

A Double-Edged Sword: Bandits in the Javanese Revolution: Foes or Friends?

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Abstract

This research is based on a fundamental question: what was the position of bandits in the Javanese Revolution? Banditry is a social phenomenon connected to crime, the history of the Indonesian Revolution, and the social history of Indonesian society, particularly in Java. This research aims to analyze the social phenomenon of banditry in Java during the post-independence period until the end of the Indonesian Revolution. The research employs historical methods to identify relevant sources. Additionally, researchers incorporate oral interviews with individuals who experienced banditry during the same period. A literature review is also conducted to situate the topic within a complex and nuanced analysis. This research reveals the complex and multifaceted role of bandits in the Javanese Revolution, where they blurred the lines between criminality and heroism. This is further exemplified by the existence of "Revolutionary Bandits" who were utilized by Indonesian military forces in Java as supplementary troops during the revolutionary era.

Keywords: Bandit; Revolution; Crime; Social History; Social Phenomena.

Introduction

Bandit is a form of crime that develops in agrarian society (Pranoto 2010, 6). The emergence of Bandit coincided with the opening of plantation land by colonials in Java. Colonials cleared land by exploiting forests on a large scale (Peluso 1991, 67–69). By introducing of the commercial planting system by colonials in Java or known as the plantation system, the residents who were originally farmers experienced quite troublesome problems. This is related to the capitalist system, working hours and taxes imposed.

In 1870-1900, the Cultivation System was implemented. Then, it changed to another exploitation system that was the liberal system and the Ethical system in 1900-1942, This showed that exploitation in the agrarian sector was increasing annually. This had an impact on the welfare of farmers. Many farmers were less prosperous, they suffered, experienced poverty and even starvation (Booth 1988, 38–73). These conditions were the initial of emergence of Bandit in Java.

In simple terms, Bandit can be interpreted as a group that emerged as a result of agrarian conflict between the indigenous and colonial people. The opening of plantation with a colonial capitalist system affected how land ownership was regulated in Java. It was recorded that before 1900 colonialists in Java made unilateral claims to ownership of land in Java, at least this regulation was contained in the Agrarian Law 1870 (Boomgaard 2011, 484). This became one of the reasons for the emergence of Bandit in Java. Because the problem of land ownership, crop yield, tax and income influenced how the economy of the farmers at that time.

Furthermore, economic problems had an impact on food and welfare, accumulating into disappointment. The accumulation of disappointment led to an act of "rough" treatment by the farmers. Robbery, theft and other criminalization were concrete actions taken by farmers as a form of disappointment because wealth had been taken, forcibly seized by colonialists. These criminal acts in colonial terminology were called Bandit. Bandit was used

by the farmers as a way of expressing disappointment with the colonialists (Hobsbawn 1974, 13–29).

The emergence of Bandit phenomenon made the colonial government perceive it as a disturbance to the security of society. Therefore, security was increased by adding police personnel in various areas, with the aim of securing these areas. However, these efforts always failed, because the problem arose as a result of the colonial government's ignorance of the farmers who felt miserable due to the domination of these plantations (Adas 1981, 217–247).

Webster's Third New International Dictionary provides a definition that Bandit has four groups those are robber thief and murderer, someone who gets an unnatural advantage, an enemy (Pranoto 2010, 106). However, the Bandit world is not always about harmful crime. During the period of the Indonesian revolution, Bandits had their contribution in maintaining independence in Java. Even in some areas, Bandit is a heroic figure for the people in those areas. As if it is a double-edged sword, there is a part that leads to the enemy while another part leads to the user. The discussion about Bandits during the Revolutionary era in Java is quite interesting, because the review is not only a macro history, but also a micro (Iggers 1997, 41–101). This discussion is also a form of effort to prevent the nationalization of history by enriching social historiography and it does not try to discredit national historiography, as happened in the case of the historiography of the Madiun incident which is more directed towards anti-left political aims by providing a sufficient clear distinction between nationalists and the left group (Sugiyama 2011, 21–24). Therefore, in simple terms the discussion of Bandit in the Revolutionary era in Java is a microhistory which is a derivative of national history that is political and macro-historical (Kartodirjo 2014, 35).

