

CHAPTER TWO

THE SETTING

To set the stage for the actual media debate about Kedungombo, I will describe four points in this chapter: first, the Army's interest in Kedungombo's high media profile; second, the culture of Public Works; third, the economic interests behind the drive to build more and more large dams; and fourth, the political expediency of environmental rhetoric in Indonesia.

The Army's interest in Kedungombo's high media profile

The continued focus of the media on Governor Ismail, due to the Kedungombo controversy, served the interests of active and retired Army officers, who had opposed the appointment of Ismail by President Soeharto for a second term as governor of Central Java. Since the same persons also felt resentment toward Soeharto, who strongly supported his protegee's Kedungombo policy, the high media profile of this dam was even more useful to the interests of this military faction.

Five observations can be advanced to support the argument that the media coverage of Kedungombo was beneficial to the interests of the politically dissatisfied officers. First, the military did not seriously try to prevent the mass demonstrations, nor to ban the media coverage of those demonstrations. Mass demonstrations were actually prohibited by law, yet, most of the demonstrations were carried out without serious attempts to prevent them. Some student activists even provided information to me that a retired general who claimed to be sent by the Defense Minister, Ret. General Benny Moerdani, had offered funds to them during the 1989 demonstrations. The students claimed that they had firmly turned down that offer.

From 1990 until 1991, the Armed Forces continued to act favorably toward Kedungombo-related demonstrations. Only before the second demonstration of Sragen villagers at Jakarta, were 200 would-be demonstrators ordered by the Solo Army commander to return to their villages. And in contrast to the February-March 1989 student demonstrations, the media did not seem to be prohibited from publishing those stories.

A second observation was made by a former foreign correspondent for a Hongkong-based business magazine. He observed how the Indonesian authorities handled President Soeharto's outrage over the letter of INGI to the World Bank, which criticized the Bank's Kedungombo policy. This letter was signed by, among others, a number of Indonesian NGOs in a town near Brussels, Belgium, so the media promptly dubbed this event as "the Brussels incident." The INGI letter was signed and sent by to the World Bank in April 1989. But, as the former correspondent stated:

A presidential order issued during a cabinet meeting in July to discipline NGOs who had attended an INGI meeting ... was not carried out, and Soeharto was forced to repeat the order at the next cabinet meeting in early August. Even then, the admonishment delivered by home affairs minister, Rudini, was perceived by those at the receiving end to be less harsh than his superior intended it to be.

The third observation brings us back to one of the two legal levers of the Department of Information in controlling the media, the STT. Between 1989 and 1991, only one nonmainstream media, *Berita Hutan*, had its STT evoked. Meanwhile, no student media had their STT revoked by the Department. This fact could lead one to believe that the student media were less critical to Kedungombo than *Berita Hutan*, which was the case. That is

another reason to believe that a larger degree of political space was provided to the students by the military, who were happy to see someone else discrediting the aging president and his protege, Governor Ismail.

Speaking of political space for the students, one comes to the fourth observation, which relates to the "Land for the People" calendar case. After threatening to take the two student activists to court, no legal action was actually taken against the students or the nine organizations that produced the calendar. A ban was indeed placed by the Attorney General on the calendar, two months after the students' interrogations began. In the meantime, the calendar's publicity had increased its visibility, even with no licensed media in Indonesia reproducing its cartoons. And with a caricature of the President and the First Lady in its center, it is quite obvious who benefitted from that publicity.

The fifth observation has to do with the business of naming large dams in Indonesia. In contrast to the tradition of naming large dams with the names of civilian Public Works Ministers, one dam in Central Java was given the name of a military dignitary. This Mrica dam was inaugurated by Soeharto on March 23, 1989, and called "*Panglima Besar* [Commander-in-Chief] Jenderal Sudirman." Superficially, the choice of this name seemed to be quite logical. Sudirman was born in the Banyumas region where the Mrica dam was located. A State university dedicated to General Sudirman, was also located in this region, in the town of Purwokerto. It is important, however, to look at the timing of the dam's naming. Soeharto inaugurated this dam on March 23, 1989, after the climax of the student demonstrations in solidarity with the people displaced by Kedungombo. So, if the analysis was correct that Soeharto's military rivals were silently supporting the demonstrations, naming the dam after the name of this legendary general

can be interpreted as a deliberate attempt by Soeharto to mobilize support among the military.

The political culture of Public Works

Understanding the rhetoric of the Kedungombo dam builders would be impossible without understanding the political culture created and maintained by the Public Works Department. In this section I will describe four important elements of that culture that were relevant to this thesis: first, the legacy of Sutami, as the first and longest serving Public Works Minister, during the New Order; second, the function of dams as monuments of the New Order; third, the function of dams as symbols of redistributive justice; and fourth, the function of dams to uplift Indonesia's image as the region's 'Big Brother.'

(a). The legacy of Sutami

Sutami was certainly *the* Indonesian engineer who had the biggest impact on the way of thinking of many engineers who worked for the Department of Public Works and the State Electricity Corporation (PLN). This latter government agency previously fell under Public Works until it was m.oved to the Department of Mining and Energy, although PLN staffpersons themselves were still "card-carrying" staffpersons of Public Works. Hence, to understand the language of the many engineers who have been involved in Kedungombo, or any other Public Works and PLN project for that matter, it is very crucial to recognize Sutami's legacy.

