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# SUHARTO, WITCHES

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“ . . . no one is around for anyone any longer, and that this is indeed death, this dying of which Blanchot has complained not that it is fatal but that it remains impossible.”

Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*

## I

In Banyuwangi, on the eastern tip of Java, at the time that President Suharto left office in 1998, in a space of three months about 120 people were killed after being accused of being sorcerers.<sup>1</sup> Later, in December 1999, ten people were killed after being so accused in the nearby area of Malang Selatan. There were similar occurrences in other areas of Java. Let us start with one instance.

On the night of December 9, 1999, in the village of Harjokuncaran, south of the city of Malang, four members of the same family, all accused of being sorcerers, were attacked. Three were killed and one escaped. One of the men arrested for the murders said, “My father was killed by sorcery.” He knew this because his father could not

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\* I am greatly indebted to Arief W. Djati who assisted me in the interviews cited. Without his help I certainly would not have been able to comprehend Javanese witchcraft. I am also indebted to John Sidel, who with real generosity furnished me with valuable materials on the events. I also want to thank Ben Abel of the Cornell Library for his initiative in finding items for me in the Echols Collection. I want to record my special appreciation of the effort of Benedict Anderson. He made many substantive comments on the basis of his unique knowledge of Java and of Indonesian politics and his sensitivity to language which I believe to be unequalled amongst scholars of Indonesia. And I want to acknowledge the generosity of the Graduate School for Asian and African Studies of Kyoto University which supported me while I worked on this study. I am particularly grateful to Professor Tsuyoshi Kato of that institution for his kindnesses.

<sup>1</sup> The killings in fact began earlier, at the time when the Suharto regime looked weak. But their major incidence was after Suharto was no longer in power.

stop urinating until the moment he died. His was one of a number of strange deaths. Some people swelled up; their abdomens or an arm doubled in size until several died. About Muki, the father of the family of sorcerers, one man said, "If he wanted to borrow money from you and you didn't give him any, he got angry"—the implication being that one then fell ill. Another man, in his early twenties, perhaps, was indignant. His brother was being held for trial. He was outraged not because his brother was innocent, but because his court-appointed attorney was asking for expense money; his brother was quite justified in killing a sorcerer since the man was a murderer. This youth was upset as well because the night of the killings he was not present and so was unable to participate in slaying these hated witches. His own house was a few kilometers away, and his mother was ill, the result of sorcery. The very distance between his house and the sorcerers' proved how powerful the latter were. They could make his mother fall ill even when she was far away.

A man who had been an itinerant seller of noodle soup said that Bukhori, Muki's son, entered his house while he was out working. Bukhori was a relative of his wife, but ran off with her. Then the husband himself was bewitched. His arm swelled, and he was in bed for months. He went to the doctor, who told him he had an infection. But, he said, "there was no wound," thus clear "proof" (*bukti*) of sorcery. Bukhori was known for his predilection for other men's wives, and each time, after the wife was stolen, the husband was bewitched. A woman said that at first she was grateful to Pak Muki. When she fell ill, he would give her large pills and she got well. But as time went on, she did not recover. And, she said, "many others got sick and they stayed ill and were killed." The pills Pak Muki gave her had pieces of rice inside. When she was ill, she felt there were strange things in her stomach. She was sick for two and a half years. The doctor told her her illness "came from outside" and "was not the kind of illness he could cure," so she was sure she had been ensorcelled. When Pak Muki was killed, she got well. All those who died, she went on, had swollen abdomens. They were all bewitched "for almost no reason at all." For instance, people wouldn't lend Muki money or, if they did, they couldn't ask for it back, and either way they would fall ill. At this point in the conversation a young man broke in to say that if sorcerers did not use their knowledge, it would attack them. This was meant as an explanation for why it was that Muki was so violent. It was not simply his character; it was a part of the structure of sorcery itself. One could not understand how much harm Muki and his family had done if one did not see that they were compelled to deflect the lethal force of sorcery away from themselves and onto their neighbors.

Another seller of noodle soup said that Muki owed him Rp.70,000, the price of twenty some bowls of soup, and that he could not collect the money. If he asked for it, Muki would say, "No problem. I'll pay later." I asked him why he continued to give Muki his wares; why not stop after, say, the fifteenth bowl. He replied that he was afraid he would die if he did so.

Another man added that "if you did what he said, he helped you. But if not, you died." Muki made no explicit threats. In the minds of his fellow villagers, he did not need to do so. Villagers were terrified of him. It was not at all clear to most of them that if one did as he said, one would not be affected. Muki's own brother, who had helped him on many occasions, was also bewitched. And the parents of his daughter-in-law, who gave him land, were bewitched too.

The mother of Muki's daughter-in-law, a woman who appeared to be in her seventies, said Muki sent an emissary to ask for her daughter's hand. "We were forced [to agree]. If not, I would get sick. So my daughter said yes." Muki said nothing menacing, but they understood that if they did not do what he wanted, they would suffer. In any case, the woman fell ill and her husband also. Muki said, "A whole water buffalo won't cure him." That is, they could spend the price of a water buffalo on cures, and he would not get well. "Proof," she said. Her abdomen swelled to the point where she could no longer lie flat and her thighs swelled so much she could not urinate. But as soon as Muki was killed, she got well and her husband got well too. Time after time the swift recovery of ill people after Muki, his wife, and his son were killed was taken as "proof"; theirs was a family of sorcerers.

The entire village population, according to the testimony of the people we met, felt themselves enthralled by sorcerers. The result was the end of social reciprocity. A man asks for a family's daughter. There are none of the usual negotiations around marriage. There is only a tacit understanding on the side of the girl's family: if the daughter does not marry the sorcerer's son, himself a sorcerer, the mother will fall ill and die. A man gives Muki a month's supply of soup. He is convinced that if he does not, he will die. Muki never pays. Someone is so sick, the result, it is certain, of Muki's efforts, that no matter how much he might pay, he could never get well. "Whoever had anything to do with Matrawi [Muki's formal name] would have a mysterious [*misterius*] illness soon after," the local paper reports.<sup>2</sup>

Muki, his wife, and Bukhori, his son, were beaten and hacked to death, then strung up on display. Nineteen people were arrested for their participation; most of them were released later. It is likely that many more were present at the attack. All those we met in the village, present at the killings or not, rejoiced at these murders.

The people of this village are convinced that death has visited them in unnatural ways. The father of one of those arrested, whom we have already mentioned, had to urinate so badly that he did so the whole day. "My father died dried out," his son said. Death is no longer natural. And its unnaturalness makes it unbearable. If someone dies of comprehensible causes, his survivors usually do not remain preoccupied with his death. On the other hand, the bizarre quality of death by sorcery makes the passage to death and the deceased unforgettable. Ordinary or natural death is followed by a series of funeral practices. Biological death is followed by the washing of the body, the interment, a series of rituals at punctual intervals. This has the intended effect of funerals everywhere: the separation of the living and the dead, though in Java this is done in terms quite different from our understandings in the West.

Javanese practices at death are marked by certain qualities. The memorialization of the dead is minimized. It is not the purpose of the funeral to ensure that the living remember the dead as he or she "should" be remembered. Separation of living and dead does not mean that the memories of the deceased are put into a past from which the deceased person can never return. It is expected that the dead might reappear autonomously, as it were, without being consciously called into memory. They come back in dreams or even in waking life. The spirit population itself—and Java is densely

<sup>2</sup> "Bisa Kencing Sehari Penuh" (Able to Urinate for a Whole Day), *Malang Post*, December 12, 1999, p. 1.

populated with ghosts, spirits, and supernatural effects—is vaguely thought to be made up of the living transformed into the dead. Their supernatural effects are always startling and usually unwelcome. But they are expectable nonetheless. “Did you die, father?” the son of a murdered man accused of sorcery asked his father. “I only moved away” was the reply. The mother of another murdered witch was visited by her slain son one afternoon. He was dressed in blue clothes. She asked him if he was healthy, but he disappeared without answering. She was startled. But she must have been reassured as well; I was told that his dress indicated that he was fine.

Javanese accept such phenomena as the usual intrusions of spirits into the world rather than as the impossible reappearance of someone who is dead and therefore incapable of returning. But the place made for involuntary memory and hallucination, to put their experiences in our terms of understanding, still does not allow for “unnatural” death. Death is unnatural not only when it takes strange forms and when it seems to be in the power of the sorcerer. It is unnatural when it is contagious. By that I mean that death is unnatural when everyone seems menaced with death and, since it is the human condition to be so menaced, unable to put the threat out of mind; such people look for a source of death in order to put an end to its contagion. Even when they find that sorcery is the cause and the sorcerer is dealt with, they are not at ease because the nature of sorcery is unclear to them. Soon the sorcerers’ power will reach me. Hence the obsessive quality of sorcery. And with that the hunt for witches.

The idea that the sorcerer must use his power on pain of its otherwise being turned against himself is important. The sorcerer is accused of focusing his malevolence against certain people. But everyone is a likely eventual victim. The sorcerer is only a vehicle for something that originates beyond him. He must continually find new targets. He is, in that sense, like the curer or *dukun*. The supernatural curer in Indonesia, as in most places, himself falls ill. To be cured, s/he must allow his or her body to be visited by the spirits which have caused the illness. Often there are two sets of spirits, good and bad. The curer becomes their receptacle and allows them to be used for curing. He or she thus gains a double identity. S/he is who s/he is in everyday life. And s/he is someone or something completely different when s/he cures. The sorcerer in this view is the curer inverted. Both offer their bodies for the use of supernatural powers which possess them as much as they possess the spirits.

Magical curing is, in effect, the act of making supernatural power reasonable and useful. When the curer becomes the sorcerer—and, in a few cases, this is what people thought happened, though most people accused of witchcraft were not curers (*dukun*)—this power loses its reasonableness, its capacity to be made part of ordinary thinking. The curer produces health, but the sorcerer causes death. The difference, perhaps, is in the verbs “produce” or “make” versus “cause.” The sorcerer is not productive, but destructive. No doubt this opposition is a useful element in explaining the workings of the world. But the sorcery that followed President Suharto’s departure from office surpassed it. Few of those murdered were *dukun*. The possibility of using Javanese mysticism to explain fortune and misfortune or to alleviate anxiety was unavailable when sorcery was dislocated from the *dukun*. The identity of the sorcerer and the source of his power then became unclear. The very thought of sorcery then became a way to imagine that unnatural death has appeared or will do so.

The sorcerer in the period after the fall of Suharto was—and at the moment I write this, continues to be—one's ordinary neighbor. Some accused of sorcery, such as Muki, were curers. But most were not. The post-Suharto witch is just like everyone else. But he has a second identity as well, one that, according to the Javanese theory of witchcraft that still applied, he did not choose. This lack of choice is often obscured by the enmity people bear the person of the sorcerer. But it remains an important element of sorcery. The sorcerer is a repository of lethal power. This lethal power, which resides in him, affects—one can say "infects"—his victims as they fall ill. The cure, if there was one, was sometimes the removal of strange objects from the victim's stomach or other parts of his or her body; these objects contained or communicated the sorcerer's power. But usually there was no cure. The sorcerer's victims are inhabited, as he is. The difference is that they, for some reason, are not offered the sorcerer's possibility of deflection of that power. During this period, villagers felt that alien forces—forces that could not be identified with the known spirit world—had emerged uncontrollably into this world on a community-wide scale. With only the slightest reason, or none at all, one is ensorcelled. Explanations of envy or conflict of interest that accompany accusations of sorcery in other times were often left aside.

The motivations of the witch were thus often obscure. Muki, for instance, was not rich. But according to villagers he could have been. "If only Muki had sold his sorcerer's services, he would have been very rich," we were told. As it is, Muki acted for reasons that were indecipherable. When someone fell sick, it became a sign of Muki's powers, particularly when the person had had something to do with Muki. As we have said, whether one did what Muki wanted or not, one suffered from him. Interests could not explain his actions. If one dealt with Muki, giving him what he wanted was no help at all. Being in touch with him meant being brought to his attention and therefore becoming his victim. And this happened simply out of his need to be malevolent.

As an intermediary between the spirit and human worlds, the sorcerer should be a figure. But, unlike the case in the West, there is no image of the witch, at least the witch of this period of mass accusations. The curer who does evil is a figure. One can see him on television. But the sorcerer of today's East Java looks just like anyone else. These witches were not set apart by appearance or even by status, since rich as well as poor, prominent as well as humble people were accused. Of course, elements of thinking about traditional sorcerers remain. Thus there were experts who could tell if someone has supernatural power. But as we shall see, such expertise could not be relied on.

A sorcerer could be a man or a woman, and he or she could be old or young. Sometimes children are killed along with their parents because sorcery is said to descend in families. But I do not know of young children accused of practicing the art. Even the name, *tukang santet*, or, in Banyuwangi, *tukang sihir*, gives no clue. *Tukang* denominates someone who practices a trade and has a particular skill. But one cannot assimilate this skill to a merely technological one, for one reason because the older sense of *tukang* retains the implication of esoteric knowledge. The word can also refer by metonymy to someone who works with something, thus a *tukang botol* is someone who collects bottles to sell. A sorcerer is associated with magic—*sihir*—the way a *tukang botol* is associated with bottles. The name, in other words, while it seems to link the sorcerer to a class, when pushed for meaning ends with mere metonymy. The witch

is defined by association with witchcraft. But in many cases that seems not to have been known in advance. No one reported seeing the accused practicing his craft, for instance, so far as we know.

Hence, a name exists without an image. The contemporary witch is located behind the normal appearance of one's neighbor. Nothing about him or her yields definitive proof of sorcery. "I told them to look wherever they want," the son of a slain sorcerer said to the masked men who invaded his house and killed his father. "You won't find anything but holy books here. There is no witchcraft anywhere." In fact, the attackers did not look. Muki, it was said, was often seen returning home at two or three in the morning. Doubtless he had been sitting in the river or visiting a site of magical power. Sitting in the river at night is a common Javanese mystical practice. Many people do it who have no intention of becoming witches. Some of the accused sorcerers were curers for whom such practices are quite normal. In any case, anyone might try out these techniques without being a professional mystic, as it were. It is in the nature of this outbreak of sorcery accusations that the normal changes into the uncanny. Muki, by his appearance and even by his esoteric actions, does not differ from those who live in the same village. He lived there for at least thirty years, according to his neighbors. It was only in the last five years or so that, they said, he became feared. And then he came to embody an absolute, unbridgeable, and unbearable difference.

The frequent recurrence of the word "proof" (*bukti*) in the mouths of the killers (and also of the survivors, preceded, naturally, by "there is no . . .") leads us to speculate on what this word means. It does not mean "evidence (of the criminal)." The reader will note that the usage of the word seldom bears on the identification of the witch. That is self-evident to the accusers. "Proof" means, first of all, "there is something strange." Someone swells up; it is "proof." After Muki was killed, and such swellings disappeared, it was also "proof," as much for the strangeness of the disappearance as for the coincidence with his murder. "Proof" means that what the speaker expected was borne out. One might expect the opposite. In the face of bizarre happenings, there is no explanation. In effect, to say "proof" is not to say "he did it, here is the evidence," but "I knew it." The uncanny event was anticipated.

There is "proof" when illness becomes uncanny. But illness is merely the expression of a feeling that the uncanny has already permeated life. It is not difficult to find a sorcerer under that condition. Only the survivors protest that the murder victim was not a sorcerer. Everyone else is sure. They are certain that sorcery is at work. After reaching that point, there was no dispute about who was the witch, except, of course, from the accused. The sorcerer is not recognizable by anything in his appearance. But he is known, all the same, once there is "proof" that the uncanny has manifested itself. He becomes "known" as the source of malevolence precisely when all one can think of is malevolence and one is bewildered as to the cause. Just when one cannot know the reason for so many bizarre and frightening occurrences, one is certain: "It is Muki." Presto. The insistence of "proof," as well as the strange context of its usage, lets us see that it is a denial. "I do not know what is happening or who is causing it" is the real meaning of this word.

The Javanese witch is not like the communist in America during the McCarthy period, or Jews during the pogroms, or gypsies at periods when they are attacked. These are recognizable types. Javanese witches are not. The fact that the witch's

appearance reveals nothing but the ordinary and that nothing about this ordinary aspect identifies a person as a witch in part accounts for the brutality of the killings. Muki was bashed in, slashed, and stabbed and then, when he was dead, strung up in the doorway of his house. His wife and son, similarly slain, were hung, the first in another doorway, the other from a tree in the grove to which he had fled. When the witch lacks a figure, it seems necessary to disembody him to get at the essence of witchcraft. Simply killing the person does not do. To be rid of the witch, particularly given the lack of ritual means to do so, means killing something that one cannot find. It means killing more than the body, and therefore it requires the witch to be slain multiple times, as it were.

The *Malang Post* reports two killings of *santet* on the same day, both of which illustrate the difficulty in killing a witch. One, a woman, Mbok Siamah, age forty-five, did not resist her killers.

Her body trembling and her voice shaking, she begged not to be killed. But the woman's supplication was ignored by the *massa* [*massa yang sangat beringas*].<sup>3</sup> The woman gave in to her fate as they beat her body with various clubs and sharp weapons.

