an important effort to replace vigilantism with legal accountability

while preserving a detailed historical record of one of Indonesia's most significant episodes of communal violence during the Reformasi transition (Kusairi, 2022).

The court also tried the defendant Sapi'i, who was suspected of being Djamuri's killer. The Police Investigation Report, read aloud by the prosecutor, stated that the Djamuri problem did not end with the Qur'anic oath. Residents, including his neighbors Nurmal and Jamilah, had planned a customary trial for Djamuri, and at that time he was interrogated by residents on charges of being a sorcerer. According to the accusation, Djamuri had once cursed Saroni on the orders of Ja'ani in return for 4,000 rupiah (Arsip Pengadilan Negeri Banyuwangi, 1999). Upon his confession, Djamuri was expelled by the residents, in line with Banyuwangi custom, under which a person who admits to practicing witchcraft is punished by expulsion from the village. However, after a year away from Patoman, Djamuri returned. His return initially caused no trouble for the residents. Djamuri even showed good behavior by becoming a Qur'an teacher in the village, and around 50 children recited the Qur'an with him every afternoon in a small mosque near his house. His relations with his neighbors improved, and he often helped them in business, farming, and celebrations. He also took part in religious activities, including giving the call to prayer in the small mosque when prayer time came, and he frequently offered financial assistance (Arsip Pengadilan Negeri Banyuwangi, 1999).

In July–September 1998, Banyuwangi was shaken by the issue of witchcraft murders. The issue also reached small hamlets like Patoman, where it revived an old wound: the earlier expulsion of the sorcerer Djamuri. At first, some people came to the village to ask about witchcraft. Jumadi and Darno, residents of Patoman, confirmed that a witchcraft case had occurred a year earlier. A person whom Jumadi did not recognize then incited residents by claiming that a sorcerer was a time bomb who would kill residents and cause public unrest (Subekti & Kusairi, 2019). The provocation also claimed that a sorcerer was a person without religion, or even a communist, and that anyone thought to be a sorcerer therefore had to be killed before he could act with mystical power. It further linked witchcraft with the rise of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), so that the sorcerer had to be killed before he could attack residents with magic (Interview with Ainur Rofiq, 8 May 2014).

In this informant's view, the sorcerer killings in Banyuwangi were initially preceded by the issue

of a PKI revival, a label that was then attached to the alleged sorcerers. People became emotional about the supposed re-emergence of the PKI and were provoked to kill those thought to endanger their safety. The PKI issue was also the most effective means of dividing citizens, so that it seemed as if the conflict between Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the PKI were growing again (Lakpesdam NU Banyuwangi, 2012–2016; Subekti & Kusairi, 2019). The unfinished reconciliation between NU and former PKI members made the issue easy to exploit by parties who wanted to create disorder in Banyuwangi. The informant understood the murder in Patoman as an action that began with the issue of the PKI's re-emergence. Thus Jumadi, who had been provoked, notified other residents and made efforts to kill Djamuri on the grounds that he was a "mysterious person."

On Thursday night, 3 September 1998, at 9:00 p.m., as agreed, the residents gathered on a village road not far from Djamuri's house. Jumadi, who felt hurt and had been provoked by someone, assigned tasks to the group. Surprisingly, some people whom the residents did not recognize also offered to help carry out the murder (Siegel, 1983). These outsiders from other villages were called *Gantung*, or paid mobs acting in the name of the anti-sorcery movement. After Jumadi finished his instructions, the crowd moved to Djamuri's house and surrounded it. Someone called for the lights to be turned off, and the electric switches in Djamuri's house and in his neighbor's house were switched off. The house was immediately broken into, and Djamuri was beaten as he was dragged to the back of the house. The defenseless Djamuri continued to be beaten, someone stabbed him, and he was even struck on the head with a river stone. He died on the spot. Not satisfied with his death, the crowd hanged his body from a *bayur* tree with a plastic rope (Arsip Pengadilan Negeri Banyuwangi, 1998, 1999).

Djamuri's wife, Mardiyah, described the killing as sadistic, and she could not bear to look at her husband's body. The next day, the neighbours were reluctant to mourn or help with the burial, so only a few people, most of them relatives of the victim, took part in the funeral. The police at that time only asked that the victim be buried immediately after a doctor, Endrawan of the Gitik Public Health Center (Puskesmas), issued the medical certificate (Arsip Pengadilan Negeri Banyuwangi, 1998).

