

Research Article

Witchcraft Politics in Indonesia's 1998 New Order Regime: Conflict, Propaganda, and Political Directions

Fikri Gali Fernando Holqi¹ Amartya Firdausy Salsabila²

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the conflict during the New Order regime in Indonesia in 1998, based on the mystery of the Banyuwangi film, film as a reflection of the reality of the dynamics of 1998 reformasi in Indonesia, which clearly affected the city of Banyuwangi. Particularly regarding the witchcraft politics in Banyuwangi. This study employs a qualitative approach with a thematic analysis type. Consists of primary data containing the film *Mysteries of Banyuwangi*, as well as secondary data containing published research results such as journals, books, articles, and report archives that can answer the research problems. The data analysis technique uses manual coding through the processes of familiarization, initial coding, and open coding conducted using NVivo12 software, leading to a systematic thematic narration conducted in-depth to analyze phenomena using scapegoat

¹ Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang.
Email: fikrigali61@gmail.com (Corresponding Author)

² Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang.
Email: amartyafs@gmail.com

theory, leadership, mechanical solidarity, and multidimensional conflict comprehensively. The research findings reveal that the political conflict surrounding witchcraft occurring in Banyuwangi is based on the New Order regime's strategy to maintain its political legacy regarding the existence of charismatic leaders such as Megawati Soekarno Putri and Abdurrahman Wahid. The pattern of conflict is directed at the Ulama as the main target by creating propaganda that scapegoats the existence of witchcraft and the role of witch doctors through community support. This conflict orientation is aimed at charismatic leaders who are able to undermine the stability and political legitimacy of the regime.

Keywords: Witchcraft Politics, Banyuwangi Conflict, 1998 Reformasi, Propaganda, Human Rights Violations

Introduction

The existence of culture in the Osing Tribe of Banyuwangi is a reflection based on the diversity of Indonesia's cultural heritage through the significant instrument of History (Jatim Land, 2024). Banyuwangi has cultural values that correlate with mystical elements. As a region that possesses a diversity of mystical cultures through the entity of witchcraft, Banyuwangi has a group of witch doctors (Haryanto, 2023). Black magic can be interpreted as a part of the cultural heritage of Banyuwangi that is preserved, especially among the Osing ethnic community (Kusumo, 2024).

The term '*santet*' or witchcraft is one of the problematic issues that tends to have a negative connotation and is discussed in its existence in Indonesia. Although it is always identified as a myth, some people believe that *santet* is part of human life and an implementation of black magic practices aimed at hurting opponents (Misteri Nusantara, 2024). However, in reality, the practice of witchcraft is verified as a deviant practice by the community of Banyuwangi (Kumparan, 2024).

The Osing tribe community gradually strives to classify to sustain the existence of something that is validated as a cultural symbol, as it has overlapping values in political situations and civilization (Hadzantonis, 2019). Based on the existence of the Osing Tribe, Banyuwangi was once known as the "City of Santet". This identity was initiated by a case of mass slaughter of *Santet* shamans that occurred in Banyuwangi in 1998. Based on data from government reports, 115 victims died in 20 districts, while referring to data from the Fact-Finding Team (TPF) through PBNU, identifying 143 victims (Ulumuddin, 2022).

Public opinion and understanding on a broad scale have so far only focused on the issue of who the perpetrator was in the massacre of witch doctors in Banyuwangi, which to this day remains an unresolved problem. In addition, the handling of victims of serious human rights violations, as mentioned by the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission (KOMNAS HAM), has also so far not been resolved (Farisy & Sudrajat, 2025).

This condition occurred during the New Order regime, where the government implemented a repressive legal strategy, significantly limiting public participation, with the main orientation being to maintain power (Jadidah, 2020). However, not many scholars focus on the patterns, directions, and political propaganda of black magic carried out by the New Order regime in 1998 in Indonesia. Therefore, the use of analysis tools such as scapegoat theory, leadership, mechanical solidarity, and multidimensional conflict is expected to answer and clarify the state's responsibility towards victims of serious human rights violations in Indonesia

Objectives

Based on that background, the goal of this research is to analyze the patterns, propaganda, and political direction of witchcraft in Banyuwangi during Indonesia's New Order regime in 1998.

Literature Review

The study conducted in an effort to identify local and anthropological concepts underwent a stable revolution, in this case, in the Melanesia and Africa regions, which is very prominent in anthropological studies on witchcraft. However, it has changed

and developed concerning studies of witchcraft in Latin America, Asia, etc. Reflections from different perspectives on shamanism, voodoo, and witchcraft are oriented as conceptions and implementations that share similarities with terms applied in other regions. However, there are also substantial transformations in those views (Buyandelger, 2013; Jokic, 2015).