Regarding the historiography of Bandit, there are at least two researchers who are quite familiar with this discussion, those are: Eric J. Hobsbawn (2018) and Suhartono W. Pranoto (2010). Overall the two of them discussed about Bandit, Hobsbawn discussed generally about Bandit in the world by explaining the types of

Bandits and who is Bandit in general; Meanwhile, Suhartono W. Pranoto discussed Bandit in rural Java in 1850-1942 by explaining the early emergence of Bandit and the types of Bandits in Java. In addition, in the context of revolution, Bandit had been discussed by Anton Lucas (1989). He explained how the Bandit played a role in the revolutionary process in three regions in the northern part of Central Java. Apart from Anton Lucas, the discussion of Bandit had also been discussed by Robert Cribb (2010). Cribb explained about how Bandit played a role in the revolution in Jakarta which moved side by side with the revolutionaries.

According to that, researchers also examines the writings of Julianto Ibrahim and Bandiyah regarding Bandits. These two articles were published these at Gadjah Mada University, respectively by the History Study Program and the Political Science Study Program. The two have a fundamental difference in focus, namely Julianto Ibrahim's writing explains more about social conflict which leads to historical writing, while Bandiyah is more political which highlights the dynamics of a Bandit becoming an official.

Julianto Ibrahim's article entitled *Bandit dan Pejuang Simpang Bengawan* explained how the revolutionary period in Surakarta was a condition where there was a lot of violence and crime. This happened because the condition of the country was unstable. After all, it was facing a second conquest attempt by the Dutch to Indonesia. To deal with this, efforts to maintain independence were not only carried out by the Indonesian army but also by the community. Many revolutionary movements emerged from the people of Surakarta as a form of disgust and disappointment felt since the Dutch colonial period, the Japanese oppression, and the chaotic conditions of the current Revolutionary era. Of course, this is a positive step in efforts to maintain Indonesia's independence, however, the consequences are quite severe, namely indiscriminate chaos in the form of violence and crime. This behavior was identified as Bandit behavior which was always detrimental, however, this was quite difficult to handle because these people were still closely connected with revolutionary fighters from both

society and the Indonesian military (Ibrahim, 2002, 320–326).

Bandiyah's article, entitled *Evolusi Jawara di Banten*, explains how in the period before independence until the New Order in Banten, Jawara as a social Bandit changed from being a criminalist to becoming a state official. This happened when the Bandits commonly known in Banten as Jawara began to establish organizations to accommodate people who had the same background. Then, by erasing the bad image of Bandit behavior in the past, these champions began to enter the political realm as state officials through one of the parties. This was done massively and measurably until he finally became Governor of Banten (Bandiyah 2008, 165–168).

The topic of Bandits is social as a social phenomenon in society. However, because the topic of this social phenomenon occurred in the past, it falls into the realm of Social History. Social history is explained by Sartono Kartodirdjo as the history of general society or the history of a particular Community (Kartodirdjo et al. 2017, 4–8). Meanwhile, according to Bambang Purwanto, social history is implemented as a history of the daily life of society (Purwanto 2008, 132–135). Meanwhile, Kuntowijoyo concluded that social history is a history whose research focus is society, either as a research object or as a research subject (Kuntowijoyo 2013, 13–18).

Banditry as a social phenomenon in society during the Revolutionary period proves that social history needs to be discussed further to find and explain this phenomenon accurately. The existence of economic conditions that are completely lacking, there is chaos in the stability of the country which results in a decrease in the level of security, creating opportunities for criminal acts to arise by these Bandits. This phenomenon is quite complicated because Bandits were not only troublemakers but also auxiliary soldiers who functioned well against the Allies and the Dutch during the Revolutionary period.