Without significant resistance, the woman . . . collapsed onto the ground. The moment was critical, and there was no way out, but the woman still was able to show her supernatural powers [*kesaktian*]. Even though they struck her dozens of times with sharp weapons and objects, she did not die. This widow was even able to find blankets to cover her face.

Seeing that the victim was not yet dead, the *massa* even tried to choke her to death with twine, but this did not do her in. In fact, the twine broke several times.

Finally, the *massa* went back to beating her with various clubs. Finally, Mbok Siamah could not hold out against the blows and she died straight away. The brutal *massa* needed a half hour to finish off this opponent not at all equal to them.

The newspaper then describes the seventy-year-old Pak Gito, who

. . . swung a staff. Pak Gito drove back the *massa*; those who approached him crumbled. Pak Gito made the *massa* in front of him retreat several steps out of fear. But, because their number was so large, they fearlessly kept on trying to kill him by swarming around him with sharp weapons.

Pak Gito finally was overwhelmed in the face of this opponent, so much greater than himself. Finally, this former village government official fell.

Seeing their enemy fall, the *massa* straight away clubbed him. In fact, one person who had brought a sword with him slit Pak Gito's throat. Besides that, several others who had brought sharp weapons stabbed his right leg with a sword. Pak Gito finally died a horrifying death.

<sup>3</sup> The word *massa*, in its original sense meant "masses," as we shall see below. During the New Order it took on the meaning "mob." It is possible that the original sense has returned, particularly given the proto-revolutionary quality of this witch hunt. The reader might want to substitute "masses" for "mob"; the writer would not object. But here, in particular, the qualifier "*beringas*," meaning "savage," makes me opt for "mob."

During this time the mob also ransacked the victim's house. A Politron fourteen-inch television set was beaten till it was smashed to pieces. The household furnishings were also smashed.

The next day, Pak Gito's corpse was found lying in front of the house, curled up. Next to him were rocks as big as his head used to beat him. This was proven by the splattering of fresh blood on the rocks.<sup>4</sup>

This case, which I know only from the newspaper, involves two witches who were lovers. Pak Gito, married and seventy-years-old, had bewitched the widow, Mbok Siamah, so that she fell in love with him. Mbok Samiah became a witch as a result of her relation with Pak Gito. Villagers warned the pair about their immoral behavior but they continued to see each other. Pak Gito was only recently discovered to be a witch. It is said that he caused the deaths of many, something presumably known only in retrospect. The proof in this case was the finding of the tools of witchcraft—scissors, hair, and nails—hidden in the kitchen hearth.

Traditionally, witches in Java are difficult to kill. But usually to kill them one has to find a certain weak point or use ritual means. In stories before this time, the victim, in pain, finally tells his accusers how to bring about his death, or he himself removes his magic invulnerability. This newspaper report comes closest to such stories, but it lacks mention of magic invulnerability and ritual means of murder.

This narrative about the killing of a witch has, however, another element. In other cases too, the house of the witch was ransacked and the contents burned. This, indeed, is also sometimes the practice in urban riots against Chinese. Here the television set is given special notice. We will see later that this is not necessarily by chance and that it has something to do with the nature of the new witch. In riots against Indonesian Chinese, their goods were also often burned. In the incidents I witnessed in Central Java in the early 1980s, this was meant to repudiate the attraction that wealth, associated with Chinese, had for the rioters. In that way, Javanese rioters asserted their difference from Chinese.<sup>5</sup> Here too, rioters tried to eliminate all trace of the witch and consequently any contamination by him and certainly any identification with him.

But the television set, so prominently marked by its details ("A Politron fourteen-inch television set") is an extra element. This set is not just destroyed; the household belongings (unspecified) are beaten in the same way as the witch ("beaten till it was smashed to pieces"). In one village we visited, an extremely poor man was watching television at the house of a neighbor, there being no set in his hovel, when masked men, called Ninja, arrived at the door, summoned him out and killed him. His mutilated body was found at the corner of the village road the next day. His wife and children were watching a soap opera with him. I asked them if they still watched it. "Of course" was the answer.

These people, who suffered materially from the father's death, and who were already poor, had no hesitation in resuming their television habits without him. They did not fear feeling his absence. There are reasons for this which we will see in a

<sup>4</sup> "Masya Allah, 2 Dukun Santet dibunuh Lagi" (My God, Two More Witches Killed), *Malang Post*, December 21, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> For a description of these incidents see my *Solo in the New Order: Language and Hierarchy in an Indonesian City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 232-254.



moment that have to do with Javanese death practices. But one sees also that television fascinates. Whatever one sees on it, watching it one is removed from daily concerns. We might reluctantly guess that the family does not miss the father because the attractive power of television is so great. *Dukuns*, or magical practitioners who can also practice black magic, are represented on television. But these are not the witches involved in our account; the new witch could be anyone. The habitual programs of this family and most other peasants I know are the soap operas which deal with the lives of rich people in the capital in which sorcerers rarely appear. Television in rural Java fascinates. The source of that fascination may be the power that brings foreign elements into the village. The destruction of the television set in order to disengage from the force of the witch suggests a power vaguely associated with the new witchcraft whose source includes not only the traditional world of Javanese spirits, but something beyond it.

The sorcerers' corpses were mutilated. But what is a corpse if not a mutilated body? One can say that corpses are the living deprived of life and thus deformed. The decay of the body that comes with death is evidence that the person is deceased. In Java, the ghost is the restoration of the corpse. Not only is the person again present, if in an ambiguous manner, it is also whole again; it has a complete form. Some types of Javanese ghosts, such as the woman with a hole in her back, are monstrosities. But the ghosts of murdered sorcerers reappeared whole, at least to their families. These ghosts are not the opposite of living persons, but are their continuation and restoration. They are not anomalies, but, in a certain way, entities wished for. These Javanese ghosts ameliorate the shock of death. They obscure the moment of decease and hide the "deadness" or absence of the person turned into a corpse.

In order for a person to mourn, the instant of death and the corpse as corpse, as the body mutilated by death, have to be forgotten. Or perhaps the process of mourning, when it works and if it works, is this forgetting. We replace our knowledge of the corpse with the memory of the person when he was alive, using the past tense when we effectively separate the living from the dead. The deceased then are elsewhere, not part of the living world, relegated to a past that prevents their return. Javanese return as ghosts. But despite this return, there is still the separation of life and death to the degree that the ghost conceals a death immune to cultural integration.

By contrast, the trajectory of events after the death of the sorcerers was in the opposite direction. Instead of the restoration of wholeness, frequently enough there was the cutting of the body into pieces and the bashing in of the skull and other cruelties I do not have the courage to repeat. Often the bodies were dragged through the streets. In place of the ghost there was the display of deformation. One can say that there was a procedure since, unless the sorcerer escaped, there was always murder and mutilation, and usually the corpse was put on display. Rather than the production of ghosts, there was the display of a death which resisted amelioration and which was in opposition not only to the usual Javanese cultural practices but, I think one can say, to all cultural practice. The production of figures, the work of imagination, was set aside in order to search for something else.

This search could only be done through destruction. Revelation of "death" could not be accomplished through constructing a figure of death, through writing, telling, or painting, for instance. Whatever was to be seen could only be shown through

displaying the essence of the corpse, and that could be done only by opening the body, by smashing it, and by severing its members. The displays had the usual effect of the representations of death the media furnish us with. They said, "it is not me." The murderers hoped, if not for the end of death, at least for the ability to put it aside. They searched for its essence—sorcery—inside the body of the sorcerer. Once the sorcerer was dead—and it is clear that they were never confident of killing him definitively—the corpse was intended to give death a certain visibility. Death being in the dead body, it was not, or was no longer, in them. The revelation was supposedly also the cure. And yet death was never defeated. One knows this because the reputed sorcerers were killed multiple times, at it were, not merely because traditionally witches are difficult to kill, but because the killers were not sure that the witch was definitively dead and because the witch hunt continued in other villages.

Murdering their neighbor, they tried to avoid the possibility implicit within the logic of witchcraft that, because they too had death within them, they too were sorcerers. This possibility starts in the feeling of invasion by a lethal element heterogeneous to themselves. This element disables them; it makes them incapable of becoming what they should already be—living beings, and also social beings. They are already inhabited by death. If they are dead, or if they have death within them, but somehow are still alive, they are, at least potentially, witches. They need, after that, only to become the switching point, the diverter of death, to be fully witches. Under that condition, to kill the witch is to become the witch oneself.

Some who were accused of sorcery were not sure that the accusation was false. A man in Banyuwangi was warned by the village headman that he was suspected of being a sorcerer. He refused to flee, telling the village headman that he was innocent and therefore he would stay. But when his house was stoned, he ran off. He traveled widely, going to Bali and other places, to escape possible death. It is believed that certain people, sometimes thought to be witches themselves, have the capacity to see if someone is a witch. He went to a religious school in the countryside and asked the teacher (*kijaji*), "Am I a witch?" "No," was the answer. The man went back home. On the way he met the officer in charge of the local military post and repeated his question. This man, who had the power to see whether someone is a sorcerer, looked carefully at him and noted the radiance of his face. He said, "Yes, you are a witch." As a result the man postponed his return.

This man could not tell from his own interrogation of himself whether he was a sorcerer. He asks how he is seen by others, and he thinks that they may know something about him that he does not know himself. He got two answers to his question. Neither was definitive. He could not find in his surroundings a reflection of himself as he thought he was up to the moment of the outbreak of witchcraft. To ask, "Am I a witch?" when the "proofs" of witchcraft are signs of an identity concealed from oneself is to rely on others' appraisal of oneself. But these others are not convincing. They may know something, or they may not, but whatever it is does not match what the accused knows about himself. There is no verification possible, at least for anyone who did not admit to being a sorcerer before the accusation. (There were

two cases of people who admitted to being witches, but in these cases it was impossible to tell whether the persons became convinced of their powers only after they had been accused. Confessions contrived to suit the wishes of the community are, of course, quite common in cases of witchcraft.) The witch's identity is apparent to no one except those with special powers, and even then, as we have seen, not authoritatively: This, of course, did not stop villagers from finding "proof." To ask, "Am I a witch?" is to say also that what others think about me has no certainty; their opinion only can make me further doubt who I am.

The feeling of being possessed—if not the posing of the question, "Am I a witch?"—seems to me a condition for the unprecedented outbreaks of witchcraft in Java at the end of the New Order. It indicates that, at a certain moment, there was not merely uncertainty about identity, which means that one doubts who one is, as though one had a range of known possible identities. To be a witch, at least in Java, is to be invested with a power heterogeneous to all social identity. Thus there is also the possibility that one could be someone completely different from anything or anyone one knows. The impossibility of relying on social opinion opens up infinite possibilities within the person. But these possibilities are not the ones imagination presents.

Accused of witchcraft, I can find no reflection of myself. I therefore ask, "Am I a witch?" but I do so futilely. To ask this question is to say that I cannot put myself in the place that others once placed me. I can no longer see myself as they saw me at an earlier time in my everyday identity. Earlier I would be able to say, "I am not a witch," because I would not be able find in myself the confirmation that the accusations of my neighbors were true. But under the conditions that prevailed during the witch hunt, self-image disappeared as multiple possibilities of identity thrust themselves forward. "Witch," under that condition, is a name for the incapacity to figure oneself.

The difference between witch and murderer of witch collapses when both are thought to be inhabited by death and feel it urgent to kill to save themselves. They are governed by the feeling that death is already present in them and in those near to them. The capacity to die replaces social identity. To rid themselves of it they must kill. They have the attributes of the witch. They hope that murder will restore normality. But the continuation of murders shows that this is not the case. They are witches before anyone has that name.

Muki is the "proof" of his fellow villagers' collective disability. According to their reports of his behavior, he took no account of their persons; he gave them no credit for who they were. However you behaved toward him, you died. In their descriptions of their dealings with Muki, his accusers picture themselves not merely as powerless, but as denuded of social attributes. They got no reflection of themselves as they thought themselves to be from Muki. Faced with him, they acted against their will, their feelings, their habits, and their customs; they had no life in themselves with which to resist. Their terror pictures themselves as, in a certain sense, already dead. What happened then was a cultural failure. It was an inability to put death aside and, with it, the incapacity to manufacture either ghosts or social persons.

The heirs of these sorcerers, all of whom claimed that the victims were not sorcerers and that they themselves are not, produced ghosts often enough. That they were able to do so shows a difference between culture, on the one side, and a certain

deculturation. But why and how they could do so, and why, at a certain time, cultural processes failed remain to be explained.

## II

Let us look at the case of another murdered witch (I mean, when I use this word, "accused witch"). Munakip was slain in his bed on the night of December 21, 1999. He was, according to the *Malang Post*, "*dieksekusi massa*," "executed by the mob because he was suspected of having black magic."<sup>6</sup> Here is what his son told us:

Dad chanted the Koran in the prayer house [in front of their own house]. After he finished praying, he read a magazine, talked with the kids [his students] and went to bed. The kids went home. I locked the door but left the window open. I heard someone at the prayer house and thought they might be thieves. Maybe they were after our cucumbers. I said, "Who's there?" Then about ten o'clock they started to throw rocks and broke the windows. There are no nearby neighbors.

Someone came in the back of the house by the window. I shouted for help.

"Don't do that. If you scream, you'll be cut up" someone said. I went out another window to find a neighbor with a telephone. I didn't pay any attention at all to being cut up, I just kept right on screaming. But I [had to] telephone the police. [Later he said that the police came in fifteen or twenty minutes, there being a police post not too far away.]

Mom was in the kitchen, getting the meal ready [the meal eaten just before dawn during the fasting month]. They locked the door and wouldn't let her out. There were many people at the mosque, but they were afraid to help.

Dad was asleep when they came. He was kidnapped, is the word. [In fact, he was murdered in his bed.] Then he was cut to pieces.

They could have come one by one, but they came lots at a time.

Later I saw pictures of the corpse. It was *sadis* [derived from "sadistic"]. The police didn't want to show me them, they are afraid of raising the urge for vengeance. But I am not after revenge; I want the law.

There is someone here who envies [*iri*] us. So far as the *santet* issue goes, there is no truth in it. Just envy. He wants to smash this family.

JS: Have you had problems with the neighbors?

There have never been any problems. But if you mean envy, sure, there's a problem. The problem is, Dad and I don't work, but we live as well as those who do. [He goes on to explain that he is a producer of weddings; he dresses and makes up the couple and rents them clothes and decorates the house, for which, the newspaper reports, he gets about three million rupiah a month, many times more than the neighboring farmers. His father, he repeated, was a teacher of the Koran.] The one who envies us, he sees that we don't work [by which he meant "work in the fields, work manually"], and yet we live as well as they do.

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<sup>6</sup> "500 Polisi Serbu Kalipare, 25 Pelaku Dicidaduk," *Malang Post*, December 23, 1999, p. 1.

He went on to explain that Mariano, a *preman*, or hood or street criminal, who lived in the village, but went to Jakarta and had returned two or three years ago (the newspaper reported he had returned two or three months before the incident), has been blamed for organizing the killing. He is said to be behind three other murders. But, said Udi, "the *provakator* is someone else. Someone very envious of this family. This man has not been arrested. He worked from behind the scenes; he was the real instigator."

Mariano escaped but a few weeks after I spoke with the victim's son; Mariano was arrested in Jakarta. The paper reported that he named a *provakator*, implying that it was someone involved in national politics from Jakarta. But later a local man, one matching Udi's description, was arrested. Thus, the designated *provakator* was not at all someone part of a national conspiracy (*konspirasi*).

The house in which we spoke with Udi was built with his money. He earned enough in the three years since his return from Jakarta to build a larger than usual house, which was not yet finished. He also bought a truck, which someone drives for him and which he uses in his wedding productions, and a motorcycle. My Javanese friends agreed with him; these acquisitions, in the context of the village, were very likely to arouse envy. What is more, the rapidity by which Udi, and hence his family, became wealthy was likely to be attributed to magic. And, we learned later, other *kijaji*, or religious teachers, said Udi's father was a very powerful *tukang santet*. This reputation, preceding the acquisition of wealth, was used to account for the family's fortune. All of this fits the descriptions of witchcraft as it operated traditionally in Java. Jealousy, envy were always mentioned as usual elements that would spark accusations of witchcraft.

We can ask what it means when Udi says that villagers are *iri* of his family. He speaks of how he is seen by others. He "knows" what they think of him. He sees the difference between himself, his father (he does not speak of his brother or his mother), and them. This difference, as he puts it, does not consist merely in having wealth while they are poor. It is also that "they see that we do not work, and yet we live as well as they do." He minimizes his relative wealth in favor of a difference which, he implies, they do not understand. He pictures himself and his father as a mystery to their neighbors. They have an enigmatic characteristic which is unacceptable. *Iri*: "to feel or to have the feeling of discontent seeing someone else's good fortune," says the dictionary. Judging from the newspaper reports that a neighbor was responsible for plotting the murder, Udi seems to be correct in his supposition. It was a neighbor who provoked the attack, and not a plot concocted in Jakarta, and it was someone who saw how Udi waxed rich rapidly. The "discontent" here was obviously unbearable. It was, of course, his father who was killed, while Udi himself was left untouched. Udi's neighbors, in his account, never perceived him at work when he produced weddings. They only saw prosperity where there had been none before. In Udi's understanding, his father, who had been a Koran teacher for decades, whom others, possibly unknown to Udi, suspected of practicing sorcery for some time, was innocent and was

nonetheless hated. Udi feels that their envy and their lack of comprehension are behind the events.