As the first and the longest serving Public Works minister under Soeharto (1966-1980), Sutami had left his ideological imprint on gen'erations of engineers in the Public Works Department and PLN. His civil Service track, however, did not start under Soeharto, since he joined the Public Works Department during the administration of Soeharto's predecessor,

Soekarno. Sutami had served under Soekarno as director of a State Corporation, Hutama Karya. And just as he later fulfilled Soeharto's grandiose "economic development' dreams by building many large dams, Sutami was also the man who had helped Soekarno realized his "nation-building* dreams by building various colossal civil engineering structures, such as, the Soekarno or 'Ampera" bridge (a large bridge over the Musi river in South Sumatera), the Semanggi bridge (a two-layered clover leaf-shaped traffic bridge in Jakarta), a large stadium which hosted the first and only Games of the New Emerging Forces, and Indonesia's Parliament building, which was initially planned to host Soekarno's aborted Conference of the New Emerging Forces.

Sutami also combined his career of "producing" things with educating young Indonesians to follow in his tracks. His longest teaching career was in teaching the technology of reinforced concrete in the engineering department of the University of Indonesia. In his later years, after years of experience as Minister of Public Works, which allowed him to travel around the country and see the poverty in the countryside, he integrated more social science and ecology into his already well-developed engineering skills. He trained himself in the social Sciences by reading and by regularly discussing his ideas with professors at his *alma mater*, the Bandung Institute of Technology (1911-1918). Eventually, on November 20, 1976, he was promoted to Professor in a new chair called "regional science" at the University of Indonesia in Jakarta, and developed a textbook on this new discipline. With that background in mind, some former staffpersons of Sutami regarded their mentor - and not Emil Salim, the actual Minister of Environment - as being the first Minister to develop environmental

A review of numerous articles written about and by Sutami, as well as references to his ideas, reveals that five major ideas of his seemed to have been adopted by successive waves of civil engineers and other Indonesian intellectuals. Those five ideas were: (1) the identification of engineering feats with patriotism; (2) the belief in the truthful engineer; (3) a reinterpretation of the old Javanese slogan, *jer basuki mawa bea* ; (4) the need to save the sinking island of Java; and (5) the need to prioritize conservation of water catchment areas over building dams.

The identification of engineering achievements with patriotism seemed to be Sutami's most powerful legacy. As a member of Soekarno and Soeharto's generation who fought for independence from the Dutch, Sutami's favorite theme was that Indonesia was facing a new form of *perjuangan* (struggle), namely to prove its technical expertise, which had often been ridiculed by colonial engineers (Sutami, 1976: 2-3). This modern struggle, which should be fought as heroically as the *Revolusi* to expel the Dutch from Indonesia, was repeatedly emphasized when Sutami inaugurated the accomplishments of Indonesian engineers. For instance, when inaugurating a dam in Central Java in November 1974, Sutami proudly stated that "Dutch technicians were not able to find the right design for this river" (*Tempo* , 9 Febr. 1974).

This "beating-the-Dutch" theme was carried over by Sutami from older generations of Indonesian engineers, to generations younger than him. From the older generation, Sedijatmo was the one figure who was most often portrayed as being able to beat the Dutch engineers (*Pekerjaati Umum* , Febr.-April 1984). Under Sutami's fourteen years of ministership, this mentality was passed on to successive generations of engineers working for the Public Works Department (Soerachmad, 1984: 32).

Sulami was quite successful in framing engineering achievements as patriotic acts. Relying on his own achievements in reinforced concrete engineering, his sober and hard-working lifestyle, his relatively clean reputation in an otherwise corrupt bureaucracy, and his excellent relation with the press, Sutami often challenged his younger colleagues to put the *perjuangan* (struggle) spirit to work by building as many dams as possible, even with the very limited equipment that the Public Works Department could provide (Suroyo, 1972: 24). On many occasions when his staffpersons achieved something remarkable, Sutami did his best to honor them personally. Once he created publicity -- and a legend — by carrying a young engineer on his shoulders after this young man managed to build a hydropower dam in West Sumatera.

; Sutami's second legacy was what I call, "the belief in the truthful engineer." He first stated this idea in 1976, in a special interview with a pro-student news weekly in Bandung, *Forum*. "Politicians can lie, [but] for technicians it is impossible to manipulate the facts" (*Politikus bisa bohong, teknikus tak mungkin memainkan fakta*). This subtitle underlined the headline of the interview, which was published by *Forum* in the third week of July 1976. According to the Minister:

A politician can sometimes lie. If it is needed for political purposes, [the politician] can lie. But a technician can not lie. It is difficult to lie. If we want to construct a large dam, based on manipulated figures, for instance, that could be dangerous. A technician has to search for and use reliable data. For instance, data about the soil condition, the strength of the hills, the weather condition, *et cetera*; this data collection has to be reliable. As technicians, we have been used to accustom ourselves to search for the truth. That is why if we have to lie, that would be difficult. It is better that we do not talk. For a politician, it is different. Sometimes, he has to lie for the sake of his political strategy. That is the difference.

These words were grounded in a special political context. Anonymous letters were circulating in Jakarta that attacked his department, as well as himself personally. Those critiques were, according to him, groundless. The figures used in one of those letters, describing the procurement of heavy equipment and building materials were, according to him, completely off target. Claiming to know who the anonymous source of those letters was, Sutami felt that the criticism of his department and his leadership used a "political perspective" (*kacamata politik*). In response to those political attacks, he made his ethical standpoint clear:

As a human being, I am only responsible to God, and as a devil's servant, I am responsible to my leader, namely President Soeharto. I am loyal to the President, I am loyal to the 1945 Constitution and the *Panca Sila* [the Five Pillars of the State Philosophy], not to anything else. What I am doing is for the sake of development, the benefits of which are felt very much by the people, especially those who live in remote areas. [I am doing this] not for my personal interest.