In October, in line with the investigation of other murder cases, the police also investigated the murder in Patoman. On 16 October 1998, the po-

lice arrested those who had taken part in the killing: Sapi'i, Jumadi, and Darno. Warji, Kabul, and Misbah, residents involved in other killings, were also arrested (Manan et al., 2001).

The trial received wide media attention. This is notable because it was not only the Djamuri case that was heard; for days the Banyuwangi District Court tried one witchcraft case after another (Herriman, 2010). In his statement to the court, Sapi'i said that he had merely joined in, as had his neighbors Warji, Kabul, and Misbah and several other neighbors who ran away before the police arrived. According to the residents, Djamuri had disturbed the balance of life through witchcraft, and killing him was one way to restore peace. Sapi'i's relationship with the victim had been good. However, out of a sense of communal duty to secure peace, the residents made Sapi'i come along on the night of the murder. Nevertheless, Sapi'i was prosecuted at the Banyuwangi District Court for engaging in vigilante action. The prosecution demanded a four-year sentence for him, as for the neighbors who joined in killing Djamuri (Arsip Kejaksaan Negeri Banyuwangi, 1998), but the court sentenced Sapi'i to only two years.

The Djamuri case can be categorized as a pattern in which the killings were not carried out purely by local residents but also by paid crowds known as *Gantung*. These paid crowds also included trained professionals who deliberately created confusion in Banyuwangi and who, in early October 1998, became widely known as "ninja" (Retsikas, 2006).

The account above is a chronology of the violence that occurred in Banyuwangi in the murder of Djamuri. A coherent narrative supported by authentic evidence is present in the record of the murder trial, and the event can be written chronologically through the evidence held at the Banyuwangi District Court. This account is not a single, absolute truth, but the chronology can at least serve as one pattern of historical writing (Kusairi, 2015). This is especially important for the history of violence, where the search for sources often reaches a dead end because people fear speaking truthfully about what was recorded in the collective memory of that time.

METHODS

This study employs the historical method, which consists of four stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Garraghan, 1946; Gottschalk, 1986; Kuntowijoyo, 2013). It is framed by Sartono Kartodirdjo's multidimensional

approach, which treats episodes of collective violence as the product of interacting political, social, cultural, and legal factors, and by an Indonesia-centric perspective.

Sources were gathered from four categories. (1) Judicial and police archives: police investigation reports (*Berita Acara Pemeriksaan*), interrogation records, indictments (e.g., P-29 and P-42, 1998), and court decisions of the Banyuwangi District Court (e.g., No. 416/Pid.B/1998/PN.BWI), together with prosecution files from the Banyuwangi District Attorney's Office and, where available, the Surabaya High Court. (2) Institutional and investigative documents: victim lists and findings of the Nahdlatul Ulama Fact-Finding Team (TPF-NU), reports of the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM), and the House of Representatives Fact-Finding Team (TPF DPR-RI), as well as regional government archives. (3) Contemporary media: *Jawa Pos*, *Kompas*, *Republika*, and *Forum Keadilan* for 1998–1999. (4) *Oral testimonies*: interviews with survivors, witnesses, victims' relatives, village officials, and religious and community leaders, conducted in 2014–2015. Secondary literature on violence, witchcraft, and the Reformasi transition (Herriman, 2007, 2010; Siegel, 2001; Retsikas, 2006; Tilly, 2003) was used to place the findings in context.

External criticism tested the authenticity of each document, including its origin, form, stamps and signatures, and case numbers. Internal criticism assessed credibility by asking who produced the document and for what purpose. Police and court records were treated as institutional sources that reflect the perspective of the investigators and the legal process, so witness statements in them were read as testimony recorded under particular conditions, not as neutral fact. Oral testimonies were evaluated for the memory bias that arises from trauma, fear, and the more than two decades that have passed (Portelli, 1991).

