# Spatial Contestation of Indo Europeesch Verbond and Japanese Internment Camp in Kesilir Plantation Village 1920s-1943

Rifandi Septiawan Nugroho, Yulia Nurliani Lukito, and Kemas Ridwan Kurniawan

Abstract—Kesilir Village, in the southern tip of Banyuwangi, opened as a plantation area in 1920s by Indo Europeesch Verbond (Indo-European Community). Ironically, in the early period of Japanese occupation (1942-1943), the village was converted into an internment camp for Europeans in Java, including the Indo-Dutch community. Interrupted by two ruling regimes and local plantation workers in the colonial era, Kesilir has become a node of the social dynamics of people from various backgrounds. Specters of histories, memories, and the traumas of during colonial era haunted the physical and mental space of the residents, blending with the social spaces up to this day. This study investigates the village's spatial structure and architectural intervention of two colonial regimes, extending from the opening of the IEV plantation in 1920s until when it was used for internment camp under Japanese occupation in 1943. The main objective of this study is to reconstruct the architectural history of the Kesilir Village by understanding the relationship between environment, built structure, and social dynamics that occurred in the past, through analyzing archival records, spatial structures, and memories. The study of regional morphology is used in this study to dissect maps, notes, sketches, and physical traces that can still be found. Field documentation and archive elicitation were also carried out to capture collective memories that still remain.

Index Terms—Hybrid, internment, morphology, memory.

# I. INTRODUCTION

It was spring season in 1920s. The Indo-Dutch Community, I.E.V. (Indo-Europesche Verbond), acquired 2.500 hectares of land in Kesilir Village to be developed for plantations [1]. This village is located on the eastern tip of Java island, at the southern tip of the Banyuwangi Regency, adjacent between two major rivers in the east and west, jungle forests in the north, mountain ranges in the southwest, and the Indian Ocean in the south. In the eighteenth century, it became part of the Besuki Residency, along with Bondowoso, Jember, and Situbondo. Since the fourteenth century, Besuki Residency has been known as a main distributor of agricultural products to areas outside Java, ranging from rice, corn and vegetables [2]. Due to its fertile land, this area attracted private company in the Dutch colonial era. Unmitigatedly, under the ownership of I.E.V., the reeds were

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chopped into plantation parcel, irrigation canals were built across the valley dividing the hill, along with transportation roads stretching from north-south and east-west for mobilization and distribution.

Expansion of the plantation sector began with the introduction of Ethical Policy and private investment opportunities in the Dutch East Indies, which replaced the colonial system of forced cultivation, marked the birth of a new economic power in the early 20th century. At the same time, gradually, from 1920s to 1930s, many Javanese were sent to plantations to cultivate private lands in the Kesilir Village. They were allowed to build houses, cultivate agriculture, and develop plantation infrastructure [1]. On the other hand, as in other plantations area in the Dutch East Indies, landlords built bungalows or houses to rest on the farms [3]. Nobody expected that their dreams in the estate would change 180 degrees when the Japanese arrived.

Malaria epidemic in 1942. Japanese troops had controlled most of Indonesia's territory from the Netherlands. To control many other European's movements, the Japanese military government initiated an isolation program into internment camps in the countryside. This effort supported two Japanese priorities for the Indonesian people: destroying western influence among the natives and mobilizing them for the victory of war [4]. Kesilir then converted into internment village which was quite ambitiously planned. Every day, about 120 people were sent there; around 10,000 people were projected to live in harmony as an independent community at the end. They were required to meet their own basic needs by processing the available resources on the plantation. However, in less than two years, the utopian dreams collapsed. The young community was unable to anticipate the population explosion. Many of them end up starving to death, lack of nutrition, lack of clean water and were attacked by malaria mosquitoes [1], [5].