Udi knows the village's perception of him is occulted and transformed. He stresses the mysterious aspects of himself to explain how his father was accused of being a witch. He, of course, thinks he has been misperceived. He explained how he lived in Jakarta for ten years and learned his trade, and how eventually he plans to return there. For him, the making of money is nothing. He sees that "they," his murderous neighbors, cannot understand him. At the same time, they accuse him of nothing. His capacity to become different is, if not explained, at least left without need for explanation because it took place in Jakarta, outside the village. Whatever he is—hairdresser, earner of money—that quantity belongs to the city and not to the village. Villagers, it is implied and frequently said by others, are *bodoh*, ignorant. They do not think of interpreting what is outside their world. They merely find a local cause for what they do not understand.

Elaborate weddings with expensive preparations were a feature of the New Order which penetrated the village. They were a ritualized sanction for the wealth that was gained during that period. Precisely because weddings provided opportunities for redistributing wealth, differences in wealth were made tolerable, though only uneasily. What was found intolerable was differences of wealth that seemed to have no provenance. This, at least, is Udi's understanding of how he is seen. In his view, it means that, to them, his father, an extension of himself, could be anything at all. Of course, Udi knows that "they" are mistaken. He does not accept their view of himself or of his father, perhaps because he retains a confirmed sense of his own identity from his time in Jakarta.

Judging from Udi's explanation, his neighbors' murderous impulses are not directed toward social differences. Indeed, they stem from an inability to perceive difference in the first place. The envious want what someone else has. But while the word "envy" (*iri*) is used, it seems to me to fill in for the lack of a word. According to Udi's understanding, the problem was not that neighbors coveted his riches; in fact, when they broke in, they took nothing from the house nor did they do what we have seen anti-Chinese rioters and some attackers of accused witches do: destroy their victims' goods as a sign that they, the rioters, renounced such wealth. *Iri* here is directed not against a consolidated social distinction, but against its provenance. Our wealth, says Udi, is only in their minds a sign of not laboring and still living well. For them this has mysterious origins that indicate sorcery. It is not that "we" have what "they" want. It is rather that we seem to be vaguely or indistinctly different.

"Envy" here indicates that "our" mystery is insupportable to "them." And that can only be because they might become like us. The villagers desire to live without work, and therefore they feel envy. But they also fear that if they did live without work, if they became like Udi and his father appear to be, then they would also be sorcerers. "Envy," as used here, indicates an identification that is both desired and feared. Finally, it implies that one is, indeed, already in the place of the envied, unable to break an identification with him. The attempt to do so was murder. In Udi's analysis, the inability to generate a reflection of himself in the minds of his fellow villagers was the result of this identification. It follows that murderers and victims

were, he thought, the same in the minds of the former. Both were witches in the sense that a menacing force had them in their grip.

In the case of Udi's father described above, there is nothing that contradicts ideas about witchcraft from an earlier time. The witch here is also a curer, as was always the case before. But there is a new witch in East Java today, even if sometimes he appears also as a curer. He is new because this witch has sources of power which, while remaining inchoate, surpass those of the witch of the past. Some witches were also *dukun*, or magical curers of the traditional sort, including Muki. Most were not. But the point is that even when a *dukun* was involved, the recourse against him was different than it would have been in earlier periods. This difference was an implicit acknowledgment of the new powers of the witch. We were repeatedly told that there have long been witches in East Java and that sometimes they were killed. The main difference, people told us, was that in the past only individual witches were attacked. The ethnographic evidence is slim, there being no extended studies of Javanese witchcraft, to my knowledge. What evidence we have, however, does not support the idea that there were many killings of witches earlier. Probably such reports refer to the last years of the Suharto era, when the killings began but before they reached the frequency of the years after Suharto left office. In any case, Clifford Geertz, whose study, *The Religion of Java*, was carried out in the 1950s and published in 1960, says this:

Accusations of sorcery are common enough, but they are never made openly and directly against anyone; they are only whispered to others as malicious gossip or discussed rather abstractly as hypotheses to account for peculiar behaviors . . .

In many instances the immediate suffering from sorcery is psychologically real and the accusations fervent . . . Even in cases of this sort where the hurt is real and immediate, accusations are never expressed directly to the assumed culprit, nor is a public charge made; gossip to all one's neighbors is the typical pattern.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, in our cases, accusations were made collectively, and there was action rather than gossip. Traditional sorcery is discussed by both Geertz and Koentjaraningrat in terms of particular types of *dukuns*, each of whom specializes in such things as love magic or thieves' magic. But in the cases I am discussing, the only accusations were against *tukang sihir* or *tukang santet*; generalized practitioners of evil magic. This reflects the difference between then and now. Then:

. . . sorcery is always practiced for a particular reason, never for sheer malevolence.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, Geertz notes,

Although one may gossip about it and make secret accusations to one's heart's content . . . any open attempt to organize public opinion against an accused sorcerer would be almost certain to fail. Similarly, one finds no private individuals in Modjokuto [the place in East Java where Geertz worked] with a

<sup>7</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1960), p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

wide reputation for instigating sorcery. Although some dukuns are suspected as all-too-willing agents, even these are in no way socially ostracized.<sup>9</sup>

Koentjaraningrat mentions that sorcerers might be accused of causing death, but he mentions nothing at all about the killing of sorcerers themselves. The recourse against sorcery was, first of all, gossip. And after that, it was the hiring of another sorcerer. Geertz again:

In all the cases of sorcery of which I heard, I never discovered a case in which direct confrontation by the victim of the accused took place or where any general open accusation was made or any claim for punishment or damages instituted even informally—there being no formal procedures in any case. *Sorcery is a mystical act to be mystically combated.*<sup>10</sup>

Geertz then tells of one man who, having been robbed twice, went to a *dukun* who practiced evil magic to get retribution.

Today the accusations of sorcery are often divorced from particular injuries. And even when this is not the case, the threat of the sorcerer was general. Somehow the malevolence that issued from him would harm everyone, even if only one person in a village felt himself to have been injured. Thus the need felt for collective action. This is the case with Udi and his father. Udi was convinced that one man was behind the murder, a man envious of his family. But this man was able to convince many in the village that they too were in danger. No doubt the *provakator*, as Udi termed him, had been jealous for some while. But at a certain moment his perception made many afraid enough so that they took collective action. This, following after Geertz, was new.

The remedy against sorcery is no longer sorcery. Gossip no longer satisfies. The power of the *dukun* will now not prevail against sorcerers. When sorcery was the answer to sorcery, the spirit world was in equilibrium. This is currently not the case. The menace is general, and catastrophe threatens. Thus, the attempt is to banish witches, if not witchcraft, forever.

The defenses against sorcery have disappeared. The implication is that witches today have another source of power, one proceeding from outside the world of Javanese spirits. Even where the elements are seemingly traditional, the generalized panic indicates a fear that has no known provenance.

<sup>9</sup> Geertz adds: "It seems to follow no definite kin or class lines, but instead there seems to be a tendency for a man to accuse another of sorcerizing him if he, the victim, conceives of himself as having either frustrated the wishes of the attacker or angered him in some way." Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, p. 110. See also Koentjaraningrat on this topic. Koentjaraningrat, *Javanese Culture* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 419. Koentjaraningrat says: "The victims of sorcery are usually rivals and enemies who have done much harm to a person, or they may be a relative or neighbor who has unintentionally insulted or offended someone, and may not even be aware of it. To take revenge, a sorcerer is usually hired at a high fee to make the victim very sick and, frequently, to kill him." But Koentjaraningrat says nothing about the killing of sorcerers. About such sorcerers, he says that they, "Are ordinary people who mix with the other members of the community, and several of them are not even professional *dukun*." *Ibid.*, p. 425. However, it is assumed that they are known for their powers. In any case, "Criminals and also ordinary people with aggressive or destructive intentions are generally the black magic *dukuns*' clients. Non-criminals do occasionally want to harm their rivals or enemies, or want to take revenge on people who have insulted them, and to these people the *dukun sibir* renders his services." *Ibid.*, p. 424.

<sup>10</sup> Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, p. 110, emphasis added.



It also suggests that “envy” and “jealousy,” so often associated with witchcraft across the world, perhaps have a different meaning today in Java. Udi was certain that the envy he detected in his aggressors came from their misperception of the skills he learned in Jakarta. It was not just his wealth, which in an earlier time might also have excited jealousy, and not merely that this led to mystification, but that this mystification was unbearable because it was outside the control that earlier would have come through gossip and counter sorcery due to the fact that, in his view, it originated outside the experience of the aggressors.

It is tempting to think that, in each case, the villagers’ inability to understand the penetration of village society by the market somehow triggered the violence. But this cannot be so since, as I have said, the poor and the desperately poor were also attacked, and those who had no connection with the world outside the village except through television were attacked as well. I do not want to discount the market entirely. But we cannot find the exact source of this power. Witchcraft here is not a metaphor for something that we, as analysts, could name but they, the witch hunters, could not. Something amorphous and unnamable was at work. Up to this point one can only say this: At a certain moment there was a menace felt whose origin was unknown and which was general. It surpassed the usual understandings of sorcery. With this, a social type was activated: the village mob. People, using the idiom of sorcery as it had been known, invented a new witch; only the name for the menace was the same.

### III

How did such a change come about? We can look for a first answer in the history of the Suharto regime. The New Order, as it was called, narrowed and rationalized national identity. It was a time when the emergence into adulthood which, in the Sukarno period, was a time full of undefined opportunity, became restricted. It is only apparently paradoxical that though the development of the market allowed new careers, the unlimited imaginative opportunities of the Old Order evaporated. Only certain social types were allowed. Walking into the regional parliament, for instance, one had to have proper attire—especially shoes, not sandals—and the right identification. Dressed in the form that indicates the greatest wealth of possibility, as a revolutionary, one would certainly be refused admission. Getting a national identity card was a recurrent problem. This card specified, among other things, which of the five authorized religions one belonged to. Letters of identification, identity badges, permits multiplied. Since the fall of Suharto, there has been an abrupt decline in the insistence that identity be continuously, officially confirmed. Government surveillance has decreased considerably, as the free press, for instance, indicates.

One should not exaggerate the degree of the new freedom, but once again (though without the euphoria that pertained at the time of independence), there is the possibility of becoming nearly anyone. This time, however, it is not that the government or the nation approves of such development, but that it is simply not doing the work of surveillance to the same degree. The assumption that one is seen in the eyes of national authority is greatly weakened. The youth in the revolution knew they dressed in the same way as their compatriots. They could find their doubles next to

themselves. Youth who marched against Suharto merely imitated this look from the past. The model vanished as quickly as though it were only one more fashion. By contrast to the early days of independence, when eccentric attire of various sorts was accepted, perhaps as the possible look of the future, there is today a certain indifference, the general effect of the lack of confidence in a generalized other.

It seems as though there is a substitution of the surveillance of the market for the surveillance of the nation. On the one hand, we have the new indifference of the state; on the other, the rapid change of fashion. Even village youth, for instance, dress in t-shirts, imitation Nikes, and so on. But there was no substitution, at least for villagers, as we shall see below. During the Suharto regime the market was allowed a sphere of influence without necessitating the relaxation of governmental surveillance. A space was made for fashion and for consumption, but on the condition that it was ultimately subordinated to national identity, with all that implied in terms of recognition by the state. Add to this the untransformed nature of the village in which the pressures for consumption were felt without a place being made for them. An example, of course, is the case of Udi. The effects were felt not so much in Udi himself, who forged ahead, building his house and buying a truck and a motor bike, but in the reaction toward him by those who were mystified by his sudden production of wealth. Had the circulation of money and, with it, consumption, been a normal part of village existence, perhaps most villagers would not have thought that sudden wealth implied sorcery. They themselves, even the poorest, by their dress, showed that they nonetheless depended on the market to a greater extent than ever, without, however, any thorough transformation of their mentality. The New Order introduced "Development" even for villagers. But it contributed nothing to the cultural development necessary for making a place for new social types. On the contrary, the surveillance it practiced had the effect of suppressing the assertion of wealth as a form of social status in the village, at least for those who held no government position.

It was not only the pressure of new wealth that was felt at the time of the witch murders, however, as evidenced by the killing of the poor as well as the new rich. The effect of the New Order was to make it seem as though only certain forms of social expression, principally those that were traditionally found in the village, were available. Retrograde as it was, this conferred security on those who appreciate authority. For them, safety continued to depend on governmental surveillance. They may not all have been supporters of the New Order, but its ending meant the end of that security. The lifting of surveillance meant that much, if not everything, seemed possible. That includes, in particular, asocial drives.

The asocial is here-hatred. I have indeed used the word "hate" for the feelings toward the witch. "Hate" in Java is often spontaneous. Muki was accused of practicing witchcraft for as long as people can remember and to have had ancestors before him from whom he inherited his sorcery. I do not know the facts, but the debts of the soup seller, who spoke as though these were debts incurred by Muki over a lifetime of sorcery, extended only about a month. The second soup seller, who lost his wife to Muki's son, suffered this loss, it turned out, several years earlier. However, he had been bewitched only recently. The intensity of feelings against Muki may have made it seem to villagers that he had always been a witch. In other places, the witch was said to be recent. In all instances, the intensity of animosity cannot be doubted,

and in that sense “hate” is the correct word to describe the animosity. But Javanese hate, as evidenced in most of the cases of witchcraft, was unpredictable and uncontrolled, rather than savored and slow growing. These qualities suggest the resurgence of unconscious drives hitherto repressed, rather than an outbreak of long-standing resentment, cultivated in memory and cultural representations.

Perhaps it is possible, however, to characterize the violence against witches historically. In Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s vignette of the revolution, “Dendam” (revenge), young men waiting for a train become convinced that a *haji* is a traitor. He has magical powers, and until he gives them up, they are unable to kill him. The possession of these powers convinces the youth that the *haji* is guilty. Benedict Anderson reflected on this story in his earliest written formulation of his idea of nationalism. He made the point that murder and the impulse for revenge were a part of the revolution, something forgotten by Western scholars.<sup>11</sup> One sees them here attached to suspicion and magic, as with sorcery. And, as in the cases previously discussed in this paper, suspicion arises suddenly and for no reason we are told about. (We know only that someone has actually betrayed the company, but there is no evidence that it was the *haji*.) Since the revolution, violence has also been put out of mind by Indonesians. The revolution is often discussed in Indonesia, for instance, without mention of the word “Dutch,” unless “negotiation” also appears in the sentence. Iconographically, Indonesian soldiers are shown in heroic poses, but seldom, in my experience, with a visible enemy. Violence remains, in my opinion, in the cultural memory of Indonesians, though it is repressed.

From the Indonesian perspective, the revolution was a push toward national expression, one which took modernization as its goal along with independence and for which violence supposedly was a means. However, revolutionary violence was seen by the educated as threatening the achievement of these aims rather than accomplishing them. Its targets uncontrolled, it could mean social as well as national revolution.<sup>12</sup> Only in a few locales was there a successful social revolution, but it may be that, in many places, violence surpassed even revolutionary goals. It may have been inevitable that such violence was repressed, feared, and built into the national memory under the form of fears of communist resurgence, sadistic criminals, and social disrupters.

The Suharto regime, which committed several massacres on a scale well worth world cognizance, at the same time contributed to this repression by attributing violence to the unformed *massa*, defined as “mob” or perhaps “masses.”<sup>13</sup> Whatever

<sup>11</sup> Benedict Anderson, “Reading ‘Revenge’ by Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1978–1982),” in *Writing on the Tongue*, ed. A. L. Becker, Michigan Papers in South and Southeast Asian Studies, no. 35 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> The failure of the social revolution is definitively treated in Benedict Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance, 1944–46* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972).

<sup>13</sup> Benedict Anderson has generously given me the history of the word. “It is from the Dutch-German *Masse(n)*, and I am sure came to the Indies via Sneevliet [the Communist leader], and the first modern radicals, meaning the Marxist idea of the ‘masses,’ i.e., not the bourgeoisie, and not the aristocracy and political elite. It shows up positively and honorably in Tan Malaka’s great 1920s pamphlet, *Massa Actie*. In the revolution, it was always there (used by the left mainly), and it competed with *Rakyat* (which could also mean something populist and unMarxist, and sometimes even the Nation), *Murba*, *Marhaen*, and so on. In the 1950s liberal period, the parties increasingly (to win elections) thought they had to have *ormas*—meaning ‘mass organizations,’ or better, perhaps, ‘organization of masses’—as part of their weaponry.

its real origins, as, for instance, in ordinary criminality, or with the army itself, violence during the Suharto regime was usually associated with the *massa*, a term increasingly used in opposition to “the people,” or *rakyat*, though the actual persons who fall under the term are the same. According to the official retrospective view (one widely shared), the revolution was the work of “the people” under the leadership of the educated. Its violence, put out of memory, reappeared in the fear of the *massa*. With the discontinuation of the populism of Sukarno and the increasing distance of the regime from the people it governed, “the people” receded from view. The *massa* became prominent as the Suharto regime justified itself through the security it claimed to afford in preventing violence. Such a claim required a national menace. The *massa*, as transfigured revolutionaries, spectral communists, and criminals, was this menace. Though I say that the *massa* are transfigured revolutionaries, it would be more accurate to say that they are the decomposed people, by which I mean “the people” deprived of their moral sense, without goals and without form, revolutionaries without the goals of independence or any other aims, which leaves them violence as their only property.