He further explained that a "business war" was going on, since it was difficult for him "to divide the few, limited cookies" his department could offer to building contractors. The four-hours special interview ended with the minister's stressing the benefits that the people in the provinces had obtained from the construction of roads, bridges, dams, and irrigation canals by his department.

The third legacy of Sutami was his reinterpretation of the old Javanese slogan, *jer busuki mawa bea*. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, this slogan was repeatedly used to justify the social costs of Kedungombo. Its entrance into the national political language, however, can partly be attributed to Sutami. In his textbook on regional Science, he called the

Javanese slogan an Indonesian concept for "conservation" and "maintenance" (Sutami, 1980: 119).

According to Sutami, one should not only reap the benefits of nature, but also care for the social and ecological condition of the environment that is producing those benefits. In his textbook, he used volcanoes as examples. On one hand, volcanic eruptions fertilized Javanese soil, enabling the people to create their wet rice fields. Also, the boulders, gravel, and sand left over from those eruptions were useful for construction work. However, the mountain slopes that were regularly flooded by the volcanic lava had become more densely populated, and these people were living in constant danger. Therefore, transmigrating those people was the price which had to be paid to benefit from the volcanoes (Sutami, 1980: 120-121).

Sutami also demonstrated how to apply that principle in building dams. Since dam reservoirs would flood large tracts of land, it would involve a certain "*bea* ," namely the cost of appropriating the land. If the area to be impounded were not yet developed and densely populated, then those land appropriation costs would still be "within normal limits." But if one waited too long and the area became more developed and more densely populated, then the land-appropriation costs would become too high a percentage of the total dam building costs, which would make that project not feasible anymore. The opportunity to develop an important natural resource would be lost by the State (Sutami, 1980: 176). Sutami did not have the opportunity to elaborate on what proportion of "costs" to "benefits" he felt was reasonable, since the overworked minister suddenly passed away in 1980.

A year after Sutami's death, a monument was erected near the Gajah Mungkur dam in Central Java to commemorate the 13,000 families who had

to move away. This concrete structure, with four bronze statues representing a Javanese farmer's family, is called "*Monumen Bedhol Desa* " or "Monument of the Uprooted Villages." Inscribed on the monument is a map with the names of the 51 inundated villages, and the names of the six workers who died during the construction of the dam. Sandwiched between the map and the lists is a brief text entitled "*Jer Basuki Mawa Beyo* , " signed by Soeharto on November 17, 1981. In that text Soeharto hoped that "this sacrifice would not be useless, and would instead bring blessings to those who had transmigrated, the people around the Wonogiri reservoir, and all the people of Indonesia." Hence, Sutami's popularization of the Javanese motto saw its fruits in the work of his immediate successor, Purnomosidi Hajisarosa, who commissioned the erection of that "village uprooting" monument.

Sutami's fourth legacy was the notion that Java was already "overloaded," and needed to be saved from a prospective ecological disaster. This theme was repeatedly expressed by him using various colorful metaphors. In 1972, Sutami was quoted as comparing Java to the hen who laid golden eggs but who was not well fed and whose feathers were constantly plucked off, until it was nearly bald (Suroyo, 1972: 24). In 1976, he made the analogy of Java as a sick limb that needed a surgical operation (Sutami, 1976). And in 1977 Sutami was cited as saying that if population growth on Java continued at its current rate, Java would soon turn into a desert. He compared Java to an overloaded boat, which was going to sink or capsize because of its excessive cargo (Soerachmad, 1977: 28). And although his description of Java's condition varied, his solution to the problem was also consistent. Java had to be rescued. In the short run this should be done by building more reservoirs on the island and resettling Java's excessive

population on the Other Islands, where irrigation could be provided for them. In the long run, Java should be reforested and regreened (Sutami, 1977a).

Sutami's views on how to develop the country always started from his concern with Java's ecological problems. When he introduced his chair in *Ilmu Wilayah* (Regional Science) at the University of Indonesia, he called his Science a theoretical framework "to rescue Java" (Sutami, 1976c, 1977b, 1980). And although his English translation of "*Ilmu Wilayah*," and his bibliography included the work of Walter Isard, an American regional Science pioneer, Sutami's "regional Science" was his own synthesis of his reading of Isard, Talcott Parsons, and his Javanese, *Revolusi* and engineering background.

As a Javanese, Sutami might have been inspired by an old Mahabharata episode, in which the Earth Goddess, Prthivi (Bhudewi), complained because her load became too heavy, because there were too many human beings on her back. This human load caused her to sink several thousand *yojana* (an Indian measure) into the archaic ocean. At that time, the Hindu God of conservation, Wisnu, came to her rescue in the guise of a boar, whose name was Varahavatara (Santikno, 1977: 63).

Sutami's fifth legacy was that building a dam did not always have to precede measures to conserve the prospective dam's water catchment area. In solving the problem of which to prioritize in times of budgetary constraints, dams or watershed conservation, Sutami offered the analogy of a parent and his or her child. If there was only limited food, who had to eat first: the parent or the child? Sutami's answer to that rhetorical question was: obviously the child, because the child had longer to live than the parent. According to Sutami, building a dam would be the same as taking

care first of the parent, because it was for immediate needs. On the other hand, conserving a watershed would be similar to taking care of the child first, since by doing that, one would be able to take care of future needs. Hence, Sutami believed that the conservation of watersheds had to have a higher priority than building dams. So did Poernomosidi Hadjisarosa, Sutami's immediate successor as Minister of Public Works, who applied his mentor's teaching in justifying the conservation of the Cilutung watershed in West Java over the construction of the large Jatigede dam on the Cimanuk river (*Konstruksi* , Dec. 1978-Febr. 1979). In the following year, Hadjisarosa repeated that analogy in an article in his Department's journal (Hadjisarosa, 1980: 9, 11).