Based on these writings, researchers tried to reveal which side the Bandits in the revolutionary era were on, whether they were harmful criminals or heroic figures from society's perspective. Based on microhistorical studies as well as social and political history in the development of historical

science, the discussion about Bandits in the revolutionary era will be very interesting and will not just present the character as a role that tries to legitimize politically. Banditry as a quite complex social phenomenon needs to be studied by combining several scientific disciplines, such as social science, history, political science, or others so that a qualified explanation is obtained (Mukti 2023, 106–108).

This research was prepared based on historical methods, literature review, and oral interviews. These three research methods are combined with their respective portions to obtain a qualified explanation in this article. The historical method functions as a tool to see the validity of the sources used, as well as see what historical patterns existed at that time. The literature review method is used as a tool for identifying relevant written sources for this research, next is the interview to the people who had experiences about the banditry in designated period, used as an additional source to obtain relevance between field facts and historical sources in the form of writing. All three are very necessary in this research, the historical method makes it possible to study past phenomena accurately, the literature review method allows researchers to carry out in-depth written studies, and oral interviews can present emotions from the writing presented so that it feels more real.

The historical method used by the researcher uses steps from leading historians, namely Ernst Berheim and Kuntowijoyo, the researcher's literature review method uses the theory of Mestika Zed, and the researcher's oral interview method uses the theory of Paul Thompson. These three theories are combined to form a series of technical observations to analyze the Bandit phenomenon in Java in this Revolutionary era. This Bandit phenomenon needs to be observed in depth as a social phenomenon full of dynamics so that the position aims and objectives of these Bandits can be thoroughly understood.

The historical method with four steps, namely, *Heuristics, Criticism, Aufassung, and Dartelhung*, is the first step carried out in this research. Simultaneously with the work of the historical method, the literature review method is also used at the critical and *Aufassung* stages, by

comparing and criticizing each core of the reading and historical sources presented, so that they can be interpreted properly sequentially. Furthermore, the interview method is used as an additional source to obtain humanistic and connected descriptions from the sources obtained. Oral interviews allow the writer to display people's memories regarding certain phenomena, so with this interview method, it is hoped that it will be able to fill gaps, connect, and provide information. Life from the articles presented (Berheim 1990, 15; Mukti & Permana 2023, 105–109; Thompson 2017, 33–34; Zed 2004, 7–9).

Based on methods and sources This article aims to find answers to the problems: who were the Bandits in the revolutionary era, why did Bandits play a role in the era of the Indonesian Revolution on the island of Java; What was the role of Bandits in the era of the Indonesian Revolution on the island of Java; How the Bandits took sides during the Indonesian Revolution in Java.

Bandit on the Revolution Era in Java

Ricklefs stated that at least the revolution occurred in 1945-1949 (Ricklefs 2007, 317). In 1945 Indonesia needed a revolutionary Indonesian proclamation by Sukarno on behalf of the Indonesian people (Reid 2018, 1–2). Then the proclamation of Indonesia was proclaimed which was a sign that Indonesia was free and independent in managing its state administration. August 17, 1945 Indonesia declared that it had become independent, even though Indonesian independence was still in the shadow of the old ruler, the Dutch. The Dutch as the party that won the war still had the desire to regain control of Indonesia, this was proven by various efforts such as Dutch Military Aggression I and II. In simple terms the Dutch was trying to return power to its side. On the other hand, Indonesia was trying to change the prevailing regulations to be more independent from various sectors, including politics and economics. It was also hoped that this was not only independent of colonialism but also crypto-colonialism which was considered very detrimental because it was considered as covert resource colonialism, as was done in one of the countries in Southeast Asia, that is Thailand

(Herzfeld 2002, 900–902). It is on this basis that the naming of the revolutionary period is introduced.