As we will see, the responsibility for the murders of sorcerers was taken not in the name of the people of certain villages, and not by individuals who had quarreled with the murder victims, but by the *massa* or “mob.” That they accepted a pejorative term for themselves indicates how desperate they were for a form of identification of any sort. To murder in the name of “the people” would be an assertion that this violence was justified within a moral framework. To claim to be the *massa*, however, means claiming an incoherent violence, one resorted to desperately, as we have seen was the case, and without reflection. *Massa*, in this sense, is a mere negative term, that is, “not the *rakyat*,” and this is the analogue to *tukang sihir* or *tukang santet*, Javanese “witch,” in this respect. It indicates not an instrumental violence, but possession by violence of those who became murderers, just as witches are said to be possessed by lethal spirits.

One would not expect the word *massa* to be used in these situations, not only because it is pejorative, but also because it commonly designates a feature of the city rather than the countryside. That villagers applied it to themselves, given the historical evolution of that word, shows how violence during the Suharto regime took on a hidden attraction which we can only in part attribute to its subterranean transformations.

The word *massa* is ambiguous, in the first place, because of its honorable connotations in the past. In the Suharto period, it comes to indicate people whose violence explodes and spreads without goals and, at the same time, those whose violence is captured by nefarious members of the political elite for the latter’s own purposes through deception. (The *massa* are easily deceived, being, like the *rakyat*,

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These *ormas* were sectorially segregated: as youth, women, farmers, fishermen, laborers, intellectuals, schoolteachers, and so on. This ‘positive’ idea of *massa*, connected of course to *organisasi*, did not disappear under either the Old or the New Order. But in the early 1970s, Ali Murtopo’s Opsus gang invented the idea of the *massa mengambang* (“floating masses”), i.e., deliberately ‘not-organized’ masses, which also were not sectorially defined. They were designated as rural for the first time, i.e., outside *kabupaten* seats, etc. These floating masses were to be left to float, unmoored. Gradually this idea of *massa* as an unorganized, floating, menacing ‘mob’ emerges to compete with older meanings. This is why in the 1980s the meaning of *massa* is highly unstable, so hard to translate. Lefty groups like the PRD (People’s Democratic Party) still used *massa* in the older sense, as well as some PDI-P (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle) people.” Personal communication.

without the capacity for formulating their own goals.) Thus any group calling itself “the *massa*” indicates that its members are violent and that their violence is pure of any aim, and, at the same time, they enter themselves into the vocabulary of Indonesian political discourse in such a way that they can be used for certain aims, though these do not originate in themselves. As we will see, the witch hunters were thought to have been manipulated from outside. From their own point of view, however, they acted without goals insofar as they acted with an urgency so great that it precluded any formulation or consideration of what they were doing. To say that they acted against witches and, thus, had a goal, is to overlook the fact that to say “witch” is merely to expel an unbearable hatred, violence, and feeling of being possessed. Any object, simply because it was exterior, might do as a target. But afterwards, as we will see, they justified their acts. If they did so without leaders to speak for them, it indicates that they had a source of political action outside constituted discourse. They are the *massa*, but they are then close to being revolutionaries, returning them to the original meaning of the word.

During the revolution, there were examples of such pure violence, and they came at moments when the “other” was obscured. In the accounts of revolutionary fighters, violence sometimes appears blind, occurring at moments when there is no cognizance of the identities of those surrounding one. What was left was killing which, in its disregard of the surrender of the eventual victims, can be called murder. Here is the account of one revolutionary youth:

Enemies were no longer taken prisoner; they died. They had to die. The corpses of the enemy were allowed to stay where they were sprawled out; the attacks continued. Always forward, always attack, kill and only kill.

The writer left his post in the kitchen in order to join the killing:

. . . shooting them no matter if the enemy ran off in complete disarray or with their hands up. We all had become mad; mad with killing the enemy.<sup>14</sup>

When he calls himself “mad” (and after the revolution he was hospitalized for his violent tendencies), he means that the desire to kill made his victims’ identities secondary. It was as “enemies” that they surrendered, but their signals were of no consequence. There was something else about them, beyond their status as “enemies,” that made it urgent that they be killed. Viewed from a broad perspective, the violence toward neighbors in 1998 was similar to this revolutionary violence in its disregard of social identity. This similarity between witch hunts and revolutionary situations could indicate the return of an historical situation, but it could equally well show the autonomy of a destructive impulse whose origins are distinct from any particular social situation. Such an impulse is held back under ordinary situations, but it can emerge when, for a variety of reasons, the capacity to see the other and to be seen by him is blunted. But we have more to understand about the relation between murder,

<sup>14</sup> This retrospective account of a youth who fought in the revolution is included in James T. Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

the creation of corpses, and the inability to see oneself in the eyes of others, or to see others in their social identities, before we can draw conclusions.

This account of a revolutionary recalls a Javanese practice called *keroyokan*. *Keroyokan* is a form of *main hukum sendiri*,<sup>15</sup> or “taking the law into one’s own hands,” at least as seen from the outside. It takes place when a mob that has formed spontaneously chases, catches, and usually beats to death a thief or other culprit. It occurs usually in markets or in villages or city neighborhoods. To my knowledge, the victim is always an outsider, which makes recent cases of witchcraft anomalous except when one pauses to think that the new witch is, underneath his appearance as neighbor, the embodiment of a foreign force. In cases of a traffic accident involving a villager, for instance, a group of men quickly forms to hunt down the outsider who was driving the car. In the market, petty thieves are often the victims.

Middle-class Indonesians often take *keroyokan* to be a primitive form of justice, and they usually disapprove of it. I have heard the practice explained by scholars as a continuation of village justice that persisted after law codes from the state were imposed. Some see it as a desperate recourse to justice in the face of the notorious failure of the Indonesian courts (it is commonly known that judgments in Indonesian courts are up for sale). Lacking justice, the *rakyat*, the people, take it upon themselves to see that punishments are meted out. There is a reflection of this in the statement that the *massa* took vengeance (*dendam*) against witches. But one cannot see *keroyokan* as a form of class justice since, judging from newspaper accounts, the victims are overwhelmingly from the same class.

The problem with these lines of explanation is the difficult word “justice.” One might better reserve the word for occasions that are reflected upon and allow the hearing of various voices. In *keroyokan*, there is a single, collective sentiment (to avoid the word “opinion”), and it is formed (to avoid the word “decided”) by the crowd nearly instantly. Thieves are often killed for stealing the most trivial items. In a neighborhood in which I lived in Surakarta, a man was killed for stealing a towel, for instance, and this is quite common.

My concern here is not moral. It is to understand how a group with murder in mind can form so rapidly. Indeed, the root of the word “*keroyokan*” means “to spread,” as in “an opinion spreads.” Something triggers a response, and it is practically instantaneous. Justice, as I say, is considered. This reaction is automatic. But what is it that triggers the violence? It is always an instance of aggression. Not all crimes are aggressive, of course. And those which are not do not figure in *keroyokan*.

It is aggression that triggers *keroyokan*. And it does so not, in the first place, as a matter of justice insofar as that means certain norms have been violated. If that were the case, there could be discussion of the merits and interpretation of the facts in each case. This, as I have said, precluded a balanced result: small losses lead to murder. Aggression in these cases is unbearable. It produces, as with witchcraft, murder as the solution. Reflection is not merely avoided, it is impossible. Aggression here is the

<sup>15</sup> Ordinarily the phrase is *main hakim sendiri*—“to play judge oneself.” But in East Java, the word for “judge” (*hakim*) was often substituted for the word for law (*hukum*), as indeed I heard also in other parts of rural Java. While the new phrase is syntactically incorrect, I retain it here both to record the strange usage and to open speculation about the reasons for this mutation.

equivalent of "death" in the cases of witchcraft. One is already invaded by it; one is the aggressor oneself, and one wants to banish it.

There is a common reaction, which means that the inability to tolerate aggression is common. One would like to say that such a reaction is part of Javanese culture. But it seems to me, rather, that this phenomenon attests to a failure of culture. In Java, there are functioning modes of discussion and recognized ways to formulate community opinion. These are disabled when aggression appears on the scene.

The aggression of *keroyokan* is material. There is injury or loss. This marks it off from witchcraft, which deals always with phantoms. But these phantoms are, of course, aggressors. They too are violent. The case of the revolutionary discussed above suggests that, first, there is aggression, whether material or phantasmatic, and then there is the obscuring of social identity.

#### IV

Alternatively, one might see the outbreak of witchcraft not as the breakdown of identity, or as triggered by phantasmatic violence, but as a form of social conflict. This, indeed, was the supposition I had in mind before going to East Java. Since these witchcraft accusations arise within the village, we must look first at the local situation in order to examine this supposition.

The Javanese village remained culturally untransformed all the while that class differences, for instance, became accentuated within it as, during the New Order, developments in the growing of rice increased the differences between owners of land and the landless. It is clear, however, that culturally the village changed but little. One turns to what Clifford Geertz, in his classic description in *The Religion of Java*, called "the core ritual." This is the *selamatan*, or communal feast. The peculiarities of this ritual, described by Geertz, have been interestingly reinflected in the study of Andrew Beatty. East Java is a region of multiple historical influences, and it has experienced immigration from Madura, Bali, and elsewhere. The *selamatan*, as Beatty sees it, accounts for these differences while suppressing their importance. The ritual symbols, for instance, have "variant readings," allowing participants silently to hold their own quite divergent beliefs:

. . . Each symbol has a range of meanings which variously contradict, complement, or nest inside each other. The variant readings which comprise this symbolic ambiguity are not the quibbles of specialists over the finer points of tradition; they reflect fundamental differences of a kind we are not accustomed (not *prepared*) to expect in ritual. A few of the participants believe that a transcendent and unknowable God created man and sent down the Koran to Muhammad as his sole guide, and that man's preordained actions lead inexorably to heaven or hell. A few others disbelieve in any kind of afterlife, and question the idea of a personal God, the absolute truth of the Koran, and the divine mission of Muhammad. The remainder—perhaps a small majority, though proportions vary—believe in the continued existence of ancestors and perhaps in

some form of karma, but not in a Muslim afterlife. But they all pronounce the same words.<sup>16</sup>

What is not said is at least as significant as what is said. And what is said, though it varies little among speakers, varies greatly in meaning. The formulaic explication of the *selamatan* address, in its generalities, ambiguities, and wordplay, encompasses diversity and seems, superficially, to deny it . . .<sup>17</sup>

There is an agreement, one might say, not to bring up differences unless it is in order to minimize them, but this does not mean that differences are denied. On the contrary, according to Beatty: “. . . there is still a sense that something important has been said and shared. If this is ritual as consensus, it is a peculiar form of consensus which under the surface preserves contradictions and divisions.”<sup>18</sup> Differences are, he adds, buried “in common ground,” which is “common only in form, not sense.” The result is that “instead of consensus . . . we find compromise and provisional synthesis” [provisional because it lasts only as long as the ritual]: a temporary truce among people of radically different orientation.<sup>19</sup> The ritual consists of the insistence, not to say belief, that locally people have ritual form in common. But, as Beatty points out, knowledge of difference persists; a “truce” implies the continued differences of the parties who have agreed to it. If what sets people apart is put aside during the ritual, it seems not to be ever out of mind. Individual interpretation of common symbols is well known to Javanese, who, in my experience, outside the ritual, comment on the ignorance of others. Beatty’s use of the word “truce” seems to me apt.

*Selamatan* are found throughout Java, but they are local, in the first place, because the spirits that are referred to in the rites are local in their habitats. They are sometimes Muslim spirits, just as they are sometimes “Javanese.” Even without the form of ghosts, the spirits of the past haunt Java, if one can use that verb in a general sense, by residing in the persons who participate in the *selamatan*, giving them their indisputable identities as Muslims or whatever else. One might think of the *selamatan* from this point of view as a ritual that localizes the major historical forces, largely originating outside Java, which have swept through the island. Through the *selamatan*, these historical effects, taking the shape of participants—human and otherwise—are given a place. The assertion of these differences is a significant part of the rite which, in effect, says that all of these forces have a place.

The *selamatan* thus acknowledges the multiple historical and cultural currents that have passed through Java, perhaps most densely, and with the most variety, in East Java. It gives them a place in the local community, all the while that it arranges that such differences should remain as discrete as possible. Community beliefs, in the *selamatan*, comprise both those that originated locally and those that came from elsewhere and were localized. Rather than giving precedence to either, the ritual dampens differences between them. But the ritual makes gestures to authorities outside the boundaries of the village, whether Islamic or Hindu, for instance, or national, since

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion: An Anthropological Account* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.



the different beliefs of the *selamatan* are associated today, as they were in the 1950s, with various national political orientations. It thus tacitly acknowledges that authority by and large originates outside the village.

During most of the New Order, there was tight government control of religious activities. Moreover, according to Beatty, because it was dangerous to be conspicuous, many people were reluctant to join Muslim mass organizations, with the exception of the Nahdatul Ulama (NU), which had excluded itself from politics to become a cultural and religious organization. This reluctance “reflects a desire not to upset the political status quo rather than a lack of interest among [those with a strong Muslim orientation] in the promotion of Islam.”<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, during the final years of the New Order, there was also a push beyond the usual boundaries of self-restraint. During the latter part of the New Order, Islam was given an important role in Indonesian politics and culture. With government acquiescence, there was, among the young, “a true missionary spirit,”<sup>21</sup> which, though kept within the boundaries set by the government, certainly upset the “truce” mentioned above. Beatty describes the efforts in one village to bring practices in accord with Islamic belief.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the newly wealthy had, again according to Beatty, little means for enjoying their wealth. One man told Beatty that, were he to do so, he would offend his neighbors. He thus lived on a scale far below what he might have enjoyed.<sup>23</sup>

Given the push made by certain Muslims and the pressure of increased wealth, one would think that the witchcraft accusations might follow the fissures papered over in the *selamatan*. Udi, for instance, might be taken as an example of how someone made himself a target. But our other example is different. Muki was said to have had “only enough to get by on.” Nor did the violence follow the lines of social division; it was rather a case of the village, or a preponderant element of it, mustering itself against a single family. Generally speaking, the targets were usually members of the Nahdatul Ulama, but the murderers were also. Nor did we find any preponderance of either wealthy or poor individuals among those accused of witchcraft.

This area of Java was the scene of massive killings of communists by Nahdatul Ulama members in 1965. The remnants of the left are now distributed amongst other organizations allowed by the government. One might expect to hear charges that descendants of murdered communists had initiated these violent attacks to get revenge, and, in fact, such charges emerged from the military. But the NU itself denied this possibility, reasoning that such a charge would divert guilt from those they assumed to be their political rivals—i.e., the army—and would alienate their allies in other parties where descendants of leftists were members. In the NU view, as expressed to me by its leaders in the city of Banyuwangi, the only divisions at play were between the military and their organization.

The NU claimed that there was a hidden identification underneath the charge of witch. They asserted that many Koranic teachers, members of NU, were targeted. Such people were vulnerable to being called *tukang sibir*, or witches, not because they

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., chapter 5, especially pp. 134-157.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

actually were so, but because they often practiced white magic, helping their neighbors and fellow villagers. They thus left themselves open to misidentification. If they were good witches, as it were, they could also be bad witches. And, they added, witches had been known for centuries in the area, and, they believed, there was such a thing as black magic, and it is difficult to know who practices it. Their political opponents used this obscurity to eliminate village NU leaders. As I have said, however, it was not only NU leaders who were targeted. Nor did we find evidence of outside forces.

What happened in East Java was not the result of communal politics at work following the weakening of national authority, which put pressure on the fragile village religious mechanisms for the keeping of order. These were not conflicts that pitted Muslims against Javanists or one sort of Muslim against another or Muslims against Christians. These outbreaks were caused, rather, by a collapse of the structures that generate identities and the subsequent surge of untamed impulses.

Consider a contrary case, Ambon, where there was conflict between Christians and Muslims. Preliminary reports suggest that conflict began with individual disputes. A bus conductor argues with a passenger who does not want to pay. They turn out to be from neighboring villages. Later the conductor leads a group of his friends to the passenger's village to continue the conflict that started on the bus. One village is Christian and the other Muslim. It seems that, at this point, the conflict becomes one of Muslims versus Christians, though it could have remained a dispute between gangs of youths or simply between particular villages. But each side, at a certain moment, acted in the name of its respective religion.