Information was cross-checked among judicial archives, newspapers, investigative reports, and interviews. Judicial records served as a chronological framework against which oral accounts were compared, while oral accounts supplied context absent from the files, such as local beliefs, social tension, and rumour. Discrepancies were noted and discussed in the analysis rather than resolved by privileging one source (Bloch, 1954; Tosh, 2015).

The verified facts were analyzed through the multidimensional approach and Charles Tilly's theory of collective violence, with attention to the relations among local belief, rumour, village officials,

security forces, and legal institutions. The Djamuri murder case (Patoman Hamlet, Watukebo Village, 1998) serves as the illustrative case, supported by comparison with other cases (e.g., Sulaiman, Humaidi, and Ashari). The results are presented analytically and chronologically, moving from the course of the violence in July–October 1998, to the role of village and security apparatus, to the judicial process in 1998–1999.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the New Order regime, violence became a matter of public discourse, and everyday social reality showed the existence of political violence committed by the state. Drawing on Barrett and Kurzman's (2004) study "Globalizing Social Movement Theory: The Case of Eugenics," the relationship between mass movements and the state is not a direct one: society tends to treat violence as the basis of order, while the state acts as though it were merely a judge. As a result, violence in local areas such as Banyuwangi was part of a pattern that existed at the national level. Violence perpetrated by various state apparatuses was "wrapped" in ideology and political hegemony, so that it was considered legitimate in the name of the state. Consequently, when ordinary people committed violence in the name of the country, the victims were publicly ridiculed and condemned by the masses (Human Rights Watch, 1999).

Victims of violence were then also labeled as communists, as belonging to the era of *jus-jusan* (rumor-driven attacks), as belonging to the era of *petrus* (the mysterious shootings of the 1980s), as members of the "security disturbers" (*gerakan pengacau keamanan*) and public vandals, or as political criminals. Although the New Order was eventually overthrown by the Reformasi movement, this pattern of labeling violence persisted. The Banyuwangi case is one example of labeling carried out in the name of combating shamans, or witches (*dukun santet*). This accords with Charles Tilly's (2003) concept of reactive collective violence, that is, violence that arises in response to particular issues and is then carried out by people who act on the basis of labels. Violence does not arise instantaneously, even in a society that holds traditional values of harmony. Sometimes it occurs as a result of outside interference. This pattern is common in many episodes of violence whose victims in the community knew nothing about the root of the violence.

According to Banyuwangi residents, the region had earlier experienced overshadowing vio-

lence. During the Blambangan kingdom, the people of Banyuwangi fought the Dutch colonial government in the *puputan bayu*, which caused many people from Blambangan to die. Only a few residents remained, and they are now known as the Osing. This trauma of invasion is what led the Osing to be unwilling to befriend colonial rulers (Nurullita, 2015).

The G30S/PKI incident remains deeply imprinted in Banyuwangi's collective memory. It was an incident in which the PKI and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) stood against each other, and the local community became involved in it for several reasons. First, the song *Genjer-Genjer*, a work of Banyuwangi culture by M. Arief, caused Banyuwangi to be regarded as an area that continued to oppose the government (Roosa, 2020). Second, the PKI's mass base in Banyuwangi was relatively dominant, and many violent incidents were attributed to the PKI through several events, such as the *Pancasila Jaya* incident in Glagah. This caused community trauma among those who witnessed these events (Subekti & Nurullita, 2023). In 1993, a shift in meaning occurred in the aftermath of G30S/PKI: a shaman was murdered who was said to have killed people through magic. Another factor that made witchcraft in Banyuwangi acquire a negative meaning is the pattern of killing shamans that existed in various regions. In Jember in 1981, for example, 27 people were accused of being shamans and judged by residents. In Sumatra, too, people believed to possess magic were killed because their magic was thought to be used to kill. There were also reports that between August 1990 and February 1993 in East Java, 30 people were killed for allegedly being shamans (Herriman, 2007). Over time, witchcraft came to be regarded as a negative form of knowledge, and mystical culture such as witchcraft then turned negative (*Forum Keadilan*, 2 November 1998). Banyuwangi, long identified with witchcraft in its positive sense, was gradually influenced by this negative view (Kusairi, 2015).

