

# Collective Memory of Java's North Coast Road (Pantura) in Central Java in the New Order Period: A Historical Study

Endah Sri Hartatik Universitas Diponegoro, Indonesia

## Abstract

Jalan Raya Pantai Utara (commonly referred to as Pantura) has given rise to a multitude of phenomena that have since embedded themselves as shared memories among the communities residing along its route, as well as those who have journeyed along this roadway. These collective recollections encompass a range of elements, including the historical Jalan Raya Pos, notorious for the harsh policies enacted during Daendels' era, instances of criminal activities, traffic accidents, the presence of prostitution, vibrant graffiti art, the distinctive strains of Pantura's Dangdut music, and various others. However, this reservoir of collective memory is gradually dissipating, largely due to the Pantura highway making way for the Trans Java Toll Road. The distinctive phenomena and symbols that once adorned the landscape of Jalan Pantura have the potential to be pieced together into a comprehensive narrative within the annals of collective history. Employing historical methodologies and conducting oral history interviews served as the foundation for sourcing information in this study. Through meticulous exploration of archival records and engaging in dialogues with carefully selected informants, this research underscores that the intricate web of recollections surrounding the complexities of Pantura's history was shaped incrementally, parallel to the evolution of its economic, social, political, and cultural facets. The findings of this research underscore that the collective memory encapsulating the multifaceted essence of Pantura's past has been an evolving creation intertwined with the progression of economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions. Significantly, we continue to encounter traces of this collective memory in a myriad of artistic expressions, melodious songs, and numerous other manifestations that persist even today.

## Keywords

History; Pantura; Highway; Collective Memory

## INTRODUCTION

Society serves as a living witness to the phenomenon of modernization, encompassing both abrupt and gradual shifts (Khalil et al., 2023; Yeganeh, 2021). One facet of modernization is technological advancement orchestrated by the government through the establishment of barrier-free toll roads in Java, exemplified by the Trans Java Road connecting the western and eastern regions. This toll road aims to alleviate congestion and reduce travel durations in comparison to the Jalan

Raya Pantura route (Hartatik, 2018; Hartatik, 2018b).

Conversely, Jalan Raya Pantura, also known as Jalan Raya Daendels, has birthed a diverse array of collective memories. This collective memory encompasses narratives about the eerie Roban Forest/ alas, tales of criminal incidents involving jumping squirrels, legends of Sunan Kuning, Gambilangu, and Banyuputih, as well as Comprong's notoriety as a hub for prostitution. It also encapsulates the tradition of accidents frequently occurring

just prior to Eid Al-Fitr, along with the mention of restaurants boasting delectable menus. Regrettably, this collective memory is gradually fading into obscurity, primarily due to the Trans Java Toll Road's displacement of Jalan Raya Pantura from its central role. The tales that were once associated with the Pantura highway are now transitioning to narratives of events transpiring at rest stops, the utilization of cashless payments at toll booths, designated stopping points, picturesque mountain vistas, and more. Moreover, this collective memory is now accessible mainly to those traversing the Trans Java toll road, particularly individuals operating four-wheeled or larger vehicles (Kurniastuti et al., 2020).

This societal collective memory is evolving into a historical narrative, serving as both an enjoyable account of the past and a record of events that should be meticulously documented to preserve their authenticity. Durkheim (Fowler, 2007: 26) posits that collective memory is a dimension of memory existing collectively, imparting social significance through individual interactions with symbols, thereby forging a collectivity. These symbols undergo a process of externalization from individuals to the collective whole, culminating in the formation of a collective symbol. This memory becomes embedded within the fabric of social and group realities, assuming authoritative resonance. Over time, this symbol is transmitted to subsequent generations through memory, solidifying into a collective memory.

Halbwachs (1992: 25), on the other hand, defines collective memory as a social construct, molded by contextual influences and empowered by the contributions of its members. He asserts that every member of a social group is engaged in recalling and reconstructing the past, leading to the

development of distinct collective memories among various social strata over extended periods (Halbwachs 1992: 42). The present-day societal landscape gains depth by tapping into the collective memory of the past, effectively uncovering historical social dimensions. Consequently, it's undeniable that contemporary issues can find solutions through the reconstruction of past collective memories. This concept is observable in instances such as the eerie robes, highway crimes like the jumping squirrels, graffiti art on truck backs, rhythmic melodies played by drivers, and others.