Unfinished colonial visions are immersed in Kesilir; specters of the past are haunted throughout the village. For the European and mixed population, the quiet countryside houses became an exile of themselves when the Japanese came. As for Japanese troops, the dream of making an independent village to support the East Asian war finally collapsed. The architecture of houses in the countryside denotes the most basic survival artifact that is just being played with [3]. Later, the internees were transferred to the Tangerang camp in September 1943 [6]. In the end, those who remained to live in Kesilir were mostly families of plantation wage laborers, who were initially positioned only as workers and slaves, who arrived in the 1930s. From them,

the collective memory of the past Kesilir remains; some are remembered, others are left behind as traumas trying to be forgotten.



Fig 1. The situation of Internment Barrack at the Kesilir Village Parcel number 7 (Sketches of Warmer Johan, published in 1984)

How did I.E.V. and the Japanese government develop the potential of Kesilir Village's environment? What were the physical and social impacts born from the transit of the two colonial regimes in Kesilir Village? This paper aims to reconstruct the spatial history of Kesilir Village by using a study of regional morphology and memory as a tool for combing the relationship between records in the archives, the structure of the built space, and residents' memories have not been recorded. In this way, the village of Kesilir can be understood as a physical environment that gives clues that today, yesterday, and not long ago, architecture and regional planning have become means of survival for those who live there, facing various social changes, mobilizing ideas, as well as intercultural meetings, whether through a planned process or not.

#### II. METHODS

To uncover the morphological development and social dynamics of the village, physical reconstruction was carried out by combing the relationships between archives, the structure of the built space, and the collective memory of residents. The morphology is formed by elements immersed in everyday space, such as mountains, river streams, roads, blocks, and building penetration [7]. in the colonial context, everyday space is also the result of the hybridization between traditional and modern spaces in the context of industrialization [18]. Understanding these elements enable us to analyze the origin of regional characteristics. Usually, the elements exist through two processes: artificially measurable constructed or inevitably respond to the original features, such as the existing structure of nature. In the long term, the elements that are formed by humans also shape back the humans who live in there, or in the framework of Lefebvre's (1969) theory of space production is considered as a reciprocal relationship between the space that is perceived, conceived, and lived [8].

Archives, built environment, landscape, and everyday space become "memory machines" that codify and reproduce memories [9]. Since they are obscured in everyday spaces, traces of unsolved memories will always "haunt" in an indeterminate way [10]. Reconstructing a place for memory is an attempt to place disseminated memories as historical reappropriation. The structuralist theoretical framework of Umberto Eco (1973) approaches it by grouping codes into primary (denotative) and secondary (connotative) functions to read functional and social meanings in a visual language [11].

To examine the sketches and notes of internees in Kesilir, we use the framework of memory and visual language reading. These materials are then compared with the previous map established by I.E.V. Besides collecting archives of the colonial period, we also conduct field documentation, interviews, and archives elicitation by exhibiting the archives to residents. Visual representations encourage the emergence of latent memory and different types of information from a person compared to just verbal interviews. The encounter of colonial archives and the memory of residents open further discussions about the archives and the limited realm of historians. When archives enter a new domain, formal narration then renders simultaneously with people's memories to form a narrative about social history that is believed and rooted in society.

#### III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Building a Plantation Village: Kesilir on the Map of I.E.V

Kesilir Village is defined by natural boundaries, which make this area isolated but rich in biodiversity. On the south side, the village is directly adjacent to the Indian Ocean, through a transition of teak forests and swamps as a respite. On the west side, Kali Lamong river or the flow of Kali Setail river cuts off the village area from other villages, just as on the east side where Kali Baru river flows. Slightly southwest, seven overlapping hills confine the village from the high seas. Meanwhile, on the north side, the village boundaries gradually progressed into paddy fields, the transition blended with the geographic areas of other villages.

On the I.E.V map (Fig. 2), the structure of the village area looks formally arranged, oriented towards the production and distribution of plantation commodities. Three main formation elements stand out in the morphology of Kesilir: irrigation, roads and plantation parcels. Those three might be interpreted as a barrier, destination, and orientation that support the plantation system. Although functionally they are identical, the meaning of these elements has been continually shifting from time to time. Road infrastructure becomes the focal axis used as a reference for the distribution of plantation parcels. The road axis was initially constructed from north to south, slightly cutting a diagonal line in the centre of the village, and extending perpendicular to the north-south to the Lampon beach on the edge of the Indian Ocean. Two axes of the east-west road also stretch out to divide the village in two on the north-south side (Fig. 2D).