The legitimization of witchcraft or sorcery on a global scale is understood as an individual's capability to apply supernatural knowledge intended to hurt others. Referring to the global perspective identified by several continents in the last decade, millions of individuals legitimize sorcery or witchcraft. This is not only as an entity that is no more harmful than in the past, but also as a cultural phenomenon that is inspired and can have an impact not only in economic aspects, but also disrupt social cohesion, thereby leading to violence (Gershman, 2020).

Magic or witchcraft, through a reductive approach, is identified as a manifestation of something else done by a sorcerer or shaman that can create violence (Geschiere, 2015). However, magic or witchcraft is classified into negative and positive aspects, where negative means demonic, and positive means creative. Demonic magic or witchcraft is a representation of political activities that lead to 'theurgic', whereas creativity manifests a consciousness that can bring about changes in life situations, resulting in better transformation (Lyssakov, 2017).

According to Weber, society is stratified into several parts, namely economic class, status, and power or party. Economic class can be identified as a community's economic condition being the same. Three fundamental aspects necessitate fulfillment in

this economic class section, namely causal instruments that relate to human life probabilities as manifested in the labor market. Then, status is an element that can determine a level of rank, dignity, and lifestyle. The last is power or party; this component can be interpreted as a political element that aims to create dominance of power (Goodman, 2014).

The existence of the concept of stratification according to Weber is capable of creating conflict. Conflict is a situation of lack of consensus regarding orientation and ideological interests. It is identified with the competition between two opposing forces. This conflict aims to advocate for the ideology, values, and interests of a group concerning power and status through strategies that are capable of eliminating opponents (Turner, 1998). That is why we need social solidarity to avoid or resist the existence of social conflict, due to the presence of a sense of shared fate, integration, and strong relationships among actors within a community (Soerjono, 1985).

Emile Durkheim first used the term social solidarity as a way to describe a social network (Johnson, 1988). For Durkheim, mechanical social solidarity created through community activities has a high degree of equivalence with low differentiation. The components of this concept of mechanical solidarity are based on the similarity of norms, values, and beliefs among members of society (Turner 1994).

Regarding this issue, some scholars only research the conflict of the shaman killings in Banyuwangi, for example, Hambali (2015), who found a large number of human rights violations that occurred and legal uncertainty during the New Order era, one of which is the politics of the shaman massacre. Then Sujatmoko (2016)

found that the government is obliged to provide rehabilitation rights for victims of human rights violations through the provision of status, material assistance, and free services.

Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach with thematic analysis, consisting of secondary data containing published research results such as journals, books, articles, and report archives that can answer the research problem. The data analysis technique uses manual coding through the processes of familiarization, initial coding, analytical coding, and pattern coding. Data processing is conducted using NVivo12 software sourced from primary data, namely the documentary Mystery Film of Banyuwangi, released in 1998. The researchers collected data based on the narratives present in the films, and then the data was processed through classification coding based on the emerging keywords. After that, a systematic narrative analysis was conducted in-depth to analyze the phenomenon using Rene Girard's scapegoat theory, Emile Durkheim's mechanical solidarity, and Max Weber's multidimensional conflict, and was done comprehensively.

This study was designed not only to cover one aspect of the film, but rather to attempt to reach the level of objective reality. The use of film as the primary source does not, however, make the research biased. Instead, the film serves as an instrument to try to understand complex reality through interpretation, ideology, and the theories used in analyzing the data in the research, supported by research studies and reports to strengthen the argumentation of the analysis results. Thus, it is not confined

to empirical data that may be subject to propaganda and research bias itself.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the researcher presents the findings coherently, based on qualitative data obtained through the Banyuwangi witchcraft film. The findings produced by the researcher are constructed concerning the research questions through the coding of the created themes. This is accomplished through a complex process and thematic analysis. The findings are presented and illustrated in Tables 1 and Figures 1, 2, and 3. Table 1 describes the coding structure, which also includes themes and codes generated from conversations and data analysis through the Banyuwangi witchcraft film. Table 1 identifies important themes, which then summarize the political dynamics of witchcraft in Banyuwangi.