(b) . Dams as monuments of the New Order

Dam builders have continuously attempted to portray large dams as the achievement of Soeharto and his *Orde Baru* (New Order) administration after sanitizing those large dams of their *Orde Lama* (Old Order) origin. This attempt started with the inauguration of Karangates in 1972. Minister Sutami stated on that occasion that the Selorejo and Karangates dams were built with the skills and expertise of Indonesian workforce, obtained "since the beginning of the New Order under the leadership of Mr. President" (*Pekerjaan Umum* , June 1972). Ten years later, in an article in an engineering magazine about the history of Asahan, it was mentioned that only the "New Order" under Soeharto's leadership was able to lift the project off the ground (*Konstruksi*, March 1982).

The naming of three large dams inaugurated during Soeharto's administration after three non-party civilian engineers also indicated Soeharto's attempt to imprint his *Orde Baru* "development-oriented" ideology on the nation's collective memory. This dam-naming business

must have had some political significance, because Soeharto -- as well as the Public Works Ministers under him -- did not very often "name" dams. They only officially named four dams, and of those four dams three were named after well-known Public Works Ministers-- Juanda, Pangeran Mohammad Noor, and Sutami. Only one was named after an Indonesian general, as discussed earlier.

Apart from the dam-naming business, an image was created by Soeharto and other memoir writers who had been close to him, that he had given a lot of attention to dams during his entire life, even prior to his presidency. In a memoir of one of Soeharto's former adjutants, Ret. General Yoga Sugama, a former head of the State Intelligence Agency (BAKIN), Soeharto was said to comply with a recommendation of his deputy, Ali Murtopo, to rebuild the Rawa Pening hydropower station when he was the Army commander of Central Java in the 1950s (Wiwoho and Chaeruddin, 1990: 30). In his latest autobiography, however, Soeharto did not mention Rawa Pening at all. He emphasized instead a large dam in which he had personally been involved, the Wonogiri, also known as the Gajah Mungkur dam (Dwipayana and Ramadhan KH, 1989).

In that same autobiography, he described how he delivered one of his few spontaneous speeches during the inauguration of another large dam in Central Java, Wadaslintang. On that occasion, he stated that the Indonesian people should not worry about Indonesia's debts, which "would not burden [our] children and grandchildren in the future" (Dwipayana and Ramadhan KH, 1989: 501). One could ask why did Soeharto deliver that important speech about Indonesia's foreign debts at Wadaslintang? The answer might be that either Wadaslintang reminded Suharto about Indonesia's growing debts, or that Soeharto himself deliberately used the dam as a setting to

highlight the benefits of Indonesia's debts. In that sense, it reinforced Soeharto's speech on a sensitive topic in Indonesian politics, two months before the 1988 General Assembly of the Indonesian Congress (MPR) reelected him for his fifth presidential term.

With all this euphoria of Soeharto and his dam-building career, the Old Order's role in initiating the building of large dams in Indonesia was practically pushed out the picture. That is historically an incorrect picture of the Old Order, which initiated many of the so-called "New Order" dams. Take for instance the Brantas River Project. This project was initiated by a decision of the last Public Works Minister under Soekarno, Sardjonb Dipokusumo, who in 1961 appointed Suryono as the first Project Officer of the Brantas River Project. The work of that Project was based on on investigation by a Japanese firm, Nippon Koei, from 1959 to 1961. The offering of a buffalo head, which initiated the construction of the Karangates dam took place in the following year (*Indonesia Membangun* , June-July 1962; Aryono, 1974: 10; Suryono, 1987: 25). Hence, the young Indonesian engineers involved in Karangates and Selorejo learned their skills before Soeharto came into power in 1967 to start his New Order administration.

In contrast to the Brantas dams, several other 'Old Order' planned dams seemed to disappear from the 'New Order' large dam discourse, particularly Jatiluhur and Sempor. Jatiluhur, which was Indonesia's first large dam was certainly not treated as *the* milestone in the history of modern large dam construction in Indonesia out of "nationalistic" purposes; it was designed and constructed by foreign engineers from a French company. Sempor, which was entirely designed by a young Indonesian engineer in 1958, disappeared from the dam builders' language for a completely different reason than Jatiluhur: it had blemished Indonesia's

Table 3.
Death tolls of villagers during the construction of two major
irrigation and hydro power dam projects in Central Java

Name of dam	Number of local villagers who died	Year the dam was inaugurated
Sempor	127*)	1978
Mrica	6'')	1989

Notes:

*) This accident occurred when Sempor's coffer dam broke from a flash flood on the night of November 27, 1967, which destroyed 1,100 houses and a mosque in six villages, as well as 800 m railway and killed thousands of farm animals.

**) These villagers who lived along the Serayu River banks drowned, when a high flood of 4,486 m³/s took place on March 24, 1986, because Mrica's tailrace cofferdam collapsed at 5:40 p.m. due to overtopping and erosion of the rockfill behind the sheet piles. Besides those human victims, 15 bridges were washed away, 300 houses were submerged and among them seven were washed away.

Spurces: *Adil*, 50 (3), 198; *Engineering News Record*, 7 Dec. 1967; *Jayabaya*, 27 Sept. 1981; Pdita, 1-2 March 1978; *Tempo*, 11 March 1978; Jansen 1983, p. 184; Kuswari 1980, p. 33; Soedibyo 1988, p. 792.

dam-building reputation. The Sempor disaster had put the dam's name on the pages of *Engineering News Record* under the humiliating title: "Javanese Dam Collapses During Monsoon Rains." It has since been one of the two Indonesian dam disasters recorded in the relevant literature (see Table 3).