Revolution is a political process in which there are various conflicts between groups and rebellion against existing rules, even though this has never happened as before and after. In this case, diplomacy and struggle are needed. The Indonesian Revolution was an accumulation of a process of political change that occurred continuously based on external and internal factors (Kartodirjo, 1981, pp. 3–4). Internal factor includes various armed unit groups and various other groups. Meanwhile, external factor includes diplomacy and various things relating to the international world. Harry Poeze explained that external factor also included all powers that took part in the atmosphere of the Indonesian revolution (Poeze 2019, ix). Therefore, the Indonesian revolution is an accumulation opened to its influence, either in the domestic or overseas. Various efforts and influences in the revolution were efforts to maintain independence or destroy as well as attempts to change the political rules in Indonesia with independence or to conquer Indonesia back to the Dutch.

Indonesian independence and revolution were two things that were closely related in the historical review in Indonesia. In this period there were two terms, revolution and war of independence. The term revolution was more often used because experts indicated there was an effort to legitimize and obscure history when using the term war of independence (Reid 1981, 33–40). This obfuscation and legitimacy were carried out by the armed forces to carry out their interests. The term revolution was considered to be more directed towards the wider community who played a role and had an interest. In Indonesian historiography, the term revolution was considered more appropriate because the discussion of the 1945-1949 period belonged to the Indonesian people at large and did not belong to certain parties. In the review of Indonesian historiography, revolution can be classified in the study of social history. As the result, there was a very broad openness in the discussion regarding social and economic aspects (Kartodirjo et al. 2017, 11–12).

In this discussion, the author tries to reveal who the Bandits are, what the role of Bandits was in the era of the Indonesian revolution, and what roles they played. The context of this discussion is the Java Island region (Jakarta, Central Java, and East Java). Bandits are the ultimate criminals. Bandits are classified into 4, namely 1) robbers; 2) someone who steals, and kills with cruelty and shame; 3) someone who gets an unfair advantage; and 4) enemies (Pranoto 2010, 106–108). The underworld has always been identified with Bandits because of the actions they carried out.

In the period of the Indonesian revolution, Bandits were faced with a choice. Choosing to become criminal figures as they should be or becoming heroic figures as revolutionaries (Ibrahim 2016, 134–145). In fact, some chose to be revolutionaries while others chose to become a Bandit.

Involving Bandits in the Indonesian revolution was not without reasons. Various considerations had been carefully thought out beforehand by the strategists of the armed forces. It could be ascertained that rewards were the most important thing in this endeavor because generally the purpose of Bandits and other criminals was economic problem. The main reason was Indonesia during the revolutionary period 1945–1949. It was a period of staking. Therefore, various efforts were made, including collaborating with Bandit criminalists.

During this revolutionary period, Indonesia experienced defeat in the field of military technology and strategy from the Dutch as the enemy. However, Indonesia is superior in controlling the battlefield. To overcome this problem, fighters applied jungle warfare tactic (Nasution 1954, 1). This tactic required the fighters to have high mobility and capable field mastery. In this context, Bandits were considered very competent. They were not only mastery of the field, but also a wide network. In addition, courage was also the reason why Bandits are included in this struggle.

Java in the context of the island of Java, the use of Bandits was considered very effective. This was proven by the implementation of this strategy in various regions in Java. In Jakarta, Bandit was known as *jago/centreng*; in Central Java it was

familiar with the term, *benggol/lenggaong*; while in East Java it was known as *bromocorah*. (Pranoto 2010, 108–109). These designations were not binding, because in certain regions the names can be different. For example, in East Java, Bandit was synonymous with *Bromocorah*, but some people also know it as *brandal*. In addition, in northern Central Java, Bandit was known as *kutil* (Lucas 1989, 145–146).