By contrast, in East Java, no one acted "in the name of" (we note the apparent exception: those who acted in the name of the *massa*). In a village, some took action against a witch. Each group that did so acted separately and one by one; there were none of the large-scale actions, such as those against mosques and churches in Ambon, where the local origins of the actors were indistinct or, at least, unimportant compared to the religions they espoused. In one instance, in Banyuwangi, one group sought three witches in different neighborhoods. But these were adjacent neighborhoods on the edge of the city, and the murderous youths hung out with each other. The witch hunts were the actions of clusters of unselfconscious young men who not only did not, but in my opinion could not, act "in the name of." They lacked the ability to see themselves in assumed identities such as "Christian" or "Muslim" at the moment of the attacks.

Precisely what did not work were the projections and identifications that underlie coherent politics, violent or peaceful. When these identifications are in place, the actors become "the people," or *rakyat*, who are, in Indonesia, always spoken for by their leaders. The *rakyat* sees itself in its leader. The lack of the ability to do so is one condition for these witch hunts as I understand them. The decomposition of "the people" or the failure to form "a people" left the actors as the mob, as an incoherent group, without any particular identity. *Massa* is a word which indicates this lack and perhaps tries to compensate for it.

## V

The settlement of cases of *tukang santet* in the thirty-six cases we found originated outside the village. The police investigated and, as usual in Indonesia, arrests were assumed to mean guilt. While not everyone was satisfied that all those guilty were arrested, no one to our knowledge protested that those arrested had not participated in the murders. Usually the arrests meant that the village settled down. Families that had been attacked resumed amicable relations with people whom they suspected or even knew were amongst the killers of their fathers or mothers or spouses. It was not only the police who participated in making peace. The local authorities—meaning the village headman, the *camat*, or government administrators above the headman, such as the police, the army, and often officials of the Nahdatul Ulama and other organizations—convened meetings of the village and explained the need for national law to take its course and for villagers not to take the law into their own hands.

It was astonishing to me that feuds or vendettas did not ensue. But that they did not testify to the restoration of authority. We can begin to understand why there were no vendettas when we see how it is that the survivors of murdered “witches” asked for justice. In every case, the family protested that the murdered person was not a witch. (“If he were,” said one, “I would have killed him myself.”) Usually peace was made, as I have said, and the families of the village got along as well after the incident as they had before the incident. In some cases, they even got along better, as one person closely related to a murder victim told me, since “they [the killers] know now that what they did was wrong and they are sorry.” Whether this was true or the sort of denial that characterizes the *selamatan* is not clear. But that these Javanese, after the slaying of their fathers, mothers, and brothers, can expect to be on good terms with their murderers is revealing. It means, in the first place, that what prompts the desire for revenge, the inescapable memory of the murdered father or mother, does not press urgently. The funeral rituals had the effect they are supposed to have everywhere, of separating the living and the dead. The reason for their effectiveness is both that authorities intervened—this intervention reassured the villagers—and that the expected result of Javanese funeral rituals is not the sort of transformation of memory that we usually associate with mourning, as we have already explained. Furthermore, the murderers usually attended the funeral, though this was not the case for Muki and at least one other victim. Once the active memory of the dead has been given a place, the urge for vengeance is lessened. Though, as we have seen, it depends also on the quality of the memory.

Let me give an example. Fathidullah, 65, who lived on the outskirts of the city of Banyuwangi and was a retired employee of the provincial government, was murdered when, as usual, a group of men came to the house, said, simply, “*tukang sihir*,” broke in, dragged the man out of his bedroom, killed him, and dragged his body to the main road. The man’s wife and teenage son were in the next room. They could do nothing and were left untouched. Eventually seven men were arrested, including one, Dul, who, according to the widow, “hated” her husband and was, in addition, “arrogant.” The crowd wore masks—members were therefore referred to as “Ninja”—and spoke Indonesian rather than Javanese. But, Fathidullah’s son told me, they were all local; they used Indonesian as part of their disguise. I asked how they knew. Did they recognize the voices? The adolescent son broke in:

It wasn't that. They were my friends.

JS: How did you know that?

They asked me to pardon them.

JS: And did you?

Yes.

JS: And how are things now?

Just fine.

He added that he hangs out with them just as before. This young man's mother still harbors a great deal of animosity toward Dul and his family, even though she meets Dul's wife on the street, and things are as usual. Her son, on the other hand, found it easy to forgive his friends. They, he said, just went along because they were asked. They were not the real killers. If the memory of his father pressed on him, he could not have forgiven his friends so easily. Even his mother, more affected than her son, is satisfied that the killers have been arrested and asked for nothing more to be done.

In many cases, the dead individual returned to his family in the form of a hallucination or a dream. Sometimes the spirit advised that nothing further be done. "I am reconciled [*pasrah*]," said one. Another said, "Don't answer defamation [*fitnah*] with defamation." Sometimes the spirit was silent. Each time a phantom appeared, the body was again whole, the person nicely dressed. These are what we might call productive spirits, restoring the harmony of social life. They ask nothing. If, by contrast, the body were to be seen again in the mutilated form left by the murderers, the visit would almost constitute a demand for vengeance. In place of the memory of the mutilated corpse, there instead appeared the image of the dead person restored to his appearance when alive, but in the form of a spirit. Such spirits made it easier, no doubt, to put murder in the past. Even if such spirits reappeared without being summoned, and even if they demanded something, the effect would be similar. The unrelenting and uncontrollable memory of the dead could be assuaged by answering the demands of the spirits. Indonesian curing rituals work by establishing a response to what otherwise cannot be answered and has gone un-understood until revealed by the curer. When, however, the spirit's requirements are met and illness still persists, sorcery is often suspected. Sorcery, that is, is often a result of the failure of exchange with the spirit world. The result of which is, once again, an urge for vengeance as the only possible alleviation of pressing psychic demand.

The capacity to form or call forth spirits thus dampens the call for revenge. One can think of Javanese spirits as the form given to repeated urgent inner insistence. Javanese spirits, if this hypothesis is correct, are manufactured out of involuntary memories given the forms of ghosts. But when images do not take shape, sorcery comes to mind. Sorcery, whose locus always remains obscure, is taken as the place from which psychic demands issue, albeit incoherently. The ghosts that appear soon after death articulate memories, even as they conceal the immediacy of death. "Sorcerer," by contrast, marks the point where the failure to manufacture images becomes evident.

The question remains why disputes were often brought up when there were charges of sorcery. In order to answer this question, it is better to disentangle the elements. Disputes, which always exist and which were extant before the sorcery outbreak, are usually manageable without violence. The unbearable menace that is sorcery comes and

goes. The survivors of these attacks clearly had difficulty believing that they could be objects of hatred. We will see that it came as a revelation to them and that they were sure it was unjustified. But extreme violence left without an origin would be all the more menacing. It is not surprising that it finds its purported source in those with whom one quarrels. Further, Javanese sorcery is not only anti-social; it is asocial.

But if one eliminates dispute as the cause of the accusations, one has to explain the source of the murderers' hatred. One can point to the conditions for its arousal in Indonesian political conditions, though these conditions do not completely account for the menace, the murder, and the urge for display that are at the core of sorcery. We will return to this question later. For now, we can see that citing disputes and conditions in the village localizes forces which are national and, perhaps, even global in their origins and gives a precise location for psychic forces, perhaps panhuman, which are nowhere to be mapped. Citing disputes thus normalizes the uncanny.

It is for that reason that the witch hunts were set within the village rather than the area as a whole. Mobs acted against their neighbors. A mob, as we have said, is new to the village. It, of course, denies the validity of "neighbor." What is at work is the transformation of village categories, quite against the will of everyone, murderers and victims alike. That fellow villagers were the targets is better understood when one starts the other way around: mobs formed within villages. The word *massa*, "mob," is at once evidence of the breakdown of identities—a phenomenon caused by forces that arose outside the village—and the attempt to restore identity by the use of a word recognized from descriptions of national events. It is the attempt to give the uncanny a face, even if that face is one's own, and give it a place within the village. After that, it can be dealt with. The witch is sought out as the hoped-for local counterpart of the possessed mob.

The *selamatan*, I have said, localizes differences. In 1998, social differences had dissolved and the bearers of menace had not been identified. The threat had to be dealt with differently. "Witch" is the name given to a nationally derived menace to make it part of the local scene. "Witch," I have pointed out, means "diverter of death." In that sense, the murderers were also themselves witches. But they appeared on the scene in the form of the mob, in the impossible but understandable attempt to give death—now no longer natural, originating elsewhere, outside the village, and thought now to be present—not a permanent place in the local community, of course, but a temporary identity. As the mob, they indicate that they are moved by forces outside the village. But as an entity limited by the boundaries of the village, they say that a new force has a local form. The mob takes shape in the village at the point where the usual explanations of the uncanny no longer avail. Blaming the witch further localizes this force otherwise foreign to the beliefs hitherto surrounding witchcraft.

## VI

Sorcery begins not with quarrels, which are always present in the village, but with accusation, and accusations can be triggered when anyone—including the accuser in particular—fears he has been spiritually violated and that he might be a sorcerer himself. The sentiment that sorcery not only exists, but is imminent, and that perhaps

"I" am a sorcerer can arise, it seems, out of nothing. Nur Ali, a man we visited in Malang Selatan, heard that a list of sorcerers existed, and that the name "Nur Ali" was on it. Fearing attack, he fled and spent time away from home before returning. His younger brother said that another Nur Ali was the real sorcerer and that everyone knew he, the other Nur Ali, was a sorcerer. Saying this, he asserted that everyone knew his brother was not the person designated. But despite this, our Nur Ali felt that the name could well refer to him. No one made any threats against this man; no one stoned his house or said anything to him except that the name "Nur Ali" was on a list. The existence of the list itself has not been verified. This man obviously felt that, nevertheless, there might be something to the accusation, though he denied he ever had anything to do with sorcery. He remained terrified at the time of our visit. A man's name can suddenly designate his possession by sorcery. Anyone at all can become accused of witchcraft: by himself, by others.

In view of the variable ways in which people are targeted as sorcerers, we find that the word "vengeance" is a misnomer if used to describe these actions against sorcerers. Given that the word is used, however, by villagers who discuss these events and their aftermaths, it is surprising that we never heard of alleged sorcerers' families taking revenge in turn. There is a reason for this that we should consider in addition to those we have already discussed. Revenge depends on the ability to formulate one's sentiments and inculcate the party thought responsible. Articulation itself is not simply a matter of gathering one's feelings and finding words for them. As in any language, the words must have authority. The path to the articulation of justice is, in Java, also the way to the refusal of vendettas. We can see how justice is authorized in the following incidents.

In Banyuwangi, in a neighborhood on the edge of the city, Asari was summoned by the head of the neighborhood (RK, *rukun tetangga*<sup>24</sup>) after someone fell ill and claimed Asari had bewitched him. Asari, according to one of his daughters, said, "No, it is not true. It's simply that there are bad feelings by someone toward me as the result of an inheritance dispute." Then another person fell ill, and Asari was summoned by the local military official (*koramil*, or military subdistrict commander) and told to move because his life was in danger. He went to a religious school in the countryside for two years and then returned. Again there was trouble, and again he was told to move. He said, "So far as whether I am killed or not, it doesn't matter. I am not guilty." A week later his house was stoned and the windows broken. That night the *massa* (said to be all local young men) came. They took his daughter, cut off her hair, and held her. They told her that if her father did not return, she herself would be killed and his house and the six houses of his relatives which surrounded it would be burned down. They made her sign a blank sheet of paper so that later they could write whatever they wanted on it, but it did not become clear to me what it was they thought they might write. Asari returned from the military post, and he was killed.

Asari's daughter insists that there was never a problem with the neighbors. The inheritance dispute, over a piece of land, happened years ago. The brother-in-law of her mother used the land to put up a house, then fell ill and accused her father, Asari, of causing the illness, but it was all in the past. Asari and his relatives wanted to make

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<sup>24</sup> The head of the neighborhood is familiarly called "RK."

the violence of their neighbors understandable: there was a dispute, someone grew troubled and ill and tried to blame Asari. Asari himself had forgotten the whole thing. This explanation risks leaving the animosity of the village as a whole baseless. Why the entire village set itself against them is left unclear to the victim and his family. Asari's relatives are most concerned to say that Asari was not a witch and that they are not witches. They are completely without guilt of any sort. Their interest in making this assertion overrides their concern to explain why Asari was singled out as a sorcerer.

We spoke with ten or so of Asari's children and other relatives. I asked them if they were still afraid. The answer to this question was "No, we are innocent and Dad didn't do anything wrong." His daughter said,

. . . they [meaning his killers] are afraid because the leader has not yet been arrested. Now that those who were arrested are about to be released from jail, he might well be identified. But Dad didn't do anything bad, he was never a witch, he never did anything. I should know. I am not guilty. I did nothing wrong. They want to kill me, let them go ahead.

Her answer, which is typical of others as well, implies that "they" might well kill again. And, among other things, given the belief that witchcraft is inherited, under certain circumstances she could be correct. As she reports her father's words, she repeats his sentiments about himself on her own behalf.

The import of her words is not that death is unimportant. If it were a light matter, there would be no accusations of witchcraft in the first place. It is rather that the face she presents to the world represents her exactly as she is; the same is true of her father. They are not different than they appear; they are not witches. On the other hand, the killers refuse to face her. When she meets them on the street, "they look ahead, but I bend forward and stare at them. They are afraid."

Fear, here, is based on the emergence of a hidden quality. She is not guilty, she does not fear that she will appear to be a witch. If she does, it will be due to the misperception of other people. Death, in her discourse, is merely a side effect of misunderstanding. Or, rather, the horror of being killed because of a misunderstanding is comparatively insignificant compared to the horror of living with fear that the quality of witchcraft, if one can so speak, will emerge. She is innocent of witchcraft; her father was innocent of witchcraft. They therefore are and were without fear.

But she was not always fearless. When her father was first killed, she was afraid to talk about it. But then she thought, "Dad is already dead, what can I lose?" She was afraid at first of "the people who count" (*orang besar*). But again she reassured herself, "I have nothing to lose. I am not guilty." She is upset with the police and "the people who count" for not arresting the instigator of her father's murder.<sup>25</sup> I asked her why, then, not do to them what they did to you? She said, "We can't. The people who count, they can do it, but we, who don't count [*orang kecil*], we can't." In reality, her neighbors do not have a social position different from hers. But in her mind, they have

<sup>25</sup> But not for not protecting her father. Why did the military not protect him? I do not know. Perhaps it was because they were afraid that they could not prevail against the mob, perhaps because it would have meant recourse to more troops further up the chain of command which they were reluctant to ask for. Perhaps they were convinced the man was a witch. It is evident that the military was not behind the events and that they tried to save the man's life initially.

connections, "they know the police, they know the army," and they are protected. On the other hand, she feels she is without recourse to the official world. For instance, the complaint her family filed with the military when threats were first made was lost; at least, military personnel claim they have no record of it. For her, it is an indication of how connections work and what it means to lack connections.

Justice, for her, depends on those above and can only come from above. She lacks the means to achieve justice because things still work in the way of the New Order; they depend on "KKN"—corruption—connections and nepotism. She is convinced that in the world as it is properly constituted, "the people who count" would recognize her lack of guilt if they would only pay attention to her. In her thinking, an ideal government would—and in a certain way, already does—see her for what she is. It is not only that "We can't" make our own justice, though that is what the people who count can do, according to her, and perhaps that is exactly what the witch killers did. It is also that this ideal authority exists already for her. Somewhere—probably at a level above that of the local authorities—and somehow, they know the truth. Therefore she is not afraid to show her face. The problem is that she has no access to that structure, and the killers do.

An idealized structure exists for her and reflects her innocence back to her. She has no doubt that in showing her face to the world, she shows her true face and not a mask that hides witchcraft. She recounts how she stares them down and how they too know what she knows about herself. Her confidence comes from believing that "they," true authority, know her and, for that reason, her knowledge of her own experience is right: "I am not a witch."

She has confidence and pride in her ability to formulate her case. She told me, "I only went to school through the third grade, and I can't even sign my name. But my mouth, it's not bad, eh?" The assumptions behind her thinking are evident also in the next example.

Atmoyo, a Madurese living in the mountains off a road which even motorbikes could not take if there were heavy rains, was killed. His daughter, who seemed to me to be in her thirties or forties, and who was a widow, said this:

Dad was accused of being a witch by the neighbors. He was a farmer and went to the fields everyday. He wasn't a witch. He was just ordinary [*biasa-biasa saja*]. Every day he would take part in a neighborhood gathering [*arisan*], he would be with his friends [*silaturahmi*, a word popular in the New Order, which means something like "forging the bonds of friendship"], and so on.

Then the house was stoned. My brother was in Bali working. I waited till midnight for Dad to come home. Next morning, I went to where they were having the meeting for the neighborhood gathering. I saw blood. I followed the traces. I just followed them. Then I looked for him in the gardens and in the fields. Then, at 5:00 in the morning, on the edge of the road, covered with banana leaves, there he was. His leg was cut off. He was crushed in all over. His neck had a rope around it and his trunk was cut almost all the way through. [She weeps].

I waited till 9:00 to report to the village headman to tell the police, the doctor, and so on. Then he was brought home. He was bathed like an ordinary corpse. Why not; he was already a corpse.