Similarly, Roudiger and Abel (2015: 359-361) contend that collective memory, as a relic of the past, triggers diverse perceptions across distinct groups. A shared experience, such as a crime along the Pantura highway, may evoke dissimilar memories among individuals from various backgrounds, ages, and geographical locations. Robust societal memory contributes to long-standing identity and convictions, whereas memories that remain unarticulated are prone to fading. Golf (1992: 3-4) underscores that collective memory has the potential to shape an individual's future life. This influence is feasible because the past actively informs collective memory, which possesses the capacity to transcend individual recollections. This dynamic arises from the intertwining of tradition and learning, as exemplified by the behaviors of those traversing the Pantura highway to prevent crimes and accidents (Hartatik, 2021).

## RESEARCH METHOD

Conducting a study necessitates the acquisition of data and factual details for the writing process. Given the historical nature of this research, historical methods were employed to gather these data and facts, chiefly through oral history techniques and

interviews (Wasino & Hartatik, 2018). This historical approach encompassed data collection from multiple documentation centers in Semarang, including the Suara Merdeka Archive Depo, the Central Java Archives, and the Library Service. Furthermore, research extended to other significant repositories like the Press Monument in Solo, the Kanisius Library in Kota Baru Yogyakarta, the library at Gajah Mada University, the National Library, and the National Archives in Jakarta. Subsequently, the collected data underwent critical evaluation for authenticity, content accuracy, and relevance, all in preparation for their utilization in the writing process. To complement the written data, oral history interviews were conducted with carefully selected informants. These interviews took place individually or within group settings, often through the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method. Quantitative data, encompassing figures related to crime rates, population, livelihoods, and accident frequencies, were sourced from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS). Visual records and documented accounts of accidents occurring on the Pantura highway were secured from repositories like the Suara Merdeka Archives Depot and the Press Monument. Moreover, to enrich the discourse on the collective memory of the Pantura highway, relevant articles were retrieved from esteemed documentation institutions. These institutions included the National Library, the Gadjah Mada University Library, and the Jakarta National Archives. In sum, meticulous curation and analysis of this multifaceted data provided a comprehensive foundation to inform the subsequent development of this research.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The communities residing alongside the Pantura highway are enriched with a

tapestry of diverse stories and testimonies, a diversity that stems from the distinctive locales of various cities. This localized perspective becomes evident in the tales shared by individuals recounting the eeriness of the densely wooded Roban region. Accounts frequently narrate the presence of spirits inhabiting these woods, often associated with occurrences of crime (Interview, Sofyan, 2022; Interview, Farid, 2022; Interview, Rukuan, 2022). Sutrimo and Warsito further elaborate that certain locations draw particular attention when embarking on journeys along the Pantura highway, particularly the curve within the Tugu Mangkang vicinity and the uphill stretch in Plelen, situated within the Subah area. Similarly, in the eastern segment of Central Java, the sharp bend spanning from Lasem to Sluke merits special vigilance due to its perceived haunted nature, which often correlates with accidents. This phenomenon can be attributed logically to drivers who lack comprehensive understanding of the geographical and physical nuances of such treacherous curves (Interview, Sutrimo, 2022; Interview, Warsito, 2022). The collective memory retained within the community subsequently functions as guidance, urging travelers to maintain vigilance and exercise caution, particularly during nocturnal journeys.

Another facet of collective memory tied to the Pantura highway pertains to the graffiti art adorning the rear surfaces of trucks, buses, and public transportation during the 1990s. These graffiti artworks comprise depictions accompanied by textual elements conveying invitations, cautions, appeals, and other messages. The imagery etched onto these vehicles captivates attention due to their portrayal of enticing women, joyful children, endearing animals, and the like. Furthermore, graffiti art assumes a socio-cultural role for the vehicle owners and drivers. For drivers,

such artistic expressions serve as a conduit for self-expression, manifest through a spectrum of visual compositions. Those drivers with an affinity for images of alluring and elegant women will utilize their favored images to convey sentiments of delight. Examples include phrases like "I'll wait for your widow" and "Sentir Lengo Potro Tiwas Mikir Ora Rumongso" (Interview, Wasito 2015); Nano deep (Hartatik, 2018: 320-22).



