

Madura On My Mind



In 2013 I travelled to Madura (as well as Surabaya, Palembang, Medan, Banda Aceh, Pontianak, Singkawang and Lombok) to do research for my novel, *Aruna dan Lidahnya (The Birdwoman's Palate)*, which has since been made into a movie (now available for viewing on Netflix).

Here are some of the downhome eateries that make it into the novel, though in the novel I leave them deliberately unnamed.

BEBEK SINJAY

Jl. Raya Ketengan no. 45, Bangkalan, Madura

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If this isn't the mother of all impossibilities, I don't know what is: divine deep-fried duck that tastes like the finest of duck *confit* served in a messy, barn-like local take on a fast food joint.

Ignore the onslaught of Sosro bottled tea adverts and the dreadfully unkempt prep station, and focus on duck so beautifully cooked, the current Holy Grail of Culinary Madura—gloriously crispy on the outside; moist, buttery and fall-off-the-bone

succulent on the inside—you might as well be, if you close your eyes, and think sans the sambal, in the middle of La France Profonde.

Speaking of sambals, opinion sharply divides on the merit of the mango *sambal*—a kicker of a condiment, if you ask me, while some argue that a dish so singularly gorgeous has no need for a counterpoint. No matter, folks are here for the duck, and quite rightly so.

And so people and food continue to arrive, regardless the time and day, and queues often reach, justifiably, all the way to the main street.