On top of the leaves the killers had left a page torn off a calendar from the year before. On the reverse they wrote:

Atmoyo  
Witch  
Beaten by the mases [the word being misspelled]

She went on:

He was tortured. If you saw him, mister, if you saw him you would be afraid to look. There was no proof. What was the proof? The real proof. Where was it?

Everyone has to die, mister. But not tortured like that, mister.

They arrested four people. In fact, there were lots and lots of people who came to the house. I couldn't see them all. I was afraid, I couldn't look at them one by one. In fact, they threatened to whip me. They wouldn't believe Dad wasn't here. Really. They came into the house, armed with whips, looking for Dad. They took lots. On top of everything else, they were thieves too.

Please have something to drink.

They cut him up. Just cut him up.

She went on to say, in answer to our questions, that there had never been a problem with the neighbors. Later we learned from her and her brother that in fact her father's brother who lived next door had had a dispute with him. He was being sought for the murder but had fled.

I asked her if she were still afraid.

I was afraid at first. When they were making an issue of it, I was terrorized [*diteror*] before, afraid. Now, I'm not afraid any more.

I only became aware when the neighbors were called [by local officials] to a public meeting. "Oh, the neighbors hate my dad." Then it became clear and so I was not afraid.

She then added that she too had been accused of helping her father in his witchcraft.

After four of them were sent to jail and there were no more accusations, sure, I thought, if the accusations start again, I will just report them [to the local officials]. Since here the people are ignorant [*bodoh*].

At the time, Mom, if she had to leave the house for so much as to go to the well, she shook and trembled. [She imitates her.]

If my father had not died, I wouldn't be brave enough to speak this way. I became a skillful talker.

She then imitated how she was before, stuttering and moving her mouth without issuing words.

And if I thought about Dad, I [and she imitates her inability to speak again, this time with noises and without opening her mouth].<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> We can speculate as to what language she might speak as the witch. It would not be Javanese, but the language of elsewhere, a babble of the sort, perhaps, she uttered when she was still afraid.

Her father's death and the threats against her left her speechless. But like Asari's daughter, what gave her the courage and the skill to speak was the realization of the situation: "Oh, the neighbors hate my dad." It is their fault, they are wrong. He is not a *tukang santet*. And she is not either. By knowing "I am not a witch," she regains the power to speak, and, as was the case with Asari's daughter, it seems for the first time ever.

Both of these women learn how to speak, how to articulate their place, and, one can say, their identities, when the necessity arises to deny that they and their fathers are or were witches. Their capacity to do so comes not simply from the realization of conflict in which, to defend themselves, they must take a position contrary to the majority of their neighbors. It is not sheer need that makes them skillful speakers; it is the courage they gain once they realize that, in the eyes of political authority, real or ideal, they are innocent. Once the meeting was held at which, no doubt, the neighbors proclaimed that her father was indeed a witch, and the political authorities responded by saying that the villagers could not take the law into their own hands, Atmoyo's daughter spoke. The same was true for Asari's daughter. Both women reflect in their voices the situation that has been verified for them by political authority. They do not only speak their convictions; they say truths that, for them, originate outside themselves and whose content is the denial, not merely of acts of sorcery, but of having a sorcerer's being.

One could put it this way. When these women realize "they hate my Dad" (and me), they also realize "I am not a witch." Witchcraft here is lethal hatred which emerges autonomously. Anyone who bears that hatred, who is a witch, has to be careful in the face of others, not because these others will murder her or him, but because this fatal force will show itself. The witch will emerge. The witch emerges despite the will of the person who bears the witch inside her. But when she sees "they hate my dad," which means, first of all, "they hate," then she discovers it is they who are witches. That they murder confirms it. Thus a reversal: the witch is the murderer of so-called witches.

This exchange of the place of hatred and lethal force precedes any named agent. The people who come to the house are not, in her account, even "the *massa*." Nor are they neighbors, nor are they people with a grudge. They are merely numerous; so numerous they are not identifiable. "There were lots and lots of people who came to the house. I couldn't see them all. I was afraid. I couldn't look at them one by one," says Atmoyo's daughter. Their numbers and their violence ("... they threatened to whip me") make identification impossible. They are not merely anonymous in the sense that they arrive bearing no names that might later be discovered and declared in court. In their incoherence, they even lack a name for the group or names for the individuals who made it up. These are the *massa*, but this invented term does not represent them. We would say that they are literally anonymous, except that the literal fails; language does not apply.

I thought it strange that since, later, the police arrested the alleged murderers, thus rendering them identifiable to others in the village, still Atmoyo's daughter could not recognize even one. She insisted that she could not. Perhaps it was because of fear of reprisals, though I do not think that is the case. One might think that large numbers offer the chance to find one or more people who give clues to their identities. But for

her, numbers mean that she is overwhelmed. She can only see members of the mob in the aggregate, as a force. No "one" did the awful deed. Together, they were the appearance of violence with nothing and no one behind that appearance. Sheer lethal force itself manifested itself to her.

Later, the *massa* appear under their collective name. Should these people who hate try to act again, she will report them to the authorities. They are *bodoh*, "ignorant." This is also the usual characteristic of the *rakyat*, whose need of leadership is predicated on being *bodoh*. Once she understands that "they" are *bodoh* and that she can simply report them, this "they" becomes located somewhere between the *massa* and the *rakyat*. They are the *rakyat* insofar as they are subject to control by the authorities. They are the *massa* insofar as they are not. In either case, the killers in her discourse have a defined place on the Indonesian political scene. She knows about them.

She has given hatred a place. It may be spontaneous and lethal in its expression, but it is subject to control. There is spontaneous hatred, and it reveals itself in those who are inhabited by it, despite their wishes. But there are also authorities who keep it in place. Furthermore, "they," the murderers, have it in them, and (thus) she does not.

At that moment, when her full identity is confirmed, she learns to speak. She does not have to fear, as she did initially, that she might be a witch, as her father might have been a witch too. In that case, she, like any witch, would reveal herself without her knowledge. She knows this, not merely through her perception that those charged with witchcraft and those who killed have exchanged places, but also through the presence of the authorities, whose involvement in the relationship locates witchcraft in the *massa* and keeps it in place and harmless. She is thus sure of her knowledge. Being certain, she speaks without hesitation. "Witchcraft" (*ilmu sihir*), a possibility inside everyone, herself included, has been ruled out in her case.

Suppose she were a witch. How would witchcraft reveal itself? In the case of the man, discussed above, who thought he might be a witch, judgment of his condition was determined by the rays of his face, visible only to certain experts, themselves often thought to be witches. These women do not fear distant experts. They speak of those they meet who live nearby. When Atmoyo's daughter thought of the dismembered corpse of her father, she was overcome by her identification with her father's corpse. She tried to say what she had in her mind. Her mouth would not open, but she emitted noises nonetheless. She tried to emit, to exteriorize, the dead inside her. If witchcraft is lethal power that must be passed on, she was at that moment a witch herself, albeit a failed one. Witchcraft announced itself in the noises that her mouth held back.

At that moment, could she only speak, surely she would have called out "revenge." But her failed words issued as broken sounds. It is not merely that she could not formulate what she felt. It is, rather, that she was without words, but with something else that I have betrayed by saying what she would have said. In retrospect, after the fact, there can only be a betrayal of a moment of nonrepresentation. And yet, past that moment, in retrospect, "revenge" would seem the only word possible. But no word was possible.

One could say that “she” was divided against herself; the mouth being the living daughter and the noise the effects of her mutilated, dead father. In that case “she” was overwhelmed by death. In the other instance, the mouth opened, sound issued, but it was stuttering and babbling, not words nor anything that could be mistaken for language. What came out was violence, not because these noises were deliberately aggressive and communicated anger against whoever was present with her—though it must have been unbearable for witnesses to hear and watch her stuttering. It was violence because it was energy that overcame—one can say annihilated—whatever it touched. She too was a witch at that instant. She remained so until she could say, “they hate me” and “they hate my father,” at which point they, the killers, become the witches.

In these moments when survivors become witches and are filled with hatred and so stand in the place of killers—at least potential killers—violence and speech are incompatible. Speech does not contain violence, as though it could put its energy to use by saying what motivates it and by going on to find a target for vengeance. It was impossible for these women to speak until they could say “they hate,” which means, as I have said, “I do not hate.” At that point, violence is exterior to them and located in the other. “They have death in them; I live.” Violence is something different from herself, the two being in opposition to each other when, for instance, Atmoyo’s daughter holds her mouth closed and prevents the articulation of the sounds that come from her. Violence remains autonomous; at best, it can only be passed on.

It is the law of Javanese witchcraft that sheer violence be passed on. But there are two ways of doing so. One is action; it is the killing of the witch. The other is the way of these survivors. The first way takes the killers outside the existing political framework. The way of the survivors inserts them within it.

There is nothing in these women that can withstand the violence of the corpse. In the battle between themselves and hatred, they are overpowered. To regain themselves and exteriorize their lethal hatred, they need a source of themselves, which they find only outside themselves. Atmoyo’s daughter finds it in the *aparat* (local officials, including police, military, and civilian officials); the other woman in the vaguer eyes she imagines have her in view. They can see themselves seen, once the government intervenes, in the scenes and prescriptions of the authorities. These women become survivors; they have a place in the confines delineated by authority, and they take it for themselves. Then they can say—and it is precisely their saying, their speech, that is, of course, at stake—“they hate me.” The pronouns of that sentence then have referents. The “me” or “I” that was overcome by death, so that it became like the corpse, comes back into existence. This does not happen through the sheer opposition of “me” and “them,” because the “them” before that point was only a murderous force, an absolute other. As a result, confrontation with “them” was, essentially, a confrontation with something that could not be “faced,” which offered no face of its own and so took no cognizance of one’s own face, whose appearance offered no reflection of oneself. (“There were lots and lots of people who came to the house. I couldn’t see them all. I was afraid, I couldn’t look at them one by one.”)

In neither case could these women see that they were seen. To be in view of murderous force is to be annihilated without the possibility of becoming a ghost, without imagining how one would be once one was dead. The absolute other is

absolutely other and leaves no room even to imagine one's own extermination. The accessible other was the authorities. The *aparats* restored Atmoyo's daughter to herself, not in the first place because it was authoritative, but because she could see herself in their eyes. And thus she achieved clarity: "they hate me."

The experiences of these women might form moments in a logic of the sublime: "I almost died, I survived." But their identifications with the corpse are so complete that, instead, the "I" disappears so one cannot even rewrite their experience as "I am a corpse; I am death." This sentence is only linguistically possible; "I" here has no referent. The "I" of this formulation, if it is to have a referent, already contains in it the "almost" of the sublime and, with it, the idea of surviving death. In the Javanese instance, there is the sequence of being a corpse which is not named or thought of as such, followed by a denial: "I am not a witch," meaning, "I am not dead. I do not have death in me. Death will not betray me. I am alive. I belong to a certain society and a certain polity."

These women are without pathos; they do not speak about the possible loss of themselves. They insist, instead, on their living participation in their society, which is to say, that they are alive and were never dead or close to it. In the absence of the sublime, there is no attempt to say what it is that they "almost" experienced. Instead, they speak of a violence that they faced and which remained foreign to them. What they learn later is that "they hate us," which is to say that "they" are filled with violence and we are not. Before that point, when they might speak about their own possible deaths, they are so closely identified with the corpse that they cannot speak. When they recount their own experiences afterwards, it is to say, in effect, that they were faced with actors they could not recognize and confronted by something they could not name. They tell us of a moment of no recognition. Numbers confuse. We are then as close to a description of absolute violence as perhaps we could ever be taken.

The recovery from that moment is the insistence that violence, death, witchcraft, in effect, is in "them" and not in "us." First comes identification with the corpse which remains unlabeled or unnamed; then there follows a refusal or denial of violence within oneself. These two moments remain discrete, without the use of the recounting of the escape from death to solidify the identity of the survivor. Instead, the reconstruction of the "I" depends on political authority. And it is political authority that deals with violence. Thus the mythologizing that usually accompanies death begins. But in Java it begins not with dyadic confrontation—me/death—but with the political *aparats* and one's connection to it.

This mythology is, of course, that of political authority. The myth is that only political authority and only that particular political authority would do. It is just here that one sees one of the great crimes of the New Order: it left intact, pristinely unchanged, the idea of "the people," whether under the name *rakyat* or *massa*, as speechless and needing leadership to speak for it. It is as though the only authority possible existed necessarily outside "the people" themselves and resided in those who constituted themselves as their leaders. The myth is that whenever the people attempted to speak for themselves, they were the *massa*, the mob. It is in this sense that the New Order is responsible for witchcraft. What, after all, are the possibilities of being faced with something unbearable, inassimilable, and inexpressible? Is not this the source of literature, for example? But literature was suppressed during the New Order,

while the market encouraged something that only resembled literature to enter circulation. The lack of recourse to anything but violence, on the one hand, or submission to authority, on the other, is a feature of societies where there is no institution of literature and consequently none of the freedom of response that comes not only with literature itself, but with the consideration of possibilities it opens.

Nonetheless, it is exactly the dependency of speech on authority, as it was constituted at that time, that stopped the survivors of witch hunts from trying to take vengeance themselves and so stopped further murder. (One might argue that it is the survivors' lack of force that does so, but in the earlier example, the victim's family were numerous and thus capable of effective retaliation.) I asked Atmoyo's daughter if she wanted revenge. She said:

Dad was murdered and he didn't die the death God ordered. So I want justice [*yang adil*]. According to the law.

The very possibility of stating the claim for justice, of articulating her demand, and before that of being certain of her innocence of sorcery, makes the taking of justice for herself, in the form of a vendetta or a feud, out of the question. She leaves it to the authorities who, she is confident, will do it for her. She, of course, is sure they will decide correctly because her reflection of herself comes from them.

On the other hand, those who murdered also claimed to be doing the work of justice, and they did so without the consent of the authorities. When, in the case of Muki and his family, suspects were arrested, villagers went to the police station to demand their release. When the police refused, they burned down the station. How then can I claim that the demand for justice depended on political authority?

In the first place, because the actions of the witch hunters were seen by some, at least, as being the beginning of revolution—that is, as having their origin outside of the present political system with its own (implicit) source of authority, even though possibly inchoate. When Pramoedya exposed the violence of the revolution in his short story, "Dendam," Western readers missed its significance. As Benedict Anderson pointed out, they could not understand the sentiment of revenge nor the violence that comes with it.<sup>27</sup> They saw the revolution as having certain goals. Violence based merely on suspicion, motivated by apparently twisted mental processes we popularly call "paranoid," seemed to have no place. The same situation described in "Dendam" appears also with witchcraft. No one claimed that the killers were innocent. They said, instead, that they acted properly, that Muki and his family were witches and that they deserved their deaths. At this point, one sees how a violent impulse takes on a justification. In the case of witchcraft, we, the readers of this piece, are unlikely to share that sentiment. Nor would we, the readers of Pramoedya's vignette, be likely to condone the murder of the *haji* described in the story. In the vignette, the suspicion of the killers is never fully justified. The Western readers who Anderson justly claimed wanted to ignore violence and revenge kept their political ideas pure. Like them, we want to separate our understanding of violent impulse from the possibility that it could be a concomitant of revolutionary action and even revolutionary goals. The burning of the police station should show us that, in fact, we are correct in separating

<sup>27</sup> Anderson, "Reading 'Revenge.'"

the impulse to violence from its justifications as two separate moments. But we are not at all correct in ignoring the connection of revolutionary political ideas of which we approve with the unbearable weight of inassimilable (non)ghosts of history, whose impossible effects—revolutionary sentiments and ideas—seem to arise out of nowhere, just as literature ultimately does.

And hence also the other effects of these (non)ghosts—the lethal violence that is immune to argument and takes no cognizance of social and human definition. Taken with Pramoedya's story, we see that beneath our political ideas there is possibly a drive to violence that rises autonomously. Later, such violence is thought to be only instrumental and therefore in the interest of a goal whose formulation precedes it. Or it is "excessive," which means that one does not need so much of it to obtain one's aims. The seeming inevitability of violence, whether antecedent to goals or aroused in the midst of action, whenever an absolute other is sensed to be present, is obscured. The barring of this impulse is, it seems to me, one of the benefits of the study of witchcraft.

At the same time, that this potentially revolutionary instinct could not progress further is, once again, an effect of the cessation of political thinking during the New Order. One hopes that more evolved ideas of "the people," their ability to formulate their own goals and to insist on them despite the efforts of the political class to speak for them, would prevail. Thus the impulse toward violence that comes in moments when the cultural and social do not prevail could be appropriated for other than conservative—indeed reactionary and repugnant—ends.

## VII

There are historical conditions for the outburst of witch hunts, though they are inadequate to explain the events entirely. Witch hunts broke out in East Java at the moment when established political structure seemed no longer to take notice of village life. At that time, when villagers felt themselves unable to rely on the *aparats*, witches appeared in the world. It is not that there was chaos in the political realm and a real breakdown of authority. Things worked as well as they had. But with the end of the long, long Suharto regime, it seemed to villagers as though the state was no longer in touch with them. When, for instance, Asari's daughter says that her report to the military about the attack was lost and that she and her family had no connection to power, but others had, she does not complain that authority works through networks of personal connections. She complains that she and her family had no connections. Again, the complaint is not about how the regime used power, but that it *did not* use it, at least for "us," it being understood that this "us"—those without access to political authority—have to be added up to form the village population.