- (Theme 1) Community: Movements carried out by the community, such as *anti-tenung* (black magic), there are fundamental conflicts, the community's orientation is only to expel, not to kill. But there was a mass murder by unknown people against the witch shamans. The motive of the mass murder in the scenario
- (Theme 2) Muslim: The majority Muslim population of Banyuwangi is spread across 360 villages, and *santet* is prohibited by religion. *Anti-tenung* shamans are thwarted by ulama (religious people), so people think that ulama will support the movement.
- (Theme 3) Witchcraft: The Banyuwangi community is opposed to *santet* shamans because the practices of

santet shamans can create negative implications for society, so the community rejects them.

Table 1 explains the results of the thematic analysis conducted based on primary data on witchcraft politics through data collection from the Mystery Film of Banyuwangi 1998.

Table 1: Coding statistics of the Witchcraft Politics

Open Coding	Analytical Coding	Pattern Coding	Frequency
Community (Theme 1)	● Propaganda	The community	1
	● Conflict	opposes witchcraft	10
	● Violence	shamans, and	6
		propaganda from an unknown person creates terror, murder, and conflict.	7
Muslim (Theme 2)	● Religious	The majority of	2
		Muslims were terrorized, and Ulama and religious people (<i>santri</i>) were also targeted for murder.	2
Witchcraft (Theme 3)	● Shamans	Witchcraft as a part of	4
		culture becomes a scapegoat for the vertical conflict between the community, religious leaders, and shamans.	5

Note: Coding processes by author, 2025

The results of the coding based on participants emphasize the relationship between the existence of the Muslim community

as a majority group led by scholars and the propaganda carried out through witch doctors, which is then used as a scapegoat in witchcraft politics, creating vertical conflicts in Banyuwangi. Based on Figure 1, the researchers found calls regarding the propaganda, which include conflicts resulting in mass killings by unknown individuals.

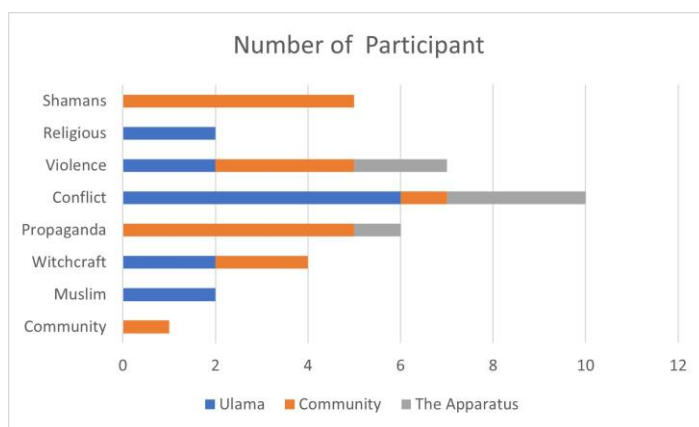


Figure 1: The Number of Participants Based on Movies, author processing, 2025

Although the challenges in identifying mass murderers require empirical identification, the motives, goals, and patterns of mass murder strategies can be identified based on images 1 and 3; images 1 and 3 are interconnected in answering the motives, goals, and patterns of mass murder strategies carried out by unknown individuals.

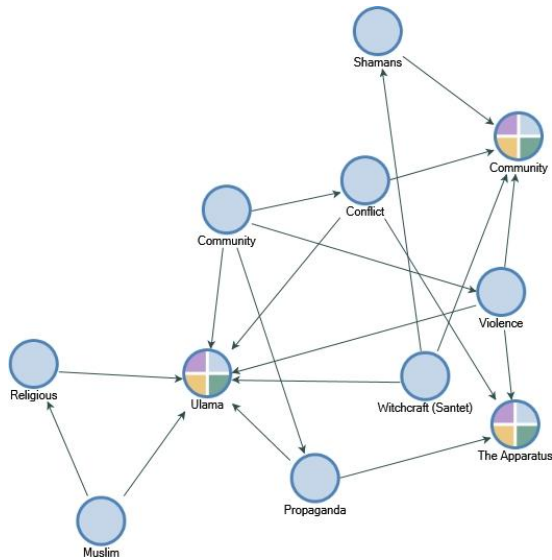


Figure 2: The Relation of Ulama, the Apparatus, and Community with the Witchcraft Politics, author processing with NVivo12, 2025

In image 2, focus on the relationship between participants in the conflict and the elements that are the focus of the political conflict occurring. Image 2 illustrates the involvement of three main participants in the conflict, namely religious leaders, the community, and the apparatus, who have different views. The community discusses the conflict through the rejection and expulsion of witch doctors who can create problems in the community.