Another case emerged after the witchcraft issue: the "ninja," which also affected residents. On 1 October 1998, *Republika* published a sensational report suggesting that former PKI members had paid their followers to kill shamans in Banyuwangi (nu.or.id, 3 May 2015). This report was misleading, because those killed were NU Qur'anic teachers. Regardless of the headlines in various newspapers, the situation in Banyuwangi at that time was frightening.

October 1998 was a gripping time in Banyuwangi. Every day after sunset the city emptied of

vehicles, with only one or two passing, and the streets were mostly dominated by security forces patrolling every few hours. The villages were likewise quiet because of the issue. People gathered only at the corners and entrances of villages, at the mosque, and at the houses of religious leaders. They were doing nothing but standing guard against mysterious people who were said to be able to vanish and kill their victims within seconds. This mysterious figure was often called a “ninja” (Jaffrey, 2017). The killers were no longer called masked killers, even though both were the same hooded figures. Ninja did not move in groups like the masked killers but alone or in small groups of two to four people, with different tactics. Besides the fear of ninja, the assassins still used the *Gantung* mode to sweep through people suspected of being shamans. Banyuwangi’s nightly activity was paralyzed, and with its economic life stalled the city seemed dead.

The violence in Banyuwangi was also linked to the influence it had on communities’ willingness to speak. In reconciliation work for the victims of 1965 and 1998 carried out by the Research and Human Resource Development Institute of NU (Lakpesdam NU) together with Syarikat Yogyakarta, one researcher lived for months with the families of 1965 and 1998 victims simply to find data on the violence they had experienced (Interview with Daim Dimiyati, 2014). This is understandable, because the public’s memory of the events is deeply imprinted, making data from interviews very difficult to obtain. Alternative sources are therefore needed in writing this history, namely written data from court proceedings.

Examining Violence through the Judiciary

In line with Taufik Abdullah, violence is always associated with vigilante patterns of behavior, which are part of a syndrome of marginalization that has long affected the lower classes. When opportunities opened up through Reformasi, moral outrage surfaced and mass violence occurred. Vigilantism can occur when the state is absent and people administer justice in their own way (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998).

Among government officials, the village officials know best about violence in rural Banyuwangi. They are in direct contact with people’s daily lives, a role reinforced by their position as a symbol of legal representation and the lowest level of state authority (Herriman, 2013). Therefore, when a problem occurs in a village, the village apparatus plays the most important role in resolving it. In rural Banyuwangi in July–September 1998, the issue of *dukun*

santet (shaman witchcraft) was growing. Witchcraft associated with ritual murder became an increasingly common topic of conversation, even when it was combined with a communist label. At the village level, this condition sparked suspicion among residents and even triggered the hunting and killing of accused people (Walter & Neumann Fridman, 2004).

The murders carried out under the witchcraft issue caused many casualties. In Banyuwangi, the *dukun santet* was both hated and feared by society: hated because he was believed able to make people sick and die unnaturally, yet feared. Even so, some people were drawn to becoming sorcerers because, besides being feared, it was also regarded as a livelihood. More tragic still, people who had never had any knowledge of witchcraft were labeled shamans because of slander, revenge, or unclear information (Kusairi et al., 2025a; Woods, 2007).

At first, the murders that occurred in July–August 1998 were considered ordinary murders, committed by local people who had a direct relationship with the victims. When the murders peaked in September, people began to suspect that a conspiracy lay behind them and that the killers were trained people (Kasdi, 1999: 90). In areas with many victims, the village officials were powerless against the brutal actions of the community. In Rogojampi District, for example, TPF-NU records list 19 fatalities (Arsip Tim Pencari Fakta Nahdlatul Ulama [TPF-NU], n.d.), and the village officials were used only as a means of justifying the killings. Before the murders, perpetrators often visited village officials to ask permission to expel people suspected of being shamans or witches, but the victims were then killed. Village officials were used only as symbols of legitimacy for the murders (Kusairi, 2015).