The idea that security depends on connections to those in power is as old as the Indonesian republic. Connections had been established well before independence between members of the political class, though what patterns of prenationalist culture they might have drawn on has still to be investigated. Since this was a period of economic stress, no doubt these old connections had practical consequences. In the Suharto period, with the end of populism, networks became widespread. Through them, one attained what was, for most, the only access, real or imaginary, to the state. The policies of the regime, which took little account of the general welfare, were thus

sometimes ameliorated for a few, while many others sustained the illusion that they, too, could gain access to authority.

These networks should not be confused with the patron-client relations one finds in one form in the Philippines, and another in Thailand. They rest not so much on a sense of obligation as on familiarity. One “knows” someone who knows someone, even if the starting point is only knowing someone by reputation. The basis is recognition; one asserts that one is familiar with someone. We might expect that such assertions were usually made for political gain or to further business interests, but in fact the acts of ritualized recognition that establish these networks function more often as denials of the opposite assertion: “I do not recognize” or, perhaps, “I seem to recognize, but I do not know how.” Not to know someone who knows someone is tantamount to feeling excluded from the nation as conceived by its members. One is all too aware that powerful forces exist in the state and that, without connections to it, one is at best unprotected and, at worst, its victim.

To call the set of connections that linked one with the state “networks” is to reify hazy imaginary connections. One can best understand the idea of such linkages by thinking of them as familial or, more accurately, genealogical. The person who traces his genealogy knows, at the start, that he has ancestors; his task is to find them. In the same way, someone like Asari’s daughter knows that she knows people in the local *aparats*. She expects to find them when she has need. To discover that they, in return, do not know her has certain consequences that can be understood in terms of the history of the New Order.

The New Order began with an enormous massacre. Under the pretense that communists were perpetrating a coup, hundreds of thousands of alleged communists were killed. The army encouraged local groups to do the killing or did it itself. The essential point, from our perspective, is that it was killing on an enormous scale of Indonesians by Indonesians. After the establishment of the new regime, the government declared itself to be always vigilant against further uprisings, which means it suspected a segment of its own citizens. When, by the 1980s, communists were no longer part of the lived experience of young people, the regime killed thousands of people with tattoos whom they identified as criminals. They might have brought such people to trial, but, as they had done when they faced a communist “threat,” under the pretense of urgency, they massacred suspects instead.<sup>28</sup> Thus, they verified their suspicion: there is an element interior to Indonesian society which—by its very nature, as opposed to its deeds—is violent.

The effects of this in popular political assumptions were double. It was generally believed during the New Order—and still now, though to a lesser extent—that dangers threatened from within Indonesian society; the lower strata, in particular, was thought to pose a threat. Communists and criminals were endowed with a near mythical power to regenerate themselves and credited with a power to disrupt society that seemed all the greater because it was so little evident in the world. At the same time, it was also recognized—this time with all too much evidence—that the state, through its army, could and did act with great violence against Indonesians.

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<sup>28</sup> On this topic, see James T. Siegel, *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta: Counterrevolution Today* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).



Indonesian society was thus riven. On one side were good citizens and on the other were those who threatened violence and massive political and social disruption. The difficulty, particularly if one belonged to the lower strata, is that it could not be clear who was on which side of this rift. The elimination of communists did not end the threat of communists. The elimination of "criminals" did not end criminality. The source of the menace is not evident. Recognition by the state, therefore, was, and continues to be, reassuring, because it means that one is not a member of the group that the state, in its omniscience, finds menacing.

The Indonesian experience is the inverse of the usual European notion of totalitarianism. In the latter, to be seen by the state is to be vulnerable; the state is a source of terror. It is the Indonesian genius to make the state at once the chief source of murder and also the means of granting not merely immunity, but innocence as well, to its citizens. But for that interaction to work, one needs to be connected to the state. Those whom the state attacked were, of course, also recognized by the state, but as being without the connections that made one a part of the larger national community and therefore without the social definition that precludes the definition of oneself as violent and disruptive.

The perceived ending of state surveillance thus produced suspicion, first of all, of oneself. When it is possible that one might oneself be a witch, it means that one cannot draw on one's own experience of oneself to know one's own nature. Someone else knows one better than one does oneself. This situation pertained during the revolution, when nationalists were afraid of being known as traitors, even though nothing objective justified that claim. After Suharto fell, the *aparats*, which knew who one was, was felt to be temporarily out of commission. Nothing prevented the most heinous thoughts about oneself from being credible.

The first defense was to find someone else responsible—"witch," rather than "communist" or "criminal," was the form that accusation took. For the general menace within Indonesia to have a name, it had to be part of a particular scene. Within the national context, the names for such a menace were "communist" or "criminal." But for a moment, after Suharto's fall, the local was severed from the national; indeed, this supposition is critical to our explanation. Menace had thus to be formulated within the immediate context. The menace was national, but its appearance was local. Identifying and hunting down "witches" localized malevolent agents in the way that the *selamatan* placed Muslims, "Javanists," Hindus, and so forth on the local scene, though of course without the same capacity to institutionalize their appearances. Seen from the perspective of those possessed or obsessed by feelings of overwhelming catastrophe, those closest wore the recognizable face of malevolence. The appearance of the "witch," followed by the witch hunt, offered a means for local control of general malevolence when state control failed.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> The other limitation of widespread witch hunts is geographical. To my knowledge, witch hunts occurred on a large scale only in Java (West as well as East). In my analysis, the fusion of Javanese and national hierarchies is central and this, of course, limits the geographical zone in which my analysis is relevant. Obviously one would have to take account of other conditions where other kinds of violence broke out as, for instance, in Aceh or in the Moluccas.

In colonial Africa, witchcraft beliefs were seen as efforts at social control, and thus might be interpreted as the internalization of the authority of the colonial state and the local application of the state's wishes.<sup>30</sup> In Java, witchcraft accusations arose in the absence of the state. They were an attempt to reassert social control, but control over phantasms. These phantasms were not the ghosts of Java, but were fears that arose within a national context. I will argue that they were new to Java and were a legacy of the New Order rather than a reassertion of a traditional practice. The witch hunts were a conservative movement in that the people involved wanted to reinstate an order feared to be vanishing. But they could also be seen as potentially revolutionary in that they tapped a source of energy available not only for the murder of individuals, but for the destruction of institutions—particularly the police—which stood in their way. But if we measure their degree of success in achieving their aim—the assuaging of uncanny sensations, we find they wrought no change. And, as we shall see, to the degree that they reaffirmed notions of popular action as the savagery of the masses, they were reactionary. But though they began with murder, harnessed to more advanced political thinking, one could imagine a development in which their millenarian dimensions could have been used for radical change, as happened during the revolution. As it was, the movement for *Reformasi*, a notion which left the idea of the savagery of the underclass untouched, saw in the *massa* only inchoate violence. Those who took on the rubric *massa* for themselves seemed to agree.

### VIII

It remains to discuss the sources of the uncanny within Indonesian history. Traditional Java, with its myriad ghosts, is an inevitable candidate. But given the surpassing of traditional beliefs already delineated, we have to look elsewhere.

In a hierarchical tradition, the impulse toward hierarchy does not end with the collapse of government. Following the collapse of the New Order, peasants still looked to authority. Not finding it, they assumed they were seen by another power, this time one that penetrated them and that was dissociated from extant political structures, in fact unlocatable and devoid of benevolence. From this arose the possibility of being oneself a witch.

In the view of the survivors, the government (generally confused with “those who count”—educated people with some status) did not merely understand that survivors of attacks were innocent victims of hatred. It also saw who they were. It understood that, contrary to their inner promptings, they were not witches. Violence and hatred, here, has one source; innocence, establishment of legitimate being, has a different source. Justice in this system is in no way abstract. It is tied—much too closely tied—to a particular political system. It leaves a source of injustice—hatred—arising from sources unknowable except to “those who count,” incapable of being understood. And what is thoroughly unintelligible was thought to have no other possible outcome than violence. Its presence rests as the justification of a regime which had the keeping of

<sup>30</sup> This, at least, is the interesting supposition of Mary Douglas. See her introduction to the volume she edited, Mary Douglas, ed., *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), p. xxiii.

order as its primary excuse. In this way, the state became the point of reference for oneself. Justice here, meaning retribution for the killing of the innocent, is reserved to it.<sup>31</sup>

The logic of surveillance and its lifting leads to the question, "Am I a witch?" Where does the violent aggression inherent in this question originate? One might start with unnatural "death." Its symptom was most often swollen bodies. They suggest hysterical symptoms, of course, and they suggest the decay of corpses. What are the fantasies (which is not to say that these fantasies might not be based on real events) behind them? The grand massacre in this area happened in the prelude to the New Order, in 1965-66, when precisely Ansor, the youth branch of Nahdatul Ulama, along with others, slaughtered communists. At the time, there were numerous reports of bloated bodies floating in the river. The retention of water reported by a woman who would have been a young adult at the time of the massacres, the assertion that a man, who would have been about the same age in 1965, died because he could not stop urinating, these stories that refer to water as it either bloats or flows through people, recall those terrible earlier scenes.

Another element of that time, frequently echoed in villagers' reports, is the statement, "If we didn't kill them, they would kill us." Its original enunciation referred to communists; its second to witches. We also note the currency of stories, then and now, that allege the existence of hit lists: lists of individuals targeted for death. A figmental version of this rumor circulated widely in Indonesia in 1965-66, where in Aceh, as well as in Jakarta and other places, people spread the report that hit lists had been drawn up by communists and that their names were on them. Though no such document has ever been produced (aside from a blank sheet of yellow paper cited to prove that the communists used disappearing ink), rumors of these lists were used as evidence to prove that if the innocent did not kill the communists, they would be themselves killed.<sup>32</sup> In much the same way, years later, Muki's killers would assert that Muki and his family had to die if they, his fellow villagers, were to survive.

This pattern, again, argues for repetition of an historical event, one that was never assimilated and must therefore be repeated. In fact, the recurrence, the reenactment of historical events and concomitant, generalized social neuroses does not begin with 1965 in Indonesia. Similar events and reactions took place during the revolution, when nationalists feared that they would be slain by revolutionaries, even though, to their knowledge, they had never been anything but supporters of the Republic. As I have

<sup>31</sup> It is not only the survivors of accused witches who thought this way. The inhabitants of Harjokuncaran burnt down the police station when the police refused to release people arrested for murdering witches. Their fellow villagers did not think them innocent, but rather justified in their actions. Eventually, the villagers rebuilt the police station, according to Nicholas Herriman in a paper as yet unpublished. They too eventually recognized that the *aparats* knew who was guilty, even if the crime was in their eyes justified. It seems to be a question of different moments: at certain times possessed by violence; at others, released from it, though, in my experience of this incident, without neutralizing the witch. In any case, the word they applied to themselves, "massa," implicitly calls on authority for containment. See below.

<sup>32</sup> Benedict Anderson and Ruth McVey, *Preliminary Analysis of the October 1, 1965 Coup in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1971).

already said, they felt that, unknown to themselves, they might be less than loyal and that they could therefore betray themselves to revolutionaries who were keeping them in view.<sup>33</sup>

It is death and identification with the dead that initiate these events. But actual, current death cannot be the cause of the identification, given the geographical scale and limited time span of the widespread, hysterical, violent responses. Swollen bodies, representations of the dead from nearly fifty years earlier—that is, the imaginary dead or the dead returned, not as ghosts, but as those who were never made into ghosts—give us the identificatory object. Certainly these dead came to mind after Suharto's fall. Abdurachman Wahid, head of the NU, president of the nation, apologized for the massacres. He incited protests for having done so; protesters claimed that an apology was uncalled for and threatened the return of communists to power. There is no greater mass of un mourned dead in Indonesia than the communists killed in 1965-66 and none more fit to return to haunt the living once state repression had been lifted.

In the context of Java, the mere return of ghosts is not unexpected, as we have seen. The problem comes rather with the formation of national, rather than Javanese, ghosts. The hundreds of thousands of people massacred because they were suspected communists were held in memory by the Suharto regime precisely as those who might return . . . return, as we have said, in uncanny forms. Political disruption was frequently blamed on communists and their descendants. The fear was that communist ideas would prevail even without communists to broadcast them. And so, in various disruptions, their traces could be made out. It was an example of "OTB" (*organisasi tanpa bentuk*), or "organizations without form or bodies," in the formulation of the time. Communists, defeated once during the revolution, came back again in the Sukarno regime. Massacred at the beginning of the Suharto regime, they aroused fears, because people imagined that they might rise again through some unknown process: without formal organization, "bodiless," as specters lack bodies. This myth was widely subscribed to. In my opinion its origin was not 1965 or 1948, but earlier. Indeed it seems inscribed in Indonesian nationalism itself.<sup>34</sup>

We need not go further back in tracing these phantoms. It is enough to realize that one is preceded by another without reaching a definitive origin for them, though they are contained within the history of Indonesian nationalism and not within the regional traditions. These phantasms are not at all of the sort that prevail in the Javanese spirit world. Those, we have seen, are controllable by ritual means and through counter sorcery. Control of national phantasms was claimed by the government itself. Their ghosts were not recognizably ghosts from the perspective of the village. They required another sort of expertise to be brought under control. It was precisely this source of control that was thought to disappear with the fall of the regime. We need merely seriously consider the threat that Suharto's forces so often repeated—without us to

<sup>33</sup> See Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*, the section entitled "Revolution."

<sup>34</sup> This is the thesis I presented in a study of the massacres of 1983. Indonesian nationalism marked a break from the societies of the archipelago which existed before it. The national family was of a new sort, with a new morality, leaving the old society as a source of immorality and illegitimacy which it was feared would emerge again in the heart of Indonesian society. See Siegel, *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta*.

keep order, the nation will be overwhelmed by violence orchestrated by subterranean agents—to see the effect.<sup>35</sup>

The clearest effect are the “ninja,” the term used for the killers who wore masks covering their faces, a costume that recalled figures seen on television. Java is rightly famous for its masks, but these portray the features of the Javanese drama, adopted from the Mahabharata and Ramayana. To don such a mask was to take on the attributes of the character, but in the context of the theatre. And though it was a ritual theater which sometimes featured possession, it was still theater.

The purpose of the ninja mask was to hide the identities of the wearers. The ninja mask in illustrations is merely a wrapping over the whole of the face. It serves very well to hide identity. But, once it is labeled as a “ninja” mask, it designates an identity—from a certain point of view, at least—extending the tradition of Javanese masks. The ninja mask does not merely obscure identity, as a robber’s mask does. Ninja served samurai and developed, one Japanese told me, “hidden powers of personality.” On television, they are represented as extraordinary fighters and have hidden weapons. No doubt the idea of possessing such heightened powers impressed the *massa*. Derived from television, the ninja masks in East Java embody powers that come from a distance. But this distance is neither that of the spirit world nor that of the person with “special powers of the personality.” Unlike traditional Javanese masks, which are varied and represent many different characters, there is only one ninja mask and one collective “ninja” personality. The ninja is merely an undifferentiated power, as opposed to the characters of Javanese drama, many of whom have particular strengths, and also opposed to the actual Japanese ninja, individuals who served particular masters. The nature of ninja power in Indonesia is never made clear. The masks designate a supernatural power, but which supernatural power is not evident. The mask thus obscures what it also designates. We can speculate that during the witch hunts, wearing a ninja mask allowed one to hide two things: the face of the wearer and the power associated with it.

Ninja belong to no particular world. Perhaps for that reason, they are sometimes also associated with the Indonesian army; soldiers, it is said, wear ninja masks when they do particularly atrocious acts. But this association, too, is not definitive. Ninja in Indonesia are merely a power that operates in any world and that appears there without explanation. Lacking a particular origin, when ninja appear today, they are merely from “elsewhere.”<sup>36</sup> They are, then, like the strange energy of television in the village, which brings figures from other worlds into the lives of villagers. Ninja are thus appropriate for the embodiment of spirits who do not belong to the Javanese spirit world, spirits who manifest themselves in bloated bodies rather than as the dead

<sup>35</sup> See Siegel, *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta*, for a description of the (non)ghosts of the New Order. My assertion here assumes that there was widespread support for the New Order. No one will deny that only at the end was there significant opposition to it. Even the political prisoners released after as much as seventeen years without trial seldom tried to establish their own historical record, contenting themselves with a demand for the restitution of their full civil rights.

<sup>36</sup> They are not necessarily associated with Japan, as their use by the Indonesian army indicates. Their appearance on television confounds their origin rather than making it clear. A grade school girl I knew in Jakarta watched television daily. She knew that some programs were Japanese and others American, but believed that what was from Japan was from America and visa versa.

resurrected in their own identities, whether personal or political. The ninja attempted to do away with these phantasms. But to do so, they first had to borrow their power. One might better say “embody” than borrow since, I am arguing, the ninja, faceless expressions of power, were fleeting consolidations of the fear which began the witch hunts.