The Identification of large dams with the New Order also appeared in media statements about Kedungombo. In 1983, long before the dam was built, a provincial parliamentarian stated enthusiastically after visiting the potential dam site: "Who says that the New Order government does not care for the people. Look at this evidence. How much money will be spent, only to increase the farmers' productivity" (*Suara Merdeka*, 6 Nov. 1983). Six years later, after the dam had been built, a social activist who had defended

the local people's rights stated that Kedungombo had proved "the success of the New Order, since it was built entirely by Indonesians" (Nadapdap, 1989).

The success and reputation of the New Order were also brought into the picture by other media figures, during various stages of the villagers' resistance against the State. When the Kedungpring villagers were preparing the legal case, a provincial government spokesperson called it "an indicator that the New Order had been successful in developing the people's legal awareness," which showed, according to the spokesperson, that Indonesia was indeed a State based on law (*Suara Merdeka*, 26 June 1990). A year later, after those villagers lost their court battle, a history lecturer at a teachers' college in Yogyakarta suggested that the agony of 5,268 families living around the reservoir should be relieved as wisely as possible. Why? Because "If they are not rescued, they will leave a tarnish on the New Order's history. Their children and grandchildren will remember bitterly and will tell everybody, how during the New Order, under the reign of President Soeharto and Governor Ismail, their grandparents were sacrificed for the sake of development by being inundated by 90 m high water" (Suwarno, 1991).

(c) . Dams as symbols of redistributive justice

The transformation of large dams into symbols of redistributive justice began outside Java with the inauguration of the Riam Kanan hydro power plant in South Kalimantan in 1973. A Banjarese writer stated that the South Kalimantan people felt "*himung*" (proud and glad) having a large dam like the ones in Java (Zainuddin, 1974: 39). And in 1981, three years before Suharto's Kuala Tanjung speech, a young Riau journalist and poet, Ediruslan Pe Amariza, publicly criticized a PLN official who had built eight

power plants of various kinds in West Sumatera, and none in the neighboring province of Riau (Amariza, 1988).

In Java itself, where the largest number of large dams had been built, competition between the provinces' ruling elites was also expressed in the size of their dams. In 1972, Central Java Governor Munadi stated that "While West Java has the Jatiluhur multipurpose dam and East Java has Karangkates and Seloredjo, Central Java has no multipurpose dam yet. This is what discourages foreign and domestic investors from investing in Central Java" (Suroyo, 1972). This link between foreign investment and multipurpose dams was certainly very shaky. Many provinces outside Java, such as Riau and Irian Jaya, which had no single multipurpose dam, had already attracted foreign and domestic investors, because of their abundance of natural resources.

The framing of large dams as symbols of redistributive justice in Indonesia's economic development became more explicit after the construction of the Asahan hydroelectric dams in North Sumatra. President Suharto's personal attention by visiting this project three times, raised the political importance of the Tangga and Siguragura dams at Asahan. On April 7, 1980, Soeharto laid the foundation stone of the Siguragura dam. Two years later, in Januari 1982, he initiated the first stage of Asahan's operation. Two years after that, on 6 November 1984, he inaugurated the use of Siguragura and Tangga's hydro power by a large alumina refinery in Kuala Tanjung. In his speech, he emphasized that Indonesia's economic development was not only aiming at rapid growth, but also at redistribution (*Insinyur Indonesia* , 31 Oct. 1984).

With Suharto's frequent visits to Asahan and his praises for Indonesian engineers involved in that project, large dams and reservoirs

became symbols of each province's prestige. Eventually, dams and reservoirs in Java became one of the most important barometers of progress for provinces outside Java. Illustrating a news article about the Riam Kanan irrigation weir in South Kalimantan, a Jakarta daily published a picture of an irrigation dam in Central Java. Its caption stated: "The Government is going to build an irrigation project in South Kalimantan, like this dam in Central Java" (*Merdeka* , 13 Sept. 1989).

That caption was misleading, because what was going to be built was only a relatively small weir, which would utilize water that had already been impounded in a large reservoir upstreams of the weir. That 9,200 Ha wide Riam Kanan reservoir was wider than all existing reservoirs in Java, and it even is the widest in the entire country. However, the "catching-up-with-Java" spirit continued to spread among other intellectuals who originated from other islands. An author in a South Kalimantan newspaper, for instance, who advocated for another large dam in his province, stated that: "If the Cirata reservoir in West Java can be build, why can the Riam Kiwa hydro power reservoir not be built, although it will also serve the public interest" (Karim, 1990). And when the Bakarü hydropower dam was inaugurated in September 1990, many media writers treated it as an indicator of the political will of the government to develop Eastern Indonesia, especially the province where it was located, South Sulawesi.

(d) . Dams as symbols of Indonesia's "greatness"

With the active support of the technical as well as general media, dam builders have for the last quarter of a century boosted the Indonesian people's pride by portraying Indonesia as the Champion dam-building nation in Southeast Asia. Many Indonesian dams have repeatedly been portrayed as superior in some of their features to all other dams previously

built in Southeast Asia. After Jatiluhur's inauguration in 1967, two French engineers claimed it to be "the largest yet built dam in Southeast Asia" (Bohn and Hamon, 1967). While the Asahan dams in North Sumatera were being constructed, a contributor for the *Asian Building & Construction* called it "the only project of its type in Asia" (Sharp, 1982). In 1979, the 120 m high Wadaslintang dam was portrayed as "the highest dam in Southeast Asia," a title which was eventually to be passed on to another Indonesian dam that had not yet been built, the 165 m Maung dam. In 1987, the 125 m high concrete surface dam in Cirata was cast as "the highest of its kind in South East Asia" and even simply as "the highest [dam] in Southeast Asia." In 1989, Bakaru's tunnel was portrayed as "the longest in Southeast Asia." And in 1990, the 6.5 Km long Mrica dam was casted as "the longest dam in Southeast Asia."