The structure of the area represents not only the intention of planning but also the inevitable consequences of natural factors that ultimately produce imperfect forms [7]. Imperfections in the Kesilir Village can be seen on several sides, such as the shape of the winding road on the north side adjusting the hilly topography, circling the contour layers annotating "De Berg (mountain)" (Fig. 2B & 2D). Also, on the south side, the road axis is perpendicular to Lampon Beach through land that is free of plantation parcels. The absence of parcels in the southern region may be due to natural consequences that are difficult to develop because the area is full of teak forests and swamps.

The development of the irrigation route in Kesilir was in line with other areas in South Banyuwangi during the 1920-1930s, as in other areas, under the management of Irrigatie Afdeling, BOW Department. The development started from the Bondoyudo-Tanggul (24,000 hectares), Bedadung (16,3000 hectares), and Mayang in Jember, Pekalen Sampean in Panarukan, Kali Setail, Kali Baru, and Kali Blambangan in South Banyuwangi (total capacity of 35,000 hectares). The construction involved prisoners from Kasihan and Jember prisons, as well as several prison districts in Karuk, Kauran, Glundengan, Pondoklawuh, Talang, and Wulugan [2].

The irrigation system in Kesilir Village consists of bridge infrastructure, floodgates, primary and secondary canals and reservoirs. The main channels mostly exist parallel to the highway. The most significant infrastructure from the past is a concrete bridge which, according to local testimony, was built around 1928. This bridge is not only for crossing people and vehicles but also for crossing water over the valley to enter the village. This bridge is known as "talang lawas", which was the only access to the village in the past.

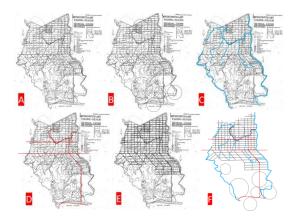


Fig. 2. Map of the early Kesilir 1920s, source: National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia. (B) Zoning of protected forests, swamps, and mountains (untreated areas). (C) Main irrigation channel. (D) Main road network for distribution of plantation products. (E) Plantation parcels. (F) Juncposition of four morphological elements.

Every plot of land in Kesilir is not left abandoned. All are registered into the same portion of the grid, except for forests, swamps, and hills on the south and north sides. The distribution of parcels refers to the axis lines of the main roads. On the map, there are two characters of parcels, which are patterned with squares and parallelograms. This difference initially referred to the central axis, the primary road. On the north side, the parcels are smaller than the south side, in symmetrical squares. While on the south side, the area is more extensive and is in the form of a parallelogram. Southern parcels are numbered from 1 to 52, while those on the north side are not. Most of the parcels in the north are rice fields, while the plots in the south are fruit and vegetable gardens. Most of the houses on the map are located on the south side of the parcel. The private sector may mostly use the land in the south for the residential home and their cultivated land, while on the north side, it is more left free as agriculture for residents (Fig. 2E).

## B. Kesilir From the Eyes of Drawing Teacher

Warmer Johan, a Dutch architect and drawing teacher who was exiled in Kesilir during the Japanese occupation, redrew

the village map from 1942-1943, referring to the original plan by I.E.V.'s 1920s version. If the I.E.V.'s map implies a plantation area planning strategy, Johan's map acts like a mirror of himself as an intern. Although he could illustrate the whole village from above, he was not utterly experienced all the spaces. Johan's everyday life is a process called by De Certeau (1987) to store "lexical functions", which are formed through relational relationships in daily practice [12]. Every day it becomes an operative process that appropriates the existing topographical understanding of the existing spatial planning.