This was the case in the murder of Sulaiman, a resident of Pandarungan Hamlet, Kaligung Village, Rogojampi District. At around 10:00 p.m., the perpetrators took Sulaiman to the house of *kamituwo* (hamlet head) Musairi in Pandarungan, intending to have Musairi expel or try him (*Jawa Pos*, 27 September 1998). However, since Musairi was out of town, there was no law enforcement, and Sulaiman was murdered (Arsip Pengadilan Negeri Banyuwangi, 1999, Case No. Reg. Perk: PDM-482/EPO/BWI/02/1999; Komnas HAM, n.d.). That the case was first brought to the *kamituwo* shows how the apparatus could be used as a marker of legitimacy for violent behavior. In Sulaiman’s case, the village officials were under pressure because they faced resistance from the people who were passing

judgment. At the same time, the officials' inability to control the situation was read by residents as permission to kill.

A similar incident occurred in the murder of Ashari, who was found hanged at the Kalong Bridge (Interview with KH Abdul Fatah, 21 December 1998[sic: 2014]). Before the killing, the perpetrators gathered at the village hall for an illegal meeting (*Jawa Pos*, 26 September 1998). A "trial" before a symbol of local government also took place in Tambong Krajan Village, Kabat District, where H. Samsul Hadi, suspected of practicing witchcraft, died hanged in the courtyard of the village hall (*Jawa Pos*, 27 September 1998). Although the police and village officials had tried to block the crowd, they could not stop it. The same pattern appears in the murder of Sidik, the *takmir* (mosque manager) of the mosque in Pakel Village, Glagah Subdistrict (*Jawa Pos*, 27 September 1998).

At the rural level, there was talk about every murder but no preventive measures. Village officials who should have anticipated the killings were never present to prevent them. The Babinsa (village-level army noncommissioned officer), representing the security apparatus in the village, received little sympathy from the community. The Babinsa's role, so important in the New Order era, disappeared suddenly with Reformasi, and he was used only as a village apparatus fixture. When a villager was killed by *Gantung*, the Babinsa and police came and treated it as a tragedy for the victim's family.

Other evidence indicates that Babinsa personnel were involved in the murder case of Humaidi. Residents of Pakisplampang Hamlet, Pakis Village, Banyuwangi District, saw their houses destroyed by a mob, although Humaidi himself managed to escape. Humaidi's family reported the case to the Dandim (Military District Commander), naming Sukron (a Babinsa) and Sugiyat (Kodim intelligence) as people who took part in the vandalism. This was based on a secret meeting attended by the two men, at which it was said that the killing was ordered by the Banyuwangi Dandim. On 25 September 1998 at 7:30 p.m., the two soldiers, accompanied by ten mobilizers, went to Humaidi's house and attacked it. Because Humaidi was not there, they destroyed the house. The incident resembles one in Rogojampi District, where there are indications of the involvement of a Kodim officer named Guritno and a police officer with the initials IM (Interview with Muchlisin, 11 May 2014).

These events show the powerlessness of village apparatus in anticipating the masses. Killing and hanging in front of the village hall was seen as

approved by village officials. Another case is the murder of Mateha, where the village head allegedly permitted the killing (Kusairi et al., 2025a).

Although not all village officials were powerless, between July and September 1998 villages were often visited by mobs and masked groups. Appeals to the public not to be provoked by the killing issue could not stop it immediately. Another factor was the police's lack of firmness in following up on mass killings, so that mass murder, even using village officials as symbols of legitimacy, kept happening. Community groups that had been under pressure and powerless during the New Order grew stronger and took over the power of the state symbolized by its apparatus. As a result, the government, represented here by the village as its lowest level, became powerless to meet the community's demands.

The role of village officials was not entirely weak in Banyuwangi; in some places the apparatus was firm. This was also influenced by community compliance with officials' appeals not to be provoked by the witchcraft issue. In Jajag District, for example, there were no victims of witchcraft-related murder. Its residents, predominantly Javanese, were very obedient to formal leaders such as village officials (Interview with Ainur Rofiq, 8 May 2014).

In October 1998, residents began to suspect that the mass murders were committed by masked groups or *Gantung*. Village officials responded by mobilizing residents to carry out *Siskamling* (Environmental Security System), that is, the *Pam Swakarsa* system. That month, village officials, already defensive about outsiders entering their villages, became more active in guarding them. On 1 October 1998, the regent, police, and the Commander of Kodam V/Brawijaya appealed to the community to strengthen security through *Siskam-Swakarsa*, and village officials obeyed and broadcast the appeal (*Jawa Pos*, 2 October 1998). From then on, villages partnered with the government to prevent violence through self-defense. The change in attitude of people who had previously been friendly with the assassins or *Gantung* and then turned against them was inseparable from the role of village officials, who had received the appeal from the security apparatus. This was because the assassins were no longer from the village but came from outside deliberately to kill people accused of witchcraft (*Kompas*, 2 October 1998). Village security increased with the help of the security forces, and police officers patrolled the villages almost hourly to check on and protect the community.