**Figure 1.** Example of Graffiti Art on a Truck Body (Source: Private collection).

These depictions vary based on the values and lifestyles of the drivers; those embracing a modest and religious way of life will create artwork featuring virtuous images accompanied by correspondingly decorous text, such as "Mother's Prayers Accompany You" or "Mother's Love Along the Way Children's Love Is Everywhere," and others. Usually, these images are conceived by the driver, who then seeks approval from the vehicle's owner to display their preferred visuals and words. According to Amurnarni's research, graffiti images serve multifaceted functions, including expressing personal lifestyles, communicating ethical values, and alluding to certain behavioral patterns (Admunarni, 2008). Instances of lifestyle expressions include phrases like "exercise if you want to be healthy," while allusions to behaviors are

encapsulated in statements such as "be healthy" or "I'll wait for your widow." The subsequent image portrays examples of graffiti art found on tailgates.

Traveling over long distances undoubtedly induces boredom among drivers. Consequently, it becomes imperative to cultivate a more relaxed atmosphere during the journey to ensure its safe completion. One effective method to establish this serene ambiance is through the enjoyment of music; drivers commonly find solace in the tunes of Dangdut Koplo. Dangdut Koplo, a rhythmic variation of traditional Dangdut songs, emerged during the reform era as a counterpoint to the standard Dangdut style popularized by artists like Rhoma Irama, Elvie Sikaesih, Mansyur S., and others. This genre, notably prevalent along the North Coast region of Java, is often referred to as "Pantura Dangdut Koplo." Distinguished by its invigorating rhythm, underscored by the resonating beat of drums or ketipung, this musical style effectively counteracts drowsiness and provides dynamic entertainment for drivers on extended journeys (Interview, Supar, 2023). For truck drivers transporting goods and inter-provincial bus drivers, Dangdut music, specifically the sub-genre known as Koplo Pantura, predominates as their musical preference. This variant boasts spirited rhythms and straightforward lyrics, often interspersed with light-hearted jokes. Such musical selections offer a pleasant and engaging travel companion. The lyrical content of Koplo Pantura songs frequently aligns with the drivers' experiences, reflecting their separation from loved ones and families due to work commitments. These verses adeptly employ satire, invitations, and other rhetorical elements. A few illustrative examples of Pantura Dangdut Koplo lyrics are as follows:

**Kartonyono Medot Janji**

*Kok kebangeten men  
Sambat blas ra ono perhatian  
Jelas kubutuh atimu butuh awakmu  
Kog kebangeten men*

*Loro ati iki  
Tak takbarno karo tak enggo Latihan  
Suk yen wis oleh gantimu, wis ra kajok aku  
Mergo wis tau, wie tau jero*

*Mbiyen aku jek betah, suwe- suwe wegah  
Nuruti kekarepanmu sansoyo bubrah  
Mbiyen wis tak wanti- wanti, ojo ngasi lali*

*Tapi kenyataannya pergi  
Kartonyono ing Ngawi medot janjimu  
Ambruk cagakkunuruti angan-anganmu  
Sak kabehane wis tak turuti tapi malah  
mblenjani  
Budalo malah tak duduhi dalane (Putra, 2020).*

Translation:

**Kertonyono Breaks the Promise**

How dare  
Complaining is absolutely no concern  
In fact, I need your soul and body  
How outrageous

This heartache  
I'm done to get used to it  
Tomorrow, when there is a replacement for  
you, I will not be surprised  
Because it's been, it's been very deep

In the past, I was still resistant, long, lazy  
Follow your desires increasingly scattered  
I didn't remind you before; don't betray

But the truth is betrayal  
Kartonyono in Ngawi broke your promise  
Collapse my stance to follow your dreams  
I have followed all, but you deny

Go home I will show you the way  
(Translation, Hartatik, 2023).

The following is also an example of  
Dangdut poetry that drivers on the Pantura  
listen to.

**Ambyar**

*Sak umpomo koe ngerti  
Isi neng jero ati  
Roso nyaman mergo perhatianmu  
Nanging aku ora iso  
Blas ora duwe kuoso  
Mergane koe sing duwe  
Uwong liyo dudu aku  
Cukup ati kroso ayem  
Yen weruh koe mesem  
Senadyan tresno  
Aku mung iso meneng  
Op wae tak lakoni  
Opo koe ora ngerti  
Tresno iki tulus suci  
Yo ben aku ajur Anggone nunggu atimu  
Tulung ojo ilang (Putra, 2023)*

Translation:

**Untidy**

If only you knew  
Fill in days  
Feel comfortable because of your attention  
But I can not  
Absolutely no power  
Because you have  
Other people, not me  
Enough to feel at peace  
When I see you smile  
Although love  
I can only be silent  
What do not do  
Don't you understand  
This love is pure  
Yes, I'm broken, waiting for your heart  
Please don't disappear (Translation,  
Daughter, 2023)

When analyzed from the perspective of the world of Dangdut music, the lyrics of Pantura Dangdut Koplo songs often appear more explicit in portraying situations. They possess a raw and unrefined quality, akin to the musical and lyrical stylings of Dangdut luminaries such as Rhoma Irama, Imam Nawawi, Fazal Dath, and others (Interview, Rohendi, 2015). For bus and truck drivers who indulge in Dangdut Koplo music, the significance of the song's lyrics pales in comparison to the primary importance of the melodious strains that accompany them during their travels (Interview, Sukarman, 2023; Interview, Supar, 2023). What holds paramount importance for these drivers is the capacity of the music's rhythm and beat to dispel the weariness that often sets in during lengthy journeys, thereby ensuring an enjoyable experience whether traveling near or far.

A book authored by Hartatik (2016: 262) underscores a profound and enduring connection between the social and cultural fabric of Jalan Raya Pantura. This intricate web of social and cultural norms is constructed upon the foundation of long-standing interactions among regulations, road users, and law enforcement entities. In an endeavor to curtail the escalating numbers of daily criminal incidents that impede national security and order, the government embarked on a strategy of shock therapy for individuals who disrupted society through enigmatic acts of violence (Petrus). President Soeharto himself declared that the crimes perpetrated by these individuals, both within homes and on the streets, constituted a resurgence of inhumane brutality, instigating widespread fear and harboring the potential to sow destabilization. This apprehension emanates from malevolent individuals, encompassing thieves, robbers, and murderers, prompting swift action to

liberate the populace from fear and cultivate a sense of security (Siegel, 1998, 155). Daily newspapers, whether in the capital or regional locales, frequently recounted instances of individuals, often bearing tattoos and plastic restraints, succumbing to gunshots (Tempo, April 16, 1983; Pos Kota, September 12, 1983). These concerted efforts contributed significantly to the drastic reduction of crime by the close of the 1980s.

Another collective memory etched within the community's recollection when the Pantura highway is mentioned pertains to the surge of criminal activities committed by culprits who pilfer cargo from trucks. These incidents encompass a range of goods, including electronics, rice, and other manufactured items, often orchestrated by groups of perpetrators. Their *modus operandi* involve individuals boarding trucks to abscond with goods, transferring them to alternate vehicles, and vigilantly evading detection from law enforcement and other potential obstacles. Nevertheless, instances of these criminals are now rare, as cargo-laden trucks have migrated to the Trans Java road, free of hindrances. The Pantura route has fallen into disuse due to safety concerns and protracted travel times. Additionally, weighbridges, once synonymous with corrupt transactions on the Pantura highway, have been shuttered, consigning memories of their mismanagement to the annals of history, as the weighing of truckloads is no longer practiced. Restaurants that once thrived along the Pantura highway in Central Java now stand deserted, as many buses, trucks, and private cars veer towards the swift and unobstructed Trans Java toll road, effectively truncating travel durations.

Accidents along the Pantura highway predominantly make headlines in the lead-up to Eid Al-Fitr, coinciding with an upsurge in vehicle traffic. Two-wheeled

motorized vehicles are particularly prone to accidents, often due to driver fatigue induced by extensive journeys. Human errors, such as non-compliance with traffic regulations—for instance, exceeding speed limits or disregarding traffic signs—also contribute to accident occurrences.

## CONCLUSION

Collective memory refers to the recollections held by a society that are tied to specific events. The ongoing evolution of Central Java's North Coast Highway, spanning decades, is poised to engender and perpetuate such collective memories within the societal fabric. When individuals inquire about the Pantura highway, their thoughts will likely conjure images of frequent accidents, criminal incidents, the musical and artistic expressions that flourished in the vicinity, the customary pit stops of drivers, and more. This reservoir of memories stands at risk of fading away as the community transitions away from the highway and embraces a novel toll road devoid of obstacles. This transition will inevitably usher in fresh collective memories in the years to come. Narratives recounting bustling restaurants and winding paths will be supplanted by the smooth thoroughfares of unobstructed travel, punctuated by rest areas designed to cater to travelers' needs.

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