At least three things are implied in Johan's map. First, Johan's thick lines illustrate the history of the central infrastructure to support the production and distribution of plantations in the 1920s and 1930s. These thick lines are the essential elements forming the morphology of the Kesilir region, some of which have been described in the previous section; in the form of a big road, irrigation canals, and two rivers that border the area. Second, the zonations written by Johan on the map not only contain information on the area but also state the history of social dynamics that occurred in it. On the north side of the village, the parcel grids are depicted thinner, overlaid with the large words "Verbodden Gebbied" (restricted area). Below it, a small caption "On Bergaanbag" (uncomfortable) written in brackets "Malaria?", including a question mark indicating Johan's hesitation when writing it down. We can understand that this northern side of the region was temporarily closed due to the malaria epidemic, as expressed by Wackwitz in his report (1942). Third, the essential building points are marked by a code system by Johan, representing several focus objects that arise from the social activities in which they pass. If we classify the code compiled by Umberto Eco (1973), it contains meaning according to specific functional and sociological types [13].



Fig 3. Warmer Johan's 1942, Kesilir map draws on original maps of the 1920s area and experiences of everyday spatial practice.

The parcel grids on the map also need to be understood as more than just regular regional patterns. The parcel grids undergo multiple shifts in function and meaning, becoming modified code from time to time. In this case, we can classify the parcel grids into primary functions (denotative meaning) and secondary functions (connotative meaning) as suggested by Umberto Eco (1973) [13]. In its primary function, it acts as a system of grouping plantation areas which are divided equally. It can also be associated like the road element, which

has a role as a barrier, connector, or orientation. However, in daily practice, the grids also interpreted as a divider for planting groups and harvesting time by the locals. During the Japanese occupation era, the function of parcel grids shifted to a surveillance control tool that agitated the internees. In Johan's picture, we could see the density of the buildings that are getting closer in the parcel grids on the east side, where the dominant home range for Johan. After the Japanese left, Johan's code was codified by the citizens through their daily life. The parcel grids are no longer a means of control mechanism, but a position orientation that marks where they and others live and do activities. The shift in meaning that occurs in the existence of these parcel grids is a secondary function.

There are five codes used by Johan in his map. The three points symbol reads "inh hutten" which means hut. These codes are scattered on the eastern side of the north, in the parcels of the Sanggar Village. Meanwhile, on the south side, there are single black dots, which in the legend are named "perc. woning" or parcel house. At first glance, these two codes denote different functional and sociological types. In the south, parcel houses occupy large plots of land, while on the north side, huts occupy narrow plots. The north side is mostly used for agriculture, while the south is a plantation with rest houses. Another code is "woon loodsen 7×20m" (warehouse house or barracks 7×20 meters) which uses two parallel lines code. This typology spread along almost every plot from parcels one to eight. The code shows that most of the warehouses and barracks for internment are concentrated in the eastern region, as is often shown in Johan's other illustrations. Through the statement of Pak Badar, a resident of Ringinagung Hamlet who was witness to the history of that era, it also confirmed the fact that the area was used for internment since the residents were prohibited to passing ahead.

The last code is irrigation, which is marked with zigzag lines. This irrigation canal is the main and big one, while it is subdivided into smaller canals to enter the plantation area using water gates. The main channel of this canal is on the north side, parallel to the main road that runs through the mountains. The flow is entered from outside the village via the main entrance bridge. Furthermore, the canals are continued to the south, culminating in parcel 52, reeds to the south, and timber forests. Irrigation canals act as the veins of plantations. It can be seen as a divider that cuts the territory, as an altitude orientation, and as a destination. On the map, Johan annotates irrigation with a thick blue line. The blue lines are broken down into three large streams that enter the plantation areas. The canal network cuts the village area into five parts.

C. Kutho Dadi Alas, Alas Dadi Kutho (The City Becoming Forest, The Forest Becoming City): Kesilir in the Memories of Residents

Narwiyah, a daughter-in-law of the couple Nyah Bandung and Henky Jaarman, lived in a house inherited from her father-in-law at parcel 47. Narwiyah said that Jaarman accepted the status of an Indonesian citizen and chose to become a soldier defending the homeland after independence. Previously, Jaarman's parents who lived in Kesilir were expelled by the Japanese army. Narwiyah's memories

complement the narratives of community that have not appeared in the archives and diaries of the Dutch [14]. From the story, it illustrates how the relations of ownership, lineage and power in Kesilir Village look ambiguous and confusing. The Indo-Dutch people, land rulers in the colonial era in Warmer Johan's account, were driven from their land under Japanese occupation. The parcels that have been numbered change ownership suddenly. After that, the Japanese did not last long there. After losing the war, the plantation parcels were abandoned again. As a result, residents, newcomers who previously migrated to work on plantations, have the right to occupy uninhabited land.