Actually, most of those statements were incorrect. In 1964, before the 103-m high rockfilled Jatiluhur dam was completed, the Philippines was already operating its 129 m high Ambuklao and 128 m high Angat dams, while Thailand was operating its 154 m high Bhumiphol dam. In 1978, when an agreement with a consortium of Japanese companies to construct Indonesia's first underground power station (Asahan) was signed, four Japanese companies were also awarded a contract to build the Philippines's first underground power station on the Agus river in Mindanao.

In 1979, when Wadaslintang was still under construction, Thailand was constructing its 140 m high Srinagarind dam. Thailand had also beaten Indonesia in the field of concrete-faced rock-filled dams: in 1984, it had completed its 130 m Khao Laem dam. And when the 125 m high Cirata dam was completed in 1987, the construction of the 210 m high San Roque dam in the Philippines was also finished. In 1968, before the construction of

Mrica with its 6.5 -Km dam crest length was even started, Thailand had already finished a dam, Lam Pao, with a crest length of 7.8 Km. And in terms of power generating capacity, the 600 MW Asahan or the 1,356 MW Ci Tarum dams have been beaten by the Philippines's 1,800 MW Kalayaan pumped-storage scheme.

Not only the capitalist ASEAN nations, but also the socialist Vietnam nation has already become too difficult for Indonesia to beat in terms of its large dams. By October 1991, Vietnam's Hoa Binh hydropower station had a capacity of 960 MW, larger than Indonesia's largest hydropower station, Saguling (700 MW). Its 10 billion m³ reservoir was also more than three times larger than Jatiluhur. And its underground powerhouse was much larger than Cirata's underground powerhouse, which had been claimed as "the biggest cavern in the world."

This false image of Indonesia as *the* Champion dam builder in Southeast Asia actually derived from the notion that because it is the largest Southeast Asian nation in terms of geography, population, and natural resources, Indonesia should obviously be *the* natural leader in dam building. This self-aggrandizing impulse was very strong among some founding fathers of this young republic, especially Muhammad Yamin, who had dreamed about a "Greater Indonesia" (*Indonesia Raya*), including what later became Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and the Southern part of the Philippines. This notion of greatness was also very explicit in the rhetoric of the first president, who was a co-founder of the Non-Aligned Movement and challenged the Dutch and British troops in West Irian and Sarawak. Soekarno's successor, Soeharto, a far less flamboyant public speaker than Soekarno, was also filled with that obsession. Neither were many Indonesian engineers who planned and built Indonesia's large dams

immune from this "great nation" idea. As an engineer in West Sumatera said to stimulate his fellow citizens: "Since we are a great nation, we must be able to build the Batang Agam hydropower plant" (*Insinyur Indonesia* , Dec. 1982).

This imagined parallel between the dimensions of a country and its dams was definitely misleading. Thailand, one of the smaller Southeast Asian countries in terms of area and population, was the most advanced dam-building nation in Southeast Asia, both in the number as well as in the magnitude of the dams it had built. Despite of its fallacy, by boosting the Indonesian public's pride, this notion increased the public's tolerance for the price that had to be paid to support that pride. It evoked what Leszek Kolakowski calls the "Fata Morgana" image. According to the Polish philosopher:

The simplest improvements in social conditions require so huge an effort on the part of society that full awareness of this disproportion would be most discouraging and would thereby make any social progress impossible. ... It is not at all peculiar then that this terrible disproportion must be quite weakly reflected in human consciousness if society is to generate the energy required to effect changes in social and human relations. For this purpose, one exaggerates the prospective results into a myth . . . [The myth acts like] a Fata Morgana which makes beautiful lands arise before the eyes of the members of a caravan and thus increases their efforts to the point where, in spite of all their sufferings, they reach the next waterhole. Had such tempting mirages not appeared, the exhausted caravan would inevitably have perished in the sandstorm, bereft of hope (Hirschmann, 1972: 32).

The economic interests underlying the drive to build
more and more large dams

Obviously, it was not only those ideals of becoming the most advanced dam-building nation in the region, or the interest to glorify Soeharto's New Order, or to distribute the development pie equally across

the provinces, that fueled the drive toward building more and more large dams in Indonesia. As in any other nation where dam building had become high priority, there were certainly some economic interests which benefitted from this drive. From studying the advertisements in engineering journals, news about alleged corruption cases related to the construction of large dams, and the financial agencies that funded those dams, one can uncover the economic interests which underlied the idealist claims of large dam buildings. At least, three groups benefited from the drive to build large dams in Indonesia, namely the cement industry, Public Works-related companies, and Japanese business interests.

(a) . The cement industry

The thriving cement industry not only supplied the cement, but also acted as a major impetus for building large dams. A handful of cement factories could also exert strong political power, due to their shareholders' relationships with Soeharto and his extended family (Dharsono, 1986: 87-88).

(b) . Public Works-related companies

The construction and Consulting companies which were owned by the Public Works Department, as well as companies owned by individuals related to the department, constituted the "revolving doors" that accommodated the department's retirees as well as increased the Department's income from these government-owned companies. In fact, as Radinal Mochtar, the Public Works Minister himself stated, from the nineteen companies owned by his Department, only two had suffered from continued losses during the last two years. These two companies were involved in the production and distribution of asphalt and in the maintenance of heavy equipment. All other Public Works-owned companies were doing pretty good, and some of them had even forrhed

joint ventures with foreign companies to fulfill the requirements of tenders for international contracts (*Lampung Posi*, 18 June 1992).