The *selamatan*, a ritual that localizes historical forces, cannot make a place for the unmourned dead of earlier massacres. It has no place either for the violent revolutionary who once existed, but who is rarely—perhaps never—memorialized nationally. His violence remains at large. Javanese thus had to take on the enchanting power of these aggressive dead themselves once the state was thought no longer to be there to keep them at bay. The ninja killers and the bloated bodies were that embodiment.

It is just at this point that the complex and even contradictory elements of the ninja mask can be seen. The ninja come out of television; they embody a fear of the dead from times past. But the fear of communism as presented by the government was thin in the last decades of the New Order. The productions of government propaganda were exhausted. The embodiments of ghosts in the world publicized by the government were unconvincing. And figures out of mass-produced television serials are not known to embody deep fears. One Indonesian told me how surprised people he knew were to hear of ninja in connection with massacres. To his mind, ninja derived from the world of children. From one perspective, then, these were worn-out ghosts, the attributes of children’s play: empty forms. But this merely left the fears on which they originally drew unexpressed and vague. They were fears of violence whose motivation remained unclear and which somehow came from below and from God knows where. The ninja, which fascinated unreasonably, were then available to express these fears.

Thus the perceived collapse of hierarchy and the release of uncanny forces. The puzzle is the political consequences. On the one hand, we see evidence that these witch hunts roused a fear of revolution, which is to say, of a force that arises outside of hierarchy. The fact that rioters burned a police station—is this a revolutionary act?—might justify such a fear. On the other hand, the attack on witches as the attempt to master fear is scarcely revolutionary and, in its avoidance of political targets, is reactionary. If there is a resolution, it comes in the assumption of power under the name *massa*, “mob.” To apply this word to oneself is to acknowledge oneself as violent and unaccountable. Violence is inherent in the *massa* and needs no further reason. Which is to say, also, that the violence of the *massa* is thought necessary to them and even urgent. “*Massa*,” like “ninja,” is thus available to express phantasmic forces unleashed after Suharto fell. Such forces could be revolutionary. But the very word *massa* could also be a summons, no doubt unconscious and certainly ambivalent, calling for authority to reassert itself.

*Massa* stands where a word indicating identity should be. One would think there would be others. If, as I have argued, national identity failed in these cases, one might expect regional identity, “Javanese” identity in particular, to assert itself. That it did not indicates the degree to which the Javanese historical tradition was no longer available as a source of identity. Indonesia is not an ex-Yugoslavia, where ethnic identifications from the time of empire remained uneradicated during the communist era. Nationalism effectively absorbed Javanism while, also, Javanese systems of

hierarchy made a place for Indonesian authority. Both tendencies left "Javanese" to become a mere subcategory of Indonesian.<sup>37</sup>

"We are the *massa*" and "Am I a witch?" are the sentences that begin events. At that point the violence implied by the nouns turns outward toward the nearest target. The next sentence: "You are a witch." Again, we see the effect of decades spent unguided, unshaped by political thinking, leaving only the word *massa* to indicate a tremendous wave of fear. There was almost as little enthusiastic support for the New Order as there was resistance to it. But the great witch hunts are evidence of the extent to which Suharto's political notions penetrated the village. Neither support for nor resistance to the regime prevailed; instead, there was absorption of the anxieties on which the regime was found. Hence, these conditions: compliance and even contentment while it lasted, helplessness and panic when it ended.

This is not the only possible story. Why murder? Why is it that, overcome by terror, one kills? I myself am sometimes terrorized. I have not yet murdered. It is true of others in other places as well. And some Javanese took no part. In the end, the explanation remains incomplete. Necessarily.

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## EPILOGUE

### POLITICAL EFFECTS: EVERYTHING BACK IN PLACE

When witchcraft killings broke out in Malang Selatan, not far from Banyuwangi, the chairman of the local Nahdatul Ulama branch, Kijaji Hashim Muzadi, said that Malang Selatan was known to be a communist area before 1965 and that if the situation were not brought under control, "Our government will collapse. What will happen will be a revolution in our country." For that fear to be realized, the witch hunters would eventually have to have acted in the name of the *rakyat* (the people). As it was, the results were conservative, leading back, as they eventually did, to the production of ghosts and the reliance on authority by the victims, which, of course, bolstered the *aparatus*.

As it was, Kijaji Hashim's counterparts in Banyuwangi, site of the fiercest witch hunts, refused his diagnosis. They were afraid not of the *rakyat*, but of the *massa* as "provoked" by the army. Their fears were not simple, however; they are worth looking

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<sup>37</sup> The first of these propositions is the thesis of John Pemberton in his excellent book, *On the Subject of "Java"* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); the second I put forward in Siegel, *Solo in the New Order*.

at carefully. Haji Abdul Rachman Hasan, the former head of the Nahdatul Ulama in the regency of Banyuwangi and, at the time I met him, the speaker of the regency's parliament, told me this:

Black magic [*ilmu santet*]? It means you are sick till you die. Many people here have black magic. But no supposition about someone is necessarily correct. The ones who know for sure are themselves sorcerers [*tukang santet*].<sup>38</sup>

No supposition is necessarily correct. And, according to this distinguished leader of the organization headed by President Abdurachman Wahid, to know about black magic with certainty would itself incriminate the knower. Everyone else must doubt. He, like the other Nahdatul Ulama religious leaders in this area, knows not only that magic exists and that the Koran affirms this belief, but also that this area of Java has been known for centuries for its black magicians. With the exception of one religious leader—this time a supporter of Golkar, the former government party—who told us that there is no such thing as black magic, that if there was, the United States would have used it to send rockets to outer space, people time and again confirmed their belief in black magic. But black magic itself was not enough to explain what happened in 1998:

By chance, at that time, in this area, someone was using various strategies to cause trouble. They are using sorcerers. People were influenced to kill sorcerers. Who it is who was doing the influencing, we don't yet know.<sup>39</sup>

In fact, as I have said, the general supposition, iterated by NU leaders who had more confidence in me, was that the army was causing the trouble. This explanation was not only reported in the national newspapers; it was considered a fact in conversation. Certainly there was a *konspirasi*: a word taken from the English or perhaps the Dutch.

After looking into the matter, it turns out that not all [the murdered people] were sorcerers. Among them were village teachers of Koranic chanting and mosque officials. As it turns out, most of them were members of the NU [Nahdatul Ulama]. Out of 117 people killed, eighty-four were members of NU.<sup>40</sup>

The assumption seems to be that if the people killed were actually sorcerers, one would not have to resort to notions of conspiracy. Witchcraft exists, and it is understandable that witches be killed. But the NU leaders with whom I spoke are certain that the majority of those killed were not witches, despite the fact that they agree it is practically impossible to know, with certainty, who is a sorcerer and who is not. NU leaders are convinced that the victims were not sorcerers because, according to them, they were often Koranic teachers. That such people often helped out their neighbors, for instance with white magic to make couples fall in love or to cure an illness, is not disputed, either by them or anyone else. But the fact that the victims were NU members makes these NU leaders think that the movement against sorcerers was directed against the NU. They acknowledge that most of the *killers* were also members of NU, but respond to that inconvenient fact by explaining that uneducated villagers are susceptible to being incited.

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<sup>38</sup> Personal interview, Haji Abdul Rachman Hasan.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



The NU members also report that when the masked men, or ninja, were arrested, not one of them was ever found to be from the army. This fact, rather than contradicting their supposition that the attacks were orchestrated by the army, against NU members, supports it. According to the NU leaders, at the moment the perpetrators were released from jail, they turned out to be madmen. And, they say, that at a certain moment in time, the number of mad people in Banyuwangi increased noticeably. There are several versions of this story, sometimes related by the same person. There is the relatively simple conspiracy theory that explains the transformation: after suspects were arrested, the police substituted mad people for the soldiers or criminals who actually took part in the attacks, all thugs hired by the army. There is also a version that says that somehow the ninja turned into madmen. And there is the further emendation that there were numbers of madmen who spoke with accents other than that prevalent in Banyuwangi. According to this version of events, people suspected these madmen of being ninja (thus we have a reversal of the assumption that madmen were substituted for ninja) and therefore chased them. When caught, it turned out that the troublemakers spoke with accents foreign to Banyuwangi and that they had the strong physiques common to soldiers. That soldiers posed as madmen, and that genuine, though "foreign," madmen were substituted for soldiers, was merely a complication. This story of an army conspiracy, in all its versions, in any case, gained credence because the army is known to have instigated unrest in East Timor, in Aceh, in Jakarta, and other places.

When we noted that most of the cases we'd heard about involved disputes, and always involved local people, NU leaders told us that it made no difference. The wrong people were arrested; they may have participated in the killings, but they were not the *provokators*. The latter were from outside the village; one could trace them ultimately to Jakarta, and they were from the army. NU leaders whom we interviewed remain convinced that the leaders of the disturbances are not in jail

The NU leadership felt that the conspiracy (*konspirasi*) against them had a planned trajectory. The troubles began, they said, with "real witches," which means it all began as a response against alleged sorcerers who were not necessarily NU members. But then the attacks continued and began to focus on Koranic teachers who were NU members, and the violence escalated to the point where it threatened them, the regional NU leadership. Many of them reported threats received over the telephone. To protect their families, they often sent them away. Some of them circulated between villages every night, both to protect the villagers and to protect themselves, armed with whatever weapons they could muster. One man, for instance, had a sword made for himself. They distributed charms to make themselves invulnerable.

So far as we could find out, no regional leader was harmed. The nearest to an attack that we heard about involved a man driving with his family when a white jeep cut in front of him. The jeep is, of course, a reference to the army or the police, as is the color white, since it is used by the military police. This man refused to stop, and he believes this action saved him from being murdered.

In the partisan politics that ensued, the regent, a military man belonging to Golkar, was forced to resign. Blamed for allowing the killings to occur, his resignation no doubt validated the accepted and nationally publicized version of events broadcast by the NU leadership, according to which "we are victims," or, more precisely, we, the

leadership, were almost victims. Victims, then, of whom? Victims, they say, of the army. But the army acted through the *massa*. And the *massa* here was composed of their own followers, adherents of the NU. The army, they claimed, called up that force and directed it. This suspicion was unsupported by evidence, but it won credence in the mental and political climate that then prevailed. It was credible because the army was clearly to blame for so much violence in Indonesia at that moment. And it was believable, also, because wishful. If the NU had not found the army to blame, it would leave only the *massa*, and only NU followers, consisting of the same persons, to stand as suspects. Blaming the army diverted attention from this uncomfortable possibility. And it followed a pattern in Indonesia by which, once there is violence, someone in the center is said to have directed it. True or not, directed violence is less frightening than the uncontrolled aggression that arises from the *massa* alone.<sup>41</sup>

The leadership, thinking itself targeted for murder, found itself in a situation no different from those who asked, "Am I a witch?" The parceling out of amulets, for instance, to ward off this violence, was a religious response to a danger which could be of the same nature. Which could, in other words, be a secret danger, coming from supernatural powers. But the response of the leadership was not to ask "Am I a witch?" It was, rather, to say, "we almost died." In the logic of the sublime as it is practiced in the West, closeness to death is not closeness to mere biological death alone. It has a transcendent dimension. Now one (almost) knows what death is, death here being reified and mysterious. NU leaders felt themselves close to a *stille kracht*, a secret power, one hidden in their membership. It was not that their membership turned against them out of political or for other reasons. They rather acted as *massa*, and the actions of the *massa* are unfathomable until, later, someone understands who is behind them.

The death that they almost escaped was, thus, not ordinary. But neither was it the same unnatural death of their followers. NU leaders repeatedly affirmed their belief in witchcraft, but such belief as it was shared by their followers was only an excuse for fomenting trouble for themselves, the leaders. The *massa*, not witchcraft, was the source of power. Or rather, once NU followers were transformed into *massa*, the world was turned upside down. It became populated with madmen and killers whose prey, deferred for a moment perhaps, was themselves. Witch hunts may be going on in the village, but the real target was "me." These unfathomable tactics made sense when they were attributed to political rivals who, moreover, were famous for violence.

Ordinarily, the Indonesian leadership formulates what the *rakyat* wants but cannot say. But in place of wants, desires, and interests there were only psychically compelled actions evident in the actions against witches. Viewing the incoherent fury of their followers, NU leaders felt that they were its ultimate targets. Why should they have felt that way? Presumably because of the army presence, and I cannot rule out the possibility that the army, or its thugs, did place some of the threatening phone calls. But before that moment, these thwarted spokesmen came up against their new inability to articulate for, and therefore lead, their followers. The connection between them and their followers had been broken, just as we have seen to be the case from the viewpoint

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<sup>41</sup> On this topic see James T. Siegel, "I Wasn't There But...: Gossip and Politics in Jakarta," *Archipel* 46 (1993): 59-65.

of the followers. What had been followers, *rakyat*, their “people,” were, as a result, acting autonomously and therefore incoherently. Only by attributing another leadership to their actions could these actions be made understandable.

But of course, this interpretation did not necessarily have to mean that the NU would be the chief target of the violence. In my opinion, the reason the NU leaders chose to believe that the army had mustered the *massa* against them was not, in the first place, a result of political rivalry. It was that the actors were members of the NU. Among all the major political or religious organizations in Indonesia, the Nahdatul Ulama leadership remained closest to its followers. Precisely its decision not to be a political party left it free to have a closer relation to its membership—less influenced by the demands of national politics—than was true for the major parties. But in the course of these violent events, the connections between NU leaders and their followers were shattered, as were those between the *apararat* and villagers in Banyuwangi. The actions of the membership should have been first formulated for them. But they were not formulated at all, or as little as possible. The pressure NU leaders felt was to understand, to formulate, to speak what their membership felt. They could not do so. They felt that pressure, therefore, as directed against them rather than, so to speak, through them, as would normally have been the case.

In the event, it was better to think of their followers as being stolen away by members of their own class, even if these elites were not of their own political persuasion. Here we see the line between classes. On one side, we have those who are the repository of violence and in whom it can be awakened. On the other side, we have leaders of the people and those who would incite the mob. This way of thinking restores the political ideas of the Suharto regime, which depended on the firmness of this line and the threat that came from beneath it. That the NU leadership blamed the army did not mean that they denied their own followers were part of the murderous *massa*. But their accusation gained them an advantage. Responsibility for violence rested with the army, who made *rakyat* into *massa* with their reckless incitation to violence. The NU leadership was on the side, not only of the restoration of peace, but also, and especially, of the reconstitution of the social body. They stressed how their followers needed the guidance and control NU leaders provided, how the *massa* relied on the voices of their leaders in order to restore them to their true identity: as *rakyat*. Thus the story ends by redrawing, reinforcing the boundary between the enlightened classes and the underclass. On one side—the underside—of that boundary, the same people took on the definitions *rakyat* and *massa* alternatively. On the other side, depending on who was speaking, stood either leaders of the people or inciters of the mob.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> One could look at the *massa* in a somewhat different light. As the repository of violence, they play the role of banishing not merely violence, but force as well, from the vocabulary of Indonesian political thinking. Force is made unthinkable. Thus the work of the army is made abstract. As I mentioned, the dioramas in the army museum show revolutionaries without showing their opponents. When, in another part of the museum, the bloody clothes of Indonesian victims are displayed, it is without their killers. If there is such a thing as “Asia,” Indonesia thus makes a part of it, by contrast to Europe. The history of France cannot be imagined without its conflicts with Britain, with Germany, etc. But Indonesian history has battles whose memory is only that of a unity not yet achieved, just as the histories of many other Asian countries are told without mutual reference. Conflict is discounted, leaving hatred and violence no place in historical memory or historical narratives.

The idea of the "*massa*" shows how and where violence is banished from awareness. The *massa* are ephemeral. They are easily replaced in memory by "the people," and when they are, violence is almost forgotten. But not entirely. It comes back abruptly in an ahistorical guise. The lack of sociological definition prevents an accommodation, and thus an amelioration, of those who are said to be violent and who are therefore feared. One does not negotiate with the mob. One only controls it. The mob thus disappears and the people reappear. Presto, "they" become the *rakyat*.

When this article was already in proofs, the important article by Caroline Campbell and Linda H. Conner reached me. See Caroline Campbell and Linda H. Conner, "Sorcery, Modernity, and Social Transformation in Banyuwangi, East Java," *RIMA* 34,2 (Summer 2000): 61-97. Campbell and Conner have valuable remarks about the impact of the economic crisis on East Java at the time of the killings. They ask why sorcery resulted in violence. Their answer is that "the attacks can be understood as an expression of the tensions and contradictions of globalization and social transformation in East Java that are not confined to the period of acute crisis in late 1998, but are an ongoing expression of deep ideological divides, state repression, and social inequalities." In particular, they feel that the lists drawn up of sorcerers played a major part in catalyzing fears. Their account is based on newspaper reports and thus sees the events from the outside. I myself did not find that in the villages people mentioned the lists very often. I do not find Campbell's and Conner's account incompatible with mine, but I think that the routes through which tension has been transmitted and expressed appear different when seen from inside the village. The comparison they make with the transformations of withcraft in Africa, a subject taken up also by Romain Bertrand in an unpublished paper, is worthy of further development. I hope to take up their analysis in detail in a later publication.