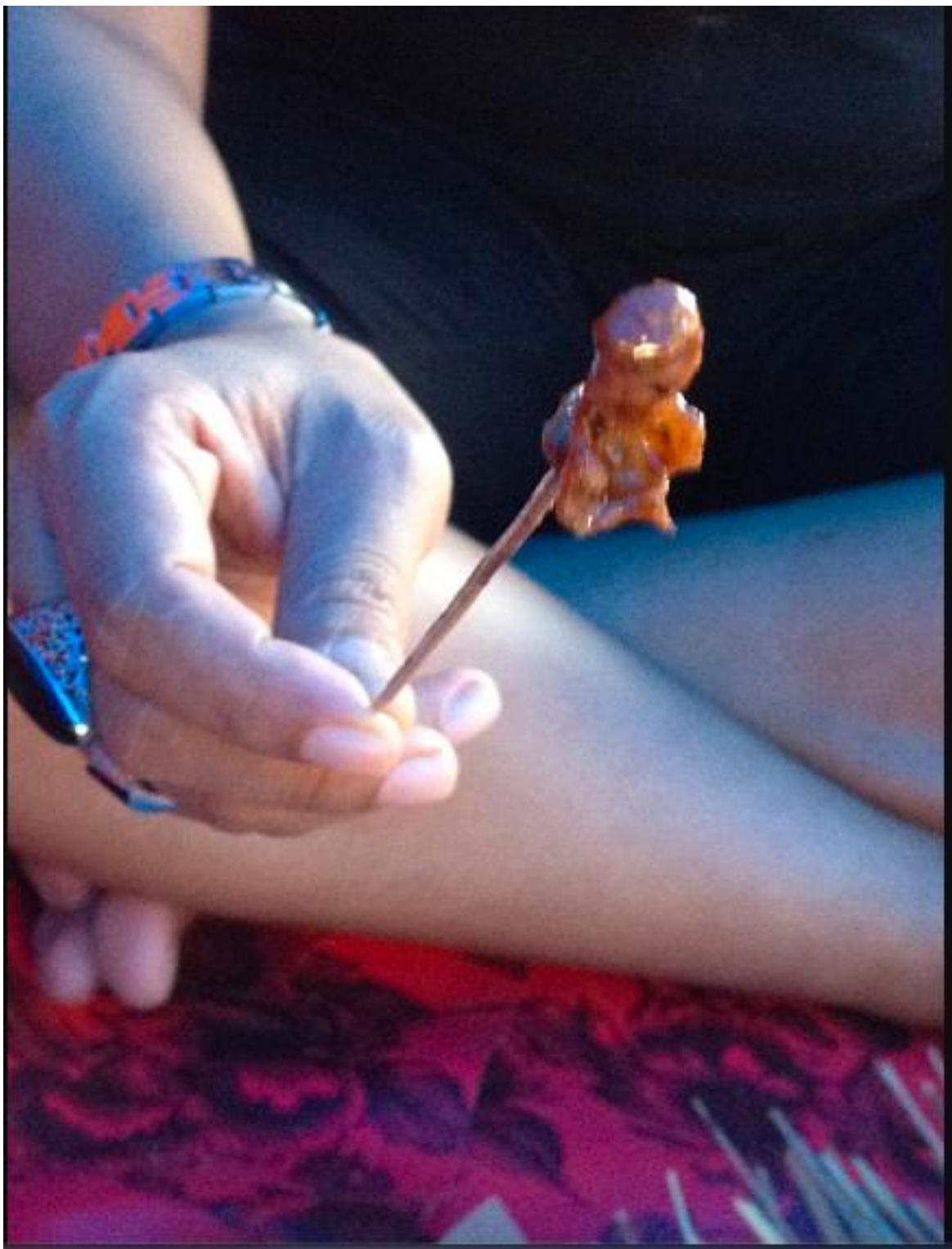




SATE LALAT PAK YANTO

JL. Niaga, Pamekasan

Tel. +62 32 4323484



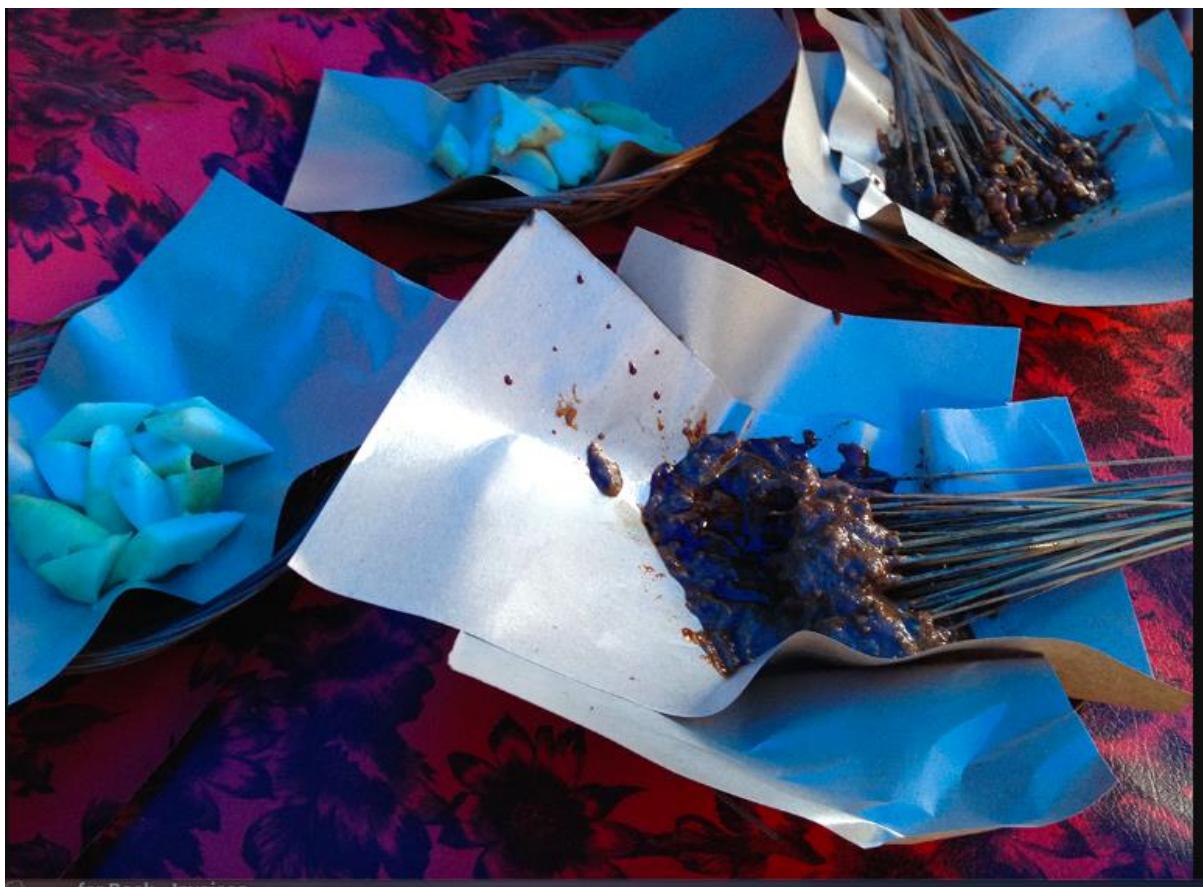
It takes a certain chutzpah to name your main product after that most reviled of creatures: the common fly. And while the result isn't exactly a comet hurtling across the culinary firmament, it somehow wears the courage of its conviction: served under a no-frills roadside tent, often in the late afternoon, where you sit *lesehan*-style (cross-legged on a raised platform), you can't help but marvel at the sheer audacity of its meager offering, both in terms of size and flavor.

That said, some things do beg questions that go beyond the culinary, and if visitors to this postcard-pretty, candy-colored city feel the need to swing by for a little street cred, then all the better for them flies.