Then, scholars as religious figures in a predominantly Muslim society emphasize the existence of propaganda from the community and witch doctors that create conflicts which result in murder as a consequence. Meanwhile, the apparatus discusses propaganda, conflict, and murder. However, the apparatus, from a legal formal perspective, does not find any murders committed by unknown

individuals. Figure 3 illustrates the responses of participants involved in the political witchcraft conflict in Banyuwangi, based on data taken from the Banyuwangi witchcraft film.



Figure 3: Word cloud generated from the participants' responses to the Witchcraft Politics, author processing with NVivo12, 2025

In image 3, the participant provides statements emphasizing community, shamans, unknown, enforcement, apparatus, and movement. This indicates a significant concern about the relationship between these concepts in the political case of witchcraft in Banyuwangi, as well as a desire for improvement in the concepts of enforcement and apparatus. The enforcement carried out by the apparatus is an important instrument that needs to be implemented fairly in response to killings, and most importantly, propaganda to divide society through horizontal conflicts.

The Relation of the New Order Regime with Witchcraft Politics and Scapegoat

The final condition of the New Order regime government experienced fluctuations. There were cases of conflict resulting in

casualties and no political stability. This condition occurred in the late 1990s when Suharto was trying to maintain his legacy as the President of Indonesia through military support. Suharto's political aggression was focused on the NU group, which had a contradictory stance towards the regime (Rafsanjani, 2021).

In a political situation fractured by factional and religious conflicts, the pressures applied will lead the target group to implement the domain of religion to provide stability and balance of power in state formation (Kulkarni & Pfaff, 2022). On the other hand, political targets are also aimed at cultural instruments. The legitimacy of society towards witchcraft or magic makes it a political objective. Mystical legitimacy can be exploited in efforts to support the political system. Meanwhile, prejudice against witchcraft or magic is identified as an aspect of conflict that occurs implicitly (Kohnert, 1996). Table 2 explains the analysis of scapegoat theory in the politics of witchcraft.

Table 2. Scapegoat of Witchcraft Politics

Process	Analyze
Mimetic Desire	Mimetic desire can be identified as a fundamental instrument of human nature. Based on social interaction methods, individuals implicitly parody the desires of others. This means that all decisions are made based on consensus. For example, if the majority of society desires the same will, it can create a conflict. Alternatively, it is verified as a scapegoat. The Banyuwangi community is fundamentally against witchcraft practitioners, as the practices of these witchcraft practitioners can create negative implications for society, especially related to household fractures. The community's rejection of witch shamans manifested in movements aimed at driving out witch doctors. The community believes that witch doctors

Table 2. Scapegoat of Witchcraft Politics (Cont.)

Process	Analyze
	<p>practice black magic that can damage households (Mystery Film of Banyuwangi, 1998).</p> <p>In the procedure of scapegoating, using taste guilt that is directed against one individual or group. This individual or group is essentially an entity that is validated as having differences. Through the sacrifice of a scapegoat, it is hoped to address and create social harmony. The movements carried out by the community as an anti-magic or anti-witchcraft were thwarted by religious scholars, even though magic or black magic is forbidden by religion, leading the community to believe that the movement would be supported by the scholars. After the movement to expel the witchcraft practitioners failed, there was a mass killing by unidentified individuals against the witchcraft practitioners. The mass killing of witchcraft practitioners became a serious issue for the police and society. Religious scholars believe that the killings were not carried out by the scholars or the community, as there is fundamentally no animosity between the scholars, the community, and the witchcraft practitioners. Although there is a fundamental conflict, the community's orientation will only further exacerbate the situation (Mystery Film of Banyuwangi, 1998).</p>
Myth, Ritual, and the Origins of the Scapegoat Mechanism	<p>Myths and rituals are representations of scapegoat procedures. Both of these elements can offer Redefinition. Myths and rituals reflect how a community organizes conflict. Society tends to vent the tensions that occur onto scapegoats. Myths are interpreted as the dynamics of conflict that describe the need to identify victims deemed responsible for the existence of the conflict. The Osing community has a culture that includes representing mystical, supernatural, and ethereal values, which each exist as a manifestation of power in the life of the Banyuwangi community known as '<i>santet</i>'.</p> <p>The Banyuwangi witchcraft performed by witch doctors is essentially a form of attraction towards the opposite sex. The Osing community verifies that witchcraft is classified into two parts, namely <i>mesisan kathet</i></p>

Table 2. Scapegoat of Witchcraft Politics (Cont.)