Jago, was a term from Bandit who was familiarly used in Jakarta. The emergence of *Jago* in Jakarta started when it was still called Batavia. At that time Batavia was still under Dutch control. The background for its emergence was the same as Bandits in general, that was conflicts regarding over land ownership, tax, farmer and other agrarian conflicts (Cribb 2010, 20–24). Initially, *Jago* was the term of head of Bandits who led various other criminal members, such as robbery and rogues. During the revolutionary period and Batavia had changed its name to Jakarta, *Jago* also took part in the struggle against the Dutch. *Jago* joined and participated with other members of the nationalist revolutionaries in Jakarta.

In Central Java, at least it was known that in the northern part of Central Java, that was around the Pematang, Tegal and Brebes, it was known that Bandit was known as *kutil and lenggaong*. Both of them were Bandits who have different duties. *Kutil* was Bandit figure who had quite a lot of organizational membership. They were respected and recognized by many people. This organization was known as the *gerakan kutil* (Lucas 1989, 147–149). Since the time of Japanese power, *kutil* had been familiar with the world of theft. However, it does not mean that *kutil* do not have other skills. The AMRI organization formed by *kutil* had the task of eliminating people in the local government who had links to NICA as traitors. Furthermore, *lenggaong* was a group of Bandits in the underworld but it played a role in the revolution as well. If the *kutil* was a group that was familiarly referred to as a community with *santri*, *lenggaong* was a criminalist group that demands revenge in the revolution. Although the motives were different, the two groups worked together in the three-region incident (Lucas 1989, 143–144). In Central Java, actually it was not only *kutil* and *lenggaong*, but also *benggol* was also a quite

respected Bandit around the slopes of Mount Merapi. However, *benggol* did not play a role in defending Indonesian independence, *benggol* tried to take revenge on the government.

East Java had many records about Bandit during the revolutionary era. The term Bandit or *bromocorah* was not binding so that in East Java Bandit and their groups had different names. During the revolutionary era, in East Java Bandit had a prominent role in various regions. For instance, in Surabaya, a Bandit named Matosin got a place in the Indonesian military stronghold. It was because Matosin was a fairly well-known Bandit in Surabaya and had great influence. In the military, Matosin had a company of troops containing Bandit, pickpocket, and prostitute. Each of them had a different task in fending off Dutch soldiers. Some of them were tasked to smuggle and steal goods while others were tasked to steal information from the Dutch soldiers (Sapto 2019, 262).

Not only was in Surabaya, but in Kediri there was also *Juwahir*. *Juwahir* was a Bandit who also collaborated with the Indonesian military. Its duty was varied, they robbed Dutch-controlled warehouses and brought people suspected of being Dutch accomplices. *Juwahir* was highly respected by the people of Kediri at that time. Because the result of the robbery of these warehouses and factories most of them were distributed to the community (Sapto 2019, 260–261).

Meanwhile, in Tulungagung, East Java, which is a neighboring area to Kediri, many revolutionary Bandits still existed until at least the New Order period. Based on the results of interviews with researchers, information was obtained that there were many Bandits from Tulungagung during the revolutionary era who were used or helped in efforts to confront the Dutch and the Allies, but their names were disguised and only the local military authorities knew. The tasks carried out were more or less the same as those of the Revolutionary Bandits in other areas, namely spying and systematic theft or ambushes. After the Revolutionary period, these names disappeared and were never heard of again, until in the New Order period, these names reappeared as criminals and were eventually arrested by local authorities. The arrests were made

based on public interest, resulting in a raid at a location not mentioned by the source. The source reluctantly admitted that he knew very well who he had arrested, it was not someone else who was his comrade in arms during the Revolution. However, arrests were still made, even leading to chases and shootouts (Interview with Toekiran Joewarno, 2020).

A Foe or a Friend?

In the revolutionary era, Bandit was a dynamic between darkness and light. In the era of the Indonesian revolution in Java, most of the Bandits did not do what they wanted, but they had another motive, that is regarding the economy. High payment and strategic position in the form of position in the Indonesian military were what these criminals wanted (Sapto 2019, 261). As it was known, the emergence of Bandit was based on agrarian conflicts between farmers and colonialists. So, it was not surprising that the emergence of Bandit was based on economic desires.