Opening hours: 17.00 – 01.30









A NO-NAME KIKIL KOKOT WARUNG

Jalan Raya Pamekasan

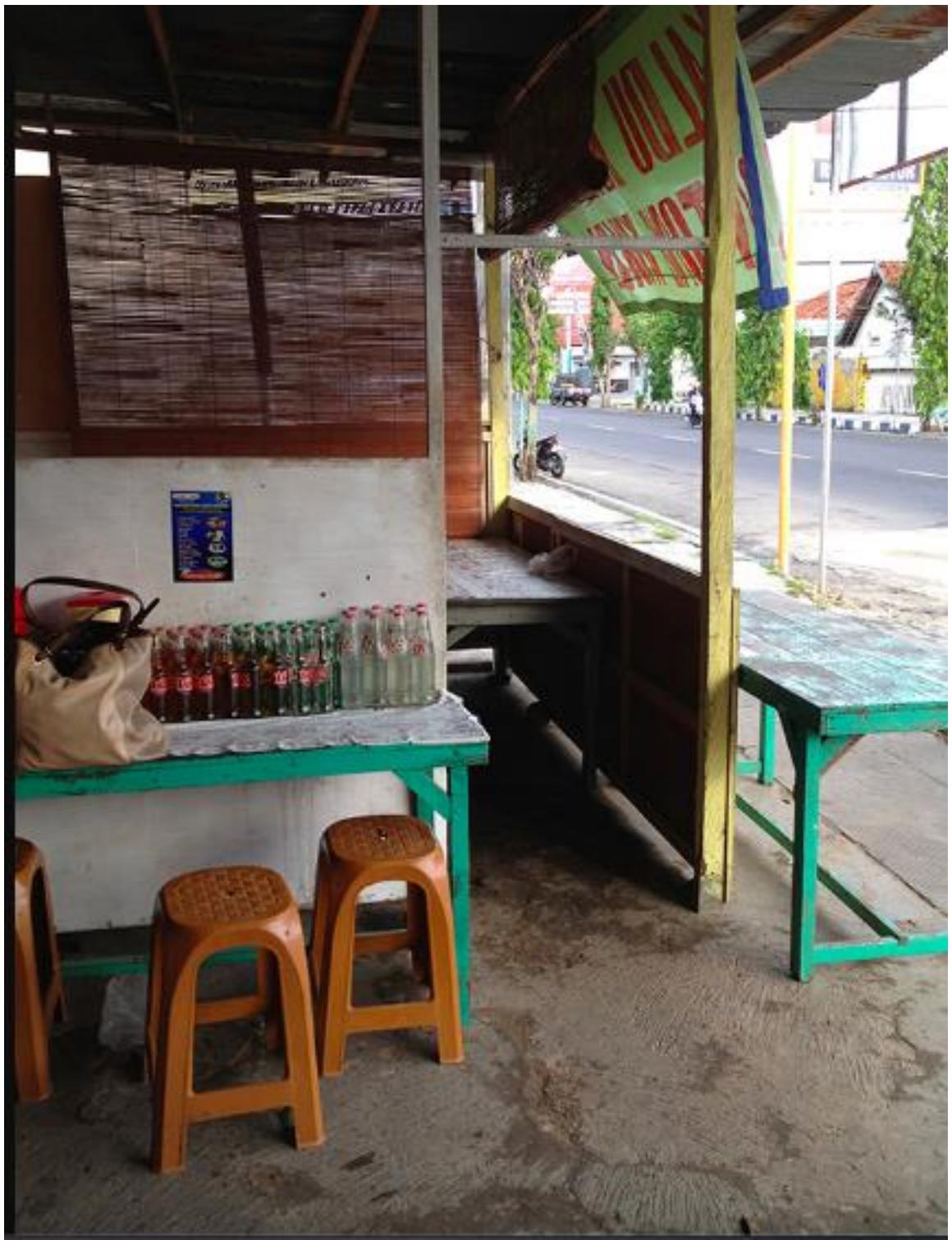


As authentic as the pundits claim it to be, cow's feet—Madura-style or otherwise—has never been high on my list.

Even though a bowl of *kikil* often reminds me of my somewhat gastronomically precocious childhood, I don't find it an attractive dish; besides, anything that requires reaching deeply into a hole in a piece of bone for the pleasure of noshing on a gooey, fatty substance that would instantly send your cholesterol level through the roof isn't my idea of a gustatorily sound adventure. Nor, for that matter, a hygienic one, given how many flies our *kikil kokot* attract in this curiously nameless roadside *warung*.

To be fair, the bowl in question isn't totally without charm: the addition of *kacang hijau* (smashed mung bean) is a welcome twist, and I would be only too happy to recommend the dish to anyone, if only for its downhome authenticity—just not the place.





WARUNG AMBOINA

Jl. Sultan Kadirun no. 8 (opposite the town square, close to the Grand Mosque), Bangkalan



The closest thing to an institution in this city, where civil servants and imams, truck drivers and factory workers jockey for space in this crammed, down-to-earth, brown-and-green-hued eatery marked out by narrow communal tables running along the length of the walls.

The food is mostly rice and more rice (everything else seems like an afterthought), but people gorge on dishes such as *nasi telor petis* (rice with spicy, *petis* (pungent, black fermented shrimp paste typical of East Javanese fare)-infused boiled egg and *empal*, sweetened fried beef), *nasi gule kambing* (rice with goat curry) and *nasi soto babat* (rice drenched in tripe *soto*) as though they were trying to lay hold—unwittingly—of a Proustian moment.

For what it's worth, it's a place that meets the world evenly at eye level, an egalitarian angle at once charming and potent.

Opening hours: 06.30 – 15.30