Process	Analyze
	"all together included" and <i>mesisan benthet</i> "all together cracked" (Mystery Film of Banyuwangi, 1998). Myths and rituals fulfill the basic needs of humans, which are oriented as a form of mimetic competition, up to conflicts that are carried out based on the scapegoat procedure.
Sacrifice	<p>In the face of an internal conflict situation, society will naturally explore a synthesis that can address issues in order to create harmony. This instinct manifested into the identification of the black camp as the direction of the suffering from collective problems. Scholars, as community leaders following the propaganda, inform that society is advised not to be easily provoked and influenced, and to always be suspicious of one another. The motive behind this scripted mass murder will create the impression that the death of the shaman is a consequence of the conflict between the community and the shaman. Therefore, this murder is a form of propaganda (Mystery Film of Banyuwangi, 1998).</p> <p>The groups or individuals identified as scapegoats differ from the individuals or groups that justify them. These entities are perceived as one of the threats or disruption factors against the community. Therefore, the community collectively accumulates sentiment through violence against the scapegoats. Such actions are oriented as a means of eliminating disturbances and conflict tensions, as well as pragmatically and significantly enhancing integration. Scholars remind that the actions of people's courts are the goal of the propaganda carried out by groups of unknown people, but this act of sadism is an accumulation of the demands of society regarding the failure of law enforcement over public safety (Mystery Film of Banyuwangi, 1998).</p>

Source: Processing by the author based on Girard (1986)

The majority of the Islamic population of Banyuwangi is spread across 360 villages. As a result, religious leaders become some of the figures with strong legitimacy as leaders through their charisma in the life of the community (Mystery Banyuwangi Film, 1998). Charismatic leaders will create themselves as the main focus and can influence the wider society through their charisma. This is based on their role and function, where charismatic leaders can inspire in order to align the collective vision and mission. Furthermore, they can form emotional integration with their followers, thus enabling the realization of the main goals (Firdaus et al., 2023).

“The role of scholars in thwarting the expulsion of witch doctors and their influence on society has made them targets of murder by unknown individuals. Following the mass murder of scholars, the community responded to the incident toward law enforcement through demonstration movements. However, as one of the drivers of the demonstration, scholars again faced intimidation and death threats from unknown individuals”. (Mystery Film of Banyuwangi, 1998).

The community has a high tendency for collectivity and similarity. Therefore, the differences in interests are very minimal among them. The collectivity of the community is communal, relying on norms, values, and beliefs. The integration of the community that is created is also a causal consequence of these aspects. Strong integration forms solidarity, resulting in uniform social relations (Turner, 1994).

“This mass massacre moved from the Southern area of Banyuwangi to the North of Banyuwangi which had changed its orientation to the point of being aimed at the Ulama directly. The community's response to terror and threats against the ulama is to continue to resist the assassination attempt of the ulama. So that the people are united in hunting for the perpetrators (unknown people)”. (Mystery Film of Banyuwangi, 1998).

The solidarity of society refers to collective awareness, regardless of the group believed in. Collective awareness can occur because society experiences conditions that carry the risk of disturbance, destruction, and confusion (Johnson, 1988).

“Community hunting as a major force creates new problems, as the community is unorganized and kills individuals who are not identified as targets. This unsystematic self-initiative by the community makes it the focal point of accusations as mass murderers”. (Mystery Film of Banyuwangi, 1998).

The transition from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity in society poses a great challenge; at this phase, society will lose its guidelines and fundamental goals, which Durkheim refers to as anomie, meaning a condition of normlessness (Johnson, 1988).

Witchcraft as a political strategy of the New Order regime

The Banyuwangi region has a predominantly Muslim community that is classified under Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). The regime intentionally made this area the first point of propaganda conflict through political motives. This is based on the aftermath of the election of Suharto as President in 1998 during the General Session of the MPR (People's Consultative Assembly), where various demonstrations were created with the aim of a coup or overthrowing the government. This was also accompanied by the phenomenon of mass killings of shamans and clerics by an unknown person (Prattama & Galih, 2019).

Yudiana & Mahfud (2023) state that the political strategy of the regime is correlated with Gus Dur, who constantly criticized the New Order regime; thus, NU became a victim of political conspiracy. The authoritarian practices of the New Order regime were explicitly facilitated and institutionalized by the affiliated

oligarchic group. Therefore, legal instruments were only oriented as tools to strengthen the chain of impunity (Wiratraman, 2022).