(c) . Japanese business interests

Beginning with three first large dam projects which the New Order inherited from the Old Order, as part of an agreement of the Japanese government to pay war reparation funds to the Indonesian government, Japanese loans have ever since provided the majority of the finances to build large dams in Indonesia (OECF, 1988). Hence, just as these large civil engineering projects constituted a revolving door for the Department of Public Works, they also constituted a "revolving door" that subsidized the Japanese economy through fully-owned Japanese companies as well as Japanese joint ventures with Indonesian companies.

The political expediency of Indonesian
official environmental rhetoric

The "environmental flavor" in the Kedungombo dam builders' language, which will be described in detail in Chapter Five, fitted the overall appropriation of environmental rhetoric by the government since the late 1970s. After the rising tide of international environmental concerns washed over Indonesian shores, the government of Indonesia created the position of the Minister for Environmental Affairs in 1978, which has been held by a Berkeley-trained economist, Emil Salim, for fourteen years. In all sectors of the government, more and more "environmental flavor" has been injected into the official development language.

This environmental rhetoric has resulted in political gains in three fields, which explains the continued tenure of Emil Salim as Minister of the Environment by Soeharto (Cribb, 1987, 1988, 1990). In the international arena, Emil Salim has, as a member of the World Commission on

Environment and Development (WCED), successfully turned conservation issues from a topic of Western reproach toward Indonesia to one of Indonesian reproach toward the industrialized world. Instead of defending the destruction of forests as a necessary price for national development, Salim criticized the West for its hypocrisy in demanding that Indonesia conserve its forests while the West continued to be not only the principal consumer of forest products, but also the perpetuator of an international economic order in which Indonesia had no choice but to exploit the forests. In a world where environmentalist arguments against logging and transmigration could easily be seen as unacceptable foreign intervention in Indonesia's domestic affairs, Salim's coupling of conservation with nationalism has increased its chances of getting a serious hearing within the government.

More important than the use of nationalist rhetoric in the international arena, according to Cribb, was the usefulness of environmental issues as a weapon to bolster bureaucratic power domestically. In the wake of increased economic deregulation, recourse to environmental protection provides an important format for the bureaucrats to justify their continued exercise of power in the public interest. This explains Emil Salim's increasingly active role in controlling industrial pollution, especially after the ratification of Government Regulation (PP) No. 2 of 1986 on Environmental Impact Assessment, and the formation of the Environmental Impact Regulation Body (BAPPEDAL), headed by the minister himself, which is Indonesia's equivalent of the United States EPA.

The third use of environmental issues was in the New Order's regaining of political support from a new generation of idealistic supporters. Soeharto was in serious danger of losing his support from the younger

generation, especially from the student movement, which launched the military into power in 1966. In 1978, student demonstrators in Bandung and Yogyakarta demanded Soeharto to step down. A military crackdown on the student activists in both cities practically paralyzed the student movement in the entire country, due to the new repressive measures taken by the government on university campuses all over Indonesia.

The 1978 crackdown on the student movement might have left a very deep and bitter animosity of the young idealists toward Soeharto's administration, had the position of Minister of Environment not been created in that very same year, with Emil Salim as the Minister. By actively supporting the environmental concerns raised by this new generation of idealists, Salim created "a new covenant" between the young idealists and the New Order.

As *the* Minister of the Environment, Emil Salim provided the boundaries of Indonesia's environmentalism by repeatedly stating that "it" should not be like what the Green Party or the Greenpeace did in Germany and the U.S. The new generation of young idealists, however, were not discouraged from learning from their counterparts in other countries. As the expose of articles in the student media showed, they also learned from their young counterparts in Thailand and Australia.

Meanwhile, two parallel radicalization processes occurred among the young generation who were still in school, as well as those who had graduated and worked in various nongovernmental organizations. As the students became radicalized by the repression on campus, where student governments had to be led by lecturers, the young idealists off campus became radicalized due to the emasculation of the political parties. Urban slum dwellers and other disadvantaged group approached both the students

and the professional activists to seek help in fighting the mighty State bureaucracy.

Eventually, a convergence between radical campus- and non-campus based activists emerged in the late 1980s. Ironically, while Soeharto created the environmental Ministry in 1978 to divert the student opposition from his personal interests, in 1990, a spokesperson of SKEPHI stated that, for her, "environmentalism" was only a cover for opposition against Soeharto. That statement was addressed to an Australian audience and published in an American newsmagazine, *Time*. So, in ten years time the official environmental rhetoric had become a boomerang aimed at its original user.

Facing such a drastic reinterpretation of Indonesian environmentalism from nature conservation to opposition against the president, it is understandable that Salim's environmental rhetoric became increasingly conservative. In relation to Kedungombo, this conservative reorientation was quite telling. In 1986, the Minister had strongly supported a campaign of Father Mangunwijaya against the eviction of slum dwellers from the Code river banks in the city of Yogyakarta (see Appendix II, pp.

). Five years later, however, he opposed Mangunwijaya's idea and supported the Public Works Department's standpoint that the Kedungombo reservoir banks had to be vacated. In both instances, the point of dispute was the same: would the conservation of these water bodies be better guaranteed with, or without, poor villagers living on its banks. Salim's response in 1991, however, was completely the opposite of his 1986 response.