Hobsbawn stated that the Bandits' interest in the revolution was due to the emergence of confrontational social protests that were synonymous with violence. This is considered very interesting and suitable in a contextual perspective. It means how the skills of the Bandits are really useful in this revolutionary era. Therefore, during the revolutionary era, Bandits and other criminalists argued that this was the right time to commit crimes (Hobsbawn 2018, 155–157).

Julianto Ibrahim also considered that during the revolutionary era, Bandits took advantage of this momentum as a way to carry out their interests. This referred to an incident in Surakarta which took revenge by looting the palace. The reason was that in the previous period the regional government had exploited the community. (Ibrahim 2016, 140). However, it doesn't mean that Bandit as a whole constitute troubling criminalism. The definition of Bandit is actually divided into two, those are ordinary Bandits and social Bandit (Hobsbawn 2018, 2–3). Ordinary Bandit is Bandit who commit criminal acts in general which are disturbing, harming and disturbing security. On the other hand, The social Bandit is a heroic figure loved by the people in the

area. This Bandit is sometimes called *robber knights*. Socially, social Bandit is Bandit who commits crimes but it considered as hero, fighter of justice, defender who is greatly admired and proud of their society (Landsberger 1974, 142–143).

In the era of the Indonesian revolution in Java there were many social Bandits. For instance *kutil* in Pekalongan, Central Java and *Juwahir* in Kediri, East Java. Both are criminal figures who were loved by the people. In this case, the criminalization committed theft or robbery of the enemy. Then, the proceeds from the theft or robbery are distributed to the people. However, if interpreted broadly, the social Bandits were not only the two previously mentioned, but all the Bandits who played a role in the Indonesian revolution in Java against the Dutch. As if it is a double-edged sword, Bandit can attack and assist the user.

Regarding the historiography of Bandits, historian is objectively free to write down their perceptions of these Bandits. As a historians are free to interpret their perceptions of the historiography they wrote (White 2017, 113–137). The discussion of Bandit can be focused on discussing the Bandit as foe or as friend. Both of these roles have been carried out by Bandits openly, even though those who did it with different figures and regions.

Conclusion

Bandits were a group of farming communities who protested because of their disappointment with colonialism. Then the Bandits acted as criminals/groups who looted the lands seized by the invaders. This happens because agrarian conflicts are considered one-sided and tend to harm farmers. Hence, this action appeared. The colonialists considered Banditry a criminal act because their actions often stole or confiscated colonial agricultural products. Furthermore, the development of Banditry does not only occur in the agricultural sector but also the wider economic sector. Criminalism committed by Bandits is increasingly widespread. However, during the Indonesian revolution in Java, Bandits also played

a role in it. With their abilities and mentality, Bandits were very helpful in the era of revolution.

Discussions about Bandits are divided into at least two, namely ordinary Bandits and social Bandits. Ordinary Bandits are Bandits who act criminally according to their wishes. Usually, ordinary Bandits tend to be detrimental and have a negative impact. On the other hand, social Bandits are rubber knights. Social Bandits are criminal figures who are very loved by the public because the crimes they commit target the invaders as enemies. So, referring to these two definitions. As if the Bandit is a double-edged sword, it can attack the enemy or the user. Regarding Bandit historiography, historians have the right to determine which side the historian will discuss. The reason is, the Bandits have done both, even though the characters and locations are different.

The role of Bandits in Java during the Indonesian Revolution era had unique complexity. They are not only considered criminals but also heroes in some communities. The involvement of Bandits in the Indonesian independence struggle was seen as a strategic decision to fight Dutch troops. This Banditry phenomenon is related to agrarian conflict and colonial exploitation and involves research methods such as historical analysis, literature reviews, and oral interviews. Historians have the freedom to interpret the role of Bandits in historiography, both as enemies and friends. The role of Bandits in the Indonesian Revolution is an important part of history that requires in-depth understanding through various sources and references.

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