The conflict that occurs is identified as a consequence of the existence of interests that hold power. Differences in interests regarding ideas, values, and goals. Thus, through the convergence of class disparities by Marx, Weber developed the theory of conflict and stated that the emergence of conflict is backed by the emergence of charismatic leaders, who can then mobilize the interests of subordinates (Goodman, 2014). Table 3 explains the multidimensional conflict in witchcraft politics.

Table 3. The Multidimensional Conflict of Witchcraft Politics

Process	Analyze
Withdrawal of legitimacy from political authority	The subordinate groups always play a role in conflicts with the superordinate. This can happen if the subordinate withdraws from the political power that is currently operating. During the New Order regime, two influential figures were Gud Dur and Megawati, two figures who represented different groups, which became the opposition to the New Order regime of Suharto's government. Java became the center of conflict under the regime. Based on this, there are three classifications of Javanese society: Kyai, Abangan, and Santri. Kyai are groups of scholars who play an important role in the spread of Islam in Indonesia, especially in Java. Abangan are Javanese Muslims who combine Islam with local wisdom (syncretism), a group that does not strictly follow Islamic law. Santri are students of Kyai. These three types formed an opposition aimed at dismantling the power of the regime (Pinter Politik, 2021).

Table 3. The Multidimensional Conflict of Witchcraft Politics (Cont.)

Process	Analyze
Dramatic discontinuity in the distribution of rewards	Subordinate groups always withdraw from the operating political power. The relevance between subordinates and superordinates is a high political stratum. In addition, the unequal distribution of power, prestige, and high disparities in welfare also pose fundamental issues. Megawati and Gus Dur gave resistance against the authoritarianism of the regime through the supporters of PDI and the Nahdlatul Ulama Group. Based on the political power of the New Order regime, it degraded the political currents of the Old Order under the pretext of economic development and political stability (NU Online, 2020).
Low Social mobility figures	The tension between subordinate and superordinate groups creates conflict when there is the existence of a charismatic leader who can accumulate and accommodate the sentiments of subordinate groups towards the superordinate. Megawati, as the general chairwoman of PDI (Indonesian Democratic Party), has support primarily from loyal sympathizers based largely at the grassroots level known as ' <i>wong cilik</i> '. Meanwhile, Gus Dur plays a role in the grand dialogues he conducts at the boarding school. Megawati and Gus Dur share a collective goal of creating justice and prosperity for society (Pinter Politik, 2021).
Routinize authority, New System of Rules and Administration	After charismatic leaders were able to win conflicts, there was pressure on routine authorities, which was done through new regulations and administration. The capacity to accommodate power by Megawati and Gus Dur during the revolution to topple the New Order regime created reform. This formed a system and transformation from authoritarianism to democratization, culminating in democracy.

Source: Processing by the author based on Turner (1998).

After the success of a political strategy, a charismatic leader will encounter a problem situation related to a goal achieved through political action (Wahyudi, 2021). The transition from the New Order era to reform has high risks, which are based on two aspects. First, the strength of civil society becomes chaotic. Second, the instruments of the old regime will create new power, grounded in the existence of its ideology and political values (Huntington, 2006).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the results of the analysis, the researchers concluded that the witchcraft politics of Banyuwangi are carried out based on propaganda that is systematically and massively organized to create conflict in society. This systematic and massive conflict is conducted by propagating the community to create conflict through the exploitation of the negative sentiment of society against witch doctors as scapegoats. The orientation of the mass killings is directed towards religious scholars. Because the scholars are figures representing the majority of the Muslim community (NU). The mechanical solidarity of society in responding to mass killings makes it an unorganized act, which Durkheim refers to as anomie, causing society to misdirect its efforts in tackling the perpetrators of crime.

This conflict essentially arises from the emergence of the charismatic figure Gus Dur as a representative of the Islamic faction and Megawati as the representative of the lower class (PDIP), opposing the authoritarianism of the New Order regime since 1998. The climax led to the realization of reform. The political conflict

surrounding black magic in Banyuwangi is based on the strategy of the New Order regime in maintaining its political legacy. The conflict pattern targets religious leaders as the main focus by creating propaganda that scapegoats the existence of black magic and the role of shamans through community support. The orientation of this conflict is directed towards charismatic leaders capable of undermining the stability and political legitimacy of the regime.

Indonesia needs to ratify the Rome Statute to bring cases of human rights violations on an international scale. The ratification of the Rome Statute creates significant pressure on the Indonesian government, as it would involve the country dealing with the International Court of Justice, particularly the ICC (International Criminal Court). This is an effort to combat human rights violations, even though Indonesia itself has ratified the ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) and has human rights legislation.

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