These activities also encouraged people to step up their *poskamling* in every village alley and

build barricades at the end of alleys, almost every 50–100 meters. A curfew from 9:00 p.m. was also imposed. A description of these conditions appeared in *Kompas* (see the report below). Residents were on guard and full of tension, carrying sharp weapons, sharpened wood, or other blunt weapons. Rumors of masked people continued, and stories circulated by word of mouth of masked people who were caught but escaped. Bus and truck traffic at night was practically blocked from both the Jember and Situbondo directions. However, reports said that deaths from murder had stopped (*Kompas*, 5 October 1998).

The increased guarding in Banyuwangi also disrupted the economy and politics. Economically, sweeping of trucks carrying necessities from Java to Bali or Nusa Tenggara frightened drivers and hindered distribution. Politically, the heightened security raised concern among PDIP cadres about whether conditions in Banyuwangi would affect the security of the PDIP congress to be held in Bali on 10 October 1998 (Interview with KH Ikcwan, 15 May 2014).

The community's active attitude toward the murders helped the witchcraft cases be resolved quickly. For about two months residents carried out *poskamling*, but afterwards it was rarely done, which indicates that village security against violence was not sustained. The role of village officials shifted from very passive to proactive, owing to stability and cooperation from the central government. Their more active presence in recent times reflects the weakness of the apparatus at that time; only after the witchcraft issue received wide attention from the central government were security commands issued in Banyuwangi (Brown, 1999). From this explanation, the pattern that emerges for writing history is the use of court data. This pattern makes the historical data analytically valuable, through both the pattern of the violence and the written record produced by the courts.

Judicial Archives as Historical Sources for Reconstructing Violence

This study makes several important contributions to the historiography of violence in Indonesia, particularly to historical studies of collective violence during the political transition from the New Order to the Reformasi period. Beyond presenting new empirical findings, it offers a methodological contribution by demonstrating the significance of judicial archives and police investigation records as sources for reconstructing episodes of violence that remain socially and politically sensitive. In histori-

cal methodology, the value of a source is determined not merely by its form but by its ability to provide verifiable evidence that enables historians to reconstruct past events through systematic source criticism and interpretation (Hajar et al., 2024; Halbwachs, 1992). Legal documents should therefore be viewed not only as administrative or judicial records but also as historical evidence reflecting the interactions among state institutions, social actors, and local political dynamics.

The first contribution of this study is its demonstration that police investigation files, prosecution documents, and court proceedings are valuable sources for reconstructing patterns of collective violence. Traditional historiography on the Banyuwangi violence has relied primarily on newspaper reports, oral testimonies, human rights investigations, and political analyses to explain the killings associated with accusations of witchcraft (van Klinken & Barker, 2009). While these sources remain indispensable, they often emphasize macro-political explanations or individual memories shaped by trauma, fear, and the passage of time. By contrast, judicial archives contain chronological records of investigations, witness testimonies, forensic evidence, defendants' statements, and judicial reasoning that together provide a structured reconstruction of historical events (Wieringa, 2023).

Within the historical method, this approach follows the stages of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography proposed by Garraghan (1946), Gottschalk (1986), and Kuntowijoyo (2013). Police and court archives were identified, critically evaluated through external and internal criticism, and interpreted alongside newspapers, government records, and oral testimonies. Through this process, judicial archives function not merely as legal documents but as reliable historical evidence for reconstructing past events.

The findings demonstrate that court proceedings reveal dimensions of violence that are frequently absent from oral narratives. Trial records preserve detailed information on the chronology of attacks, the identities of perpetrators and victims, the circulation of rumours, the role of village officials, police responses, and judicial evaluations of criminal responsibility. These records illustrate how accusations of witchcraft were transformed from individual suspicions into collective acts of violence through social interaction, the spread of rumours, and local political tensions (Kusairi et al., 2025a).