In 1986, Salim accepted Mangunwijaya's arguments, that the Code river banks that were inhabited were much better maintained by the slum dwellers, who took care of the banks for their own survival interests. On the contrary, in 1991, although Mangunwijaya applied the same logic to the

Kedungombo reservoir banks, Salim categorically opposed the use of the reservoir "green belt" by the farmers because it might destroy the green belt's function to protect the reservoir's water.

What caused the reversal of Salim's environmental rhetoric?

Certainly not so much the physical object under discussion, although rivers do hydrologically differ from reservoirs. It was the political climate in the country that had changed drastically in the last five years. In April 1986, Salim's support for Mangunwijaya, which created a boost in the priest's popularity among the young idealists, was still tolerable to Soeharto. But in August 1991, support from the Environment Minister to the priest could have created more tensions within the ruling elite, and that was certainly not tolerable to the aging president. The environmental rhetoric was only the outer package of the political message sent by the Minister's statement.

The different media coverage of Salim's support for Mangunwijaya in 1986, and his disagreement with the priest over a similar environmental issue in 1991, was also very symbolic. In 1986, Mangunwijaya's threat to fast in order to avoid the forced relocation of the river bank inhabitants, as well as Salim's support for the priest, were widely covered by the largest newspaper in Indonesia, *Kompas*. As a result of this media campaign, the Public Works office in Yogyakarta withdrew its plan to evict the river bank inhabitants. In 1991, the two different interpretations of Mangunwijaya and Salim were presented only in two separate issues of *Panji Masyarakat* (1-10 June 1991; 11-20 August 1991).

Salim's support for the depopulated green belt policy was not an isolated incident of the use of environmental rhetoric to legitimize the displacement of numerous village communities from their native land. It had been used repeatedly in many places in Indonesia. One of the most well

publicized cases is the attempt of the Forestry Department in Siriaria, North Sumatera, to evict coffee farmers from their land, which the government wanted to use for "reclamation" and "reforestation." The farmers refused, pointing out that there was no need to reforest their land, which was already under cultivation. Two brothers from the village were later arrested on charges of having raised money illegally. The remaining villagers were angered by the arrests and the false accusations of their relatives, since the two men were only collecting voluntary contributions to engage a private attorney. The case became national news, after 200 women of the village marched to the military unit where the men had been taken.

Numerous other cases can be mentioned in Sumatera, where the Forestry Department or the local authorities evicted villagers from their tree crop plantations and swidden farms, and even burned their crops, as what happened to the coffee smallholder farmers in the district of Rejang Lebong, Bengkulu province (*Fakta* , 15 July 1991). Basically, all the agroforestry practices of the local farmers were regarded as not being "ecologically correct," which legitimized their land being taken over and reforested by the government. In most of those cases, protests from the dissident intellectuals only focused on the inhuman treatment of the villagers by the local security apparatus (*Gaung* , Febr.-March 1990). In some cases, private companies that were actually benefiting from the new tree crops were brought into the spotlight by the activists in their alternative publications (*Setiakawan* , Sept.-Oct. 1989).

In other words, the ecological concepts were right, but the way the authorities treated the villagers and the capitalist motives of the reforestation schemes were wrong. In the meantime, the mainstream media kept printing headlines of how the forest was heavily damaged by the

"illegal forest encroachers." Only in very rare instances was the ecological rhetoric of the authorities brought under scrutiny. One of those rare instances was when on March 14, 1990, 161 farmers from Way Abar, Lampung, brought a case in Jakarta against the Ministry of Forestry for trying to evict them from their land on the Balak mountain, which had been designated as a "protected forest" in order to prevent a nearby reservoir, Way Jepara, from siltation. The lawyers from Forum Adil Sejahtera (FAS), a legal aid group that represented the villagers, called on a forester from WALHI, Emmy Hafield, to testify as an expert witness on forestry. In her testimony, the WALHI forester challenged the Forestry Department's accusation, that the farmers' coffee gardens were causing erosion and would endanger the catchment area of a large reservoir, Way Jepara. She used her forestry knowledge and cited the Indonesian Basic Forestry Act of 1967 to back up her defense. According to her, that law acknowledges customary land rights. Hence, she urged the Forestry Department to work along with the people in maintaining the disputed water catchment area. And since the area was surrounded by gentle slopes, the people could still grow tree crops in ways that would not destroy the function of that area.

In addition to Hafield's ecological arguments, a simple administrative argument could also be posed. The labeling of the teak plantation in Java as a "forest" and the smallholder silvicultural practices outside Java as "plantations" and not as "forests," was a legacy of the colonial time, when Java's teak plantation was managed by the colonial Forest Department, while the rubber plantations outside Java were managed by the Plantation Department. Ecologically speaking, however, smallholder rubber plantations outside Java represent a primary forest much closer than the state-owned teak plantation in Java (Soemarwoto, 1991: 291).

As in many similar disputes, the court ruled in favor of the Forestry Department, and the second generation transmigrants in Way Abar had to leave the reservoir's water catchment area. And as in the case of the Kedungpring court case, the legal aid activists were not able to use the court as a forum to educate the public about the fallacy of the government's policy. The mainstream media which reported this case, did not mention the "ecological" or, to be more precise, "eco-legal" debate at all. Even WALHI itself only reported its forester's involvement in the Way Abar case, six months after the court sessions began, in a small unobtrusive column on page 16 of its English language bulletin (*Environesia*, Sept. - Dec. 1990).

Summary

I have described in this chapter four points: first, the Army's interest in Kedungombo's high media profile; second, the culture of Public Works; third, the economic interests behind the drive to build more and more large dams; and fourth, the political expediency of the official environmental rhetoric in Indonesia.