Fig. 4. Photo of Nyah Bandung and Henky Jaarman (Personal archive of Bu Narwiyah).

The era of the Japanese occupation became a point of transition of Indo-Dutch power to local residents. It started in the years 1942-1943 when the village of Kesilir was operated for one year as an internment camp for European and mixed-race residents. In September 1943, around 3,000 internees were transferred to the Tangerang prison, where they were joined together with other prisoners at the Cimahi central camp in February 1944 [6]. During those times, Kesilir was slowly clearing the European population. Japan controls some areas, while residents "occupy" others. After Indonesian independence, when Japan lost the war, a power vacuum occurred there.

Pak Badar, a resident of Kesilir who grew up in the Japanese occupation era, said that at that time residents were given the freedom to choose plantation parcels by the government, with an area of one hectare each. He and his family repeatedly moved from parcel 52 to parcel 33. Initially, they occupied a sizeable Dutch lodge with ten other people in parcel 33, under Japanese occupation and the first and second Dutch military aggression (1947-1948), part of the population local guerrilla against the invaders who try to re-occupy the territory. To build a strategy, they hid in parcel 52, on the banks of the Ox River, tricking the Dutch soldiers by building a langgar for worship. The father of Pak Badar was a guerrilla and "mudin" (a religious expert who was entrusted with marriage affairs) who was protected by the Dutch and Japanese military because of his essential role in the affairs of residents. The process of moving around was part of an effort to spy on the colonizers, also to meet the needs of society for marriage matters [15].

The positions of parcels 52 and 33 are on the west and centre of the village. It is likely that some of the guerrillas and residents at that time deliberately took a position away from the eastern side, which was heavily guarded by the Japanese army for the internment camp and access to the main entrance near the old gutter bridge. That way, their movements could

be more flexible in managing strategies, apart from the supervision of the colonialists, who were mostly on the east side.

This condition is similar to the situation described by Mbah Pur, a resident of parcel 8, on the eastern side of the village. Plots 1 to 8 are internment camp areas that appear a lot in Warmer Johan's sketches. Mbah Pur said that in the period 1947-1948 when his parents moved there, there were still many Dutch people and their residential buildings around where he lived (parcels 1-8) [16]. The conditions of roads and plantation land from parcels 1 to 8 are also immaculate and orderly. The road width and land area are the same throughout. Sources of clean, drinkable water are readily available in Dutch wells, some of which can still be found today. This territory is not freely open to outsiders. It is possible that parcel areas one through eight have indeed been the core areas with the adequate infrastructure from the start, so they are in the best condition to be used as internment camps in the Japanese era.





Fig 5. Dutch well in Kesilir Village, at Pak Badar's house at Persil 33. (Source: author's documentation, 2019 and sketch of Warmer Johan, published in 1984).

In addition to the layout, the form of the building also becomes an intermediary that implies particular historical meanings. According to Pak Edy, a teacher who was born in Kesilir, the diversity of society is reflected in the architectural forms of dwellings and the typology of existing houses of worship, including churches, temples, monasteries and mosques. There are no indigenous people in the village. The meeting of migrants from various regions gave birth to very high cultural acculturation and tolerance.

Most of the residential architecture adopts the Javanese "Srotong" house, a house typology commonly found in villages, with a system of double beam structures "kolong kilih". There are several variants of the form of the resident's roof, a mix of Central Javanese, Osing, and Balinese. Interestingly, these house forms have appeared in Warmer Johan's sketches, as important buildings during the Japanese occupation era (possibly since the Dutch East Indies era), such as libraries, churches and offices. These buildings usually use semi-permanent materials such as bamboo and wooden tiled walls, wooden trusses, and tile roofs. Johan's pictures indicate the colonial population's attempts to apply local knowledge, which Alsayyad said was a form of passive survival strategy (1992).