Consequently, this study broadens the range of primary sources available for the study of political violence in Indonesia. It encourages historians

to engage more systematically with legal archives, which remain underexplored historical resources.

The second contribution concerns the theoretical understanding of collective violence. The findings extend Charles Tilly's (2003) theory of collective violence by demonstrating that violence in Banyuwangi cannot be interpreted simply as an irrational or spontaneous response by local communities. Rather, it emerged from the interaction of multiple historical processes operating simultaneously. These included the persistence of historical memories concerning witchcraft accusations, the weakening of state authority during Indonesia's democratic transition, uncertainty surrounding law enforcement, and the ambiguous position of village officials, who stood between representing the state and responding to community demands.

This interpretation suggests that collective violence is historically contingent rather than socially inevitable. Historical memories of earlier conflicts, longstanding cultural beliefs about supernatural practices, and local experiences of insecurity created conditions in which rumours acquired extraordinary political significance. During the institutional uncertainty of the Reformasi transition, these memories interacted with weakened administrative capacity and declining public confidence in law enforcement, enabling localized violence to spread rapidly across Banyuwangi. This study therefore demonstrates that historical memory should be treated not merely as cultural background but as an active historical force shaping collective political behavior.

Furthermore, the research illustrates that local government officials were neither passive observers nor entirely autonomous political actors. Judicial evidence indicates that village leaders frequently experienced competing pressures from state institutions seeking legal order and from community groups demanding immediate action against alleged practitioners of witchcraft. This ambiguous position complicates binary interpretations that portray the state as either fully controlling or entirely absent in episodes of communal violence. Instead, violence emerged through negotiation, institutional failure, and contested forms of authority at the local level. By integrating historical evidence from judicial archives with theories of collective violence, this study enriches broader discussions of the relationship between state legitimacy, local governance, and political transition.

The third contribution is methodological. Historical studies of traumatic violence frequently depend on oral history because many official rec-

ords are incomplete or inaccessible. Oral testimony nevertheless presents important methodological challenges. Survivors may selectively remember events, suppress traumatic experiences, reinterpret the past according to present circumstances, or remain unwilling to discuss sensitive issues. As Portelli (1991) argues, oral testimony reflects not only factual events but also the meanings individuals attach to those experiences. Oral history should therefore not be rejected, but it requires corroboration through other forms of evidence.

This study demonstrates that police investigation reports and judicial archives provide an effective complement to oral history, particularly in post-conflict societies where traumatic memory constrains historical reconstruction. Legal documents preserve witness examinations, investigative procedures, physical evidence, forensic reports, judicial deliberations, and chronological records that remain relatively stable over time. Although these documents also reflect institutional perspectives and therefore require critical evaluation, they enable historians to establish reliable chronological frameworks against which oral narratives can be compared and interpreted. Such triangulation enhances both the reliability and the analytical depth of historical reconstruction.

From the perspective of historical methodology, this approach reflects the principle that historical truth emerges through the critical comparison of diverse categories of evidence rather than dependence on a single source. As Bloch (1954) emphasized in *The Historian's Craft*, historians must interrogate every document critically because every source carries traces of the conditions under which it was produced. Likewise, Tosh (2015) argues that historical interpretation gains credibility when multiple independent sources converge to support a coherent explanation. The integration of judicial archives, police investigation records, newspaper reports, and oral testimonies thus represents a rigorous application of source criticism that strengthens the validity of historical interpretation.

More broadly, this methodological innovation contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship connecting legal history, political history, and conflict studies. It demonstrates that judicial archives possess analytical potential extending far beyond criminal justice, offering historians access to institutional responses, local political interactions, and social conflicts that might otherwise remain obscured. The approach may also be applied to other episodes of communal violence in Indonesia, including those in Poso, Sambas, and Ambon, as well

as in other post-authoritarian settings where legal archives remain underexplored.

Ultimately, this research argues that reconstructing episodes of collective violence requires historians to move beyond conventional documentary sources by incorporating legal archives into the broader corpus of historical evidence. Through the systematic application of historical methods, including heuristics, external and internal criticism, interpretation, and historiography, judicial records become indispensable instruments for understanding not only what happened during episodes of violence but also how institutions documented, interpreted, and responded to those events. In doing so, this study contributes to Indonesian historiography, to theories of collective violence, and to the methodological development of historical research on conflict and political transition.

CONCLUSION

This study makes a significant contribution to the historiography of violence in Indonesia by applying the multidimensional historical approach proposed by Sartono Kartodirdjo. Grounded in an Indonesia-centric perspective, it not only reconstructs the chronology of the 1998–1999 witchcraft-related violence (*dukun santet* accusations) in Banyuwangi but also explains the interrelationship among the political transition of the Reformasi era, local cultural beliefs, state responses, and legal processes. By integrating political, social, cultural, and legal dimensions, the research demonstrates that episodes of collective violence cannot be understood as isolated events but as the product of multiple interacting factors. The study thereby enriches the historiography of violence in Indonesia by offering a more comprehensive reconstruction of conflict during the country's democratic transition.

The principal contribution of this research lies in its use of judicial archives as primary historical sources. Unlike previous studies that have relied predominantly on newspaper reports and oral history, this study draws on police investigation files, interrogation records, indictments, court verdicts, archives of the Banyuwangi District Court and the Surabaya High Court, archives of the East Java Regional Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (PWNU), documents of the House of Representatives Fact-Finding Team (TPF DPR-RI), regional government archives, photographic documentation, and interviews with survivors, witnesses, victims' relatives, and community leaders. Through rigorous source criticism and data triangulation, these materials enable a more detailed reconstruction of the chronology of violence, the actors involved, investigative

procedures, judicial processes, and the role of the state in responding to the conflict. These findings demonstrate that contemporary legal archives possess substantial historical value and should be recognized as essential primary sources for the study of modern violence.

A further contribution is the refinement of Charles Tilly's (2003) theory of collective violence in the Indonesian context. The findings indicate that the violence in Banyuwangi was not merely a consequence of the political transition that followed the collapse of the New Order. Rather, it emerged from a complex interaction among political instability, widespread belief in witchcraft, the circulation of rumours, declining public trust in state institutions, and the dynamics of law enforcement. Beyond this empirical contribution, the research offers a methodological one by demonstrating that police and court records can be used effectively as historical sources in *ex post facto* research. In doing so, the study expands the methodological repertoire of contemporary historical research and highlights the importance of legal documentation for reconstructing episodes of collective violence.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. Not all police investigation files and judicial records remain available, so historical reconstruction necessarily depends on surviving archival materials. Some documents may have been lost, damaged, or left undigitized, limiting the ability to reconstruct legal proceedings and investigative processes in their entirety. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted more than two decades after the events, creating the potential for memory bias. The traumatic experiences of many participants may have influenced both the accuracy of their recollections and their interpretation of past events. Although source triangulation was used to minimize these limitations, a degree of subjectivity remains unavoidable.

Another limitation concerns the temporal scope of the study, which focuses primarily on the peak period of violence in 1998–1999. The research therefore does not examine in depth the post-conflict social dynamics of Banyuwangi, including reconciliation processes, the formation of collective memory, intergenerational memory transmission, and the long-term effects of the violence on social relations, cultural practices, and local government policies. As a result, the study emphasizes the historical reconstruction of the violence and the legal processes rather than the broader trajectory of post-conflict transformation in Banyuwangi society.

Future research should expand oral history investigations to a broader range of participants,

including survivors, perpetrators' families, security personnel, law enforcement officials, religious leaders, community leaders, and policymakers, in order to capture more diverse perspectives on violence, legal processes, and reconciliation. Comparative studies of similar episodes of collective violence in other regions of Indonesia would also help identify both common patterns and local specificities. Moreover, interdisciplinary approaches integrating history, anthropology, sociology, law, political science, and memory studies would provide a fuller understanding of the relationships among cultural beliefs, state institutions, legal processes, social trauma, and collective violence. Future research should also explore community-based reconciliation initiatives, intergenerational memory transmission, and state policies on conflict resolution and victims' rights. Such studies would advance Indonesian historiography and contribute to evidence-based public policy aimed at conflict resolution and the prevention of future collective violence.

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