Fig. 6 The Javanese Srotong house near the Pesanggaran Village Hall (Source: author's documentation, 2019).

In the process of building houses, residents use the material resources available in the village. Pak Agus, Pak Badar's son who is now become the Head of Ringinagung Hamlet, explains how his father built their house—building a house done collectively with the help of neighbours. The process begins by selecting a timber tree in the teak forest in the south of the village. There, a large tree, which was bigger than the arms of three adults, was selected, then slowly cut without machines. To finish the pieces of the structural module of the house, they spent about 3-4 months in the middle of the forest, until finally, they continued to the assembly process on their home plot [17]. Ultimately, the house is not just a place of shelter and refuge, but also about the relationship between material culture and resources that are rooted there.

In the collective memory of residents, the position of Japan and the I.E.V. are not clear. Some consider the Dutch contribute more to the village than Japan, due to the development of village infrastructure in the past even though they were both considered colonizers. Residents become subjects who have an essential position in the formation of the Kesilir Village space. Besides the spatial interventions that were well done by I.E.V. and Japanese internment camps, residents are the subjects who are in direct contact with the Kesilir transformation process. In the local people's saying, Kutho Dadi Alas, Alas Dadi Kutho, appears as an expression that describes the transformation process of Kesilir in the past. The Kesilir area started from a forest that was developed into a plantation town, became a forest when it was abandoned, and became a city again when it was inhabited. There, residents donated their energy to build their civilization.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

I. E.V. building the Kesilir with axes, canals and plots for the needs of plantations, the Japanese used it as a control mechanism, while the residents made it a place to survive. As a village visited by two colonial regimes and local plantation workers in the colonial era, Kesilir has become a knot for collective memory and colonial trauma in the past. Memory is not silent; it merges with everyday life as a practice of representations that connects experience, subject formation and space [9], [18].

The arrival of I.E.V. in Kesilir stems from a reading of the ecological potential that is already available in the Besuki area, especially in southern Banyuwangi. In the literature study, it has been stated that this ecological potential has made the South Banyuwangi region a politically contested territory since the 14th century so that it has repeatedly experienced depopulation and population migration. Under Dutch East Indies colonialism, the exploitation of the territory was made in a more structured manner, using regional design principles, taking into account aspects of productivity. Immigration, education, and irrigation are three critical factors that underlie the development of post-ethical politics of plantation areas.

Kesilir morphology is formed with conscious considerations or not. With morphological analysis, the characteristics of the Kesilir site can be understood in more detail, such as water flow areas, natural existing factors that cannot be avoided, and spatial planning logic. I. E. V.

Developing Behind his careful planning as a village that could live independently, Kesilir remained isolated, which was eventually used by the Japanese Army as an internment camp.

The era of the Japanese occupation is depicted in Warmer Johan's sketches and the notes to the Wackwitz internment camp report. The pictures and notes convey daily practices and social dynamics experienced during the Japanese occupation era. The archives show how internment camp residents survive in isolated areas, facing malaria, water crises and malnutrition. On the other hand, Warmer Johan's sketches also imply special treatment for internees with the existence of building facilities such as places of worship, libraries, shops, post offices, and so on. Most of Warmer Johan's sketches were drawn on the eastern side of the village, which corresponds to conditions in the memory of residents.

If for the two previous ruling regimes, Kesilir was the place to instil their dreams of prosperity, for the local people who have survived to this day, Kesilir is about the land on which they make a living, through the process of building, neglecting and rebuilding plantations. The locals are the subject who have direct contact with the Kesilir spaces over a long period and complex social dynamics. Even as immigrants, their presence eventually took root in plantation land. They became a new society that was born from the hybridization process of colonial and local cultures. Through a significant migration process in the 1920-1930s, the diverse cultural characteristics of the community were formed in Kesilir. Apart from being reflected in daily interactions, that diversity is also inherent and can be read from the building architecture and material culture that is there.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest

## **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

First author conducted the research, analyzed the data and wrote the paper. Second author and third author are the supervisor of first author. All authors had approved the final version.

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